

Death Magic 371

Chapter 371: The Mystery of Marrowy Village [3]

"Our pleasure," a flash of lightning illuminated the darkened waterfall. The Demon who had come with an army used its staff to conjure demi-god level spells. Each hit with the power to destroy a town. As to prevent the area from being a wreck, Staxius took to the back-lines and controlled the mana around the fiend. The limit was carefully instated and manipulated thus lowering the damage.

Daemonum Gladio with a sword in hand leaped from one river-bank to the other all the while slicing heads. The Demon growled and spouted fire out its muzzle. The stare capable of freezing those unfamiliar with the world of magic. The noncombatants fled into the fishing cabin with a broken window from earlier.

"Hurry it up," said Staxius with both hands stretched forward; a spherical barrier enveloped the combat area.

"Come on," turned Intherna with a disappointed tone, "-let me have some fun," she pouted as fire-pulsed from the forehead down.

"I'm afraid I'll be the one to kill it," returned Gophy with a discrete show of power. Her strength was well beyond her control, a line she said many months ago. The power of destruction and chaos in hand, a heavy o' burden to bear.

Amidst the darkened night-spy flared a fire-spell shaped like a phoenix, it stretched its wings to then dive straight at the demon. *Crash,* on impact as if arms, the spell wrapped itself around the back. Symbols soon inscribed themselves onto the body – a few seconds later, a never-ending inferno of pink-flames burst.

GRRARRR, a deafened echo from intense pain had the ground shaken. The fiend dropped its staff and summoned forth a gigantic sword, one as tall as houses. The hand-raised clumsily for the ever-burning fire slowed movement. Still, despite the trouble, it pressed forth with a rivaling intensity.

ROARR, pointing the tip of the sword at Staxius, many o' golems materialized from nothingness. Containing the fight grew hard.

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'What are they doing,' he thought with gritted teeth, '-guess there's no helping it.'

Death Element: Unleash Aura, a wave of energy crashed against those who fought. The instant feeling of nausea, Intherna cast a gaze of worry, what she saw was death. The golems and even the Demon itself all but stopped. Intherna and Gophy weren't fighting, to them, the beasts were naught but kids. If they were to take it seriously, none could say what would happen.

The triangle on the right hand glowed, and glowed did it with the veins around expanding. A dark-mist throbbled from out the symbol. The white-crimson hair levitated mildly.

"Intherna, Gophy," he called uninterested by the Demon who soon took to eating the golem's and gaining power. It managed to break the Phoenix-spell.

"Yes Master?" they returned with respect, "-how may we serve?" a sudden change of attitude.

“How deem thee the fiend?”

“We deem it worthy, master,” no smart remarks, nothing, utter silence and order as they spoke in tandem.

“Then,” the head lifted with a smile, “-go all out and summon thy godly power, I shall take responsibility and hold thy power!” In normal circumstances, one would have asked further confirmation, however, the way the words rolled off the tongue, the seriousness was palpable.

‘I haven’t used my power for a long time, containing Gophy, Intherna, and the demon should be more than adequate exercise.’ Hands pressed together,

Deep slumber, deep rest, awaken for the chance at retribution. Gate of which stands before mine way, open for thy master has come: Nevermore – Hell’s Gate. The faint sound of a rusty-gate opening was heard.

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Span across the ages, fear is what held peace, fear is what caused War, fear is the root of evil. I, the harbinger of the ultimate fear, have come to spread and reclaim what is mine of right: Nevermore – Terror Gate. The barrier holding everything together reinforced each time the power was increased.

Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power: Nevermore – Annihilation Gate. Third level up the limiter, the tremendous influx had him coil from the feedback. Nonetheless, the first boon of divinity, the body of a god, held strong.

Gateway to the afterlife, gateway to life, gateway of those who live, open, for I order so: Nevermore – Eleo Gate, No physical change, the symbols of power on the cheeks were yet to react.

“Master is serious about us going all out,” said Intherna whilst rubbing hands excitedly.

“The God of Death is readied to show us his power. I do wonder if going all out on that weakling is going to do us justice?” wondered a skeptical mind.

“You think so?” asked Interna facing the Demon as it devoured all around.

‘The final gate,’ he thought and breathed, *Pinnacle of power and strength, the last stage of a men’s life, the stage where all is turned to dust and forgotten. Elapsed over the ages, come forth o’ power of mine who has remained bound, unleash thee at thine full potential: Nevermore – Death Gate.* The body dropped to reawaken, he died for a mere second, the barrier carved the ground and turn what came in contact to dust.

I, Staxius Haggard, call upon thy strength. Stop all who dare oppose mine own will, Death Element: Magical Barrier, Death Reaper Variant, Hell’s Gate, hemisphere to rectangular with pillars of skulls, he evolved the spell. The triangle on the hand soon stretched outwards as claws to climb up the arm, the ancient writings activated, the eyes stood strong with one side white and the other deep-crimson.

Each passing second and trees would sway. The leaves went back and forth, the weather seemed to change; a low-growl came from up above. Before them stood a massive barrier dowsed in a dense aura of terror.

"Guess it's our turn," smiled Gophy with a twirl, *Unshackle mine strength limiter placed by he who controls my being, I, Gophy, Goddess of Chaos, order thy obedience,* her symbol of power lit vividly on her thigh. Her appearance changed to one of a girl wearing a short black dress, laced leggings, and knee-high boots. Skulls were most prominent, *snap,* part of the demon's right arm exploded. It could but growl defensively, a desperate attempt to conjure more golems.

Heed mine call, o' power kept away from mine reach, I, Intherna, Daughter of Rah, Goddess of Fire, demand so, her wings grew stronger, the face shifted to have the features of the Phoenix and her human form, '-time to have fun.' An onslaught of devastation had the barrier crack on the first impact. The Demon was more reliant than given credit for, it hid its strength. Opposed to Mid-tier, it was high-tier, the same as a god. The Imperial family was right to fear such a monstrosity. Each spell Gophy conjured, the air became a vacuum. Each strike Intherna made had the river below turn to steam, her heat caused it to boil.

'They're powerful,' gritted Staxius, '-containing the power of two high-tier goddesses and a demon isn't easy,' the fingertips blasted open from their fight.

"Call upon me," flashed a whisper, "-I shall endeavor to help thy, o' my dearest child, call on mine name."

O' goddess forgotten by the ages, o' goddess who spread victory and peace over the souls of true warriors. I, humble vessel for thy Symbol, plea to have a sliver of thy strength, Nike's wings latched on the forehead giving a boost in power, the dark-barrier soon had a golden hue. Yet, with them going all-out, the barrier kept on having cracks.

"You do realize if this breaks, there's the possibility of the continent going extinct with us," teleported a fatigued Courtney, "-what are you going to do, my other-self. You overestimated Nevermore and underestimated the goddess who is in thy entourage. What will you do now I wonder. Asking them to stop will be an insult," she faced the fight, "-look at them, the Demon is holding its own against the goddesses. I shudder to think what would happen if he isn't killed and the barrier breaks."

"Can't you be a little more supportive?"

"You do have strength to be able to make such idle jokes. Come on, brother, if thou art not going to surpass the obstacle than I wish not to think of what will happen next."

"Please," the eyes shut, a moment of complete silence, a droplet of water falling onto a peaceful lake, the ripples turned to waves.

"What is it you seek?" said a mysterious voice stood before two sets of stairs, "-is it the knowledge or lust, what does thee choose?" The final boon of divinity, Mortus deemed he worthy after five long years.

"Actions speak louder than words," the conscience stood before the stairway to the underground. A single step taken had the mind ache viciously. He jumped into the real world with a feeling of drunkenness, the barrier around reinforced to the point of unbreaking. Every fiber of the body screamed – not in a bad way, or rather, it felt addictive. A shackle removed, the power flowing gave ecstasy, the copious amount that had the face relaxed into a genuine smile. 'What pleasure,' he thought not realizing what happened outside. Absolute terror stapled across the faces present. Over yonder using a

combination move, the Goddesses killed the high-tiered demon and its lackeys. They landed with wings retracting, “-master!” the sudden sight had them shudder, “-are you ok?” asked Intherna worriedly.

“I’m fine,” he replied with half of the face turned skeleton, the empty eye socket held a vivid white-flame.

“Don’t scare them,” elbowed Courtney.

“Whatever,” he sighed not knowing what happened, “-the half-skeletal face regenerated with Mortus returned to where it was. *Shackle mine strength: Nevermore – Full Restraint.*

“How was it?” he asked

“It was fun,” laughed Intherna, “-going all-out is another kind of trance.”

“I agree,” nodded Gophy returned to normal, “-I’m tired now,” she yawned.

“Guess that’s true,” and back they went from whence they came, his shadow.

Moonlight settled onto the untouched battlefield. The waterfall flowed, the river danced, the trees swayed, no trace of anything.

“Mortus, huh,”

“Yes, Mortus, ace up my sleeve. I wanted to use it for so long but was never able too, well, until today that is.”

“Are you serious,” she facepalmed, “-gambling on whether the Death-element would detect the threat and allow passage – how reckless.”

“Let’s not think of the what-ifs.” The duo walked to the cabin where hid the Emperor and his uncle.

“Are you ok?” he asked entering with the wooden-floor creaking.

“GET AWAY,” screamed Arle in fear, she had wrapped herself around Solomon.

“Seriously,” he paused to stare Sultria, “-come on,” giving a hand, “-stand-up, are we not going to leave early tomorrow?”

“What of the whole assassination attempt,” he interjected a good point, “-what’s the guarantee that Uncle Solomon isn’t going to harm my life.”

“Well,” said in a deep voice, “-I doubt him coming after you or anyone related to me. What was shown today was but a trailer – Solomon, consider this mercy as I’m to honor the wishes of the late-emperor. Don’t mistake this for weakness for I’ll not bat an eye to kill thy heritage.”

“Father-in-law,” he called a few meters away.

“What is it?”

“Who are you exactly?”

“No one particular, just the king of Arda,” the walk felt rejuvenating. The heavy burden of not knowing how Sultria V died was lifted. The young Emperor could see the world for what it was. In a moment of

peril, an unexpected ally came to rescue, his father-in-law. The prior cold treatment was but a façade as the king cared for what the princess chose. Back to the cottage, the same people, the same feeling, and the same atmosphere. Nothing changed, nothing, none knew what happened or will ever know what happened. The secret of Marrowy, a secret that ended on the defeat of the Demon. A trigger for more to come, mysteries, fights, and conquest. The arrival in Alphaia marked a new quest, one that he would soon figure out per rumors and the chatter of the palace.

Chapter 372: Fearsome

"Someone is up bright and early," came a voice followed by cigar smoke.

"I couldn't sleep," replied the other, "-the train is due to come soon."

"Are the events from last night bothering you that much?"

"Father, I'm grateful you're here. I'd have never suspected such a plot against me. Uncle Solomon did apologize gravely after you left. I do think it a bit heartbreaking that you choose to abandon thy son."

"I need not apologize," said Staxius extinguishing the cigar. "The sun is to rise soon. What happened to Arle, what is to happen to her?"

"No idea," said he with the darkness of the night pierced by an array of warm colors. They stood out back of the cottage, a small area for plants and a nice table.

"Marrowy," mumbled Staxius, "-a pleasant village, the submerged feeling is gone. The air breathes easier."

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"I second the thought."

"Good morning," said Courtney with a yawn, her step was matched by Arle.

"Good morning sister," replied the King.

"Good morning my lady," added Sultria.

"What is Arle doing here?" asked the king with a frown.

"I-I came t-to apologize," said she with a big bow

"An apology, how quaint," refuted the King unimpressed, "-how the world would be a better place if words did justice. What if I shot you thee this instant and asked for an apology for those who cared about you. What then, do you think I'd be forgiven and allowed to live? What of revenge, what of humanity's disgusting ideals, what of them, tell me," the tone rose to a shout, "-how dare you, insolent little spy, how dare you to bring thy head upon the Emperor. Is shame not a word in thy mind, begone this instant," he pointed at the door, her faint sobbing was paired with teardrops. No words could be said, needles prickled her throat, shortness of breath, blurred vision from tears, the mind all but thought of running away.

"Do you have to be so harsh?" intervened Sultria, "-I understand her mistake, however, I do think humans have the right to make mistakes. Is that not how we evolve?"

“Whatever thee says,” his voice trailed as the sun blinded the garden.

“I do agree with brother on this one,” interjected Courtney, “-mistakes must be atoned, and thy disappearing from his emperor’s entourage is the best fit.”

“Fret not,” said Staxius as she headed for the door, “-actions have more meaning than words. Come back better and make sure to not be fooled any longer. Arle, one of many heroes of Alpha, go and find thy way.” Curiously enough, those last words came out naturally. He didn’t feel bad nor guilty, it was something more. To send someone away without explanation was a thing one must avoid, for if a mother never told her child what not to do, the world would divulge in anarchy. A society of which none wanted to be a part.

