

## Death Magic 391

### Chapter 391: Emi Muko

Display cases made of glass and adorned with frames of gold went around symmetrically. The interior of the showroom was remodeled to be clear, aesthetically pleasing, and show the emphasis on watches. A counter stood at the back which led to a door reserved for workers; a break area.

Next came the lighting, not overly bright nor dim, the perfect balance. By the standards of which other shops and reselling establishment conformed too – the new Meldorino showroom was well beyond the high-standard. It screamed of rich and famous. A few empty frames were dotted around. Leaving the Gaso Group and taken over by Phantom, customers weren't known to the changes. Going public would break the degrading brand name; a new strategy had to be figured out.

"A very pleasing room," said Julius going back and forth.

"And here's the payment device," said Skokdrag giving a tour, "-the cases are empty, I made sure to have few compartments for clothing and accessories. The emphasis and design screams of clockwork."

"I noticed," said a satisfied Staxius, "-I like how the floor seems to have a certain feel of gears to it. I don't know how this was achieved; by changing the reflection, one can make out gears that seem to move."

"Good eye there, majesty," said he with a proud chest, "-it's a new type of floor; the name ain't decided just yet."

"What about your fee?"

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"Tough times, my liege," the face seemed hesitant as the stare darted around.

"Go on with it."

"350,000 Exa."

"Sure," touching the earlobe, "-transfer 350,000 Exa to Guild Leader Skokdrag's account." Lit with a darkish hue, "-confirmed," returned the AI.

"Ohh," grunted the Guild Leader, "-it's been deposited already, nice, nice."

"Well then, you'll be fine going to Marrowy with the other workers, right?" stopped midway, "-perish the thought," once again he spoke to éclair, "-have a bus be called to the current address. The destination will be Marrowy Village."

"Confirmed."

"Majesty, you didn't have to."

"Taking care of my fellow comrade is a responsibility of which I take utmost pride. Well then," holding out a hand, "-may thee have a good journey home."

“You too, sire, you too, may the gods shine upon thee.” A press of a button had the showroom closed automatically; the bus arrived at an astounding speed.

“What now, father?” asked Julius.

“Let’s head to the hotel first,” another press had the car started with doors opened.

“Beautiful,” commented the prince yet again. A month had passed since the start of construction. The dwarves did much in haste. Haru’s promise of items was delayed for Wyvern scale and leather sky-rocketed on the market. Either one had to slay the beast, pay adventurers, or buy it from the traders. One could but guess the cost involved with such goods.

The 8th of February displayed across a digital clock. From silent to noisy, Prince Julius took to watch television as the blinders opened to a clear-sky. The view of the penthouse was a thing to behold. The hotel, named Lekdo, stood up high in the entertainment district of Melmark. Far beyond the eye could see walked the capital, a city far from being explored. Day or night, nothing could compare to the beauty out the large windows – it especially gave onto Stellar Avenue with its posters and advertisement.

“Father,”

“What is it?”

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“When are you going to meet the Emperor?”

“Why this all of a sudden?”

“Don’t get mad, but the computer has been flashing blue from notifications.”

“Really?” sliding the balcony door behind, “-let’s see,” the screen’s reflection was seen on his eyes, a waterfall of pages. ‘I attended the meetings, what is this about?’

\*Dear Father-in-law, I know this is a selfish request of me. Could you get a hold of Luna? I’m being pressured by the AHA to have her join their organization. I know full-well of the story I recounted, yet, this is beyond what I can handle. They’re holding our family’s sister company as hostage; thee must know that being Emperor doesn’t assure thee a life of luxury.\*

‘Get a hold of Luna?’ thought he, ‘-they took the bait.’

“éclair, have you found the location of the Feline force?”

“Lady Emi is hiding in the Monfae building,” replied the virtual butler.

“Monfae building,” sat blankly, laughter crept from the speakers behind, ‘-wasn’t that the place where Dorino was supposedly renting office space?’

“Search up Monfae and their relation to Meldorino.”

“Which Monfae, the apartment complex, or the office building?”

“Office building.”

“Meldorino rented the office a few months ago for foreign affairs. Not much detail can be obtained, should I dig further?”

“No, what of the apartment complex?” \*brr\* its location was highlighted on the phone. ‘éclair is very helpful; work is going to be so much easier from now on.’

“Julius,” he called deeply.

“What is it father?” returned he holding a pillow.

“I’m stepping out for a bit, need something?”

“I’ll ask room service, come back soon, mother’s going to call.”

“I’ll try my best; call me if anything happens.”

“Yes, father, don’t worry,” preoccupied with the entertainment of the world, the mind was corrupted.

Not that far from where they lived, into the darker area of the district, a shady complex with not much attention nor guard details. Hidden by an abandoned construction sight stood the Monfae apartments. None would have ever guessed such a place existed for people naturally deviated from the unknown. Where one could say the curiosity of such a place would invite more attention, the reality was of the setting – dark, crude, and beyond inviting. An association to murder, drug deals, and more birthed by television. Parked under a shop with a broken window, a singular board wrote the name, Monfae. The security guard slept with his cap covering from the less than visible sun. The brighter the light, the darker the shadow, tis was the truth here. Graffiti, decals, uninviting stares from delinquents, gang members, ladies in short-skirts being manhandled. Meters off and one could see another working the corner performing sexual favors for money. Obviously, this part of the district was overlooked; well, one could say ignored for not getting involved. Cimier stood as the reason.

‘Impactful but not as impressive,’ thought he with the All-seeing eyes deactivating, the crimson hue faded. The prior descriptions were of the alleys, shut buildings, and general vicinity around the complex. In no way would one adventure those parts and not get mugged, robbed, or killed. The door opened brazenly with two individuals walking at a slow pace. Chest out, dark-glasses, tattooed necks, faces; a small glimpse into rumors of the elusive Cimier members. A pin, a tag, whatever one would call it, a piece of metal differing from person to person with three simple lines; the only recognizable part of those figures. Slow to admire the car from top to bottom, they left with hands in pockets.

‘I have a bad feeling,’ \*All-Seeing Eyes,\* jumping person to person inside the complex, ‘-oh no,’ \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

“Don’t you dare die on me,” said he quick to summon a pentagram with the symbol of death. Just as he could take life without effort, the other could be done though not as easily. The magic of revival, ancient and bound to mostly scroll-craft. Hands pressed, \*Mana Control: Waves,\* shone the very fabric of which used living beings, spirit lines. Unperturbed similar to a resting lake, \*Mana Control: Spiral,\* the calmness devolved into a whirlpool abled to sink the largest of ships. Darkish blue veins rekindle with pulses, the unconscious figure gazed unknowingly.

‘Emi Muko; you who was forced to take the blame and protrude thyself to the superiors, was this the best attempt at hiding they provided. My doubts are confirmed, the feline force really is but normal

citizens dragged into a game of publicity. I honestly don't pity you in the least,' he stood to a wooden window, '-you're lucky the killers didn't aim for vital spots. The foul stench of their produce is rampant, abused before death – the world is as a cruel place as I thought,' cut, a cigar lit to remove the odor. 'I guess those two were recruits to the organization. The work is sloppy, falling for the carnal desires is unprofessional.'

"W-where am I?" came the feminine soft voice.

"Want to have a guess?" said he watching as she stumbled to sit. Her denim vest was filled with bullet holes accompanying its fair share of blood. Her jeans were more shredded and seemed to have been put in a hurry. The buttons were untied, her hair messy, eyes were swollen from crying, a wreck of a pretty face.

"Monfae?" said she holding onto her bed to stand.

"Yeah," the attention turned to an outside bagarre<sup>1</sup>, 'senseless fights.'

"What happened to me?" the confused memory told more than wanted, "-no... not again," her fuzzy memory turned to reality, "-it c-can't b-be," flared upwards with the look of a starved animal, "-KILL ME, I WANT TO DIE!"

"Sure," he pointed the window, "-go ahead and jump. Try to land on thy neck, heck, let's play a game, let's see if thee can die from a leap."

Shocked, she pushed with all her might to do as was told. A meager sprint had her trip and land head first on the window. Blood flowed down the nose to which she laid against the wall hopelessly and cried. "How pathetic am I, I can't even jump off the fucking window."

"Lady in distress," he chuckled, "-come on, stand up."

"W-why," said she holding his hand.

"Look down at the alley," he pointed forth, "-do you see? A lady selling herself on a garbage-can no less. Do you know how much courage she must have to be able to do such a thing to herself? In no way will she find a lover, her situation may be well worse than a video being leaked online. Emi Muko, in this vast world, do you think you have the right to try and kill yourself? There are people wishing to have what you do. The compromises of living, the hardships are common, a life without set-back is no life. I won't be arrogant to say I know how thee feels – I won't stop, go die, go die after I resurrected thee. There's rarely change to have do-overs in life, think, calm down and think, were you not killed a few moments ago? Besides, isn't it known that the one who saves thy life is entitled to it, not thee."

"What then?" she fell to her knees, "-what then, what can I do? I was used and disposed of. They said I'd be fine hiding out here, my sister said they would come for me, I did what I was told, I shot their videos, I sold myself, my dignity, my virtue, everything, I sold it all for free, for the chance to have my sisters' live a better life, isn't that the job of the eldest?"

"Yes, it's the responsibility of the eldest, I won't question motive nor what drove you to such length, I need but an answer."

"What..." her sobs calmed.

“Do you want revenge?”

“Against who?”

“Against the whole world, those who did you wrong, those who used and abandoned you.”

“My sisters?”

“No, I mean the root of all your sufferance; the AHA.”

\*Heh,\* breathing a laugh, “-s-sorry, b-but what can a mere commoner do?”

“I figured as much,” he smiled, “-you don’t know who I am, do you?”

“...” her smile turned to terror, “-man, you’re such a dumbass for forgetting the wallet in this place.”

“AY, who the fuck are you?” the door opened with the killers from earlier.

“MAN DON’T ASK, JUST SHOOT EM,” \*bang, bang, bang,\* bullets met their target, \*cough.\*

“W-why...” her face turned to absolute horror, “-WHY DIDN’T YOU MOVE,” her arms wrapped tightly around he who was shot, “-why... I should have died, w-why y-you.”

“My a-answer,” said he slowly on the verge of death, “-t-tell me.”

“YES, I WANT REVENGE,” she cried with the thugs approaching.

“Didn’t we kill you earlier?”

“How the hell are you alive, I’m sure we had our fun,” the pistol raised.

“I WANT THEM ALL TO SUFFER, WHY DID IT HAVE TO BE ME?”

Chapter 392: Old Grudge

“Then we good.”

“Wait...” the temperature dropped; Emi’s face shriveled.

“Ay bro, come on, shoot the man!” the pistol jammed.

“You tried,” said he who got shot, “-I got my suit dirtied for naught.”

“Yo, yo, SHOOT HIM,” screamed the thug in fear as the dead man stood with bullet wounds.

\*Death Element: Hand of God, Heart Break,\* the palm clenched followed by moans of pain. To their knees and on the floor, no blood, nothing, the gunmen died a painless death as he squashed their hearts.

“W-what h-happened,” asked she with a sweaty snot-filled face.

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“About the question earlier, what a commoner can do,” he held out a hand, “-you were mistaken,” she reached and grabbed, “-I’m not a commoner. Do forgive my lack of courtesy, I’m Staxius Haggard, King of Arda, the one who rightly owns thy life.”

“N-no, w-what about being d-dead... t-the bullets, I s-s-saw them,” petrified to the point of nausea, he grinned to which her hand slipped as she hurled onto an unsuspecting plant-pot. Dirt turned to what she ate prior, a mixture of green and yellow. Not the greatest display of one’s appearance, a repulsing sight – the pungent smell all but grew worse.

“Done?” he asked examining the bodies.

“D-do I h-have a say,” said she wiping her mouth; despite living, her face was of a ghastly pale color. No will behind her eyes, the lips seemed to be in disaccord as to smile or frown.

“Yes, you do. I believe in second chances, besides, what I want is to have thy wish come true. You want revenge, and tis what thy’ll get.”

“How...” her messed clothes and semi-nude body with hair textured as if seaweeds, “-I’ll be forever remembered as she who sold herself. The video is all over the Arcanum. It’s not easy, there are probably a thousand copies of it made by now.”

“Calm down would you.” Touching the earlobe, “-éclair; have the video be deleted from existence, I don’t care the method, use every means possible, have it wiped.”

“Orders confirmed,” he replied, “-approximated time of completion, two hours.”

“Emi,” off the door frame to stand and peer at her slumped posture, “-is staying in self-pity that fun? Look at it this way, you’re at rock bottom, there’s no further one can fall.”

“A-are you s-sure?”

“Emi,” tired of the elongated cheerful speeches, “-I’m leaving, enough is enough, you’re a grown adult. Act like it,” pointing to the bodies, “-don’t forget what happened earlier.”

“Rising unscathed from being shot,” said she, “-in no way will I forget.”

“Good, there’s running water, go have a shower and wear whatever clothes is there, I’m waiting in the car,” spoken in the gentlest way possible, her mind perceived it as, “-go shower, I don’t want your stench ruining my car.”

