

## Death Magic 441

### Chapter 441: Village of Earn [6]

The daunting night of torture began. Vil's broken figure laid atop the white couch. The abusee had a chance at revenge. With the fire of retribution burning deep and far, the scared body and mind were granted a moment of clarity. He began with the numerous 'not-harmful' toys to gradually increase the torture. A massive rod was shoved into where things were never meant to enter, the graphic and illicit imagery circulated around the Arcanum; mainly, Konak. The video, without filters nor restriction, made it outside of the continent.

"Master," said éclair, "-the live-footage is spreading across Iqeavea."

"Oh," said he now sipping whiskey, "-the more people who know of our involvement – the better." Suzanne's mind halted, her visage, devoid of emotions and response, kept firm on Vil being broken bit by bit.

\*Dring, dring,\* "-master, tis lord Elon calling."

"Put him through."

"Hello, Shadow, is that you?" came the old slow-paced articulation of the Overlord.

"Yes, how may I be of service?"

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"Shadow..." the voice came across cold and perturbed, "-are you the one responsible for this atrocity?"

"Are you referring to the live-torture?"

"Yes, it's disgusting, how... why?"

"Lord Elon, thee must know," said he straightening the posture, "-I'm not a forgiving man. I came upon your orders to remedy the situation of the pills. The matter is still in process, I but sent a warning to Snow, the group associated with Cimier shall pay, that much I promise. You see, I have deep relations with them; they took away the thing I vowed to protect."

"Shadow," returned he with a calmer tone, "-you misunderstand. I merely called to say it's disgusting. Disgustingly good – keep on torturing the man. I expect a result, this will send a strong message. Though, putting the DG out on display admits the bodies sends a bad enough impression."

"No need to worry," he chuckled, "-said message is for the eyes of Snow, anyone unrelated to the underground won't be able to see."

"Is it a spell?"

"No, it's the handy work of my butler."

"Ominous," he paused, "-well, continue the good work. I'm entrusting you with cleaning the village of Earn from damned pills." \*Beep,\* the call ended.

"Please, no more," begged he.

"No, it's not over yet," said the boy holding a hammer, "-we're going to resculpt that devilish smile." A hit followed with stomach-turning screams, the pain of having one's tooth broken paired with the merciless punches – there wasn't a shred of doubt nor mercy.

"Don't go too hard," voiced Staxius, "-here."

"What is this?" he caught a flask of which was green.

"Healing potions. I've around 3 more left – three more chances at revival. Go on boy, do your worse."

\*Click,\* he left the basement and locked the door. "éclair, inform me if anything changes."

"Yes, master, I'll track the torture."

Stained by blood, the figure climbed the stairs into a place of silence. The prior warning Vil engaged had altered the neon lights. A screen in the main-room displayed the happenings of the live-feed. Few dozen men stood menacingly in a circle with the night-workers in the middle.

"Greetings gentlemen," said he sauntering towards the armed men.

"Who are you?" said one who quietly gazed at the video.

"A valued customer," said he with a stoic face, "-might I ask why the workers have been taken prisoner?"

"You smell of blood," commented a man in body-armor.

"Well," crossing his arms, "-one of the ladies was going through that time of the month. I do apologize for my less than amiable tastes."

"Yuck," said another, "-that's freaky."

"We gathered them because of this," pointed the man in armor.

"If it isn't Lord Vil, who in the world would do such a thing..."

"That's the question," he turned to the hostages, "-the boss isn't happy. One of the gang leaders is being tortured by the DG."

"The Dark-Guild, I thought they weren't active in Elendor?"

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"You know of them?" exclaimed the guard, "-it's going to be simple. We were ordered to gather the workers and wait. The boss is trying to figure out the next course of action."

"Might I interject?" inquired Staxius.

"Sure."

"Don't you know where Vil is?"

"No, we have no idea. We checked the basement to no avail."

'They've checked the basement?'

"Thank me later," whispered the conniving voice of Gophy.

'It explains the mana I felt.'

"If he's not here, then I don't know. Maybe they took him to Hidros or some other village?" shrugged he with semi-interest.

"Well, we don't care really," said the man who watched the video, "-we're mercenaries. Money is what talks, Snow's been grateful for giving us a lot of cash to be on standby. This job is peaceful."

"Speak for yourself," voiced another angrily, "-this job is shit, I have a wife waiting home. I need to get there as soon as possible."

"Don't speak so loudly, Connor.'

