

## Death Magic 341

### Chapter 341: It Begins

9:00 displayed across the clock. A pledge turned into a show of strength. Filled with admiration and a little disheartened for having lost, the retainers were more intent on listening. In the past, being called strong had given them confidence. In actuality, they were adequate; tis was a miss communication. One needn't have to be a fighter or master to see the limitless potential the four held.

During the whole ordeal, Intherna slept inside Staxius's shadow. Her body was readied, her mind as well, though, the soul had yet to fully transmigrate. A process that would soon be complete; the only requirement was sleep. Lizzie protected and cared for, at Hidros, a new day began. In tow, Achilles vowed to follow to the depths of hell. Ranked Tier Four- Bronze, her help was welcomed.

"Alright," breathed before entering the portal; he held a sword and a gun. Orenmir the cursed, and Tharis the judge. Old allies, comrades he didn't take into a battle that often since Blood-Arts alone sufficed. The Triangle; proof of his divinity, had completely stopped the Death-Element. It functioned more efficiently and gave more power at a constant rate. The innate physical ability was doubled. "Are you sure about this?"

"Yes," readied, an old companion stood with Kniq's uniform, "-this is the only path I can follow, master, to return into thy team."

"Welcome back," one step after the other, "-the Ardanian Guild," stepped out into the office, Serene stood at the ready near the desk.

"Good morning, Majesty," bowed with pants opposed to the usual skimpy outfit, there was a dignified aura oozing.

"Good morning, Serene," sat on the chair, "-meet Achilles, member of Kniq and a close friend."

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"Pleasure to meet you, ma'am,"

"Likewise, Lady Serene," exchanging smiles, each turn to face the master in want for more information.

"Something the matter?" asked for he felt their gazes, Serene frowned.

"I see," shaking the head lightly, "-have Achilles registered to the Ardanian guild. She'll be of great help," pointing at her neck, "-guild tag of Bronze, though I'm pretty sure she's silver by now." Understood, they left for the evaluation room.

'I can focus on the matter at hand,' papers of varying types laid across the table, reports from Serene and her underlings that scoured the shadows of the capital. 'The nobles seem to be put off by something or rather someone. Why aren't they making a move, is Xula responsible? Eira's gone, the supplies should be readied soon.'

"Majesty," knocked the door harshly.

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“Enter,” from glossing over the papers, he stared whoever entered.

“I’ve come with news, my liege,” said Youst heavily breathing.

“Go ahead,” suspicious, the face showed no emotions.

“A meeting of the representatives has been called by the Queen.”

??Shit,’ stood, “-it might go to hell if she starts to go out of control. The representatives know nothing of what has happened.”

“It’s taking place in 3 hours.”

“That should give some time to prepare,” dashed to search for Serene, the door to the evaluation room barged.

“Majesty?”

“Come with me,” he ordered with a serious face. Quick on her feet, “-what is it?” they stood away from prying eyes and ears.

“There’s a council meeting, I don’t have any idea on what will be discussed. The Queen made her move, I think it’s in retaliation from me taking Lizzie away. Get in touch with Aurora and the other clan leaders, we might have to back out of the council if things turn for the worse.”

“If that happens, the Nightwalker will become a separate Kingdom with you as the head. I don’t have to spell out the implications, a new kingdom inside Arda, the people might turn against us since we’re the most powerful. United against a common enemy, if she’s plotting against you, our people might stand to suffer.”

“I know, there’s no need in repeating the issues. Have Aurora ready herself in case it happens. Besides,” placing a hand on her shoulder, “-I’m the Blood-King, if she decides to follow the path of war, I’ll show no mercy and take Arda by force if that is what’s needed to save the people.”

“Guild master with Haru, Mieshre, Ryul, and Skokdrag under thy command. You’ve got six, including Aurora and Gabrielle, of the representatives as close allies.”

“Yeah, have a contract written with Ryul’s claim as representative and power revoked. We’ll blackmail the poor boy, the battle-starts here.”

“As you wish, master, I’ll have the others be notified of her majesty’s not so ideal mindset. The seed of doubt has been sown across into the noble faction. They seem to be on the neutral side. Give the word and we’ll have them raise a coup against the current monarchy.”

“Sowing the seed of destruction; I like it, Serene, I’m glad thou art my ally.”

“Yes, you did save the nightwalkers from that eventual devastating coronation. Bearer of the First Progenitor; let us follow the path of peace till it ends, then, we’ll carve it out by death.”

“That’s the intent,” vanished in smoke, the representative arrived faster than predicted. ‘The pawns are on the move; everything has been carefully planned and set-up. I suppose provoking Xula worked better, taking Lizzie away forced her out of that deranged mindset. She should, I hope, see what I’m

trying to accomplish. The one behind this might show-up, who knows, I need to be ready for a potential declaration of war.'

Soon to be called upon, the representatives teleported one after the other. Walked with nonchalant gazes, none knew of what had happened so far. Rumors and only rumors, today was the day where the truth would be revealed. Aurora, Gabrielle, Haru, Mieshre, Ryul and, Skokdrag, were very much conscious of what transpired. Serene played a big part in giving the information without seeming to want a favor in return. Spoken in such a way to have them feel guilty of knowing the truth, the five walked in with woeful expression. One of sympathy for the King who stared blankly into the sky. As for Ryul, he got a nasty surprise upon reaching home. A letter of which showed a picture of the contract he had signed, stood menacingly. No sender nor information, the message read was 'keep quiet, we know of thy relation with the Queen. Very improper for a representative, if you don't wish to be exposed to the public and stripped of thy title and power, keep quiet and don't voice thy opinion. Glory to Arda.' Written with the same font and style the queen's assistant used; the fear of being exposed, pressured by the King and the supposed letter, Ryul's mind turned empty. A mindless doll with constant agony over what could happen.

The time of reckoning arrived, walked solemnly with a slouched posture, Staxius arrived at the throne room. Queen Shanna was nowhere to be found; this gave time for a little gossip to go around. They who peered over the balustrade were saddened. A king who had done so much was betrayed in the end. Whispered from one to another, the representatives soon engaged in a discussion.

"He poured everything into saving our Kingdom," mumbled Haru with a tear, "-I saw him try everything to save one of my companions."

"King Staxius's generosity knows no bounds; he spent a fortune to purchase rights to a land from where the Dwarves could work and make a living," frowned Skokdrag.

"The deaths of the adventurers sent into that supply run had a bad effect on him. I saw his visage grow tired and woeful; he can't have a moment's rest. Not to mention our Queen's..."

"Please, don't speak of that in here," mumbled Ruslan with an ashamed glance.

\*Clap, clap,\* walked up the stair, "-hello everyone," allowing them all to see his woeful expression, it quickly changed to a smile with the intent of reassuring the people. "I think I arrived a bit too early for this meeting, Queen Shanna is probably getting dress," laughing nervously, he sat without making eye contact. Despite everything, he tried hard to put on a face, tis was the thought across everyone's mind. It pulled on their heart, even the hardest of fighters could but look away in regret. A true man who cares for people around him, turn to a mess of incertitude. A pang of guilt whelmed from inside, a guilt none knew the origin.

A few minutes later, Queen Shanna arrived in the company of someone new. A lady to be precise. Paying no heed, Staxius stood to pay his respect as did the others. Gazing upon Shanna with an affectionate look, she took a look and rolled her eyes in disgust. Everyone saw that exchange, at that moment, the battle was won. The spark of hate and disappointment burst into a blazing inferno of revenge. The sight of a beloved king turned to ruin, he who had done so much for the people of Arda, he who gave his humanity, he who sacrificed his life, he who saved the people upon the day of the Massacre, he who had made strides in Arda being a kingdom accepted by Hidros, he who had given job

opportunities by the idea of opening Town Eden and much more, said man, was betrayed by the one they followed.

“Let the council meeting begin,” said Ruslan with the Sage besides.

“I’ll commence,” voiced Shanna, “-due to unforeseen circumstances, I’ve decided to call back all the Royal Guards to the capital. Fighting monsters is the job of the adventuring guild, therefore, Guild Master Staxius should be able to do that much. As for the mines, we’ve sworn not to destroy the forest, yet, someone had permission to start construction. Lastly, I’ve sold all arms due to the kingdom lacking funds. Today’s discussion will be on how the kingdom moves forward.” All her words were directed to one person, the King, he had done all those things with the underlying implication of going against Arda’s rules.

“Majesty,” spoke the Great Mother, “-having the guards called back will only increase the death count. Do you wish our people to suffer?”

“No,” sternly, “-I want the Guild to take care of the only job their tasked to do. When a plumber is called, you don’t ask for him to mason the house, do you?”

“If I may interject, that’s quite unfair on thy part,” voiced Mieshre, “-give that the guild is tasked to kill monsters, our priority is to serve the people. At the moment, the number of adventurers qualified to fight is low, we need help from the guards else tis will be a senseless death.”

“Are you referring to the certification?” glared the queen, “-that’s an utterly worthless idea. Those who sign to being in the guild must be ready to die per their Quest’s demand. Training isn’t necessary, even if they die, the money that is made should compensate greatly.”

“That’s quite enough,” started soft to harsh, “-Queen Shanna, may I remind you that the Guild is under my command. I shall not tolerate insults directed to the young fighters. They are well paid, yes, however, that doesn’t come from monster slaying or quest. Even now, the guild isn’t making a profit, most of the quest’s givers are poor and in desperate need of help. I’m proud to say that despite the meager pay, adventurers still choose to help, for they know the despair of being left alone without aid. Each week, I pay 2000 Gold, out of my pocket, to help support the guild. Regardless if someone walks in without money, the guild will never push them away. We’ll pay for their quest, we’ll list the request from our own coffers; saving the people is what matters, nothing will ever change,” overwhelmed by disappointment, “-are you implying that the guild isn’t doing its job? The people who register are the ones who do it without pay, tis the first thing we say before someone signs up. Do you know what they say in return? Pay or not, people close to me died because of a monster. I’m here to save the people, not to turn a profit.”

Chapter 342: Depth of lies

“Those are the people who stand in way of getting hurt for mindless actions. Go and hunt monsters, that’s thy job, I agree, it’s the guild’s job. What of the Royal Guards, are their duties not to protect the people. Using said logic, I don’t see the reason to give charity to people in need. Falls into the Royal Guards hand,” left speechless, speaking words of truth, the council had guilt overwhelm.

“What of the mines, then, what right did you have to start construction without the guardian’s protection?” another point to prove, Xula held a smirk.

“Guardian’s protection?” he paused, “-if thou refer to Lady Barbara, then, I’ve already sent for a messenger. Lady Haru is well acquainted with Commander Triste the Dymph. The forest isn’t in danger; the mine is built on a deserted land where monsters took refuge. I shouldn’t remind of how the kingdom’s coffers are, raising taxes will pain the people. That’s why I bought the rights for an enormous amount. To have work available.”

“Majesty,” interjected Krask with narrowed eyes, “-is the kingdom doing that poorly?”

“What of this, no one told us that the guild was under such strain,” added Haru.

“Yeah, we’ve always thought that monster slaying brought a good amount of funds,” sighed Mieshre.

“King Staxius,” smiled Skokdrag, “-I’m glad you’re here. It feels as if nothing is impossible.”

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“Silence,” yelled the lady next to Xula, “-her majesty has yet to finish,” a cold aura spread across the table.”

“As I was saying,” without heed, “-what of arms, and what of the ministry of land and the General. I heard that the king has been pulling strings to have rights of which is mine transferred over. Is that not an act of treason?” a point well made, acquiring more power meant a potential for revolt. The swayed opinion soon grew suspicious of the King’s action. A single sentence that sowed the seed of doubt.

“Fine,” glossing over all who stared, “-I’ll speak what I had planned. May I remind you, that this was brought on by senseless actions. Guards were asked to return to the capital; journeying through the landscape is treacherous. Without protection, any village without decent fighters may fall. In an attempt to counter that possibility, I had the ministry of land transfer the rights to me. With it, I hoped to start the construction of better paths across the whole continent. To that end, I’m already in the process of speaking with the guardians over the various forest. Better road means a faster response time, ease of access back and forth. Trading will grow simpler, enough of bandits hiding in wait. Linked into the same network, adventurers will have the ability to go everywhere at a faster pace. And for the Arms, Phantom bought all the stock. We’re going to give it out for free to the people who’ll replace the Guards. A compensation for risking their lives onto a not well thought out plan.” Refuted without an inkling of doubt, Xula had no more reason to add. Thus, the meeting continued as normal with the King in charge. Discussing matters of the state, potential trouble for land, preparing for the coming winter, and so forth.

Two hours later, it came to an end with the council siding in favor of the King.

“Enough is enough,” fired Xula in anger. “I’m done,” she gritted, “-it’s always the King and his plans. I’ve made my decision, King Staxius, I order thee to abdicate thy claim to the throne of Arda. I don’t wish to see your face ever again, UNDERSTAND?”

Silence followed, “-YOU HEARD ME, WE ARE DONE. THE GUILD WILL BE HANDED OVER TO THE GENERAL,” a sudden outburst of hate. The words rolling off her tongue were sharp and hurtful.

