

## Death Magic 301

### Chapter 301: Draebala

Flow of mana; the line from which every living being draws life. Tapped into its possibilities a few centuries ago – mages and magic users were all fascinated by said discovery. Made public, it grew to be the subject of many, many wars. Some were blessed with massive pools whilst others had the differing capability of controlling the flow. One constant remained, the mana in the Earth itself wasn't to be used by an individual. Given that some mages now could pull mana from the atmosphere and cast spell – those feats were performed using Elemental Spirits. Acting as the catalyst, tis was were current magical advancement had come. Away from Hidros; dubbed the cursed continent, mages who were voided here were still and very much effective anywhere else. Weapons, guns, bullets, for those who could control their element to perfection, stopping those projectiles were a must. Evolving along with adventurers, battle-mages of the empire were strong. What has been seen as impossible was made possible.

In hopes of making mana-potions, the Alchemist Sect assigned many jobs to Staxius, the harder ones essential for the project. Complete, they could extract the life-essence, though vaguely. An idea that took a few months to put into paper then another few months into practice. The King of Arda founded a new Art. Unknown to its true potential and nature, the art was but a babe. Able to control the flow of mana, in a restricted area – and adding skills transferred from Dark-Arts. Unlinked to the Death Element, he found a way to bypass the contract between mage and spirit. Another few experiments were in order, the trip to the will-be, mine; also helped in testing out the Arts. Having emphasized raw-strength, the basic nature of magic and how it worked eluded him. Stumbled into a pit, one where his power made him into a puppet; Staxius had to do but one thing – mastery of new art. Something that could help in controlling his ascension to Divinity. Daemonum Gladio spoke true, change came faster than usual.

[Divinity – First Boon: Host of a God]

Any god or being who transcends the realm of mortality and attains the rank of God, will inevitably, be granted a new body. One that Creation would craft from the ashes of the previous vessel, reborn as a phoenix.

Rested under the blossoming tree, the nap cut short by a gust of wind followed by a sharp pain in the legs. 'What was that dream about?' awake, the eyes took a few instants to focus. Greenery to emptiness, two realms flickered. Stood, 'Lizzie,' he reached to pat her head.

"Hello again," spoke a distorted voice, "-it's me," cold palms were felt on the back.

"What is this?" Lizzie who smiled, vanished into thin air, "-CREATION!"

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"No need to get so worked up," smiled the entity, no air, nothing, he levitated with the planet as the backdrop. "I'm sorry I had to get you here," walking towards the clockwork throne, "-I need a favor," he sat.

'What favor,' enraged, the feet moved desperately to try and reach the throne to no avail. "What do you want?"

“Nothing major,” with a snap, a portal appeared that showed a destroyed landscape, “-as you know, I’m unable to destroy, therefore, I’ve called onto my partner,” it leaned with a smile. “I need you to head to Draebala, there’s someone you need to kill.”

“Draebala,” paused, “-I’ve heard of that before, tis familiar.”

“I won’t bother to recount its origin. Time there is faster than on Hidros, 1 hour is 15 minutes where you hail. Therefore, you’ve around 16 hours, since you need to get back in 4 hours. Kill with everything you have, partner, this is a job and a test at the same time. I’ll evaluate thine worthiness to be granted the vessel of a god. Go, you’re facing a low-tiered Goddess named Intherna; bye,” followed by a wave a child would give to his parent, a greenish mist teleported him to Draebala.

Reddened sky, two suns, a town laid to ruin. Charred corpse of farmers and villagers. ‘Brings back memories,’ annoyed, he walked from the once town-square. ‘I sense a powerful aura coming from the south,’ turned, a mountain range with a giant hole in the center became the backdrop. In front, two entities went head to head, fast, a glimpse of light, spells, and overwhelming killing intent. The power emanating created thunderclouds – each roared and bared its fang at regular intervals. Following a black path, one turned due to blood, at a crossway, a pile of bodies stood in the middle. Surrounding it, on forks, the dismembered heads of human children. Their bodies, rested with their legs crossed.

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“Don’t forget,” a voice whispered, “-you are to perform the duties of a Death Reaper.”

‘I’ve sixteen hours, should be plenty of time,’ nauseating and hard to stare.

\*Souls who’ve been lost and are bound to this world for perpetual suffering, heed my call. I, the god of death, grant thee salvation. Follow mine voice, tis the place where the dead are reborn, tis the place where wrongdoers are to be purged – in my name, those who are to be judged, will be judged, and those who are to be saved, will be saved.\* Stood with two orbs, one golden and the other dark-crimson, the screech of souls resounded from all around town. The fallen bodies stood, the ethereal form; devoid of life, they walked slowly. The children stood from their crossed-legged posture; headless, turned, grabbed onto their head – then reattached the missing part. \*To be purged or to be saved, I shall stand as the judge: Judgement.\* In order, the spirits were swallowed to the differing orbs according to his will. No prejudice, no malice, the only thing that counted was for the soul to want a chance at rebirth. A chance to start again; upon offering the boon of rebirth, most tried to grasp onto the Crimson-Orb.

“End our suffering, we wish not to be reborn in this decrepit land, I WANT TO BE FORGOTTEN AND NEVER WAKE,” begged a younger man.

“Thou have to accomplish yet,” refuted back in a deep tone, “-prove thine worth before giving into failure. I despise fools who know not the importance of life,” forcefully, the soul was swallowed into the golden orb.

‘Each soul I sent to the afterlife, the more my magical element warms up, this feeling, tis bliss.’ Relishing every moment, the population of 30,043 – all perished in the godforsaken land of Draebala, were given chance at a new life. Taking two hours, the fight that happened whilst caring for the people, continued.

\*Burnt eternally in my domain, I, Staxius Haggard, the god of death, call forth the flame that purges gods and demons alike. Set ablaze for I've ordered so; Abyssal Wrath.\* If left unchecked, the corpse would rot, spread diseases, plague, and much more into the wild. Lit a blaze, the town suddenly brightened in a cold-white flame, bodies turned to ash – it hovered till the wind dispersed it onto the desert-like surrounding.

"Excuse me," instantaneously,"-who are you?" asked a childish voice followed by moans.

"No one particular," glancing back, a child with a short black-laced dress, darker knee-high leggings, high-heels with a staff in hand. Her right foot rested on someone's head. The latter was dug into the stone path, her heels had pierced right into the man's skull.

\*Judgement,\* a white flame burnt the corpse – as for the soul, it was trapped into the Box of Souls. A talent inherited to the god of death only; same as his cursed sword which trapped souls; attaining divinity, he could now trap all he wanted without a medium.

"How rude," glaring through her straight-long black-hair, "-do you know who I am?" chuckle turned into laughter. Her eyes burnt vividly, with a smirk that would make many cower, a thirst for violence, despite her petite figure; a sickening deathly aura oozed.

"Not really," unimpressed, the face and voice remained nonchalant.

"Now that pisses me off," she jumped back, "-how can you live on Draebala and not know the Goddess of Flame: Intherna, ha-" trying to follow up with a laugh, her breath cut short.

"So, you're the low-tiered goddess," dashed, without hesitation, the large hands went around her neck and squeezed. "I should probably introduce myself," the hand rose, she desperately struggled, "-I'm Staxius Haggard," giving a smile, the grip tightened.

"P-please I-let me g-go," she begged, "-ha," the voice changed, from panic, she seemed relaxed. "I'm a good actress, aren't I?" kicking his chest, she jumped away with a backflip. "And you're dead," she bowed as if completing her piece.

"I doubt that," dusting off clothes, "-you managed to ruin my shirt," no injuries – magical barrier was summoned at the last instant. "Shall we dance?" emotionless, his gaze lit her eyes.

"Yes please," holding out her hand, the fallen staff flew over as if a magnet. Chants in a differing tongue soon masked the gust of winds, \*FLAME,\* numerous fire-balls were conjured around him.

'Now this is new,' he thought.

"BURN," a rain of fire-balls befell Staxius. Not finished, she conjured another spell, this time, elementals of lava, raged forth – their movement was as fast as sound. In addition to the onslaught, she continued calling forth divine tiered magic.

'Low-tier gods are strong,' unable to counter the magic, the body was bombarded by her attacks. Fast precise without opening for the opponent to strike, forced to kneel, the body crumbled under her power. 'I'm going to enjoy this,' the onslaught continued, '-I've not felt this desperate in a while.'

"ARE YOU DONE?" she yelled.

'There,' an opening, sprouting wings, he bolted out of the rampage, grabbed her neck, turned, used his knee to kick her off-balance, did a flip, and smashed her head into the ground. Blood dripped from his nose, it fell onto her black hair, \*BURN,\* a surge of fire raged from out the floor. "AHHHH," skin, muscles, all tore from the body, despite the pain, the grip held strong.

"Die already," emotionless, her voice changed, the flame intensified ten-fold, "-a skeleton doesn't have the strength to fight me," teleported behind, what remained was an emptied carcass. "I must agree that the first and last move you made was unexpected, you were pretty strong," taking a stance to kick, "-however, you melted like the rest of them," \*bang,\* her body jumped back. The skeleton returned the power as if rubber.

"Now that's new," she commented and approached. \*Thump,\* the ground rumbled, \*thump,\* again, "-earthquake?" she asked. \*THUMP,\* '-Draebala is awesome,' a greenish light burst open, "-how are you, little kid," the skeleton stood, a white glow emanated from the eye socket. 'I'm going to have fun,' a black mist twirled, \*Daemonum Gladio,\* healed with the ancient-sword in hand, "-it's been a long time, hasn't it, STAXIUS," laughed the sword.

"Very long time," the feeling of bliss couldn't be described, \*Unleash Aura: Divination.\* Golden veins went around the body, "-let's dance, low-tiered goddess," dashed, she parried the first stroke.

"I've no idea what happened, but you've grown a little strong," her laughter echoed, strike after strike, she blocked, parried, and even hit his head to mock the hasty attacks. "FUCK OFF," an upward swing due to annoyance carved the ground in half; it opened a canyon. 'Daemonum Gladio, I appreciate you coming to my help,' came to a standstill, '-the way I am, I can't fight alongside, let alone control thee.'

"Who said anything about you controlling me," turned into a puppet, the wielder became the weapon, "-WATCH," he laughed. Sharper and precise, he jumped back into the fight, the sword went rogue. Unshackled herself, the goddess fought with smiles, strong against strong. One by one, the symbols of power activated.

'Maybe I am nothing but an illusion,' watched in third-person, Staxius waited as Daemonum Gladio took the reins. Utilizing the power of Nike to it's fullest, the Goddess soon fell to the power that surged after each blow.

"Come on already," a whisper came forth, "-you are Daemonum Gladio, and Daemonum Gladio is you. Death Reaper, you're one of the same. What you see is an untamed version of thyself. Awaken and prove that you're worthy of the mantle."

'I'm worthy?' the ethereal body grabbed onto the physical body.

"I've grown tired of the game, you puny weakling," spat, her hair changed from black to glowing-red, \*God Seal: Unlock,\* a sphere shot outwards, it destroyed everything in its wake.

\*Huff, puff,\* blown away by her power, the blade was thrust into the ground to stop the momentum. Her aura kept on increasing; it tore off the surrounding which formed into a spiral. "Let's do this together," Staxius took control, "-Daemonum Gladio, let's fight as one."

"This is so clichéd," fired back the sword, "-but you know what," from the sword, a spirit rose forth, "-I love clichés," same face, same hair, with a female voice. "You're me as a girl," laughed Staxius.

“A lady,” she winked.

## Chapter 302: Box of Soul

Two tornadoes of unmeasured strength stretched onto the heavens. Goddess Intherna hovered in one of red flames, whilst Staxius knelt on the floor with a black aura.

“Daemonum Gladio,” stumbling up, “-will you lend me thy strength?” he asked with a hand shielding Intherna’s flame. “Prove to me that you’re worthy,” semi-transparent, she reached out and grabbed his arms. “With pleasure,” two joined as one, the white eyes changed to crimson red, \*Blood-Arts: Blood Blade of the Queen, Orenmir.\*

\*Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power, from Nevermore, I call upon the power of the Annihilation-Gate.\* On his feet, \*Thump,\* the echo of the Death Element. Inside out; the dense mana flowed uncontrollably – veins burst; skin tore open. The spiral of power bulged, it forced Intherna back away; readied to fight, her eyes glimmered. Anticipation, a fight without holding back, she bolted downwards with ethereal weapons of Fire-aspect. \*CLANG,\* a shockwave sent ripples that cracked the ground, the tornadoes subsided the moment they clashed. Red hair levitating, Intherna changed from dagger to short and long sword, her speed increase. Mere shadows, illusions of her past stood as still image, she dashed around from place to place and attacked. Focused on her presence, the eyes closed; Daemonum Gladio in one hand whilst the other held Orenmir – both of which were long swords, he stood still.

“Are you going to give up?” targeting tendons and vital spots, a well-placed slash at the Achilles’ heel, \*bam,\* fallen backward, the goddess jumped on his chest then conjured an imprisonment spell. A hexagon from which rose her true might, pure divine flames. Maniacal laughter ensued; the flames brought her nothing but joy. She delighted in letting loose.

‘Did unleashing the A-gate bring more bad than good?’ conscious, the pain intensified. Paralyzed from the inside out, the eyes shed tears of blood. Muted screaming, an overwhelming feeling of powerlessness – combining with the alter-ego did naught. Orenmir laid impervious to what transpired. Doubts, pain, confusion; the Death Element revolted against its host. The Symbols of power – all activated; interfered with one another. Precognition from Kronos, Immortality from Death Reaper, and Amplification from Nike; they waged war against one another. Blood-Arts, the power as nightwalker was reduced to nothing; Intherna hit his artery. Unable to activate Crimson Thread; the blood loss could not be stopped.