"But I-leader Oeta..."

"I said enough." A master telling his dog to stop barking, the impression came across as the same. The man named Connor with the face of a teacher (bearing square glasses and neatly combed hair) didn't give the aura of a fighter. Granted if one ignored the rather well-built body.

'Mercenaries and they seem to have a lot of knowledge about Snow.'

"Say, men," voiced Staxius strongly, "-how much is Snow paying?"

"Around 10,000 Exa per month," replied the leader with an inkling of caution, "-why do you ask?"

"Out of curiosity," the aura dropped, "-you don't seem inclined in harming the hostages. Speaking to an unknown as if he were one of you. Even the captives seem relaxed and waiting despite the gun being held against their heads."

"So?"

"I have an offer."

"I'm listening."

"20,000 Exa, mercenaries have no sense of companionship. I want to know more about Snow."

"20,000 Exa," laughed Connor, "-have you ever seen such an amount before?"

"éclair, transfer the funds right away."

"Yes, master."

\*Ding,\* "-YO, I JUST GOT 20,000 EXA!"

"Me too," screamed another.

"What will it be, leader of the mercenaries, I've transferred the funds, tell me what you know about Snow."

"Mercenaries or not, we have a code. Never give client's information to another."

"What a shame," sighed he, "-cancel the transfer."

\*Death Element: Unleash Aura.\* A black fog filled the room to paralyze those who stood. Fear glued their tongues, the mind tried to make heads or tails to no avail. "You're the last one," said Staxius appearing before the leader, "-it's been a pleasure talking." \*Slash.\*

\*Once living now dead. O' thee who've lost thine live to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghoul Revival.\*

Fog, the intruder to the calm interior, vanished just as mysteriously as it came. The sitting workers came to their senses, the mercenaries were gone. "Where did they go?"

"Home," replied he covered in more blood. "Please go for tonight, Vil's brothel is closed."

"A-are you sure?"

"Yes, have a break. Everything will become apparent in the next few days," soon to head to the basement, the boy neared the end of the second flask. The screaming grew more haunting, Suzanne crouched in the farthest corner of the room. 'It's close to the hour of culling,' thought he with an injection in hand. 'If my theory is correct.' Quick to pull her on her feet, "-continue having a fun boy."

"Yes, master," smirked he completely enthralled by the prospect of hurting another.

'The cult should make their way here in a few minutes.' Outside, the building's light was off. The people in the immediate vicinity; workers of Vil's brothel, were nowhere to be seen. The place turned into a ghost town, \*twinkle,\* came the eerie sounding bells.

'Alright,' \*smack,\* a punch had her fall forward.

"Why did you do that for?" asked the lady confused by his actions.

"Shut up," no emotions came from his face, the figure simply vanished into the darkness.

'No,' she panicked, '-this feeling,' the effects of the drugs shot to her mind, '-who g-gave me the i-injection.' The face turned into a broken mess of emotions, "-h-help me," she stood to dash at the strange men wearing robes. "HELP ME," she screamed.

"The devil has possessed that child," voiced one strongly, "-cull her right away."

\*BANG, BANG,\* two shots had her fall headfirst. The narcotic nulled the pain, two bullets rendered her unable to walk. The blood stained the gravel path.

"Hear me, my companions, we are on the mission to cull those who are touched by the devil. She bears the mark of evil; her foot has been tainted!"

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"Bless her soul."

"Bless her soul."

"Bless her soul," came the slow hypnotic chants from the followers.

"Take her to the pry, we shall cleanse her body." Around the village, they walked to arrive at the center. The bodies of two, including Suzanne, was dragged and impaled onto a blunt sharp stick. The pain jolting

from her back, the rod pierced her inner-organs to come out the mouth. The fading eyes came upon the man she somewhat felt trust towards, ‘-betrayal...’

“In the name of God, we light this fire to cleanse the people who live in Earn. Hear me, o’ god who protects us from atop, grant us thine divine protection,” it set ablaze.

“May thee rest in peace,” said Staxius gazing from afar. ‘My hypothesis was correct.’

“éclair, did you record the event?”

“Yes, every single bit of it.”

“And, were the faces of the culprits captured?”

“Yes. Master, may I ask a question?”

“What is it?” facing away from the fire, he promenaded back to the brothel.

“Didn’t you feel anything?”

“About what?”

“About the lady, did you not save her from Vil?”