Soon without briefcase nor luggage, Staxius, Sultria, and Courtney waited at the station. Many o’ gentlemen dressed in formal suits waited for transport. Soon came the rumbling, the train came with minimal sound. The latter was the improved version, the one that made waves across the world upon its announcement by Phantom and the collaborating parties.

“The newer model,” commented Staxius as the white-train with red-stripes approached.

“Yeah, we spare no expense when it comes to transport,” returned Sultria. The doors opened with the ringing of a bell, some exited whilst more entered.

“Does it only come once a day?” asked Courtney taking in the sight of a technological marvel.

“7:00 and 19:00 per day,” answered a random bystander. Giving a nod of gratitude, the trio entered without many realizing who Sultria was. A beanie, scarf, and sunglasses sufficed; the king used an additional concealment spell to have the disguise flawless. Sat in first-class as payment was done via card – the slow start felt peaceful. A gentle acceleration without trouble nor mishap. The seats were as if pillows, the large window, and the assistant who walked about was reminiscent of air hostesses. Thus, was first class in Alpha. The price for said journey was 10 gold per person. As to not trouble the mind, currency conversion was done upon payment. The journey went along pleasantly, and pleasantly would it soon end. From forest to a sudden clearing where rivers and civilization were seen, the capital was yet a few hours away.

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“The meal sure was bland,” said Courtney with a yawn.

“I mean, my expectations were low to start with.”

“There’s no need to act snobbish,” interjected Adete, “-who cares as long as we arrive.”

There were many stops on the way down from the mountain. At-last, around five to six hours later, the train soon went along a slope passed over many roads. The scenery changed instant from rural to technically advanced. Counting among the few eye-catching landmarks was a large observatory inside which hosted a giant telescope. Next to it, after a few blocks of library and research-related compounds came other buildings. Offices to be precise, and next to it rested the Central-Station. A building with many o’ openings for tracks.

"Here we are," said Staxius leading the group, a step later, they arrived at the Capital. Escalators and lifts led onto the higher floors. Outfits ranged from business to casual and even school-uniforms. Amidst them stood a certain peculiarity; many hosted different traits as their DNA evolved. Four hands, five hands, many legs, and much more, the former were but exaggerated examples. Yet, the disparities were there. It depended on the person and their power. The majority of people had super-human abilities; a fact well-known. Going downstairs, Staxius's visage felt new and refreshing. The pale-nature, vivid eyes, and sharp features caught the eye of many. Courtney so as well, she didn't hold back when one would stare, almost immediately her response would be of winking or blowing a kiss.

"So, the station is actually on the third floor of that building?" voiced the sister amazed by the architecture. The giant shadow cast onto the ground was proof enough of its size. One could have felt far smaller than an ant compared to how massive it was. The roads weren't something to laugh either. Obsessively dark, a proof of well-cared asphalt. Cars were popular, and the luxurious models were sought after by the envied eyes of teenagers. Billboards made their presence known atop rooftops. Not only were the billboards attractive large screens playing music, advertisement, and others. One particular held the face of someone familiar, "-look," said Sultria, "-is that not Aceline, the pride of Hidros?"

"She's advertising make-up from what I figure."

"Yes, that much shows on the screen, dear sister."

"Have you something lodged inside thy posterior, brother?" she gritted.

"No, why would you ask something so outrageous?"

"Are you starting a fight," she took a strong step for the sarcastic remarks had tried her patience.

"There's no need to be so belligerent," he soon patted her shoulder, "-Emperor Sultria, we're in the capital. If memory serves me well, we're rather far out from thy estate."

"Yes, though the office is here, I suppose we need to head to the estate, What do you suppose, there's the possibility of asking for a butler to bring transport."

"No, that will no be necessary," an advertisement caught the eye. Pildi, an Alphianian brand specializing in cars and vehicles. They were known for making sport-cars, the kind which left those who watch in utter speechlessness. The immense price-tag did the same as well. Only a few were able to afford such item comfort.

"Father," nudged Sultria staring at him who was lost.

"Sorry," he returned with a cough, "-let's take a walk."

"Should we not head to the Emperor's estate?"

"No, sister, let's walk and get a feel for the place. Watch closely, the people are quite accommodating. There's a smile on almost all their faces," the words matched the surrounding. It was as described; many o' students returned for the trains led all round the capital-province.

Left to right, they reached a place filled with activity. The shops lit brightly, few cars were parked, cars of which were from renowned brands. As many called it, the bourgeois area for the shops was well over the salary of a normal worker.

CRASH, came a sudden impact on the streets below.

"Worry not citizens," said a man in a red suit adorned with stars, "-I've captured the villain," said he with a smile. He who laid on the floor was reduced to a muddy pile of nothingness. The spectators soon took to their phones and snapped pictures.

"What happened?" wondered the sister.

"A normal day occurrence," said Sultria unimpressed, "-a villain defeated by the AHA."

"The Allied Heroes I presume?"

"You ain't got the best of me yet, Starlight," said the sludge who jumped for the unsuspecting Sultria.

SMACK, "-I thought I didn't make it," said the hero with a perplexed tone.

"Do thy job correctly," said Staxius wiping the liquid after a punch. "Why are you staring so?"

"Forgive my rude behavior," nodded the hero, "-I've never seen such strength displayed before. Do forgive my asking again, but are you a hero?"

"No," the Platinum-adventuring tag was shown, "-I'm Xenos, an adventurer from Hidros."

"Ohhhh, it makes sense," he smiled, "-adventurers are the same as heroes. Our duty lies in saving the weak and helping whenever we're called for, it's a pleasure meeting you."

"Pleasure was all mine," after which the peculiar man dashed off.

"Going by Xenos, quite a bold move."

"Not that it's going to affect anything. Let's go."

Astonished by the way the shops were presented, Sultria could but stop and stare at many o' commodities. "Let's go in if thou wish for something," said the King.

"No, I mustn't partake in such reckless spending."

"I mean, the Empire is getting a cut out of each sale."

"That isn't the point. Whatever the case, why are we heading further inside?" The answer came soon enough. From clothing, jewelry, to a crossing leading into a differing complex – the lanes besides were empty. Many cars on the main-road purposefully stopped to stare at this particular area. The reason, tis was the complex in which car manufacturers often exposed and sold their prized possession. A showroom for various brands from affordable and durable to expensive and showy.

"Don't tell me..." paused Courtney, "-are you serious?" she laughed as they stood under the sign of the most expensive brand.

"Yeah, I'm serious," he soon dialed a number.

"Hello, yes, Cake, it's me."

"Hello Boss, did you arrive safely?"

"Yes, thanks for the concern, I called regarding a favor."

"If it's money, your personal bank account should have plenty."

"And how much is plenty?"

"Does 10 Million Exa sound good?"

"No, have another 5 million transferred tomorrow."

"5 million," she paused, "-sure."

"Father, did you ask for five million Exa to be transferred?"

"No, I asked for 5 million gold coins," he said nonchalantly, "-should be around 50 million Exa," he patted the son's back and entered the building.

"There's no need to be flustered. Phantom is rather unknown, but we are powerful in arms as well as finance. Emperor Sultria VI, I do hope you realize with what kind of man you're dealing with. King Staxius has the habit of going overboard in both business and family. Be on thy guard, we're allies though what is to say it will be as is tomorrow and the day after."

"Art thou going to dilly-dally?"

"Coming, brother, there's no need to rush."

'What did she mean by that,' paused Sultria as the duo walked forth. 'Why should I be on my guard. I trust him explicitly; whatever the case might be tomorrow, I'll never cross him. What she said is true, there's no saying to where the limit lies. The fight yesterday was proof enough, the two body-guards, the godly power, and the slaying of a villain with a mere graze of the fist. The King of Arda is fearsome.'

Chapter 373: EDO-4 SST

"Hello, how may I be of service?" came an immediate greeting from an employee. A smartly dressed man with muscles and short hair, the addition of square glasses had a differing impact.

"I've come to purchase a car," said the king with a neutral tone. "Could you show us around?"

"With pleasure," held onto a tablet, the employee walked across the expansive hall. Not noticeable from the outside, the inside was on a much larger scale. It had to be so for outlines of cars hidden behind drapes rested on circular platforms. Rare was it for people to come and speak so frankly. The norm was of people arriving, stared, and admired the beasts, then left with a smile. Not that it hurt anyone, the company provided more than adequate pay.

"May I ask to what model you're looking for?" inquired the man as they walked past many o' sports cars. Sultria followed close to Courtney, a feeling of astoundment, despite being used to the riches of the world, was felt heavily. It mostly had to do with he who led the group, the king.

"What's the most expensive model you have. I need one that can carry four people without trouble," he glanced back and returned as if confirming what was said.

"Most expensive model," oddly smiled the employee. Confused and left speechless, never was such a sentence uttered in Pildi's showroom.

"Hey, how may I be of assistance," interjected another who had witnessed the scene.

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"Do I have to repeat myself?" a frown at the well-built man forced him to smile.

"No, I apologize for being rather stunned for words. Not that excuses are going to resolve the issue but you must understand that there's never been anyone who'd ask for the most expensive item from the get-go."

"It's no trouble," he replied reassuringly, "-so, care to explain what we've in front of us?" They had walked a few steps yet it felt so far away, the door was as if the portal to another dimension. Sultria and Courtney all but stood and watched, the way the king dealt with the people piqued the interest nicely.

"We're looking at the EDO-4 of SST-series. SST standing for Sport-standard-tuning. Vehicles that are barely legal to drive around. The SST is Pildi's most prestigious series to date. They are manufactured per order and made once or twice each year."

"What of this unit then?"

"We hosted an inauguration party as well as show-festival for car enthusiasts last week. This model was made especially for said event. The culmination of Pildi's technological advancement inside a single car."

"My question is whether thou art selling such a beast?"

"Selling..." he paused, "-sire, forgive my asking, did you really come to purchase the most expensive car we have?"

"Listen," the stare changed to a glare, "-I've had it with the pointless charade. I understand that thou art doing thy job, nonetheless, I'd kindly ask thee to stop wasting my companions and I's time. I only came for thy prestigious brand, if that isn't sufficient, I'm not opposed to looking elsewhere."

"Forgive the man's mistake," in came another, a man with a lavish suit and good mannerism. "I apologize for thee having been showed such disrespect."

"Mr. Holms, what a pleasant surprise."

"Majesty King of Arda, I knew you'd have come for sure thus my presence."

"Mr. Holms, you needn't have done such a thing," gestured as they spoke, the duo began a series of unconventional conversations.

"Any idea to whom it is?" asked the Emperor.

"It's Holms; a manager for Pildi. We met few years prior and are very much so in touch for business goes two ways," stopped, '-not to mention that he dabbles in the underground as well,' a lit grin appeared. Minutes later, the topic returned to his visit.

"Majesty, may I ask why thou came to our showroom?"

"Nothing of much value, I thought it wise to check onto an acquaintance's ware for once. I'm very much keen on purchasing."

"Yes, you needn't worry," gestured Holms at the employees, a gesture of dismissal. "I take to finding what is being sought after."

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"What of the EDO-4 SST?" he pointed at a jet-black car. The headlights were of the shape of a shark, the overall feel was of utter fear, a killer on land. A mixture of luxury and sport, a love-child; direct words from car-magazines.

"The show-piece?" paused the manager, "-art thou sure?"

"Why, is it not for sale?"

"It's for sale, but I never expected anyone to go straight for this model. It's a fully operational show-piece."

"What's the problem, there's doubt in thy eyes," commented Staxius invested into obtaining what seemed unreachable.

"It's going to cost."

"Name the price."

"3,600,000 Exa," he replied with a dejected gaze.

"Brother, you're not going to spend that much on a car, will you?"

"Father, is that true?"

"Mr. Holms," ignoring their plea, "-to be sure, is this particular model considered a limited edition?"

"Limited," he chuckled, "-it's far more than that. This is the first and only model with the mana-processing engine."

"The same as the Xerxes series cars?"

"Yes, an improved version I'd say. I'm surprised you knew about them."

"My daughter and I own one of each, Red-Fury and Void," laughing, "-have the paper's readied, I'm buying the car. Maintenance and services should have been done since there was a festival, am I wrong?"

"Yes, you're correct," he took to the counter with a blissful visage. The workers came to a stand-still, the showpiece was decided to be sold. There were many bids on its price already, all reaching in the 2

million range. To win the ownership without hassle, Holms gave a price not many would wish to compete against. Minutes turned to hours as they sat inside a cold office. Courtney and the emperor took some time off to explore the capital.

"I can't believe that you're going to buy a car for 3.6 million."

"Holms," paused the king with a coy stare, "-the price is lesser than I expected. Why the hesitance when speaking of selling it earlier?"

