

Death Magic 401

Chapter 401: Dostein

The province of Dostein was located in the northwest of Scaica. Known for being where most people decide to go retire, the province was more residential with few entertainment facilities. The decision was made to have it always be a place of refuge, an asylum for young and old alike, a soothing place to rest and grow. Similar to a slope, the province's houses and entourage changed the lower one went. Lower meant the beaches, and beaches were leisure for the rich. The Upper and lower class didn't mingle so frequently and the disparities weren't obvious. None went out of their way to prove the other inferior. Tis was where the mindset of acceptance came into play, the educated populous could but smile for they were the same; Alphian.

Three hours after the crack of dawn, the chopper arrived at a local airfield with helipads. Barricaded with high-walls, the resemblance was more military compared to the airfield in Marrowy. They landed as slow and gently as possible; the touchdown felt similar to a friendly slap on the back.

"Who are they?" asked Dei peering out. Three figures stood with a lady in the middle – the gust generated from the rotors had their clothes dance.

"The welcoming party," he smiled with the door sliding open, "-come on, let's go." On the ground first, he extended a hand to aid the injured Dei to get off. She kindly took the offer and thus they walked with her more or less sticking to his back.

"Leader of Phantom," said the lady with a smile.

"Lady Lerado," he nodded, "-tis a pleasure to see thee again," staring a once over, "-you've changed."

"You think so?" her face remained cold with only the voice alternating.

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"Yes, very much so," for once, her hair was dyed grey, the skin-complexion changed to tanned. Her visage went under the knife, the contours were sharp, the lips big, the nose piercing and eyes daunting. A furred wolf-pelt robe covered her body. These kinds of robes were most common for people living in cold places as well as hunters. As for her, the attire was fitted to be more appropriate for formal occasions, "-may I ask to why?"

"The slaying of my family is a nightmare I live with, it's a part of me, I can't afford to forget the pain. I vowed to make those who hurt us pay, and I will do what it takes. Changing my appearance is nothing compared to the bigger picture," her determined eyes fixed upon he who listened.

"Enough about me," sensing the would-be silence, "-why did you call?" asked she.

"I don't suppose you're familiar with Sugar?"

"I know of Sugar, isn't that what one puts in tea or pastries, the white gold?"

"No, no," he explained calmly, "-Sugar's the name of an idol."

"I'm afraid not," the head shook in confusion, "-why, did he do something?"

“One could say so, tis the reason for my visit to Dostein.”

“A manhunt,” an expression of deep thought broke away the frigid expression, “-I can call upon my men?”

“I thank you for the sentiment,” he paused, ‘-she can’t afford to send people on random manhunts. The Lerado are stretched thin as is.’ The place felt desolate, “-tis a personal quest, you need not intervene.”

“Is that so,” she exhaled relief with the relaxing of her chest and breath, “-please, let us help with any other request.”

“Actually,” the eyes befell a car, “-I’ll need transport for the trip.”

“Here,” not another word need be said, she handed over a keychain attached to a small panda, “-it’s not as extravagant as yours but she should do the job.”

“She’s perfect,” said he now examining the car. Red with decals, an old model off by two years, a convertible speed devil.

“Good luck on the search,” they exchanged goodbyes, she disappeared into the building while he took to the street. The sound of the helicopter soon broke the peaceful atmosphere as it returned. Another airfield owned by the Dark-guild. Dubbed O25, it was once used for importing illegal items into Alpha. The operation was dropped due to Public Safety getting involved. The operation moved to the South, the industrial districts with ports and open air-space. As for O25, it remained more or less an airfield for those of the DG.

“Any idea where we should start?” asked Staxius strolling down the large empty roads. The scenery was large fields with crops growing nicely. Warm colors as the sun shone; hills broke the ideal plots of land with their darker and somber coloring. To the left, one could see piles of rocks, a weird pyramid shape, boulders used for the construction of an abandoned fortress.

“Let’s get to Lemia, tis the village we stayed at until a few weeks ago.”

“Where is it?”

“To the upper plateau. Rumor has it that Dostein is for the rich. It couldn’t be farther from the truth. If you look far enough, some places are very affordable for the average joe,” her oily hair was set free with the car now open-roofed, it slapped against the backseat with reckless abandon.

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“The upper plateau it is,” said he with a smile.

Meanwhile, far, far away from where they drove; inside Scaica, the central park had yellow tapes stopping people for trespassing. In the morning, a jogger spotted what seemed to be a lady drowning. After he jumped in to save the figure; he couldn’t believe his eyes; Aceline was dead. A fresh detective out of the Academy was assigned to the case.

“You’re here,” said a man dressed in brown pants and a white shirt.

“Yes, sorry I’m late,” said the young investigator, “-care to show me around the place?”

“Sure,” said the veteran throwing away the cigarette, “-listen, our job as investigators is to find the truth. Coming out the academy is exciting, to work on trying to find culprits,” he leaped over the tape, “-it’s not the same. The excitement is soon replaced by the cruel truth of how fucked our society is.”

“O-ok?” he followed.

“There’s a single rule I want you to follow; do not fuck or tangle with the underworld. Let me tell you, it exists, and you don’t want to get in their way. I don’t remember how many recruits were killed just for having a lead on them. We’re in Alpha, so activity isn’t that high; practice caution,” they approached the scene.

“Investigators, you’re here,” said a man dressed in uniform, “-we’ve got the witness reports, it should be on the database. The body has been sent to the morgue.”

“What about the news, Aceline died, it’s going to cause a commotion.”

“It was decided to have it revealed to the public, the beloved superstar died after her concert,” returned the officer.

“Any hypothesis on how she died?”

“No, sir, the coroner will have the autopsy ready by the evening.”

“Thank you, we’ll wander around.”

“As you wish,” saluted the man.

“Sir, what was that about?”

“Chad, listen,” inhaled the veteran, “-investigations aren’t as black and white as you think. More often than not, people are killed and snuffed; those held accountable are never persecuted. Their links tie in deep, from the prostitutes on the street to the politicians, the underworld is powerful.”

“What about justice?”

“Screw it,” said he, “-fuck justice, I do this job to live, and you should too. The more complacent you are, the farther you’ll go, it’s the honest world kid. Either comply or get put down, I’m not opposed to having a new partner,” he crouched to examine where the body was pulled out off.

‘Fuck justice he says,’ faint explosions came out his finger, “-No, I refuse to give in,” an explosion had the veteran jumped back, “-PEOPLE NEED TO TRUST US!”

“Chill out,” said he rather annoyed, “-with that ability, maybe the AHA would have been a better fit. You want to save people, go become a hero, we’re here to take the bodies, do the paperwork and get paid, what don’t you understand about that?”

“What I don’t understand is why...” another explosion rattled the scene, “-why have you given up?”

“Oh, shut up,” *smack,* he hit with the hilt of his revolver.

“Why would you do that for?” cried Chad a yelp.

“Don’t be an idiot – we still have to figure out what happened here,” shaking the head, the current of the river increased.

“It’s over that way,” he pointed, “-that’s where she was shot.”

“What do you mean, shot?”

“I caught a look of the body earlier, she died from a bullet; I’m certain. It’s sloppy for an assassination, maybe a robbery or an angered fan, who knows,” they soon arrived in a tree heavy area, “-yeah, it’s here,” said he staring at a tree trunk. “She was shot point-blank using a revolver.”

“On w-what basis?” asked Chad dazed from the assault earlier.

“Her frame, the direction where it landed, it’s pretty self-explanatory. Let’s call it a day, we have the bullet, should be simple to trace back the gun and then the owner. It’s a shame there’s no surveillance and I doubt people to know anything of the shooting. Let’s go, rookie, the world of paperwork waits,” he lit another cigarette.

“Y-yes, s-sir,” he followed. ‘Lead investigator Larson of the 8th Division; a man of enigmatic character and excellent deduction skill. Rumors says he can read the mind. Little is known from his past. The way he speaks is annoying, I so want to punch him in the face,’ images of what occurred came forth, ‘-the truth is he came up with a possible hypothesis so quick. What did he mean by the underworld, is this relating to Cimier?’

Later that day, the news of Aceline’s death went around the capital. No cause was disclosed. The people sunk into disbelief; the fans grieved but not as much as the one she was close with.

“Majesty, MAJESTY,” a maid ran across the hall outwards to a balcony.

“Slow down, there’s no need to rush,” returned the Queen watering her plants.

“IT’S OF UTMOST IMPORTANCE,” she screamed, “-THE PRIDE OF HIDROS DIED!”

“W-what?” her body slumped to subconsciously dropped the watering can and hit a flowerpot which fell and broke. “-A-Aceline’s d-dead?” nausea came from within, “-h-how?” her throat tightened.

“Gallienne, Gallienne,” Piers came running, “-oh no...” he paused, “-you’ve learned of the news...”

“I-is s-she really d-dead?” her eyes watered.

“I-I’m afraid so...” he jumped to embrace her tightly.

“M-my b-best friend d-died?” the warm memories resurfaced, “-I d-don’t w-want to b-believe i-it,” inhaling deep, “-get me the phone right now, and DON’T report this to the populous.”

“W-what are you doing?” inquired the Prince scared by her demeanor.

“I need answers,” snatching the device out of the maid’s hand, *Calling, Staxius.*

“Greetings Majesty,” came a nonchalant voice.

“Listen, Staxius, forgive the lack of manners; Aceline’s dead, do you know anything about it?”

“Are you sure she’s dead, I’ve heard nothing of it?”

“Yes, she’s dead; I got news from Alpha a few minutes ago, where even are you?”

“Headed to find a friend.”

“Well, King of Arda, this is a request from thy partner – return at once and get a hold of her body. I don’t care what you use, we’ll go to war if needed; the Pride of Hidros must be brought to life.”

“The revival ritual, are you sure?” he asked with interest.

“The time limit is three days; I’ll have the preparation started on my end – don’t fail me now, King of Arda,” the call ended.

“W-what’s the matter?” asked Dei.

“Aceline’s dead,” quick to pull the handbrakes, “-Dei, I need you to go on ahead and search for Sugar. Here’s 5,000 Exa, call me when he’s found, ok?”

“S-sure,” her cluelessness spoke volume as the car sped back from whence it came.

‘God damn it; how could she have died. I thought Elliot took care of the assassins.’

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Touching the earrings, “éclair.”

“What are the orders?”

“Have Cake send over the fastest jet we have and prepare it to carry a body.”

“Roger.”

‘Public Safety will be involved, if she goes under the knife, I might not be able to resuscitate her.’

Calling Sultria VI.

“Aceline’s dead. Do what is need to not have her body under the knife. I don’t care what method is employed. Sultria, you best not fail me.”

Chapter 402: Larson

“Urgent mission from the Boss, have the jet be readied with the ability to carry a body,” yelled across the various sectors of Rotherham – the airfield turned upside down. People went from left to right, pilots called from break, a prototype jet lifted from the underground laboratory. The hangar opened to a gloomy outside. It took less than an hour for the plane to climb to the heavens.

At the same time, Staxius teleported to Scaica from Dostein, time was of the essence. The phone call earlier freaked the emperor so badly, he knew not how to respond. That much was apparent from the following phone call.

“What did you mean by; use any means necessary?”

“Throw money, blackmail, I care not,” the phone hung with him inside the hotel.

“éclair,” quick to dash out the penthouse, “-infiltrate the investigation unit, I want the location of where the body is.”

“Roger,” came a fast response.

‘Come on, don’t you dare become more of a hassle,’ walking at a running pace; news flashed across the television inside the lobby with the title of Aceline’s death. It was a scandal, a thing of utmost tragedy. Allowing it to perpetually spread throughout the continent would have other repercussions. The mystery of who killed Aceline was still at large and Staxius knew it all too well. For once, the ruling of it being a robbery or obsessive fan was dropped. The reason for said conclusion was Elliot’s report last night; Cimier’s snipers. Out of the building, the car automatically pulled over without a driver. “Any links yet?” asked he to the virtual butler.

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“Still foraging the database; Lady Aceline’s body is being transported to Kinele’s General hospital.”

‘A thirty-minute drive,’ he slammed onto the pedal while éclair worked tirelessly.

‘What did father mean?’ sat the Emperor facing an empty screen. ‘Aceline’s dead, what does he want to accomplish?’ then the realization hit, “-this can be a scandal,” to which the fingers latched onto the keyboard, the urge to write was there but no idea came. “The Pride of Hidros was assassinated by Alpha. The Argashield Federation might not take this lightly. Arda is allied with us, yes, and Eira and I are courting. The relation isn’t set in stones yet, we’re not engaged and the Federation still views us as potential enemies. How have I been so blind, my alliance is with the King of Arda, not the Federation. Queen Gallienne and her council could vote against father and have malicious intent. This is bad, really bad, Aceline’s death could not have come at the worst time,” a spur of inspiration had one number locked in place.