“Majesty, please, think this through!” urged Ruslan nervously sweating.

"Begone, nightwalker, thou art not welcome, Murderers and leechers, who the hell do you think you are. ARDA IS A PROVINCE OF PEACE AND PROSPERITY, NOT A PLACE FOR KILLERS," she shoved him aside with a slap then turned to Staxius in anger.

'She's gone and done it,' from stood to knelt, "-majesty, if thou wish for me to abdicate mine claim, then it shall be done so. All I implore is that you do not hurt the people. Leave the guild as is, the balance is tight as is. If misfortune is to befall, let it befall on I for I'm the intruder."

"Back off," she screamed with an incantation of high-tier magic.

"MAJESTY, please, DON'T DO THIS!" begged the Great Mother fearing for the worse.

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"No," voiced Mieshre who quickly took all to safety.

"I've had enough of you, husband. Always trying to take what I've earned from under my foot. I hate you; I hate you so much," a single tear fell. Looked up, Xula held a face of content, the way she said I hate you had a certain charm; it was as if she said I love you instead. Warm eyes, a gentle smile, "-begone, I don't want to see you again," she blinked to glance to her right. "GET OUT OF MY SIGHT," changed, \*Ancient Magic: Rose Thorn,\* summoned above her finger, the projectile flew to its target.

'I understand,' he thought with head bowed, \*Pssch,\* her spell dispelled.

"Don't get so arrogant," smirked Intherna, "-majesty," giving a wink, a wall of flame erected between the royal couple.

"Hear me all," turned to the representative, "-the queen has decided that I'm of no use." The leaders of the four vampire clans materialized in a bat-shaped mist.

"Us nightwalkers, are shunned by the people of Arda," sighed Alaric, leader of Onyx with grey hair and a nice suit.

"It has been too long," smiled Julia Fawn with unrivaled charm.

\*Cough,\* stood Gabrielle with a tired face.

"Dearest members of the Ardanian council," spoke Aurora with her face and voice changed to one stern and angered, "-Queen Shanna Islegust has humiliated the one we obey. She has committed the only sin us nightwalkers can't forgive, and that is loyalty. Breaking the vows of marriage; hear this today and now, you who stand in our way," glared, the representatives knew not how to respond, "-The four clans have decided," they turned to Staxius, "-our patriarch shall take his rightful place." Guards rushed due to the sudden change in pressure.

Exchanging nods with his companions, "-the Nightwalkers formally withdraw from the council of Arda and declare independence. Anywho dares trespass into Noctis's hallow, shall perish without a moment's notice," glancing Xula, she smiled, "-if it's a war that thou wish, then tis war thou'll get,' patting Intherna's shoulder, a giant circular flame barrier erected. Touching their rings, every vampire around the province, returned to Noctis's Hallow.

"What are we doing here?" asked Intherna stood before the alchemic tower.

"Before we go back, torch the tower, go all out," he winked.

"My pleasure," hands pressed, wings of the phoenix sprouted with magma dripped off to the side.

"Burn," lit as if a match, an inferno engulfed the tower. Teleporting from places to place without using the Overseer's room, numerous portals around were destroyed. Jumped to Roth, Achilles sat oblivious to what had happened.

"Let's go," he smiled.

"Go where?" they stood in the office.

"To Noctis's Hallow," ransacked, all information, papers, and item of value were taken. Serene led the scouring process.

"My lord," she voiced courteously, "-we're ready to leave." Thus, what she predicted came to pass. The parting of two of the strongest people in Arda. All of the projects he had thought of were dismissed. The representatives were left without a word, it would take a few hours for the situation to be processed.

'Xula, you're an idiot,' teleported inside the realm of the Nightwalkers, the streets felt empty. 'She had me thrown out of the council because of the enemies. Not to mention Lizzie, she'd knew I would react that way. Her face and smile, it was a message, a cry for help. The conspirators have already infiltrated the province to the point where she's helpless,' glanced to the vague direction of the capital, '-fighting a war on your own.'

Meanwhile, in Arda, the Queen locked herself in the bedchambers.

"Don't you go back on your word," whispered a somber voice.

"Shut it," she fired back in frustration.

"Well, I suppose it's natural to be a little hurt after dishing that much pain to your beloved," snickered, it vanished.

'Staxius,' laid on the bed with her hand on her forehead, '-please don't come back. Arda's on the brink of being overtaken. I'm not sure if my presence alone is going to keep unity. We were blind-sided by Kreston. I thought they were after Gallienne, sadly, that's not the case. It's revenge for the betrayal of Dorchester. Now that Lizzie and the people close to me are gone, I can take the fight to them even if it kills me.'

"Quite a show of wit there," hovered a tiny-bat girl, "-you two are seriously the worse." she landed on Xula's shoulders.

"Adete?"

"The one and only," a winked followed.

"Why are you here?" baffled, a ray of hope lit within her heart.

"Do you think my heir would just give up on the one he loves? I watched everything from the start. There's no need to hide the truth, Kreston is the real enemy. I'm impressed."

"About what?" she sighed.

“About you two, you schemed in such a way to have the other come out on top. The king planned to start a coup so that he could flush out the conspirators. You, on the other hand, decided to turn him away and face the war. The whole ordeal about cheating was an act, one that would force him into rejecting thee and the kingdom. It didn’t work so the council came in mind – to send him away and pose as the bad person.”

“I shouldn’t be impressed,” smiled the Queen.

“Good luck,” twirled into a smoke column, she vanished.

Locked into place, the cogwheels of change moved. A scheme to bring Arda to ruin, one that was started on the day of the kidnapping of the Apostle of Syhton. Two targets, two objectives, Kreston moved in the shadows without anyone realizing it.

Later that day, Adete reported on what she had witnessed. As promised, a lot of blood was given as compensation. The suspicion of the Queen having done such action in good faith was confirmed.

Inside the capital, dusk approached. The guild was placed under the General’s command. No particular orders were given – it was ordered to be run the same as usual. The mines, out of the kingdom’s reach, was forgotten. The dwarves still worked as it was under Phantom’s rule.

The four guild leaders called a meeting in Roth. Protected by a barrier spell from Ryul, the boy lastly knew of what had happened. Another note was delivered explaining why and what had been done. “What are we supposed to do now?” asked Haru in anger.

“No idea, the guild is under Niroz’s command, I’m not going to serve that man. He who criticized the king’s action after the whole incident,” frowned Mieshre. Referred to when the General spoke on the nightwalker’s supposed betrayal. He was adamant about starting a war, one in the name of peace, or so what was said.

“I don’t wish to serve him as well,” interjected Ryul, “-however, we must continue what the King had begun.”

“Where do you get off speaking,” side-glanced Skokdrag, “-aren’t you the fuck who slept with the queen?”

“NONO,” he refused, “-here,” showing the letter, it explained the misunderstanding to a certain degree.

“I agree,” breathed Haru, “-the guild is under the general’s command, yes, however, we control the adventurers. The four guilds are the one who gives jobs and certify adventurers, that isn’t going to change.”

“Yeah, ok. If it helps the fighters then I’m all for it.” The meeting went on for more than a few hours.

News of the King’s betrayal went around the capital. Twisted to make him the devil; the people were shocked. A new faction came to take the place of the Nightwalkers in the council. Saints who prayed for Kreston’s god. An invasion by religion, the implications were dire. If the people were blinded by faith, Arda would crumble from inside out – the Church would reign supreme. The unprecedented method would take more than a few years to accomplish. A forceful take-over would harm their reputation as



saviors. Promising gold and favors, many nobles turned coat. The weight gain sufficed to stand as an equal at the council.

Reclined in their chairs, the King and Queen, despite the distance, were sitting with the same posture. A moment to think of what came next, a moment to assess the situation. To avoid Kreston from having a stronghold, there was but one thing to do. Elbow on the table, they spoke simultaneously, “-the only way to stop a religious and cultural invasion, WAR.”

#### Chapter 343: Refute

Three mansions with yards twice as big. The pathway ended into a cobblestoned road that spiraled around a fountain acting as a roundabout. Shrouded by an eternal somberness, the backdrop of the mansions were vague outlines of a forest. One with the trees stretching outwards to the sky as if fingers yearning for salvation. Deserted and abandoned by the world, tis was the feeling inside the world of the vampires. Bats opposed to birds flew from one end to another with their large wing-span.

“Where are we?” asked Achilles upon teleporting with the rest.

“Noctis’s hallow,” replied Staxius with a cigar in mouth. Intherna had casually locked arms, it made smoking harder. Glancing her innocent face, he could but sigh away and left to do her bidding.

“Are we elevated?” asked the hero who stared all round in search of answers.

“The noble district, high-born, pureblood, call it what you want, that’s where we stand,” answered Serene who seemed to miss the dry air. No people around, faint gazes could be felt on the backs.

“Blood King,” said a voice coming out the middle mansion. The Nox’s clan exited with butlers to welcome their monarch. Lord Balthazar led the group with a red-cape on which had blood dripping.

“Did we interrupt?” asked Staxius with a neutral face.

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“Pardon the not so suitable attire,” noticing the stain, he bowed to not seem disrespectful.

“No matter,” turned to Alaric and Julia, the other two leaders arrived in stride. The former seemed to have a change in heart. Julia, on the other hand, seemed fiercer, the face screamed of torturous training to uphold their pledge.

“Welcome to thy domain,” they bowed as soon as entering his line of sight.

“Thank thee well,” pointing to Intherna and Achilles, “-I’d like to introduce my companions. On the right, please meet Achilles, an argonaut from another world. As for on my left, the lady who’s locked my arm is Intherna. I suppose she’s my bodyguard and a very efficient one at that.”

“What about me?” asked Serene taking a step forward, “-I’ve not been back here for ages,” she pouted.

“Serene, what?” frowned Balthazar with Aurora by his side.

“I see,” spoke the king once more, “-Serene is my secretary. She’s made my life so much easier, I’m very grateful for her.”

“Warm words from my king,” she bowed with the face a little flushed. Stood outside with the sun hidden from view, introductions went back and forth. Gabrielle, the remaining clan leader headed to her house. She needed medicine for her sickness. A few minutes later, the exchange of words continued inside where Ruslan spoke with many maids. Nodded as hello, they walked up the third-floor where a meeting room rested. Large and spacious with many o’ seats. Heavy red frilly curtains covered the windows that gave onto the somber forest. The latter seemed to glare to any who cast their gaze. Achilles curiously watched a minute too long, in that instant, multiple of blood-crazed fiends returned her gaze.

“What happened exactly?” asked Balthazar unknown to the situation at hand. Sat around a round table with the four clan leaders and Staxius, the discussion began. Serene, Intherna, and Achilles were at the edge of the room partaking in a few snacks and drinks.

“Nightwalkers aren’t part of the council,” he replied ominously, “-all the leaders know of what happened.”

“Let me go into more detail,” interjected Aurora, “-Queen Shanna had our king abdicate his claim to the throne. I have no idea why or what – Lord Ruslan was slapped. In that instant, a decision had to be made.”

“Which is why the four clans are now under the rule of the Blood-King,” added Alaric with a smug expression.

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“The Blood-King’s Faction is alive,” smirked Julia.

“I thought as much,” sighed Balthazar, “-it was in the making. Our race was never part of the alliance, just a convenient way to not have us go on a rampage,” the olden face lit with passion, “-disrespecting the only thing we care, slapping a noble from our clans, those are the things we can’t have.”

“I agree,” voiced Staxius loudly, “-that’s why, that’s why we’ll take the fight to them,” determined, a pin drop silence befell the room.

“A-are you m-meaning to say war, my liege?” stuttered Alaric formulating words.

“Obviously,” turned to Lady Fawn, “-what would you do if a potentially harmful tribe is left untouched. Let me rephrase it, what would you do if a virus infects thy body. One takes medicine, in the eyes of Arda’s council, we’re the same as the virus.”

“If I may,” voiced Aurora, “-if we’re to go to war, our numbers aren’t that sufficient. The only few nightwalkers abled to fight are in the Sabbath’s clan.”

“Who said we needed a head-on assault,” he grinned, “-we’ll take it to the shadows. Manipulation, gathering pawns, shaking the kingdom from within.”

“Are you referring to a political battle?” inquired Balthazar.

“No,” sighed, “-Adete, would you please?”

“Finally,” flew from out the front pocket, the first progenitor stood in the middle of the table with a victorious stance. “I’ll take it from here,” she winked. Baffled by her involvement, no questions were asked for curiosity took precedence.

“It’s time that I speak the truth. My heir sent me to spy and survey the activity of the palace. Upon my travel, I came across many incoherent things. First and foremost, Queen Shanna didn’t betray the vows of marriage. I’m sure the King knows the truth. The reason for said action was to have her husband explode in fury and leave Arda or fight. She wanted the people close to her to be evacuated without getting involved. The simplest solution was to rely on the King’s vindictive nature. Thus, Ryul became a target. Posing as the devil, she wanted all to hate her,” paused to gather her breath, “-the reason is that Arda’s on the brink of catastrophe. She’s being held hostage by an unknown group that hails from Kreston. The infiltration grew so bad that they’ve won over the noble faction as well as seats in the council.”