‘Did you trick me?’ asked Staxius.

“Are you blaming a weapon for thine failure to control thy power?” a voice echoed deep within.

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Narrowly opened, the sight of Intherna constantly stabbing his chest in a tunnel of flame. Slowly yet surely, she continued to pound, from the chest, she moved to his face, a hot knife into the cheek, another in the neck, then horizontal inside the ears. She took pleasure and forced the dimly-lit eyes opened, magma droplets born off her index were dropped. It melted the eye and made way to the brain. Cracked under the pressure, the Death Element imploded, an explosion tore a hole where the heart would have been protected.

“Done,” panting, the flame lowered in intensity, “-that was fun,” shuffling up, she fell as her knee gave to fatigue. “My flames didn’t do much damage,” laid to his side, “-you were strong, Haggard. I applaud that someone like you was able to endure my full power.”

“Don’t get so cocky,” awake, “-ready for round two?” smirking, the body regenerated. “I must thank you,” stood, “-you killed me before I killed myself,” lighter than before, “-it’s my time to have fun.”

“Hold on a mo-” grabbed by the neck, he slammed her into the ground; blood splattered upon impact. Reborn anew, the Death Element calmed – the entrance into his power as a Demi-god.

“Don’t UNDERESTIMATE A GODDESS,” she yelled with a shockwave that forced him back.

“I didn’t,” he smiled, “-that’s why I went through all the trouble of letting you beat me to a pulp,” Orenmir in hand, “-a god is truly powerful.”

“How can you stand after all that?” arms on her hip, the stamina and mana expenditure took its toll, “-aren’t you a normal human?”

“Trying to buy time, huh?”

“Saw right through me,” the same conniving smirk portraited itself, “-I’m ready for round two,” the moment she spoke, her body turned to ash. “Intherna is what was given to me upon my ascension to god rank. I previously held the name Phoenix. Similar to you, I’ve got the boon of immortality. Rising from the ashes, we’re copies of one another,” wings of fire sprouted from her back, it radiated with the power of the sun.

“We’re similar?” he laughed, “-that could be farther from the truth. I agree that immortal beings are the worst opponent to go against. Finding the truly strong has been a quest of mine ever since I awoke my latent powers. Either snap a finger to kill a person or pull a trigger, I grew bored of always killing weaklings.”

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“-and that is why you fight and murder, to find those who are strong,” interjected, “-I know the feeling. I saw you grin when I had you pinned down earlier – that sight made my heart race.”

“Goddess,” bearing a smirk similar to hers, “-you understand,” the face lit with glee.

“Yes,” she laughed, “-I know,” weapons materialized, “-we’ve found opponents against whom holding back isn’t an issue.” Ended, both pounced at one another, each blow, each spell, the area around them was rendered to chaos. Clash after clash, they fought. Death followed by rebirth, each awoke to continue, a never-ending cycle of senseless murder.

\*Clang,\* pushed back, “-I do apologize for interrupting the fun. It’s close to being fourteen hours; finish your assignment,” whispered Creation.

“Intherna,” stopped, he yelled.

“What?”

“You should know something,” watching with a blank expression, “-I’m the God of Death. I’ve been sent to end thine life, Phoenix.” Holes from explosions, a town rendered to dust – the scenery changed into one far worse than war. Every so often, lightning would strike and cause a fire. Heavy usage of Divine Mana gave birth to a sandstorm.

“Quit with the bluffs,” she laughed, “-even if you’re the god of death, why have you not killed me yet?”

“I’ve been holding back.”

“H-holding back?” her voice cracked.

“Yes,” vanished, “-I’ve been holding back,” \*Cough,\* she spewed blood. “-It has been fun,” hand inside her chest, “-god or not,” grabbing her heart, “-all who await death will perish, sweet dreams, Intherna,” closed in a fist, her body dropped.

‘What you didn’t know was that each time I die, I grow twice as powerful. Phoenix, each time you died, you were reborn the same without increasing thy strength.’ \*I command thee whomst I’ve defeated, I curse thee, soul, to be bound to mine; Box of Soul – Soulfeld.\* Rather than heading to the realm of defeated godly entities, Staxius reached out and forced Intherna to his box. Picked up in speed, the storm raged forth, ‘-this land is the definition of hell.’

“How did you like Draebala?” asked Creation.

“Fun,” the eyes wandered from left to right, for they stood in a white room as opposed to being surrounded by stars and planets, “-is there something the matter?”

“You’ve passed the test. I thought Intherna would have sufficed to take thine life and show how much better low-tier gods are,” writing in the ancient tongue, Creation drew up a portrait. “Haggard, you destroyed a being who I had created long ago to rival the current Lord Death. One of my many inventions – I see that you’ve taken a liking to her soul. Consider it a bonus, do with it as you wish, I shan’t interfere with what my partner does.”

“Do forgive my saying, can’t help but notice that you’ve started to refer me as a partner. Did something happen to Lord Death?” flickers of light blinded the room.

“No, it was requested. He asked that I make you my partner. He wants to take some time off, the fight against the Titans has drawn out considerable power.”

“How goes the war?” ask Staxius now sat on the floor.

“No idea,” it turned with an identical copy of Staxius’s body, “-using Nevermore earlier broke your vampiric vessel. This body is an upgrade on what you have – using divine magic shan’t cause that much trouble. Through this, I’ll be able to siphon away the excess power, I’ve come for my payment.” Teleported inside the new vessel, the old body crumbled into dust, “-congratulation on becoming a father, partner. I shall seek thy assistance soon.”

Warmth and greenery, awoke under the shade of a flowering tree. ‘I’m back,’ stood, ‘-I feel weird,’ the grass was damp, ‘-I’m naked,’ a sigh followed. ‘A godly body,’ pushed against the tree to stand upright, the latter uprooted effortlessly. “Excuse you?” stopped, sensing how the tree would topple over, a small push and the tree fell as if knocking over a pillar made of paper. ‘I forgot,’ facepalmed, the resulting

shockwave knocked three birds out of the sky. "A walking hazard," \*Shackle mine strength: Nevermore – Full Restraint.\* 'Why,' the instant the A-gate closed, he dropped to the floor. "Creation sure doesn't care about how smooth the things he makes are," stumbling up, "-I wonder what time it is?" Butt-naked, Staxius wandered around the garden – grabbed a leaf to cover up. A sense of dignity and respect for any misguided eyes.

"Greetings overseer,"

"Majesty," screamed the lady, "-why are you in such an ungodly state?" she asked with her face turned away.

"Let's just say I had a rough time finding an outfit."

"If you say so," she programmed a portal to lead into the royal chambers.

\*Click,\* "-it's good to be back..." a spoon fell to the floor. "Did I come at the wrong time?" asked Staxius.

"GOD DAMN IT," yelled Xula, Eira facepalmed. Ladies in wait surrounded the bed for they had come to wish congratulations to the Queen. Time displayed 15:30; the feast would be hosted at 18:00.

Embarrassed, many of the girls screamed, some blushed fully.

"Listen," nonchalant, "-I'm apologetic of being in such a state," he picked out clothes from the closet, "-it grew rather chilly," dressed all the while maintaining a cheerful conversation. "Thanks for the patience, I'll see you all for the feast later," with a bow, he teleported out.

Bright red, some of the ladies laughed, "-come on mother," called Eira, "-at least he covered up with a leaf," an attempt at being serious failed as she breathed a chuckle.

"Dear Eira," turned with a menacing look, "-it would have been fine, IF ONLY HE HAD CHOSEN A LEAF THAT COULD FULLY COVER THAT MEMBER," exchanging glances, the room gave into hysteria.

'The guests should be arriving at the airfield soon,' reflecting on the fight, the face could but hold a smile. Letting loose after so long, "-where have you been?" a soft voice asked.

"..."

"Don't ignore me," Adete latched onto a lock of hair, "-you disappeared from the face of the Earth."

"Let's say that I was caught up in some business unrelating to Hidros," teleported into the mansion. Each breath he took once outside felt as if the cold air at dawn. Fresh, pure, and refreshing. Grateful to not having been brought up on Draebala. The suffering those people dealt on a daily put all into perspective. Compared to them, this place was paradise.

'Intherna,' sat inside Void, '-the idea of making human puppets isn't that discouraging. Adding the knowledge I found about mana. Giving life into something shouldn't be that difficult. I won't use other lives as the catalyst, unlike Achilles, what I have in mind may be better than her. No need for a philosopher stone, an army of immortal puppets. Sounds like a great idea – Creation brought me to Draebala for a reason. Calling me Partner all of a sudden is perplexing. As far as he was concerned, I had no business relating to him – what caused the change?"



“Yes, what causes the change?” sat on the empty seat, a soft and gentle voice of a lady. Before leaving the mansion, the car came to a hard stop.

“Wow,” added Adete, “-it??s you, vampire. Look, it’s you as a girl,” she laughed, “-I like her scent much better,” she hovered over to the strange lady.

“Daemonum Gladio, what are you doing here?” asked with suspicion, she laughed.

“I’m you’re alter-ego, have you forgotten about the clichéd promise we made?” she leaned closer, “-aren’t you the charmer,” she winked.

“Repulsive,” he turned, “-are you here permanently or will you disappear?”

“I’m here permanently,” she grabbed his chin, “-you and I are the same, I can read your mind and you can read mine. We’re twins, just make up some story; I’ve had enough of holding back and waiting for you to get strong. Like it or not, you now have a twin.”

Chapter 303: Courtney

Workers paced from nose to tail. Kept inside a tall and large hangar with reinforced walls and roof, TU-03 stood menacingly. Opened with a clang, the metallic gates to the Airfield parted slowly. Staxius and his supposed twin fought all the way from the mansion.

“Good afternoon, boss,” said a guard on the left side of the car. Opened, white hair swayed out of the window, “-greetings,” turned with a smile, she laid on the door seductively. Winks and a few lick of the lips – the guard could but cough and stare. The main attraction was her breast which seemed to want to escape the jacket.

“Stop teasing them,” said Staxius as the car parked shy of the entrance.

“Not my fault that this body is made for sin,” she laughed, “-how you’d look better if you were a girl,” out of the car, the wind blew. Knee long hair flowed, for female version, her body held no particular uniqueness. Not muscles nothing, slender and thin. Going by looks alone, she seemed weak and unable to fight. The same frame of Staxius when he first took the exam for Claireville Academy, inconspicuous yet deadly. Slammed shut, the car locked with a flash of the light.

“Come on,” she moved closer, Adete slept peacefully on her head, “-no need to be so angered, aren’t you the emotionless killer?” a smug remark paired with a shrug.

“I sure don’t understand where you’ve gotten such a personality,” placing his palm on her shoulders, “-what is done is done, I won’t argue about why you’re here any longer. Waste of breath, instead tell me this, are you here as a friend or foe?”

“Friend or foe...” she paused with a side-glance, “-that’s quite the question,” the wind blew harder, it made her hair flow as if waves, “-why not let me think about it for a bit?”

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“Don’t get so carried away,” he took a strong step, “-Daemonum Gladio, you said you hated clichés. Won’t you turning against me to take over my body as a guise of friend be the worst plot?” arms crossed, both stood in the middle of the road. Guards who made rounds stopped and stared, the

distinctive white and red hair made them on edge. Called onto Cake for the unusual stop, the secretary made strides towards the duo.

"I'm only teasing," she patted his shoulder, "-you're me and I'm you – there's no need to ask. Read my mind if thou art doubtful. I'll say it again, I came as the other you, we're more than family and friend, understand? I'm here to fight – have you not sensed it when we went against Intherna, the joy, and pleasures of being pushed back. That fight had me weirdly aroused, I can't contain the pleasure I got. The harder you fought back, the more pain she sustained, the more I felt my libido."

"Boss," waved Cake in the distance, her posture and walk hampered by the blowing wind. An invisible barrier of power that was mother nature. The power to force all being into submission.

"She'll be here soon," commented Staxius, "-I presume you're here to fight. Therefore, let's do it as one, Creation has more than we aren't aware of. We've become Gods, and we've taken over the responsibility of carrying souls to the afterlife. Kniq was good as an adventuring party to help in opening a guild in Arda. Now that's complete, I've no further use – the next order of business is the creation of an army. Phantom is where I'll settle."

"Sounds promising, the blood trade, I'll fight as long as I have pleasure in doing so. Now then, what about a name, Daemonum Gladio doesn't abide by the norm. It's as if yelling a spell or summoning a demon; not ladylike if you ask me."

"A name, let's just say you're my twin sister. Separated by birth, what you say?" he asked.

"Courtney Haggard," she offered.

"Courtney?" paused to think, "-I like it," he smiled, "-welcome to the family, dearest sister," patting her head, he smiled.

"Boss," Cake managed to walk against the wind, "-why are you standing in the open?" she asked. "Hold on a moment," staring her, two Staxius'. "Did you clone yourself?" she asked.

"No, of course not," glimpsing at his twin, "-this is my long-lost twin. Long lost as if I found out yesterday, becoming the first platinum adventurer made finding me easier."

"Well Boss," stopped, Cake shook her head in disbelief. "I won't question anything," she walked closer, "-definitely better as a woman," she commented, "-I'm Cake."

"Please to make your acquaintance, Cake, I'm Courtney Haggard," gentle and courteous, the mannerism matched Staxius.

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"Twin, you both speak similarly," on which she turned and led the way to the plane. "The guests are sure to arrive soon," pointing to the hangar, "-we've made preparations."

"Good job," nodded Staxius, "-Courtney, I'll go check on the plane, what will you do?"