“General Bashmire.”

“Rare of you to call upon me, your imperial majesty, how may I be of service?” answered a rougher, older voice.

“Am I correct in saying that public safety and the investigation unit falls under thy jurisdiction?”

“Yes, that is true, why?” came a rather cautious response.

“Good, it concerns the matter of Lady Aceline’s death. I don’t want anyone to touch nor lay a hand on her body – make sure it’s preserved. General, you understand the implications, don’t you?” the emphasis had the elder man breathe a chuckle.

“Yes, I do, your imperial majesty, I shall have the force hold and wait for further orders. I swear upon my name, Lady Aceline’s body will remain untouched,” a heavy shadow escaped out the windows as the phone call ended. Sultria’s posture gave to a slouch as rays of light pierced the lesser opaque curtains.

‘The moment a person dies, the body starts to break-down. Freezing can but slow down the process, it’s impossible to bring the dead to life. That is when it concerns the rest of the world. Not in Hidros, not where occult and magic are the main focus of development. Her body will need to be healed using potions, the mana lingering after death should be enough of a catalyst. It’s going to be a process of

reattaching her soul – shouldn't be hard. The Revival ritual; shunned by the magic world, the ritual the late-pope used to conjure an army of undead fighters. Alchemy is going to come into play; the time has come to truly see if the many years of studying and experimenting will do her justice.'

Dim, cold, and sterile, Aceline's body rested fully naked on a metal table. A singular light flashed against where the bullet entered her body. The room, despite being large, gave the impression of being small.

"Doctor,"

"What is it?" returned the man wearing a mask, "-what do you want, can't you see I'm busy?"

"Sorry to interrupt, but we've received direct orders to not touch her under any circumstances."

"Why should I care, she's dead, and we need to know the cause of death," the expression through his glasses was of excitement.

"Don't," refuted the nurse, "-it's more than a simple case of homicide. Doctor, please, listen, if as little as a single hair is taken, we'll be in deep trouble, trust me."

"Who in the world must have called to have you out of all people shudder?" the mask landed inside a bin listlessly, "-the damned politics, fine," the walk felt slow until he stormed out.

Towards the east of Melmark, the investigators assigned to Aceline's case sat in their office. Tightly packed desk with people working tirelessly. Larson sat before a laptop with details on similar cases.

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"Chad from division eight speaking. What, oh, alright, are you sure? Ok, thanks, goodbye," it hung with a cling.

"What has you in a foul mood?" inquired Larson in a mean spirit.

"Got a call from the Doctor, the autopsy was canceled. Says orders came from the top," the grudge in the voice was palpable.

"Should have seen it coming," he now leaned in a manner to balance on the back two feet of the chair, "-it happens in cases like these. Always comes down from the higher-ups; watch this, I'll bet my dinner the next call is from the Director saying us to drop the case."

Dring, lo and behold, the phone call arrived asking the same as he predicted.

"Told ya," a smug smirk to Chad had the recruit slam against the table.

"I'm not taking this whilst sitting down," he gritted.

"Chill," sighed Larson, "-don't be in such a hurry."

"But sir."

"Shut up," he stood and walked, the footsteps felt menacing in a way, "-I have my methods. Come on, the case is dropped. Thinking about it, I have an aunt who's at the hospital, want to meet her, she's very fond of idiots like you."

“Y-you sure?”

“Yeah, let’s go, the worst thing that could happen is her puking on you. Don’t worry about it.”

A tall white building stood with, *-Kinele’s General hospital,* written in big, readable fonts.

“You must be Mr. Haggard?” asked a man wearing glasses in a black-suit.

“Yes, and you are?”

“The Director of the hospital. I was informed of the arrival, thus here I am. I would be rude to not welcome a King personally.”

“Thank you for the concern,” giving a firm handshake, “-so, Director, the details of why I’m here must be known I presume?”

“Please follow me,” he avoided the question, “-the scene will speak for itself.” Past the elevators and down into a subterranean wing; they walked across multiple glass-windowed rooms with deranged individuals sitting.

“I do apologize for such an awful display,” the hallway kept on stretching, “-ignore the subjects. Past villains, criminals given the death penalty, they were given to us graciously by the Empire to conduct research. Please, don’t misinterpret, tis for the sake of knowledge – what is practice here is humane, in no way do we wish to be seen as the evil.”

“Shouldn’t this wing be secret, why have me walk, I could easily reveal the information to the public,” by insinuating a possible threat, Staxius wished to see the reaction, testing the waters as one might say.

“I doubt it would do much,” grinned the Director, “-the wing isn’t going to be detrimental to the public. The information is already there for them to see, all one needs is to have a good eye,” the steps steadied, “-and here we are,” he pointed at a room, “-the cryogenic chamber. The pod I should say was developed to house people with a fire affinity. To help them calm the flames, in retrospect, it’s basically a massive fridge.”

“And Aceline is in there, frozen?”

“The body is untouched and left as was found. I hope this is sufficient?”

“Yeah,” he nodded, “-the cold is going to preserve her as we take her to Hidros. She should return from whence she came, you know, Aceline is our pride.”

“I understand,” came a sympathetic smile, “-I’ll have the pod be readied for transport.”

“Good, how long will it take?”

“A few hours.”

“Good, do give me a call afterward.”

“Very well.”

The clutter of patients waiting at the reception couldn’t have been any worse. In said crowd, two peculiar men stood with badges, “-Larson from Division Eight, I’m here to see the body one last time.”

“Sure, down the corridor, sir, the director should already be there,” said the receptionist. People were subconsciously trained to obey to public safety. The badges were powerful tools.

“How did you do that?”

“Listen, kid, our badges hold more weight than people realize. The moment we show one of these, they are afraid for themselves. In a way, it makes us repulsive. The feeling of wanting to have us go away is like fight or flight.”

“I see,” he nodded.

“Director,” hailed he across the hall.

“Investigator Larson,” returned a rather uninviting voice.

“Come on, don’t be that way,” an obnoxious smile had the director physically distancing, “-to an old friend no less, how very much rude.”

“Old friend or I should say acquaintance,” exhaling, “-what do you want now?”

“A tiny little favor,” he came in close, “-let me take a look at the body. The autopsy was canceled; still, having a look inside wouldn’t bother anyone,” conniving in nature, the words came across awful in the young investigator’s mind.

“Have a look inside what?”

“You heard all that?” laughed Larson, “-I guess gossiping isn’t suited for my line of work.”

“Trying to alter the subject isn’t sufficient,” glared an impressive man, “-the investigation has been dropped per my request. Mr. Larson, don’t make this a matter of state.”

“Per your request?” he frowned, “-who in the hell are you?”

“Such an insolent tone.”

“LARSON, mind thy tongue,” shouted the Director, “-this here is the King of Arda. Any more from that filthy mouth of yours and I’ll have thy tongue cut and plastered onto the trash outside.”

“Director,” interjected Staxius, “-please, there’s no need for such crude words. Mr. Larson was doing his job. It did come across insolent, however, we forgive and forget. Now, if you’d excuse me,” he left with a nod.

“Damn it Larson,” facepalmed the Director, “-why the hell did you come?” the tone lightened.

“I honestly didn’t know royalty was involved, thanks for covering for me,” said he apologetically.

“Don’t worry about it,” he gave a friendly pat, “-go and check on the body, don’t do anything that can get me in trouble,” they parted.

A few minutes later, “-Sir, who even was that? How can a man be so imposing, just looking at him felt wrong.”

"I know," they walked down the same hallway, "-he's suspicious and dangerous. There was the look of a man who has killed, no, never mind, let me rephrase. A man who has slaughtered countless innocent lives – a man who's the pinnacle of what is considered to be powerful."

"How can you say that he's powerful?"

"Didn't you listen, 'the investigation was canceled per my orders,' his very words. Do you even realize how much influence a person must have to force the hand of our General. Not even that, I'm sure it's linked to the Emperor."

"T-the emperor, w-what then?"

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"Nothing really," he laughed, "-we wait and see. Tis a big ass fish, let me tell," the footsteps went mute deeper inside.

"éclair," stood outside, "-have a look into Larson. He might prove to be problematic in the future."

Chapter 403: Unnamed Unit

Ancient Magic: Teleportation, Melmark to Marrowy. A grey-cased pod with a semi-transparent window stood under the shadow of the curved hangar. Empty and desolate by nature, the airfield felt alive. Guards, many guards stood waited eagerly. Most peered down the slope expecting a car to arrive. A plane with a squad of fighter jets were lined symmetrically. Phantom's was plastered on the tail.

"Courtney," said Staxius opening the hangar, "-you've come as well?"

"You're here," she turned with a smile, "-long time no see," they greeted in form of a hug.

"I thought you were out on a mission?"

"Figure I'd come by as escort," she glanced inside, "-Aceline?"

"In the pod, where's the medical team?"

"Hold on," she gestured to a clueless looking guard, "-go fetch the medical team."

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"As you wish," quick on his feet, the boy ran along.

"Can't believe she's dead," sighed she.

"I can't believe she was killed," the posture held discontent, "-the killer needs to be found. Killing a star out in public is obnoxious, they didn't even try to hide the body."

"I see now," she nodded, "-quite a detestable show of authority. What's the plan?"

"We're reviving Aceline, what else. I've a good idea on who might be responsible," as he spoke, the medical team arrived. No words exchanged for they knew what to do. The pod was transported into the plane. Thunder-sounding roars echoed in intervals. Hence, Staxius headed to Hidros.

While the body changed continent, Dei stepped out the train into a small village named Delho. 'Is this home?' she walked, the people were few and thin, the buildings scattered with nature being most prominent. Immediately after the station came a shop, one with a broken window being repaired.

"Dei, how are you?" hailed the owner, "-I thought you left us for good, where have you been?"

"No where particular," said she shyly, "-I went to visit family in the capital," her gaze locked onto the broken glass.

"The glass," said he, "-it's Oris, you know; he's been going through a rough time. I heard he got knocked out by one of his bandmates, know anything about it?"

"Where is he?" a pulse had her chest tightened, "-where's Oris."

"Chill girl, there's no need to be hasty. He's at Mrs. Delond's place."

"Thank you, Mathew, it's good to see you again," after which she sprinted into town.

"Lovers," mumbled the owner.

"Love..." added one who was in process of fixing the window.

"Back to work," a tap on the head had the other assistant laugh.

'Come on Sugar; what in the world happened since I left,' panted to a stop, a white house with slated roof rested on a cross-way.

Knock, knock,

"Coming," the door opened with a middle-aged lady wearing glasses, "-what can I do for ya?" asked she taking off the spectacles.

"Is Oris here?" asked she who breathed heavily.

"Yes, who are you exactly?" a frown rose her suspicion.

"I'm Dei, I use to live with him," to which she removed the hoodie, "-Mrs. Delond, it's been a while."

The frown turned upside down as her face lightened, "-Dei," said the doctor, "-it's good to see you," the door opened fully, "-go on, he's upstairs."

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"What happened to him?" the creaking of the floorboard perturbed the eerie silence. Faint moans of pain escaped through the wooden walls. The building was used as the local infirmary.

"Got in a fight, the injuries weren't that bad, he's just a little shaken up."

White static noise from the television tuned to, *-Superstar Aceline found dead earlier this morning.* The words came suddenly for she strained her head to look up. The news played with bold headlines.

"How could this have happened," whispered the assistants behind.

"What's the world coming too," added another.

“Did she kill herself or get murdered. Not even superstars are safe.”

‘She’s dead?’ her face lightened, ‘-she’s dead?’ a smile confirmed her prior suspicion. When Staxius said the idol died, she all but thought it be a product of the mind. Walking turned to a dash, “-don’t run in the hallways,” shouted across.

Click, a singular bed in a tight room, the windows opened with white-drapes fluttering about. It gave onto a tall tree with less than a few leaves. A desolate radio played the news, with another lonesome figure sat peering at the va-et-vient 1of the villagers.

“Sugar,” said an adorable whisper. The lonesome figure turned with a bandage around the head, a listless expression turn to petrified. The eyelids opened in shock with the mouth following suit.

“What a-are you doing here?” once a voice many adored to now sounding as if scraping the bottom of a barrel, he lost it. The concoction ruined his vocal cords; luck at it he didn’t go mute. As a result, the voice stayed quiet and monotonous, raising his pitch or even singing would hurt the throat.

“I came to get you,” she approached to tightly hug his head to her chest, “-I’m not going anywhere ever again. I don’t care if you pushed me away for my safety, we vowed to be one, and I’ll keep that promise.”