“Which means,” added Staxius, “-Kreston is the real enemy. An invasion by culture and religion.”

“Oh...” ashamed, the feeling of being so uninformed went around the table. Jumping to the conclusion, doubting her loyalty, things unbecoming a noble clan. The Royal Couple of Arda had played everyone for fools.

“What then?” asked Lady Fawn, “-if her majesty is in peril, should we not help?”

“No,” sharp and direct, “-we’re not going to save the Queen,” cold and heartless, the decision was final. “The real victim is the people and the Kingdom – monarchs can be replaced, not the people in it.”

“Are you going to abandon thy wife?” asked Balthazar with a stern glare of disapproval.

“Of course not, I’ll save her. However, the people come first, we need to shake the kingdom from the core upwards. The council has been infected by sweet words of Kreston. Invading by wit instead of force is the only way forth. The moment Kreston takes up arms, Queen Gallienne will take arms against them. In that eventuality, Arda will be the winning factor, if we ally with Gallienne, Kreston will lose. Tis a simple idea; divide and conquer.”

“Do thee have an idea in mind?” asked Alaric.

“No, not at the moment,” faced away, “-I need to head to Mont Blanc as soon as possible.”

“Why is that?”

“It’s a personal quest, I need to head there soon. Besides, if we make a move now, it will only harm us. We’ve got about four years, I believe in the Queen, she’ll hold as long as her body permits.”

“What about us then, what will we do?” sighed Lady Fawn in disarray over what to believe.

“Allies, we need allies. Our Faction is strong without much influence. I’ll pull as many strings as I can, sadly, we need other non-human factions to ally with us. I’ve my sights on the Winged-Wolves, they desperately need help,” paused, an idea came to mind. “Alright,” the somber chessboard came from within the subconscious, no pawns nor pieces to speak of with the opposition holding the upper hand. ‘I need allies, we need allies. We need to capture their king without causing that much chaos, no forget tact, we’ll destroy if need be.’

“What is the plan?” spoke a voice that broke the day-dream. The curious and needlessly close faces forced a cough.

“Send a messenger to the Winged-wolves. Have him spread the word that the Ardanian Alliance has forsaken their village. Help isn’t going to come, spread the word of the ousting of the King. Create and flame the fire of hate. After that is done, the nightwalkers will swoop in as heroes.”

“I see,” nodded Balthazar, “-it’s a good plan to gather allies. However, I wonder about the travel, we won’t be able to teleport – tis hidden and unknown to us.”

“That’s why it relies on the messenger, he’ll carry this scroll,” reached into the suit jacket, “-it’s an Analysis spell. The moment it’s open, an impulse of Mana will allow me to concentrate the All-Seeing Eye to that point. Thus, we’ll be able to teleport without much trouble.”

“Impressive,” smiled Lady Fawn.

“Lady Aurora, find the messenger, hand the scroll, and let the plan begin.”

“Sure,” she smiled.

“Should we end it for today?” offered Alaric sensing Staxius’s fatigue.

“No objections here,” one by one, they stood with a bow.

“Lord Balthazar, I wish to have a word in private,” spoke the king rather forcefully. Understanding the intent, the rest left. The door closed to give the feeling of emptiness and fear.

“What is it?” asked the old man with a smile.

“I have a favor to ask,”

“I’m at thy command, Blood King.”

“Do you have a laboratory I can utilize?”

“How so, in no way is there something that advances here,” the eyes rolled to the left.

“Please, Lord Balthazar, the whole incident of the coronation was a scheme you put in place. Those fighters were not human, they were made using magic and alchemy. Thus, it leads me to you, the only one to gain out of that exchange.”

“You figured it out,” he laughed, “-I suppose there’s no point hiding the truth. The lab is in the basement, why would you need one?”

“Simple, I’m going to find a cure for the allergy to sun-light. It’s the only limiting factor holding our clan. With this, even the low-born will be able to assist.”

“Surely you jest,” astonished, he could but gulp at the prospect.

“No, I’m serious. The messenger will take more than two weeks to arrive at Mont Blanc. Add another few days to try and persuade the people. Should provide ample time to research the curse and find a cure.”

“I wish you the best of luck, majesty, here’s the key to the basement. It’s filled with equipment and machines suitable for alchemy and anything related to that,” with an obnoxious smile, he left as if a child being promised candy.

The arrival at Noctis’s hallow, a province that seemed to be untouchable was teetering on the edge of defeat. Kreston, the same faction that had ailed him for so long, returned once more. Two weeks for the first plan to go into effect – the world outside Arda was oblivious to the trouble brewing. Trying their hardest to support one another, Staxius and Xula, walked a narrow path – one riddled with traps and hardship.

‘Don’t worry Eira, I’m coming soon. It feels harsh to focus on other matters while you’re out being the puppet of the Lady of Ice. If the ancient dragons are going to be awakened, Undrar’s blessing will come in help. Dragons can only use one type of magic, her boon will nullify their power. If they are allowed to run rampant, Arda will fall no matter what Kreston does. Such a predicament,’ a swipe had the locked laboratory opened with the glee of a thousand hue.

#### Chapter 344: Cure

Trouble brewed in Arda; the king was ousted from power. The council changed from being affectionate to dictatorial. Taxes were raised, the capital became harder to live for the commoners. Two weeks went by since said incident. Freelance writers were curious about what had happened to the King. Bribed and buttering the pockets of a few shady guards – a vague idea presented itself. Staxius had been painted as evil. The idea spread around quickly, however, the people didn’t believe a word of it. Roth changed as a result, no longer were people in need given a chance to voice their troubles. The adventurers were given the option to skip the training to jump into action. The Guild Leaders were stripped of their authority over the Guild. A change in the regime as well as people surrounding the queen – the sage was laid off. Youst, tried as he might, was excluded from the ins and outs of the castle. Three puppeteers pulled her strings, a church was ordered to be built next to the palace. A sacrilegious prospect since her majesty’s foyer would suffer. It was the same as saying the church was equal to her. Resisting their demands grew tiring, she had made false reports to slow the process.

In a fight against the coming ravage, scholars put up a strong front and decided to boycott the universities if her Majesty tried to intervene in their work. A boycott would be disastrous since most of the power in running houses and machines came from magic. The barrier would suffer as well, thus, the University was exempted. A strong disgusting wind of change with the Noble Faction’s backing blew.

In that eventuality, Staxius set a plan in motion very, very long ago. Arda’s funds, without it, none could do anything. Coffers neared being empty, the payment for land was refunded. 300,000 gold in his personal account allowed to pull some strings. Going up against a drying coffer, taxes became the only viable option. Those poor and weak were thrown out the capital by orders of the General. Once a place of peace turned to a place of misery, Queen Shanna fought surrounded by enemies. If it wasn’t for her powers as a demi-goddess, she’d have been killed ages ago. Prophecy made a promise to the king, a promise to keep Xula safe no matter what. Thus, the invasion of Kreston’s secret faction slowed to a snail’s pace. No amount of influence from the Noble faction could hinder her position. The council of Representatives, some turned coat whilst the Guild Leader’s kept strong. Tobira Barbara the dryad protecting the forest and Great Mother, Ayluin Orilana were neutral to the cause.

“The ground floor feels like a battlefield,” said a boy hidden atop a roof. Deserted without a soul, the breeze felt as if sobbing. Guards in white and blue armor made rounds around the streets. It wasn’t safe to be out. The first few who couldn’t pay the tax and refused to leave were killed without mercy. Beastmen killing beastmen, unity was naught but a dream.

“Move it, brother,” said a girl with a sigh, “-we need to deliver this letter to the king.” Inconspicuous as shadows, they bolted out the front gate and into the wild.

‘Why is this happening,’ drippings of water from the ceiling echoed at a monotonous pace. Eerie to the point of terror, the dimness caused many to shout unknowingly. Those who refused were taken to the dungeon, an unfortunate punishment as the Dungeon Keeper was a sadist. Every day, someone new would be taken in. The same scene played over and over again. They screamed and begged shackled by chains to be placed behind bars. The moment one arrived, another left in a body bag. The survivors were people who managed to endure the torture. Ripped fingers, burnt eyes, some had their stomach cut open whilst being conscious. Others had their genitalia removed, breasts thrown to the side, ‘-impurities,’ was what he referred the ladies. The Demi-humans were treated far worse than elves and others. Ears and tails cut off, the features that made them attractive was seen as a defect by the Dungeon Keeper. Girls, boys, mothers, fathers, he didn’t care. If a demi-human came in prison, the ears would be cut by ragged-edged knives.

‘How low is Arda going to fall,’ one of the first prisoners sat in a corner without many injuries. The general had ordered the keeper to not touch a single hair off his body. ‘King Staxius,’ he thought with eyes peering into the slight cut that gave in to the wild,’-come save us.’

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“Sergeant Kelfir,” the resounding sound of gates opening broke the day-dream.

“Elga,” he voiced as the battered body of a young man stared him. A demi-human, his disciple.

“I’m here,” he smiled to fall onto the muddy floor.

“Here’s a bandage,” smirked the Keeper who threw the cloth into the puddle of mud, “-better have the injuries cared, else he’ll die,” laughed maniacally, he rolled his baton against the iron-bars.

“Elga, Elga,” rushed over, “-are you ok?” pull so he’d lay on his lap, the boy seemed in severe pain.

“I-I’m f-fine,” he replied with gritted teeth and one eye shut, “-it’s g-good to see you.” One of his ears was cut, blood flowed uncontrollably. “You always look so handsome, don’t y-you m-master,” he held out a hand to Kelfir’s face. “I c-can’t feel thy cheeks,” tears flowed, the hand was crushed by a boulder. “I made sure that lady Kelfir was taken out of the capital.”

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“Elga...?” the body grew twice as heavy, the breathing stopped.

“Elga...?” shaking to touch the disciple’s face, “-a-are y-you o-ok?” no response, reality soon caught with the illusionary haven Kelfir had made inside his mind. No screams nor lashing out, the head rested against his companion’s chest. Tears didn’t flow, hands intertwined with Elga’s, he gave a short prayer, one wishing to the soul’s safe passage into Elysium.

The few who remained yearned for a savior, a hero to come and fight their troubles. All prayed for a better day, though, hope would not arrive soon. Many lives were lost, many were killed in the fake name of justice. An example of those who didn't comply, burnt to the stakes, and more, the people suffered from the nobles laughing.

"Majesty," knocked the door softly, "-I'm here with the papers you requested." No response came, "-majesty, I'm coming in," the door opened to a room with chairs, a table, and a fireplace. \*Storage,\* was written in bold on a door leading to the left. Straight, next to the brick-fireplace, a door led further inside. \*Laboratory,\* was written above the door frame.

\*Click,\* opened, the Laboratory was twice as big as the prior rooms combined. Stretched, it contained an assembly line for robots Balthazar had been experimenting with. Paper, potions, and more were littered around on various tables and chairs. The differing compartments were divided by partitions containing glass. Staxius remained in the one filled with test-tubes and more; \*Alchemy.\*

"Serene," he called the moment the door opened, "-where's the coffee?"

"Here," she gently walked over to place the cup on a metal cabinet, "-are you ok?" he had remained here for two weeks straight.

"Yeah," spun around, "-I did leave to visit Lizzie every night, didn't I?" walked over to take the coffee, "-what about you, any news on the messenger?"

"Yes," her eyes befell what seemed to be blood on his work-desk, "-we got a report that he arrived about 3 days ago. He's convincing the village as we speak. They're very much adamant that the Queen has yet to forsake them."

"It's a false hope, don't worry," sipped, the warmth helped in soothing the body. Eira went missing two weeks ago, though he wanted to fly out to Mont Blanc, the situation grew more complicated. Patience was key in winning this battle.

"Don't mind my asking," she walked over to the desk, "-what have you been researching?"

Leaned against the cabinet with legs cross, "-the curse of sunlight," he replied.

"Are you seriously trying to nullify the curse of the low-born?" she turned with a frown of dismissal.

"Yeah, it's not just that. Researching their blood gave me more insight into the nature of vampires. As for the cure," he pointed to a shelf directly above, "-it's complete. I finished it a few days ago, I'm testing the formula – I still need to transfer it to a scroll."

Crinkling her forehead in doubt, "-care to elaborate?" her eyes narrowed.

"How can I put in simpler terms," gulping the beverage, "-here's the basic idea. I took blood samples from many breeds of nightwalkers. From there on, I classified it on the reactivity to sunlight. I did have to make a few trips to Hidros since the sun doesn't show up here, what I found was very interesting. The sun's ray isn't comprised of light, there's also a minute amount of mana. One that directly affects the Vampiric factor. Once I figured that out, it was simple to find a way to mutate the factor, an evolution to the blood. I had to use a lot of mana, but it's complete. I used a combination of pure-blooded vampires to attain the cure. Low-breeds aren't given the protection, their blood isn't potent enough. That's why

I'm reluctant to directly inject the resistance factor. It might bring other issues – we don't want to mess with genetics now. The simple solution, have it as mana. That way, there's almost no risk and the mana will change the user from inside out."