"Considering the engine is one of a kind, I thought that the director would be angered."

"Why then, why such a change of mind."

"Simple," papers slid across the table, "-I'm a humble friend of Renaud's family. The family means more than hierarchy in the business world. Besides, who in their right mind would refuse the leader of Phantom and Argashield Federation."

"Don't blow it out of proportion," papers signed and payment approved, the keys were handed over.

"The car is very valuable and stands out easily, come to me if there's any trouble with the interior, engine, or anything. Thou did pay a fortune," they stood outback of the show-room before an oval-shaped track for testing the cars.

"I'll have a go," sat, the interior was of leather, pure and exquisite, the dashboard held a vintage architecture with the splash of technology. A silent start followed by the awakening of a menacing beast, tis was the car that was purchased.

Few laps later, "-she drives like a charm," the door opened upwards.

"Glad you liked it," smiled Holms.

"Yes, I very much do so," a single press had the door shut automatically. "Now then," stood close, "-what's the reason for this impromptu visit?"

"I heard rumors of a certain high-end fashion brand being bought from under their feet."

"What of it, brands go through that change once in a while."

"That's not the issue at hand," he coughed, "-the brand in question isn't going to let itself die so quickly."

"And...?"

"And nothing really, just thought I'd have thy advice on the situation at hand."

"There's nothing that interesting about it. Mr. Holms, it's been a pleasure as always. I'll see you around for there are greater things to attend too."

"So long," said the manager.

"Brother," came a voice followed by a wave.

"Courtney and the Emperor, I see you've brought a few things to help along with the travel," a reference to a filled grocery bag.

"Cut us some slack."

"We need supplies to last the journey to my estate." Before another word said, a car turned from behind Staxius, the show-piece upon which an argument was formed earlier.

"It's a shame to see this baby go," exited the Manager with a reminiscent smile.

"Don't tell me..." she stared with a mixture of emotions.

"Father-in-law..." sweaty hands laid upon the back-window creating a hand-print.

"Go on," said Staxius grabbing onto the key, "-we're leaving."

"I'll sit at the front," said the lady upon which the car began its journey in the hands of a new owner. Spending said amount on a singular car was folly. Most weren't in a position to recklessly allow money to be drained so, especially when the world economy was head-over-heels. Nonetheless, Phantom's owner could have cared less for it was the policy instated by Cake. One could say, forcefully demanded, she wanted her Boss to enjoy the fruits of her labor. The car soon took to the East, heading away from the Capital City named Melmark. Heading east, the roads turned to a gentle slope, one that showed the drop in altitude. Opposed to the forest, all along the road were buildings, houses, and more. Warehouses and so forth on other privately own lands separated accordingly. The details weren't important for the destination was a rural-town named Sult – a derivation from Sultria. The drive upon the well-built road felt peaceful. The lack of cars towards said area seemed strange. As for the son-in-law, he slept peacefully as the minutes turned to hours. Head against the window with saliva drooling, the complete opposite of being named Emperor.

"Care to explain the purpose of getting the car?"

"Is that matter still of importance, I've paid for it, and tis mine. What else is there to understand?"

"You do know that the money doesn't come easy," she sighed, "-I'm the one making God's Ale and Angel Dust."

"Could you be any louder," he gritted to which she stared outside. "One must show his standing in mannerisms and belongings. We're a part of the Emperor's council. There's going to be opposition, I want to rile those who wish to do him harm. Let's say that the car is a bait, one costing a fortune. Besides, I rather enjoy the look of it."

"Honestly..." she breathed as to relax, "-I'm going to sleep, good night." Over yonder, the sun headed for sleep as well. Darkness soon enveloped with the countless street-lamps giving solace as the night-trip continued.

Assaulted by bright rays, Sultria awoke to blue-sky and passing clouds. "Where are we?" he asked with a yawn as the stomach grumbled. Beside laid a peaceful looking Courtney, none would have figured her to be a cold-blooded killer.

"We're about 5 minutes out the estate," came a voice from the front.

“Good morning, father,” said he as a courtesy.

“Likewise,” the voice seemed uninterested.

“We made it to Sult,” wooden board with the name of said town went past. Vivid green leaves against the bright blue, one could confuse for a child’s drawing for the colors were loud.

“What a pleasant surprise,” they stopped at a traffic light, the town held many o’ buildings ranging from four to five stories tall. In fairness, it was obvious that Sult prospered from being close to the Emperor’s Estate. A tourist attraction of which didn’t bother nor harm any. The people wore casual clothes, not overly formal, a good balance. The shops and restaurants were opened, the town-square located dead-center of Sult, boomed. Waiters rushed through alleys to have the menu readied.

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“Feels good to be back.”

“Tis where it all begins,” a pessimistic remark as the car drove farther inside. People were drawn to its shape and slick architecture. The thing about the model was that one needn’t be an expert to see how much it would have cost.

Chapter 374: The Sultrias

Walls, giant walls preventing eyes onto a mysterious plot of land. Electrically charged wires were wound atop said walls; a mere glance showed the importance. The town of Sult was left behind, the buildings came to a stop as they drove into what seemed to be an undisturbed part of the land. Pulled close to the gate, two guards in uniform hailed with rifles on their backs.

“Sorry for the inconvenience,” said the first who checked the car thoroughly, “-this is private property.”

“Will this be sufficient?” the door opened, leaving the guards baffled for never had they seen doors going upwards. Undisguised with a smile, “-do thee not recognize us?” said he who drove.

“Emperor Sultria and King of Arda,” an immediate salute with head-held high, “-we’re sorry for having been so rude.”

“No,” smiled Staxius, “-I must honor thee for an immaculate job. The reaction I expected was for thee to let us in as the car speaks for itself.”

“No, sire, we’d never be as so careless to let appearances speak instead of the truth.”

“Good, good, very good,” grinned the Emperor seeing the diligence.

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“Open the gates,” said the guard through an ear-piece. Used to the clanging of hinges and mechanism, Courtney readied herself for a crash of sound – her preparation ended in naught as it opened silently. No sound, nothing, a blank canvas of which left the mind to wonder how it worked.

“Emperor,” said Staxius as the gate reached its peak, “-let’s get ready for the worse. I doubt monsters are the only issues you’re dealing with. If push comes to shove, I will not hesitate to ask for

reinforcement. I'm here as a bodyguard, a counselor, and most of all, a father to the lady my daughter chose."

"Father, please," he said strongly, "I wish not to be referred as a boy for my soldier is readied for battle."

"Please, don't refer to thy stick as a fighter. I'm most certain the only fight it has done is against the partitions between thy chambers."

Curiously enough, Sultria's cheeks blazed into amber. He wanted to hide away but was faced with the face of Staxius against the mirror. "Sister, please, let's not get into what the emperor does in his private time. Experimenting with oneself is the way of growth, is that not what was said earlier, how human evolved – I do strongly think the overworking of said member shall result in early retirement."

"Stop it!" he cried whilst the duo laughed in his embarrassment.

'The tense aura is gone. Sultria's nervousness seems to have dwindled. I've not idea what awaits us before those gates – I might be stuck there for more than a few months. I apologize, Xula, Eira, Lizzie, in no way will I make it for the holidays. The plans for hosting a celebration on our wedding anniversary are postponed.'

Inside the walls was a mansion, one of which was rectangular hosting three-floors including the ground-floor. The rooftop seemed to have a balustrade running around the edges. On the sides were balconies peering into the plain-green-grass yard. No particular decoration, no fountains, nothing, only the crest of the Sultria family was shown. A sickle with wheat, "the crest," spoke Staxius, "is it related to Kronos, the god of time?"

"So, you know," a blissful smile came forth, "I've noticed it on thy cheeks as well, father. Tis the reason why I respect and admire thee so much, the sickle, the weapon of the god of time, it's a belief passed along the generations. He who wields the sickle shall be dubbed the god-slayer for he will slay all in hopes of fulfillment and resolve."

"Tis rather presumptuous to think a mere sickle has the power to kill a god, don't you think?" interjected Courtney.

"No, I don't think so," the car pulled to a stop, "a sickle is but a blade, and a blade is wielded for harvest or slaying. Tis the user who decides what fate awaits the tool – the craftsman is he who makes though the farmer is he who decides," the sentence, ambiguous to they who would have heard, was profound and based off real-life experience. The ascension to the throne of Alphaia wasn't one based on who was the oldest. No, the Emperor, Sultria I, deemed it fit to have the only most capable to lead to be allowed said right. A method used to find the strongest poison, insects known to be deadly locked inside a barrel – left to fight and survive, the end product, after bloodshed and carnage; the strongest. Sultria I, had experienced the process in the flesh, thus the obligation of having more than three heirs. The latter was tasked to study, scheme, and plot their way to the top. Familicide be damned, if one was in the way, either fight or left to be killed. A clear example was of Solomon's action, a passive result birthed from the infighting.

"Home sweet home," said the Emperor taking a big whiff of air.

"The mansion sure is big."

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"There's no need for flattery, this house isn't a house, I'd call it the lair for the devil himself. I've no idea the number of siblings, families, and more, killed on this property," he soon fixed a strange stoned-building to the left of the mansion. Concealed by the tree, "-the family-crypt, it's been locked since my father died. My ancestor was a mad-man, one who sought naught but power and the influence to carry on a dynasty of elites."

"A legacy forged in death?" said Staxius reflecting onto the past.

"Precisely, a legacy forged in death, the exact wording describes my family. I wonder," he paused, "-we may have more in common."

"I wonder about that," they walked in direction of the porch beside which rested flower-pots, "-Eira and my upbringing are similar. She strives to become like me, and like me, had to grow without a father. In my case, my father was here and not here at the same time, what I followed was a mindless wandering savant in search of answers, a person alienated for the sake of he who he wanted to protect. As for Eira, I sort of left a decade and a half in search of answers. The common thread is death, we know it too well. I all but hope Lizzie not be swept into the cruelty of what is real," the words spoken and ideas given were carefully chosen – to give a vague idea whilst being ominous.

"You speak of the mansion being a place of slaughter, does reason not state it be wise to leave?"

"No," he refuted with the shadow growing ever-so-close, "-the pleasant memories far out-weights what others have suffered. I've lived a good life with my father, after the fourth generation, the focus was placed on academic prowess as opposed to schemes. My father made sure to his siblings and cousins be saved from my grandfather."

"Emperor," said a maid trimming bushes around the low-windows, "-you've returned," she said with a bow.

"Yes, I have returned, where is mother?"

"Her ladyship sleeps in her chambers, should I send for her?"

"No, leave her be, my breaking her sleep will be cause trouble. We wish not to incur the wrath of the sleeping one," glanced about, "-I don't see big sister, where is she?"

"Lady Amber is at Melmark," replied the maid.

"Oh, what of my other brothers and sister?"

"None apart from lady Loftha is present, my lord."

"Goodness gracious, pay it no matter, I shall see her at once. Have a good day, Stelle."

"You too, sire, you too," they soon left the tall, skinny, brown-complexioned maid to tend the bushes. A leap inside the door showed an empty hall, nothing, no paintings, nothing, the spotless wooden floor was it that stood out.

"Quite minimalistic, did something happen?" wondered the King for it was the first time visiting.

"No, it's been this way since my father died, we've never bothered to change the interior. I didn't particularly mind since my brothers and sisters are always roaming the continent dealing in business and such."

"I heard you mentioned brothers and sisters – you might be courting my daughter, yet, I know nothing of thee and the family."

"Father," he paused, "-let's discuss the matter of a warm-cup of tea."

"Did you notice that?" elbowed Courtney upon climbing the stairs.

"A shadow," he nodded, "-I did. Don't worry about it."

The empty corridor stretched long until a refurbished room, "-here we are," the door opened with a gust of wind. The curtains swayed with a lady bearing silvery-hair stood in a plain white dress. The emotionless response had Sultria recoil.

"Loftha," he sighed, "-how many times do I have to repeat myself," navigating around the numerous seats, "-don't open the balcony when there are books and papers on the tables."

"Brother," said she monotonously, "-you're back," she ignored the prior complaint.

"Don't go changing the topic," quick to grab onto her cheeks, she gave a bored gasp of ahhh.

"Who might they be," unbothered by the now-fired red-cheeks, "-guests?"

"Family," he returned, "-I've yet to introduce the King of Arda. He's the father of Princess Eira"

"Big sister Eira," the listless eyes sparked to the excitement, "-is she here?"

"No, I'm afraid you'll have to contend with me."

"Whatever," the temperature dropped, "-I don't care about you," she said with a gesture, *CRASH!* every single piece of furniture, cutlery, and more shot at him at the speed of a bullet.

"SISTER!"

"What... I only grazed him," a sigh followed, "-wait..." the room felt hot, "-what's happening?" The reason for the prior scream wasn't in anger for her actions, rather, it was in worry for the consequence. A lady bearing red-hair materialized and held a conjured dagger to the girl's neck. Facing her stood Gophy, surrounded by naught but dust, the dust from the prior furniture.