“P-please, D-Dei, d-don’t associate with me. I was t-the reason you got hurt. I failed as y-your lover, i-it should have been me, n-not you.”

“Stop it,” warm tears fell onto his forearm, “-I love you damn it, isn’t that reason enough. I don’t care what happens to me, we vowed, remember, we vowed!” a promise made onto a melancholic full-moon, a promise to be one till death did them part.

“Sorry,” he tightened his grip around her waist, “-I’ve got nothing, I’m worthless.”

“You got me, don’t you?” she held up his chin, “-don’t be so harsh on yourself,” they locked lips, “-I’m here for you.”

Far, far away from Dostein, two cars parked to a logged-cabin. Inside, a warm fire gave heat, the outside was cold and the air was thin.

“Good job,”

“Thank you, killing her was pretty simple. Are you sure leaving the body out like that was a wise idea?”

“Yeah, don’t worry about that,” a black suitcase laid on a table, “-payment for a job well done. The young master will be pleased.”

“My pleasure,” nodded the hitman who soon left with the money.

Dressed in a butler’s outfit, a grey-haired man stood with a conniving smirk. ‘I do apologize,’ thought he, ‘-there can’t be any links to the young master.’ *Beep.*

BOOM, an explosion rattled the cold atmosphere. Birds cried far and wide as a towering pillar of smoke rose, ‘-no one must know who is responsible, everyone is disposable,’ sat he in the car.

“Young master, why have you called?”

“Did you get any information on the Hero Luna? I want her, do what is must, I want her in my bedchambers. Whoever that is must pay, she must pay!”

“Will do, young master, will do.”

“Speaking about ladies, did you kill Aceline already?”

“She has been taken care of, why master?”

“It’s father, he wants her dead. Says we could be at risk of being exposed or something.”

“I figured you to want her alive as a plaything.”

“I thought of having her sold into prostitution but she’s too renowned. She’s better off dead – I had my fun.”

“Marvelous, young master, marvelous.”

“Good job, father will be pleased.”

Minutes turned to hours. Rotherham, out on the airfield – various vehicles stood at the ready. Cake waited in the middle patiently for the plane would arrive at any moment.

“Lady Clarise, I’m glad thee made it,” said Cake surrounded by guards.

“No, Lady Cake, the pleasure is mine,” said she now a teenager, “-it’s thanks to Phantom that we’re able to work and research to our hearts contents. The papers are published under our name – the freedom thee give is more than enough.”

“There’s no need for gratitude since good work must be compensated with a good reward. The Alchemist guild is one of the pillars holding us high in the world of alchemic research,” the conversation cut short. Distinct was the sound of Phantom’s jet engine. The fighter jets would remain in the air to survey as the plane closed into the land. Screeching followed by parachutes opening, the still-greied prototype survived a cross-continental trip. Related personnel moved to wrap around the plane, Aceline’s body was soon placed in an ambulance.

“Welcome back,” said Cake.

“Good to see you,” nodded Staxius, “-have her be transported to the Alchemist Guild, I’ll be there in a moment,” the escort drove out the airfield and towards the other buildings.

“Master Staxius,” said a girl with blond hair and deep ocean eyes.

“Clarise, is that you?”

“Yes, it’s been a long time, hasn’t it?” she smiled beautifully.

“Too long, by the heavens, you’ve grown into a fine lady. Where’s the master alchemist?”

“Grandfather’s taking a break, I’ll be aiding in the ritual,” said she confidently.

“Alright,” the conversation ended. Aceline’s body entered a tunnel off to the side where GateSix worked; the subterranean research facility. One used for warfare and things beyond what one could say

humane. Necromancy, Alchemy, to name a few, the research on artificial life and immortal soldiers. The same as what the pope did, or tried to do, though better. The fighters would be sentient with the help of éclair. The secret unnamed research group; it was known to never be spoken outside. The birthplace of éclair counting as the more prominent achievement. Referred to as the Alchemist Guild to not arise suspicion, Flein led despicable experiments one after the other; he was allowed to think of whatever and do the same.

"The unnamed unit," said Staxius stood with only the body and Clarise. Access further down was denied; the medical team but helped in transporting the pod to an automatic checkpoint. From security to maintenance, all were transferred to éclair; the guardian of the unnamed facility.

"Your unit," interjected Clarise. "-we were established per your orders, to carry the worst thing imaginable to humans."

"Is it a complaint?" they walked along a white and sterile hallway.

"No, I'm grateful. Tis the only way we can fight the Cobalt Unit. By going down the route of what is taboo. I mean, we did make éclair; and he's a pillar of our security and whole facility excluding my unit."

"Well, it's what we have to do," they came to a giant double door. Two panels stood with the diagrams of a hand. A scan later, it opened to a large room with magic circles littered around.

"King of Arda," said a sharp voice.

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"Queen Gallienne," said he, "-what a lovely surprise."

"Stop with the jests," she approached, "-where's Aceline?"

"Here," said Clarise.

"My friend, what has become of you," heavy sorrow filled her posture and expression, "-Staxius, I've done what I can; the Ritual Process from Kreston is here. I vowed to never use the pope's findings," hung on watching her friend's face, she stopped speaking.

"Leave it to us," said he, "-Clarise and I will make sure she comes back to life. Go, they're waiting outside. Have look around Phantom's headquarters; the town should have some activities thee can partake."

"Please, do what you can. The freedom I gave to Phantom..." she deliberately didn't follow the sentence as the door shut.

'Blackmail,' thought he, '-guess I'd do the same if someone I loved was found dead.'

"The ritual says we need living people, we need their lifeforce."

"Don't worry about that; a Philosopher stone can be used as a replacement."

"We don't have such a thing. Philosopher stone, honestly, master, isn't that a bit far-fetched?"

"It's not," cold and distant, "-lay her body in the magical circle; I'll alter the revival ritual. Stand back and be attentive; I might require assistance."

"Do what is must, I'll be waiting."

'Life and death. A chance at reviving someone I once knew. What would have happened if I was present on that day. I'm sure I could have revived everyone, I'm sure of it,' the eyes closed, '-who am I kidding. It was an illusion. They were killed and the bodies were destroyed. I couldn't have revived them even by using a relic-scroll. Five years later, I'm standing before someone precious to another. Aceline, I promise I'll bring thee back.'

Chapter 404: Revival

The sound of pistons and machines grew common. Vents above seemed to suck the air outside, the room's temperature dropped. Each mechanism that locked and twisted was felt in two ways, if loud, by sound, and if low, by vibration. In no way was the room safe, or remotely close to it. One could say it felt more of a desolate grave than an underground facility. Queen Gallienne headed outside in the company of Cake. The latter took great care of royalty; tis was reminiscent of waiting on a loved one's surgery.

"What should I do?" asked Clarise with glee on her face, the expression of a babe seeing his mother; an innocent giggle.

"Monitor the room's status, make sure mana is circulated firmly," said he wearing an untucked white-shirt atop a formal pair of pants.

"The engine right?" said she to confirm.

"Yes, instead of having mana turned to electricity, we'll reverse the connection. The mana around this facility isn't going to be sufficient; I mean, the facility runs on it."

"Where will we get the electricity?" asked she a little forgetful.

"There's a powerplant a few kilometers to the sound, have you forgotten? We supply them excess energy."

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"Oh, yeah," her motion stopped short of a facepalm, "-go on then, Alchemist, let see thee revive a dead human." *Clap, clap, clap,* her heels echoed against a metallic staircase leading to the back of the room, an elevated platform with a one-way mirror. The doors were multiple millimeters thick, blast protected in a way.

Aceline's body remained in the pod. A press of the button had the floor in the middle opened as if a mouth to give a metal table.

'Here's to nothing,' *tsst,* the pod unlocked to give white, chilly, smoke. She felt heavy, the limbs were very much dead. With minimal effort, the body laid face up opposite an empty magical circle on the ceiling.

'She's been dead for less than a few hours. Her soul must still be in the tunnel leading to the Hall of Rebirth. The first order of business is to retrieve the soul, her body will heal after the innate magical

element is reawaken,' stood sternly before the paled figure, the eyelid shut. Same as using the All-seeing eye when his conscience released itself from the host; a similar process would be utilized.

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Bound to the mortal realm, I, the god of death, wishes to enter mine domain, release mine soul from tis bound too; Death Element: Ethereal Release. Present and not, the soul detached into a hover while the physical body remained still, not moving nor living, a snap later, he teleported to the Hall of Rebirth.

'The place sure is quiet,' no sign of Lord Death nor the assistant. The usual messengers of death which flew above weren't present – time seemed to have been stopped. Unbothered by the silence, he continued past the hovering golden globe and towards the tunnel. There, it forked into two orbs, one for those who were deemed worthy to be reborn and another towards the realm of repentance; or, the real underworld, hell. During the war between gods, demons, and other entities – there existed only one portal. Even after death, gods and beings powerful enough would have their souls transmigrate to another host. Not that it was shunned nor viewed in a bad-light for it continued till the war ended. There, a contract was struck to have another portal opened, one to hell, one for those who made deals with the devils. The concept of good or evil didn't matter, nonetheless, those who killed under impulse were most likely possessed by demons, and thus, their soul needed to fulfill its contract.

Bubbles in which souls would move were stopped, the flow of rebirth halted – it wasn't only the hall, but everything around.

'What's happened?' upon asking said question, the combined symbols of power split; the mark of Kronos, the god of time, burnt vividly to run down his left arm and rest on the back of his hand. The Sickle, the god slaying weapon, spiraled around itself and transformed into a clock. The hour, minute, and second hand stood at noon.

"Child, heed my call, tis I, the god of time. My heir has been slain by the alliance of gods; he has been killed. The harbinger of chaos, he who held the opportunity to change the godly realm was slain without mercy. He who brought the dimension of monsters, he who infected and cursed thy world has been killed. My son, Zeus, killed me and my heir, he holds dominion over the third most powerful element; time. Well, that is if he was smart – the dominion has been bestowed upon the heir of my friend. It grieves me to say this, god of death, but I must warn thee. The gods aren't right, the demons aren't wrong, the symbol of power, despite it being lost to me, was given to you by Lord Death. A war will have the whole multiverse on the verge of collapse, I foresaw it in vision. Heed my voice once more, my heir's mission wasn't to kill nor destroy, he was tasked to change and find the truth, the truth about the Origin. Go, Heir of Death and wielder of time, use thine newfound powers. Creation, Death, and Time are under thy thumb – the Supreme god isn't going to be happy. Farewell, dearest child, I shall have an assistant of mine meet thee soon; she's capable, the details of what happened will be given then."

The sensation of being stuck in a never-ending loop cut. The tunnel of Rebirth resumed; the hall seemed to return to life. The mark of time, once a sickle, turned to the hands of a clock. The symbol of Death in one hand, and the symbol of Time in the other, he panted to fall onto his knees.

'What was that?' the head spun, a feeling of vertigo had the left side of the body go numb to which he lost balance and fell.

“Staxius, is that you?” a familiar voice came from behind, “-IT IS YOU,” a warm pair of hands wrapped itself around his back.

“Jessica,” said he more or less conscious, “-where’s Lord Death?”

“He went on an expedition with the other gods. I think it’s relating to the revival of the Titans. I heard they were planning to kill the god slayer, well, since he has the ability to steal other divine being’s power and all,” her explanation eased into his mind. “What about you?” quick to change the subject, “-what are you doing here?” she went around to stand before him, “-thou art not supposed to resume the duties of Death Reapers in the hall for another millennium,” her frown gave the feeling of being uninvited.

“I came to fetch a soul,” he took her hand to then dust his pants.

“Sure, go ahead, take thy pick, I’ll take my leave, Lord Death may return soon,” following a smile, she skipped away whilst humming a nostalgic melody.

‘She never changes, even in death, she never changes,’ the situation concerning inheritance overtime was put on the backburner, ‘-where’s her soul,’ a scan later, ‘-found her.’ *Come forth, Box of Souls,* a withering hand rose to clinch the soul, ‘-that should do it.’ *Return.*

Click, the sound of a clock resounded with his mind, a heart-tearing headache pulsed from the left side of the skull – the symbol of time lit. To put it into perspective, the pain was similar to one having a toothache, though, this time, the amount would be multiplied by a hundred.

Smack, a slap forced the mind to refocus, ‘-alright Aceline, let’s start.’ He reached towards a table on wheels, it held blank scrolls. Two tiny cuts were made onto each thumb, *Blood-Arts: Crimson Thread,* after which he threw the scrolls in a cavalier gesture. Bound to differing points and angles in air, *Mana Control: Waves,* focused onto her body, the dimming mana-circuitry pulsed. *Mana Control: Lines,* guided to the proximities of her limbs, vital organs, *Mana Control: Spiral,* and brain, “-turn on the engine,” said he loudly.