"Eh, yeah," she paused with a drowsy face, "-basically, you changed the cure to a spell."

"I guess," sighed, "-what of Arda, receive any news?"

"Arda..." face turned for the worse,"-in the past two weeks, the capital is almost unrecognizable. My many sources have told me that we have as much as one year till it's unsavable."

"Any more?" sat, the work resumed.

"No, information is scarce. A complete blackout. Last I heard was that people inside the capital were ousted for not being able to pay."

"Is that so," said nonchalantly, "-I guess funds are running low. Not to mention that the arms were taken out of Arda."

"How? Didn't you order it to be taken to Roth, we did leave without saying goodbye."

"I had the old-sage use a temporary portal and send the arms. We left abruptly," glanced over the shoulder, "-still, it doesn't mean that I wasn't prepared. I changed the policies a few weeks in advance so as the kingdom would run out of money without my intervention. I hope that Xula noticed the loophole I left. It should buy her for more than a few months."

"How shady are you?" she nervously laughed.

"You can never be too careful," the face returned to the papers, "-I suppose I had a feeling that something would go amiss. There were changes in the capital and how the people reacted."

"In no way did you predict such a turn of events," her eyes rolled skeptically.

"I didn't predict the future. Paranoia I suppose, a gut feeling. Even if nothing happened, it was set-up to allow a quick fix later on. The trap of low-funds is sprung; and if what you say about the people being ousted is true. Pushing harder on the people will result in discontent; the more they grow unhappy, the better the chances of civil war. Don't forget, Ardanians are well-versed in magic, almost all the inhabitants know how to utilize mana."

"Yeah, no need to say that twice. Nightwalkers have suffered a few losses with that mob-mentality."

"Well," paused, "-have Gabrielle come to the office in two hours, I need to discuss the matter going forth."

"As you wish," Serene exited with a bow.

'How quaint,' he stopped moving, '-I don't feel anything. I use to have a little emotion to guide my decision. Now, even the news of the people being maltreated doesn't faze me. Supposed the emotionless nature is settling farther than I think. Losing my heart in this war might be good compensation.'

Chapter 345: Letter



"You asked for me, majesty?"

"Gabrielle," Staxius gave a nod acknowledging her presence, "-care to wait a few minutes?" asked courteously, in no way could she refused. Coughed and unstable on her feet, Serene helped in fetching a chair for the guest. Narrowly gazing upon the laboratory, the puppets spoke volumes in terms of intimidation. Glimpsing back and forth inside where he worked, the eyes felt drowsy.

"Ready," the door opened with a whistle. "I've got the cure," he smiled and walked to she who sat.

"Cure for what?" paused, she scoured her memories for answers, "-oh, yeah, the supposed antidote," breathing a painful sigh, her watery eyes oozed of fatigue.

"You're far worse than the other vampires, what happened?" inquired with a warm stance, her mind felt at ease.

"It's not that bad, majesty, I appreciate the concern," she turned to the side as to avoid the conversation.

"Is that so," paused with the hand holding his chin, "-sure, if thou wish not to discuss, then we'll leave it as is." Taking a step closer, "-here," he handed a scroll, "-why don't you give it a try."

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"What is it exactly, majesty?"

"Immunity to sunlight," said nonchalantly, she gave an instant frown.

"Immunity, sire?" asked with narrowed eyes, her doubt was more than obvious.

"Yes, immunity. I heard that thee longed to stroll out in the sun as the days of old. Tis thy chance. Besides, if it works on you, I'm sure it'll work on anyone else."

"That's a fair assessment," reclined, "-are you sure it's safe?" she coughed.

"Yeah," he smiled.

"I'll trust you," inhaling deeply as to clear her mind, the ribbon holding the paper was unraveled. Pulled horizontally, a purplish light emanated from the center.

"It didn't work," she peered over the scroll, "-majesty, the scroll isn't working."

"No, it's working alright," pointing at her arms, the purple light had traveled to her neck. It went through her body as if veins, the glow differed in intensity. High to then low, it mimicked a heartbeat.

"What's happening..." soon, the light would wrap itself around her body. A cocoon of mana drawn from the atmosphere. There was a certain feeling of bliss in that confined space. A moment of happiness, a moment where every single problem turned naught.

"Is it working?" asked Serene intently staring the process.

"Should be ready in three...two...one," a blinding light enveloped the room the instant he said one. Forced away, the light only grew more.

“W-what is this?” came a softened voice. Murky black hair turned silky, the face which remained hidden revealed. Oval with sharp contours, eyes as grey as the full-moon, a petite dead-tree symbol in between her eyebrows, “-I feel better,” she said in disarray.

“I supposed the formula made expressly for you worked,” he laughed.

“Expressly for you?” turned Serene, “-please don’t tell me that you’ve spent two weeks finding a cure to Lady Gabrielle’s trouble?” vivid to slothful, she stared intently.

“What of the others?” stood the lady in a flash, “-don’t tell me it’s so,” voiced with the same worry of a relative, her hands pressed and intertwined as if praying. Very much confused by what happened, the two walked and stood in front of Staxius with a slightly hunched posture. It gave the feeling of a mother scolding her child. Round and round, the words flowed in one ear and out the other, the noise grew so bad he clapped. The sudden action broke the cacophony of the avalanche of senseless drivel. Frowned, they took a step back and waited with arms on their hips.

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“I didn’t spend all my time making a cure for Lady Gabrielle. I had to do so, the low-breed, forgive their soul, need a healthy leader. One who can lead them to safety, one who can protect and one who can safeguard their survival,” pointing to the left, next to the Alchemy room, “-there’s a box filled with scrolls and potions. Take them to the people, say tis a gift from the king. The boon of immunity from the sun, we’re at war, don’t forget. Arda can strike without us knowing. That’s the reason I need all the clan leaders to be healthy.”

“Should have expected as much,” sighed Serene with a lighter visage.

“As you wish, majesty,” quick on her feet, Gabrielle left the laboratory in search of assistants.

“The boon of immunity against the sun. The wonder and utmost privilege given only to pure-bred. Not today, every nightwalker should have the chance to walk out in the open.”

“It’s a good sentiment,” spoken with a worried tone, “-don’t you think they may take it for granted?”

“For granted, who knows and who cares,” he patted her shoulder, “-the people must get what they want. I won’t stop if they want revenge, go out and suck blood o’ plenty,” paused to stare out a map plastered on the wall ominously, “-I have faith in the vampires. They know the sufferance of being shunned and accused of vile acts. Light in dark times will lift their spirits.”

“If that’s what his majesty wishes, then tis will be what he gets,” she bowed and left the room.

Hours later, boxes filled with scrolls were put at the Tied by Blood, clan-house. A mansion of which had its tiled roof coming apart. The yard, desert with a singular tree with no leaves, stood eerily over the line of people. The latter stretched all around the mansion. Tactful with care to decorum, each was given the boon. Flashes of light shone monotonously till night arrived.

“Brother, brother,” leaped off one tree to another, “-are we there yet?” asked a girl with a hooded cloak.

“Soon, sister,” said the other with the same clothes. Night sprawled around the province. Deserted without any torch nor sign of life, a broken-down railing came in view. \*If thou wish death, do

approach,\* was written on a hung sign. The outer perimeter of Noctis's Hallow. It changed suddenly from normal forestry to one viler and dense. Compact to the point one couldn't see far, a labyrinth. Cold and blood-thirsty gazes slammed itself on their backs. They who jumped and leaped from tree to tree had more on their plate. Bats flew, vultures and crows voiced their intent, the smell of decomposing bodies stained the air.

Meanwhile, after another hour, "-Lady Fawn," panted over a guard, "-we've captured intruders," he entered her private chambers.

"What do you mean intruders?" she voiced dressed in a risqué nightgown. Lord Balthazar laid on the bed with a book.

"Two children made it across the forest," he breathed.

"Across the forest," quick to slip into a heavy coat, "-let's go," she ordered with a sword.

"Take a scarf, you might catch a cold," added the old man in jest.

"Shove it."

Running down the hall towards the exit, "-ma'am, is the rumor true?"

"If tis about me and the old man getting back together," she jumped upon closing the stairs, "-then no," landing on the wall, she leaped adroitly across the other flight of stairs. Left in her dust, the guard came to a walking pace.

"What's the matter?" she asked coming up to the door. A crowd had gathered near the fountain with the king at the center. The report went to all the clan-leaders. Shackled by chains, the figures were brought by her men.

"Lady Fawn," nodded Staxius, "-I heard that thy men captured intruders?"

"Yes, I've only just got the information," she rejoined with the group.

"And I suppose that's the excuse for the rather chilly outfit."

"Majesty," sighed Serene on the other side, "-tis no time to make silly jokes."

"I suppose," seeing the intruder approach, the face grew blank. An aura of superiority rose with a semi-transparent figure peering over his shoulder.

"Who are these mysterious people?" asked the spirit with a seductive tone.

"Intherna," he whispered, "-why are you here, don't you need sleep?"

"Leave me alone," her voice echoed with a touch of infamy, "-lemme watch."

'Lemme watch,' he thought, '-quite a peculiar phrasing. Lemme watch, what is she thinking?'

"Majesty," interjected one of the guards, "-these two came in barging for an audience."

"An audience," he stood a step forth. The night sky didn't help, the stairs were aimless trying to provide a bit of night. Sadly, only the faint lamps on the pavements provided solace. "Who are you?"

"Majesty," instantly on their knee, "-we've come with news," said the boy with a girlish voice.

"I care not," he voiced thunderously, "-state thy name first."

"The Enbalar siblings, sire."

'Enbalar...' paused to think, memories of their encounter in Dorchester came in mind. "I see. Remove the hoods and unshackle the handcuffs, these two come from the capital."

"Sire," interjected Alaric, "-if they hail from the capital, reason states that they must be spies."

"They are spies," he nodded, "the Enbalar siblings are spies." He faced the mansion, "-nevertheless, we'll keep them around," peered over the shoulder, "-on whose behalf are you here, the queen, the general, or the people."

"The people, my liege."

"Good," to that, they headed inside. A secluded room with two beds, a bookshelf, and very minimalistic surroundings. The window was rectangular which curved at the top. Lined with railings, breaking in and out would be a hassle. The faint light from the outside highlighted the dust and hopelessness of said chamber. The floor, made of wood opposed to the other rooms where it was of marble, had an unnerving creek each time someone walked.

"What's the reason you're here?" asked Staxius sat on an armchair with one foot on the other.

"We came to deliver a message," replied the brother with nervous tapping of the foot.

"Surely you know that Arda's at odds with us. Why did you think upon crossing that border? You could have died, are you stupid?"

"Majesty," said the sister shyly, "-we don't care if we live or die. The capital is in utter chaos. Everything is written in this letter; we were sent per the Academy's order."

"Is Clareville involved?"

"No," replied the brother, "-all educational institutes were exempted from the tyranny that ensued. The people were slaughtered without mercy."

"I understand," he paused to read the letter. It detailed everything from start to the moment of it being written. It ended with Kreston's the enemy; they're planning more than a takeover of Arda. One of the maids overheard that the Saints were planning to send troupes to Dorchester. "Signed by Youst, the image of what happened became clearer.

"What about the orphanages, they don't provide money and are run off charity, are they ok?" he asked rather adamantly.

"We have no idea, sire," replied the sister.

"It may well be in ruins; a lot of people were evicted to the harshness of the wild. There are rumors of a dungeon where people who resist end up as playthings for the Keeper. Many who enter never leave and those who leave are in a body bag."

'Damn,' memories of a child came to mind, one who held his golden pocket watch. Yaeger Aebalar and her sister who was in the underground. Their family was tied to him for he killed their mother as a necessity. 'All those kids might die for naught,' side glancing the door, a momentary impulse came forth. One of sprawling out the room and fight the Capital alone. It would work because of the boon of immortality. Even so, even more, people would die, the kingdom would fall as opposed to being relieved. At that moment, a picture of Xula came in mind. Two prime examples of her soft-heart sat on beds. In no way was she going to let the kids be harmed; especially since she was a mother.

"I suppose that's all you were asked to report?"

"Yes, my liege."

"Are you returning to the capital?"

"No, it would be a death trap," said the brother with a worried face.

"You're not going to stay here, that's for sure," he stood, "-I'll come up with something. Might have to wait a few more days," the door opened, "-don't worry, the people won't bite you."

#### Chapter 346: Messenger

'Over yonder rises the gentle sun amidst the cold sky.' Stood amidst concrete houses with slated roofs of which rose many fire-places. A snowy-white ground, each breath made a puff of vapor. The messenger stood, frozen to the bones, dressed in heavy-leather coat, gloves, and cap. Next to a tree with white leaves, the villagers, all people with angelic wings, and warm clothes walked without heeding his call. Speaking of the tragedy at the capital had the village leader in peril, though, it didn't cause trouble for the villagers. Back of where he stood led a path of gravel towards the harshness of the mountain. Tall pines tree erected all around the village and up the mountain.