‘King of Arda he said,’ the shower ran cold, her head rested against the dirtied tiled wall, ‘-why,’ tears mixed with the water, she cried subtly. The fresh bodies were soon devoured by a famished Adete.

Emi never took a step outside the room, not ever since the day her name went viral. Depression took a firm stance in her state of mind. The abuse from guards soon became the norm. Morning was yogurt, lunch was fast-food cooked in not the most sanitary way, lastly, dinner, soup and bread depending on the menu. The scarred door opened to a troubled hallway; the staircase seemed as if the tunnel to hell.

“I can’t,” she mumbled holding tight on what little clothes she wore.

“I knew it.”

“What are you doing here?”

“Waiting, what did you expect,” said Staxius leaned against the wall, “-my suit’s ruined by blood and the mossy wallpaper. Come on,” he sprawled forth with confidence. The aura had her fear dissolve into a sense of assurance.

“Don’t fall in love,” said he taking the first step, “-I’m a married man.”

“Please don’t joke around that way,” the uneasiness in voicing and articulating her sentence was lesser present. Constantly changing the atmosphere from serious to casual, then playful, the King dealt with her insecurities one after the other. It wasn’t full-proof, her scarred mind, broken heart, and defiled body would take more time to heal. What he gave was a helping hand, a pull to have her stand on her feet.

“Are we walking?”

“No,” he laughed, “-bring the car,” the menacing EDO-4 came to a slow halt.

“It’s empty,” said she pointing the obvious.

“Great observation,” came a sarcastic remark. The beast of a machine drove forth as he helped her sit inside.

‘That was lucky, anymore late and she’d have been lost as an essential pawn. The AHA wants Luna to join their organization, and I need publicity for Meldorino. The scheme is going along the plan, I need a single factor, a single person I had a falling out with.’

“It’s Aceline,” commented Emi admiring a billboard, “-I wanted to be a model.”

“A model, why not turn to nudism, I’m sure there are places for one to pose naked for the pleasures of art.”

“...” no response.

‘This car is beautiful,’ thought Emi, ‘-I don’t want to spoil the seat. My hair’s wet, damn it, won’t that stain...’

“Don’t worry about it.”

“What do you mean?” (Did he read my mind?)

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“I saw the intent, don’t worry about dirtying the car. It’s fine, I’ll have it cleaned; I mean, the stench is pungent enough.”

“S-sorry.” (What is wrong with him. The king of Arda, kind, sarcastic, he’s a big show-off. How are my sisters doing?) her face melancholically watched as the sky was hidden by tall buildings.

“Lekdo...”

“You know of the hotel then?” he asked.

“Who doesn’t!”

“The attitude’s clearly better.”

“Aren’t you satisfied that I’m trying to take the words seriously?”

“Suit yourself,” spiteful in a kind way, they stopped at a red-carpeted entrance.

“Sire,” stood a valet with head bowed. The latter’s face turned in awe for the car behind drove itself to the parking lot.

“This is embarrassing.”

“I know,” he smiled, “-walking barefooted into an establishment as this must be harsh.”

“Are you truly a king?” said she with water dripping down her back. The looks of discomfort and shame stabbed her as cold knives, the hotel staff glared even colder.

“Majesty,” came the manager, “-I was notified that a beggar came to our doorstep. Give me a moment, I shall call security and have it removed.”

‘Are they talking about me?’ her eyes flared, ‘-it’s me... isn’t it...’

“There isn’t a need to worry,” said the king reassuringly, “-the beggar as thee so rudely described is a friend of mine. Given her state, I not fault you for thinking she a beast or worse, a criminal.

Nevertheless, the specimen behind is a dear friend of mine,” moved closer. [2000 Exa has been transferred to Mr. Martin’s Account.] “Keep this between you and me, alright?”

“As you desire, majesty,” he bowed gracefully, money could sway anyone’s favor. People always wished for more, tis human nature. The hunger to acquire, to possess, and ultimately, to show-off and be powerful.

“éclair, order clothes from the renowned brands around the capital. I want the size to match Emi Muko’s body.”

“Orders confirmed.”

“Are you going to stand there gawking?” asked Staxius.

“S-sorry,” said she with a shamed face. The guests made it painfully obvious of her not belonging. There were even kids who sprawled forth but stopped around the one-meter mark, the parents were quick to order them not to approach strange beings.

“Hello.”

“S-sorry for being alive,” a subconscious mumble came after he snapped.

“You’re excused,” taken by the arm, he forced her inside.

The television played loudly. A step inside showed Xula’s face on the big screen, “-father, you’re here,” said Julius smiling, “-mother called, come, say hi.”

“Majesty,” he stepped into where she could see, “-my queen, the green clothes befit thy hair.”



“Always the charmer.”

“What a god-awful smell, father, did you accidentally step in excrement?”

“No, of course not,” he pulled Emi into the limelight, “-it’s this thing here.”

“Staxius...” came a rather stern voice, “-why, is that another woman?” Frozen to the pressure of the family, Emi’s neck lost the strength to hold her head.

“Please, don’t be angry,” he laughed, “-this here is Emi Muko, a potential model for Meldorino. Surely, my queen, you must have heard of it from Serene.”

“I did, why is the model in such an unbecoming state, she looks as if a banshee.”

“We came upon a few problems along the way,” an elbow forced her to look up, “-say hello to the queen of Arda.”

“I apologize,” she bowed, “-I’m Emi Muko, King Staxius was kind enough to save me from the claws of savages.”

“Honestly,” her sternness remained, “-My king, please don’t tease young ladies. It’s uncalled for.”

“I’d never do such a thing, my queen, trust me for I’m but a kind, gentle person.”

“Sure father,” chuckled Julius, “-kind in a way to end one’s life without suffering.”

“Shut it,” he refuted.

“As amiable a pair, alright, Julius, I’ll take my leave, be sure to eat well and don’t stay up late.”

“Please mother, I’m old enough.”

“Sure,” the screen turned black.

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“Father...”

“I’ll explain in a second. Guide her to the shower; her clothes should be on the way.”

‘Aceline...’ he soon sat on an orange stool against the kitchen counter.

“I apologize for my father’s behavior,” said Julius in a gentlemanly fashion.

“No, not at all,” her reply came after a few long seconds, “-his attitude is refreshing.”

“Well, enjoy the shower I suppose.”

‘How am I going to get a hold of her. Since the war, we never spoke. Maybe Queen Gallienne, or even Scott. Why am I even scared to call her...’ soon the reason came to mind, ‘-she hates war more than everything. I’m sure Gallienne must have told her. The Argashield Federation is the embodiment of what she hates and wants to crush. Waiting isn’t going to do much.’

“Father, where are you going?”

"To the roof, I need fresh air."

Below came multiple bags containing garments. The constant stream of back and forth had Julius in a foul mood.

\*Calling Queen Gallienne,\*

'No response, she's busy, why did I think calling her would solve the problem.'

\*Call from Queen Gallienne,\* it rang a few minutes later.

"Hello, King Staxius?"

"Hello, Queen Gallienne, it's been a long time."

"Yes indeed, may I ask to why thy called?"

"I need a favor."

"What kind?"

"Can I have Aceline's contact information?"

"Oh..." an awkward silence settled.

"Hello, are you there?"

"Yes, yes," she said with a sigh, "-we haven't been on good terms. The whole war thing."

"Figured as much, what of the manager?"

"You mean Scott?"

"Yeah."

"I'll have it forwarded, is there anything else you need?"

"No, not really, thanks for the help, majesty."

"No worries, after all, the Argashield Federation is a big family; we vowed to help one another out."

"Indeed, we did."

"What's all this?" asked Emi stepping into a bag filled living room.

"Don't ask," \*ding,\* another bell and more clothes came.

"No, no, you don't understand," she said held onto a package, "-these are from luxury brands, their clothes go for in the thousands of Exa."

"Should I care?" said he angered, "-what I want is rest, can't a man watch a show in peace?"

The gust blew hard, a shield conjured to stand like a wall. Scott's contact information rested on the phone. "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"Hello, this is Lady Aceline's manager, how may I help?"

“Hello, I’m calling to ask if Lady Aceline would like to model for a company.”

“I’m sorry, but the lady isn’t willing to model for any particular company, she wants to rest. Please, give me your name and company brand, I’ll be sure to have thee on a waiting list.”

“Sure, Staxius Haggard from Phantom. The brand she’ll be modeling for is Meldorino.”

“Majesty, is that you?”

“I’m shocked thee didn’t recognize mine voice.”

“What do you mean didn’t recognized the voice, it’s changed. The monotonous recital of the word wasn’t there.”

“Very funny. I’m serious about the offer; try speaking to her will you?”

“Listen, we’re friends but I don’t promise anything. She’s mad ever since the war.”

“Just try, I’ll be waiting.”

Chapter 393: A gift

“For whom are the clothes, father?”

“For Emi, of course,” said he closing the door behind, “-she’ll be modeling for us, didn’t I specify it earlier?”

“Are you sure?” she interrupted, “-I mean, I don’t want to be any more hassle than is due.”

“Don’t worry,” said he pointing at the door, “-I’ve asked to have another room sorted. Go on, the staff should be outside,” as he said so came the workers.

“What should we do, majesty?” asked an army of maids.

“Take her and those clothes to the new room.”

“As you wish,” they said moving orderly and efficiently as ants. The cumbersome living room turned empty with her gone. Julius sat dangling his feet, “-father.”

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“Yeah?”

“About Meldorino, will her becoming our model that good a move?”

“Honestly,” he sighed, “-I don’t know if she’ll do – nevertheless, one must play with what he has been dealt.”

“I see...” the television added to the would-be silent background.

“Creation.”

“I’m thy son, say mine name,” a shake of the head showed the discontent.

“Would you do what I ask you to do, whatever it may so happen to be?”

“Why such a serious tone,” said the young prince, “-if it’s in my power, then yes, there’s no ulterior motive behind my actions. I’m truly glad to have been given a life in the real world.”

“Remember when I said Gods didn’t have rules for we are the rulers, the same goes for morals.”

“Are you referring to me using my power?”

“Yes.”

“No, I don’t mind, there’s no point beating about the bush, if there’s something I can make, I’ll do so.”

“What of a vessel for the soul of divine beings.” A heavy silence thumped upon the room; the words were simple yet held such meaning. The Prince’s sitting posture broke into a stutter. A few breaths later had him relax all the while Staxius watched.

“It’s possible if I know how it’s made, I don’t mind doing so.”

“Good,” the pressure lifted, “-good to know.”

“Why ask such a question?”

“To see where you stood.”

“I’ve said it before, father, I don’t have ulterior motives,” the hand hit against the couch defiantly.

“I know, was just checking. Can’t blame a man for having his worries.”

“I suppose,” thus ended the conversation between father and son.

Meanwhile, away from Melmark and inside Dostein; a little hideaway village stood on the coast. A village hosting multiple villas with even richer inhabitants. The village, or so-referred to on the map, was big and secretive. A place somewhat restricted for people never ventured close. Why look for trouble when the beach stood a few meters away, the beautifully hot sand, sparkling lagoon splitting into differing colors, and the all-mighty sun.

“Lady Aceline,” came a voice holding a platter and a phone.

“Yes?” replied the lady reclined on a lounge chair.

“I had an offer of modeling,” said the man wearing glasses.

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“Didn’t I ask you to decline all the offers?” said she with a sigh, her sunglasses stopped the reflected rays of the pool. Over yonder erected a white-fence that gave onto a good view of the bridge.

“I know, but, I think you might be interested.”

“Scott, please,” she turned gently with her light-colored two-piece swim-suit, “-I told you, I’m not interested in modeling, not now...”

“Why not,” he argued, “-I’m sure this company might change the refusal.”

“Go,” her glasses gave way for a stern glare that had the manager gulped.

"Meldorino," said he.

"From the Gaso Group, even worse, no," she reclined yet again to take a sip off a drink.

"No, Meldorino isn't a part of the Gaso Group."

"What do you mean?" asked she with the sunglasses resting on the tip of her nose.

"The company was bought out by another."

"Go on with it, if they were bought out, doesn't it discredit the brand entirely."

"I know why you'd think that. Actually, the company presiding over Meldorino is Phantom."

"Phantom," she laughed, "-are you serious?" the voice turned sharp, "-the arms trading company?" her eyes bulked with a thousand flares of ire. Scott could but buckle at the pressure. "-Out with it!"

"Yeah, the company owned by his majesty."

"..." the idyllic scene ruptured by a single glass breaking. Her emotions ran wild to which she backhand slapped her glass. The orangish liquid spewed all over, "-never," said she, "-never!"

'I'm not going to forgive them. Not after they ignored my attempts to bring peace to our kingdom. Hidros is my home too, I never wanted to leave. Still, look at me, just look at me, staying far as if a convict. There's nothing more I want than to go home and relax on the Plaustan beach. Argashield Federation my ass, they're the worse; focusing on war instead of promoting peace, I've had enough.'

"Should I tell him no?" interjected Scott amidst her soliloquy.