“On it,” came a reply followed by a push. The aura changed instantly, the surge in power was profound. Bit by bit, the concentration increased to an adequate level, ‘-it’s working,’ thought he, ‘-I need her magical element to restart,’ open palm against her chest, *Boof,* the body bounced. The paleness disappeared as the element reactivated. ‘Next comes her actual body,’ he reached for another scroll; relic class healing spell. Rather than unraveling the contents, a snap had it burnt with a white flame. *Visualize,* hands pressed, the magic circle on the scroll transferred to project above the table. A few gestures later, the very fabric of the spell was altered to fit the specific purpose.

‘Heal,’ a downward motion had the circle shrink and enter the body.

By the power bestowed upon I by the god of time, I, the god of death, order thee, entity of which none knows, entity who which all sees to move in accordance to mine will: Time Control: Acceleration. A pocket dimension manifested around Aceline’s body, the hour hand on the symbol moved forth at a rapid pace – the change could be seen in reality; her body healed.

'What happened,' a burning sensation had him cover the left eye; not that it was noticed, the retina showed a golden clock. 'Was I possessed?' thought he for the incantation came subconsciously. 'No matter,' still in pain,

Come forth, Box of Soul.

Soul locked, soul lost, I, the god of death, summons thee from the land of the dead, the land of the forgotten, and the land of the forgiven, return to the mortal plane; Soul Transmigration, a blinding light materialized to then enter her body.

Thump, the ground shook, *thump,* the walls seemed to move, *thump,* her limbs jittered, the eyelids opened in shock to which she sat upright and panted.

"Where am I?" her clueless face moved from left to right, she sweated, her hands trembled, "-wasn't I shot?" *Gulp.* "W-wait..."

"Welcome to the land of the living," said Staxius unbuttoning his shirt and loosening the tie, "-way to go ahead and die," said he in a tired voice.

"Welcome back to the land of the living..." said she with a frown, "-please, none has the power to have the dead turn back to life."

"Well," a touch on the earlobe, "-éclair, please play the news reports and coverage over her death, I need a break."

"Orders confirmed," the massive door opened as the naked idol faced a screen.

'What happened?' asked he staring in a mirror inside the washroom a few minutes later, '-did Kronos really bestow the power of time upon me? What in the world is going on. The god slayer's mission, gods, demons, a war, what... It can't be a dream, I controlled time earlier, I controlled it, I felt it, it was real, I had it go forward and accelerate her growth. The power of the one who brought chaos upon the world, the God Slayer is dead?'

"Lady Aceline," said Clarise helping her to dress, "-you were killed by gunshot. It was per Queen Gallienne's plea that you were brought back to life by the Master. I don't know what happened between you two since the prior exchange felt more or less malicious, but do be respectful. Life isn't given a second time, I hope the reality settles in thine mind," she in turn stepped out.

Aceline was left inside, alone to ponder what occurred. Her memories were up until the shooting. 'The bastard decided to kill me,' the gaze remained at the screen, '-the son of a bitch thought I could be disposed of. I guess war isn't that bad a thing; my way of thinking was wrong – I hate to admit it, nothing ever goes according to plan. I tried my best to have a world of peace, well, I thought of it in fantasy. It's weird,' her face relaxed, '-I feel enlightened in some way; was I blessed?'

Chapter 405: Guests

"Is the Queen meeting with Aceline?" asked a tired Staxius.

"Yes, master," replied Clarise with a change of clothes.

“Right, I’ll be back at a later time,” the excruciating pain resounded with each step. Outside of the underground facility, the airfield felt a little calmer. The initial panic of him coming lessened; guards returned to patrolling the area. Vehicles went back and forth between facilities, a normal day at Phantom’s Headquarters.

“Are you ok?” came a shadow of a lady, “-I felt the impulse, did something happen, brother?”

“Courtney,” the stance broke into a stumble.

“Easy!” she held his arms around her shoulders, “-I’ve never seen you this bad before.”

“I’ll tell you everything at a later date. Teleport us to the mansion, I want to sleep so bad,” and as ordered, they vanished.

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“Who stands there!” yelled a voice towards the garage, “-how did you get in here?” approached a girl dressed in a black dress with a parasol.

“Seiran,” returned Courtney, “-it’s us.”

“What happened to master,” her pace quickened, “-is he ok?” she asked with genuine worry.

“A little bit tired I think,” she explained, “-standing around here will but make his situation grow tiresome. Let’s have him rest.” Thus, the day on which Aceline had life breathed into her once more ended.

Date 24 March; three days had passed since the revival process. News of the King returning to Hidros went around those of which were concerned. Mainly the Queen of Arda for she was quick to teleport to the mansion at the capital. As for Arda – the burden of being present for every occasion grew to be archaic. The advancements made it all the more simpler. Not to mention the council who were tasked to monitor and resolve conflicts as they rose. The economy built itself up, trade was fruitful and the people were happy. The borders being opened to tourists, mainly those in Hidros themselves, brought around even more happiness. One could say, Staxius achieved prosperity in his realm; vassals, nobles, and the many clans were content.

“Majesty, are you sure it wise to cook despite us being here?” asked a concerned Rosetta; her hair was shorter compared to before. The braids which once reached her chest now but stood close to her ears.

“Please,” returned the Queen, “-I can do that much, can’t I?” the sizzling of vegetables made it hard to hear.

“Y-your right,” said the head-maid apologetically.

“Don’t worry about it,” returned a joyous Xula, I’m sure he’ll wake soon, our king has the bad habit of overworking.”

“It’s very true,” the aroma escaped through the kitchen windows.

“It smells good,” halted Laura in the middle of sweeping leaves, “-I’m hungry,” said she hanging on the sweeper with water in her mouth.

“Please sister, don’t,” returned Laurance, “-didn’t you have food an hour ago?”

“Don’t tell me what to do,” she pouted and resume sweeping the back-garden, “-where’s Rile, I haven’t seen him all day?”

“Oh, him,” said the brother with a dazzled face, “-egh...” no response came for he suddenly stopped.

“Useless,” sighed she who turned to the now cleaned grassy area of the back. The trees grew more common during the five years; it reached the point where nature was a welcome addition to the house’s surroundings. To the front, in the massive yard; two helipads were built for emergencies.

‘Where is Rile, seriously?’

Roared as if to announce its presence; a spotless white car with stripes of gold drove forth into the property. The pristine condition meant one thing – the metal steed was brand new. Pulled to the stone bricked porch, the doors opened with the driver running to open the passenger door. Two wings marked the bonnet; the of Bridjet, a luxurious car manufacturer based in the Wracia Empire. The headlights were big and circular, a show of power in most cases. Yet another addition to the ever-growing collection of motor vehicles. As for the passenger, little feet hopped onto the ground, green hair swayed as a mischievous gust blew.

“Shall I take the bag, princess?” asked Rile wearing a black morning coat under which rested a grey-vest, black tie, white-winged collar dress shirt, and white gloves. The pants were grey with formal shoes. A very elegant fit for a butler.

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“No, Rile, I shall walk by my lonesome,” smugly refuted the princess.

“As thy wishes,” he bowed with her giggling as she climbed to the door.

“Welcome home, princess,” said Seiran with yet another bow.

“Seiran!” she ran up to give a hug, “-I heard mother is here.”

“Yes, her majesty is in the kitchen,” to which she escorted her in turn. The Princess of Arda had two personal assistants; Rile and Seiran. The two of them were responsible for her protection and anything she might require. The emphasis was placed on having her be grown into a cultured lady, one who could possibly stand to inherit part of the Kingdom one day.

“Mother!” quick to put her bag on the table, she rushed to embrace the queen.

“Lizzie, I’ve missed you,” the stove turned off as mother and daughter affectionately greeted one another. There in person and not, those working to help tend to the mansion as well as the princess, made themselves absent. In the shadows; waiting for their named to be called – the royal family saw them as part of their household. Relatives bound to serve, yes, but also, relatives who loved their masters dearly; insufficient words of praise for the retainers.

‘Kronos, the god of time, the pain, it’s gone.’ The eyes opened to a creamy ceiling, ‘-where am I?’ he looked around and soon memories returned, ‘-the mansion,’ thought he taking a deep breath to sit upright. ‘This is new,’ dressed in a red sleeping gown with leaves inlaid to reflect light, ‘-when did I even

change?' he wondered as the quiet window bristled the fluttering curtains. 'The Symbol of Time,' the hand raised forward, '-the Symbol of Death,' he stared the other, '-and not to forget; Nike's symbol. What did Kronos mean by the truth to Origin? Didn't Creation... an obvious yet confusing idea came to mind, '-is Creation the first ever being, or is there another, Origin. Whatever happens, happens,' changed into casual clothes, the aroma of food paired with chatter walked up the stairs to his room.

'The place feels lively,' thought he venturing into a place of unknown. It had been a long time since coming to the mansion. The décor was renovated with more works of art by famed artists. The stairs felt shorted for some reason, as did the entrance. A glimpse through the main door showed a new car. Passing the empty kitchen where the scent intensified and towards the dining hall; the sunlight gave onto an idyllic scene. At that moment, flashes from the time spent with his companions during the adventuring days made an automatic grin.

"Master," said Rosetta, "-you're awake."

"Did I interrupt?" he asked courteously.

"No, we were getting ready to have lunch," explained Seiran tending to Lizzie as well as her mother.

'Xula's here too, what's the occasion?' sat cluelessly, food was served in haste. A tradition or one should say, a way of living, became true in Arda. Butlers and maids, after the food was served to the masters, were obliged to sit on the same table and partake in the same meal. Discriminating to those who cared for one's daily needs was disrespectful at its peak.

"Father, good morning," said Lizzie swallowing her food.

"Good afternoon, Lizzie, how are you?"

"I'm fine," she giggled with Xula joining in the conversation. Slowly but surely, the food emptied from the plates. Compliments were given to the chef by Staxius, "-it feels homely," a quote from his words.

"That was good," said he with the plates being taken away.

"It sure was," said the princess sat on his lap, "-mother did make the food after all."

"My goodness," he chuckled, "-your mother is a very good cook, I almost ate the plate."

"Oh father," she laughed, "-stop," her lashes fluttered gently.

"My queen."

"Yes?"

"It's good to see you," said he casually, "-feels like ages."

"I've heard of the happenings in Alpha," her brows knitted, "-Is everything ok or must I be worried yet again?"

"There have been a few hurdles on the road."

"What happened to the hurdles?" asked she slyly.

"Burnt, kicked, hammered, turned to dust, who knows," said he in jest.

“Most importantly, what happened to the girl I saw at the apartment a few days ago?”

“Oh, her, she’s in Hidros in the company of Scott and Julius,” the exchange of pleasantries turned deeper and longer. Both had so much to say and little time, nonetheless, they spoke, made one another laugh with Lizzie at the center of the discussions. The princess could but be loved by her family.

“Hey boss,” came a notification from Cake, “-éclair said you were doing better. Therefore, I’m sending over guests who wish to speak to thee. A helicopter should be at the mansion in a few minutes, good luck.”

‘Damn her,’ thought he with a rough expression.

“Something the matter. Thine face changed after the message,” commented a very observant Xula.

“We have guests coming,” said he to Rosetta, “-Queen Gallienne and the Pride of Hidros are on the way.” The mention of Royalty had many on guard. In what seemed to be an involuntary response, Laura and her brother took to cleaning once more. Seiran flew to inspect the outside of the mansion and call for imperfections. Rile would then swoop in to fix what she pointed.

“Are they always this on edge?” asked Staxius to the head-maid who rushed into the kitchen.

“We have guests coming; tis our duty to make sure our masters aren’t shunned,” said as if proud of the duty, the preparation began. Xula and Lizzie could have been less inclined on the matter being brought forth.

“Mother, may I please watch the television?”

“Yes, dearest Lizzie, you may,” hand in hand, she led the way into the common room on the western side. Once bearing large, transparent windows giving onto the main garden; it was renovated to give more privacy. Lesser in size and hidden by a dark-curtain – the ease of being alone to relax was present. Shut behind the doors, the princess sat to view and listen to classic music. She chose it by herself – apparently, Julius, who was very much addicted to a heavy style of music, transferred to the princess. She, in turn, sought after the tranquility inside said heavy music – what she found was the piano; dark, and discordant at times.

The minutes passed without knowing. Over yonder approached the silhouette of a helicopter.

“Majesty,” called Laurance.