"Brother..." the flamed-dagger soon approached, "-do something about this," her voice remained neutral.

"Father..."

"Gophy, Intherna, thank you for looking out for me. I think she's gotten the message, return to me at once."

"Yes, master." The hotness returned to mild.

“Quite the introduction,” he said in jest.

“Whatever,” she made for the door and left.

“Should we speak on the balcony?”

“Lets,” a rather awkward first-impression on the siblings he had never met. The sudden crashes and loud noises went around the mansion. It caught even the maid outside by surprise.

“Sorry about that,” apologized Sultria.

“No matter,” the stare befell the walls, “-how’s the Sultria family?”

“Suppose I should start with my name. I’m the Emperor and known as Sultria VI but I also go by Mark, a common name, I know, but tis was mother’s decision, a sort of nickname. In total, I have two sisters and two brothers, the girl from before is Loftha, the youngest. Then comes Hyde, my brother, aged 18. Xyra, aged 19, then, Amber, our big-sister aged 25. Mother was she who took care of us after father died. If the old tradition of survival of the fittest was a purpose, I’m sure Loftha would have won. She’s a psychic, able to move objects using her mind – for said power, she lost the majority of her ability to feel human emotion and pain. Strong yes, but a bad leader in the bigger picture. My younger brothers were always keen on observing as opposed to being at the center. Their demeanor is standoffish as for my big sister, she’s a tough person to deal with. Her heart is of iron, and her mind as sharp as glass – getting to her is an endeavor as big as breaking a mountain. Tis the summary of the Sultria family.”

“Quite several characters who I assume play a part in how the Empire is ruled?”

“Yes, we’ve made a council where issues are brought for discussion. It’s mostly things the politicians complain about.”

“What of the AHA, where does it come in?”

“They are independent and I wish not to interfere in how it’s run.”

“Understandable, suppose I must introduce myself to the family first.” Upon meeting so many years ago, the king never made attempts at knowing the Sultrias. It was the case even after Eira’s acceptance to court the Emperor. Staxius did come as a chaperon for her visit – a convenient excuse to contact with more influential people, thus, the lack of interaction.

Chapter 375: Feelings

“Majesty, dinner is being readied. If you would, please change attire and join, those are the wishes of The Emperor.”

“I shall be down shortly.” The door shut silently from being ajar. The maid, Stella, was a bit of a character – she was the first of whom Staxius took notice. Neither was she pretty nor ugly by society’s norm, a perfect example of being average. Her hair, her face, her mannerism, and her service, nothing, as in nothing, stood out. Such was the strange thing, her averageness felt fake. Words could but stare confusingly at her demeanor – in every way possible, she was average. Said averageness, said normalness; inhumane per what he thought, grabbed his attention. Sat facing a large window with the sky-night as the backdrop, a warm cup of coffee warmed from the inside. Gophy and Intherna were

adamant on examining the premises by themselves – thus, what could have been mistaken for a shooting-star, was naught but Intherna flying around.

‘The mansion is very much eerie. Mark isn’t that normal himself, the emperor, young in age, is rather clueless when the matters of life and death are concerned. This may be the third occasion I’ve witnessed it. A man made to be the ideal and just ruler served by an average maid. Alphaia might have more in store than expected. I best make sure it’s safe for Eira to stay. Solomon’s assassination attempt and his reaction to the incident – the unknowns are far too many.’

“Master,” soon came a gust of air with a lady dressed in a black-dress landing atop the window-frame. “The night feels young.”

“And yet I see thou art still old,” he refuted to which Gophy pouted.

“I’m not old,” she said with a childish voice, “-I’m very much mature,” her face didn’t match the words.

“Find anything of interest?”

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“Yes,” she replied with a sudden change in voice, “-the crypt, I think there’s more hidden in there than the emperor would want us to know.”

“The thing about that demon,” interjected Intherna who hovered on inside, “-in no way would a higher demon listen to a mere human. Contracts mean more than words to those fiends, still, there’s no way a contract like that could obey humans.”

“There’s something crucial you’re missing,” said Staxius, “-the crest on the demon’s forehead, didn’t you see, the crest of the god of Kreston?”

“Again,” sighed Gophy, “-are we not done with the province, are they always going to have an advantage over us?”

“No, I think master is referring to another problem.”

“What might it be?” Gophy’s face lit with curiosity.

“Whether Kreston is involved or not doesn’t matter,” he said, “-the truth remains, the demon was indeed in Alphaia with the crest, are you getting what I’m saying?”

“I see,” she stepped away, “-the answer is much clearer now.”

“Yeah,” nodded Intherna, “-tis thy problem now, master. Do what is must and call upon us for the fight.”

“I so want to sleep,” yawned Gophy who was first to vanish.

“Master,”

“Yes, Intherna, were you not going to sleep?”

“I’ve been meaning to ask this,” she coughed, “-what of the demon I was fighting the first time we met. I remember you capturing his soul,” her eyebrow rose, “-if demons are involved, I’m sure the service of another would better serve our purpose.”

"Now that you mention it, the last soul totally escaped my mind."

"I thought so," and thus they headed inside the shadow yet again.

'Puppet army,' he thought, '-with two goddesses on my side, I thought it would not need for anymore. Guess it wouldn't be hard to recruit others – an army is meant to be made of many fighters. The demon should be a new experience.'

"Hey brother," the door barged open.

"What is it?"

"I'm going out," her face showed what needed to be said.

"Related to Phantom?"

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"Yes, I got a call for Cake, Shadow is needed to help in calming a rivalry between two families."

"Where, what continent?"

"Alphia, fondly enough," the coincidence was more than laughable, "-it's to the south, a contact should be waiting for my arrival."

"What of transport, what are you going to do?"

"I'll get a taxi or something," her eyes rolled.

"Wait," he stood, "-let's go," the steps were hard on the wooden floor.

"Go where?"

"To buy you a new bike," he smiled, "-won't look good if Shadow shows up in a yellow taxi with the driver screaming for you to pay."

"How did you know I'd not pay."

"It's written all over your face," a smirk flashed as the doorknob turned.

"What of dinner?" she skipped over as if a child going on a grocery trip.

"I'll have the blood of someone later – Adete's a bit over the yonder today," a reference to she who dazedly sleep inside the front pocket. The corridors felt far emptier at night.

"Majesty," came a sudden figure who stopped, "-will you be joining dinner?" asked the maid.

"No," he nodded, "-I've business to attend, have the Emperor contact me for I'll be staying inside Melmark tonight," the clapping of shoes gradually faded as the maid watched.

"Won't the trip last more than a few hours?" a gust blew cold with hairs standing up straight. Dried leaves came as swarm; the clean yard turned messy, '-strange.'

"No," a click had the doors opened and the engine started, "-we'll be there in three hours. Don't forget," hands on the wheels, "-she has the mana-processing unit."

"I see," followed Courtney, "-overdrive."

Soon the asphalt flashed with the faint outline of a car. Overdrive had doubled the max-speed; if one didn't have fast enough reaction, it would have ended in death. As for Staxius, he drove casually – a cavalier behavior as the road screamed from the echoes of the raging engine.

"You were right," said Cake ending a phone call, "-it's been two hours and were nearly there."

"I told you," he paid no heed to traffic-light, "-so, what was the call about?"

"Tis Cake," she said, "-she got wind of guns being imported from Renaud's warehouse. The families are resolute in having the fight end in bloodshed."

"What of the Godfather, did he not have anything to say?"

"As far as I know, Godfather Renaud isn't going to move unless it hurts his business or the word from a certain someone," a side-glance ended the sentence.

"Hey, don't make it seem as if I'm the villain. I'd never say this aloud, but I do enjoy the presence of Godfather Renaud. We're family, and he has my back in the underworld – in no way will I ever abandon him – loyalty and duty are the only rules we must follow."

"Yeah, there's no need to start again with the philosophies, I know quite well how fond thou art of him."

'The underground, the place where Phantom made and still makes a fortune. Bearing in mind we get a cut from the profits; I wonder how much God's ale trade makes. Renaud has control over the whole continent of Iqeavea, Easel Run Gard, and a few countries unknown to me. Alpha's a new venture – I can smell the treasure trove we're standing on. Cake's rather clever, if Shadow solves the issues without trouble – we'll be viewed in respect by the ruling families, there might be the opportunity to have alliances made. I yet to heard of Cimier, the organization who handles the not-so-legit transactions of Alpha.'

Blinking lights flew overhead, tall-buildings radiating light to the point of the stars being hidden. The Capital City of Melmark was as active in day as it was at night, "-wake up, sister, we're here." The car came to a forced stop as traffic had the road jammed. Turned to the left after a few minutes of waiting, the drive inside was slow. People walked about as fully as at day – some were well dressed while others were weak on their feet. They drove past the Stellar Avenue where hosted cinemas as well as theaters. "Let's go watch a movie," said Courtney eyeing a tall-building with no apparent windows.

"And the task, forgotten about it already?"

"No, tis but a whim," she pointed at a billboard, "-it's Aceline, I never knew she made it big overseas."

"From idol to movie-star, her career is full of surprises."

"The tone you used seemed rather distant, are you not on good terms with her?"

"I couldn't say," the face remained on the road, "-we lost touch after the whole incident at Dorchester. 1st of December," memories flooded, "-Julius, Autumn, my old companions. I had dreamed of a day where we would all gather around a table and have drinks with Julius's kids running off and playing with mine progeny. I'd have loved to see what kind of mothers the battle-hardened Silver-guardians would

have made. Lastly, Fenrir, she who has always wanted to be at my side – she who I neglected and gave the duties of guarding what I couldn't bother to look at. I'm the definition of cruel no matter how you look at it," neutral, a faint touch of woe escaped the otherwise blank expression.

"There's nothing I can say about that."

"I didn't expect a reply, tis just how I feel," the car came to a sudden stop. Speaking of what he thought had made the time go in a blink, Courtney was lost in an avalanche of deep-thoughts, though one of the same, the personality and way of thought differed.

"Why are we stopping?"

"Look outside," a massive-showroom with a luxurious feel. *Denly,* was written in a beautiful calligraphic font. Clear transparent glass gave into podiums on which revolved bikes.

"Yes," she gasped, "-let's go right now!"

'Guess she loves bikes as much as Cake,' he followed. An eye-catching car with an imposing man. Many bystanders were left in shock – few were teenagers admiring the beauty of the sports bike from outside.

"Wow," came a stunned remark, "-I've never seen that car," pointed a boy in his sixteen.

"Hey, don't speak so loudly, or he'll hear you," voiced another shyly.

"You like the car?" asked Staxius stopped mid-way, the second-boy recoiled in fear whilst the first stared in awe.

"Y-yeah, obvious," he laughed, "-it looks so pretty and menacing, very cool!"

"Sir, a-are you a c-celebrity?" asked the shy-boy.

"Why do you ask so?"

"B-because of the suit, i-its expensive, t-the car too, I s-so wish to become like you one day." A guitar-case hosted over his back.

"An aspiring musician," commented Staxius, "-good, dreams are what keep people motivated. And for the question, I'm not a celebrity, just an adventurer. Go ahead and take pictures of the car, I don't mind – heck, come on, I'll let you sit inside."

"What are you doing?" asked Courtney who came out and laid eyes on the kids.

"Go on ahead and pick one, I'll be back in a second," to which he led the way to the car.

"WOOW," said the first boy floored by the experience, "-how beautiful, hey, mister, is it ok if we sit inside, it looks new."

"Go ahead, cars are meant to be used, I don't mind, just don't scratch the paint, it's going to be a pain."

"AWESOME, THANKS!"

"So you," he turned to the shy-boy, "-don't you like cars?"

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"No," he whispered, "-I only came because he wanted to see bikes."

"I see, a good friend, you guys are close right?"

"Yes," from shy, a smile portrayed, "-he's always been head-first into action while I stand back. I admire the confidence he has, I want to be like him one day, to say my feelings out loud."

"I think you're good as is," he said distantly, "-there are more ways to send a message than words. The guitar you carry, it's a strong tool to relay feelings. There are things we can never copy from another; it's better to embrace who we are. Take it however you wish, it might be the rambling from an old man – be yourself, and take care of what you treasure, happiness doesn't come easy."

"Sir, could you take a picture of us?" asked the overzealous teenager.

"Stop being rude," said the other.

"Go on ahead," he nodded, "-give me the phone." Nervously he stood and walked to the car, the first threw peace-signs while the other gave an awkward smile.

"WOW, IT'S AWESOME! Thanks, sir."

"My pleasure."

Chapter 376: Dorino

"I'd have never thought you would be the type to outright speak to them."