"Yes, tell him to f off..."

"O-" said the manager walking away.

"Wait," she dashed to snatch the phone, "-let me speak to him. I want to have the pleasures of saying screw him."

\*Calling...\*

"Hello," said she first.

"Hello, Scott, is that you, yeah, sorry about this, but I've another model to represent Meldorino. Aceline and I aren't on good terms, it's not going to work out either way. The Lady is a big celebrity now, she doesn't have time for old-friends, never mind me, she flat-out ignored Queen Gallienne whilst we fought to save the continent. I guess idealist superstars don't see the reality of things, they're station is way over the common folks. It's a miracle Hidros breathes, I suppose people don't realize what we did. In any case, thanks for the help, Scott, let's have a drink sometime," the call ended.

"THE NERVE ON THAT MAN," \*ploup.\*

"There wasn't a need to throw the phone into the pool," said he with spite.

"Whatever, I'm going to head to the beach; goodbye," the door slammed on her way in.

'As conniving as ever. Good job getting her riled up, Majesty. I guess I have to send a message of the plan going into play.'

"Why are you grinning, father?"

"Nothing much," a text had the screen flash, "-just a side-job."

Nighttime soon wrapped itself around Alpha. Julius went to bed early. Alone, Staxius sat in the study and watched as tiny flashes of light went along the motorway. A black-piano rested facing the landscape; amber lighting gave a hint of inspiration. Key by key, music heard from many o' places streamed from out the heart and into reality. Slow, soothing, and woeful, it played a refuge for the fallen.

"Master, analysis has been completed," said éclair.

The information came from all over the place, éclair worked without a moment's rest, not that a spirit needed one. Details on the mystery revolving around Asuna's death came far clearer than what was told by the Emperor. In addition to the name of who was responsible, Staxius held the bigger picture, the reason why Asuna was victimized. The involvement of God's ale and angel's dust wasn't a mere addiction tool, no, far from it, the real reason, Cimier. The Patek dynasty, the shadow funding the AHA. Second, in the ranking of most successful conglomerates in Alpha, their power wasn't anything to laugh at. Undisclosed and hidden, the dynasty was as shrewd and conniving as the underworld. Deep links to Cimier, they ruled Subrea from where one couldn't see.

'Lord Mishline Guiz Patek, quite an interesting person from what the picture shows. Going against that diversified family will be hard, they've been around since the founding of the Empire. If these are the players in this game, I might need to stand down for a bit. Pulling too much attention will only serve to bring ruin. I need something to capture the attention of the audience. Luna's ghost stories have reached most of Alpha's lips. Patek's are responsible, they'll pay one way or the other.'

Soon came morning with a new purpose. Emperor Sultria pleaded for Staxius to visit the estate. The journey by car grew tiresome and time-consuming. In no way did he dislike the pleasures of driving, it was but the sense of urgency. To remedy such trouble, Cake kindly had his helicopter, the U93-1, flown over. A helipad secluded from the public rested close to the hotel. The manager could but agree to his demand – the king made sure that he was a priority.

"Majesty,"

"Look who's awake, did you sleep well?" they met in the lobby.

"No," returned Emi, "-look at my face, does it look like it?"

"I guess not. Well, not my problem."

"Father, can you be a little more tactful?"

"Prince Julius, do you wish to accompany her to the therapist?"

"Can I?"

"Obviously, thee chooses, my son, thee chooses."

"Then I shall kindly accept the offer," extending out an arm, "-Lady Muko, may I have the honor?"

"W-with p-please," said she stuttering, a prince, a handsome one had offered to be her escort.

"Julius, she's under thy care, consider it the first order I give. I want her to be ready to become a model, do what is needed, keep the cost below 10,000 Exa."

"That little?" he inquired with a shrug.

"Not to be smug, I'm the one with money, thou art a prince by name and blood only. Go out, do what is necessary, 10,000 Exa is plenty. Figure it out, thee bears the name Haggard."

"Understood, sir," they separated at the main-entrance.

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"Good morning, boss," said a team in Sotepios' uniform.

'I told her to not waste manpower,' he breathed a chuckle, "-good morning, is everything ready?"

"Yes sir," the door closed with the bird taking to the skies.

At the estate, the Sultria's old-tome of which none had opened since the death of the Fifth emperor rumbled. The maids were alarmed and guards were called. Princess Loftha remained at their side in case. A whirlwind of dark mana took to the skies. Sun to cloudy, even the weather was at its mercy.

"Father-in-law," came a troubled voice.

"Why do you look so distressed,?? asked Staxius reassuring the emperor.

"It's not a matter of distress, just look, that's the reason I called you. There's no way we can deal with that, it's magic."

"Oh, here I thought you wanted me to lead some clueless noble along."

"No, no, please, now isn't time for jest, our family tomb is in jeopardy."

"So much for the calm emperor my daughter speaks of," soon to stare the tunnel, a thump had him shaken. 'What was that?' tame to the naked eye but a calamity to sense aura. What he saw wasn't merely mana – dark, light, divine, pure, and possibly catastrophic. 'Why's the concentration so high?'

"What's the status?" he approached the princess.

"Don't know," said the emotionless voice, "-I've waited for something interesting to happen."

"Quite the conundrum," taking a step, an invisible barrier blocked further movement.

'Now this is interesting,' knocking as if be a door, the latter resonated. 'Resurrection? No, I know this spell, transmigration of the soul. Only a few certain gods have the ability to transfer souls from dimension to dimension, who in the world is...?'

\*Woosh,\* clocked in darkness, a figure materialized with crows flying around,"-god of death."

"God of Darkness, Lixbin."

"I wish I could stay to chat, listen, things have gotten a bit out of control in the godly realm. It doesn't concern thee yet. One of my trusted companions and aid was killed in the incident. I don't want her to die in vain, her soul is ready to be granted the boon of divinity. I know all about you, Creation's Heir, Gophy, and Intherna. Take it as thee wants, I'm counting on thee. Good luck," he vanished with the sun shining brighter.

"Did you fix it, father?"

"No," the words held heavier an impact. 'A gift, a companion, the godly realm. God Lixbin came to give a personal visit – known for being shady; there's a catch to this, surely.' \*Creek,\* moved the gate with a faint thump of a godly soul.

\*I curse thee, soul, to be bound to mine; Box of Soul – Soulfeld.\*

#### Chapter 394: Duty

Parted at the entrance, Julius headed further into the capital. No cars, no escort, nothing, him and Emi walked. The sheer display of how people loved their idols and stars reflected on the outfits; some bore s, other the faces, wristbands to shoes, none was left untouched. Amidst said crowd of enthusiasts of which were mainly teenagers, Prince Julius walked at a slow, comforting pace. The lady could but cower behind him in fear, her traumatic past haunted ever so close. Some billboards or posters on shop windows often displayed the Feline Force stood before a captured villain with the caption, '-leave the trash to us.' A single gaze had him brush aside the idiotic sentence.

"Why are you so far away?" asked he with a sudden stop.

"Sorry," she bumped into him without realizing, the mind spaced out thinking of her sisters, "-aren't you ashamed to be walking by my side?"

"Why would that be so?" the head tilted to show the attentive mind.

"B-because, y-your walking with me, me out of all people, me..." the face watched all but his.

"Shouldn't be a problem,"

"Wait, no, we can't," she took a step back for the prince offered his arm.

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"Art thou so bold as to reject the advances from a prince?"

"I-I'm sorry," arms locked, they continued along the pavement. One after the other, the crowd grew denser and thus arrived at one of the more popular shopping malls. Big with each floor taking one-hour at most to explore, her face shriveled in paranoia.

'What if they're watching me, what if the AHA is coming to kill me,' a ghastly paleness engulfed her face.

"Snap out of it," he tugged, "-I'm here, don't worry. I'm the son of a hero of the war, if push comes to shove, I'll fight our way out. Lady Emi, thy art in my care – hard a task as it may be, leave the troubles and focus on me."



“S-sorry...” they resumed at a snail’s pace. Soft and gentle climbed the escalators to the upper floors. A shop stood hidden amidst a plethora of others. Obnoxious, the advertisement of the rest put it to shame, a quiet little salon for any race and gender.

“Welcome,” said a man stuck to his phone.

“Hello,”

“How can I help you today,” quick to set away from the device, he looked up to be left breathless.

“Good afternoon, Alex, I guess it was true, thy family did run a salon in Alpha.”

“J-J-Julius?”

“The one and only,” said the prince with a cheeky thumbs-up.

“I KNEW IT,” he vaulted over the counter for a tight embrace, “-it feels like ages!”

“I know,” replied the prince charmingly, “-I’m so glad you’re here.”

“After we graduated, the others were pretty hyped to continue studies with a prince, but then the news came.”

“Yeah, I apologize,” a sense of guilt had the cheery tone lowered.

“Don’t be, we understand the circumstances,” breathing deep, “-what can I do for you?”

“I have someone for you,” stepping aside, the lady came forth.

“I’m Emi Muko, nice to meet you.”

“Nice to meet you too,” replied the peculiarly dressed man. Dark skin complexion, green eyes, a pierced nose with curly hair. The outfit was as seen in fashion magazines.

“I’m Alex Ford,” he kissed her hands gently.

“Forgive my asking, but are you both friends?”

“Friends?” exchanging glances, “-obviously,” they slid to stick with one another. “We’re the best of friends.”

“G-great...” replied she unknown to how to respond.

“Still awkward,” coughed the prince as he walked away from the formation.

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“I admit, well, what can I do for you?” said he returned to the counter.

“I want you to make her into a model.”

“Seriously,” an eyebrow raised for the request was unique, “-her outfit needs reworking, she’s got the height, skin and face structure. A bit of rework and I can make her into a superstar, why, what’s the need for such a thing?”

"It's for my dad," explained the prince, "-you know, king of Arda and that stuff."

"Polygamy?" asked Alex taking a better look at Emi.

"God forbid," laughter followed, "-I dare father to even try and look at another woman with a foul intent, mother will have him scolded."

"Sounds harsh, here I thought the king being the almighty ruler of the battlefield, or so what the papers said."

"The Argashield Federation propaganda, I can't believe we survived and studied during the war, it feels like yesterday," reminisced Julius.

"I know, the memories of when an army officer came to Claireville Academy, I was sure our class would have been drafted, remember when Alan broke into tears?"

"How can I forget; the tradition was to have students drafted in case the war grew harsh. I personally wanted to get involved but the Federation had other ideas. They said that students under twenty would not be allowed on the battlefield; strong demand from the king of Arda."

"I suppose he didn't want other kids to be at risk of growing up on a battlefield."

"We won the war though," laughed the Prince.

"That we did, Professor Sophie sure was excited about the outcome, rambling on about the king being her little brother or something."

"It's sort of true; I never told anyone, but Lady Sophie is somewhat of an Aunt to me. She does come by the castle once in a while – ok no, forget that, by once in a while I mean once a year."

"Look at you," said Alex in a smug manner.

"So, what can you do about her?"

"Bring her every day, I'll start her treatment."

"Good, then we'll be off," they soon exited to go inside the next room, an office at first glance.

"Good afternoon, how can I help?" asked a lady wearing a white coat.

"I have an appointment for Emi Muko," said the prince.

"Yes, the doctor's waiting, please, lady, follow me," to which she complied. The door soon shut with the words, \*Therapist,\* on a frame. Muffled weeping came from under the door, the assistant sat as if it was normal.

"I'm back," said he returned a few hours later.

"Welcome back, Julius," said the king with a magical circle drawn in the living room.

"What are you up to?" the door locked with a malefic presence. Staxius returned with the issue of the crypt solved.

"Getting ready to have a divine soul transmuted into a new vessel."

"I don't see the vessel," commented the prince.

"Fate works in strange ways."

"Oh... I understand now," memories of the prior conversation about using the power of Creation, "-fine, I shall do so, is there a reference I can use?"

"Here," a miniature version of the puppet stood on the floor, "-make it, I'll have the other procedures readied.

"Should I cast a barrier?"

"No, I've taken care of it already; sit back and watch," a dark-sphere was quick to contain the penthouse, invisible to the naked eye, none knew of what was to happen.

\*Summon forth: Box of Alche,\*

\*Summon forth: Box of Soul,\* they materialize to hover on his right and left side.

'Let's begin,' he thought.

\*Death Element: Unleash Aura.\*

\*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 five gates activated, the triangle lit vividly with his appearance changing.

\*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 pressure increased creating a breeze.

\*Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power: Nevermore – Annihilation Gate.\* A loud thump echoed round the room, three gates unlocked, triggering more would create an unbalance in the happenings of the continent.

\*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.\*

"I hear thy plea, child," the wings wrapped itself on the forehead, the goddess answered his request with love.

"Now, create the vessel."

"On it," said the prince conjuring an infinity symbol. It spun fast creating a circle from which came the puppet-body fit for a divine soul. Erupting with power, the hard task began with Staxius taking to sculpt the inner-workings for an empty vessel. \*Blood Arts: Crimson Threads,\* a conductor leading an army of needles, the process continued till late at night.