“You misunderstand,” the building came in view, “-she was only a means to an end. Her death, painful as it was, gave us evidence of the true intention of Earn. We have leverage against the cult.”

“Still, it doesn’t seem right.”

“I understand where you’re coming from,” the cheerful and smiling face returned to emotionless, “-she granted me trust and extended a hand of friendship. I took her offer and did as was needed. There’s no need to think of those who I’ve walked over to get here. I’m no hero, anything goes.”

“BAHAHAHA, DIE, DIE, DIE, DIE,” laughed the boy with Vil’s broken head laid open on the now red couch. Brain matter dribbled, the stomach was torn opened to expose the intestine that flopped outwards. “Welcome back master,” voiced he in a frightening tone.

“What’s your name, boy,”

“No name,” said he continually stabbing the dead Vil, “-I was orphaned and sold into slavery. No name, no life, no place to go – I’ve had enough of being abused!”

“What will you do now, boy?”

“I don’t know, master,” the passion-filled gaze laid upon his.

“Does thee wish a place to call home?” he held out a hand.

“Home, sir?” covered in blood, he walked towards Staxius with bloodied footprints behind. “Are you sure?”

“Yes,” he smiled, “-take my hand if thee wants a home.”

"Please," the handshake turned into an embrace for he longed to have cared. The boy cried, cried, and cried, the acts he suffered and done, "-take me with you."

"With pleasure," \*SLASH,\* the boy fell whilst coughing blood all the while Staxius held his heart. "I don't need a human," the grip tightened to crash the heart.

'If you are to serve me,' a few droplets of his blood landed into the boy's mouth, '-you need to be strong.' A burst of red fume had the walls covered in liquid; the dead figure awoke to hover. "Does thee have the will to become a nightwalker!"

Left to right, the figure tore himself apart trying to get away. Part of the arms turned into claws; the curse of the vampires worked twice as much on his tainted soul. \*BAM,\* it flopped onto the ground, no response, nothing, '-what a shame.' The weather thundered, the night screamed, the wind blew, so many lives were lost, people's trust broken, and the God of Death stood mercilessly before those who he used. '-Pathetic.'

Chapter 442: Village of Earn [7]

'Humans are too weak.' \*Death Element: Void Flame – Blaze.\* The bodies of the boy and Vil burnt into the late night. Over yonder rose the sun, dawn broke into the land with its usual glamour. An oblivious figure who but waltz into a room filled with death and destruction.

"éclair,"

"Yes, master?"

"Contact lord Elon."

"As you wish," command received. The spirit, ever loyal, watched carefully, data on the secret to Earn piled one after the other.

"Greetings lord Elon, I hope I didn't disturb."

"No, my boy, there's no need for concern. Say, I didn't expect for thee to call so fast."

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"Tis on the matter of the brothel. The owner has been killed; I'm expecting the other allies to come in full. Therefore, could you pull on strings and acquire the building itself?"

"Acquire the building?" he paused, "-I've no idea who is the owner. Might be a daunting task."

"No," said he now on the dimly lit streets, "-the man is a noble by the name of Kiano."

"A nobleman," stopped lord Elon, "-I'll have Alison negotiate. Good job on finding the route of the problem. If nobles are involved, it's so much easier." On that, the phone ended with Staxius heading to the inn.

The tables and chairs were arranged differently, Mela and a few workers scurried from here to there to clean. The menu displayed 'breakfast'.

"Welcome back," said she noticing the man.

“Thank you, may I use the room?”

“Yes,” she nodded with firmness.

“Thank you,” he nodded and climbed the ever-creaking wooden stairs.

‘Finally,’ sat on the bed, ‘-time to rest,’ laid back, ‘-I’ll take a nap.’

Meanwhile far, far away from Earn – Lord Elon called on his secretary.

“Good morning, master,” said she shyly opening the door.

“Good morning,” he returned with a stern aura, the shutters of which show the forestry was shut. The sun might have risen outside, yet, the inside reminisced of the darkened night. A singular reading lamp rested atop the desk. The hardcovered book with golden corners shimmered.

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“Come in, have a seat,” said he with fingers touching one another.

“Yes, master,” she obeyed to grab a seat.

“I’ve gotten news from Shadow,” firmed he across, “-the boy has proven his worth. My expectations were high, even so, he made leaps and bounds across. I’m happy to say that I might have found the heir to take over the Empire.”

“WAIT, MASTER!” she stood, “-you’re not thinking of retiring, are you?”