"Well," inside the showroom with the boys still peering in, "-I sort of saw Julius and I in those two. We weren't that close, but it seemed familiar. Anyway," the head shook in dismissal, "-I rather not think of the past," paused before an ever slick red and white sports bike, "-this one?"

"Yeah," she nodded.

"Isn't red a bit loud?" they debated with an assistant close-by. The latter gave a many o' glances trying to figure who had come. The car outside drew attention; the first impression was of someone important, very important.

"Excuse me sire," mustering courage, the girl spoke politely, "-is there anything I can assist with?"

"Yes actually," he flat-out ignored Courtney's argument for sticking with the red, "-do you have this model in black?"

"The Monif-4T?"

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"Yes, the 4T," interjected she boldly, "-excuse me, but I'm the one who's going to ride the steed."

"O-ok?"

"Go ahead," he spoke trying to reassure the assistant, "-she'll be the one discussing of what to have. Be sure to call on me for payment," the sentence ended with a nod. He moved to a lounge area off to the right – the suit-jacket had the bottom button untied to allow ease of movement.

In a blueish-glow, the smartphone displayed a peculiar interface. Those assisting Courtney were too busy meeting her demands to pay heed. 'Time to see what has been happening around the world,' many o' sources and many o' information was neatly sorted and laid to rest. The handy work of éclair, the spirit behind the AFR.

'Companies declaring bankruptcy, what a shame. The economy sure is crashing.' Whilst collecting thoughts on the matter, a transaction of arms was seen via a small window, 'I forgot about tonight. There's a big shipment of weapons heading to Iqavea; Elina wants to arm-up. I don't see anything abled to create havoc at the moment. Starting a fight will destroy both parties – I sure hope the rulers know what they're dealing with,' scrolled one after the other, 'I found it. The duty assigned, so, we have the Jefferson's Family fighting against the Lerado's. How's she going to resolve this conflict. The Jeffersons are Godfather Stanley's close allies whilst Lerado's are under Renaud. Peacefully settling the issue is a far-stretched. The Lerado family have it tough – I've heard their activities revolve around importing and never re-selling. They're left out of the money being made. The Jefferson's are renowned for being one of the more violent families out there. No wonder Stanley loves them so much. I can see it ending only in bloodshed,' a message blinked from Cake, 'I see,' he smiled, 'Lerado know they're going to lose; that's why Shadow is being called as reinforcement. Her presence alone should discourage the Jefferson's, not that I need to worry. If push comes to shove, she might kill a few lackeys and destroy their house. No killing, as Renaud said, no killing other prominent family members.'

"Brother!"

"Y-yeah," the hovering screen toggled off, "-what's the matter, did you need something?"

"Time for payment," a massive grin made her look like a clown.

"How much?"

"1,000,000 Exa."

"Seriously?"

"Don't you dare say no, I didn't complain when thee spent over three million on a car."

"Fine," with no grounds to argue, the paperwork and payment were complete.

"Who the hell are those two?" wondered a sale-man roaming left to right impatiently.

"No idea," said the lady who assisted them, "-they all but bought the bike as if it were nothing. Guess there's no limit to how much wealth a rich person can acquire," the door opened with the bike readied to leave.

"Hey sire," came a boyish voice.

"What is it?"

"What did you buy?" asked he who had a charming personality, the frankness was admirable.

"A bike," he pointed to the street where Courtney readied herself to leave.

The engine growled as she stopped, "-I'm off, see you later, boss."

"Wow," said the boy as she burnt along the asphalt, "-the Monif-4T, sire, you're very much rich."

"One could say so," he climbed aboard the car, "-be sure to get home soon. The bigger the light, the bigger the shadows."

Soon came the next day, the prior night was spent at the heart of the capital. A press of the button had the curtains part to show the idyllic scenery. A call later, waiters brought over a succulent breakfast. Stood on the balcony, the sky seemed constrained by the planes.

Ring, vibrated the phone onto the bedside table. Coffee in hand and wrapped in dressing gown, "-hello?" he spoke with a touch of fatigue.

"Father-in-law."

"Emperor Sultria, good-morning, what can I do for you?"

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"Did thee forget of our prior night's engagement?"

"Are you referring to dinner?"

"Yes, obviously – I convinced my sister with much wait to have her be present."

"And my sister was adamant about getting a new toy. The whims of fellow siblings are issues we must deal with. What's the reason you called, surely it's not to rant of something so frivolous."

"Point well made," the voice trailed as he backed away physically, "-where are you?"

"At Melmark."

"Good, wait for me – we have much to discuss."

"Before hanging up, about lady Loftha, is she perchance in the AHA?"

"No, we refused her since the job is far too dangerous."

"Such a waste."

"Excuse you?"

"Do I have to repeat myself?"

"..."

"Good," said Staxius, "-I'll be waiting at the town-square. Make sure you reach by 11 o'clock, don't dilly-dally."

"Alright," the phone hung.

"This is a view worth admiring," said Adete half-awake.

"Not from my point of view," he stared at her face.

"I know, I know..."

A loaded day began. Seated inside the car, Staxius drove around the capital to explore and see what brands were well-seated. 'Here we are,' he stopped shy of a luxurious shop, the large windows with clothes and accessories of which held a massive price-tag. The other shops paled in comparison, a direct show and assertion of power. 'Meldorino, the business has been slow since Elkdo came onto the market. A fall from grace, Elkdo has the same clothing style with its prices affordable to the regular joe. Luxury brands and whatnot, Meldorino doesn't have anything to distinguish itself. A bloated brand passed its time. The owner is going through a lot, a wealthy divorce, and a lack of business. They had to shut-down shop in Iqavea and Hidros – Alphaia is the only place where a few of their product can be found. Look at the workers, opposed to smiling, they hold woe – such a shame, what a waste of manpower,' as if fate, a phone call came with Cake's details as the caller.

"Hello?"

"Hello, Boss," she said rather blissfully.

"Yes, what's the matter?"

"You're not going to believe it."

"Try,"

"It's about Dorino, I've news he's in Alphaia trying to salvage the company."

"Didn't the divorce hurt him?"

"He had more funds hidden and invested in property, the same as we're doing now."

"How reliable is this information?"

"Comes straight from one of his maid's mouth."

"Don't you tell me," he paused, "-Godfather Libra?"

"The information broker, yes, he owed us a favor."

"Where's he right now?"

"Melmark, at the Monfae building."

"I see, he's renting office space. What's the plan, were you not going to outright buy the rights from under his foot?"

"Yeah, I tried."

"Elaborate."

"I was stopped because of their diligence."

"Fine, no need to get into details, what about now, surely we can take scheme our way."

"Thing is," a little giggle escaped, "-Godfather Libra gave us a freebie, a crucial piece of information detrimental to a person's reputation. Most of all, it comes with proof," *ping,* an explicit video played. It involved what seemed to be an underage boy and precarious objects as to not get into details.

"This is going to be fun. Give me more information, the guard details, who he deals with, the right-hand man and all."

"Sure, here," the details came in form of files.

"Wait," the eyes locked onto a strange figure exiting a limousine, "-I see Dorino."

"What do you mean?"

"I meant what I said," the call hung suddenly. 'Typical man like him are egocentric. I should be able to make an impactful first impression. What's the correct way to make it so I'm both feared and respected. The two are such bad-traits to have, yet, in this case, it's a must for him to acknowledge my presence.'

"Intherna," a sudden jolt of inspiration.

"Hey, master, what's up?"

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"I need you to attack that man over there. I'm going down the cliché route, in no way do I have time to scheme something better. Conjure the fire-spirit and have it attack the man, I'll swoop in and destroy it, we'll see how it goes from there on."

"Are you sure it a wise idea?" voiced Gophy feeling left out.

"Anything better to suggest?"

"Why not hold off the first-impression. Haste isn't the answer for most live's troubles."

"And waiting will all but waste an opportunity. It's a gamble, the goal is to make a strong impression. There's no need to speak to the man."

"Are you serious?" she paused, "-actions opposed to words."

"Just checking, I only need to scare the man, right?"

"Yeah, make sure he doesn't see you. I'm counting on you," *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

"About the fire-spirit," smirked Gophy, "-how much power are you thinking?"

"I'm going all out," laughed the daughter of Rah, "-in no way am I passing up this opportunity." *Heed mine call o' spirit who dwells in mine soul, o' spirit serve mine blood, o' spirits who very ire could melt the world, come to me, Onix,* a screech from a bird echoed down the road. The hot gust had the rubber tire give, windows shattered on the car – Dorino stood flustered to the point of trembling.

"Idiot," *Death Element: Magical Barrier,* he leaped conjuring a triangular barrier. Onix, the fire-spirit in a humanoid shape came to a hover to blow fire. 'Why does Intherna's personality ail me so,' the mark of the death-reaper lit mildly.

Monster detected: Calling the AHA Unit. Please, Evacuate, Monster Detected, Threat level S+. An announcement came from out of nowhere. *Monster detected: Calling the AHA Unit. Please, Evacuate, Monster Detected, Threat level S+.* It repeated more than a few times – surprisingly, the people in the close vicinity left in stride.

'Damn it, here I thought I was going to have a little private show,' a cold glare had Intherna whistle nonchalantly.

"Director, please, let's evacuate," a subtle voice had taken the hand of the middle-aged man.

"Fear not citizens," came a presumptuous voice from the back, "-I've come to help," the star-filled outfit sparked.

"There's no need," *Death Element: Mana Cancellation.* No additional effort required, the Onix dissipated into fine ashes. The link was cut, thus the end.

"Pardon my asking," spoke the man in the star-outfit, "-are you the adventurer?"

"Yeah," an uninterested reply with eyes on the man behind. The experience startled him a little and startled he was to strangely admire the one who jumped as a hero. 'Good, the emotions I sense are of fear and gratitude.'

"Seriously," replied the Hero, "-Platinum Adventurers are no joke," said he with hidden jealousy and envy. "Taking down an S+ class monster without the need for backup."

"Backup?" many o' figures were on the roofs staring where the incident was reported.

"Yes, backup," said he, "-backup, the AHA, heroes who are willing to risk their lives as to protect our continent. People with extraordinary abilities – our DNA is what makes us proud."

"I can see that," the car was soon to drive over with Gophy at the wheels. The windows rolled, "-get in master," said she.

"I do admire the fast response. See you around, hero," door shut, they drove to disappear after a turn.

"Who was that man?" asked Dorino with sheer will-power.

"No idea, Director, should I bother to find out?"

"Yes, do, please, I must repay the kindness shown."

Chapter 377: Cimier

"There you are," said Sultria sat inside a café. The interior described as elegant, the furniture matched the floors and wallpaper. Some colors stood whilst others blended into another, a place meant for the upper-class.

"Why the rush all of a sudden?" asked Staxius pulling a chair.

"My two-youngest brothers are in Melmark, I've arranged a meeting."

"Acquainting the father-in-law, should be simple."

"Yes, well, tis what I wish for. On another note, what of Lady Courtney, she's absent?"

"The lady had business to attend to, what of the brothers, will they be here soon?"

"I told them to be here at 17:00."

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"Another hour of wait," said Staxius peering the clock. The encounter with Dorino, the spirit summoned caused many to fear. It was the first for an S+ alarm to ring. Trained to evacuate in an orderly manner, the populous turned to mindless robots for said amount of time.

After what seemed an eternity between speaking to Sultria and keeping track of the activity of Shadow, the focus was divided to the point of being lost for words. A sudden push of the door showed two formally dressed men. Leather shoes, dark-blue suits, neatly combed hair, and a visage similar to the Emperor. A single glance sufficed for them to walk over.

"Good evening, Emperor," said the first, a taller man than the second.

"Good evening, big brother," added the second.

"Hyde, Xyra, glad to see you're well," a grin of courtesy had the men at ease. "Take a seat." Thus, the table of four reached capacity.

"Forgive my asking, brother, why have you called us with such urgency?"

"Dear Hyde, as straight forward as always."

"Brother, please, do understand that we have a duty to run the sister branch."

"I understand time is a precious commodity," he turned to the white-haired man, "-I do think this introduction is far more important."

"Good evening, gentlemen, I'm Staxius Haggard, leader of the Argashield Federation, Blood-king of Arda, it's a pleasure."

"The famed hero of the war," mumbled Xyra, the oldest, with a flushed face, "-Xyra Sultria, the pleasure is mine, sire, to meet such an influential figure in the war, it's an honor, truly."

"Flattery isn't needed," he smiled coldly and waited for the other.

"Hyde, majesty, Hyde Sultria," the dirtied blond-hair with blue eyes vividly darted about Staxius's person. Intrigue is caused by admiration and lust for knowledge.

"I presume Princess Eira has acquainted herself?"