“Yes?” turned he who stood on the balcony and eyeing the guests.

“Shall we go greet the invitees are would you do the honors?”

“Go on ahead,” he nodded, ‘-in no way can I say no. Thy face and expression speak of the excitement.’

“Really?” it slipped his tongue, “-I’ll take my leave,” bowed in haste, the figure ran to vanish in the somberness of the staircase.

In what could be described as vague, Laurance and Laura took to the yard. They would be the first point of contact. The present sound of rotors followed by a moment of serenity; they landed. Two figures dressed in casual-dress wear were stopped to smile and talk. ‘Here they come,’ he moved.

On the way down; Xula stopped as if an ambush.

“Careful,” remarked the King holding her hand.

“Sorry,” she lifted her head as they bumped against one another.

“Did you hurt yourself?”

“No,” the attention was on the door.

“Shall we?”

“Let’s.”

“The mansion sure has changed since the last time I was here,” remarked Queen Gallienne.

“What do you mean by that?” interjected a curious Aceline.

“Nothing much,” she eluded the question, “-why does thee look so out of place?”

“Do I look that drifted?” asked the idol rhetorically.

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“Here we are,” voiced Laura with all her might into three sweet words and a grin.

Chapter 406: Old friend

“Fate is such an elusive lady,” said Staxius stood as the guests entered.

“Very much so,” added Queen Gallienne as they now sat in the lounge right after the bar.

“Rosetta, please, have Rile tend to the bar.”

“Will do, majesty,” bowed the head-maid.

“Meanwhile we wait for refreshments, care to speak of the reason for this impromptu visit?” a frown had the room tense, not overbearing, but present.

“I’d like to say thank you,” smiled the queen lowering her head into a grateful nod, “-I can’t believe thee did the impossible. I never thought of Ardanian magic being so potent.”

“One can’t just raise the dead,” interjected Staxius who gestured to be at ease, “-dear friend, I did what was necessary and what thee desired. Think of it as nothing but the duty we are bound to as comrades to one another,” the phrase disarmed her guard, the Queen felt no misgiving of which she exhaled softly. To her right on the same couch, Lady Aceline’s fingers moved, her body language was of a person unable to keep cool or relax. Perpetually tapping her fingers against her knee, her gaze wandered around to reluctantly settle onto his face.

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“Nonetheless, I’m thankful,” said she as the door opened. Rile and Laura came to serve drinks as well as snacks. The visit was casual as was told by their outfits.

“The reason we’re here,” her body turned to Aceline, “-go on, speak,” articulated the voiceless mouth.

"King of Arda."

"What?" he crumbled her courage with a single harsh tone.

"I want to pay back the favor I owe since my life belongs to you, I'll do as you say," soft at first glance, the conniving look, despite how deeply it hid, couldn't escape his watch.

"Payback the favor," said he cutting and lighting a cigar, "-how amusing," he puffed. "Do you think me a fool," the words came across as rude and intolerable.

"No..." returned the idol uninterested, "-wait, I mean, I'll do what you want, I'm being honest, give me a chance to prove my worth."

"You don't understand," said he caught on her intent, "-Lady Aceline is no longer part of this world."

"W-what do you mean?" inquired Gallienne with a shift in her sharp-edged lips.

"What I mean is simple," he touched his earlobe, "-éclair, if you would."

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"Orders confirmed." The harmless wooden table split to reveal a stand onto which rose a screen. Information on the state of things in Alphaia was filtered and shown. "The idol Aceline is dead as far as the continent is concerned. I don't have to remind you," a side-glance had her breathe restlessly.

"Are people mourning my death, will I not be able to return to the spotlight. What of my belonging, what about my fortune, what will happen of it?" her thumb and middle finger pressed hard against her temple, one could have mistaken her intent as wanting to break her forehead.

"I don't know yet, it's not decided. There was no will in the discussion, it's probably going to be returned to the state. Idol Aceline, or should I say, Aceline, what happens going forward? You're but a remnant of the past, thy manager left, thy fame left, and thee were betrayed in the end by those who thou slept with to reach thy position of power." The more he spoke, the more aggravating grew the sentences, and just like that, the sharp words chipped away at her shield, her facade, her illusions.

"You're nothing," he added the cherry on top, "-nothing more than a whore who has but herself to blame. Do apologize for my use of vulgar language."

"Stop," said she quietly.

"I can't hear anything amidst the enormous pile of garbage of which is thy mouth, do say once more, lady who's been but an insolent brat. Where's the bravado, where is it now, why won't thee fight back, come on, do something, say something."

"SHUT THE FUCK UP," she screamed and kicked the table. *Woosh,* by hands, feet, and neck, white strings came from out the walls to bind her upwards.

"LET ME DOWN," an outburst to no avail, her body was restrained to the point where a single hair wasn't allowed to move.

"Majesty," said a rather darkened voice, "-should I send her to the afterlife?" asked Laurance in ire.

“Forgive me, majesty,” said the king facing Gallienne, “-you see, my retainers are very much like myself. We don’t take lightly to act of disrespect; in that regard, you could say I’m more or less lenient. Sadly, I can’t vouch for them,” he pointed back with a thumb.

“Do as is pleased,” realizing the situation, “-there’s nothing more I can do to help. My request was fulfilled, a friend of mine was brought to life. The latter is in her hands, if she chooses to die, then, who am I to stop the will of nature,” a push on the door had her blend and fade into the common room.

“Aceline, Aceline, Aceline,” he shook his head smugly, a blatant act of superiority which was backed by Laurance. “The higher thou art, the harder thy fall – it couldn’t be any truer. The same could be said to me, though, I know how to keep my feet on the ground. What of you, Icarus, what shall thee do for thy wings are melted?”

“Let me go,” said a persistent voice, “-LET ME GO.”

“Majesty,” gritted Laurance, the strings tightened as it turned red.

“Ease up, else you’ll ruin the room.”

“I apologize, majesty.”

“Aceline, listen,” said he with a certain degree of kindness, “-what was said earlier is true. You were assassinated by those who you thought were on thy side. Backed stabbed, my trouble doesn’t lie in that, no, far from it. Why in the hell would one willingly turn away from her friends, the people she could rely on for strangers in another realm. The fear of the unknown, name the excuse, I’ll understand. Still, if it wasn’t me, you had Scott and the Queen of Hidros. Don’t get me started on the half-asked fight for peace. What was done in Alpha is shameful and hypocritical. The girl who preaches for peace but uses violence to get what she wants. Sugar and his girlfriend received the worse of it. Did you know Dei came to the concert in hopes of ending thine life?”

“Those two again,” her eyes rolled, “-what a pain.”

“Laurance,” the intensity by which the name was called meant one thing, death. Five strokes later, the arms, legs, and head, were slowly decapitated. He took time in crushing her bones, tearing through the skin, veins, muscles until it severed. As to have the sufferance be felt fully, the head was kept for last. A prolongation of her final moments as a living being.

Present and never changing, present and never yielding. All who wait break and all made are subjected to thine will. I, God of Death, the humble inheritor of thy power; call upon thee to have mine will answered: Time Control – Reversal.

A cocoon of greenish color wrapped around the lifeless body. The spewed blood and body parts began to hover. A gesture had them return from whence they came; time went backward. Her body reconstructed itself and returned to being hung. Laurance’s perplexed expression spoke volumes.

“WHERE AM I?” screamed she with absolute pain.

“How does it feel?” stood inches away from her face, “-how does it feel to be brought to life a second time. Does it make you angry, or does it give a sense of purpose? Aceline; I want one thing, and that is for thee to cut the bullshit and speak. The more lie told the more suffering will follow. I’m a giving man, I

repay kindness in double – yet, I take triple what is owed. So, shall we have a normal conversation, or being cut open by a more skilled torturer be adequate?”

“Fine, fine,” her face relaxed, the lips returned to a state of being there for the pleasures of the other to see. The knitted brows came to a slow landing above her semi-emotionless eyes.

“Laurance, go fetch us something to drink.”

“Will do, majesty,” the intent was clear, and thus another headed to what seemed to be another dimension. So close yet so far; even if she wanted to leave, her feet felt glued to the floor. Invisible arms seemed to tie her against the couch; the will to leave crumble by the pressure of Staxius’s sternness.

“I’ll admit, I came here to try and exploit the favor I owe you. There’s no way around it. My actions are what landed me in this position. It was a question of pride; it just wouldn’t let me ask for help. I was new in Alpha, the way things worked, how unfair it was – I couldn’t take it. I wanted to reach out for help, but... but, what’s the point in getting everything given. That’s why I chose to be alone, I wanted to prove to myself that I was still dependable. At some point, I must have lost sight of what was ahead,” the more she spoke, the warmer and sweeter grew her lips. Each word felt as if a fruit plucked from a withering tree; a tree that had life rekindled within.

“See,” nodded the king, “-could you not have done that before? It would have saved me the trouble of reviving thee again. About the visit, what’s the purpose?”

“I want to return to my former life,” her head lowered, “-I’m being greedy, I know, but it’s what I want. There’s so much thing I have left to do; please, give me a chance to redeem myself. Even if it means starting over, I don’t mind, I want to go to the stage and sing. I regret refusing the invitation to perform while thee held the guitar – I was afraid, afraid that my walls would break if I gave. I didn’t want to be dependent.”

“On one condition,” said he, “-apologize to Scott, Sugar, and Dei.”

“Yes, I’ll beg if that’s what you want.”

“No, nothing of that sort,” the dimness grew into blissful colors. The prior atmosphere resembled a prison as opposed to a lounge. Drawn so to have the sun be welcomed inside, the room felt friendlier. Two faces of the same coin depending on the context and situation.

“What then?” she asked.

“A simple sorry will be enough. Don’t expect Scott to return; he’s gone for good. I’ll make sure thee returns to stardom in the next few weeks. I have a plan in mind. For now, just take a break and relax – Hidros is a changing continent. Go around and visit; my door will always be opened. What do you say, old friend?” he raised a hand.

“W-what?” her mouth dropped in awe.

“Why so confused, do thee not know of what a handshake means?” asked he in jest.

“I know, but why, I’ve been nothing more than trouble for the past months or so.”

“Listen, Aceline; however bad you think you are, I’m worse. The only guilt thee needs to deal with is how thee fell into the chains of emotions. You let yourself go with the atmosphere. Going with the flow might seem wise; yet, there are times when one must flow against the current for a waterfall might be what lays ahead.”

“I see,” her head lowered in shame, or what was projected. “Staxius,” her eyelashes fluttered sweetly, “-can I consider you a friend again?”

“The issue was never on my end,” he laughed, “-it was you, dear Aceline, who chose to alienate us. A friend led astray is but a lost lamb, I don’t blame thee for anything. On the contrary, I think it’s best to embrace the experience; don’t be a fool any longer.”

“Thank you,” as he said, she was only someone with a clouded mind, clouded judgment, none was a harder critic than herself. The blindness made the blood boil, her cupped hand gradually clenched into a fist – reborn as her old self, a welcome addition to the ever-growing connections.

‘It’s going to plan,’ thought Staxius, ‘-Aceline’s a friend once more, a will be rival for the actual star, Emi Muko.’

Chapter 407: Reality

A mind tethering on the verge of collapse, a lady who was but an innocent child led astray by the hard-truth of what it meant to be someone of renown, Aceline, the Pride of Hidros, had returned to her prior senses. The fakeness of wanting to prove herself – a good sentiment when said and done, was nothing short of a convenient excuse. The way peace turned to its antonym, hurting others to attain what was wanted. A feeling of superiority which grew addicting, the influence of being surrounded by people who said ‘yes’ and complimented every little thing, and in case of mistake would often default to ‘it’s fine tis not thy fault’, one starts to see how said environment changed an individual to what she hated. The conversation served to open her eyes, the underlying emotion of wanting to be criticized came true; being held responsible made it so much easier to atone and be a better person.

Following a nod of gratitude, the idol pushed against the brass colored handle to fade into the bar and the common room. There, Queen Shanna and Queen Gallienne awaited patiently, discussing about life in general. They would often complain about how their husbands would ignore them for days, and even months on end. Prince consort Piers was assigned to help the Goldberg’s in managing Dorchester; hence the absence. As for the King, the man rarely came home, often staying abroad for months until the task would be settled. The drive and determination were yet to fade, from the marriage to now, Staxius unwillingly chose to distance himself. The fear of the curse of the Death Reapers was etched into the soul. A good example in recent years was the killing at Dorchester; he blamed himself partly for if they didn’t come into his life, they would have lived a peaceful life.

“Majesty,” opened the great-door, “-shall I bring thee drinks?” asked a concerned Laurance.