"I'm going to follow you," she glared that went unnoticed by Cake.

"Catch me if you can then," toggling Shadow-Step, he dashed across the airfield.

“Don’t get so smug, brother,” glued to his back, they ran at the same speed.

On that, a few hours went by, guests were asked to make it before 17:30. Punctual as they were nobles, luxurious cars drove in and went around the runway. Gallienne, Piers, Sely, were the first to arrive. Next came Undrar and Auic. Josiah, Sophie from Claireville Academy. Cake stood at the ready for she would represent Phantom. Surprisingly, Prince Ernis, Aceline, Scott, and Lucy made the trip.

“Glad you all could make it,” said Staxius waiting next to the staircase into the plane. A carpet was deployed for the nobles to walk onto. No exchange of words, the guests were shocked out of speaking for the place held more authority. Expansive with cold-blooded guards standing with guns at the ready. No other guests – despite the list being long, arrived. At 17:45 sharp, even if more were to show up; none would be allowed inside. Taxied onto the runway, Staxius sat next to Courtney. Behind, the guest sat with eyes wandering around the place as if it were out of the ordinary. Such a display of power, fame, money, and strength. The stairs retracted; a rumbling signaled the massive engines coming to life. Turn upwards, it would take off vertically as opposed to a normal plane. Three crewmen with two controlling the guns. Gesturing a thumb’s up, the engines gradually increased in power, the force had many in fear. A resemblance to the echoes of wars not so long ago.

‘I better engage with the guests,’ stood, “-tis a pleasure to see thee have made it for a joyful occasion.” Royalty sat opposite one another, they cheered with wine glasses in hand.

“Refusing would be an insult,” added Ernis, “-I’ve longed to see the province from where my dear friend hails.”

“We had to come,” added Gallienne with a flustered face, “-we’re allies.” The exchange of pleasantries continued till Piers spoke out, “-Majesty,” he interjected in a polite tone, “-is the lady who sits at the front a relative of yours?”

“I heard my name,” she stood with grace.

‘Damn it,’ thought Staxius, ‘-Courtney’s going to use Dark-arts.’

“It’s a pleasure to make the acquaintance of my brother’s comrades,” giving a curtsy, “-I’m Courtney Haggard – his long lost twin sister.”

“Twin sister you say,” paused Ernis, “-you do look alike,” stating the obvious, Gallienne took a sip out of her glass.

“I do sense the same amount of mana emanating from you both,” her eyes narrowed in suspicion.

‘Do something,’ an elbow to the rib forced her to cough.

“I do apologize,” smiled Staxius, “-must be air-turbulence,” he added without sounding disingenuous.

“Tis a simple explanation,” the now angered Courtney turned to the Queen, “-twins are often one of the same. One could say we’re fragments of the same soul – separate yet united. Twins are rare, and the connection we share is often misinterpreted as lies or want for attention. I’ll say but one thing, Staxius and I are related by more than blood.”

“Do work on thy phrasing,” voiced Staxius, “-you make it sound so scandalous,” to which all who partook in the conversation laughed. “Why don’t you speak for longer,” offered Staxius who left to check on the others.

“Director Josiah and Sophie,” two seats after, “-it’s good to see that thee have accepted my invitation.”

“Oh, it’s no trouble,” flushed, Josiah said with an oblivious smile, “-I only wish that we could have done a little more.”

“It did come as a surprise to see you have a twin,” added Sophie with a not so joyful mood.

“Not that I wanted to hide the truth, it sort of happened – thus the result.”

“No matter,” she ate snacks one after the other, “-I’m only waiting to see your adorable babe. Do you think she’ll call me Auntie Sophie?”

“Auntie Sophie,” he laughed, “-I had no idea you wished to grow old so quick.”

“Listen here,” she nearly stood, -I’m not old, not yet anyway,” sitting down with a pout, “-you’ve outlasted your welcome, do jump off as punishment.” Nodding as if to say it was a good joke, he moved to Auic and Undrar.

“Hello Guild master,” smiled Auic.

“Hello brother,” added Undrar.

“Is something the matter?” he asked sensing doubt from the ladies.

“Yes actually,” added Undrar, “-I’m quite baffled by her sight,” she pointed at the twin. “She acts and speaks exactly like you,” her eyes narrowed, “-even her aura is powerful.”

“Don’t mind Viola,” interjected Auic, “-she’s a little upset by an argument she had with Julius before coming here. Apparently, Fenrir wanted to come sadly, Julius forced her to stay. Ayleth’s marriage isn’t far off – preparation has them in utter chaos.”

“It’s no issue,” he smiled, “-I’m glad you could make it.” Paused a little, “-I’m sorry,” he bowed.

“Sorry for what?” asked Auic whilst Undrar reached out to stop the gesture.

“I’m sorry for leaving Kniq behind. You all separated because of my selfish agenda.”

“What is this?” Undrar gave a small slap, “-you did nothing wrong,” she smiled, “-we heard it from the news. You rescued the apostle from Kreston – eight months fighting; First platinum Adventurer, you’ve made our guild proud.”

“Besides,” interjected Auic, “-you did tell us about the goal of opening a guild in Arda. We know from the start that tis was the goal – eventually, we’d have to part ways. Viola recounted us the tale of how you left the Silver Guardians as well. People move on, we’ve outstayed our use – tis understandable,” her fox ears sulked.

“What’s this talk all about,” he patted her head, “-I’ve not abandoned you. There’s more to do down the line – I’ll be seeking the help of my Guild-mates soon enough. Don’t get rusty, for now, do enjoy the

coming feast." Heart at ease, a master of words, many of the people on board were distant. Still, engaged in conversation, their worries turned to naught.

"How's it going?" asked Staxius after hugging Scott.

"Good actually," he gave a firm embrace, "-the plane is amazing, I had no idea you were this rich," his eyes continued to wander around, "-out of curiosity,' he leaned, "-how much is it worth?"

"250,000 Gold," replied Staxius.

"Holy," nearly choking on a biscuit, he sat back down and had water.

"Hello, Staxius," voiced Lucy, "-long time no see."

"Long time no see," they shook hands, "-what happened to Aceline?" the idol slept peacefully.

"Oh," abled to speak, "-she's a little fatigued from the auditions." On that, their conversation continued, outside, the scenery changed as they flew over Dorchester and reached Arda – a massive tree, bigger than a mountain came in view.

"Alright everyone," upfront, Staxius spoke loudly, "-we're going to land shortly. The province of Arda isn't that much different from what you know. Given the disparities, there's no need for concern – you're here today as guests and comrades of the King. I'll say but one thing, enjoy the feast. I shall see you all once we've landed," nodding his head, "-I'll be back." \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

#### Chapter 304: Second Princess

Alone and robust, the setting sun was soon overpowered by the dazzling light from the castle. Lit from all over, carpets led into the palace. Carriages with differing crests entered. Led inside with butlers aiding, the last level of the tree felt peaceful and quiet.

A few kilometers down; the same could not be said. Lit the same with noise and chants. The streets came to life, flyers of which read, '-congratulations to the royal family,' scattered around. Mug in hand, farmers and adventurers alike danced and filled the town square. Musicians took center stage to perform their various pieces. Fast and rhythmic – it filled many with energy and the passion to dance.

"Sure is a treat to have a festival once in a while," said one of the adventurers.

"I agree," yelled a woman with short hair, "-princess Lizzie is rumored to have shown promise in the ways of magic. An offspring of our all mighty queen and the protector of Arda – how powerful will she become I wonder," downing mug after mug, the tavern echoed with cheers and sweats.

"Father," sat waiting in a lovely white dress with glitters, a pair of laced gloves going up to her shoulder, Eira's gently combed white hair resembled the bud of a yet to blossom flower. The bedchamber filled with attending maids – all had focused their attention on dressing the queen.

"Am I intruding?" he asked and stepped in.

"Not really," replied Xula with her hair getting combed, "-have the guests arrived?"

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“They’ll be here shortly,” the attention turned to Eira, “-the crown of princess befits you,” he smiled, the silvery-white crown held a massive red-ruby in the front. Worth more than diamonds, messing with royalty’s coffer when it came to jewelry was but a fool’s errand.

“Thank you,” holding her dress, she bowed with a smile.

“Words of gratitude are wasted on me, highness. A refine gemstone such as thee must have fallen from heaven. Do beg my asking, art thou a star or an angel?”

“Stop with the teasing,” pitching his forearm, they laughed. In the corner, a cold stare sent a shiver down his spine.

“Whatever is the matter, my queen?” turned, her eyes were of a reddened color, anger, or frustration.

“Do you wish to partake in the feast looking like that?” she asked for he wore shabby clothes. Ones brought over from the many shopping trips with comrades.

“Queen Shanna is right,” as if a shadow, Rosetta teleported behind, “-Youst has been awaiting thy return for much. Do please not cause unnecessary upset, the poor man has been troubled ever since this morning. He has reached the point of which to step willingly into oblivion.”

“He blames himself for the revolt?” asked Staxius with a stern voice.

“He blames more,” added Rosetta.

“Then I shan’t waste thine time,” nodding his head, “-I shall come to fetch in a moment,” reaching for the door left ajar, a weak push sufficed. Glancing back, Eira and Xula waved simultaneously.

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‘They sure are very much happy,’ catching a glimpse, the clock displayed 17:50. ‘TU-03 should be here soon, I’ve already asked Serene to greet the guests on the platform. The event starts at 18:30. I’ve time to shower.’

\*tap, tap, tap,\* back and forth, the nervous agitation of Youst echoed in a separate room. One used for the king’s personal use. The incident earlier though it brought laughter; was to never happen. Thus, per Xula’s orders, an unused room changed to a closet. Cupboards all around with a circular platform in the middle and a mirror on the wall. Next to said mirror, a glass case with many protection spells – it held his crown and staff. The Dragon-Heart staff adorned with precious stones. The staff, not as tall as those used by mages, about an arm’s length; some could describe it as a walking stick. None the matter to details, tis was a well and good staff. \*tap, tap, tap,\* and again, anxiety peaked, Youst’s legs moved without him knowing.

\*Click,\* “Youst?” the door opened and broke the monotonous taps. “Majesty,” stood from a stool, the head-butler rushed to kneel at his feet, “-what I’ve done earlier the day can’t be forgiven. I ask to have mercy and deliver a painless death; having doubts about our monarch is a sin a servant cannot atone in life.”

‘Impressive,’ ignoring the groveling, ‘-light colors,’ he scanned with utmost focus, ‘-my crown and the outfit I am to wear,’ stood a step away from the podium – a white and gold outfit. One twice as elegant and overly obnoxious – the court tailor spared no expense.

“Majesty?” forehead locked to the cold-floor, “-have you chosen my punishment?” he asked.

“Youst, after you’ve basked in the spotless floor’s pleasures, could you assist in dressing me, the attire vexes me, I’ve no idea on where my head should go or where my legs must land,” arms crossed, a lie to say all was forgotten. Shedding a single tear, the butler rushed.

“Would his majesty care to spare this unworthy butler the honor of asking a question?” spoken as the clothes were fitted around the king, Staxius raised an eyebrow.

“What’s the matter?”

“Not that I wish to intrude, however, I feel as if you’ve changed in some way. I’ve not wrapped mine head around it – instant say that tis thy speech,” done, he stepped back.

“I’ve no idea what you may be referring too,” admiring his clothes, “-I do agree that my manner of speech has altered a minute amount. Tis nothing to fret over; holding a formal tone is a must in tonight’s gathering. Princess Lizzie is to be celebrated, I wish to show that the royal family is ready to lead,” filled with conviction, the crown was placed on his head. Staff in hand, twenty minutes had passed. “A job well done,” patting Youst’s back, “-you’re an amazing worker. Perish the thought of heading into oblivion, there’s more to accomplish,” grabbing the doorknob, “-you need to watch as Lizzie grows into a strong princess. She shall need all the help that we can muster,” opened, the imposing figure vanished into the hallway’s shadows.

‘King Staxius,’ knelt out of fatigue, ‘-it brings me joy to serve a magnanimous king such as you. I can’t but wait to see what Arda becomes; we’re on the way to change, I felt it. The pressure that oozed when the door opened; it seeped all my strength. A god in the guise of a vampire; I might be giving to old age.’

Air cut as if it were the butchers, a black shadow came from the North East. “They’re here,” voiced Serene, “-toggle on the light,” the platform sparkled.

“How goes it?” teleported with formal attire, Staxius stood close to Serene who had her gaze on the craft.

“I said,” tapping her shoulder, “-how goes it?”

“Majesty,” taken aback, “-you’ve come to welcome the guests,” wasting no time, she directed elves that stood with light-spells. On hover, the air-monster began its descent. Bigger than the craft, the platform stood without trouble, slowly, the wind blew harsher. Holding desperately on her dress, Serene’s eyes watered. Not only her, but the same looks of concern were also seen on the elves.

\*Death Element: Hand of God,\* a snap later, walls summoned to help break the wind. Bows of gratitude were seen all-around. \*Tsst,\* landed, the engines breathed a sigh of relief similar to cold water hitting hot metal.

“Arda at last,” the door opened with Cake leading the front. Dressed in a black dress with a furred coat, she walked graciously.

“Welcome to Arda,” stood in line, the elves who gave light bowed as the guest walked. In the end, Staxius stood with his crown, staff, kingly outfit.

“We meet again,” formal, Cake held her dress and bowed.

“Over here, my lady,” butlers stood at the ready to escort the guests.

“Do follow the butler, he shall lead to the throne room,” he said with a smile.