"Hear me o' villagers, the capital has forsaken thee, help isn't to come,' pleading with all his might, the few ears he caught were of kids missing milk-teeth. For the following few days until the day the Enbalar siblings arrived at Noctis's Hallow, the constant warning would continue.

Each night spent was as if they're last. Monster fighting, further up, supplies were low. The harvest this month was pillaged by said devils. Set to freeze without warning, hunger was soon to arrive. Hunter, try as they may, couldn't but face defeat. All the animals, deer, and more alike fled. Reports of many younglings going missing at dusk forced the adults to not leave after 06:00. Living off what could be scoured around – life grew harder. The cold added more than snow, it meant certain death if one was starved. The body had to work twice as much to survive. The Winged-wolves; angels in human forms, were accustomed to the climate. Not the messenger, he stood frozen on the third day. Taken pity upon by the village leader; the chance to explain what had happened presented itself. It took convincing, abandoning the slight sliver of hope was tough. It made listening to reason that much harder to swallow.

"The capital isn't going to save us?"

"No, I'm afraid not," sat before a fireplace, the warmth provided a little comfort. Opposed to outside, the inside had a rustic feeling, one that matched a log-cabin. A rug made of bearskin rested in front of the fireplace. A small circular table on the side of the chairs provided support for warm drinks. The village leader, a man well in his late sixties had white hair. Wings of which had their feathers falling. The

face, paler than most with veins and bone exposed due to the skin losing its vigor. Wrinkled around the eyes, each smile felt as if a burden in the skin. The lips were hidden by a beard and mustache. All the men bore facial hairs, it helped in keeping warm.

“What are we going to do?” mumbled the leader, “-the adventurers have been fighting for months. The frost giants aren’t letting up their attack. I fear that we may need to abandon the village. Moving everyone from here further down will be troublesome.”

“What if the monsters were defeated?” asked the messenger, a butler in service of the Nox’s clan.

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“We’ll be able to move to climb the mountain as the days of old. There’s plenty to be harvest up there, tis as if heaven, a climb to purge out sufferance.”

“They need to be defeated right?” he asked intently.

“Yes sir,” replied the old man sipping the remainder of his mug, “-I doubt that the monsters will be killed so easily. Haven’t you heard the rumors? Beasts as large as the trees, goblins twice as strong as humans, vultures waiting to strike the fallen. Lastly, a dragon who roar every midnight causing avalanches. It rests atop Mont Blanc which of itself is more than a few weeks,” resting the mug, “-so you see, expecting them to be defeated is pointless.”

“Forgive my asking,” he interjected, “-did anyone spot a girl fly over the village in the past week?”

“A girl flying over the village?” paused to think with a gentle stroke of the beard, “-no. I hear that a boy saw a large-white figure fly. I doubt it’s anything consequential. Probably a vulture or one of the mountain beasts. So, what brings you here?”

“I came to deliver the message,” he smiled.

“So, you came to announce our end,” breathing a chuckle, “-how very quaint,” the head shook at the absurdity.

“No,” said sharply, “-I come not from Arda.”

“Not from Arda? Why so, did the council fall apart?”

“A very well-educated guess, Elder,” he nodded, “-the council has in fact fallen into a disagreement. The reasons why elude me, I was never one for politics.”

“On whose behalf are you here then?”

“The Blood-King, the exiled faction of the council.”

“The Blood-king...” the words echoed around the room. A name as fearsome as told by the many stories throughout the village. “What of him, what will he do?”

“Thou shall see at dawn,” kindly putting away the blanket, “-I’ll sleep on the couch over there, good night, elder.”

“Yes, good night indeed,” the last exchange was confusing and mysterious. Preoccupied with the situation of the village, in no way could he focus on the what-ifs.

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The next day came soon. The village awoke to a heavy mist that limited vision to about 2 meters. Turned to check on the messenger, “he’s gone,” mumbled the Elder.

Out in Noctis’s Hallow, the roads before the three mansions were filled with carriages. Ones with supplies on their back. One by one, butlers ran around sorting the issues as they arrived. They were getting readied for an expedition.

“Serene,” called Staxius, “-I want you to remain here.”

“No,” she refused, “-in no way am I going to let you leave alone.”

“Don’t be so stubborn, I need you to take care of matters here,” he voiced kindly.

“No, I don’t care,” she turned in dismissal.

“Majesty,” interjected Balthazar, “-if she wishes to accompany thee, why not let so?”

“Surely you understand,” he refuted back.

“Yes, I do understand, thou art worried about the matters of state,” he smiled. “As for Serene,” he pointed with a cane, “-she’s worried about you more than the state. The Clan leaders will handle the troubles as they come. You needn’t worry, be sure to bring back the princess.”

“Will do,” exhaling, ‘-look at them.’ Serene and Intherna argued over trivial matters as opposed to Achilles who spectated. ‘Feels like Kniq.’

“Majesty,” approached Lady Fawn, “-what of the carriages, are you sure the single one will do?”

“Yeah,” he replied, “-the supplies will last a week at most. That should be enough time to help the adventurers,” eyes fixed on the trail ahead, ‘-here I come, Eira.’

“Sire,” in came Lady Gabrielle dressed in comfortable clothes, “-what of the spies?”

“The siblings?” glancing over the shoulder, “-leave them be. The capital is a death sentence at the moment.”

“Alright, if you say so,” she nodded.

Precisely at 07:00, an influx of mana overwhelmed his senses. ‘That’s the signal,’ he thought with the All-seeing eyes active. Far from the village, a secluded path of snow with a singular man.

“Mount up,” turned sharply with the suit-jacket catching air, “-we’re going.” The frivolous argument turned to silence. Sat in the back with Staxius on the reins, it was pulled by hounds. Ones that Serene summoned. Armed and ready, \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

In the mist, a carriage with a single lantern approached.

“Who’s there?” asked the messenger a little frightened.

“Get in,” said a monotonous voice, “glowing pair of eyes walked with ease in the snow.

“M-majesty,” from a figure to now the King, the butler bowed and entered from the back. He was met by three menacing faces. Achilles on the left with the aura of a trained fighter, strong and merciful. The middle, Intherna sat with her back pressed against Staxius’s, her face showed innocence with a hint of mischievousness. To the right, Serene with a face as beautiful as the moon, a face that had a melancholic beauty. Intimidated, he gulped and sat as far away as he could. The trip continued with the never-changing scenery.

“Butler,” voiced Staxius a few minutes later.

“Y-yes, m-majesty,” he startled out of the comfort of the landscape.

“We’re closing the village. I hope that you’ve explained everything in detail.”

“Yes, and there was a boy who says a figure flew over a few days back.”

“Good,” the face relaxed, new people meant a new persona. Snowy to somewhat clear, the carriage advanced quicker on the stone path. Led upwards, it gave into a large open area with nothing but snow. The houses were built with precision, it suited the region very well. The highest was two-stories high. Few children who ran around alerted their parents. In-turn, they rushed over to get the Elder.

Stopped shy of the houses, in the center of a path dividing the village, the Elder approached. Hunched back with a walking stick, he came accompanied by a lady.

“Elder,” approached the messenger.

“W-what’s the meaning of this?” asked the old man.

“What do you mean, didn’t we discuss this last night? You said you wanted the monsters to be killed.”

“Y-yes,” he coughed, “-we already have adventurers fighting them.” Peering over the messenger’s shoulder, “-who is he anyway?”

“Mind thy tongue,” fired the butler instantly, “-don’t be so rude in the presence of royalty.”

“Royalty you say?” he laughed, “-stop with the jests, in no way will any noble blood walk here.”

“Let me speak,” approached Staxius who overheard all that was said. Each step resounded with power; it forced the men to gather behind the Elder.

“As you wish,” bowed the butler out of his way.

“Staxius Haggard, King of the Vampires, Protector of Arda, it’s a pleasure to meet you,” he gave a slight nod with hands on his chest. A sign of respect for those who were older.

“K-k-king of v-vampires...” murmurs went around the village. All were shocked and distraught.

“Majesty,” spoke a boy behind the crowd.

“Alice!” he voiced loudly. It was the boy who came to the capital a few months ago, the boy who grew attached very quickly.



“Majesty,” he ran without heed of his parents and leaped.

“Got you,” Staxius caught the boy and spun, “-you’ve grown since the last time,” he smiled to a stop with the boy hugging tightly.

“Alice, please,” called the Elder, “-don’t be so open,” he facepalmed.

“Grandfather,” turned while still being held, “-Mister Staxius is a nice person. He took care of me when I was scared of those people in the capital.”

“There you have it,” smiled Staxius at the Elder. One by one, each lowered their head in respect.

“Welcome to our humble village,” spoke the Elder.

“Please, there’s no need to lower thine heads,” he said with a warm tone. Placing the boy on the ground, “-go meet up with your mother.”

“Ok,” he ran off with a skip.

“Majesty,” spoke the Elder, “-may I ask why thou art here?”

“I’ve come to help,” he voiced, “-rather, we’ve come to help,” at that moment, the three ladies vaulted off the carriage. Stronger than most, they all walked to stand behind the King. “I heard the village was in trouble with monsters. The butler should explain the intricacies later. For now,” he pointed to the carriage, “-there are food and provisions for a week’s worth. Consider it a gift from the Blood-King’s faction.” The words fell on their ear as if dessert after dinner. An indescribable joy of relief. Without time wasted, the villagers were quick to unload the carriage. It held more than a week’s worth of supplies. They could last for a few more if rationing came into play. The guests were taken to the Elder’s house. Alice smiled along the way for the warm memories of the bath and playtime returned vividly.

“Someone’s good with kids,” elbowed Intherna in jest.

“Phrasing,” he sniffled, “-it makes me seem as if a predator,” they entered the house.

#### Chapter 347: Mont Blanc

Entranced by the word King, many inhabitants stood outside the Elder’s house. The jarring cold didn’t bother for they were prepared. The visitors, now considered guests, were well seated before the same fire-place. Intherna took many pleasurable gazes at the villagers. Some were old, some young, and some adults, all held a similar expression.

“Elder,” spoke Staxius, “-thank you for such a warm welcome.”

“It’s our pleasure to welcome the king,” he said with a nervous smile. The king was sat crossed-legged on the bear-rug with Alice beside. The boy played with a toy. A grandfather, a mother, and no father to speak about. Thinking of what could have happened, Achilles was tactful as to not ask. The lady seemed in mourning, her face held a solemn grin, one of requirement opposed to heartfelt.

Sensing the room grow distant, “-how of it,” spoke the King.

“Of what, sire?”

“Of the monster problem.”

“Oh, that,” paused to gather his thought, the Elder glanced at his daughter who had stared away as if to sneeze. “I have no idea,” he breathed with the gaze returned to the fire. The crackling of the burning wood had the room in constant noise. “The last I heard of the issue was when a group from our village headed to check on the Adventurers. Try as I may, I can’t tell you anything about what is happening. There’s a dungeon, an old castle, a dragon, and giants – tis the rumors.”

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“Dragon,” mumbled, the face turned silent, ‘-I had a feeling that Mont Blanc had something to do with Eira’s disappearance. I can sense her mana faintly; it’s far up, far above the clouds.’

“Majesty,” interjected Alice, “-are you going to fight the monsters?” he asked with attention on the toys, “-If so, can you tell father to come back soon, mother is getting angrier by day.” Innocent words of truth. It pulled a string in the mother’s heart. Angrier by the day, those exact words made her stumble, a startled expression mixed with woefulness. Alas, unable to bear said words, she fled into the kitchen under the pretense of more drinks.

‘Oh,’ thought Staxius, ‘-must have awakened a bad memory,’ he calmly patted the boy, who in turn, smiled. Checking up on the Elder, he remained fixed on the fire. Long and deep, it was as if it had trapped him, like the call of the mermaid. A melodic voice that soon turns into the teeth of a beast. A trap of beauty, a trap many o’ folk speak on the shores.

“Elder,” he called.

“S-sorry,” astonished out of the trance, “-how may I help?”

“Is there lodging available?”

“If tis a house, then there’s one nearest to the path into the mountain. The couple was killed when the beasts appeared.” On that, goodbyes were exchanged.

The door shut behind, they who had come to save were left outside. The wind sure was chilly, one of which each breath would cut inside the nostrils. It came straight from the mountains, without tip for it was high above the clouds.

The walk down the village was enlightening. The same feeling as Noctis’s Hallow, the people who walked around were rare and very often just hunters. A stone path with snow on one tile to another, it took a few minutes to reach the edge. Cross what seemed to be a red-line, a barrier of sorts, one ended up at the outer-village. The path to the mountain began with two concrete pillars holding a broken gate. The houses here were abandoned, the fear of monsters at night sufficed. Broken to some extent, the one the Elder offered was one of the lucky survivors. An elevated veranda that gave into the doorway inside. Few flowerpots stood on the rather large balustrade. The floor was of logs, wooden logs cut to not be round.