“No, far from that,” he laughed with a few coughs, “-time has been against me for a very long time. There comes a point where one must think of future generations. Godfather Renaud, a man who is trustworthy and always by my side, up until the boy came, he was to become the next Overlord. Nonetheless, I’ve made up my mind. He’s young, I’d guess in his late twenties, a king who controls from the shadow, a king whose standing is either good or bad. Our company has long focused on researching how technology could advance our world, despite this, people go to war. They go to war using swords, shields, horses, and carriages. We have cars, trucks, and rifles, yet, tis only given to a few chosen. I say, the Ardanian Federation and Wracia Empire are the only alliances that use guns in warfare. The other kingdoms including Konak and the land to the Far-west are still living in the age of old. This is why I need to train and educate the future behemoth that is to come, Staxius Haggard.”

“I understand, however, will that not break apart the DG?”

“No,” he smiled, “-not if he takes down Snow, especially that they are a known family of Cimier. The five godfathers know who’s the threat to us, and to that end, we mustn’t give any leeway. I don’t want the guild to be broken by a trifling matter of succession over my name. The Lerado Incident is a glimpse into what could become, a premonition if I were to die without an heir.”

“Master, I have my doubt on Lord Staxius’s capabilities.”

“Silence,” he yelled across, “-watch the screen. I’m Overlord for a good reason.” A picture of old Hidros plastered across, “-the story of the man known as Staxius Haggard. It’s a long and hardy one, a boy who lived on a battlefield – a new man, tried to enter Claireville academy. From there on, I’ve failed to find

information until the war of Dorchester against Kreston. He was in the shadow, manipulating, and gathering allies, the Silver Guardians. Afterward, the battle lasted sixteen years until Kreston won. On that day, he appeared once more and took to Arda. There, he became known to the royalty, became a hostage or a trusted member, who knew. Mistake not, the man had no influence, no power, no fame, no fortune. Somehow, somehow, he got inside the ever closed and compact province. Then came the birthday of the late king, the apparition of monsters. The world changed, and so did he. Thus, after a while, he took to becoming an adventurer and became renowned on the field as Xenos. In that period, he was made alchemist and founded the formula for God's Ale. He got involved in the Dark-Guild. Our profits sky-rocketed, he took to Iqavea as bodyguard to the Pride of Hidros. The achievements stacked one after the other, he got married and became king. The princess of Arda won her tournament and became the Prodigy. Around that same time, Phantom was founded and led by Cake. Kreston invaded Oxshield, abducted the apostle. For eight months to a year, Xenos infiltrated Kreston and rescued she who we worshipped. Following that, we met at the weapon selling event, he was gathering members for Phantom and recruited GateSix from our noses. Phantom amassed power and money, they worked, made, became arms-traders, influenced war all over the world for profit," the slide show ended on a picture of Staxius.

"What does that have to do with us?"

"Don't you see," the voice came strong, "-he did things that would take centuries in a few years."

"I do admit it's impressive," she sighed, "-Overlord, please tell me how thee view him."

"A boy who climbed his way into kingship and has set his sights on the world. There's something different to his aura; the Krestonian Holy Invasion is another example of his strength. He defeated the Divine Blade, Raulf Serlo, of Hidros, arguably one of the greatest swordsmen to ever live. If that doesn't amount to the strength the boy possesses, then I know not what thee wishes."

"Sir, sorry for saying this, I'd argue most of the things you give credit were made possible by other people."

"And?" he laughed, "-unknown people. There's a certain saying, a leader isn't defined by how strong he is, but by how strong the people who surround him are. I won't take away credit just because another did the job in his stead. The King of Arda is an amber waiting to pounce. I shudder," he grinned, "-I shudder to think how he'll shape our Era. The other Kings and Generals must have taken notice just as we did. The Federation is viewed with fear, a nation that possesses technology centuries from the common. What would happen if he decides to attack a continent or a province?"

"A massacre?" she guessed.

"Precisely," he laughed, "-blood will be shed by the thousands."

"How does that relate to him becoming the next Overlord?"

"Simple," the shutters opened to blind the room, "-as strong as he is, there will be plots for assassination. Thus, the Dark-Guild, rulers of the underworld, at his fingertips, will make the assertion of power ever so simpler. I want to see a king who doesn't fear repercussion, a king who will drive forth, alone if need be, to conquer the other realms. The unification of Hidros was the greatest thing I've



witnessed – the continent boomed as a result; people are happy. The same can't be said for the mainland."