"Yes, majesty, the princess is a rather cold person. Tis the impression from her appearance – I've hardly seen her smile. Her melancholic beauty is far more than our brother could bear to ignore," a sentence with the goal of provoking the Emperor. He could but shyly accept what was being said. The introduction made, a long and deep conversation followed. Many o' drinks and snacks were called; the topic was more business and affair of state than the gossip of war. Amidst the conversation, Staxius carefully laid out bait, bait for them to bite. Bait to isolate inconsistencies to form a subjective view over what waited. A heavy judgment persona to evaluate the youth sat before him. Their mannerisms were of royalty with the flare of youth, the flare of energy, and life. They enthusiastically spoke of what intrigued their minds, matters of trade, and all.

Meanwhile the happenings in Melmark, Shadow arrived at the destination. A clear coordinate was given through her phone, one of a few with classified information and access to éclair. Currently, there were only three with the owners being, Staxius, Courtney, and Cake. The trio who left the yet to be famed Phantom.

"Shadow," said a peculiar voice with an accent that held no remarks to pronunciations and articulation. "We've been awaiting ya," said he with a relieved expression. The accent was hard to follow.

"How's the evacuation?" asked Shadow coldly with a mask over her face.

"Going aight, I think," said the man in a simple white-bottomed shirt, a tie, and matching pants to go with. Situated around a 6-7 hour drive from Melmark to the South-Ease, Shadow came upon a village named Plasto. The inhabitants were mostly workers for another town further down south linked by the railway. Plasto with a few hundred citizens bore more forests than infrastructure. A secluded place with a river flowing down its side from the mountains.

"Where're the other families, what's the status?"

"I don't know – the Jefferson's already got their hands on the weapons. The attack might be now or in five minutes for all I know. The head of the family is already on his way to the airfield of Marrowy."

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"Wait," her voice sunk, "-didn't I demand him to be present before leaving?"

"Wasn't my call, Shadow, tis the lady of the house, she cried to her husband. She cried spouting nonsense about a vision of doom. The lady did have a talent for predicting the future."

"Idiots," jumped onto the bike, "-I'm going after them, have the other follow."

"What of the supplies, we still haven't loaded them."

"Burn the damned thing, throw it in a river, I don't care. They are nothing but excess weight."

'This is bad,' she sped along the road to the north, '-if they get ambushed... what a pain.'

Over yonder came a spiral of smoke. Shadow pulled to a stop of a massacre. SUVs and cars filled with bullet-holes, the lifeless bodies of guards, and the family of Lerado. The lady thought to have given the prediction of the disaster was nowhere to be found. 'This can't be my fault?' she walked narrowly avoiding the corpses. Barriers to protecting the road were broken. It all but told one story, the first in the escort crashed to break through the protection. No signs of remains as below was a large-drop. Amber of flames burnt in the broken cars.

"Hey," she called on her phone.

"Hey, what's the matter?"

"The Lerado's are no more," voiced Shadow resting against a toppled car, "-I want to suspect the Jefferson's."

"Want to, what do you mean?"

"The suit," she said, "it's not what the Dark-guild uses. It's more like,"

"More like Cimier," interjected Staxius, "I expected something like this. What's the deal now?"

"Is it not obvious, I'm going straight to the Jefferson's. I'll call when more information is made available.

"Sure, I'll personally relay it to the Godfather. Good work, sister," the phone hung with him crossing the road of a big interjection. The flashy-billboards were yet to calm. 'What a mess,' people walked, the wind blew, and the night sky blinded by the ever-shining Capital.

The sound of the train made the air tremble. Staxius moved further into the city, further into the shadows, an alley with broken-down barriers leading under the train tracks. The reason for said barrier was of a canal, one that flowed slowly to the sea. Rebels and thugs were often the guests at said location. A hangout spot for the tough – the fact grew clearer one walked. Pillars supporting the tracks were littered with graffiti of profane origin. 'The youth,' said Staxius kicking a pebble into the canal. 'Lively bunch.'

Calling Godfather Renaud,

"How's it going Staxius," returned the ever-blissful voice.

"Hello, Godfather,"

"What's the matter, why sound so gloomy?"

"It's concerning the Lerado."

"..." Silence, the mention of the name had Renaud's persona changed.

"What of 'em, did something happen?"

"They're dead. Ambushed whilst in transit."

"Staxius sonny, wasn't their protection your responsibility?" the friendly tone dropped, "-I don't want excuses, how can you let a family member die."

"Godfather, pardon my saying this; I sent Shadow as soon as I could. The evacuation was planned to start only after she arrives – sadly, they left before my back-up, what do you expect?"

"I don't care," said he abruptly, "-I'm very disappointed. I should have known to settle this myself. Sonny, make sure to have the one responsible killed. And, one last thing, I'm not disappointed in you, no dear, I'm disappointed in myself ???? it's cause my fight with Stanley, the Jefferson's got the better of us."

"Godfather, don't take it to heart. Things aren't as they seem – I've not heard of Cimier, what of them? They're supposed to be the most influential family here."

"I know what you mean," he paused, "-listen, I'm going to fly over to Alpha – we need to honor the dead."

"Ok, godfather, I'll have the bodies be preserved."

"Ok, sonny, take care."

‘What a mess,’ he thought leaned on the pillar, ‘-now a funeral. Suppose I should contact Courtney.’

The news of the killing soon reached the other Lerado members. In pain the bodies were returned to the village hospital, one built and funded by the DG. The doctors could but sigh terrifyingly at those killed, the head of the family, and his children. A reminder of the reality of the underworld.

“Staring idly at the canal seems fun,” came a soft voice.

“Stare long enough and it stares back,” he replied.

“A mirror with that could gaze upon our very soul,” reflections of the passing train rippled the calm flow.

“Why is a lady like you venturing out these parts?”

“No idea,” said she who crouched over the ledge, “-I sensed something or someone powerful earlier, guess curiosity got the better of me.”

“You make it seem so scandalous.”

“And you make it as if this area is off-limits.”

“It is off-limits,’ he pointed to the no-trespassing sign, what remained of it.

“Oh...” she stood, “-my bad,” she grinned emptily. Her grey-colored eyes seemed to pierce the very fabric of reality, a piercing, and an intense stare. Her pointy-nose, sharp facial features, long and curly blond hair, lovely eyelashes, and bold eyebrows, “-I’ve just noticed the sign.”

“Better now,” he pushed to a stand, “-if I may intrude, care to have a fellow stranger accompany thee out of this macabre area?”

“How gentlemanly,” she chuckled politely, “-please,” giving a curtsy, they both left to whence they came. Darkness and silence were replaced with loudness; the busy city made itself known. “Thank you very much for the show of compassion. I knew not gentlemen still exist.”

“Oh, it does my lady, rare and a few – we exist.” Blinking sweetly, she gestured to disappear inside the crowd. ‘Renaud’s going to make it here by tomorrow,’ focused, he made for the hotel, checked out, and made way for Marrowy instead of Plasto. ‘A strange part of me says to watch out for Renaud. There might be a plot to have the Godfather assassinated. I can’t afford to be careless as I did with Lerado. Daemonum Gladio might have something found by tomorrow.’

Calling Serene...

“Hello?” came a half-asleep voice.

“Hello, it’s me.”

“Majesty,” her tone peaked in astonishment, “-why are you calling so late?”

“I need information, do we have any nightwalker in Alphaia working as spies?”

“A bunch actually, why, what’s the matter?”

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"What of Michelle, did he infiltrate Cimier?"

"Yes, I got a report a few months ago, why?"

"I need to get in contact with him."

"Ok, hold on a moment... Done, I'll hang up. Take care, majesty." To stay atop things in a time of crisis similar to now, the Blood-King formed a special training program for nightwalkers in the arts of infiltration. The immortal couldn't be killed nor caught; no curse of sunlight meant freedom.

"Did you call for me, majesty?" said a voice in a whisper via the phone.

"Michelle, pardon my intrusion, I need information about Cimier's activity. The news of Lerado's massacre should have reached thy ear. Do what you must and have it readied by sun-break."

"Understood," the call ended in a suspended note. Soothing orchestral music played over the radio making the drive less of a bore.

"Who are you?" begged a man dowsed in blood. Tables toppled over, files littered, bodies on the floor, a figure with a demon-mask and a sword, the building had Jefferson's trading written outside.

"I think the answer should be rather obvious," said she with the blade against the man's neck, "-if thou wish to live, answer my question. Were the Jefferson's involved in today's attack?"

"Please, spare my life," the light-brown pants turned damp, "-in no way will I reveal what I mustn't, it's the law of the Dark-guild."

"Too bad," a single stroke beheaded the man, "-I never intended on getting answers," she said with a snicker. "Making a fool out of me will be the last thing the Jefferson's do – responsible or not, my reason for fighting is as clear as day. Death is coming, just thee wait."

Chapter 378: Eira's Entry

'How long has it been since my last entry. A few months I'd guess. The post-war situation filled our everyday lives with changing norms. I suppose forgetting about my diary isn't much of a surprise. It's relaxing in a way, therapeutic, being able to write my thoughts and speak to myself using this old gift. Starting atop, Sultria VI of the Alpha empire and I am courting to be wed. The decision was mine alone. Father does think it his fault, but it's truly my choice. I like the man, he reminds me of a younger version of the man I so admire. As for my father, mother, and little sister – after being on non-speaking terms during the war, we had a warming reunion. I cried wholeheartedly in their arms, well, them being naked in the bath does make it not that pleasant a thing to remember – the scene is perturbing. The mere thought has triggered ghastly images, I better leave that episode behind. Sultria VI, what can I say about him, let's see.'

'Found it, after a few minutes of reflection, I have some vague thoughts about his personality. My suitor has to be tied with his family. In no way is he the man now without the crude upbringing. Decisive and deceitful to those he hates, Sultria VI is similar to father as mentioned before. One striking discord is their views on punishment. Father will most likely kill them who wronged him, else be tortured to the point where death seems a gift. The Emperor is more likely to pursue mercy and be empathic to the wrongdoer. It ties in with the legacy of the Imperial Family, the survival of the fittest mindset remains

still in the branched family. I've had the chance to meet a few of them. They occupy more reserved roles such as housekeeping, training butlers, and assistants to serve the Imperial family. The head of the branch family goes by the name of Solomon, not that I've met him for he's in hiding last I heard. The current head is his wife, lady Rury D'Elago Fielder, a non-native of Alphaia. She's handsome and astute to the matter of wit. The first impression was of a reserved person with a contagious smile. Managing to have her smile is the only way I've observed to get on her good side.'

'Other interesting characters of the Imperial family must be the siblings. Apart from the eldest-sister, the rest are amiable and very fond of my cold demeanor. I was referred to as ice-cream by one of the brothers, Hyde I think, the blue-eyes are quite noticeable. There's nothing much to say about the two brothers, studious and hardworking to help. Xyra is quite eccentric in the way he dresses – outside meetings I'd not be surprised to see him walking in drawers. Ah – yes, an incident similar happened when I stayed over the estate; convincing father that day proved easy. The feeling of being watched by a strange shadow. There I remember thinking it is a ghost or a mana-spirit, but when confronted, I came to the surprise of finding the young man sleep-walking. I read of the medical condition in a book. Not in reality as the experience was quite abrupt as the maid was soon to wake him. Hyde's too focused for his own good – always on the matter at hand and never bothering to read the room nor the emotions given by the opposing party. On said night, after encountering the eccentric Xyra, I was asked to sit and watch as Hyde spoke to a potential business partner. The talk, or what he said, was naught but a one-way street of him pounding ideas into the intimidated partner. The reason I sat was to replace Xyra. It didn't come as a surprise when the other never showed. In that way, Hyde and Xyra balance one another. Good-cop and bad-cop I figure, they do it without realizing, tis the scary part.'

'Loftha, lovely cute Loftha, I absolutely adore her company. She's an angel, I've never seen anyone so bashful; her smile makes me want to rip out her cheeks. There's a side of her I've been warned about. Something I never experienced, whatever the matter, Loftha is cute, I'd like to meet her as soon as possible. I also spoke with Sultria's mother, she seemed a little reserved, similar to Amber. My experience in Alphaia was memorable. I was left shocked when our courtship was made public by the Imperial family. I understand why, the daughter of one of the up-and-coming kingdom's is a popularity boost. A way to have the populous catch much-needed breaths. I went along with the plan and appeared in interviews. Surprisingly enough, my visage, the white-silvery hair I got from my biological mother, Queen Gallienne, was a thing of strange to them. The blank expression I acquired from my father, boosted my popularity. I must say that Alphaia is technologically advanced, Hidros is all but catching to them now. Overwhelmed by the media attention, I turned down many offers of models and returned to Hidros, those are what I remember from my last visit.'