Opened with a screech, a common room presented itself. It bore a fireplace slightly to the right on the opposing wall with four seats facing said commodity. A few steps inside laid a doorframe to the left, it led to the kitchen. A corridor led further to the back where stairs climbed to the right after the fireplace. Upstairs rested bedchambers, a toilet, and showers. The standard for housewares.

The King stood ominously; he needed a few minutes to breathe. As for the others, the butler rushed to the fire; the cold was unbearable. Achilles took to the kitchen, Intherna and Serene rushed upstairs to claim their rooms.

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"Majesty," called the butler with the wood crackling away, "-please, rest whilst I clean."

"A generous offer," he smiled, "-why not heat thyself first?"

"Cleaning will suffice," quick on his feet, the butler vanished away into the background. The warmth from the fire sent shivers up the feet and throughout the body. A pair of tiny legs walked across his face to sit on the head.

"Adete?" he asked.

"Yeah," she replied with a fatigued tone, "-leave me alone, I need sleep," curled like a kitten, she slept.

'We're here, the adventurers are fighting someone on that mountain. I need information though the Elder seemed to be in the dark. Why would there be dungeons and a castle so far out into the mountains? Doesn't sound right. The rumor of a dragon is almost too obvious. Are the dragon's awakening or is it a ploy. If Eira is here, it must do with them. Gergusser, what are you playing at?' paused, the mind wandered about.

"Majesty," said Serene with a gentle push.

"I dozed off," he coughed. Everyone had taken a seat before the fireplace, some indulged in a book found upstairs and others in snacks and drinks.

"I'm curious," voiced Intherna, "-what of the adventurers, I keep hearing of a team being sent here. Surely, they must be dead, right?"

"Get off it," refuted Serene in anger.

"Oh, did I hit a nerve?" joked the Goddess.

"Cut it out you two," sighed Staxius, "-the adventurers are Xula's Elite guards. A man who can split a mountain. A girl with absolute authority over fire and lightning as well as the spirits. A man so silent he'd turn invisible. An elf that could shoot in any given position, angle, distance, and hit her target. Lastly, a vampire, their leader, my secretary, Serene."

"Is that so," said Intherna with a hint of curiosity.

"Yes, they were my teammates at one point. Oenus Tuyon, the swordsman. Magra Yeltris, the mage. Rasu, the thief, and Kearen Ellican, the bowwoman. I long to see them again, that's why I came. To finally put an end at the battle."

"About that," the door opened, "-I'm glad to see you again."

"Who is it?" asked Achilles.

"A friend," walked the hooded man, "-Serene," he said and took off the hood. It revealed a demi-human bearing the facial features close to a cat. Sharp eyes, each time he glanced felt as if an interrogation.

"Rasu?" she stood, "-it is you," she laughed.

"Yeah, I don't believe it," he coughed in a sickly manner, "-why are you here?"

"I've come to help," she smiled as they stood face to face. A long due reunion. "Where are the others?"

"Fighting," he shook his head, "-fighting day and night. I came to fetch this week's supplies. Honestly, I was scared, the people here don't even have food to live, how could they spare us a meal," peering behind to the fireplace, "-who did you come with?"

"Oh," she turned with a big smile, "-I've come as part of the King's team."

"The king's team?" he paused; "-surely nobility isn't going to sully their hands fighting beasts."

"You're wrong on that front," stood a large figure, "-on the contrary," he turned, "-Nobility should be at the forefront of the fight"

"M-majesty," instantly to his knees, "-forgive my rudeness. Thou have changed from the last time we met."

"And thou art more social than I would have guessed. Stand up, there's plenty to discuss," holding out a hand, "-I'm here as a fellow adventurer," the platinum tag sparkled, "-call me Xenos."

"Thank you, Lord Xenos," taking his hand, they sat around the fire once more. The discussion went around. Achilles shared tales of her experiences with monsters and so did they. From reserved to open, stories of fights always had the power to link people. Staxius sat away from the discussion as not to intrude. Intherna did the same, she sat on the ledge of his seat messing with a puzzle.

"Hey," she gave a quick elbow, "-when are we going to fight?"

"I thought you weren't going to fight until I was approved as a suitable leader."

"That's not it," she laughed, "-in no way can I refuse thy will. What's the point I wonder. Still, you intrigue me, thus my interest. Thou know how to keep a lady entertain. The schemes and amount of troubles you go through is unbelievable. I want to see you win, all the time, I want you to outsmart the other. What's that mind thinking, what are you planning? Those are the thoughts that keep me awake. I can't figure you out, it's frustrating. The same as this puzzle, I hate it with a passion."

"Do you mean to say you hate me as well?"

"Hmm..." she hummed, "-HUMM..."

"Ok, enough. I get it, no need to force the words."

Ended after a minute, the discussion changed to the matter at hand. Staxius asked Rasu to draw up a map detailing everything they had learned.

"This is it," he commented with a filled paper, "-from what we got told by the villages, the mountain path goes around the whole mountain. It's around a two-week journey on foot. It might take longer

depending on the climate and such. There's another issue at hand, altitude sickness. The air is much thinner the more we climb. To prevent that, there are about five stops along the path. Ideally, we must spend at least two to three days in hopes that the body is readied. That would have applied if the monsters weren't a problem. The first stop has been cleared, the real trouble is the second stop, around here," he pointed on the map, "-it's a fortress. The waves of monsters are constant without stop. We managed to make an outpost to rest. I tell you, the beast is unlike anything I've seen," he breathed loudly. "We grow powerful with each kill, and they do the same, they learn of our stratagems and patterns. Their unpredictability is daunting, one would think a commander is leading their forces."

"Is that the farthest you've made it?" asked Staxius.

"Yes, sadly. We could skip the fortress and carry onwards. But that'll leave the village open to attacks – our priority is to make sure they are safe. Else, what's the point?"

"That's a good sentiment," nodded the king, "-we'll leave the first thing tomorrow. Take a rest and have some food, we've got plenty to go around. If things get tough, I suppose Serene and I will fly somewhere close and hunt. Does that work?" he asked.

"Absolutely, works fine with me."

On that, he headed upstairs for fatigue caught up. Tomorrow would mark the day of a new fight, a fight for the people as well as the rescue of his daughter. Despite this, he dreaded the day they'd meet. A tough choice might have to be made, one of slaying the one he vowed to protect. A kingdom in peril, a daughter in need of help, a shadowy faction making moves on Dorchester.

'I wonder if GateSix has any weapon that could strike the mountain. The same as the prototype missiles they spoke about on the phone earlier this week. Instead of the plane, one that was launched on its own. Weaponry will be very much appreciated.' Tucked under the blanket with a misty window, the room was small but clean. The butler did an amazing job.

Meanwhile, near the borders of Kreston, one leading into Dorchester, rumbling of various kind shook the ground. Heavy machines move to cross the border. Unsupervised, they moved into Rotten thicket, a place filled with memories. At the helm, a lady dressed in white and gold, "-onward peasants, thy angel has descended."

#### Chapter 348: Alps

Dusk settled with the crew setting up in the mansion. The unexpected arrival of Rasu had Serene excited. They spoke for a copious amount of time. The fireplace provided heat, the butler gave food and drinks. Overall, it was a good experience since the next day would mean traveling into the Alps. The darker it got; the more cold engulfed the house.

Staxius slept peacefully despite the cold. The others had to take refuge and sleep near the fire. Thus, continued the night till daybreak. No chirping of birds, rather, a sharp echoing growl had the team on their feet.

"Morning," he voiced fully dressed for the day at hand.

"Morning, master," replied the butler who had cooked breakfast.

“Morning,” sighed Serene still half-asleep. Achilles and Intherna were outside taking a whiff of fresh air. A few minutes later, everyone had breakfast in silence. It was as if their last meal, the pressure of venturing in the wild had multiples of emotions whelm from within. The clock soon displayed 07:45. The trip would be made on foot as opposed to the carriage. In that endeavor, large backpacks with essential gears as well as weapons laid on the bear-rug.

“Is everything ready?” asked Rasu who came from the toilet.

“Yeah, we should be fine,” nodded Serene.

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“Alright people,” voiced Staxius seeing the team ready to march, “-make sure to only take the essentials. As told by Rasu yesterday, our goal is the first outpost. Should take us around two days to make it.”

“Yes, sir,” they replied in tandem.

\*Click,\* opened the door to a nervous-looking Elder.

“Good morning,” greeted Staxius courteously. A glance to the right showed Alice and her mother shyly gazing upon those who were to leave.

“Good morning, majesty,” replied the man with shaky arms, “-here,” he handed a necklace, “-it’s a charm of good fortune. Little Alice pestered her mother to make one for you.”

“Is that so,” kindly taking the commodity, “-I’m thankful for the sentiment,” to which he wore the item. Exchanging goodbye, they walked through the gates and into the mountain. Enormous with the slope unclimbable on barefoot, the path was the only option. Trees stretched on further the more they walked. Branches, leaves, and pebbles stood out against the icy-white path. At times, the ditches would shuffle and cause fear. And so, the walk up the path began. Two days till the first outpost, a long walk of which they knew not the length. ‘Wait for me, Eira, I’ll come soon.’

Meanwhile, on the border between Kreston and Dorchester, forces breached into a foreign land. Unguarded and unwatched, the forces would take around a day or two to cross Rotten Thicket.

Far, far away from the action; Castle Garsley was getting readied for Ayleth’s marriage. A ceremony that would happen in four days. The to and fro at the capital was more than exhausting, Julius ended up staying awake at night. Awake to witness the proper proceedings.

“Do we have more to travel?” asked Intherna when the clock struck noon.

“Not that much,” replied Rasu, “-we’re around a quarter of the way there,” he smiled pointing to a landmark. The latter being a graveyard to the fallen. White and dull, the scenery never changed.

Camping out at night then starting at day. The two days went by as if a blink. The air grew to be thin, a slight change but noticeable.

“The first outpost,” proclaimed Rasu as they walked up to a gentler land as opposed to the slope. “I have no idea why this is here,” they stopped. A giant wall with a few strongly built buildings displayed against the pureness of the mountain. “It was mainly occupied by blue-goblins,” said Rasu who continued the walk. “It wasn’t that tough to clear. Small fries if you ask me,” he chuckled whilst passing the broken

gates. One of which was tall and curved at the top. It hosted battlements from which archers could stare down the mountain and fire upon targets.

"Are you sure this is safe?" asked Intherna with a smirk.

"I was here when they were killed, so I would presume so." In a blink, as those words were spoken, an arrow narrowly grazed his face and ended on the ground.

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"Clear huh?" Achilles mocked the presumptuous statement and dashed forth. Monsters were camping, readying their weapons to strike the village. Two buildings on each side with the path down the middle. No escape from either right or left. Red glares were spotted all across the broken windows and rooftops. The battlements that now stood behind was clear. No orders no command needed to be issued. Staxius stood in wait as the monsters were slain. Achilles tore straight into their flank. Intherna nonchalantly burnt a building to the ground, her only expression was, my bad. Serene took to the skies, she summoned many o' ghouls to do her bidding.

'Look at them go,' thought Staxius with a blank expression.

"They're powerful," commented Adete. "Good luck to anyone who dares go against us."

"Can never be too prepared," he added as another building got devoured by flames

"Are they not strong?" inquired out loud, "-wait, where's Rasu?" The man vanished from existence and assassinated many archers who were out on the trees. Bodies fell to then crumble into dust. A mere ten-minutes went by, "-are you done?" asked the King nonchalantly. The fighters stood proudly. Two buildings on fire, numerous bodies turned to ash.

"Yeah," grinned Intherna, "-I got to have some exercise," she stretched smugly.

"I suppose we should get back on track?"

"No," interjected Rasu, "-we're going to camp here for two more days. Your body needs to adjust to the climate, it's only going to get steeper."

"Fine," on that, a temporary camp was set-up in a still working cabin.

Out in Arda, the politics grew harder. The guild grew into a system where the weak failed miserably. No job requests came forth, the adventurers who worked were either desperate or forced. The majority had left.

"Majesty," knocked the door to her chambers, "-the council has come." The door opened to a few servants hailing from Kreston. Nuns and sisters who were bound to serve. The premise was that of a gift from the church. 'Prison,' she thought and walked to the throne room. There, the four saints waited righteously with their holy book and white robe. \*Clap, clap, clap,\* they walked up the stairs to a full room. Previous guild-leaders sat on one side whilst the other was of traitors. Turncoats who took to the Saint's favors quickly. Great Mother Ayluin and Barbara the Dryad, were absent. On their feet at her sight, the four factions of Elves, Beastmen, Dwarves, and Demi-Human, stared intently. Together, backed by the populous, none could do them harm. The only race in favor of the Church was the

Lizardmen with a rather large area of land. A battle between the people and nobles – all of this was kept under wraps.

The rumor and needless killing of the Demi-Humans had Haru in anger. Her face, gentle at one time, was filled with the resolve of revenge. She wanted to lash out and kill the invaders. Those she represented were the only ones being persecuted. It was as if a replay of what happened in Hidros so very long ago, an asylum turned hell.