Next, Prince Ernis, Queen Gallienne, Prince consort Piers, and Queen Mother Sely. Exchanging pleasantries, royalty was treated with respect.

“I must say,” voiced Gallienne, “-King Staxius, the crown befits you,” a jest to which they headed inside. Following them, Undrar and Auic dressed accordingly, nothing overly fancy – it sufficed as formal clothes. In the same fashion, they were warmly welcomed. Escorted out; a muscular figure stepped, the stair seemed to want to give in to the weight, Josiah with Sophie. Identical reactions all around, they knew Staxius to be a king. Only in speech and not physical, he with a crown forever etched into their mind – powerful and menacing. Lastly, Aceline, Scott, and Lucy, “-welcome to Arda, dearest comrades.”

“Thanks, majesty,” as to not step out of line, all who walked were very self-conscious. The eyes of the elves, the stares of guards hidden around; being overly friendly could have changed the situation.

“King Staxius,” half-awake, “-you’re looking rather handsome,” commented Aceline, her sentence had Serene on edge. “Look at you,” her fingers reached to Staxius’s face. In the background, Serene’s eyes narrowed, her nails grew sharper for it was rude.

“You’re the one who looks absolutely stunning,” glared at the guards, he secretly grabbed onto Serene’s overly itchy finger. “Butler,” called, a demi-human in a tuxedo appeared, “-could you show Lady Aceline to the washroom. She seems a little flushed.”

“This way ma’am,” he led the way, Lucy followed behind with a relieved face.

“That was a close one,” whispered Scott.

“Don’t worry about formality,” spoke Staxius, “-we’re friends. You’re here as my guest, none will raise a finger let alone voice at thee all,” looking around, “-have I made myself clear?” a question to the attendants “-As you wish, majesty,” echoed.

A few minutes passed, 18:30 came around. The throne room was filled moderately, portal led to various spots. Gathered in one spot, representatives spoke to one another. The appearance of the famed-Queen Gallienne gave birth to curiosity. It had been a first for non-Ardanians to be allowed passage into the continent. In good-intent, Haru with an enormous smile took strides and spoke to Piers. They had grown acquainted over the days.

“Tis a pleasure to make thy acquaintance, Majesty,” giving a curtsy, the demi-human smiled.

“The pleasure is all mine,” Gallienne returned the sentiment, “-I’ve heard many good things from my husband.”

“Is that so,” slyly gazing at Piers, “-did her majesty enjoy the present?”

\*Cough,\* Piers startled to the point of choking on his drink. “W-what ever do you mean?” he asked with a scared look.

“I enjoyed it,” smiled Gallienne, “-it was very good. I’d say the prince enjoyed it more than I,” on that, jesting back and forth, Haru broke the ice. From secluded, more and more Ardanians gathered around



and spoke. Few teenagers ran around; “-you’re the Idol Aceline,” they stood with phones in hand, “-I love all your songs,” they cheered.

“So precious,” in awe, Aceline could but engage strongly with the youth.

“I must say that lady Aceline sure is popular with my daughters,” approached one of the nobles from the Demi-human factions.

“I never would have thought that her music would have had such an impact,’ voiced Scott as the crowd moved from left to right.

\*Now entering, the Royal Family of Arda,\* a shuffled followed by a pin drop silence – the announcement had many on edge. Babe covered in a red blanket with the royal crest embroidered, Xula walked beside Staxius who locked arms with Eira. Many of the young nobles in attending had their heart stolen, slowly they walked up the stairs to the throne.

“First and foremost,” spoke out Xula, “-I would like to thank all who were able to take time out and make it for the celebrations of the Second Princess of Arda’s birth. Tonight is a night of joy; do as thine heart dictates.” Stepped back, it signaled for Staxius to speak. “As her majesty said, we’re here as friends. Void prejudices, on my behalf, many special guests from Oxshield have come to join our festivities. Most prominent are Prince Ernis from the Empire and Queen Gallienne from Hidros. Speak as you would a normal comrade,” staring far back, “-I see that Lady Haru and Prince Consort Piers are already enjoying the drinks,” said in jest, laughter followed. At ease, the celebration commenced.

#### Chapter 305: Celebrations

Walked into the throne room; the pin-drop silence following the speech returned to the norm. Claps echoed around after which conversations resumed. “Father,” called Eira, “-what are we supposed to do?” she asked giving a glance to Xula who held Lizzie.

“I suppose we should converse with the guests,” looking down, the face felt lighter than before.

“Staxius,” a soft voice called from behind, “-could you please take care of Lizzie,” her eyes wandered upstairs. Many of her friends had come and were eagerly awaiting her return.

“Of course, do enjoy thyself,” held in a cradle, Lizzie slept as if all the noise were naught. As for Xula, she climbed the stairs with screams of joy resounding down.

“Eira,”

“Yes?” she who had been staring the babe had her eyes glow.

“Do you want to maybe hold your little sister?” he asked.

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“N-not right now,” she stepped away, “-I’m a little on edge. I fear that I might drop her,” her face stared away.

“No matter,” clear and direct, “-let’s go meet with the guests, it would be rude not to participate.”

“Lead the way then, father,” gracefully, they walked to the nobles. Pretty standard for gatherings of sorts, most were impatient to see the second princess. One by one, the King attended to each and everyone present. Rosetta and Youst remained close in case the babe needed attention or change of clothes. Eira was showered with compliments that night, noble boys from other prestigious families approached with compliments of which they harassed the beauty of the moon on a clear night sky or the aroma of flowers. As cold as she was at Claireville academy, her gaze changed the moment she sensed ulterior motives of baseless praises. Engaged with the parents, Staxius could but use the All-seeing eye and watch over Eira. Not overprotective, he was curious to how she dealt with frivolous approaches.

“Goddess Sephira,” a boy walked over and spoke.

“Pardon?” turned, Eira squinted her eyes.

“I do apologize,” he took a step back, a fox-demi human from the noble family of Ishra. The oldest son; shunned for being weak and unable to produce mana and wield any weapon. Frail constitution, the family cared only about power, thus the second oldest was in line to head their family. The Ishra’s were one of the noble families in Arda. Not that they meant to focus solely on power, said family had always trained special guards for the royal family. Vowed to serve the Queen at any cost, it didn’t come as a surprise when a boy that weak was born, “-I mistook her highness for a goddess I’ve heard of in the many books I’ve read.”

“Goddess Sephira, the ice-queen,” she stared an unwanted smile, “-you wish to compare me to the goddess who’s praised for being the most dignified and virtuous out of the elder-gods?”

“I apologize fully,” he bowed, “-I meant no disrespect, it’s just that thine hair, cold and pure made my feet move on its own.”

“Pleased to make your acquaintance,” smiled Eira, “-you’re the first who’s approached me with curiosity as opposed to my rank and beauty,” a lock of hair grew to tickle her face, using the index, she gracefully returned it behind her ear, “-I’m First Princess of Arda, Eira Haggard.”

“I-I’m Kozu Ishra, eldest son of the Ishra family.”

“Do enjoy the party, Lord Ishra,” nodding her head, she returned to Staxius. The latter had finished his conversation with the head of the Ishra family, a menacing wolf-demi human. Stex Ishra, one of the strongest swordsmen in Arda.

“Father,” whispered Eira, “-were you spying on me?” she asked.

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“Not spying,” he stared with a blank face, “-I was only waiting for the typical go-to-hell refute.

“I see,” she poked at his stomach, “-do you wish to say I’m cold also?”

“I yield,” he laughed, “-let’s go meet with Uncle Josiah.” Having conversed with all the guests, what remained were his comrades.

“Brother,” coming out of the shadow behind Gallienne, “-I’m back,” smiled Courtney for he didn’t see her after the landing.

“W-who’s that woman?” asked Eira in shock, her foot stopped moving with the face turning to one ready for battle.

“Don’t pay her heed,” said Staxius monotonously, “-Uncle Josiah.” They spoke till Xula made her way down, a little flustered, she moved quickly around the crowd, “-Staxius,” she touched his shoulders.

“Wrong person,” replied a female voice.

“Wait,” a few meters away stood her husband, “-who are you?” she turned to the twin.

“We meet again, majesty,” smiled Courtney.

“Those eyes,” she took a step back, “-Daemonum Gladio,” instantly recognized, Staxius intervene for the queen had Prophecy on standby to fight. “Please my queen,” he caught her hand, “-you needn’t worry. I forgot to introduce my long-lost Twin sister, she’s a little eccentric.” Glared as a response, Xula had none of it.

“Yes, I am indeed Daemonum Gladio,” bowed the lady, “-I’m your dearest husband’s alter ego. Someone who’s very much enjoys fighting, to the death,” a smirk portrait itself, “-however, it’s nothing you should worry about. I’m here as friend opposed to foe – Let’s say that Staxius and I have many things that are to become apparent in a few days.” Escaping her fury, a crying Lizzie took the queen’s mind off the developing situation. Together, husband and wife headed into the bedchambers to take care of the babe. Inconspicuous, none had an idea of what had happened. There, the king spoke the truth and explained the situation in greater detail. After which, opposed to being angry, Xula’s face replaced for one frightened. He didn’t skip out the detail about fighting a god in another realm. A prospect that had her on edge, of which her hand tightly grasped onto his as if to never let go. Her fear was of him going to a place where not even death could reach.

“I won’t say to not worry, it would be selfish of me. I know it comes as a surprise; however, I’ve attained divinity. It makes me a God by both name and body, I know not if you were aware. I’m the heir to the God of Death. I’ve shown Eira my truest form; she’s fine with the idea. I chose to keep it a secret for it would have caused unnecessary unrest as you bore Lizzie at the time. That’s my truth, the reason why I’ve always been strong and weak at the same time. Being mighty means nothing in the grander scheme. You’re close to attaining the rank of demi-goddess, you must know what we have to deal with. I’m thy conduit – for the longest time, all your power has been channeling through me. I feel it every time I fight, the warmth of home, that’s why I can say for certain that I’ll always come back.”

“We’re filled with drama, aren’t we?” Xula gave a nervous chuckle, “-the things we both deal on a daily basis far eludes us. I’ll do what I can to support you,” on that, Staxius interjected, “-I’ll do the same, my queen,” sat on the bed close to one another, \*KNOCK, KNOCK,\* the door opened.

“Mother, Father,” Eira stood in the doorway with hands on her hips.

“Come in,” said Xula a little flustered, the would-be kiss interrupted.

“May I ask what you were about to do?” the door close behind.

“Your mother had something stuck on her cheek, I thought I’d help.” As not to cause trouble, Staxius stood and headed out to tend to the guests. Many presents were given and stacked in a storeroom down the corridor.

“Josiah,” spoke Staxius, many of the guests were famished. To that end, tables were readied for dinner.

“Uncle, are you coming?” asked Sophie who moved with the others.

“Go on ahead, I’ll be there in a moment,” he stopped with the focus on Staxius,

“About the exchange program for students, could you give me the details right now?”

“Sure,” reaching for a letter in his suit, “-Eira’s class 2-A will be sent over to Arda on the 6th of December. It will not interfere with their studies. They choose to give time off their vacation to be able to learn from the leader of Kniq. What do you say, is that acceptable?”

“What about the time they are to spend here?”

“That’s to your discretion, Guild Master, though we recommend less than sixteen days for they are from noble families,” he took out an agreement, “-here are the papers.” Signed and cared for, Josiah resumed his walk towards having dinner. As if clockwork, Xula exited of a portal for a maid had called on them to dine. ‘6th of December, depending on how the monsters are handled; we might head for Plaustan. The Tower might be a good training ground. Tomorrow’s the day the deal is to take place out in Easel Run-Gard; I hope it goes to plan.’

Time showed 19:30. Royalty dined with royalty, Ernis took a liking to the people around and so was the feeling from Gallienne. Queen Mother Sely was quite reserved by the sudden interactions. Courtney made herself rather popular amongst the Ardianians, her charm which came from Dark-Arts ensnared many of strangers.

“She’s as sharp with her tongue as she’s sharp with her thirst for blood,” commented Xula after having wine. Once dinner was over, they moved to the ballroom where many swayed to the melodic arts of the musicians.

“Father,” turned Eira with an innocent gaze, “-let’s dance,” she asked with a smile.

“Go ahead,” nodded Xula, “-from what I can see, many young suitors wish to dance our daughter. What will it be, King, are you ready to let her go or will you take her hand and dance?” Swayed on the clean white marble floor with golden leaves and flowers. Each tile served to create a masterpiece. High walls ending in a dome that sparkled as mightily as the sun. Left to right, couples danced.

“Care to dance,” he held out a hand to which she accepted. Thus, father and daughter took to the center. Leading the piece, Staxius felt as graceful as a feather, complimenting him was Eira who moved just as graciously. “That was fun,” they stopped with the music.

“Good luck,” said Xula, “-Eira, you do realize dancing with your father means that one is not ready to have any romantic endeavors.”

“Of course, I know,” she smiled, “-I’ve more things on my mind than petty matters of the heart.”

“I shall leave you girls to it.” Walking across towards Ernis and the rest, he joined with the comrades and spoke for minutes that turned to hours. During said conversations, many, many little rumors were known to him. The ins and outs of what Kreston had been up to. News that Undrar voiced with a smile.

“Majesty,” without notice, time reached 22:00, “-many of the guests have already left,” added Serene.

“Dear me,” laughed Gallienne flustered, they all had taken a room to drink the night away. Eira took care of Lizzie whilst her mother and father entertained themselves.

“It was p-please t-to come here,” stumbled Ernis.

“Highness,” caught, “-you should show restraint when drinking,” teased Staxius.

“It truly was an honor to visit Arda,” smiled Undrar; the feeling was mutual across the faces.