“No, it’s fine. I shall be in the library – do apologize to the queen on my behalf.”

“Understood.”

The smell of books, aging pages, the glue of binding, and the scent of wood – a place befitting a scholar. Sat against a newer looking desk on which laid dated notes going as far back as XX88. ‘Must have been

some project I gave up on following.’ Reclined to stare at the ceiling, the chair eased the rather uncomfortable looking posture. ‘Aceline and Scott turned side. I have Emi being catered by Scott. Julius’s involvement came as a surprise, the boy is going to make me proud, I can feel it. The AHA is still a mystery, Cimier, how far are they embedded into Alpha?’ going over known information, making a timeline and representation of the events often led to unexpected leads; assumptions of proportions as saying the world was flat as opposed to round. No building too tall nor too short; the world one made inside one’s mind was endless – an adventure where the finish was but another step going forth.

Knock, knock,

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“Who is it?” he asked nearly falling over.

“It’s Rosetta, majesty, tis lady Aceline, she says there are details she wishes to share.”

“Have her sent in,” replied Staxius, “-also, tell Queen Shanna to take Lizzie to town. Since Queen Gallienne made the trip to our doorstep, it would be nice for them to be treated as is due. Cost is not a concern; go on, a shopping trip; I know how much she loves to buy new clothes.”

“As you wish majesty, and who shall I send as an escort?”

“Seiran, Rile, and Laura, you can go if thee wants.”

“I shall take up the offer, majesty, thank you,” her footsteps echoed, happy from the pace and intensity, silence soon retook its throne.

The moment he relayed the message, a gleeful expression slapped across the ladies’ faces. A girl’s day out – they knew his intent and wouldn’t pass the offer for anything in the world. Thus, they jumped into new outfits – the new car pulled to the porch. The retainers made it a point to have their master enjoy the trip – thus, without looking back, the guests headed into the ever-developing Rosespire.

Clap, clap, clap.

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“There’s no need to knock,” fired across.

“O-ok,” the door opened with hesitation, “-pardon the intrusion.”

“No, it’s fine,” said Staxius sitting with one foot over the other, “-about the details; I hope it’s concerning the unsightly state of the entertainment world,” inquired with a raised brow, she nodded to take a seat.

“Please explain,” his posture relaxed to one more formal.

“Before I start, let me say this, I’ll try my best to give facts, but my memory is still hazy,” apologetic in a way, her lower lips slid subtly from left to right as for her eyes, they seem to stare into nothingness.

“Doesn’t matter, just speak,” said he in reassurance.

With a pause, she inhaled to puff up her chest, “-ok,” exhaled, “-I am, or was, dating a member of the Patek dynasty. When I first arrived at Alpha, the country felt as if a book was left unturned. Scott helped me get few jobs here and there, to model for small companies and such. I wasn’t well known, the Pride

of Hidros was a name given only in Hidros and Iqavea. As to here, I was nothing more than another girl with dreams. My singing got to be places – the agencies sure know who I was. Apexi was kind enough to recommend my work to other agencies. The next I knew; I was gaining popularity fast. It was there that Scott suggested I move to the film industry. I had previous experience since I shot commercials and videos for the music. I played minor roles here and there until that fated script landed in my hands. I was blown and wanted to do it at all costs. Hero Luna waltz in after I landed the role, she took the spot just because of her boyfriend; the guy I ended up dating to reach where I was. I did catch his eye since I received a call from Ansoft a month or so later, an invitation to join their team. I accepted and my journey into the dark-work began. I met with the Patek's – he introduced me to a few family members, but I doubt them to be real. As for Luna, she disappeared the moment I came onto the scene. It's related in a way, the events which led to her overdose. In the process of me being a star, I destroyed Sugar and Dei's life because of a disrespectful comment. I know, I ended up giving information on how I came to be where I am. Staxius, here's what I came up with; I was killed by a hired hitman. Patek would never have someone link them to any filth since their reputation is on the line. I'm sure the killer is probably dead, fake promises and fake wealth; I hate them with a passion. The heir to it all, my supposed boyfriend, was the worst – a narcissistic, rapist, on an ego trip thinking the world belongs to him. The words aren't enough to describe how shit of a person he is; I want him dead with all my heart. By the way, the reason I was killed is most likely to do with a document I read on a visit to his hotel. It had details on a drug that could have anyone pass out and give themselves physically to the user. The notes further elaborated on shipping 'products' marked by size, age, and gender, to various parts of Iqavea; the sickening thing about it all was ages had numbers from 8 to 16," her expression showed exhaustion as she could no longer continue speaking. The last piece of memory seemed to have triggered an unpleasant thought.

"Enough," he stood to pat her shoulder, "-thanks for telling me about the experience. There're even more secrets deep under the Patek Dynasty, we're closer to the truth," the door opened, "-go, Laurance's outside waiting for you – tis a girl's day out, don't miss it, the others are waiting," her slumped shoulders and lowered gaze wandered into the hall, "-take it easy, you'll be in Alpha soon – as a star."

Stood on the balcony, one could see the idol be escorted in another car towards the thriving capital city. 'Patek and Cimier could be the same entity. Her last description was similar to a prostitution ring or something to do with slavery. It didn't specify race, I doubt she skipped that detail, the only conclusion is that humans are being sold and traded. To Iqavea said she, there must be a red-light district in Alpha too; maybe to the south, the Emperor wasn't keen on speaking of the happenings in that spot. I doubt the spies to have any relevant information.'

"Master, there's a call coming from Alpha," voiced éclair.

"Put it through."

"Hello?" spoke a timid voice.

"Hello, who is this?" returned Staxius.

"Finally," a sigh filled the transmission with white noise, "-I've been trying to contact you for ages."

"Sorry about that. I figure you've found Sugar?"

“Yes, he’s in the village.”

“Going by the tone, you two made up?”

“Correct,” she giggled, “-we’re a couple again. Talking over our feelings to one another did help, he wanted to protect me and I wanted to support him.”

“Excellent,” another hurdle crossed, “-listen, I’ll have a pick-up arranged, thou art returning to Hidros.”

“Where must we go?” asked she.

“Stay where you are, the money is sufficient to stay at an inn, is it not?”

“Yes, it’s more than enough, master, when will the transport come?”

“In a day or two, sit tight.”

“T-thank you,” said she bowing as if he would see her.

“Very well, I shall see thee in three days, goodbye,” the phone hung.

“éclair, get me in contact with the Lerado’s,” the spirit was quick to change to another channel.

“Hello, Mallie Lerado, speaking,” came a rather confident voice.

“Hey, it’s Shadow.”

“I apologize for my tone; how can I help?” the shuffle of her posture was heard loudly.

“I need an escort for two people.”

“An armed escort?”

“No, nothing that extravagant,” after which, details on the location of Sugar and Dei was given.

“Consider it done,” the call ended. The Lerado would transport them from the village to the airfield where a plane from Phantom would wait. On that ended a tedious day – a day where many unknown came to life, a day where a friend returned home and the plot advanced. There still remained a doubt in his mind, a doubt about Origin and the powers of a god of time. What did it mean, gods are not right and demons are not wrong, a conflict with the result being neutralism. Who to side with, and who to chastise, the godly realm was still so far from the reach.

Meanwhile, inside Rosespire at a very renowned bakery, the ladies enjoyed pastries on the second floor. The windows gave onto a more or less busy road with taller buildings shielding from the sun. The activity of the town sure was uncanny in a good way. The populous all but forgot the dirty stain of war. Demi-humans were allowed to roam freely; there were even inter-racial couples. The connection of the monarchs was the catalyst. Who were they, the people, to oppose to another race when their Queen was good friends with a Vampire-king or Blood-King, as referred to in chronicles.

“Aceline,” said a joyful Gallienne.

“Hey,” she waved with a changed persona, “-how’s the day been so far?”

“Only getting started,” interjected Shanna with a wink, “-on that, how was the discussion with the King?”

“Oh, that,” she frowned in disgust at the pain of death, “-eye-opening,” said approach was why she stood before them, “-I got a lot of things out of my chest. I truly feel reborn.”

“Good to hear,” added Gallienne sweetly, “-welcome back home, Aceline, Hidros missed you.”

Chapter 408: Magiology

The ladies’ day out ended pretty nicely. Everyone returned home with a lot of gifts. Lizzie bought toys under the pretense it being for learning. Aceline’s demeanor got better gradually. As for Staxius; he took the next three days off. No contact with the outside world, nothing, éclair was ordered to block any communication from those who wished to perturb the peace. Xula remained by his side as well as young Lizzie; the break was more of a chance to spent time with the family. Eira sadly couldn’t make the trip for she headed to Dreqai with Phantom’s team of researchers. A talk or debate, on a possible finding inside the field of Magiology. The topic at hand was Mana Emission. Living things emitted mana, that much was known to the researchers as a hypothesis. It was observed but a method in testing was yet to confirm the reality. Adding on that line of thinking, a rather olden scholar proposed the idea of the non-living thing, such as walls, houses, things inheritably not living, to possess traces of mana. The formulation of the idea, as said by the article, was the field of Alchemy – transforming matter into energy to then turn back into matter. For it to be possible, there must have it in the non-living things to make such a process true. Thus, the next idea; which was the main purpose of said talk – Mana and Energy were one of the same. A revolutionary idea, so simple, yet so difficult to swallow. As the founder of Magiology, Staxius was asked to attend the talk, however, he chose to send his daughter as representative.

A good learning experience – her plane arrived on the 24th of March, the talk was set to happen on the 25th – the same day Dei and Sugar were to land in Rotherham. Staxius wasn’t as rude as to leave her to go empty-handed. No, on the contrary, he reviewed the papers and gave his thoughts on the matter.

Stood amidst what seemed to be a museum dedicated to magic, Eira found herself surrounded by renowned scholars of various fields. The gathering of influential minds of their century, the people who worked tirelessly to better the lives of the common folks. The researchers from Phantom were led by; Rhee the leader of GateSix, Master alchemist Flein, his granddaughter Clarise, and Eira. Rhee and Flein knew many of the other guests. The warm lighting tried to make the room feel casual, though, the faces showed distrust and unwillingness to show weakness nor reveal secrets. The Cobalt Unit was present in form of a representative; a youngling the same as Eira. She wouldn’t have mistaken the representative for another; a face on the verge of breaking into a full rant. Her peculiar way of presenting herself, characteristic matching a single girl; Anastasia Whitstar.

“Don’t,” said Rhee with grey-hair mixed with her natural color, “-that girl over there is Anastasia Whitstar, a talented foul-mouth young scholar in the field of Alchemist. I heard the Cobalt unit took a liking to her work of which was ‘spontaneous human combustion.’ She found a way to ignite the magical element of any living being without physically touching the person.”

'Is that what she's been doing?' thought Eira for it hadn't been that long. "Sure, Ma'am, I'll do so," the will to greet a friend turned to nothing more than a fleeting glance hoping the girl would match her sight.

"Do you know her?" inquired an observant Clarise.

"We were classmates at the Academy."

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"People change," smiled the blond prodigy, "-don't worry about it." As hard as Clarise tried to hide it, people's gazes would often pierce her back, the filthy unsightly comments on her appearance made her want to puke. She knew better as to heed their short-mindedness. Still, it did affect her heart for one must remember, Clarise was still young, younger than Eira.

"Look at you trying to console me," smiled Eira, "-I heard father has been very pleased by your work."

"You flatter me, highness, the master is calm and composed, he gave us a place to follow the never-ending journey of learning. What about you?" her cat-like stare switched to a file, "-what's in there?"

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"Comments from father," answered Eira proudly, "-apparently, the discovery was made by a researcher from the Cobalt Unit. It's the reason I came, to have their pride be destroyed."

"A-are you serious?" coughed she, "-Is this not supposed to be a gathering of minds to better our growth as a civilization?"

"Granddaughter," whispered Flein, "-thee forget; we're here as part of Phantom. In their eyes, we're those who thrive in war. Look at them, their countries are dependent on us to provide weapons – we hold power unlike any other. It's not a surprise that people know the Hero King of the Argashield Federation owns Phantom, we may say we're neutral – however, similar to the Cobalt Unit, we're affiliated to a kingdom. Secrets of a kingdom are secret to the population – it's war, constant war – not bloodied but intellectual," the speech slowed for he needed to breathe.

"And intellectual warfare is what we must win today," interjected Rhee. "Why do you think all these people came together, it wasn't to discuss some finding but to show the power of the Cobalt Unit. It's a warning, a very shrewd one, but a warning to those not under their thumb, basically, us, and some other factions working towards other goals."

"I see," nodded both Clarise and Eira. Soon, a loud man spoke to have their attention. Massive gates to the west opened to reveal a conference room with multiple seats. One by one, it was all filled with people from all over the world. The discussion began immediately.