“Greetings respectful representatives,” spoke a lady with black hair. The Queen’s new right hand, “-today’s discussion will be about the fate of town Eden.” Nodded to start, the discussion went silently. The conversation was heavy sided to the saints. They spoke as if the monarch.

“We should cut ties with Queen Gallienne. Her action against our god has heralded multiples of backlash,” said a man with blond hair and glasses. They all looked similar, same complexion and same hair-cut, the resemblance was uncanny.

“Yes, what Saint Tim says, we need to stop collaborating with Hidros.”

“May I interject,” voiced Ryul, “-I do understand that Queen Gallienne has cause trouble for Kreston. The basis of why such discrimination needs to occur is shaky at best. I’d like her majesty to think long and hard.”

“Are you meaning to say that the Church is wrong?” asked Saint Tim, the first who spoke. “Are the elves going to rebel against the crown the same as the nightwalkers?” he laughed with a disgusting expression.

“Silence,” voiced Xula, “-I wish not for the nightwalkers to be brought up in this discussion,” warmly gazing Ryul as well as the others, “-I have to disagree with what Saint Tim proposed. Town Eden is essential in Arda’s economical growth. Our craftsmanship is a thing of wonder, we pride ourselves with our know-how.”

“Majesty,” spoke another Saint, “-surely you’re not going to go against the church, are you?” an underminding threat.

“Saint Mich, may I have to remind thee who’s the monarch of Arda. I will not allow decisions made on bias and emotions. Even so, if the church is as mighty as you say is, why not provide the funds? 500,000 gold coin should suffice, what you say, Saint Mich, are you willing to go that far?” she stared coldly without mercy. “Does anyone wish to add to the table?”

No response came. The Queen had read their intentions long before the council. A game of pretending in which the Saints felt as if they manipulated her.

“About the forces being sent to Dorchester,” voiced Mieshre, “-did her majesty allow such an action?”

“This is the first,” she faced Niroz, “-General, care to elaborate?”

“I think that’s enough for today,” said Saint Tim, “-it’s time to pray.”

“If you’d please,” they excused themselves from the table. This action allowed the General to make up and excuse and accompany the four others.



“Majesty, I think it’s time for us to leave as well.”

“As you wish,” they stood and left. Frustrated and powerless, the council fell into disarray.

Soon, four days passed. Staxius’s team made close to the second outpost, the fortress. The deadlock, the place which had halted the adventurers advance.

“Kearen, Magra,” hailed Rasu which echoed inside a cave. The wood crackled, the fire formed shadows on the ceiling. Tents, a pot on the fire, and torn clothes stained by blood.

“Rasu?” pointed a figure with a staff, “-is that you?” she asked with an exhausted voice.

“Yeah, it’s me,” footsteps followed.

“Who are those with you?” asked the other.

“Back-up,” he added coyly.

“Did her majesty sent back-up?” asked Magra, “-are we that weak that she sees fit for us to need support.”

“Oh please,” came a sharp voice. Their dulled eyes rekindled. “How pathetic can you guys be?” a singular figure approached.

“Lady Serene?” mumbled Magra who dropped her staff, “-is it YOU,” she leaped into her arms.

“Our leader has returned,” chuckled Kearen. The hopelessness of fighting without advancing took its toll. Moral ran low. A weak mind meant a weak body, and a weak body meant defeat. The ray of courage her presence made was a credit to how good a leader Serene was.

“Did you come to rejoin our team?” asked Magra ignoring the people behind.

“No,” she smiled after exchanging hugs, “-I’ve come as part of another team.”

“Pleasure to meet you,” sparkled the Platinum Tag, “-I’m Xenos.”

“Xenos...” they took a step back, “-sorry for our rudeness,” they knelt onto the rough-edged cave.

“Please, there’s no need to worry about formality. We’re all comrades,” he chose to not disclose the state of the capital. “Where’s Oenus, the dragonkin?”

“Fighting, majesty, he’s fighting,” added the dark-elf in shame.

“Our stamina ran low, he forced us to return to base saying that we held him back.”

“When was this?” Staxius asked sharply.

“A few hours ago; we were on way to rejoin him,” completed Kearen.

“Well then,” he took off the backpack, “-I’m sure the day has been tiring. Serene, please, have the supplies be shared. Magra and Kearen are worst for ware.”

“What about you?” she asked.

“I’m going to fight, is it not obvious?” he smirked, “-it’s my turn to have fun.”

## Chapter 349: Griffin

"They keep on coming..." sword drawn, posture firm, greyness of the sunless sky made seeing clearer. Not contemplating the brightness, the mind, and eyes could relax and focus. Massive stone-walls were erected along the slope. Its gates had spikes facing outwards. Untouched and unbreeched, said fortress seemed as if a goal too far to reach.

Beasts of varying sizes, normally bigger than the average man, stood with growls. A humanoid icy body that resembled golems. Guardians of the fortress. The heads weren't circular or oval. It was of a cup, one with the edges pointy as if teethes. The arms and legs were as big as tree trunks. Some bore weapons whilst others were lighter and faster. The battle had taken place in front of the walls; a makeshift magical barrier prevented any unwilling escape. A confined space where the outside could come in but never leave.

"Seriously," a heavy upward swing had four of them pushed back. No damage whatsoever. The ground suffered more than the beasts themselves. Cut marks parting the frost and exposing the rocks under. \*Clang,\* slower and more preservative, the sound of a battle had the heart race.

\*SMACK,\* a brick of ice came from the fortress. The projectile hit its mark in a flash. \*Spat,\* blood dirtied the floor, Oenus wiped his mouth with the torn sleeves.

"I ain't going down yet," he jumped into the fray yet again. An indomitable fighting spirit, the will to never give up.

"Master!" the words faded as he sprouted wings and flapped out the cave. The gust extinguished the fire and nearly broke the tents. A single flapped cause so much destruction. Magra and Kearen stood in awe.

"Are you going to join him?" asked Magra to Serene who watched silently.

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"No," replied Intherna, "-he said that he'll handle the situation. Let's just get the camp set-up."

"I agree with Intherna," said Serene with a click of the tongue. "We had our fun fighting up the mountain," she stared the mess around.

"Suppose we ought to get a meal ready for when he returns," grinned Achilles with a flushed face. The altitude and lack of air made her body yearn for the sun. Memories of a warm bed riddled her mind, exhaustion from the steep climbed didn't help either.

'Looking out for your team,' thought Intherna as she nonchalantly conjured a blazing inferno of crimson-pink hue. 'Who says you're coldhearted.'

"Excuse me," spoke a quieter voice.

"Yes?" returned Intherna with a curious tone.

"The hue of your flame, is it Therna, the everblooming tree of Rah?"

"Yes, I'm surprised you noticed, Magra."

"I knew it," she smiled, "-I only heard of it being used by the Sun-God's descendent. How can you have it?"

"I am his daughter after all?" she laughed.

"Are you sure?" she paused, "-please, I've no time for jests."

"Ahh, so thou think I speak nonsense," she faced away defiantly. "Words that come out of my mouth are always of truth. I think this conversation has outlasted it's welcome," she gestured for her to leave.

"I a-apologize," she left with a bitter taste. Intherna's smug and pride personality made it hard to hold a conversation. She always replied with superiority. Thus, was the reason why Serene disliked her guts. A mutual feeling that was overshadowed by respect. They saw the other in a differing light than most. On that, the camp was rebuilt in stride to accommodate the new guests.

"Adete," hovered, "-can you smell it," asked Staxius with a surprised grin.

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"I don't sense anyone cooking on this big rock."

"No," shaking his head, "-have you always been this airheaded?"

"Give me a break, I was sleeping a few moments ago. Someone had to go and wake me up, what do you want?"

"Nothing," he peered downwards, "-I'm just excited. There's this feeling in my chest, one of nostalgia. Tharis and Orenmir are vibrating; I've longed to fight. It has been so long – the monsters look tough too." Given no time to reply, he landed with a heavy shock. It sent back many o' beasts who had cornered the tired Oenus. 'Let's begin,' no magic nor incantation. Hands wrapped around Orenmir; he took a low stance. The eyes shut, everything turned into white misty outlines.

"Be free, spirits," unsheathed, a whirlwind of screaming souls escaped. They latched onto anything that moved and breathed. Left, right, center, the frost giants fell as if the lowest-tiered monsters. They seemed as weak as the goblins. It took less than five minutes and the barrier was cleared off the giants. Barely tired, he slid to a stop in front of the gates. "Oenus, go tell the team to get ready to move. We'll be staying in this fortress tonight." \*Snap,\* the Void conjured. Water fell onto the ground. Blue-goblins hid above the trees. They were responsible for throwing the projectiles at the fighters. Eyes shut, he peered over the beasts. The slow agonizing turn from the unknown figure had them yelp. \*Void Aspect,\* Tharis unholstered, "-have a taste of judgment," a beam shot out which vaporized the treetops. A flawless diagonal cut leaving nothing in its wake.

'They seem to be intelligent,' facing the door again, footsteps scurried above. Without notice, boiling oil was poured, \*Death Element: Magical Barrier,\* the eyes opened to the liquid hovering in the air.

"Surely," he smiled, "-surely you didn't think this would work, now did you, commander?" said as if knowing who was responsible, he sidestepped away.

"Adete, get ready."

“Alright,” half-awake, \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* hands pressed together, she waited fondly. \*Slash,\* four strokes cut into the fortress wall. It exposed a courtyard with forces ready to fight. Goblins in armor, a griffin perched on the back wall with a humanoid figure. The battlements were riddled with Stingers, a sub-species of spiders. Those monsters could fire endless barrages bullet-like projectiles. It was the same as a firing-squad, lined, and ready to fire per command.

‘Rasu spoke the truth about them having a commander. Even if it was in jest, they’re too organized to be called mindless. If this is the evolution of monsters, I’m not far off to think that the day where monsters form their nation will rise.’ Flames burnt deep, he walked with a thirst for killing bubbling inside. ‘Get ready to die.’

The monsters charged without mercy; frost giants leaped from the side of the mountain. An all-out assault with the Commander watching. ‘Know thine place,’ throwing a glare, \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* blood was drawn from Oenus who remain baffled. Beheaded to be converted into the Crimson Aura, a force of 50 goblins died in an instant. Stringers fired to no avail; the projectiles stopped shy of their targets. \*Snap,\* it returned with twice the force breaking the battlements. The giants in the air held spears that had his head in the line-of-sight. \*Sprak,\* moments away from the target, they got turned into mincemeat to then be burnt.

At the back, the Griffin sprawled its wing to retreat.

“No, thou art not fleeing,” each step resounded death, the more forces that came, the quicker they died. A mixture of Blood-Arts and the Death-Element. The latter being the defense and the former being the attack. The triangle on the right-hand lit dimly. It forcefully kept the symbols of power as well as the mana from going out of hand. \*Death Element: Hand of God,\* no gestures, only a firm stance, the beast stuck in place. Flapped as mighty as it could, all was for naught.

“So, you’re the commander,” stood with one foot on the beast’s head, the one responsible quivered. Legs and arms shook, the figure was humanoid. Long hair, beautiful eyelashes, and a blue complexion. Her eyes yearned for forgiveness. “Maybe one day,” said monotonously, “-the day where you and us can live together. Monsters and the natives.” Tharis pointed at her forehead, “-for now, it’s only a dream, nothing will come out of this carnage. People will die, and it’s my duty to relieve them from the shackles of life.”

“P-p-plea-se s-s-save t-the g-g-girl,” \*BANG,\* her brain matter scarred across the gravelly path. ‘The monster spoke,’ he thought, ‘-why can I sense their souls. Monsters have souls?’ the goblins weren’t unique, they felt cloned. Still, there was a soul, a staple of being alive. The commander, a humanoid with unique features, one resembling a sea-creature – most notably, the ears. They held a slight resemblance to fins.

\*I command thee whomst I’ve defeated, I curse thee, soul, to be bound to mine; Box of Soul – Soulfeld.\* The soul which came off its body was soon to be trapped in his growing army of souls. ‘I’ll summon her as a ghouel later.’

“Master?” footsteps came from the opening in the walls. Staxius stood in the middle with a legendary beast at his feet. Bodies of countless monsters laid about to then turn into dust. The first layer of the fortress was cleared for it hosted more the next gate after.

“Hey, hey, hey...” voiced Rasu loudly, “-WHAT HAPPENED HERE?” no sign of life, the fortress was conquered.

“You’re here,” stepped off the beast, it straightened itself with a growl.

“GET AWAY FROM IT!” shouted Magra who held a staff. It cawed at the sight of the weapon.

“GET AWAY,” she screamed readied to fire. The beast roared to take a stance beside Staxius.

“Cut it out,” he said whilst caressing the beast, “-Griffins are not monsters. They are noble beasts from the days of old. It won’t attack since I’ve killed its master.”

“What are you going to do then?” asked Achilles who walked up to the beast.