'I'm done,' \*Soul bound to forever be under my service, come forth for thy master demands it.\* palm against the vessel, \*Soul Transmigration,\* a blinding flash lit the penthouse to break into the night sky. One could have mistaken it for an explosion.

\*Shackle mine strength: Nevermore – Full Restraint.\* the heavy load of the always evolving element showed itself in the heaviest headache. The forehead seemed to pulse with each heartbeat, a feeling of nausea had him squinting, yet, to keep up the appearance, the king appeared unbothered.

“Did it work?”

“Give it a moment, the soul needs to settle and awaken.”

Bland and uninteresting, the puppet soon changed, the pigmentation of the skin complexion, the facial features, it all transformed to fit the host.

“What is this p-place, where am I?” light-brown eyes stared as hungrily as a vulture to he who stood before her. A diadem held her medium black-hair from hiding the well-built face. A handsome woman by whatever angle one could watch.

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“What is thy dominion?” inquired she in authority. No response came from he who stood, the man was well over her height. Her face, her eyes mainly, was reminiscent of a cat.

“Answer me, damned insolent fool,” quick on her step, her hand wound to slap.

“How dare thee,” \*snap,\* her hand stopped shy of the cheek, “-how dare thee try and hit he who owns thee,” said Staxius in the cruelest way possible.

“Owns me?” she tried to fight to no avail, the body was stuck in place. “Don’t you know who I am?”

“No, matter of fact I don’t,” came a less than pleased voice, “-one of the rare teachings from my mother said to never hit a woman,” \*Smack,\* she crashed against the barrier from a single flick, “-I’m sorry to say, it only applies to humans, not otherworldly beings.

“DON’T YOU DARE DISRESPECT ME,”

“Silence,” a simple gesture had a needle stick her tongue to her pallet, whimpers of excruciating pain ensued, “-how dare thee,” \*smack,\* he kicked, “-who are you to try an order me around.”

\*CLAP,\* the injuries healed, her consciousness returned, “-w-w-who are you?”

“Ladies first,” he gave a helping hand.

“No need,” she discarded the offer, “-I’m Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator, Queen of Eduipt.”

“And I’m the God of Death; Blood-King of Arda, Staxius Haggard.”

“Arda, I’ve never heard of such a kingdom before.”

“Tis a new world, majesty, or should I say, commoner. Cleopatra, the King of Eduipt has been ransacked by invaders, thy people are killed, women raped, and lovers betrayed. Thy soul came to me as a gift, I know not the reason and I care not. I have but one question, are you useful?”

“Eduipt is ruined,” the shock had her on all-fours with tears.

“W-why,” she asked, “-why was I given chance at a new life?”

“Thou art mistaken,” he smiled, “-tis, not a new life- thou art bound to mine soul.”

“Meaning?”

“Meaning you are to do my bidding; I’m obliged to keep you around since another deity requested so of me. Queen Cleopatra, I know of thy achievements – a femme fatale best describes thee, enigmatic, well-versed, and talented in the matters of state.” Her cries continued; the news was too heavy a burden to bear.

“Drop the charade...” said the King coldly, “-a good actress, I’ll give you that, but, tis not going to work against me.

“Right,” she sat on her knees with her thighs exposed rather seductively. The face turned from woe to inviting and playful.

“Good luck,” walked Julius, “-the man of which thee tries to manipulate isn’t going down that easy.”

Chapter 395: The Jester Act II

“I don’t believe a word,” a smug grin had her checking out the room.

“Cleopatra,” spoke the King, “-my question, I’ve yet to have the answer.”

“I don’t have a choice in the matter, do I? You introduced yourself as the God of Death, the peculiar architecture, way of dressing, and countless other details speak volumes. My home is ruined, in no way will thee lie about such a thing. I guess there’s nothing much to do, King of Arda, I, Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator, pledge myself to thy name,” taking a formal respectful bow, he accepted.

“Do refer to me as to how thee wishes, I’m not particular in title or code of honor. Not to a being from another world, thee deserve more than the commoners here.”

“Thank you for the kindness, I’ll stick with Majesty – in no way do I wish to incur the wrath of the unknown.”

“As thee wishes.” On the 10th of February, another joined the puppet army. Not a combatant, but a strategist, one experience in the ways of politics. Legends of her journey as Queen were showed in greater details, the Arcane Library did her justice.

The jester, subject to the hypothesis from the conspiracy community, was researched to no avail. No information, the only viable explanation was as quoted; “-Jester, else known as the New Year wrecker, is still at large. The few videos available on the Arcanum have been deleted. No trace in either soft or hard copy. The minds of our loyal readers have concluded this. The jester is a deranged individual who came to show the weakness of the AHA. The heroism filled association rumored to be tied to the underworld. Speaking ill might result in death, thus we plead, do not ask questions or you are dead. Amidst the plausible reasoning, one stands out like a sore thumb, it goes as follows. The Jester is a character made by another individual to promote Luna’s ghost stories. Her popularity skyrocketed ever since the new appearance. The matter has been squandered without a trace – we can but speculate, but tis as followed, the Jester will strike, please, be on the lookout, Alphaia isn’t safe.” Whether right or wrong, it was up to the reader to decide. In such a manner, the days turned to weeks and another month went by.

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The 11th of March came in a blink. Staxius and Julius remained steadfast by the Emperor's side. The young men by age met and became good friends. A handsome prince interacting with the future brother-in-law. The sudden addition of a very talented politician had the council a little confused. Cleopatra made her debut as the secretary of Staxius, who was the Emperor's counselor. It wasn't hard to see how the general populous might have been confused. During the discussion hour, as the initial problems were brought on for clarification, Staxius's quick wit and direct approach slowed to a normal pace. The trio, including Cleopatra, were very much vigilant. Each decision was taken into consideration with plans for the future. The change it brought held more subconscious results. The people, edgy from the announcement of Monsters in the North, were somewhat relieved. She didn't just make an impression, her beauty got her what she wanted, a definition of a seducer. Her level of charm rivaled and surpassed Serene's – a feat not humanly attainable. While Serene took to the melancholic beauty side, Cleopatra's more open and touchy approach garnered more favors. The meeting ended with the council in accord. Sultria could but smile, never had he seen them be manipulated and forced to do his bidding.

"I'm impressed," said the emperor enjoying a warm drink.

"There's no need for such are trivial matters," added Cleopatra loudly. Her personality was sometimes unbearable."

"As pretty as she is, her mouth is as repulsive," refuted Staxius.

"What a crude thing to say," her mouth covered in shock.

"S-sure..."

The television screen soon toggled to an urgent news report. A man spoke loudly over the sheer chaos in Melmark. The title, Jester's return. A bomb exploded over the Capital a few minutes earlier. The chemical released contained a virus that made a person's DNA, most specifically, the one controlling their latent powers, go rampant. Instant combustion for those with affinity to fire or drowning for those with water. Screams followed by death; the heroes were hit far worse than the civilians. The perfect anti-hero weapon, the perfect anti-Alphian virus.

"HAHAHA," came the broadcast of a man, "-hello Alpha, did you miss me, oh yes you did, you did, you did, wait, you did, didn't you?" now stern, "-I present you my present. Best regards as you die painful deaths; go ahead, try to send the heroes, criminal AHA..." he covered his mouth as if a child, "-did I say too much, oh no, no, no, no, that can't be true," it cut to static white noise. Luckily, the wind blew and took most of the virus to the mountains. Still, death was imminent, the danger of the situation was far worse. Even doctors couldn't assist for they were themselves affected. Biological weaponry, a theoretical way to fight but not implemented.

"Father!"

"Don't get emotional," said he, "-calm down," the plug was pulled. "Stay put, the virus isn't going to subside even if you go there."

"We need to do something," urged to act, the face fixed the door.

"No, you don't," held in place by Cleopatra, "-Emperor, stay put," said she handcuffing him to the chair, "-he's restrained, now what?"

"Let me think."

"Take your time," said she with a lick of the lips. What followed was a little over the top, she got carried away by him trying to escape. Cuffed to a chair, she gagged to then sat atop him seductively. Few nuzzle on his neck, a warm bit on the ears, and overall foreplay, '-I'm going to devourer you.'

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'The virus is in Melmark, only Alphan's are affected. The cure must be with the Jester, I can think of only one person to go seek the culprit," turned to check on the Emperor, "Hey, I think I have an idea..." what returned was an undressed Sultria trying to get away from an ogre.

"Cleopatra," quick to grab the back of her collar, "-what are you doing?" he pulled.

"Checking if he has any concealed weapons," she gently touched his leg with her feet.

"Seriously," shaking his head, "-are you that craved to eat?"

"Matter of fact, yes, there's no one willing to satisfy me. Well, I can go out and do it myself but you refuse to let me do so, come on, I want to have fun too."

"I refuse," giving a facepalm, "-who knew someone of thy repute would be so indulging."

"Whatever, if you don't want others to satisfy me, then do it thyself."

"No," quick to refuse, "-let's continue this subject on another time." Her body and words might have meant one thing, but her mind thought of another, she was shrewder than expected. Allowing her to roam free could and would have devastating repercussions, whether it worked in his favor was a differing matter.

"Do excuse her famished demeanor."

"Who cares, Melmark is being destroyed by a virus, can't you do anything?"

"Just you wait," said Staxius, "-a hero will come, or should I say, a heroine."

"A heroine?"

"Yes."

As predicted, a singular figure stood before the avalanche of sick individuals. The virus which spread held a yellow pigmentation, an obvious sneer at the trouble ahead.

"Please, save me," asked a man with tears of blood and melting skin. Over yonder, a boy with the ability to mutate turned into a crazed fiend eating all in its path. Broken windows, impaled bodies on the sidewalk, the sky lit with flames. Ambulances called for the emergency all but stood still with the occupants' dead. Men in uniform suffered the same fate.

'How cruel,' thought she in a skin-suit. In the final moments, a news team managed to film Luna's arrival. The few viewers watching from their homes cowered. Death played without filter.

"You're still alive," came a loud enough snicker.

"So are you," returned she who walked.

"I remember you, yes, I do, I do, I do remember you... did I say I remember you? BAHAAAAHA," it cut short to silence, "-the ghost who...who...who RUINED MY NEW YEAR'S PARTY!"

"Calm down," she replied, "-there are no hard feelings."

"No hard feelings?" for the first time, the Jester came out into the public, "-hell no, you see, I'm vindictive, if I want something to burn, I want it burned," a scarlet flash had him charged forth. \*BANG,\* the ground buckled under the impact, \*smack,\* a punch from Luna had him flew to which she gave chase with a jump. A fight of devastating proportions ensued. The lasting effects of the virus killed more as time went on until, \*BANG,\* the ground cracked yet again with Luna holding onto the Jester's neck.

"Y-you w-win," he vanished leaving a case, \*-Antidote, you dumbass.\*

The signal cut with an explosion, the last thing recorded after Luna's victory.

"A-are they safe?" inquired the news reporter, "-we've lost contact with the film crew. Part of the capital went dark, this just in, police are bordering access to that area. Wait..." the feed returned, "-it's Luna," said he.

"People of Alphaia," she coughed, "-I've failed as a hero, I've failed to protect the people. I wish I could have had help from the AHA, the organization in charge of helping us, where are they? The sheer amount of death today is enough, it shows how powerless we are. Heroes and civilians killed, people of Alphaia, we're weak..." she fell to her knee, "-the Jester bested me once again... but," a grin had a ray of light shone upon her head, "-I procured the antidote. The anti-agent to the virus," the camera sloppily panned to a nearby device, a blueish test-tube fired upwards as if a firework. \*Poof,\* a cloud of blue rained upon the capital, the yellow-pigment turned to naught. Laid face up with the video-camera to her side, "-it's time to rest, Alphaia, it's time to rest," the lens unwillingly focused on her face and arms, and soon the feed cut.

"You were right," said Sultria, "-a hero came."

"That she did," a smile escaped to which Cleopatra elbowed him into focus.

"Emperor," said she, "-tomorrow will be a hard day. Good luck in advance, the media will be at thy neck looking for answers."

"Oh yes they will," said Staxius, "-an unknown biological weapon with the maker vanished; getting out of it will be hard. The populous is enraged."

"I need to take responsibility."

"No, you don't," voiced she.

"She's right. There's no need to take the blame for this. Don't you remember what Luna said; the blame was put on the heroes and their association. I have a sneaking suspicion that she wants revenge too, someone who knows the truth about Asuna Muld."



“Are you sure?”

“Yes.” The day ended with the television constantly replaying the last scene. In particular, the one where she laid down as her face was half-exposed. A death count of 50 and 30 suffering minor injuries was reported. As said earlier, the enrage masses took to blame the AHA for their poor judgment. The heroes under their contract were treated far worse than convicts, the trust in them declined.

“I’d say the scheme today ended with better results,” said Cleopatra taking a sip of whiskey.

“I agree,” fingers on the earlobe, “-éclair, start Operation Malk.”