'Enough reminiscing, back to the matter at hand, the present. I graduated from Claireville Academy around a year ago in XX92. We're the 24th December XX93; in a few weeks and it will be the new year. There's a clear path I want to follow, a newly emerging field of study. Magiology, the mixture of technology, magic, and science, three clear opposite-field merged in one. The five-year period of the war took lives but there were also gain, a revolution of intellect, and an overall understanding of science and the world. Magiology was debated over by many scholars a few years ago. All who are now but baffled. The field has merit, the first paper released under said term was the Mana Dispersal by father. It eventually led him to get the Lodle award. There are arguments about the newly established history of Magiology – many are pushing forth the idea to have Staxius Haggard named as the founder of said field. Vague as it's made out to be, the theory of Mana Dispersal is a work of art on its own. Going in

detail would but waste paper and leave a bitter taste in my future self's rereading of the diary. Backed by many researchers of repute, Magiology is a genuine field being taught around universities around the globe. The epicenter is Phantom's University. The lack of students is certainly lonesome. A focus on excellence and perfection cuts the already low-amount of students into fewer numbers. I'm grateful to be able to learn what my father created. Considering what sort of person he is, I doubt tis the only theory he's written. There are more, I'm sure of it, more on the nature of our worlds and the fabric of existence, world-ending outcomes. I think I'll get engaged during my time studying – a courtship is good but not concrete. I doubt I'll be getting married soon, when that day comes, I'll have to leave behind Hidros and live on another continent. It's sad, the closer I try and catch father, the bigger strides he walks. I'm always bound to see his back, that's the truth I've come to accept. Neither in magic nor studies, there's no beating a god. I might not be the one, but I know who is. Lizzie, she has his and her blood inside her veins. For a child of five years old to be able to conjure A-class level spells is unprecedented. Mother took to personally instruct her on the way of magical-arts. I envy her in a way, she's tied to father – I don't hate her for it. It's my luck, my fate. I can but look to the future, there's a duty I must do. Become the best older-sister one could wish for; I want to be the one Lizzie looks up to.'

'On another note, father left for Alphaia quite a while ago. Wherever he goes, trouble finds him. I pity those who will unknowingly go against him.'

'Upon rereading the entry, I ramble a lot about my father. My admiration is creepy in a way. I'll strive to keep updating the diary after major events. Reporting daily will be a loss of time, one that I can't afford wasting.' An entry logged on the night of the Lerado massacre. Kept on her desk in a high apartment, her window gave to the sheerness of the three-Phantom skyscrapers. 'Can't believe all of this is owned by a single man,' she shook her head, '-and I'm part of the heritage,' her head lowered to a glass-display case. Inside were jewelry, ones of Ardanian craftsmanship; her collection, birthday gifts from Staxius. Amidst them all, one stood prominently, a gem with the ability to change hue depending on the user's mana and emotions. Rare wasn't sufficient to speak of its value, one could go as far as say it unique. To put it in perspective, the stone Eira owned was the size of the largest coin. There was also another, not as flawless with the special trait. It was half the size and auctioned in Alphaia to a noble at the price of 9,000,000 Exa. Eira's stone, flawless and expertly cut, sat inside a blue-box, giving a rough estimate; 36,000,000 Exa if not more. The decision to turn into a necklace, ring or any other accessory was to her own discretion. 'He doesn't respect money,' she thought with a big smile. 'To give me such a gem without as much as thinking twice, how rich must one be to do that. I doubt any other royalty has his guts.

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Far, far away from Hidros where the sun reached its peak, the high-pitch sound of engines made birds flutter. The fogginess of the mountain lessened, a shiny white-plane came lined to land. 'Godfather Renaud is here,' thought Staxius leaned on the car waiting a few meters away. A screech had the plane land. 'Private jet,' the door soon opened with a man dressed in a black suit and a fedora with a cigar. Each step down the stairs felt powerful; the face wrinkled little from age. Guards were on the ground scanning the area for threats.

"Ay, sonny,"

"Godfather," said Staxius respectfully with a smile.

"I didn't expect to see ya here," dropping the cigar, the handsome face of one of the most feared Godfathers stopped to smile. Expensive rings and a simple mechanical watch, the dial was of a creamy color inside which was carved to give the impression of neatly arranged squares.

"I came to apologize for the blunder yesterday."

"Don't mind it, sonny," giving a fatherly pat on the back, "-what is done, is done, can't do none about it."

"Should we leave for the funeral?" asked Staxius.

"Yeah," the door opened leaving Renaud lost for words, "-nice car," he smiled.

"Godfather," spoke a guard distressed, "-what of us, we must follow where you go!"

"Don't worry about it," the door shut, "-I'm with Shadow. Tell Karlson to not be so uptight, I'll be fine, the Haggard family has my back," the windows rolled to separate inside from out. "Ay, how much did this baby cost ya?"

"3.6 million, why?"

"It's a good car, I like it," said Renaud with an amiable attitude.

"May I ask why you're happy?" a subtle tremor of power had the car started.

"I got news of what Shadow did earlier."

"What happened?"

"You dunno, Shadow took to the Jefferson's headquarters and killed every single guard. I had messages from Stanley begging me to stop the assault."

"Won't this cause a gang-war?"

"Can't be avoided. I'll settle the matter peacefully after I know who caused the incident."

"Shadow did kill without proof, what if it's false, what if the Jefferson's aren't responsible."

"Dunno then, Stanley ain't the type of person who'll send killers unnecessarily. I'm sure he's investigating to see if the Jefferson's are involved. Don't forget, this fight was between Lerado and Jefferson. What do you think about it?"

"I have my doubts. I fear things aren't as clear as it made to be, godfather."

"Ahh, always the cynic."

Chapter 379: Funeral

Long, slow, woeful, the weather matched the setting. Passing the hospital and driven further inside; they came upon a modest-looking house. One with no additional floors, a six-room hideout. He soon parked next to the curb of the walkway into where the funeral was hosted. Dressed formally, Godfather Renaud stepped out with a cold visage. Crowds were gathered outside for the inside was too heavy a

burden to bear. The whimpering of family members forcefully called to assist the parting of those close. It was a feeling Staxius knew all too well, flashbacks of Lizzie's and the other's death came in waves.

"Shadow," said Renaud paused before a mask-wearing figure.

"Godfather," she replied with a nod, "-good to see thou art in good health."

"For the most part I'm fit as a youth, yet, the vexing old-age creeps ever-so-close."

Leaving the two to converse, Staxius headed inside to pay respects. The bodies were cleaned and rested in coffins. It was requested for them to be cremated rather than being buried. The ashes would be taken back to Hidros and released at sea.

"So, Shadow," said the Godfather coldly with prying eyes staring up and down, "-let's head to a more private location," in a whiff, he turned and reached for the door. Fedora off, respect was paid as well as the exchange of a few words to those who grieved. The way he moved, spoke, and acted, was a telling sign of experience. It wasn't his first nor last funeral; each week, a fellow DG member would die. Funerals were as common as going to the store. Yet, today felt different, the way the eyebrows knotted together, the way the clean-shaven chin strained; there was anger hidden deep within. Anger waiting to pounce on the next target.

"Staxius, Shadow," he spoke under a tree not far off the property, "-I know I'm responsible for this tragedy," gone were the compose words, gone was the cool attitude – his true emotions came to light, ??-I ain't gonna say none about it. My fault, my shit to deal with," faced away, "-should 'av seen this coming. I'm a fool, good for nothin' fool," the accent grew overbearing, a side-effect of the fast-paced speech. "Listen to me," the trail of words stopped, "-I want ya to find who did this. Inside, sitting at the right of the boy's corpse is a man from Stanley's team. I doubt he has that much gut to send a pawn to assist the funeral he caused. It's fishy, I don't like it one bit."

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"It's true," added Courtney, "-during my encounter with their guards, none seemed to know what had happened. Ask as I might, nothing came from the slaughter."

"Don't sell yourself short yet," smiled Staxius, "-there's more here than I expected. I can say for certain that Godfather Stanley is involved, whether directly or indirectly, I know not yet."

"The dead ain't coming to life," heavy palms landed on the shoulder affectionately, "-take how much time ya need, I'm waiting," and off he went to meet the others present.

"Any clues to go off of?"

"I got my source, just need time. What about you, I got a message saying the return to Hidros?"

"Cake told you, did she. Guess it's not much of a surprise. Shadow is needed to handle a transaction off-shore, you know, the ones with millions on the line. She wants to have the best at the ready, Elliot is readied to move."

"The life of an arm's dealer isn't easy, I hope tis not hard."

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"Not hard?" she snickered, "-I'm always on the verge of being killed, always fighting, and always killing. In that aspect, this job is the worst shit one can ever do," her head tilted ominously, "-that's why I adore it. I'm thy sword, remember, I'll do what is must, my lord," here moved another figure down the green-yard traversing the few flower-plots with ease. Back to the tree, arms crossed – the breeze blew as the coffins were moved. Heavy on their shoulders, the number of people present grew apparent. Little from the first glance and an endless number of individuals in formal clothes walked. Gathered around, the procession left after a few words of prayer from the priest. Long, slow, and woeful, he followed at a much slower pace. Fingers tapped the steering wheel; the greyish sky was thunderous.

'The sweet scent of death,' came a whisper that tickled the ears. 'How's it going, Lord Death,' and again came the same voice in a more devilish tone.

"What do you want?"

"Tis not the way to speak to an old friend," materialized a translucent figure on the passenger seat.

"Please," replied Staxius, "-Creation, I do think jokes like are not becoming the all-mighty, at all."

"Whatever, suppose the god of death has no interest in humor," it took on the appearance of Cake.

"I do enjoy humor," he refuted, "-good humor, not the kinds that make one want to die of cringe of awkwardness. It does strain the mouth to give a fake grin."

"Calm down," said Creation shocked by the words, "-I only came to pay visit and homage to an elder-soul."

"Elder-soul?" he asked.

"Yes, Elder-soul, the head of the Lerado family is next in line to being chosen for reincarnation or ascension to divinity. Unlike you, if the soul is deemed worthy, he'll be reborn with knowledge and power of all."

"You're the one in charge of that process, right?"

"Half-right, I only but created it who judges the souls. All are independent, the world of the dead and divine isn't as glamorous as the humans make us be. For the most part, watching how the world evolves is the best entertainment, give or take a few millennia to see any action. Also, congratulation on taking the first step in the stairway. I had bets that said task would be accomplished in a decade, suppose Lord Death got away with it."

"On the subject of Lord Death, how is he doing?"

"Since you took the mantle, he's cheerfully enjoying the time off. The souls are being judged by Tharis and thou art doing a good job."

"There's nothing to applaud, Death for the most part is instant. The souls are taken away without my knowing – there are exceptions, let's not get into details. What of the dimension, how's Zeus and the other gods?"

"I don't really know; the Titans are trying to reawaken. Kronos's heir, the god slayer, is on yet another murder-spree. Tis under Zeus's line-of-authority, Death and Creation has no part in the politics of gods."

“Thou does know how repulsive that sounds; the politics of gods.”

“Yeah, it does leave a bitter taste in the mouth,” the procession reached the grave where rested a crematorium. “Suppose I should be off, see you around, God of Death.”

‘Quite a rare visit from a rare guest,’ the door opened to a mild-shower. The coffins were taken into a rather clean room where the bodies would be burnt. The use of purifying Fire-spirits was a must for the ritual to go in good-omen. Tis was the belief of which the priest followed.

Message received: Michelle.

A spur of relief came from inside out, ‘-the report is here,’ he thought whilst holding the phone. Stared upwards to see the people, he slipped to read what was sent.’

Concerning the investigation of Cimier’s activity relating to the Lerado incident, they are as his majesty suggested – Cimier is responsible. Not to go into much detail, I managed to scour around for a close enough reconstruction of the night. The scheme began far before thy arrival at Alphaia, as far as Cimier’s concerned, the leader of Phantom poses no threat. The rumors of Lerado’s efforts at dealing in the retail of the narcotics had the underworld shudder. Responsible for import only, they were the middle-man in most trade made between Cimier and the Dark-guild. Take out the middle man and the whole distribution is perturbed. Since Lerado is affiliated directly to Renaud, their profit would skyrocket if turned to resell. The leaders of Cimier were wary of such a move. All was all and good until the intervention of Jefferson’s. Totally unprovoked, the latter decided to enter the trade and have Lerado deal with them directly. Cimier saw it as a sly and dishonest move – the rest is history. These are what I can recall at this moment.

The massacre; it is indeed the work of Cimier. They dispatched their elite hitmen to carry out the elimination of the obstacle. It came as a surprise when I spotted lady Lerado, wife of the head of the family, passionately gazing upon the bachelor leader of the Jefferson’s. The conclusion drawn is an extramarital affair – I doubt the head of Lerado to be so oblivious. I’m sure the news reached his ears sooner or later. On a closing note, and this is purely my opinion, nothing factual, I highly suspect Cimier to be in a very close hidden relation with Godfather Stanley, the waited report ended.