“Why don’t you escort them home?” asked Xula, “-do wash up,” she spoke to everyone.

“I guess so,” a little tipsy, “-butlers helped the men whilst maids helped the ladies. Even Queen Mother Sely’s face lit with a reddened glow. “I’ll go change,” whispered Staxius.

\*Clop, clop, clop,\* echoed in the corridor leading to the changing room, a figure stood near the door. “Courtney.”

“Hey brother, are they heading home?” she asked.

“Yeah,” he entered, “-what about you, where will you rest?”

“I’ll crash at Pandora for the time being. I can’t afford to cause you trouble now can I?” she smiled. “-I love to kill; therefore, I’ll take the mask of Shadow and ask for work. You’ll know what I’m doing at all times, besides, aren’t you going to research for the puppet army?”

“Yeah,” he changed clothes; “-you’ll be spreading the name of Shadow as one to be feared. Do as you wish, dearest sister, I’ll trust you since thou art I,” reaching for a wallet, “-here,” a key, “-that’s for Pandora. Stay as long as you want; reach out for help the instant you’re cornered.”

“Brother, oh-brother,” she slapped his back, “-we’re gods after all. I’ve no intention of losing.”

#### Chapter 306: Port Elte

The salty aroma of the sea breeze tickled the nose. Waves flowed and crash mercilessly a few kilometers away on a cliff. From blue to white with a fizzing sound, the mid-day sun blazed without restraint. Above, the roar of airplanes flying around with a green and black tail. Docked, a large black and red ship cast a shadow on the port as the sun made way to the west.

“Sure, took yer time,” stood with guns at the ready, around ten-men with black glasses with empty emblems. Members of Phantom in the company of others bearing a differing style of suits – one distinct to Godfather Renaud’s guards.

“We do apologize for the trouble,” disembarked in an orderly fashion, soldiers in green uniform with a yellow dragon on their chest. “Lieutenant Read at your service,” spoke out the leader.

“Lieutenant you say,” voiced one of the Phantoms, “-we’d like to examine the arms before continuing the deal, is that adequate?” he asked with a cigar in mouth.

“Sure thing,” he turned and faced four trucks covered by a heavy dark blanket. \*Clang,\* one of the wooden crates broke open, “-these are the Antis-V2, we intercepted a shipment a few weeks ago,” the lieutenant continued explaining how they came to possess the cargo.

“Looks to be in order,” voiced the buyer as he jumped off the truck. Rejoined with the team who glared fearlessly at the army-men, the opposite soldiers weren’t discouraged, rather, their fingers itched.

“Now then Lieutenant,” backed by his men, the deal took place in a supply depot of the Eastern Kingdom. Secluded which was used as a port before the war. Located at the south of the Eastern continent; a mountain range protected the port. The only way of access was either by sea or a path that went around the mountain towards the East. Heavily barricaded, most of the forces were called to move further in-land as the Western Kingdom took the initiative with harder than before attacks. “The rate is 300 Gold per rifle.”

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“Preposterous,” lashed out the army-man, the face visibly on edge. The lack of men around had caused the lieutenant to shudder. “The deal was 325 per unit, you can’t change the deal without notice,” gestured strongly with his hands, the message didn’t reach Phantom.

“Those are the orders I got, don’t shoot the messenger as they say,” giving a nonchalant shrug, Read grew annoyed.

“How dare you!” he yelled, “-we got offered 310 Gold per unit by another country. Why the fuck would we go for such a deal,” turned, “-tell your boss to go shove it.” \*BANG,\* one of his squadmates had his head exploded; the blood splashed onto the Lieutenant’s face.

“JOHN,” turned in anger, “-SHO...” numerous heads of men peaking from the ship had their gun aimed.

“Lieutenant Read,” spoke the Phantom, “-I forgot to mention a tiny detail,” he smiled. “There also came another order from the top, in case the deal doesn’t go through; we’d forcefully take the cargo in addition to what military supplies you have stored. This isn’t a deal you can back out so easily,” puffing smoke, “-what will it be, 300 per unit or we raid the port?”

“DON’T LISTEN TO HIM SIR,” yelled out of the squad-mate, \*BANG,\* before he could raise his gun at Yves’s head; the army man dropped dead. “You think we’d not know about you robbing a sister supply depot due to greed,” smirking, “-traitors to one’s country deserves death. Even so, Shadow was gracious enough to allow thee to live, what will it be?”

“F-fine,” raising his hand, “-FIRE,” he yelled – additional men jumped out the trucks. “You thought you’re the only one with a plan?” laughing maniacally, one of the soldiers used a launcher named RXP-VF, the latter used magic and science. A launcher that packed the same firepower as grenades.

“GET DOWN,” yelled YVES, “-Shadow, we need help,” he yelled through an earpiece.

‘On it,’ the projectile fired, all moved in slow-motion, the guards leaped out of the impact area, bracing for the explosion, “-Is that all?” a black-figure landed from out of nowhere. “Is this toy supposed to be dangerous?” nonchalant, stiletto dug itself into the shell, \*snap,\* a compressed shockwave blew outwards. The impact forced many on their knee; Crimson mask with the features to a demon, knee-long hair with a sword on the waist, “-Yves.”

“Yes boss,” from on the ground, the man answered her call, “-what is your wish?”

“Get Cake on the phone,” she approached the Lieutenant as the shockwave forced many on their knee.

“W-who are you?” asked Read who fell onto his bottom.

“Shadow,” sheathed sword in hand, “-do you have more surprises in store?”

“You’re the leader of Phantom then,” his eyes lit, “-we got them,” yelled into his collar, the closed building opened with countless men in uniform running out. “I do apologize,” he stood, “-I’m no traitor to my country. We needed funds, therefore, away from the central line of command – we turned rogue to lead and capture an arms dealer. You people deal with death, all that money made off the heads of the people your weapons have shot, we need them now.” Stood proudly, “-the men behind me are here to deal the final blow. Give us the money or we’ll kill you all.”

“Boss,” yelled Yves, “-Cake is on the line.”

“Don’t ignore me,” he reached for the mask, \*Crack,\* “-don’t disturb me,” gritted Shadow as she held his wrist, the earpiece toggled.

“Shadow?” asked the secretary.

“Yes, it’s me,” she replied with her grip tightening.

“Whatever is the matter?”

“The Eastern army pulled one over on us,” every so often, she’d glare at Read who wanted to give the order to shoot. Reinforcement gathered and marched in slowly; boxed in with the only escape being the sea or the ship – Shadow stood without care.

“Courtney,” a deep voice interjected in the channel, “-you need not worry about a thing. I’ll settle the issue with Renaud, slay them without mercy, send them to oblivion,” the call ended.

“You look less imposing,” voiced Read, “-did your backup not respond?”

“On the contrary,” with a single flick, the wrist broke, screamed overpowered the crashing waves. “-Code Black everyone.”

Code Black, hearing those two words, guards jumped off the ship with guns at the ready. “What are you doing, fool, KILL THEM!” yelled Read.

“Tis time you head to sleep,” \*slash,\* beheaded, the body dropped with blood spewing everywhere. Panicked, reinforcement dashed behind trucks and opened fire. Behind steel-pillars holding crane, Phantom returned fire. Gracefully in the middle of bullets flying from left, right, center, Shadow made minimal movement – unsheathed, at last, \*Death Element – Daemonum Variant: Ire,\* blasted through the air, the concrete caved the instant she jumped. One by one, heads fell without realizing what happened, \*CRACK,\* the road broke as she landed. \*Click,\* the sword sheathed, \*Death Element – Daemonum Variant: Silence,\* white flame burst forth to combust those who she had killed.

“Alright people,” returned, “-empty those warehouses – take any and everything; we’re done here.” The daze of Code Black broke; thus, the deal at Easel Run-Gard came to an end. Loaded on the boat, they soon set sail after five hours.

Sat in the alchemist tower, Staxius worked on the idea of a puppet army. King and Queen shared the burden of office work. Transferred over to the tower, all that paperwork could be viewed from where he stood without going to the office. A few favors were called to make it possible. Multitasking [Job complete. Phase-Two has commenced] flashed across a purple screen – one used for Phantom and the DG, the many screens were separated to allow a clean and clear indication of what happened at all times. From Guild to Arda, and Phantom with the DG underneath, he grew accustomed to all four quickly.

‘Phase two,’ he thought with hand moving subconsciously, ‘-The ship has set sail for Unfu’s archipelago, Halos’s Isle. An isle owned by the Dark-guilds. One that’s used for the export of God’s ale. Since it’s illegal in other countries, I figured many bases like this would be dotted around. Never would I have thought that Renaud would contact to reveal the location. An airfield and a port; the perfect hideout.’

Three days had passed since the celebrations. The TU-03 was refitted to serve as transport for Phantom. Negotiations took longer to organize for it was planned to happen a few days ago. A sudden attack from the West caused unrest.

‘Eastern faction is getting desperate for money,’ he paused with a diagram of a dismembered body, ‘-they choose to go against the DG knowing full-well of the consequences. Looting that supply depot might come back to harm us later. In no way can Phantom take the blame of such a slaughter.’

“Cake,” earpiece toggled, “-can I have the contact info of General Miller?”

“Are you going to negotiate the deal already?” asked Cake.

“No, we need to clean up the mess Shadow caused,” flashed in purple, the interface began a new call.

“Who dare use the private channel so nonchalantly!” the voice of an angered old man came through.

“I do apologize for the sudden call,” deep, a menacing voice spoke, “-there’s something I’d like to negotiate.”

“If it’s for the release of prisoners, then shove it, the Western Kingdom will never give an ounce of mercy to its enemies,’ yelled, it nearly deafened Staxius.

“Tis no such thing,” from relaxed, he leaned, “-I’ve got a proposal. There’s crucial information I’m willing to sell, one that could alter the course of the war. As far as the Western Kingdom is concerned, you’re reaching the end of your forces. A cornered rat is what suits thee best.”

“Though it pains me, I do agree. But there’s no way I’ll buy information from an unknown caller,” from anger, it settled a little, a sign of that he had his attention.

“Understandable,” deep breath in, “-I’m from Phantom, an arm’s dealing company. I’ve heard of the Western Kingdom lacking arms and bullets. I’ve got a shipment of 2000 Units of Antis-2 and 200,000 bullets ready to export on a moment’s notice. As a bonus, I’ll throw in a war-changing piece of information.”

“I see,” the voice relaxed, “-you could not have come at a better time. We’re running low on weapons. Antis-2 is the new model of an assault rifle. It could change the war. You’ve intrigued me, Phantom, care to give me the rate?”



“450 Gold per Rifle and 1 Gold for every 50 bullets, you do realize that the Antis-2 is hard to come by. The manufacturing company with technology has declared bankruptcy due to certain unfortunate events. These are the last batch to be made.”

“450 gold is way overpriced, even if it’s the new model. The retail price was around 420 on launch. War is rough, we have no means to pay 450 for 2000 units.”

“How about 420 then, I’ll give you the retail price if you buy the whole 2000 units.”

“400 and we have a deal,” fired back the old man.

“400 Gold per unit for 2000 Rifles, what about the bullets?”

“We’ll take the lot.”

“Understood, the total will be 804,000 gold. When do you wish for the weapons to be delivered?”

“Tomorrow at 14:00 at Shelder’s Airfield, you’ll have the money upon delivery.”

“Consider it a deal, General Miller. In good faith, I’ll give you the information for free. Port Elte, now supply depot for the Eastern Army is unoccupied. Send troupes from the south; an outpost sheltered by the mountain, I sure you know what this means.”

“If what you say is true, then the Western Kingdom might have a chance. Too a fruitful relationship,” the phone ended.

‘As expected, the old geezer overseeing the army is an idiot. Has no care for tactics, fight with grit, and strength. All the better for me.’ [Shelder’s Airfield at 14:00, delivery of the Arms] Landed at Halos Isle, the TU-03 would make the trip. ‘We just made a deal of 804,000 Gold on a single day, that’s a fortune.’

Chapter 307: Arcane Library

Leaned on the chair, a moment of shut-eye for the time said 15:00. \*Dring, Dring,\* [Caller: Auic]

“Hello?”

“Hello, guild leader, I apologize for such short notice. Could you please make the trip to headquarters, I’ve got a couple who wish to speak to you. They seem to know you personally; the lady, in particular, she’s very, very adamant.”

“Alright,” stood with his phone in the pocket, the call ended. ‘I need to go stretch my legs,’ yawned out of fatigue. He walked through a portal, “-what’s the problem?” the door opened as he stepped out into Kniq’s headquarters. A glance showed Auic leaned back on her chair. Her eyes squinted with her fox-ears turned away.

“Anything the matter?” he stepped into her room. A man and woman stood; the former had a backpack as large as him. The latter sat with her legs crossed, her aura felt as if a viper.

“Guild Master,” voiced Auic in relief, “-glad you could make it.”

“Guild master,” their gazes met, “-you’re here,” the man reached out for a handshake.

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“Elliot,” he gave a nonchalant once over, “-you seem to be doing rather well, what brings you here?” the stare reached behind towards the lady as well.

“Well-”

“Never mind,” interjected Staxius, “-you’ve annoyed my secretary enough. Let’s head to my office.” The trio stepped out, glimpsing back, Auic smiled as if to say thank you.

\*Beep,\* toggled, the curtain parted thus letting the sun inside. “Speak your mind,” arms crossed with a tough stare, the guild leader emanated fear.