“Orders confirmed.” On numerous blogs, videos, and relating subject to the incident, a particular comment had many wonder the true identity of she who seemed to be Luna. The only link tying her to reality, on the unbranded clothes, a watch with the name of a certain company. The rumors flared, a link to tie the mysterious lady, a link the conspiracy theorist took by storm.

Faced down on a bed, a masseuse worked her gentle hands around Aceline’s body. Moans of relief escape as the body’s tension relaxed.

“Did you see the video?” asked Scott with a platter.

“The one with the heroine taking her well deserved rest. Yes, I saw it, and I’m not happy. You noticed it as well, her watch, the company, it’s him. Will that man never leave me alone.”

“Come on, just accept the offer already.”

“Why are you so adamant?”

“It’s because I consider him a good friend. He saved you multiple times, I don’t see why thee not try and match his point of view. Lady Aceline, forgive my saying this; as a friend, I must tell thee the truth, you’ve changed for the worse. Being called humble is far from the truth, money and fame have altered your perception, frankly, I’m disappointed.”

“How dare you speak that way to me!” she screamed in anger.

“Color me scared, what, are you going to fire me?”

“Don’t cross that line, I swear, Scott, you’ll regret it.”

“Do it,” said he taking a stand, “-I’ve had enough of being worked around like a servant. Money wasn’t the reason I stayed, you were my friend, I had faith in you, not now, I’m so very much disappointed.”

“SCOTT, STOP PRETENDING TO BE MY FRIEND, YOU’RE JUST A FUCKING MANAGER,” a rude outburst had the masseuse gasp.

“I see how it is, fine, Superstar Aceline, I’ll excuse myself. I’ve taken the liberty of deleting my contact information from thy phone. Forget I ever existed, this humble manager is unworthy of dealing with a decorated idol, goodbye.”

Chapter 396: Apexi

Cold was the night and freezing came the breeze. A man dressed semi-formally wandered to the tall building of Lekdo. The latter seemed a lair for a demon for the weather thundered each minute, each second, depending on its mood. A flash followed by rambles of a famine beast. A tale told by the elders, when the night growls, tis when the gods are angered.

\*Beep,\* a notification came from the door. "Father, shall I get it?" shouted across the hallway.

"No," returned one deeper. Turned with a click, the door's unlocked seemed as if a prison gate.

"Hey,"

"You're here," the door opened to an exquisite living room. Off to the right side sat Julius with the repetition of news from the Jester's return. The day was named Act II.

"I did it," said the man dripped from the trousers due to rainfall.

"I see that," quick to point to the shower, "-go on, have a change, there's clothes readied. Join me in the study afterward." The man moved listlessly to do what was told. The water's warmth provided a little comfort, the mind fixated on but one thing, frustration.

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"It's the second I've seen him, who is it?" asked Julius.

"An old friend, don't worry, he's truly worthy."

"If you say so," he turned from being lent on the couch to face the screen.

A few days had gone since The Jester's Act II, a title conveniently given by a local, unpopular, newspaper. They took to the Arcanum instead of traditional paper print. As many skipped over another crucial matter that day, said source managed to scoop the pivotal events. Scott and Lady Aceline's parting. One of the most renowned managers leaving his client on unknown and mysterious notes. Devoted fans were enraged by the manager's decision. A would-be angered mob of supporters, thanks to the proceeding of said day, were stopped by the Jester. Some clueless commenters voiced a mild yet bitter rumor – the two incidents could have been linked.

"Good evening."

"Good evening, come in."

"Thanks," to which he took a seat.

"Shall we begin?" asked the other.

"Let's," said he. The topic of discussion, after Scott's departure from Aceline's care, was his employment.

"I can't believe you were right," said the manager.

"Honestly speaking, I wanted to have Aceline model for my company. Turns out, she hates me far worst than before. 'Not to forget, my real target was you, Scott. Aceline might have talent and prestige, it all but serves to have her ego elevated. You, on the other hand, are hardworking and to the point, a strong

justice when it comes to fame and fortune. My involvement all but added the fuel to ruin their relationship. I would apologize, though, it would but serve as empty words. The scheme to have the AHA suffer has begun.'

"I was a little fearful at first," said Scott with a nod, "-to hear from you after all this time. Here I figured the king to be busy. The points said were spot on, Aceline is deluded from reality. Her fame has climbed to her head. Not many people know of her affairs with politicians and people of power. I told her countless time to not get involved, yet, she does what she wants. It frustrates me, the brat from the Patek Dynasty pisses me off even more."

"The Patek Dynasty, what about them, what of the son, care to tell me about the happening?"

"Oh, it escaped my mouth."

"Do thou not wipe thine arse after taking a shit?"

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"I understand," he sighed. The amusing sentence referred to giving a bit of information, a cliffhanger, the worst thing one could do to another.

"Lady Aceline is dating the heir to the Patek's. Undisclosed, of course, it's been going on ever since her arrival here. There was a movie, Luna on Earth, she loved the script and wanted to be the main-actress. The auditions went by smoothly, the producers and director were happy, well, until Hero Luna showed up. Arms in arms with the heir, her spot was given to Luna. Tis then she realized the importance of connections; our pride of Hidros is naught but a corrupted fiend in the industry. I hate it from the bottom of my heart, I hate how she turned out. It was supposed to be my job to keep her from all those things, I failed as her manager."

"I understand," nodded Staxius reassuringly, "-how the events played out is less than ideal," he gave a few minutes to calm down.

"Sorry about that outburst," quick to take a sip, "-I'm once again sorry for leaving Aceline, I know you wanted her to be the figure face of Meldorino, now, it's all but ruined."

"Dear friend," a genuine smile had the atmosphere lightened, "-there's no need to apologize for I'm the one responsible. I erected the wall between thee and the idol, I'm sorry--"

"No, please, don't apologize, friend, it wasn't thy fault," he interjected sharply.

"Then reason states it's not thy fault either," Scott's expression congealed in bafflement. "I've called you to offer a deal, dear, friend, I know that you care not about money. Yet, consider this, I will pay thee on competence. Let me rephrase that," it came across insulting to a renowned manager, "-I won't pay, I will award thee a mere token of my appreciation, how does it sound?"

"Go on, majesty, I'm listening?" hands crossed, a straight posture and an attentive face, Scott watched.

"Here's the chance to take Aceline away from the grasp of the Patek's. A chance at retribution; now, let me make this clear, it's not confirmed if she'll be saved by the following actions, nevertheless, the possibility exists," he paused at short intervals. The manager remained quiet throughout as the information assimilated slowly. "I have someone who was wronged by the same people of which thee

hates. The higher-ups in the industry of film-making, business, and politics. It's going to be a war; thee understands, a full-out war. In said war, thee will be my knight, or rather, the knight to my queen, the one who was wronged. Her name is Emi Muko, you must have heard of her – a member of the feline force.”

“Yes, I do actually,” the long-awaited silence broke, “-Emi Muko, she's unbelievably beautiful. I know of her; she caught my eye as a potential star – tis a shame of what happened. The bad publicity, her video, quite a shady situation.”

“Tis dire, her reputation here is not so ideal.”

“I agree,” mumbled Scott,“-but,” he stared with a smile, “-there's a chance.”

“A sob story, a tale of repentance,” grinned Staxius.

“Exactly.”

“So, Scott, what do you say? Will you make Emi Muko into an international star?”

“What about funding?”

“I'll allocate thee a budget – however, criteria must be met.”

“I understand,” he sighed, “-I left my agency to follow Lady Aceline into Alpha, it's going to be hard to be reemployed. Her only path to success is by getting signed by a good company.”

“Give me a tier list,” smiled Staxius, “-which do you think best suits her field.”

“Come to think of it, there's not actually a need to be signed by a good company. Let's get her on the same path as Aceline; her ex-agency, Apexi. They peaked with Aceline but are under the radar. The few people remaining are the band; S-Kiss, H Jewel, and First Romance. Not mainstream but popular in Hidros.”

“What of Ocher Time, whatever happened to that show?”

“Scrapped, Apexi doesn't want anyone to sully the name of what Aceline created. She's still the pride of Hidros, our continent's gem.”

“Well then,” he smiled, “-should I pull some strings or will you be fine?”

“There's no need for such things,” chuckled Scott, “-I need to meet with Lady Emi first, I need her thoughts on the matter.”

“Already thought of it,” said he standing, “-let's go.”

Room 405 came on the door; a knock had it gently opened with a lady peering. Introduced as the manager, she warmly welcomed the friendly smart-looking man. On said note, the 13th of March ended.

‘Scott is now under my payroll, he'll make Emi into a star, that man's ability is often underestimated. Good thing I had éclair look up his history. Out of all the people he's worked with; many went on to become influential people in the entertainment industry. Binding his ability to Aceline is but a mistake. Now, it's time for Cimier, I need dirt on how far the Patek's links with them.’ Two days went by and

Staxius was yet to leave the office. The works and schemes being moved in the shadows were deadly. For example; just yesterday, a hit was ordered on a high-ranking politician. The lack of pawn in Alpha had him personally go out and kill the man. The use of magic had public safety rule the death as a heart attack. With him gone, the dirt and rumors gotten on the Lerado family were carried over to the grave. Now backed by the Haggard's, Lerado's venture into retailing narcotics became profitable. Cimier and the Jefferson's were stumped; their access was cut. The price for going against Godfather Renaud. In spite, rumor says Godfather Stanley took to meet the Overlord. It ended in a few of his men getting killed, he barely made it out alive. The cause for such death was the betrayal of his trust. None was allowed to go against another family, and yet, Stanley did so with the Lerado incident.

'I need another person inside Cimier,' thought he rolling a crystal ball against the table. 'Sending Cleopatra might be a good idea. She's the perfect fit to use her appearance and charm, too perfect I'd say. Another who's good at infiltration. A spy,' suddenly came memories from a forgotten project. One not scrapped and well-funded, a cooperation between the Federation and Phantom, a training program for in the art of infiltration.

"éclair," a push of a button toggled a flickering screen.

"How may I help?"

"Show me the reports for training unit Zero."

"Reports are encrypted, access is denied."

"Use my authority then," a scanner soon materialized.

"Please inject Mana."

'Cake and her obsession with security.'

"Access granted."

'Honestly,' head deep into the folders, the last report was dated a week ago. The training program was still in operation. The number of inactive spies was in the hundreds, each lived a normal life. There was one active, a mission even secret to the king, \*Protection of the Blood-King,\* ordered by Queen Gallienne and Cake.

'Dearest King of Arda, tis I, Queen of Hidros. I know sooner or later that thee will gloss over the reports of Unit Zero, which is why I'm writing this. I know full well you don't need protection, yet, I fear that the day might come on which thee'll need a spy. Tis the reason why the mission is active. We have our best spy waiting for thy to call his favors.'

'Hey Boss, it's now my turn. Don't get mad or anything, you're well respected and have more haters than meets the human eye. It's precaution, anyway, just call out the man's name and he shall come.'

'I have the best allies," he smiled, "-come forth, 02," a figure materialized in a shadowy mist. No face, no clothes, nothing, the bland was how he appeared.

"How may I serve, majesty," said it knelt.

“Raise thy head,” he ordered. The glances crossed – a man with common features, nothing stood out, the same as the time at Sultria’s palace, the maid – they bore similar likeness. “Good,” said he, “-what were your orders till now?”

“I’m afraid I can’t say so, majesty.”

“Why is that?”

“I’m obliged to listen to them who give me orders.”

“And who are they?”

“I’m afraid I can’t reveal so.”

“What of unit Zero, any information I can gather?”

“No majesty, I was ordered to not give away information even if the King of Arda asks so. The walls have ears and thus we never say anything,” stern and unyielding, excellent qualities for a spy.

“Good sentiments,” the long fingers stretched to touch one another, “-as the King of Arda, I ask you to fulfill a mission. For the sake of safety, I shall do so through the use of paper, does that sound acceptable?”

“Yes, majesty.”

Chapter 397: Ansoft

The mission given was simple, to infiltrate Cimier and gather information relating to their trade, vocation, members, and everything in between. To dismantle an organization build since the founding of the Empire would be a tall order. Ranked in the top five of most nefarious and powerful Underworld organization, the work to be done was enormous. Thus, came help in form of Michelle. He gave a tip that Cimier was recruiting new members- hence the idea of having another spy. O2 departed as soon as the orders were confirmed. Left to wonder out the window with hands on the keyboard; Staxius thought of the next plan of action. Operation Malk was still active; the lively Capital night flashed with spotlights. An event, a concert celebrating the 10th anniversary of Ansoft, an idol agency, one of the more prominent establishments in Alpha.

The reputation assigned to them was of conspiracy, stealing idols from other agencies in hopes of profit. Despite the condemning statements made by affronted agencies, nothing was ever done. Lack of evidence and lack of finance, going to Court would but tarnish names. The more notable case was with Aceline. She changed from Apexi to Ansoft in a heartbeat around the start of the war. From there on, they made sure she became the more desirable idol in the continent. A task one could say they accomplished beyond expectation. Her break into the film industry; stumped at first, but her talent carried her multiple levels beyond the other stars. Hence where she’s now.