Smokes of the dead rose high as the mild shower turned into heavy-rainfall. The sound amplified as the rain hit hard on the metal-sheet covering parts of the building.

‘Godfather Stanley is involved, and the wife fled to the other younger man’s side. It doesn’t bother in the least. I know who is responsible, yet, there’s no proof tying them together. A letter from an unknown spy, one from the Blood-King Faction, isn’t going to hold weight in the underworld. Here, either capture red-handed else have sufficient proof.’ Scouring the faces, he came upon one of a handsome lady, curly short hair, a rounded nose with a moderate risen nose-bridge. Luscious lips, pierced ears; she wore heavy-black, the lady in mourning, the wife and mother of those who died. ‘Isn’t that her?’ glared Staxius unknowingly, it caught the lady by surprise who all but sniffled to turn into another man’s arm. Conveniently enough, the man was from the entourage of the head of the Jefferson family. ‘If she’s going around selling herself short to the top of Jefferson, this matter falls into a rather tight situation. The emotions of the remainder of the family are of disgust, sadness, and anger, anger at the lady.” The bodies were left to be cremated slowly as the family member’s left. Renaud was soon to join Staxius’s company on the way out.

"Ay, ay, ay," he voiced loudly seeing not so pleasant vans, "-what is happening here?"

"Godfather Renaud," came the leader of the now stomping hitmen of Stanley's family, "-I didn't expect you to be here."

"If it ain't Charlie," said Renaud with a frown, "-the only reason you're sent out is to exterminate threats, did Stanley order an attack?"

"Observant," he paused with the face covered by a mask with a dark-blue one-piece jumpsuit, "-for even a child could figure that much out."

"Who's the target?"

"Isn't it obvious," he laughed and pointed at Shadow, "-the one who massacred the Jefferson's will have to answer to justice."

"What justice are you even talking about?" thundered Staxius, a step forward had the bystanders shudder. "If thou art going for an eye for an eye, then I suppose I hold a grudge."

"May I ask who you are?"

"My name isn't of importance, what is important is that you dared point fingers at Shadow and used a not so polite tone with Godfather Renaud. Dear me, I so hoped that basic manners be known to the lowest of imbeciles."

"Don't get so cocky," a raise of the hand had countless guns face him, "-where's all the bravado now?" he added after a second of silence.

"Bravado?" the face changed from distressed to blank, *Death Element: Hand of God,* without as much as blinking, gun muzzles were crushed with the slow agonizing sound of cracking. "I think you misunderstand," he laughed, "-bravado is fake." *Snap,* all weapons fell with a clang, "-now then, I think there's room to discuss," he smirked.

Chapter 380: Mallie Lerado

Senseless gazes went around; guns turned to naught but crushed trash. Charlie stood with the hand in the air, not a few seconds had gone before the gesture to aim was given. The clean shaved face stuck itself in a stupor, lowering one's arm felt awkward, the more seconds pass the farther the tension grew. Staxius stood beside Renaud and Courtney, one of which was far more impressed than the other.

"Room for discussion," added Charlie slowly, the hand lowered with the pace of a snail, "-what is there to discuss?" he asked keeping a cool face.

"First of all," spun to face the wife who abandoned her family, "-I'm sure the lady is hurt. Her cries have stained the shoulder of the man who hails from the Jefferson's. Not that any had the guts to speak; I would have let it be, that is," glaring back, "-only if thou didn't get cocky." Strongly stepped to the lady, the face turned to the man, young in age, tall, dark-skin, brownish-hair, hazel eyes, a well-rounded nose toppled by freckles.

"Not wanting to intrude, I've got a few matters to discuss," said with a smile, the man could but breathe thinking of what was to happen. Sneakily on the way to where he stood, Staxius pushed the man who stumbled.

"HEY, WHAT ARE YOU DOING?" yelled Charlie with a flame-filled stare.

'I've got my evidence,' thought Staxius.

"What's this all about?" asked Godfather Renaud to Courtney.

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"Just watch," she replied, "-watch as he thoroughly dismantles their confidence. I'm sort of hoping blood doesn't shed. Considering it's the Boss, can't do none about it."

'Focus, it's time to make use of the second boon. With the facts before me as is, I can see a vague line of thinking, plausible scenarios for the massacre of Lerado.'

[Divinity Second Boon: Arcane Library]

"Please, sir, don't harm," cried the widow named Mallie.

"Don't," said he who had given a shoulder to cry. The right hand to the head of Jefferson's, Yuri.

"What's with the wait?" said Charlie trying to move towards Yuri.

"Got it," he smiled, "-O' grieving family members of the Lerado," said to the crowd with fluid gestures, "-hear me, the word of he who has the truth of what transpired. Believe me or not, I have the facts and evidence of who caused such tragedy," a glimmer from subtle watering eyes grabbed the attention. They came closer to form a circle.

"Tis a thing of utmost woe, I'm ashamed to say for the very reason of this heartbreak is none other than lady Mallie," he pointed with authority. The tension had the swaying leaves froze; time stopped.

"How dare you!" lashed Yuri with the intent of punching,

"Kneel," returned Staxius coldly, the pressure from a single word forced the man onto the ground. "The truth shall be the decision of the crowd, for they're the judges of today's trial. Here are the facts. Lady Mallie and Yuri grew to be lovers after many passionate nights. Her youthful and playful nature with Yuri's handsome figure could not have been any more obvious. I'm sure many noticed said act of absurdity, I'll go as far as say she often snuck out at night, didn't she," he said to an unsuspecting man.

"Y-yeah, I SAW HER!" came a nervous reply.

"One thing led to another, talks of the Lerado becoming a reseller had the underground shudder. A secret alliance between Cimier and the Jefferson family was made and backed by Godfather Stanley. The proof is here, we've got a fellow comrade from Stanley's assassination team, here to silence and close ties. To the reason why such a thing played. Yuri used his charm to work into the good graces of the lonely lady. She wanted nothing than to be loved, thus, her craving led to today. Yet, I wish not to have her excused, one sworn to the Goddess of Marriage, Ingyn, must not shame her vow." The words felt as hard-hitting as a hammer onto a nail, the combination of tone, facial expression, body movement, the

way spoken had the crowd's emotion showed in form of invisible waves. Staxius moved as the conductor, carefully planning each word, each sentence, and each expression; it would eventually lead to something greater.

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"What then," said Yuri, "-what if our love broke the vows of marriage, are you not hypocritical to accuse Lady Mallie of extramarital affair when you, yourself, are sited in history as a man who has an entourage of beautiful ladies!"

"And beautiful they are," he chuckled, "-beautifully deadly. They are by my side for tis their duty. Would you shame a lady who surrounds herself with men, or would you shame a man who surrounds himself with ladies? The answer is yes, most would, that is if said man or woman is successful and subject to the unfound basis for jealousy. In my example, I do surround myself with ladies, ladies who have their own lovers. Business, and personal life must be separate. Tis the first thing one should understand, I suppose," side-glancing Mallie, "-she knew not the meaning of pity and love. Enough of ideology, the issue remains that her actions caused her family to be killed. Tis facts, tis the truth, and proof is in my word – witnesses of the incident have been killed. What say you, Lady Mallie, will you admit to having betrayed thy husband for the love of another!"

(No... that's not the truth,) she spoke, "-yes, that's true."

('Wait... no, what am I saying?') "I betrayed my husband, I betrayed the Lerado," her voice sunk into cries.

(I NEVER BETRAYED ANYONE!) "I was the one who tipped Cimier of our earlier departure. Yuri said to report to them directly, he promised to have me spared. He promised the events to never be tied to my name. We discussed matters of us living together, far, far away."

(What's happening?) her helpless eyes rested upon Staxius who nodded. "-IT WAS ME, I KILLED MY OWN TO BE LOVE," she screamed to a sob to then jump into Yuri's arms.

"HEY, WHAT ARE YOU SAYING?" he tried to push with no avail, her arms wrapped around his back, the scene spoke volumes.

"Charlie," said Staxius, "-you were sent by Godfather Stanley. It's obvious he wanted to hush the lady for her living would be detrimental. The example is there, look at her, she spilled everything after a few words. How pitiful," staring the crowd, "-what say you, judges, WHAT DO YOU WANT!"

"Revenge... Revenge... Revenge... Revenge," the cheer grew loud each time.

"Yuri, right-hand man of the Jefferson's, you dared to have a lonely lady fall for the warmness of love. Thou won her favor, and not only did you win her favor, but you also won her trust, her body, and her soul. Take responsibility or was it all an act for the Jefferson's. Art thou afraid of another family becoming stronger? I must say whatever happens today is final, the Lerado is finished. Charlie came to assassinate the lady disguised as a plot against Shadow. The real culprit isn't the lady, no, she was a mere toy for the wise and conniving. Godfather Renaud, what do thee wish?" The last hammer hit upon the nail, truth or not, the opinions around changed. With the vast array of words, the culprit flipped to being the victim, her heart-tearing cries paired with Yuri's refusal to comfort was sufficient.

"They schemed with another organization to get power. A spat on our code of honor," said angrily, "-Lerado family, I'm not going to stand and watch ya end. Hear me today, I give ya two choices, either disband or rise again. Mallie Lerado," he called, as the lady dirtied her dress by being pushed onto the ground. "Revenge or give up?"

"Revenge," she took the hand of he who accused her not long ago, "-I want them to pay for what they did," fierce and determined, she stood with dirt contrasting against the black dress.

"Here," said an innocent voice from above, "-special delivery from Phantom." Guns and bullets came to a hover in the hands of the Lerado.

"What will ya do?" asked Renaud. The henchman waited for all but one thing. Mallie raised her arms, the signal for them to aim.

"Yuri and Charlie, go to your bosses and say this," she signaled for them to shoot. "The Lerado ain't done just yet," bodies fell left, right, and center.

"You're going to regret this," the bullet-ridden car sped along the road. The sheer unfiltered intensity had her on the ground shaking.

"Sonny," said Renaud, "-you're the devil, aren't you?"

"Whatever do you mean?" the outburst of bullets had villagers on edge. The bodies were taken to the hospital where the doctors had them dispatched without proof. The Lerado family revived on the verge of being squandered. An amber given alcohol to flame and rise.

"Tell me, what happened earlier?" asked Renaud on the way to Marrowy. The sun came to set, a jet waited for his arrival.

"A lot occurred, care to elaborate?"

"Tell me everything, how did you know?"

"It was simple for the most part. Truth isn't facts, it's what people want to hear. I did just – first, I had to get the crowd on my side. Their hatred was directed to the lady, thus, I spoke of a story I read earlier this month. Yuri and Charlie didn't react because of a spell. They were under my control from the start, even when Yuri spoke, he could but watch from a window. The spell is very much dangerous since the host thinks that it's their own feelings and words. Once I had the crowd, I flipped the situation around and made her a lady in distress. In no way would this have worked under normal circumstances – with Lerado, their home, on the verge of being destroyed, any sliver of light in the abyss feels like the sun itself. I'm surprised thee understood the intent in the end."

"Reviving Lerado, it's a good sentiment," he said solemnly gazing towards the setting sun. "-I don't think they'll last having made enemies of Cimier, Stanley, and Jefferson."

"You forget," he smiled, "-the Haggard family is in Alpha. Sorry to say, I did this not to revive the Lerado but to have my family enter the underground scene without much hassle. Our reputation in Hidros is good enough for the locals. Here, I'm afraid we're nothing but pebbles. That's why I went through all the trouble."

"Sonny," returned Renaud, "-are you sure about this?"

"Yes, we'll make sure they know who the Haggards and Godfather Renaud are. I'm not leaving until those who disrespected you are punished. The promise stands, I will have revenge in thy stead, believe it."

"Conviction, talent, guts, sonny, I'm glad ya on my side. Do what ya need, I help when needed," soon to climb the vexing slope, a jet waited for take-off.

"Wake up, Sister."

"Are we there yet?"

"Go, the plane is getting readied to take-off. Protection of Renaud is in thy hands. Give Cake my compliments when you land."

"Should I tell them of the plan of the conquest?"

"Not now, Phantom will make its move soon enough."

"Alright."

Cigar in mouth and leaned against the car hood, he watched as the plane took off. 'There they go. Things are starting to get going. Guess I'll do the same as before – get in the underground scene and see what happens from there. Cimier is still an unknown – time solves all, I suppose."

Caller: Sultria VI.

"Hello?"

"Father, where have you been?"

"Had to attend a funeral, what's the matter?"

"Could you come to Melmark as soon as possible? I'm at the office, there are people here asking for thy name. Did you do something?"

"Let me guess," he puffed, "-it's the director of some company?"

"Yes, how did you know?"

"I saved the life of one yesterday, I think. I'll be there shortly, keep the conversation going."

"Easier said than done. Amber is speaking to them; I think the conversation is turning sour. Whatever you did, has been undone."

"Seriously..."