“Well,” clearing his throat, “-I’ve come to say thank you,” he bowed, “-thank you for letting us have a place to stay. My sister’s condition has improved tremendously. Lady Cake took her to Town Claireville and paid for the medical expenses. Her smile made me motivated to work, I registered with the guild and went on the job. I even got recruited by a party. It all went fine until the truth about my personality came to pass. On a quest, we were asked to protect a trading caravan from Rogues on the outskirts of Riverwood. As expected, we were ambushed. Knightfall in hand, I did my job and exterminated the trouble. I got praised for the skill shown; still, I couldn’t qualm the hunger I had. The more I shot, the hungrier I got, monsters soon became weaklings, my party dropped me because of said thirst,” he held the lady’s hand, “-without nothing to shoot, Knightfall’s ire grew. No money, nothing – I have your debt to repay, sadly, the guild isn’t where I belong. This is why I’ve sought you out, Shadow, leader of Phantom. I heard from Cake that you were in the process of recruiting people for a personal army,” matching Staxius’s gaze, “-let me join your faction. I’ll kill anyone you ask, tis all I’ve done my whole life. In no way can I change back to lead a normal life, it would be selfish. I can’t, with what I’ve seen, there’s no way.”

‘This man,’ thought Staxius, ‘-reminds me of myself. An urge to kill, he’s worked for Kreston. Given their nature, he’s a machine programmed to kill. Knightfall, the spirit of his gun also gives out an aura similar to a demon. It would be a shame to let such a talent rot. A marksman that can shoot a person from 2.5 kilometers away; a Guardian.’

“You wish to join Phantom?”

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“Yes,” adamant, the voice screamed of determination.

‘Tomorrow’s the day we deal with the Western army. I fear that they might pull one over on us. That amount of gold is no laughing matter. They could buy fighter-planes if wanted. Miller is the kind of General to fight without relying on machines. I’ve made up my mind,’ he stood, “-if you wish to join Phantom, head to the airfield immediately. Tis out in Rotherham,” reached into the suit, “-give this to the guard,” a card. “It’s addressed to Cake, she’ll be waiting for your arrival.”

“Thank you, sir,” stood Elliot with a smile, “-I won’t disappoint,” another handshake.

“Don’t count your lucky stars yet, you’re but a potential recruit,” firm, he returned the handshake. “About you,” turned to the lady, “-is there something you wish for?”

“No,” seductively, “-I’ve come to assist my young master,” her body flickered, “-you see,” her hand crawled down her waist, “-I crave for one thing,” her eyes seemed to lit, “-and its blood.”

"I do wish that you'd not sully the chair, tis not a bed," unimpressed, "-the matters of the flesh is meant to be sorted in private," the gaze stern as her wrist moved gently.

"Stop," grabbed Elliot, "-don't you ruin our chance with your libido," he gritted, "-I'm sorry about that," he turned with a nervous smile, "-Knightfall is a little, risqué," he gulped.

"Oh, that matters not," voiced Staxius who reached for the door, "-if she wishes to partake in the bonding of flesh; I would not mind employing her as a lady of the night. There isn't a lack of sex-crazed idiots around these parts, what you say?" the eyes emotionless, her response was one of confusion. "Since thine hand moved to pleasure thyself, why not allow strangers to do the same. I mean, thou tried to elicit a response."

"Fine," she rolled her eyes, "-sharp eyesight I'd say," the duo stood, "-you intrigue me, leader of Phantom."

"I'd wish to say the same thing," he pointed to a ring on his left hand, "-I'm a married man. Even if I were a bachelor, I'd still not have any desire to approach thee," giving a smug smile; her face grew harsher.

"Tough nut to crack," she winked. "-Come on," Elliot pushed her out the room, "-we'll make way to the airfield. See you soon, sir," they argued till the elevator.

"What was that about?" asked Auic who walked out her office.

"Some people I met during my trip to Kreston. The man is a talented sniper, I should be able to find him work."

"For Phantom?" asked Auic.

"Yes," he smiled, "-for Phantom. How goes the guild while we're on the matter?"

"It's going rather well actually. The news of Xenos being the first platinum adventurer has opened a lot of job prospects for us. Achilles was promoted to Silver a few days ago. Her job in exterminating monsters out in the Tower of Aris proved to be worth the trouble. They're climbing with a Mid-tier guild named Lampe."

"I see," they now stood and stared out the large window panes, "-what about Avon. I heard you two moved in together, are you dating?"

"You could say that," she sighed, "-he took a few exams and got a job at Junior Claireville Academy to teach the arts of magic. We're living as a couple," she smiled, "-too bad he's a spirit. Every night goes off to replenish his mana. I wish he'd have a physical body. I do love the man; he's been there ever since the first day. You also master," she smiled, "-it's thanks to you that I'm happy. I have a lover, a good job, and confidence in myself. All of that was made possible because you took me in. I never thought the King of Arda would help a play-thing so much. The memories of that crude past have been filled with those of joy and happiness. Kniq and everyone, we've grown to be a family."

"I'm also grateful," stared into the distance, "-all of this would not have been possible without help. I mostly gave out orders and started the projects, it was the members of Kniq who made it into such a good guild."

"Yeah, it's all lovely," smiled Auic.

"I have something serious to discuss," he turned, "-I've thought about this for a long time. Kniq doesn't need a leader who is not active. Viola has taken care of it for a while. I think it'd be better if she became the leader, I've already signed the papers to transfer ownership. Kniq's emblem, the wings, is meant to fly unbound by the world. To fly and discover what lays beyond the horizon," placing a hand on her shoulder, "-do discuss it with the others."

"Quite selfish of you," she chuckled, "-I can already see their responses. Filled with swear and insults, we care not if our leader is inactive. He's the Guild Master of Arda; Kniq isn't a guild. Tis a family, our family, comrades who have faced much trouble together," breathing a sigh, "-I'll ask Viola first. If she's ok with the idea, I'll speak it to the others."

"I've always been selfish," he winked, "-I'm off, take care, Auic."

"You too, Guild leader," the door to the portal room closed shut. 'Transferring Kniq to Undrar is not that bad an idea,' stepped into the tower, '-Avon's spirit is bound to this realm already. I think I'll be able to make him a body with the properties of a living human. Alchemy is the way forward, altering the properties of an element will be tough. A large pool of mana will be required, thus my usage of the philosopher stone for Achilles. Not anymore,' he smiled, '-my mana pool as a god is immense.' Hands on the table, '-what is it that makes a human, human?'

[Divinity: Second Boon – Arcane Library]

First came the body, second came the mind. Reflected on the boons, first was the body of a god. The second was the knowledge of a god. Arcane Library, direct access to the Lord Death's collection of books all stored as memory. Similar to Clarity, the Arcane Library held more knowledge when it came to life, death, and magic. Clarity was a skill any who'd reach their limit could activate. Though Staxius pushed its limit with every trip resulting in his death – the price for what knowledge he got wasn't worth the boost in power. Arcane Library; an evolution, one of which knowledge only a divine could access.

'Heavy,' the eyes opened to a dark-blue world, '-water,' he coughed with bubbles floating upward, '-Knowledge,' inside said realm, turquoise waves swam across as if fishes. Each was a fragment of lost knowledge, '-focus on what a human is?' holding his breath, he dove further. Turquoise all around swirled of which resembled a flock of fishes, a crimson ray shone. Reached, "-got it," reawoke, the breathing grew erratic. 'The bottom is far darker, I've a feeling that the ocean of knowledge has a mind of its own. Still, it served its purpose. The possibility of creating human puppets exists. Who better to test it on than Avon.' Pen in hand, the ray he caught held knowledge of the composition of a human body.

'All that is required can be acquired, a trip to the butchers should suffice.' The hand grew symbols, a new spell. 'To transmute the elements into the form I desire; I'll be the catalyst. First comes the body then the mind. The mind will be the soul and body will be my creation.' From a pentagram to a hexagon, mixed and matched of which he wrote in the ancient tongue.

\*All who live will die, and all who die will be reborn. The soul is a conduit of which I control.\*

Written in blood on a scroll. Preparations for the Transmutation of flesh into a human body was readied. A stepping stone, a mere fraction of what was to come. A few hours had passed – sinking into the Arcane Library took more time than expected. 'All that is left is to get the flesh and Avon. Auic, you

wished for the spirit to be human. Lady luck was on thy side today. My vision and your dream intertwined. I'll use Avon as a test. If this goes as plan, the research on mana will also come in handy.

"Where have you been?" asked Xula who soaked in a warm bath.

"Work," he joined, "-what about Lizzie, she asleep?" he asked.

"She fell asleep after she had her fill of milk," moved over, "-are you sure you're alright, you don't seem that healthy."

"I'm fine," he smiled, "-just had a few things to take care of," leaned with a wet-towel on the eyes, Xula's voice turned to silence for the door to the realm of dreams opened.

### Chapter 308: Potential Recruit

\*Wahhh, Wahhh,\* "-here I come," half-awake, the long nights of caring for Lizzie had just begun. In what seemed to be the blink of an eye, dusk turned to dawn. 'Xula," shaking she who slept curled for it was cold, "-wake up," he whispered gently.

"What is it?" mumbling, a yawn escaped as she spoke.

"I won't be here for two to three days," stood, "-could you take over?"

"What you up too?" she asked with her body relaxed and energized.

"I have to head out to Easel Run-Gard," the curtains parted as he walked over to the door. "Are you up for it?"

"Still haven't answered my question," sat on the edge of the bed, she peered over to Lizzie's cradle.

"It's a business deal for Phantom. I can't discuss it anymore, the only thing you need to know is that a lot of money is involved. We're talking in the hundred thousand."

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"Phantom again," now beside Lizzie, she leaned over to caress the babe's cheek. "No more than four days," her posture straightened, "-else I'll have you sleep with the dogs."

"Do we have dogs?" he asked in jest.

"I'll make sure to find some," she joined the laughter. Thus, the day began with the Queen in a good mood.

Preparations began in the Alchemic tower, '-this should go here, here, and here,' sorting the research papers, anything linked to DG and Phantom was concealed. Even in Arda things could still be malicious, especially for a King. 'The team in charge of the mine have started construction on a stone path as well as the infrastructure around the will be facility. The estimated time is up to one and a half year.' Status reports flashed across the screen. Read, he sent a reply giving new orders to the problem of monster attacks at night. Simple solution, contact the guild.

'Tharis,' holstered inside a black-suit jacket, '-Orenmir,' the sword that was kept unused for so long.

\*Tap,\* invisible, the sword rested on the hip. As for healing, two rare-scrolls were kept inside the suit.

Readied, he teleported out of Arda into the mansion. Void slept in the garage. Time showed 09:00, ‘- Elliot should be at the Airfield at any moment now.’ \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

Cold and damp, the dewy moist air tickled the nose. “Let us in,” shouts came from the entrance, “-we’ve got an audience with Lady Cake,” a familiar voice.

“What’s the matter?” walked over, the gate stood close with a guard atop one of the two towers guarding said entrance.

“Boss, they say that they know you,” turned one of the guards.

“Let them in.”

“As you wish, boss,” a pull of a lever, followed by clanging, the black-gates opened. Elliot and his spirit stood; the formers outfit was one differing from yesterday. In the style of a military uniform without the badges, he stepped in with a bag. The latter, dressed in skimpy clothes, walked as if the cold never bothered.

“You made it,” said Staxius with arms crossed.

“Yes, sir,” he gave a salute.

“Good,” turned the leader, “-let’s go,” he walked over into the office. The breeze blasted through the road leading onto the field grew to be more vexing by the day. All around, the numbers of guards increased gradually, they were recruited by Jason and chosen by Cake. Scanning the surrounding, the recruit felt the pressure of said compound. No idle chatter, complete order, and discipline.

\*Click,\* the door opened, climbing stairs, a corridor stood. Besides the boss’s office rested another room, one for Cake. “Good morning,” the door unlocked. “Morning,” replied a voice from behind a desk filled with screens. Displays all around, the room felt more like a command center than an office. “How may I help you?” blue glow off, the lady stood with dark-circles paired with a look of despair. “P-p-please,” she pointed to a coffeemaker, “-one cup.”

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“You pulled an all-nighter again,” said with a disapproving tone, he reached for a cup and pressed a button. “Here,” hot, the drink rested in Cake’s cold hands. It helped in getting some of her body heat back. Intrigued and confused, Elliot watched Shadow who interacted with a fatherly emotion. His spirit vanished midway as the coffee was made.

“Who’s the new boy?” she asked after sipping the liquid.

“A potential recruit,” stood with arms crossed, “-have you forgotten about him already?”

“Elliot,” she smiled, “-what brings you here, I thought you were working for the guild?”

“Well ma’am,” he spoke out, “-I came in hopes of getting recruited by Phantom. I wish to put my service into my sister’s saviors’ hands. I promised to serve, thus my visit.”

"I see," she paused and moved to a dustbin, a push and the lid opened. "A potential recruit you say," her eyes turned to one inquisitive. After which, the conversation turned into an interview, one after the other, Elliot replied to her questions impeccably.

"Who do you work for?"

"For Staxius Haggard."

"I see," smiled Shadow, "-I say you've passed the first test," he moved over to Cake, "-I'll dispose of him if he doesn't suit our expectation," whispered, "-I'll be headed to Halos in a few minutes. You do realize how much trouble it's going to cause if the deal fails."

"I understand," she turned to Elliot, "-guards," she called, "-get him proper battle-attire." After, two muscular bodyguards stepped inside to carry him away.

"May I ask how you are to head to Halos? We've no aircraft, the helicopters might not make the trip seeing the distance."

"Should be fine," he smiled, "-I'll teleport there. On another note," he reached closer, "-Antis-2, what manufacturing company was it?"

"Oh, Gate-Six, they went bankrupt. I heard the scientists disbanded, no money means no research, those people are rumored to be freaks who enjoy warfare more than anything. Not the prospect of fighting, but the prospect of seeing their inventions in action."