Ansoft also held a group; close friends and a once-popular male singer and guitarist. He played alongside Aceline at the concert in Iqavea; Sugar. A young man who once made the female audience cry by his lyrics – the would-be-figure face of Ansoft, if not for the scandal with his bassist. An affair, even when most liked the possible romance, many other fans were jealous of her involvement. A lesser attractive

girl taking to be with Sugar – the wave of jealousy that came could have had an earthquake seem as if a gentle breeze.

Then on forth, the band broke, Sugar had a history in narcotics and his name grew lesser-known. The female fan-base was vindictive. The bassist went into hiding; none even remembers the band anymore. While the other two disappeared from the map, the drummer went on to join a prominent boy-band; Riot. The mystery surrounding the two were yet to be known.

‘If Emi is going to take the road of following Aceline, she’ll need talented musicians behind her. Sugar, and his bassist, I’m sure they’re around, I’m sure they never quit music. Meeting them the first time; I refuse to think that a man who vowed to become the best guitarist in the world just ended up lost. éclair gave me nothing but a summary of Ansoft; Aceline’s agency.’

Soon, the connection linked. Riot would be performing on the 20th of March. Aceline was also scheduled to make an appearance, it seemed that the two rulings over the male and female audience would take to the stage. There was a lot of hype around the Pride of Hidros making a return to sing. Her voice that captivated many was yet to be heard.

‘I have a sneaking suspicion that Apexi is being lost in the torment of the competition. Emi Muko, for you to have revenge, you must become more popular than the AHA. Fly over thy weaknesses; this isn’t pity, tis a second chance. Go, become what you wanted to become so I can have a stronghold in the entertainment industry. A sob story isn’t going to cut it, I need Sugar, a strong guitarist. The last song they ever recorded touched my heart – I remembered it so fondly. Eira played it on full-blast at the castle; he did what he meant, the notes were alive and from a man who had practiced ruthlessly.’

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“Master, the 10th anniversary is going to be a big crowd.”

“Yes, I know, someone familiar might show up, who is to say, really,” pressing the last chord, “-who is to say.”

On said night, Scott in the company of Emi agreed. Her will was lit anew, she wanted to change herself for the better. As for O2, the latter went to infiltrate Cimier. Staxius sat and watched as the pawns moved. Meldorino was hard at work designing watches; the watchmakers worked tirelessly for it had been a month. The development of a new movement began; the planning phase, as reported, was finalized well before the intervention of Phantom. They all had a similar idea – what was needed, testing, and finding the parts and materials. A process that would have taken eight years came down to a few months. Everything was in-house, the engineer led hands, the mechanics gave ideas; the things made available to the makers were close to a miracle. If one didn’t work, if the mechanism were wrong, the option to turn to magic remained. After finalizing the deal with the watchmakers, Staxius gave a simple offer; to have one of the watches have Meldorino written on its dial. They, themselves, knew not of what happened to the timepiece.

“Julius,”

“Yes, father?” asked the prince with heavy gust swaying the suit.

“Are you sure?”

“Yes, the task thee gave was to have me make Emi into a model. Scott and I discussed it over a long period and I’ve come to a decision. I want to try my best in the field of entertainment. I’ll shadow him first and then try at becoming an idol. I saw Scott’s passion, he’s an inspiring man.”

“A prince becoming an idol, the prospect is so Avant-guard it makes me wonder. Supposed the music lesson will go to good use, thou have a great voice, prince, go on and become what thy wishes.”

“I know,” stood few feet apart, he bowed, “-I must apologize for my selfishness. I know I stopped school to follow you around, and now this. It must be heartbreaking to see a boy wander around aimlessly.”

“There’s no need for that,” he lifted his head, “-I applaud thy will. Go wander the world, discover it for thyself. I think it best; thou did come to experience the real-world.”

“Thank you, father, I love you.”

“Yes, yes,” he breathed a nervous chuckle, “-a prince mustn’t be so open with his feelings.”

“Who cares,” a quick embrace later had the trio take-off Marrowy’s airstrip.

‘Creation’s heir, or should I say, my son. What a turn of events. Guess the world works in differing ways. I feel like I’ve lived so many lives, everyone around me changes, people I’ve met are but unknown figures wandering our world. Immortality, what will happen when the ones I love eventually die.’ Staring him was the cold truth. Time waits for no one, and it certainly didn’t wait for the mortals.

“Boss, are you climbing?” asked a pilot.

“No, go ahead to the hotel.”

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“As ordered, boss,” giving a salute, the helicopter took-off. The old lock to the hangar opened with a single twist. The sound of the sides moving was of utmost pain to one’s ear. The high pitch screaming of the hinges brought upon by rust and time resounded across the empty inside. A vail formed the silhouette of a bike, the Monif-4T. ‘Good thing I had it parked here,’ toggled, it raced down the slope to where the wind blew.

“éclair,”

“Yes, how may I be of service?”

“Find me a way to get unlimited access to the backstage of the concert.”

“Orders confirmed.”

The scenery changed fast, Staxius darted as if a bullet – dodging the few cars, no wonder Courtney loved her bike.

“Two options; enter as a backstage member or pay to have unlimited access. There’s a man who is known to accept a little gift to have anyone do as they please.”

“Give me the history of the man in question.”



“Name: Rel Nedo, age thirty-five. Heir to the electrical company: Meadow Tech and one of the sponsors for the event. Ever since taking the rein over the business, money is low, the man is less than intelligent.”

“How certain is it he’ll accept a bribe?”

“Update, another option has been discovered – become a sponsor.”

‘A sponsor, considering how much publicity it’s going to get, might be a viable option.’

“Get me on a call with Cake.”

“Orders received.”

\*Calling Cake,\*

“Good afternoon boss, how can I help?”

“Did you get the present?”

“You mean the gold and precious stone you sent?”

“Must I repeat myself?”

“Sorry, we did get the shipment. It’s been processed into money as we speak. May I ask where thee procured so much?”

“It’s not of importance.” (Besides, I can’t go around and say that my son has the power to make anything out of nothing. We agreed that he was only allowed it when I said so).

“As you wish boss, so, how can I help?”

“I need around 30% deposited into my account.”

“What of the rest?”

“20% goes to bonuses for all our employees. The remainder thee do per our company’s need, invest in estate or stock-market.”

“20% as bonus, boss, you do know it’s a large sum of money.”

“Yeah, I know, we have a lot of people working for us. Rotherham runs on our money – catch my drift?”

“I understand, it’s for the economy of the continent, sure, I’ll have workers be given bonuses. Only if good work is done.”

“To thy discretion, now, send the money, I have things to do.”

Calculated and handled by éclair, the deposit amount was 15 million gold or 150 million Exa. Added onto the current balance, 198,391,000 Exa stood big and proud. As impressive as the number looked, there were other people with even more money than that wandering the world, given, they were a few and well hidden. 50 million worth of pure gold and precious stones or half a billion Exa, created by the Prince. For him, it all but took a few minutes. To not upset the economy; a limit to his power was instated. Besides, his personal account held over ten-million Exa, sufficient for a young adult.

“éclair,” still on the road, “-get me a hold of Mr. Dorino.”

“G-good m-morning, Majesty.”

“Good morning, how was the office, did you find it adequate?”

“Yes, it’s perfect for a newly reborn company, the workers sure are motivated to do their best. We did as was told, the team is familiar with clocks and watches.”

“Excellent, have them come with ideas, anything, design, mechanism, the sky is the limit. I trust my companion spoke about the watchmakers?”

“Yes, Lady Cake was friendly and charming, our teams are working hand in hand with the master-craftsmen,” said he confidently with a hint of joy. The vacation did and served its purpose.

“Director Dorino, are you at the office?”

“Yes, why so?”

“I need you to check if we can apply as sponsors for the upcoming concert.”

“O-ok,” came a confused man, “-let me contact them,” for a few minutes, the line remained silent – it gave time for the sun to rise over the mountain range.

“Sorry to have kept you waiting; there was one spot but...”

“But what?”

“Another company beat us to the chase.”

“How much are they offering?” inquired Staxius without care.

“Excuse me?” coughed Dorino for he knew the amount of money involved in said events was large.

“Just do so,” said he.

“Meadow Tech offered 500,000 Exa.”

“What of the top sponsor, what is their name?”

“Are you sure, majesty?” asked Dorino once more.

“Did I stutter?” returned a less than inviting tone.

“The top sponsors are Pildi and Denly, they’ve 25 Million Exa each.”

‘Now that’s a big number,’ he smirked, “-contact the organizers. Tell them Meldorino is going to grant 60 Million Exa.”

“60 MILLION?”

“Get it done, Meldorino is going to have their re-launch on the big stage,” the trees swayed, ‘-the time has come, we need to make an impact.’

Chapter 398: Sponsor

“Mr. Haggard, please, listen to me. 60 Million isn’t an amount to be throwing around. I’d honestly advise us only put 5 Million at most,” refuted the challenged Director. Sponsors were used to fund the event, but this much, all would but go towards their coffers.

“Listen to me,” clearing his throat, “-I didn’t finish my thought process. 60 Million, only if they pull the top two sponsors. The Companies from Patek, I want them gone. For the sizeable donation being given, it should sway their feelings.”

“What do you mean, sir?”

“Two things run the world; greed and fear. No one would be foolish enough to have the chance of 10 million slip away, no matter how great a company one is.”

“Mr. Haggard,” his hand rested atop the table, a feeling of nausea came from within. Lady Gaso, ruthless as some say, couldn’t compare to him, not even a fraction. The seamlessly limitless money and the backing of various other mysterious groups – he sure was powerful. “-I’ll transfer the call to the organizer of the event. I trust thee have our best interest in mind?”

“Of course, Director.”

“Hello, is this the owner of Meldorino?”

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“Yes, and you are?”

“A member of the sponsor team for Ansoft. I’m glad of you taking an interest in our event. However, as it stands, all spots have been claimed,” the tone felt friendly and experienced.

“Listen to me,” with authority, “-the saying money buys all stays true. I’m here to offer 60 million for becoming the top sponsor of the event.”

“60 million sir, do apologize for my rudeness, isn’t Meldorino bankrupt, how is the company going to afford such a price?”

“Indeed, they are, well, partly. The money isn’t from them, no, far from it. I’ll be paying the amount on behalf of Meldorino. That shouldn’t be a problem, now, would it?” the trailing words felt threatening.

“O-oh, h-how about conditions?”

“I want both Pildi and Denly out of the event. One could say I wish to become the sole sponsor. What about it?”

“S-sir, I’m afraid that isn’t possible. The money involved is enticing, however, there’s no way the Patek Dynasty will remain at bay. Ansoft isn’t going to make an enemy out of them, do understand where we come from.”

“Sure, I understand,” paused to think, “-my deal lays on the table. Could you kindly organize a meeting between me and those in charge of Ansoft? There are some matters I wish to discuss in private. Do invite Pildi and Denly, I don’t want it to seem as if a shady conspiracy is happening.”

“We’ll have to go through the hierarchy...”

“Do pardon me, but it isn’t a request, tis an order, one from Royalty. You best make sure it happens, else, things might get a little rough, do you understand?”

“...” faint muffled gasps escaped out the phone.

“Ok, sir, sorry to have put you on hold,” she returned a few minutes later, “-I have received confirmation from a higherups, representatives from each company will be at Melmark. I’ll forward you the meeting place.”

“Thank you, have a great day, my lady,” the call ended. ‘How insulting, they’re sending representatives instead of their higher members. I best show them what it means to disrespect royalty; Cleopatra, Intherna, and Gophy,’ giving a smirk,”-éclair, have the helicopter return at once.”

“Orders received.”

Out in Melmark, three representatives made it to a very classy and expensive restaurant. The meeting was scheduled for 19:00, and currently, the time was 18:45. Arriving early was a courtesy. Excluding the one from Ansoft, the other two came in expensive cars. Tables laid meticulously; the windows made semi-transparent to give a sense of privacy. The amber lighting, well-dressed waiters, high ceiling adorned with chandeliers, and other decorations.

At 18:58, rumbling a line of cars came to parked at the entrance. In the middle, a jet-black limousine with Phantom’s crest engraved on the side. The door opened gently with three ladies as pretty as Goddess Venus, stepping out. Short elegant dresses to match the formal setting of the restaurant; they were well-mannered and dignified. Behind them stood Staxius in a very, very expensive suit. It left the valets and assistants speechless. The white and crimson hair, the young and pretty visage, a well-built body; he walked at a slow pace accompanied by the ladies.

Prior to them coming, he gave a summary of the event. The first step inside the restaurant had the guests raise an eyebrow – a very, very strong first impression.

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“Welcome, do you have a reservation?” asked the manager.

“Yes,” spoke Intherna to which they were guided to the table. Spacious and out of sight from the others; the ladies gently walked to catch the eyes of the men and women. Cleopatra’s seductive nature had her wink and give sweet eyes. It took them by surprise.

“Hello,” said Staxius to which the other three stood, “-I figure thee to be the representatives?”

“Yes, sir,” they nodded, a little frightened by the aura emanating.