“Lore says that if a Griffin loses its master, either it will die or revert to being an infant. That is because they are loyal creatures who will never share their strength with another. Death is the most likely case.”

“Why though?” asked Intherna, “-such a beautiful creature to perish because of a weak master.”

“I suppose it’s their decision. Dying to not fall into the enemy’s hand,” warmly gazing the griffin, it cawed and rose it’s talons to then land again.

‘Nightwalker,’ spoke a voice as they locked eyes again.

‘You are?’

‘I have no name and no master. My purpose is to fulfill my duties. Now that she has been slain, I have no use for this life.’

‘Are you sure about that?’

‘What are you referring too?’

‘Your master is alive. I have her soul.’

‘Nonsense, no vampire is god.’

‘God is I for I’m the Death Reaper.’

‘I sense no lie. What is it that you offer?’

‘Serve my name. Be reborn anew and swore to me as did your master.’

‘We are prideful. Changing masters even if one has died isn’t loyal.’

‘As you wish, noble beast, I shall slay thee instead.’

‘Thank you.’

\*Slash,\* the eagle head fell to the floor leaving everyone astonished.

“WHY DID YOU KILL IT?” screamed Serene, “-HE WAS BEAUTIFUL!”

“Watch closely,” opposed to blood, a sparkle of light had the beast shrunk. It changed from massive to as tiny as a puppy. “I killed the griffin to give it a chance at rebirth.” Body of a lion, front feet talons,

head and wing of an eagle, the cub like Griffin was soon to run and perch itself on Staxius's shoulder. It meowed instead of roaring.

"A legendary beast you say?" laughed Achilles.

"Should have expected that much," facepalmed Serene.

"I've had enough with your spontaneous personality," sighed Intherna, "-don't tell me you're going to take care of it," paused, "-look, the mighty king has a pet," a remark which had the others in laughter.

"That somewhat hurt," grinned Staxius who petted the baby-griffin. "I'm not going to become its master. That role has been assigned to the commander. The sea-like monster who spoke."

"..." Silence, a monster who spoke. The words he spoke held more implication than was first thought.

"A monster who spoke," smirked Intherna, "-please tell me you have its soul?"

"Is that something to even ask. I'm still recruiting for the army, don't forget," facing the Griffin, "-this little guy here has its soul bounded to hers. He's the conduit for her into the mortal realm. Which means," \*Snap,\* it vanished into smoke. "I can conjure him whenever I want."

Chapter 350: Marriage

"Who the hell are these people?"

"I have no idea."

"Can someone be that powerful?"

Xula's Elite guard team, now adventurers under the Guild Master, stood baffled. The supposed fortress, the second checkpoint on their climb. One that couldn't be breached for the months they fought, was completed by a single man in less than an hour. Nonchalant to the amazing feat that was done, the crew simply gathered and spoke. In said conversation, the topic at hand was what sort of food to eat later. Staxius remained impervious, a boulder in a sandstorm not swaying nor faltering. The few minutes in which he fought, Oenus had fear struck in his heart. Fighters and skilled individuals in the ways of warcraft were all gifted with a skilled named Sense Aura. Naturally, some were weak and others strong. An example of strong was Axius; he could identify an aura from the other side of the world.

"Hey," called Serene with a smile from the middle of the courtyard.

"L-let's go," shuffled Magra with a nervous gaze.

"Majesty," gathered in one place, "-are you ok?" asked Kearen intrigued by what he stared so intently.

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"Yes," he replied with the stare locked onto a peculiar area. The crimson halo spun around his head, most of the blood lost on the battlefield soon flowed towards him. Adete sat and swayed left to right. Fighting meant food.

"Did something happen?" he asked emptyly.

"No, I suppose."

'The fight is over,' he paused and thought, '-could I make it up if I sprouted wings?' the eyes were fixated on the peak.

"Don't even think of rushing there," added Achilles, "-master, I know what you're thinking."

"You got me there," breathing a sigh, the magic dispelled. Adete ate the halo. "Let's set up camp," he offered. A singular building stood unharmed to the right. The sun was soon to set – yet it felt as if nothing changed. So far, a week had gone by to arrive at the second checkpoint. Another two days to rest before setting off onto the trip.

\*Date Saturday 28th December. We broke through the fortress at last. To my surprise, the king came with back-up. He made clear of the place where we were stuck look easy. He didn't break a sweat. The strength of that man is godly. Each time, the blank face, the nonchalant attitude, they remind me of an empty canvas. One that he changes depending on the occasion.\* The fireplace burnt a warm light. Sleeping bags were set one after the other. A four-hour shift to guard.

"Hey," a somber figure stood with deep red eyes, "-go sleep, I'll take over," time showed 2:00.

"Is it over already?" voiced Oenus with an uncomplete entry.

"Yeah," he yawned to peer out of the frosty window. "Oenus."

"Yes?"

"Can we speak for a moment?" turned Staxius with a serious tone.

"S-sure, what is it you need?" he walked over to the window.

"About you," he said ominously.

"Y-yeah?" Oenus's heart pulsed.

"I was told that you're a dragonkin. Could you explain the origins more? I've come across someone like you before."

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"Oh," the stance relaxed, "-let's sit, it might take a few minutes."

"Sure," they walked to a corner far from the others.

"Dragonkins," he gathered his thought into words, "-from what I know, we're descendants of the Ancient Dragons. I'm one of the few who are still surviving. The Ancient Dragons were once worshipped and called deities. They held the world around their tail; the supreme beings that ruled. Then, the war between God and Demons occurred, in that exchange, the Dragons killed mercilessly in thirst for power. On the brink of extinction, the few legendary dragons sought refuge to one god. The latter is still unknown to this day. As part of a pact to not cause unrest, the dragons were willingly imprisoned. The flesh that is, their souls traveled from generation to generation in search of suitable hosts. Dragonkins are offspring of the dragons inside temporary vessels. Depending on who had what, the blood is inherited by the blood-line. Some are granted enormous power while others are inconsequential. In my case, I was given the blood of Temtus, the Dragon of water and wind, guardian of the sea. He's a

legendary dragon, though the blood I inherited is less than adequate. I can barely conjure a wind spell but it did give me a very strong constitution.

"I see, what of the vessel thing, care to elaborate? What's the difference between Dragonkin and vessel."

"Dragonkin are direct and indirect offspring. Anyone with the blood of a dragon is considered a Dragonkin. As for the Vessels, they are the people who inherit the Dragon's full strength. If strong enough, some can become gods among men, a power that could shatter the world."

"Why, what's their purpose?"

"Majesty, I wish I could give you more information," the head lowered, "-why is it you're interested?"

"Because of this," he pulled down the turtleneck shirt.

"Wait..." barely lit from the fire, "-Undrar..." the jaw dropped. "You bear the blessing of Undrar, who are you?"

"Me," pulling up the shirt, "-no one that important. Thanks for the information, go sleep. I'll take over guard duty."

'The mark of Undrar...' stood as if a hallow man, '-how is that possible?'

'I was wrong to think that Dragonkin could help. Eira, the Lady of Ice has decided to make you her host. If this is an uprising of dragons; there may be more hosts who've joined on Mont Blanc. What Oenus said is a half-truth, I heard from Undrar that the other dragon only went into hiding to get revenge. The part about being imprisoned is a lie, tis was a God who defeated and locked them.'

Sun soon rose, the days continued without much trouble.

Wednesday 1st of January. The rise of a new year as well as the wedding day. Town Garsley, especially the castle was well-decorated. The yard leading inside was shielded by tents, one of which was pristine and used for said occasion. The tavern was replaced for a hall. Right side for the bride's family and left for the groom. Guests came from all over. Among the notable was Prince Consort Piers, and a few nobles from the Groom's side.

"Today's the day," smiled Julius beside Autumn. Ayleth stood beautifully in her wedding dress surrounded by her sisters and family inside the throne room.

"You're looking amazing," complimented Adelana with tears flowing uncontrollably.

"Who knew the shy girl would be the first to get married," joked Undrar dressed beautifully. Her blond hair sparkled; none would have guessed she was in her thirties.

"Here I thought I would get married first," added Ancret with her usual glamor, "-what about it," winked at Julius, "-let's be next," said in flirt, the Duke choked.

"Come on now," the door opened with Millicent and Fenrir, "-no need to embarrass the boy," joked Millicent.



"I mean, you have a point," interjected Annet, "-still, he needs to decide soon else the Dukedom of Garsley isn't going to have an heir," she winked obstinately.

"Fine," he gave and turned to Alyson, "-do you have something to add?"

"You look great sister?" a thumbs up followed by silence. Classic Alyson, the strong and silent type. They had changed so much that none would have guessed them twins.

"Why are you silent?" spoke Ayleth to Fenrir.

"Nothing much," she replied with her ears sulked, "-I wish Eira and Master could have been here."

"Yeah, I wish so too," added the bride with a woeful tone, "-master's the only reason I can think of getting married today. He's done so much – I mean, if you exclude the part where he disappeared for sixteen years or so. Still, if it wasn't for that sacrifice, Dorchester would have been ruined. I mean, who would have guessed him being friends with Gallienne. The Cold-Hearted queen changed for the better. Dorchester was given ample support to start."

"Let's not speak about that man," gritted Adelana, "-I don't care about what he has done. What I want is for you to be happy, ignore him for all I care."

"Let's not start a fight," interjected Undrar, "-he's probably busy fighting someone right as we speak."

"Yeah," smiled Ayleth, '-I know that big-sister knows this deep down. Master Staxius, we're grateful for what you've done. Keeping to the shadows and helping those in need. If someone knows how it feels to be weak, it's sure you. Paying 90,000 gold for my surgery – just because you sent a pawn to fight. I was weak and forced guilt upon thee. It made Adelana mad, her hatred from long before kept on stacking. I'm sorry, I wish you were here to witness the marriage.'

"What are you daydreaming for," called Millicent, "-let's go, miss bride." Before realizing, she stood before a gate, one that opened to a crowd of people standing. Her sisters and friends on one side with her lover waiting near the altar. An idyllic moment, two lovers meeting to be one. Dorchestrian tradition states that the vows of marriage have to be taken with a sword. A knight must stand by the bride's side. The significance of this means that if ever harm was done to the lady, the knight held the right to kill the Groom. The higher the rank, the better. It was planned that Staxius would be the knight.

Julius instead stood in place. Rings exchanged and vows taken to the knight, Ayleth and her groom, Stanley of Venus's Merchant family, kissed to conclude the ceremony. A single tear of happiness escaped her face.

"She's so happy," added Fenrir.

"Yes, I know," smiled Adelana, "-if it wasn't for Stanley, I doubt she'd be here today."

"Mental support," interjected Millicent, "-without it, one can fall in ruin." Applause and cheers led out the castle. A car waited to take the couple to their new life.

\*BANG,\* a loud explosion had the crowd shudder.

"What is it?" cried the people panicked.

Faint streams of smoke came from the town paired with rumbling. The explosion came closer and without notice, the gate shot open.

"So, this a heathen's marriage," voiced a lady with short white and golden robe. It covered up to her thighs, "-how troublesome." A cacophony of destruction came behind. \*SPLAT,\* a charred body slammed against the castle.

"Who are you?" asked Julius with everyone readied to fight.

"Me," she laughed obnoxiously and entered the castle. The charred corpse flopped down behind. "-Heathen aren't worthy of knowing mine name. Prostrate thyself," she said as if disgusted by their sight. "Come to think of it, thou better off dead," \*snap,\* a white beam conjured out her right hand.

\*Purgatory Flame: Barrier,\* hands pressed, Julius deflected the beam to be sent flying across.

"BROTHER!" he hit the wall to instantly be knocked out.

"Vermin," rolling her eyes, "-die," multiple of beams conjured. Most of them were stopped by Undrar.

"Don't you dare," rushed Adelana with only her fists, "-I WON'T LET YOU RUIN MY SISTER'S MARRIAGE."

"ADELANA," screamed Undrar to no avail.

"Please don't get in my way, peasant," sidestepped, \*SLASH,\* a diagonal motion had her fall onto the floor.

\*GASP,\* '-m-my t-throat,' - unable to speak, blood drained, the vision grew blurry, "-A-Adelana," mumbled, darkness whelmed the mind.

"Weak," sighed the intruder.

"HERE," screamed Millicent, "-TAKE YOUR WEAPONS AND FIGHT."

"Oh, scary," she laughed.

"Don't underestimate us," they dashed forth to fight. Autumn conjured spells after spells. Fenrir kept close, the others fought from a range and took times challenging the intruder. Undrar kept busy protecting and evacuating the guests.

"NOW, LET'S GO," coordinated, the fight seemed one-sided.

"Don't you get cocky," her face changed from innocent to vile, "-THEY TOLD ME NOT TO KILL, BUT I DON'T CARE," wings sprouted to which she spun. The beam cleanly cut through the walls. \*BAM,\* bodies flew.

'W-what's happening?' Julius's eyes opened to hell. He caught the final moments of those who fought. Adelana, Alyson, Ancret, Annet, Ayleth, Fenrir, and Autumn were slaughtered without mercy.