"Good," patting her shoulder, "-get a hold of the scientist who led their whole operation. We might get some use of them."

"Mysteriously bankrupt," stared Cake, "-they were well off until a few weeks ago. Did you do anything?"

"Whatever do you mean," giving a wink, "-I'm not responsible since their leader was an idiot," to which the door opened. 'Gate-six,' in the corridor, 'a secretive research group that manufactures weapons. I got wind of their prowess through a message the Master Alchemist sent. They had close ties with the DG until a new head broke off the alliance. Karlson was out for blood; I only needed to add fuel to the fire. A single phone call to Renaud and here's the result, a company disbanded.'

"Are you ready?" footsteps echoed to the cafeteria.

"Yes, sir," replied Elliot readied for battle.

"Alright," grabbing Elliot's hand, "-don't puke," \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* the strain put over such a large distance didn't cause trouble. Since Courtney remained on Halos, teleporting to her location via her mana was as if walking through a portal.

"Sure took your time," sat on a bed facing the beach, Courtney waved. A well-ventilated cabin with sand all over the floor, it made standing a little difficult. The change from Hidros and here was apparent. The blinding sunlight with the heat could make any cower in fear. Glaring, the sand seemed as if hot charcoal.

“Don’t fret,” the eyes wandered around, “-Halos sure is a paradise,” the door opened. To the left rested the beach and to the right, a road led straight into a large compound. An airfield as well as a port that took one-third of the isle’s size.

“So this is the famed Elliot,” she grabbed onto his face and examined closely.

“Please to meet you, ma’am.”

“Not flustered, you’ve experience dealing with women,” she laughed, “-what’s the deal, why did you decide to come here all of a sudden?” her attention turned to Shadow who stared into the distance.

“I came to oversee the deal,” he gave an over the shoulder stare, “-that amount of money can drive the hardest man crazy. Don’t worry,” the crimson-mask materialized, “-we’re Shadow, two faces of the same coin.”

“Indeed we are,” her mask appeared with a white-flame.

“Let’s go, Elliot,” called Staxius.

“Don’t mind my asking, who are you?” he asked as they walked.

“I’m Shadow,” replied Courtney.

“I’m Shadow also,” added Staxius.

“Could you elaborate?” he asked with a clueless glare.

“Shadow isn’t a person, tis an idea. One that I’ve yet to decide on, a constant remain. Shadow is he or she who slays without mercy, a killer by trade, a being who’s transcended the human limits. For now, there are only two Shadows, one who works behind the scene and one who carries out the dirty work. I’ll let you figure which one is who later,” they arrived shortly after.

“Boss,” sat under a tent, guards fanned themselves with magazines riddled with the naked beauty of men and women alike. “Glad you could make it.”

“Yves,” called Staxius.

“Yes, boss,” he stood straight with a salute. All who worked for Phantom knew of the two Shadows. It wasn’t a secret by any mean since they looked alike with the same hair. None bothered to ask, the only thing was loyalty and obedience.

“We have a recruit who shall be tested today,” pointing at the back, Elliot became the center of attention. The members of Phantom’s stares changed into glares; they examined every inch of the man. “He’s a marksman.”

“I presume he’ll be standing in the craft as the negotiation is handled?” asked Yves.

“Yes,” nodded Courtney, “-You’ll be the spokesperson. Brother and I will hang back, that is unless the General shows himself. Remember, this assignment is life or death, either the cargo is sold or we’re heading into a trap. Hence the reason for the Boss’s visit.”



“We have the power to destroy at will. Still, we’ll be docile and use discourse, violence will be the last resort. Do your job correctly; everyone will be using the same channel,” briefed, the guards who sat, stood, and changed gear. The fatigued faces turned to one emotionless.

“Here,” Staxius threw an earpiece, “-you’re going to need one.” In the background, the TU-03 had its cargo bay filled with arms. “Alright people,” spoke Cake who had the channels split into differing squads.

“Shadow,” spoke another man who bared an accent similar to Renaud. “Our agreement ends here,” he approached with a grey suit, “-we’re heading out. Good luck with the negotiations.”

“Thanks,” he gave out a handshake, “-transporting that much cargo without a ship would have been impossible. Give my regards to Godfather Renaud, the payment will be sent over early this afternoon.”

Thirty men excluding Staxius, Courtney, and Elliot stood at the ready to fight. Armed with DV-43, a gun manufactured by Gate-Six, it was superior to any other model. Less recoil, more range, a semi-automatic rifle that could dent Adamantite. Water on one side and wind on the other, tis was the Magical-Weapon variant. It used the host’s mana as a catalyst, depending on how much mana it got, the more powerful it grew. It fired Elemental Shards as well as bullets.

“The time has come,” spoke Staxius as Phantom entered the aircraft.

“This is awesome,” giggled Courtney, “-I’ve no idea why, but this makes me very, very happy.”

“B-boss,” whispered Elliot, “-I’m weirdly confident, I’ve no idea what we’re stepping into, however, I know we’re going to win.”

“Confident,” smiled Courtney, “-nice, I like it.” Sat in the cargo area, the men stared at one another in silence. To prevent feelings from ruining the mission, all the guards, despite them being very good friends outside, had their hearts locked.

“Ready for take-off,” spoke the pilot. Engaged, the engine roared with power. Armed to the teeth, TU-03 lifted off for a venture into an unknown world.

Midflight, Cake contacted General Miller. The pilot was advised to not fly over the continent. Instead, they would make their way around and come in from the North West.

‘What kind of person are you, Miller,’ thought Staxius, ‘-I’ve no trust in what is to happen. My information is limited, either a trap or a good deal. The information I gave yesterday should have helped in settling my credibility. If it goes loud; Orenmir might come to play.’ Courtney sat beside and grabbed Dragonrend. Ready for anything, the plane flew to the destination.

#### Chapter 309: Cat and Mouse

Circled around the continent to take a North-west approach, the TU-03 had Shelder’s Airfield in sight. Mountainous and with sharp gusts, atop a cliff. A tight runway that seemed to stand alone and oversea over the sea and upper plateau. ‘We’re here,’ stood and stared out the cockpit, the distinctive feature of the area came clearer.

“Alright,” a voice came from the earpiece, “-General Miller just told me that he will be doing the negotiations.” Focused, Staxius’s eyes closed. ‘One, two,’ the closer they got, the more aura he saw.

“Boss, we’re landing in three minutes,” voiced the pilot who struggled in the harsh condition.

“I’ll leave it to you then.”

Sat harshly on the seat, Courtney’s curiosity piqued, “-what’s the matter?”

“The Western Kingdom is indeed a threat,” the crimson eyes burnt. Jumped from one soldier to another, Staxius got a general layout of the area, it didn’t come as a surprise to see more than a few hundred men standing by. ‘General Miller,’ he thought whilst staring out the victim’s eye. What came to pass was secretive documents and reports of necromancy. Research in making undead fighters. The General had no problem shifting the pages as if to brag about what he had accomplished. ‘You’re indeed a fool,’ thought Staxius, the plane lined itself with the runway.

“Alright people,” he spoke through the earpiece, “-the moment we land, it’s showtime. Make sure to not raise your weapons. Scatter and don’t stay grouped if we get out, stay least a few meters apart. Yves, you’re the first point of contact. The moment it goes loud, everyone open fire; we’re neither friend nor foe – survival is a priority, do I make myself clear?”

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“Yes, boss,” a simultaneous shout.

“Elliot,” spoken in a separate channel, Staxius’s mind worked at full-throttle, “-your priority is to make the first shot. I care not, do not kill the general unless I give the order. Typical army men will have at least a Commander by their side. He will most definitely give the order to shoot. Monitor his mouth, you’ve mastered the art of lip-reading.”

“What if they have another signal?” asked Elliot who felt pressured.

“We’ll focus on the obvious, what is simple is often what is true and efficient. If there is a convoluted system, it will take time for response,” to which he turned to Courtney, “-that’s your cue, Shadow, kill them all.”

A bump followed by a screech, the TU-03 landed. Already, the feeling of unrest rose from within. Flags of their monarch stood religiously at every few intervals. “That’s general Miller,” pointed Yves, “-that’s the man I have to deal with?” he sighed and got his mind together. The first impression meant everything, Yves, out of all of Phantom, was an average man. Scared to shoot a gun and even more at the sight of blood, despite that, something stood out. A special talent, the talent of getting out of any situation. A master at the ways of thwarting traps. His talent came painfully obvious on an assassination job. Godfather Stanley at the end of his rope, had sent countless assassins after him. Even so, he’d always make it out alive with wit, quick thinking, and resourcefulness. Jason played a big part in catching such an elusive fish; it had been more than a few months. Recruited when Staxius was out on Kreston, he dealt nicely with negotiations and tough situations.

‘Let’s see you in action,’ All-seeing eyes activated as Staxius surveyed the area.

Opened with a click, the staircase lowered gently. The General stood before a black-shiny car with twenty men lined in rows of four. As predicted by the Boss, a commander did in fact stand a few meters away from the general.

“Good afternoon, General,” spoke Yves, “-the weather in Easel Run-Gard sure is picturesque.” Out, the beauty of the continent grew obvious, mountainous with trees and snowy peaks. Remote as the populous lived further inland; the side of the continent was subject to regular hurricanes. Tough to settle when winds tore down houses in one swoop.

“You haven’t seen the gist of it,” laughed obnoxiously, Miller was of a big and plump stature. A sign of being well-off for food was abundant in a time of war. Curly hair, pimpled riddled face, and white lips. The trouser’s zipper was down with his white drawers barely showing.

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“I’m sure there’s more than I’ve not seen,” walked Yves with short hair, round glasses due to poor eyesight, a custom-fitted suit as he was skinny.

“Do apologize my asking,” in range of a handshake, Yves stopped, “-I’d like to cut right to the chase,” serious, “-I’d like to discuss the matter at hand in the open. The negotiations for 804,000 Gold worth of arms.”

“I see,” he mumbled under his breath, “-could we at least have the decency of speaking in a place less noisy. The wind is one of my enemies,” to which the General turned and moved.

‘How do you get out of this, Yves,’ asked Staxius, ‘-Miller is smart, standing out in the open will prove disadvantageous to the snipers he’s got guarding the office towards the right of the facility.’

“I do beg your pardon, sir,” Yves stood firm, “-I’ve got a better proposal, why not examine the product before we discuss the matters of money. It’s better to see the equipment first hand, isn’t it?”

Rolling his eyes in annoyance, Miller forced a smile. The commander’s face changed from ease to cautious. “Squad one, go with the general,” said Elliot who lipread.

“Open the Cargo door,” waved Yves as he turned back. \*Clang,\* the back opened. Followed, four armed men with the general. Stared from a distance, “-I’ve got a bad feeling about this. Snipers; set your sight on the Phantom’s men as well as the pilot.”

“They’re closing in fast,” whispered Courtney stood above the cargo bay, the guards readied their guns.

‘We’ve got their King,’ thought Staxius, ‘-they know that we can’t kill the general. Taking out ours is a good idea. This might turn into a firefight soon. Damn it, if only we had someone who could hack into their broadcast, sending a threat that way would be so much simpler.’ Ignoring the what-ifs, ‘-there’s no way we’re getting out of this without a fight. Best make the first move while we have the advantage.’

“Stand at the ready, the general approaches, eliminate his guard unit if they point their guns,” ordered Staxius, \*snap.\*

Close, the shadow of the plane helped in shielding the sun. Stuck, Miller’s forehead dripped with sweat. “Excuse me,” he spoke, “-are you sure this is wise?”

“Wise?” stared over the shoulder, “-are we not going to discuss a business deal. What is wise about that, you’re going to examine the arms we have.” A few meters away, “-could you wait here?” requested Yves, “-I’ll have someone bring out the crate.”

'Nice,' thought Staxius, "-assist him, Yves' got the better idea."

"Hold fire, I repeat, do not fire. Squad-One, stay on guard, the general might still be in danger. We're dealing with cunning individuals. Snipers, lock sight on the plane; watch any and all movement," spoke Elliot. The marksman was hidden in plain sight. Concealed using magic, he laid and stared out the door left open.

"Here we are," five guards helped in sliding one of the crates down. Gazed against the Western Army, a mental battle of which Phantom won.

"Go on," smiled Yves, "-examine the weapon," he handed a magazine, "-take some shots and feel its power. The Antis-2 is sure worth the money."

\*Bang, bang,\* shot the General out into the nothingness, "-It packs a punch," he laughed. "Should we discuss the payment?" On that, his phone rang.

"General Miller speaking," he stopped as the crates were taken back into the cargo hold. Secretively, the Western Army only saw ten men moving around, the rest were concealed. A false sense of security that had them on ease.

"Greetings, General Miller," spoke a deep voice, "-Shadow here, Leader of Phantom. I've gotten notice that my representative is ready to deliver the product. We'll accept payment by card, is that an issue?"

"Shadow," he smiled, "-it does surprise me that you weren't present for the exchange. Not to mention that you've sent a measly ten men. Do you have that much faith in me?" laughter followed.

"It's not a matter of faith and trust," sharp, "-I sent the number of people I deemed sufficient to handle the deal. Are you implying that we're weak?"

"That certainly isn't my intent," they walked away from the plane, "-the arms have been examined, I wish I could stand and chat, however, we need to finalize the deal," the call ended.

Midway from the plane and car, Miller turned and asked Yves to wait. "I have to check with if the money has been arranged for."

"What do we do?" asked Courtney, "-this game of cat and mouse is driving me crazy. WHEN ARE WE GOING TO START SHOOTING," screamed across the general channel, the guards breathed chuckles.