“Shall we begin the discussion?” asked he now sat and surrounded by the three ladies. Each of them held glares as sharp as knives. They waited as hunters, waiting to reach out from under and catch the prey by surprise. They began with a short introduction. For the most part, Cleopatra did all the talking – since they didn’t bother to send those of high-stature; she and Intherna spoke heavily. It didn’t come across as rude but the implication was there for they had insulted a good man. Then the topic swayed to the discussion of sponsorship.

“Do forgive me, but, Pildi and Denly have been good to us Ansoft. It would be rude to let them go. We value relations over money.”

“I doubt that,” said Staxius, “-if relations were what Ansoft wanted, would it not have been smartest to get to know he who offered such a copious amount. What I see here is nothing but minds that have been made to not accept whatever I say.”

“Please Mr. Haggard, that isn’t what we meant,” voiced the representative from Ansoft.

“It’s not of great importance,” said he with a grin, “-thee from Pildi and Denly, how much money would it take to back off the deal.”

“Sorry?” said them as if offended.

“You heard me right,” the tone turned cold, “-I said, how much to let me do as I please. Surely, thou mustn’t be that hardheaded.”

“10 million Exa,” said he with a smug tone, it was a big amount, big enough to be called a fortune.

“Is that all?”

“Wait...”

“Order complete, I have found the details on why Ansoft doesn’t wish to have our money,” came éclair.

“I see,” laughed Staxius with the other three left confused. “Ansoft is privately owned by Patek.”

“How did you...” the eyes flared in fear.

“Here’s my next proposition, the 60 million is off the table. I’d like to buy out the spot owned by Meadow Electrical for 1 million.”

“S-sure,” said he from Ansoft, I can have the deal be readied this instant.

“Good, give me the account details and I’ll have it transferred right away.” Thus, came to an end a rather educative encounter. The private ownership of the Patek came to light. Their rein ran deeper than expected.

Returned to the hotel, Intherna and Gophy disappeared whilst Cleopatra stuck around.

“Quite a shame the prince left so quickly.”

“He wanted to make his path, who am I to stop the ambitions of a young man,” a click had the television toggled. “What about you, Cleopatra?”

“Nothing much, majesty, I came into this world to help thee, thus I shall do so. I must ask, why did you insist on giving 60 million?”

“A ruse, I never wanted to get the top spot. Yes, the money was on the table, and yes if they accepted, I would have paid, but sending the representatives meant but one thing, negotiations were off. I figured as much, the Patek did stand behind Ansoft. That’s why I went and choose an easier prey. In their mind, I was fearsome since I came with such a heavy entourage. My mention the title Royalty had their guard

up. Then it becomes but a game of fishing, they bit the last offer and here we are. Meldorino will get air time as one of the top five sponsors.”

“Interesting,” said she laid on the couch, “-I’m off to bed, wake me up later, master.”

The more days passed, the more excited became the populous. The concert would take place on the outer edge of Melmark. Construction was completed after two days; artists from all over flew in to prepare. Riot sure was the highlight of the event; many fans stood eagerly waiting for it to begin.

A few timepieces readied for sale were shipped from Hidros. Placed on display at the showroom, people wandered in and out – the products from Haru arrived as well. Operation Malk reached completion after advertisement for the concert went live on television and radios. Many were speaking of the possible connection.

The 20th of March came, the roads leading to the stage were jammed. As a sponsor, Staxius got a backstage access pass. He stood prominently as the performers went from places to places, getting sound checked, outfit readied, and more. One man interested him, only one, and it was he who stood at the end of the line. Medium length blond hair, a spotless face with makeup.

“Tolm.”

“Yes?” answered the man staring up.

“Can I have a few words?” to which the band turned.

“Sorry sir, but we have to focus on the concert ahead,” said the leader with a smile.

“I do understand,” returned Staxius, “-it shan’t be long, I need but a few words. Tis concerning the show itself.”

“Ok sir,” they grudgingly accepted. For a popular boyband, their manners were respectful.

“What do you want to speak about?” asked Tolm inside a secluded room.

“Do you remember me?”

“No, I don’t,” said he sharply.

“Tolm, dear Tolm, drummer for the band in which played Sugar. Don’t you remember me? Iqavea, the masked guitarist – Aceline’s bodyguard.”

“It’s you!” said he in astonishment, “-are you here as bodyguard to Lady Aceline again?”

“No, I’m here as one of the sponsors. Not that it matters, I have one question. Where are Sugar and the bassist?”

“Oh...” he stepped aside; “-I can’t say.”

“Tolm, I don’t mean you or them any harm. I want Sugar to return to the music scene, I want him to sing and play again, that’s what I want, truly,” the sincerity had the drummer cower.

“I still can’t say, I’m sorry, it’s too hard,” to which he bolted out the room.

'What a pain,' he sighed.

"Is anything the matter, sir?" asked one of the helpers.

"No, don't worry about it," to which he stepped out to catch a glimpse of Aceline. They locked eyes for a few seconds followed by her acting as if they were strangers. A quiet shuffling to the side caught the attention, a muffled like movement followed by black hair running away.

"Hey, wait," he followed. Dashed down the stairs and outback, it sprinted wholeheartedly.

"Wait," he caught the arm a blink later using Shadow-step. The hooded figure resisted and tried to stare away, it fought heavily.

"You're hurting me," said it with a pistol escaping onto the ground.

"Who are you?" he pulled sharply, the hood gave way to reveal a scarred face, the visage soon linked with a fellow he knew, "-you're the bassist, Dei."

"Why are you here," she broke free, "-WHY ARE YOU HERE?" screams of anger echoed.

"Calm down," said he picking the gun, "-here."

"Why are you giving me this?" she moved away as to reject the weapon.

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"Didn't you come to kill someone? Go ahead, Dei, go kill, I won't ask questions. Go kill, well, that is if you can take the burden of slaying another human."

Chapter 399: Dei

"What should I do?" said she close to weeping. The scene didn't raise any suspicion for music played on the stage. "Just look at me," a badly injured face and body fully covered.

"It's up to you," returned he coldly, "-what is your purpose, what did you want to accomplish?" she defiantly stepped back. The injuries had her expression hard to read, on the first impression that was. Her mouth and the look she gave sufficed – the pain and suffering oozed.

"Dei,"

"What?"

"Come with me," without notice, he grabbed her arm and walked towards a fast-food seller.

"Let me go," she struggled.

"Stand still will you?" now under a big tree, one could see the stage and the opening bands. In a fatigued manner, she rested against the trunk to slowly fall into sitting with her head between her knees.

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"Dei, I want to know what happened to you and Sugar. I have a vague idea, but I want to hear the truth. Cimier is involved, aren't they?"

“How did you know?” asked a muffled voice, the stage made it harder to hear.

“Not of importance. Besides, I can see that you’re hurting. Let me see the left hand.”

“Why should I?” returned a less than inviting voice.

“Because I’ve said so?”

“Just leave me alone, getting involved in my affairs isn’t going to bring about any good.”

“Tis my choice to make,” said he sat beside her, “-you and Sugar, I knew from our first meeting that there was love between thee both. Must have been hard, keeping the relation hidden. Stardom seems to be this idyllic lifestyle when in reality, what I’ve experienced from the artists is being bound, holding a sad demeanor. The grass is always greener on the other side.” Time continued; no reply came from the lady. It was all but a passing moment of idealness, a moment where the crowd moved according to the music. Security sure was tight.

“Thank you,” her voice seemed lightened, the broken face rested on her knees. The shadow from the tree provided shelter from the rampaging sun.

“Want to talk about it?”

“Why so adamant?”

“I want to have you and Sugar back into the limelight. I know people who’ve been hurt by those responsible for your fretting hand. Try and hide it; it was obvious. An incident happened where the ability to play the bass was lost – that’s why,” a deep inhale later, “-that’s why I want to know.”

“Forget about it,” she laughed painfully, a desperate attempt to seem normal. “I did lose my hand – well, there’s nothing that can be done,” the sleeve rolled to unravel a damning sight. Her fingers were broken and never allowed to heal; the skin suffered burnt marks from a corrosive solution. Where there were once five fingers, now remained but four. The pinky was gone, broken off, or cut, none could have said. “You see now,” her disfigured expression looked like surrender, “-I swore to have revenge today,” the head laid against the trunk, “-seems it wasn’t in fate. Those in power will get what they want, and those at the bottom can but fight to have what they have discarded. The world is a brutal place, even more so than war.”

“Dei,” holding the left hand, “-tell me what happened. I won’t promise anything.”

“Trying to comfort me?” the changing clouds had her attention drawn further into the blue-sky’s emptiness.

“No, why would I do such a thing?”

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“Enigmatic, I didn’t want to believe. Sugar said one day you’d show up, and here you are; as a King and god others know what title I’ve missed.”



“Old friend is decent enough. Dei, we were once bound by the same passion – I remember the time we performed, Aceline, us, Sugar, the stage that night couldn’t have lit any brighter. The genuine feeling of passion I felt, it’s all so far away now.”

“The best concert I ever played,” she smiled, “-fine, I’ll tell you what happened. You’d have wished to never have known the real story. Sugar and I were dating secretly. I saw the world from his eyes, he wanted to shine brighter than ever, so I decided to put his happiness before mine. I never regretted that decision. We recorded, performed, and went on tour, the band became popular very quickly. The girls loved him, and so did I. The spark of passion into becoming the guitarist had his mind occupied. Ansoft treated us well until Aceline showed up. We got news of her failing an audition; as friends, we went along to cheer her spirit, what returned was carnage. Scott stopped us from getting in touch. I guess around said time, we were more popular than Aceline. Life was pretty good, I got to see my lover do what he wanted, I assisted him the best I can – our band was rolling in fame and money. Then came that Friday evening; we returned home after a day at the studio. A door left opened, people in suit, armed and dangerous with Aceline in the middle accompanied by another well-dressed man. Next thing, I found myself on the floor barely able to hear. Sugar lashed out or from what I figured. Later on, I saw him change for the worse, I don’t have a clue what they discussed. Our downfall started on said occasion. Something troubled him, I wanted to ask and ended with the silent treatment. It became frustrating, so frustrating that I confronted Aceline at Ansoft. She didn’t take my outburst lightly since the day after, our relationship was in the public. An enormous backlash came straight for Sugar’s throat. We were shunned and ousted. He couldn’t take the burden – so we fled. A chance to start again, we seized it. For the following few months, he worked as a local bar singer as I did common work around the town. Freed from the life of stardom, I could indulge in doing things a normal couple would. The vindictive nature of Aceline returned – we were amused, Sugar was forced to swallow some concoction and I had my hand broken. She stood and watched, I know it was her, sneering at our sufferance, I – I give up.”

‘It fits, her story links with the intervention of another party. I doubt this sort of assault would have been ignored. Cimier played a hand. Aceline was present, and she was in contact with one of the Patek since they are in cahoots with Cimier, it links. Sugar lost his voice, she lost her hand, it runs deeper than expected.’

“Can I ask something else?”

“What more?” asked she wiping her silent tears.

“Where is Sugar?”

“At Dostein,” her stare sharply met the floor.

“Did you break up?” her face changed upon those words.

“W-why would you think that?” she refuted angrily.

“He’s the type of guy to not wish to impose his disability onto another. Especially onto one he loves. I mean, I can understand – he feels responsible for what happened to your hand,” he smiled reassuringly, “-which is why you came with a gun, to end the source of the torment.”

“I guess,” she sighed, “-why, do you think it’s wrong?”

"No, as far as I'm concerned, she holds no real value. Go ahead, pull the trigger, or should I call onto another to have her killed?"

"Stop bluffing, you're not going to kill her on my behalf."

"I'm the owner of Phantom, our company is neutral. As long as there's money or something we are to gain, no job is dirty, no request too hard; tell me, what do you have to offer?" the voice changed as did the monotonous face.

"N-nothing, my hand is ruined, Sugar isn't in a position to sing, we're but broken individuals wasting breath on the planet."

"No, my dear Dei, you have more than thee understands."

"I'm not going to sell myself, that is off-limits," her right hand sloppily moved to cover her breast.

"In no way would I ask such a thing. Besides, I doubt thee to have any clientele."

"Awfully rude for a gentleman."

"I meant it in jest, please, don't think it harshly."

"Whatever, out with it, what do you want?" the otherwise listless gestures grew energetic.

"You and Sugar's soul," the smirk had her shudder.

"S-soul?"

"Not literally, I only want to have thee work to compensate for the service I'm to provide."

"What kind of work?"

"A work at retribution, a band of those who were ousted, a band of rejects. Sugar, you, we need a drummer, and Emi Muko, heard of her?"

"The one who had her virtue opened to the world to see?"

"Yes, her, I've employed Scott as her manager. I want to make her the better version of Aceline, and what better way than to have the original killed."

"..." bobbed left to right, the darkened aura around her mind soon came as a yes, "-I want Aceline to die, please, have her killed."

"The contract has been made," smiled Staxius with a hovering screen, "-put thy finger and we shall have the job started."