"Thus, I conclude, mana is energy, and energy is mana," bowed Tyler Gad, the author of the papers and a prized member of the Cobalt Unit. Applauses rattled the room; an overwhelming amount of people were in agreement with the discovery.

"Settle everyone," came a lady dressed in grey, "-as you've heard, the topic of today's discussion has been laid bare. We, from the Cobalt Unit, think that Magiology is a field in which nothing more than nonsensical gibberish is created. We mean it in good spirit, creating a field of study, given, we know it's

now implanted in universities; can be scrutinized by the collective mind of the scholars. From what our member said, as I surmised, he refers to mana as being energy; which would completely get rid of the prospect of Magiology as it's based on the study of mana. Instead, it should be the research of Energy, the founding principle governing our world," smirking, the crowd felt silent, "-I'd like to have the opportunity for people to come and discuss the topic further." An open invitation to dismantle their findings, a challenge aimed at Phantom.

"Those snobbish pieces of..." gritted Clarise softly.

"Don't worry," smiled Eira, "-what I hold here is a bomb."

"I can't wait to see what he has said on the matter," grinned Rhee knowing the end result. Flein could but sit with arms crossed.

"Anyone?" asked the lady once more.

"I'd like to speak on behalf of Mr. Haggard, the founder of Magiology," a simultaneous shift from the turning crowd had her smiling.

"And who are you?" asked the lady in a disrespectful manner.

"Eira Haggard," she took a strong step forth, "-First princess of Arda."

"Eira..." mumbled Anastasia.

"Highness, have you come to disprove our findings?" the blatant pleasure in them mocking Magiology divided the crowd.

"No, I've come to voice my father's thoughts on the matter, after all, we're all here to work at bettering our world," the calm very diplomatic refute had the lady feel a sense of shame.

Snap, a light projected various illustrated diagrams made by Staxius, an addition to what Eira was to speak about. "Mr. Gad made and raised a good point; mana and energy are related. There's no fault in discussing what has been observed – I can see why many people assume so. People without the ability to wield magic will have clouded judgment, not that it's shameful. As a field of study, Magiology requires more than knowledge on a particular subject since it includes many other fields combined as one. I'd go as far as say, not even Alchemist – the pinnacle of what is to be a scholar, can stand to comprehend the ever-changing facets of Mana. Now, the argument can be made that Magiology is too irregular a subject to study. Wrong, utterly wrong, the observations are irregular, but the principles remain the same. Mana and Energy are different but similar just not identical. Take the basic alchemic reaction of turning water into wine or any other beverage – the theory dictates, by channeling the mana around the caster, it would provide enough energy to have matter reshaped into another. It's the first thing taught in Alchemy, and I think, Mr. Gad misinterpreted the sentence. The mana used by the caster isn't energy, but his lifeforce itself. The latter is not involved in the reaction, rather, it's used as a catalyst to start the reaction; the mana from the atmosphere is then attracted to the object given what affinity the caster chooses. Where does energy come into play? Well, Mana provides the basic structure for the reaction to occur, energy is what makes it happen. That is the reason why we use transmutation circles. It's not to transform the object, no, but to transform the mana from the user into energy. The spark that comes from a finished reaction is the Point of Fusion. To elaborate further, there are three principles, Mana

from the user, mana from the atmosphere, and energy. The reaction is as follows; Caster uses mana to attract similar affinity from the surrounding. Then, using the transmutation circle, he uses his mana to convert the latter into energy which is then used to power the mana from the surrounding. For the sake of clarity, the process has been kept as simple as I could. The subject is far more complicated – we know of it in practice but not in theory. Similar to a child knowing that striking a match makes fire, he doesn't understand the basics and theory behind why it works – the same is applied here. Magiology is a field that takes into account Mana into Magic, Technology, and Science. In conclusion, Energy and Mana aren't the same, not in the least, for a man can wield mana but not energy else he would be a god," she finished with an awe-struck crowd. What Staxius wrote, vague as it was, completely dismantled what the Cobalt Unit proposed. He instead managed to put forward the first-ever theoretical analysis of an Alchemic reaction, a process many forsook as irregular and unobservable.

"Amazing," said a man without care for the room, the applause he gave was of utter pride and joy.

"Mr. Haggard strikes again," laughed a few of the elder scholars, "-that man is such a hard fellow to deal with. Too enigmatic for his own good, but I agree," with barely any hair left, the elders could but admire and respect what was said.

"Princess of Arda," asked another rather loudly.

"Yes, sir, how can I help?"

"Has Mr. Haggard decided on when he'll be releasing the papers on the new findings. The theory of Alchemic; I confidently speak on behalf of all of us here, we need those papers – I can't stress this enough, the possibilities behind those findings will push us even further as a civilization."

"I don't know, sir, it depends on him."

"She was right," laughed Clarise.

"What's the matter with you?" asked Flein amidst the loud chatter.

"Princess Eira held a bomb, one of devastating proportion," she pointed to the Cobalt Unit, "-look at them trying to save face. I can't see Mr. Gad, anywhere, the shame must have been too hard to endure. Such humiliation before savants; it's candy for the mind to relish."

Chapter 409: Phantom's Headquarters

"Should I prepare transport, majesty?" asked Rosetta standing before two lines of retainers. Princess Lizzie and Queen Shanna were fast asleep upstairs. Only the king was awake at 06:00. The five of them wore custom-fitted outfits; with their grooming being on par with any person referred to as 'handsome'.

"No, there's no need to strain thyself," said he strolling past the servants – it was as if walking through a tunnel with them being the walls. The door opened to a chilly outside, the outburst of breeze felt something close to a child taking breaks before laughing. The wheezing amidst the trees served to add the illusion. Void, sparkling black with her inherent sharpness and intensity was still eye-catching. Rare was it for a car of this age to drive through the streets. Many ignored the main point; Xerxes series – a project from the Cobalt Unit or rather, one of their subsidiary companies. Naturally, after having made his own research unit, they were tasked to refit and remake the vehicle – a new improved engine with the interior as exquisite as when bought.

“I’ll be back in a day or two, do send my pardon to her majesty,” said he entering the low car.

“Have a good trip,” came from the balcony, “-I love you father,” little hands waved. The Queen made it a point to say goodbye – young Lizzie’s puffy cheeks and innocent smile spurred on a feeling of joy. The green hair swayed to the wind, the gleeful expression of two; a sight which would have made any family man crumble inside. Giving a silent nod, the car roared to leave the mansion. Lizzie would remain in Rosespire as the Queen needed to return to Arda. The portal made it easier to travel; it allowed the princess to study piano and return home for the ‘proper’ education on her element and the legacy of the Ardanians.

‘I wonder how Eira’s doing at that sham of a conference. A gathering of great minds, could they be any more obnoxious. Magiology is a field worthy of study. Energy and Mana being the same, if said sentence was proved, the field which Eira has worked to further advance would crumble. In no way can I let that happen; the Theory of Alchemic reaction will spark their interest – the note I gave will foreshadow many more than is told. The curiosity enough will have a bigger impact than the tired and ignorant comment they put forth. I’ll release the papers later this year, the bait is thrown, I need but wait.’ Paying heed to the road, the drive across the much bigger Rosespire felt refreshing. The barricades between the outside and inside were replaced – instead of iron bars, they used gates, enormous gates which could only be lifted using clever mechanisms. Granted the gates had never been shut; the garrison was moved further up the road leaving the entrance free and empty. Only suspicious looking vehicle was stopped. Leaving the capital was always a joy – the roads were empty as opposed to entering. Catching the eyes of the bystanders, Void toggled to burn the asphalt and head for Rotherham. The massiveness of the walls didn’t change however far he went – the North Gate of Rosespire, an extension of the capital. On the left, over yonder; train tracks linking the north of Hidros, split into a fork to pass over the road on which he drove. Said particular track headed for Riverwood. As for the other track, it continued to the vague Northwest; a stop at the outer edge of Rotherham to then continue to Dundee and finally the Station at Kreston’s border. It linked the Northwestern part of Oxshield – construction for inter-provincials was on way, the project was 75% complete by what was reported in the newspapers.

Two hours later, the reclusive Rotherham came in sight – a faint glimmer in the distance as the roads narrowed to only two lanes. The three skyscrapers of Phantom couldn’t be missed. Passed the town center where people walked, worked, and chatted as normal, continued further until the edge of town. There, the scenery changed, the tameness of behind swapped for an intimidating compound. Airfields followed by research facilities leading into another town – the Town of Phantom, a place restricted from access by the normal populous.

“Boss,” saluted a guard in the first outpost, with a nod, he pressed a button which signaled the main-gate to open.

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“Good morning boss,” said another guard as he drove at a walking pace. The first airfield, the start of the organization. The office inside said the airfield was moved to the skyscraper, rather, the building became more of a hangout spot for the guards and workers. A cafeteria with paid chefs and free food. The link between the latter tasting bad often deterred many. Not in this case, no, far from it, the quality of ingredients was first-class, the menu changed every day; with it being as delicious as the day prior. A five-star restaurant for the workers. In the case of leftovers, the rest would be donated to the homeless

or those unable to obtain food on their own. The packed food would be sent to Rosespire via a portal to a charity put in place by Gallienne. A collaboration from the leaders of the Argashield Federation. The attention to the sufferance of the minor segment of the populous; the proactive steps in helping them – tis was one of the main reasons the Federation was hailed as gods; a blissful populous equaled to a simpler rule.

“What’s the status on their arrival?” asked he parked behind the old-office building.

“The jet will land in a few minutes,” replied éclair.

‘Well then,’ he stepped out in yet another sharp suit; a glance at his watch with ‘Meldorino’ on the dial showed 09:35. Chatter from the cafeteria; it was time for breakfast – few guards, on rotation, came to pick-up food for those stationed on overwatch. Speaking casually, their breath cut as soon as Shadow came into their line of vision.

“Good morning boss,” they saluted.

“Good morning,” he nodded, and to push the door opened, it wasn’t rare to see ladies working the hard job of protecting a compound as big as here. The ground floor was renovated to give more space. Long rectangular table with seating for sixteen. Around seven tables were spotted; to the back, food was served per hands of Jenny. A student from a private university; she would come to the cafeteria and work part-time to have a little extra cash. Being more or less open-minded, she was pleased to do as was wished. The footstep, normal in sound, felt louder, those who sat were speechless. The joyous chatter turned to silence for Staxius entered. Quick to give a nod and gestured for them to continue – he stood in line the same as the others. Many offered to have him skip the line. Still, he refused for whether one was powerful or not, the guards and workers were still humans helping to have the compound work without trouble. The Boss loved his employees and they returned the feeling ten-fold. Words between them weren’t exchanged for his actions sufficed. The hotel-like treatment; good working conditions and a generous wage. They knew to be respectful.

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“Good morning, what would you like?” asked the girl.

“That, that, and that,” replied he.

“Sure,” she took the tray and served with an utmost smile.

“Can I have a second serving of the pudding?” asked he in jest; many who stood grinned at the childlike request.

“No,” returned she with the expression of a mother, “-there are more people in line,” her lashes rose to stop fluttering; the boss stood with a blank expression.

“P-professor?”

“No second serving?” he asked once again.

“No, we c-can’t,” the fluttering resumed with a clogged grin.

“Good,” said he with a lightened tone, “-very good,” proud of her response, he took a seat at the closest table.

“Good morning boss.”

“Please, there’s no need to stop. Continue as thee would, I heard today’s menu is very much delicious,” the personality changed to a food enthusiast; those around were taken aback. Never would it have crossed their mind; someone as infamous as Shadow would have a childish side. Contrary to lowering the respect they are due; a stronger connection was built. One where they held him in high regard and admired how humble the man was. It gave the human touch for someone too perfect is often playing a heavier fa?ade.

“Boss, how are you?” soon, two presence approached from behind.

“Elliot and Yves,” he replied nearing the end of the meal, “-a pleasure to see thee both here; please, take a seat.”

“Don’t mind us,” they leaped over the bench, “-tis rare to see thee eating at the cafeteria,” commented Elliot.

“I suppose so; I mean, I should know what my fellow comrades are eating,” using the word comrades instead of employee – solidified the bond further it was as if saying they were friends and strangely, they were. For once, he trusted the compound and the safety of many people in their hands, and they trusted him to lead them towards a better future. The relation was far stronger than friendship.

“It’s very good,” added Yves, “-I’m happy about the food; raises the spirits from the stomach upwards.”