"Calm down," voiced Staxius who sat crossed legged, eyes closed, the entire airfield became a part of his mind. Every breath, every action made, the All-seeing eyes watched. "Get ready Elliot, this is the crucial moment."

"Understood," whispered Courtney when they locked eyes.

"They don't seem to be heavily armed. Squad One could easily take care of the guards, they seem to be amateurs," their conversation was broadcasted across the channel by Knightfall, she took over the duties of lipreading.

"General, we should go ahead and pay them the money. Phantom is rumored to be allied with the Dark-guild. If by chance one of their men die by our hand, we could have the whole organization turn against us. The spy we sent to check on the information about Port Elte turned out to be true."

“Why are you so scared,” laughed Miller, “-we outnumber them ten to one, it should be a simple clean-up duty. Tell the snipers to aim, we get free arms and save 800,000 gold coins. More the better, we could get fighter-planes.”

“General, I strongly advise against such a move in greed.”

“Commander, do you wish to defy the chain of command?”

“No sir,” reluctantly, “-Squad one, stand at the ready. All forces, gather up on point Delta, we’re going loud in three, two, one,” \*BANG.\*

\*Ancient Magic: Teleportation,\* blood sprayed across windows, “-Commander, give the order to shoot,” ordered Miller sensing an ominous silence.

“G-general,” in a blink, the commander’s leg blew out completely.

“General Miller,” voiced Yves, “-it’s not nice to betray a deal,” behind, four headless corpse of squad one laid at his feet.

“SNIPER SQUAD,” yelled Miller with his back against the wall, “-SHOOT HIM,” no response, the clapping of high-heels echoed from behind. White hair ending with blood-red, “-I’ve had enough of this little game. Are you going to buy the arms or do you wish for me to end the life of your men,” a laser marked his chest. From ten, the guards ran out on the runway, “-no chain of command means that an army is worthless,” laughed Yves.

‘Checkmate,’ smiled Staxius, ‘-the king is cornered.’ Initially, the deal was to happen peacefully. However, the moment Yves asked for the general to examine the products first, everything changed. A concealment spell to hide the guards and appear weak – a play to ignite the self-destructive nature of jealousy. The Commander understood what was happening, despite this, the General gave into his nature. The exchange of glances was for Courtney to take out the snipers. As for squad one, the guards made quick work of them.

“G-general,” alive the commander spoke, “-i-it’s over, raw strength can’t win against wit. They spared my life once, it’s not going to be the same result,” referred to the laser, the plump man fell to the floor. “Retreat men, do not open fire.” The total time was less than a minute. In jest, Yves turned with a thumbs up. Phantom had conquered a foreign airfield with the combined wit of its members.

### Chapter 310: Sparks

A combination of strength, wit, and ruthlessness. The start of Phantom; Shadow, Courtney as the secondary Shadow, Yves as the inconspicuous escape artist and negotiator. Led from overseas, Cake the overwatch, and lastly, Elliot.

The sea breeze blew loud and heavy, rotors turned to life – it rivaled the opposing gust. Cargo unloaded; the deal’s intricacies were finalized per Phantom’s term. A deal with the opposite party being held hostage.

“We’ve done it,” voiced Cake loudly through the earpieces. In midair, as the message delivered, the cargo hold boomed with cheers and applause. The guards were ecstatic about how the deal turned out. No bloodshed in comparison to what they were used to.

“Boss,” fully visible, Elliot walked from the doorway and sat close to Shadow, “-did I make the team?” he asked in the general channel. A pin-drop silence ensued after the cheers; many were on edge. Waiting for Shadow’s response felt as if knocking on death’s door. In their mind, the towering figure they worked under was a being untouched and undefeated. Hard was it to not ignore the rumors passing in the underground. The Alchemist working directly for Godfather Renaud who now was a prominent member and right-hand man of the Overlord. Said link made him as powerful as some low-ranked Godfather as he could speak to Renaud without trouble. Not to mention that Renaud personally financed many of Phantom’s risky endeavors courtesy of Cake. The weight he held couldn’t be quantified – a steadfast climb to the top. Under normal circumstances, not many bosses would be afraid of a lonesome alchemist who delivered high-grade drugs. However, Staxius’s feasts prior, mainly, the extermination of a powerful rogue faction, alone, without back-up – the carnage captured after inspection could but be depicted as the apocalypse.

“Your entry,” from staring outside, he glanced over to Elliot who stood with Knightfall strapped on his back, “-welcome to Phantom,” he gave a handshake. “This goes to all who voyage with us back to Halos, you’re now part of the family. I care about one thing, and one thing only, it’s not strength, tis efficiency, and the ability to adapt. Yves displayed his skill to the fullest today, rare have I seen a man change an outcome to his advantage under such pressure. I applaud thee all.”

A few short words, ones resounding deep inside their heart. Complimented by their boss, the feeling of loyalty grew. Watered, Elliot gave a bashful smile then ran off to the cargo-bay. Behind the man who ran, sat Courtney with a shrug. Her smile was one of mischief.

‘Good,’ he thought and stared out, ‘-Elliot’s our eyes. Phantom has begun its march to being an unrivaled force. We’re but pebbles renowned in only a few areas. This deal was a stroke of luck, I dare not think of the vast world waiting. All the money to be made, tis entertaining.’ Headed to Halos, the flight resumed without much interruption.

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On that, a few days past, the day from when Class 2-A would set flight to Arda approached. “Eira,” called a voice as she exited the office, “-is it true that our study trip has been approved?” asked a girl who shielded herself from the gust carrying leaves as the weather grew worse.

“Ysmay,” voiced Eira who carried an umbrella, “-come here.” Droplets of water landed on the skin, a tingly feeling with an underlying sensation of cold.

“Thanks,” smiled Ysmay who wiped her forehead, “-lunch break is nearly over,” she paused to examine Eira’s face, “-I can tell that it has been approved.”

“Yes,” they walked down a stone path headed to the battle-arena. Cold and relentless, the once filled yard felt empty; the greyish sky cried. “I’ve gotten the news from Director, it’s settled. We’re taking off on the 6th of December,” spoken in a gloomy tone, Ysmay caught on.

“What’s the matter, did something happen?”

Exchanging glances, “-I’ve remembered something important. We’re not training as trainee adventurers for Kniq.”

“What do you mean?” asked in a high-pitched voice, Ysmay’s face turned for the worse. “We were all excited to learn under your father, what happened?”

“Apparently,” with a sigh, “-we’re going to study under the Ardanian Adventuring Guild,” her eyes lit with glee.

“Is that so,” taking a few steps back into the now pouring rain, “-WERE YOU JOKING THIS WHOLE TIME?”

“Come on,” Eira’ burst into laughter, “-get in here,” she held out the umbrella, “-you do get flustered a lot nowadays. Maybe it’s the fact that your fiancé has returned from Iqeavea?”

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“Stop it,” bright red, Ysmay fought hard to avert Eira’s gaze.

“Anyway,” not wanting to harass any longer, “-we’re taking off for Arda. We’ll be studying under many, many representatives, strong adventurers, and scholars. You’ve heard of how Ardanian magic far-outclasses the rest of the world. A land that has been but the mystery, I’ve experienced it first hand, the kingdom is joyful.”

“Shut it,” the walk resumed, “-you just want to head back to see Princess Lizzie, don’t you?”

“H-how did you know?”

“You’ve spoken about her non-stop since you got back,” a bell rang to signal the end of break. Inside the academy, Josiah’s voice echoed down the hall, “-students of Class 2- A, make your way to the battle arena.”

Chatter filled halls turned silent, the students rose straight. “Did something happen?” asked Tony who had drooled over his mouth.

“No idea,” voiced Fletcher as he wiped his eyes.

“Did you do something?” asked Harold with a cough.

“Let me sleep,” sighed Simone.

“Do keep at least a form of decorum,” whispered Timothy. Sat close to one another, the boy’s uncharacterized behaviors made the nobles smile and laugh at times. Buffoons or jesters, the commoners were treated with the respect of a homeless man.

“Boys will be boys,” voiced Anastasia with a humph, “-doesn’t help that the boys of our class are commoners and probably bastards with no fathers.”

“Keep it down,” urged Mille, “-they’ll hear you.”

“I don’t care,” she turned defiantly, “-they can all sleep with the pigs for all that I care.” At that moment, four shadows cast onto her table. Anastasia who had voiced her feelings loudly opened her eyes to being surrounded.

“We’re bastards you say?” smiled Simone, “-care to repeat that to my face?”

“What will you do about it,” stood Anastasia, “-assaulting a lady would be a very commoner thing to do,” she laughed, “-peasants, all of you, if it wasn’t for this school allowing idiotic adventuring seekers to join, I’d have more time studying opposed to wasting breath on idiots.”

“Stop it,” whispered Kim.

“Don’t,” Fletcher held out an index finger, “-we’ve dealt with her shit for 2 years now.”

“I don’t care if you’re a noble or not,” Simone grabbed her collar, “-call the guards for all I care,” mana oozed from his right hand, “-we’re taught magic, not to study but to fight. Us commoners have to survive, we only put up with pompous bitches like you so that we’d not get in trouble. I care not if the hierarchy exists, there’s another rule that trumps your so call authority, and that is,” \*snap,\* flames burst out his shoulders, “-survival of the fittest, the grip tightened.

“As expected,” she spat, “-commoners resort to violence given any circumstances.”

“It’s been ten minutes,” an emotionless voice came from the hall, the floor turned from beige to white, the room froze in an instant. “Would you like to take this fight outside?” Ice shards summoned against all who stood, “-a single snap will suffice for eternal sleep. Now then,” smiled Eira, “-survival of the fittest was it?” she laughed.

“Here comes the princess,” said in a smug tone, Anastasia rolled her eyes, “-from dealing with the dramas of the low-born to a stuck-up princess, I’m stuck between shit and hell.”

“Anastasia,” sighed Ysmay, “-don’t start this again.”

“I’m a stuck-up princess,” stomped to where the girl stood, “-let’s make it official then, Noble lady from a Viscount’s family,” she threw her glove, “-a no holds barred match.”

“I’d love the opportunity,” they accepted.

“Here they go again,” voiced Timothy, “-a never-ending feud between friends, a rivalry unlike any other.”

“SHUT IT,” said in tandem, \*CLASS 2-A, GET TO THE ARENA THIS INSTANT,\* screeched, the intercom blasted with Sophie’s angered voice. Typical arguments, a weekly occurrence, Anastasia held a bad attitude. Nevertheless, her hatred wasn’t that deep, misunderstood, the class accepted how she was.

Sat in a row, Class 2A waited as Sophie paced around in the middle. Murmurs and questions of what happened flew left and right. Anastasia’s demeanor remained unchanged to which she sat far from her classmates.

“Good afternoon students,” in came Josiah with a smile. “I’ve got an update on the exchange program concerning class 2A. Per request, we’ve tried to make arrangements to have Kniq be involved in the program. Sadly, they didn’t fit the criteria, strong as they are, handling a group of up and coming mages isn’t worth the risk. Instead,” he turned to Sophie.

“Instead,” she took over, “-we were offered another deal. Guild Master of Arda; Xenos, has accepted to take class 2A for the program. Arrangements have been made – it will be hosted on the 6th till whenever he decides to end the event. Take this opportunity to learn, Xenos is famed as the hero who



saved Sharon. The first Platinum adventurer.” Excitement grew – the wish to study under the King was fulfilled. On that, preparation from their side resumed.

Monday the 2nd came, Arda had steadily grown. Town Eden became well-known, craftsmanship from Arda was sought after. “Boss,” the phone rang in the middle of changing Lizzie. “Hello?” he spoke as the smell emanated out the changing room.

“Our little show of power at the Western Kingdom has given us a little repute. The intel and weapon we provided have changed the course of the war. Exposed on the south, the Eastern Kingdom is losing ground fast.”

“What’s your point?” he asked as the task was fulfilled.

“Well,” she smiled, “-remember the company that went under? There’s a conference being hosted tomorrow at Dreqai, the continent to the West of the empire. The name is Dragoon. Scholars and researchers from all over the world come together and showcase new technology and weapons. Of course, it’s for sale for any party to take. I heard that the lead researchers of GateSix will be showcasing their last uncompleted project.”

“Weapons showcase, will that not be a secretive event, we’re but a nameless organization,” Rosetta carried Lizzie away for she was hungry.

“It is very secretive, only a few people are chosen to attend,” to which a chuckle was heard, “-still, we’re dealing with a new market; the people in attending are Generals of many kingdoms which I remind you, are somewhat poor and weak yet war-hungry. It’s the perfect opportunity to make an impression, we’ve about 4.5 million gold since the deal with the Western Kingdom. From prior events, the most spent was 100,000 gold on a craft from a rather powerful kingdom. Thus, it leads me to say that the most this year will be 500,000 gold.”

“I see,” he smiled and stood out in the garden, “-I presume preparations for my departure has been made?”

“You know me far too well,” she chuckled.

“Alright, I’ll attend Dragoon – my target is GateSix. Thanks for the help, Cake; I might go overboard with the spending.”

“No problem,” she laughed, “-with the cash coming from the drugs trade, we’re only going to get richer.”

Quicker than expected; the Western Kingdom attacked the East. The blame, as opposed to falling on Phantom, was hailed as a strategic masterpiece from General Millar. To be able to predict such a move; it enchanted many chroniclers. A turning point in the war, of which, stood an unnamed entity, Phantom. As far as the outside world was concerned, the arms company only gave weapons, tis was the soldiers who fought long and hard. The real truth and the real scheme; would forever remain a mystery.