"I'm s-sorry," breathing a laugh, "-BUT THIS IS RETRIBUTION!" \*beep, contract, accepted.\*

"éclair, have a high-priority order sent. I want Elliot in Alpha within three hours; the target is Superstar Aceline."

"Order Confirmed," he stood with the hands resting.

“Dei, I welcome you to Phantom. We’ll leave for Dostein after the concert is over and take Sugar even if it needs brute force.”

“...” The figure remained stuck in place, “-getting cold feet?” asked he.

“PLEASE, DON’T, HAVE IT CANCELLED!” she screamed, “- I want revenge, but not like this. I pressed and agreed, but I don’t want her to die, PLEASE, DO SOMETHING.”

“Nothing can be done,” a shook of the head followed the displeasing words, “-Aceline will die one way or the other. Thee chose it for thyself,” lighting a cigar, “-go and walk off the confusion, I’ll be back later.”

The order arrived instantly at Phantom’s Headquarters. Elliot was called upon from the espionage mission on a local gang. “What’s the status, Lady Cake?” he asked walking towards the hangar.

“A mission ordered by the Boss came from Alpha. We’re setting up transport,” came through the radio.

“Look,” said Knightfall, “-the target is a Superstar. I wonder how many fans will cry after her death.”

“Damn,” said jumping onto a bike, going from one place to another needed vehicles for the place was too large, “- I enjoyed her songs too.”

The XR-TO Black-Bird Version, a tremendous improvement on the flightless jet bought so long ago. The gem and culmination of Phantom’s technology and research. A pilot from Sotepios waited in his flight-attire.

“Good morning, Sir Elliot, we’re readied for takeoff at your discretion.”

“Let’s do it then,” armed and ready, the runway roared as if an erupting volcano.

The event continued as predicted, the crowd all but grew denser. Staxius remained close-by, watching from a biased point of view. The music sounded nice but wasn’t great, it lacked originality. Arms crossed; he eyed the skies as if waiting for a rainy day.

“Oh come on,” mild arguments came from the dressing room.

“Lady Aceline, please understand that our singer is better suited for this type of performance. We agreed to perform as one on stage, but thy refusal for repetition forced our hands. In no way can Riot afford to have the fans be subject to an unprepared artist,” voiced the Leader loudly.

“Mind thy tongue,” returned she with a disgusted expression, “-this is nothing but promotion for the next movie. Long are the days where I have to fatigue myself from performing. We’ll do as I say, I’ll take the lead on the first two songs, then do as you wish, I have an appointment later.”

“My lady, please understand,” interjected Tolm, “-our leader only wants the first song to be a success. We can carry the energy from the hyped crowd over to an entertaining night, doesn’t it sound nice?”

“Shut up,” stood she with a light bulb crashing at the back, “-do as I say, else.”

Chapter 400: The Show must go on

Her threat fell on true. Time continued till the lovable Aceline jumped onto the stage in the company of Riot. The boy-band held five members excluding her. In melody and rhythm played the first song; her performance was above average. To their surprise, she carried over the energy masterfully.

Cheers and screams came from the packed crowds. Dei watched in fear with a pale face hidden behind the hoodie. Her prior actions meant the life of another would be taken. Influenced by rage, the instant her hand lifted off the contract earlier, the weight came as if a thunderbolt.

“Master,” said éclair, “-I have new information. The AHA recently ordered an assassination hit onto one of the stars. No more can be researched on the matter for tis the last transmission.”

‘A hit on someone,’ thought Staxius wandering out of reach. Elevated with a clear view of the performers, a still under construction building. The perfect location for a marksman. ‘The pressure broke Dei, an advantage I used to have Aceline eliminated. Killing an old friend all but sounds as if a treacherous thing to do. I did swear to protect her, what am I even doing...’ he sat solemnly on the edge of the window.

The appearance of Riot came at a later time than told on the pamphlets. A delay brought about by management, mostly, Aceline’s whim. She wanted to go first despite the warnings not from Riot alone, but other supervising staff as well.

“Master,” stopped slow and confined footsteps.

“Elliot,” smiled Staxius.

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“Good evening, master,” said the man dressed in a casual outfit. He grew out a mustache; the little detail had the face completely different.

“Don’t forget about me,” a cold shiver seductively caressed his lower-back.

“Knightfall,” nodded he, “-good to see you as well,” to which he faced the performance a few kilometers away.

“Humph,” pouted the spirit to vanish into the somber night.

“About the mission,” approached Elliot, “-are you sure about the last-minute changes?”

“Yeah,” said he now stood on the very same edge – the wind-blasted its glaring gust. The suit could but give way and fall to the strength, the force was enough to push away a normal man. Still, it didn’t faze him, not a single movement; the King all but stood. “Cimier will be involved tonight. Be on overwatch, I’ll relay anything through the channel. Let’s work as one, Elliot.”

“Roger that, Boss.” Upon the last words, the figure gently fell to then disappear. Around an hour later in the performance, other figures made their move. \*Click,\* the stage blacked out nearing the end of a song. Cries of annoyance riled the crowd to the point where none could interfere. The crew at the back were stunned – no answers, it blinked into darkness.

“How great is it... how great is it, oh, how very great is it!” \*clop, clop, clop.\* “A stage perfect for one as exalted as I,” \*clap,\* the spotlight shone onto he who had had the continent in his grasp. “Tis I, the

Jester," with a bow, the crowd began to boo. Those on stage were petrified for he didn't come alone. Gunmen stood with weapons at the ready.

"Get off the stage, you repulsive idiot."

"No one wants you around here."

"The heroes will come, just watch, damned Villain, they'll be here soon."

"You!" he screamed to a member of the crowd, "-who will come?" childish giggles followed, "-who, tell me, who? The heroes?" squatted, the fingers moved to the left. "Them?" dead people piled on one another, "-them heroes?" the tone fell into sternness, "-yeah, they were weak. Heroes like them don't need a place, they do not need the respect we give. Protectors of Alpha, what a joke," giving a shrug, he walked to stand menacingly behind Aceline. "Here's another example of a snake."

"You'll pay dearly," said she under her breath, "-dare to touch even one of my hair, I swear, I'll have you killed on the spot."

"Bitch," he smacked the back of her head, "-who the fuck do you think you are?" she fell on the ground. "Listen, princess of whatever shit hole, either stay quiet or be permanently silenced. I hate how a traitor has the audacity to talk back," \*spat,\* the saliva landed square on her face.

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"Jester," came another set of footsteps, "-dear old Jester," smiled Luna, "-thou fell into the trap."

"On the contrary, Hero Luna," \*snap,\* the gunmen rushed onto the stage, "-you fell into my trap," a wave later had a barrage of bullet destroy where Luna stood.

"STOP PLAYING AROUND!" screamed Aceline, "-this isn't the time to go around messing up the event. If you want to play games, then go ahead to the children's yard," who knew from where the sound of gunfire triggered a sense of bravado from within. She stood to confront the Jester physically – Riot tried their best to stand up, sadly, fear had them paralyzed.

"How dare you," \*bang,\* the Jester pulled a handgun to fire at point-blank.

"LADY ACELINE!" shouted the crowd; Luna was gone. \*Drip,\* came the loud noise of liquid falling.

"Why do you do this?" said a man dressed in expensive clothing, "-that sense of bravado, where did you keep it for all this time. Was becoming the worst idiot you could the only option? Aceline, I don't consider you a friend – we've fallen from that era. I'm the one responsible for militarizing your place of birth, and I will continue to do so. The Argashield Federation exists to protect and exterminate threats to the people, and threats to the continent," giving a sly grin, "-I guess thy safety falls into my jurisdiction." \*Death Element: Magical Barrier,\* quick to conjure walls between the innocent and macabre, "-go, escape," said he bleeding tremendously.

"B-but,"

"GO!"

“Mr. Haggard,” in came Hero Luna, “-thanks for helping the innocent,” a punch later had the Jester’s guards cower.

“DAMN YOU AGAIN,” a long-ended fight in company of Luna and Staxius came to a close. The latter, injured, one fairly unknown in the continent; would be remembered as the hero who saved Aceline. As for Luna, she single-handedly took care of the Jester and his minions.

Dust from the villain landed on the stage slowly. Silence prevailed – public safety officers were on the scene. Riot was exhausted, Aceline sat by the edge whilst the saviors stood. Lower ranked Heroes also made the trip to help in calming the crowd. None was injured miraculously, the organizers could but shudder. A sponsor was shot trying to defend their idol.

“The snipers have been dealt with, Boss. You were right, Cimier is involved.”

“Carry on investigating,” said he touching the earring.

“Luna,”

“Yes, Mr. Haggard, once again, thanks for helping; if it wasn’t for you, I doubt the superstar to be alive,” said she in gratitude.

“Come here, please,” he threw a mic, “-sing Sweet Bitter Love.”

“I-I, surely not, sir, please, I’m not that good a singer.”

“Just do it,” he smiled, “-Tolm.”

“What is it?” returned the drummer across the dimly lit stage.

“Sweet Bitter Love,” said Staxius.

“Excuse you?” turned the staff as well as the performers, “-were you not injured?” asked the leader of Riot.

“Trust me, the people are the ones who need reassurance. The show must go on, isn’t that the golden rule, come on, do it!”

“It’s always like this,” laughed Tolm, “-wherever Mr. Haggard goes, trouble must follow,” sat and readied, “-three, two, one,” the drums bounced into action. The bass soon joined with the guitar cutting across the two other instruments. Moved by the rhythm, Luna couldn’t hold back the lyrics.

The lighting on stage was destroyed during the gun-fire. None knew who performed nor who sang, what was prominent was the song, energetic and smile-inducing. Those who were scared but a while ago felt a sense of relief. Backstage, the organizers went crazy – public order demanded the show be stopped, lives were on the line. Still, the swaying of the crowd that sang along could but sway the feelings of the one in charge.

“What is it?” inquired a tired Aceline after a nudge.

“Get up and sing,” came a deep voice, “-you owe me that much.”

“Oh, fuck off,” she waved in dismissal and jumped, “-I’m done, the show is over, public safety’s coming.”

‘Suppose people change. Her bravado is intact, farewell, Aceline, farewell.’

\*Bam,\* the song ended. “Here, take the guitar, I’m done for tonight.”

“Mr. Haggard,” yelled Tolm, “-thanks for everything,” the light toggled as repairs were handled in haste. It lit to reveal Riot smiling and wanting to give their best.

The crowd’s mass seemed empty. Many folks went home after the incident – Public Safety assisted in evacuation. Those wanting to remain could do so, tis was the decision handed from the top. As a result, security rose even further.

“You didn’t run away,” came a tall figure amidst the shade.

“I guess not,” returned a tired voice from underneath the same tree.

“I’m not going to apologize.”

“I know,” said she, “-I know. Thank you for not killing Aceline, what I did was in rage. I realized the mistake too late; revenge is a beast not worth the effort of feeding. What contract did I sign?”

“To be employed by Phantom. We’re going to find Sugar, I told you about what I want.”

“Come on, my hand is beyond useless, even if I try to relearn the instrument, tis will be but wasted effort.”

“Don’t underestimate me, there’s a way to fix your hand.”

“Really?” she came out of her shell, “-you’re not pulling my leg, are you?”

“Yes, I speak the truth. Still, we need Sugar first, else, what’s the point?”

“F-fine, I-lets do it.” They took the car back to the hotel.

‘Now then, I lied about killing Aceline. The intent was there, and the order was given, but I changed it shortly after. Her dying would mean a lot of disadvantage, I guess the competition would be lightened, but it’s of no consequence. From what Elliot reported, Cimier was involved. I doubt we’ll know who was the target of assassination – maybe Tolm or even Aceline. There is still so much I don’t know about how they work or think. Luna’s intervention against the Jester sure came as a surprise. Here I thought the incident to be someone famous getting killed. No matter, tomorrow we’re headed off to Dostein – wait for me, Sugar.’

Recorded footage from last night’s event went around the capital. The heroism showed by a man who took a bullet to save an idol. It ignited the flames of passion amidst the populous. They who were failing to see the good side of humanity were rekindled. The newspapers as well as stations were desperate to have an interview with the man – a particular clip went viral. One where Luna and he greeted one another as acquaintances – it had attention shift upon learning more about the man. Staxius Haggard, owner of Meldorino and one of the top-five sponsors. The watch she wore was the same as shown in advertisements before and after the event. The name Meldorino became the topic of conversation for a few days. The showroom, as a result, had more and more guests visit. The prices were above the normal paycheck; the timepieces were absolutely beautiful.

A long corridor stretched till the back of the hotel. "Are you ready?" asked a man approaching the exit.

"I think so, yeah," returned a timid voice.

"Scared of flying?" the double door slid to reveal the helipad, "-let's go find thy lover, Dei. Let's go find the guitarist who's going to shake the world anew."

"Y-yes," she followed.

'Who does he think he is,' the wind whistled through the trees, '-my protection is under his jurisdiction, what an idiot?' Aceline wandered around the central park. People went for jogs and such, '-I hate you, king of Arda, I hate you.'

"Aceline," the cold tip of a gun-barrel plastered against her back, "-my condolences, the young master has decided that you're of no use."