“I agree,” nodded Elliot, “-a war is won on a full stomach.” They exchanged words over the table; other guards jumped into the conversation – without fail, Staxius would reply and crack jokes at times. The first impression was of a stern, mysterious, and powerful leader. Now, the impression was of a charismatic person who enjoyed speaking to anyone who wished to spur on a conversation.

“Master, the plane is to land in two minutes,” said éclair.

“Excuse me,” said Staxius standing up, “-thank you for the pleasant meal. It was succulent, good food tastes better with good company. Keep it cordial and pleasant – I appreciate the hard work, thank you.”

“No, thank you, boss,” came a torrent like a response. Taken aback, he nodded to leave a step out.

The plane approached the airfield. The screeching of the wheels against tarmac had signaled the landing. Curious marksmen on the watchtowers pointed their rifles at the new-comers. They were ordered to shoot on command only else if the compound went into code-red; then, it would be shoot on sight.

“Where are we?” asked Sugar climbing down the stairs.

“I don’t know,” returned Dei as confused as her lover.

“Is that him?” he asked over his shoulder.

“Yes, it’s Mr. Haggard, the one you idolized,” said she to reminisce.

Stood on the firm ground; Sugar stood nervously. He had changed, once revered as being handsome, the man was but a fleeting memory of the past. Long and messy which got on the way of his eyes; an overgrown beard with uneven edges – various scars down his neck and arms. Skinny paired with oversized clothes; the wind made his stature painfully obvious.

“Hello Dei, Sugar, welcome to Rotherham,” said Staxius.

“Hello,” smiled the lady. They were but a reflection of a forgotten past, talented musicians turned to ruin

“Sugar,” said he facing the shell of a man, “-it’s good to see you.”

Listless eyes rose painfully. The sullen expression was emphasized by his skin sucked to the cheekbones. In no way did he look healthy.

“H-hello,” spoke a broken voice.

“I see,” said Staxius placing a hand on his shoulder, “-Sugar, or should I say, Oris, I brought you two here for one thing; return to the stage. I know it might seem a tall order considering thy conditions – still, a contract is a contract, and Dei signed. From today forth, thou art in my care. The journey must have been tiring, let’s go get you two some food.”

Left to eat on their own, Staxius took a stroll. ‘He’s worse than I imagined. The vocal cords are in a pitiful state. The body might have taken a turn for the worse, but I felt his fingers, the man’s been practicing.’

“éclair, get in contact with Clarise as soon as is possible; we have two patients who the Alchemist sect are going to cure.”

Chapter 410: Dei and Sugar

éclair sent the message a few hours ago. Staxius led Dei and Sugar around Rotherham. A tour of the premises was given since Dei signed to Phantom. They were comrades united under the same company, the same name, a shared identity. The meal they had earlier seemed to have had a very good effect on Sugar – he felt more energetic. The skull-like visage glowed, good food made a man pleasurable.

“Lord Staxius, can I ask what treatment we can expect, is it long-term or short-term?” Stopped on a pathway of which went through a modest-sized park, Dei raised a good question.

“Short-term,” said he watching ducks float about the pond, “-we’re going to forget the traditional way of practicing medicine. The knowledge they have will but allow for the pain to be made bearable, don’t think I didn’t notice,” a reference to her always changing expression, “-the left hand must ache – it’s destroyed and we need it renewed. It’s a miracle the arm wasn’t amputated.”

“Didn’t we come here to get healed?” whispered a tired Sugar.

“Let me finish,” turned to stare the two, “-traditional won’t work. However, I can say with confidence the injuries which are more of a disability will be healed. The treatment will last a little more than a few hours. After that, both of thee will be able to sing and play the guitar as if it never happened,” direct and fearless, they nodded in agreement.

“Master, a message from Lady Clarise, ‘-we’ll be at Rotherham in three to four days. People have grown rather attached to the papers you sent. Princess Eira has taken a liking to the elders in the crowd, I think it best we stay,’ end of message.”

‘There’s no way I’ll wait four days,’ taking a deep breath, “-Dei, Sugar, there’s a change in plan. I thought of handing thy cases to a friend of mine, but she’ll be gone for a while. Therefore,” he stepped to a few inches away from Sugar, “-I’m going to treat thee personally.”

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“Really?” expecting them to disagree, the expression was of relief – the brows relaxed, the tensed lips gave to a listless posture. “I would much prefer you as our doctor,” smiled Dei with Sugar nodding.

“Glad to hear it,” back on the stone path, “-let’s go, we’ll start the treatment right away.”

“Right away?”

“You heard me,” he walked without stopping. Past the university, past the town, till the alchemic facility. Opposed to the subterranean laboratory, they stood before a hospital ran by alchemists who were also skilled doctors. Three stories high with spotless hallways and corridors, the workers here would tend to everyone with utmost care. It was necessary for an accident could happen at any time given the nature of the work. Once inside, he took to speak with the receptionist who kindly called upon a helper to show the way.

“Come on,” gestured he to approach. White all around – the cleanliness was remarkable. A few twists and turns later, they came to an empty room with a single bed and a table.

“Dei, come with me first,” ordered Staxius, “-Sugar, wait here,” to which the man sat on a bench.

“Isn’t healing him priority,” the doors shut, “-I mean, my injuries will take longer to treat,” said using common sense – the sentence was ignored.

“Take off the hoodie,” he ordered once she sat.

“Just the hoodie or?” her eyes couldn’t lift off the floor.

“There’s no need to be bashful, take off the hoodie, I want to take a look at the arm,” explained he calmly.

“B-but,” she seemed reclusive as her right arm move to cover her chest.

“Don’t tell me,” he shook his head, “-there are no clothes under there.”

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“L-leave m-me alone, m-money is hard to c-come by,” her explanation was less to be desired.

“Fine,” the door reopened for she needed a robe. Blue and rather free, she was quick to change. Her left hand till the elbow was broken, blackened, and in a weird shape. No longer was it something humane – faint traces of mana were sensed. ‘Mana poisoning, Cimier must have a talented mage in their ranks. To inflict such an injury, haven’t seen this kind since the war between mages. Even if the curse is lifted, the victim would most likely lose usage of the limb, a very effective way of neutralizing the enemy. An

injured soldier was nothing more of a burden the kingdom is obliged to pay. To care for them as if babes or elder folk – they provide naught but take. Two birds with one stone; there were reported cases where kingdoms would mercilessly kill the injured to not cause trouble in the economy.’

“Is it that bad?” said she.

“Sorry, was lost in thought. Don’t worry, I’ll get to healing.” The arm rested openly on the bed as she sat on a chair. ‘The first method I considered was Alchemy – she would be operated and be fixed from the inside out. Now, there’s an even simpler method, one I never thought I’d obtain – the rule over time. I can reverse her arm to where it was normal; then forward time so as the limb match’s her body’s age.”

He pressed against her arm to which she yelped. *Present and never changing, present and never yielding. All who wait break and all made are subjected to thine will. I, God of Death, the humble inheritor of thy power; call upon thee to have mine will answered: Time Control – Reversal.* A greenish orb enveloped the arm, lines of various symbol spiraled – the intensity of the light grew. Time turned back, her arm healed, *By the power bestowed upon I by the god of time, I, the god of death, order thee, entity of which none knows, entity who which all sees to move in accordance to mine will: Time Control: Acceleration.* Once healed, the limbed returned to the present.

“And it’s done,” said he proudly, the process took less than ten minutes.

“What did you do?” it felt weird to suddenly have her arm normal, “-what in the hell happened?”

“Magic,” returned he rather smugly, “-go on, tell Sugar to come in, we don’t have all day.” The same procedure was performed, instead of the voice, the whole body turned back time. From messy and sick to a time before the fateful day; Sugar was once more in his prime.

“I haven’t felt this good in forever,” commented he, “-I can breathe using my chest; my throat doesn’t feel sore, it’s not hurting when I speak, Lord Staxius, what did you do?”

“Nothing much,” he held a mirror, “-I only made sure thy body is healthy to start a new journey.”

“Healthy, *Crack,* he knocked over the bed which pushed against a cabinet on which rested a flower-pot. The reason being his visage, in no way was it possible. “I’m not healthy, I’m back to how I was a few years ago.”

“It’s the least I can do. My comrades need to be in top shape to perform,” they exited the room. A man born anew stood before Dei, her face melted into a warm paste of salty tears.

“The gods must have been gracious today,” said she, “-they returned you to I. My lover, my life, I’m glad you’re back,” she took his hand and held it close to her chest, “-how is the throat, can you speak without pain?”

“Yes, dearest Dei, I’m so sorry for what I became after I saw you in pain. I was selfish, I thought I was the only one hurting, but, but you were suffering alongside me, and I still thought it best for you to go away. I promise, I will never leave your side,” the charm and uniqueness of his voice rekindled. “Your arm,” he caressed her, “-it’s fixed, we can both return to the world of music, I want to start anew, I want to prove myself.”

"I will follow you till the ends of the earth," an overwhelmingly emotional reunion brought by a single change.

"Excuse me," coughed Staxius, "-tis not the time for melodramatics. Dei, Sugar, we have a job to do."

"Lord Staxius, pardon my asking, what do we do?"

"Well, at the moment, Phantom doesn't have an affiliation to any idol agencies, there's no way we can break into the market. The sole reason I had thee both was to accompany a will be star, someone with the potential to rival Aceline."

"Then?" inquired Dei impatiently.

"Then, I thought it be a waste to have Sugar not use his talents. Your voice has been motivational for the youth, it would be a shame to have it not used."

"My lord," said he, "-I had my fame in singing, I've been in the spotlight; the experience is known to me. I may look young – but you know tis not true. Please, let me be a guitarist opposite to the main vocalist, I'll help the girl, Emi Muko was it?"

"Dei told you about it?"

"Yes, she did, and I'm happy to help however way we can," to which he wrapped his arms around her shoulders playfully, "-I want to be with my lover and make music."

"A very pleasant thought. Dei, Sugar, I'll have 10,000 Exa transferred to thy accounts. Go and enjoy; consider this a gift for being recovered. There should be a train on the outskirts of Rotherham, I'll have a car ready. I'll call on thee soon; for now, go out and enjoy."

"Boss," voiced Dei, "-that amount of money is too much."

"I see you used Boss," the motion of touching the earlobe cut, "-said title is used with diligence. Use my first name, we're friends; there's no need for title and such."

"éclair, have transport readied," to which, a few minutes later, a jet-black car arrived.

"Thank you so much," skipped Sugar to the car, they were energetic, ready to begin anew.

'This has taken a change. The plan was to have a somewhat renowned idol model for Meldorino and attract attention. I have Sugar, Aceline, and Emi; two of them arguably being the better-known stars of the industry. There might be a chance to break into the entertainment industry. Meldorino is still new, it's the fire of which needs to spread, to that end, Operation Malk runs. We need influence in Alpha; Aceline had her shot at glory. The industry there is much more profitable than Iqavea and Hidros. Besides, I suspect it is run by Cimier, the Patek's, or some other hidden organization. There's no way Phantom will be welcomed. The only thing to do is fight,' the strong afternoon sun glared, '-Hidros is where Phantom is strong, Alpha is far. I need to consider this as a conquest; the goal is breaking apart the Patek's and Cimier. My son-in-law called on my help to solve the monster trouble; there's no way to help, I've explained it already – the AHA must be the ones who do so. If the adventuring guild gets involved, the backlash might break the building trust. There's one thing to do,' he sighed, '-Phantom needs to acquire an Idol Agency.'

“Call Cake.”

“Order confirmed.”

“Hello boss,” answered she with heavier noise in the background.

“Did I disturb?”

“No, how can I help?”

“I’m thinking of acquiring an Idol Agency.”

“Another company?” her voice didn’t seem surprised, “-we have GateSix, Midas, Meldorino, Phantom itself, and a few companies I can’t seem to remember. I suppose adding more won’t help. I do have to warn you, there will be trouble.”

“How so?”

“We’ll have too much money,” she laughed, “-between the legit and, ahem,” she cleared her throat, “-Phantom’s total profit last year was around 1.5 Billion Exa.”

“That much?” he coughed, “-how in the hell did we grow so much?”

“Partly due to thy whimsical nature, boss, not that I say it in a bad way. It’s weird how thee always manages to invest on the right companies; I forgot to mention, we hold shares in a lot more other companies including the Gaso Group and Patek.”

“Cake,” the speech slowed.

“What’s the matter, boss, why so serious?”

“I’ve relied on you for ages, don’t you get tired?”

“No, god no,” she laughed, “-I love this job, but I’m scared. I’m scared one day I’ll die and leave all this behind; I don’t want to go, I want to stay and help you as long as I can. You know, I want to stay and watch Phantom grow.”

“Consider thy wish granted,” he licked his fangs.