"Please," her head shook, "-you're not referring to the unification of Iqavea?"

"Maybe I am, or maybe I'm not," he paused to gaze upon the outside. "This talk has but reinforced my decision. Go," he gestured, "-go and acquire the rights to Vil's Brothel in the village of Earn."

"As thee wishes," she bowed out the room with a rising sense of excitement. "The story is the same as fables of heroes of the old, king who unified world. If Lord Elon trusts so much in him, then there's one thing I can do,' resolved to glare the hall, '-tis to do my best!"

Curtains swayed with the afternoon wind, the heat gave into a faint moment of coolness. Two figures materialized inside the room, "-master," said one.

"Intherna, Gophy," the nap broke, "-welcome back," said he giving a once over. The puppet bodies were at their expiration, lashes and blood-clots, cut over the arms and legs, a sick display of what had happened behind closed doors.

"We did as was told," the bodies fell with wisps hovering above.

"It's as was seen," said Gophy, "-the cave is used for torture and the ritual of emending."

"Emending?" asked he.

"Yes, the ritual of correction. The Cult is trying to conjure a demon to cleanse the land."

"Cleanse the land?" he stared at the ceiling, "-did they know about the pills?"

"Most likely not, the people here are simple-minded," commented Gophy.

"Listening blindly to their gods, what a shame," he sighed. "Suppose we need to get rid of the cult leader."

"That would be the Village Leader and the Alchemist," said Intherna, "-getting rid of them might be troublesome."

"Might affect the village, the balance of those living here," glancing his watch, "-can't help it. The Cult is more dangerous than be let living."

"We'll leave, for now, master," said Intherna as the fatigue of staying in a weak body stacked.

For the next few days until the 3rd of June, Staxius stayed in the village and gathered information from the locals. The drunkards at night were more than happy to answer the questions. Vil's Brothel resumed working, the passing of Vil came as a shock. Still, money was needed, and the new owner, a masked man, took over the business of buying Pills from Snow. The first encounter with the dealers gave the impression of worthlessness. Cleopatra, ordered per Staxius, was tasked to infiltrate the dealer's click. She did so easily, none could have expected a femme-fatale coming to the scene. Each passing day was filled with scheming and thinking. The location of their hideout was soon discovered at the shipping-district towards the East. A well-established fishing company was the middle-man for the import of the narcotics.

'Here we are,' thought Staxius with a few docks' in sight. Ships were lined without movement despite the harshness of the waves. A hangar with \*Jeen's Shipping\* rested with multiple trucks moving left and right. Cargo from a nearby ship was transported by unusually formally-dressed men.

'They've taken to imitating the DG to heart.'

"Master, shall we intervene?" asked Gophy in spirit form.

"No," he grinned, "-leave this slaughter to me."

A gate, guarded by a uniformed man, stood between him and the hangar.

"Who are you?" asked he confused by the sudden appearance.

"Death," he smirked, \*Blood-Arts: Extria.\* A nauseating feeling forced the man onto the ground, '-come to me,' a gesture broke the body with blood gushing out.

\*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,\* Adete stood atop his head. The crimson halo manifested as if a floating crown.

"Who are you?" voiced one of the carriers.

"A visitor," \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* no time to blink for the body fell apart. A singular man walked with the essence of blood-lust – anyone who came in his way was killed. Using Extria, the ability to control blood inside the living at a range defined by the nightwalker's strength, the massacre went on until dusk.

Night veiled the docks. A heavy fire rose towards the skies. The bodies of every single member associated with the import laid dead. What transpired was but the prelude of a terror which would have the world turned.

#### Chapter 443: Village of Earn [Conclusion]

Smoke rose from the silent port. Those allied with 'the fake Dark-Guild' burnt to ashes. The man responsible all but sat with feet dangling off one of the concrete docks. Cigar in hand, the sea breeze, differing from the land breeze, carried with it the salty aroma of the ocean. The life beyond human observation – the aquatic realm. For some reason, the mind wanted to take a break. A peaceful moment of rest, watching and sensing, feeling the world.

"Master," intervened éclair oblivious by the current mindset.

"Yes?" replied Staxius crushing the cigar onto the slightly damp berth.

"Preparations for ending the Cult are in place."

"How so?" he asked now stood and retracing the steps.

"The video and information gathered for the last week are ideal to bring their secret to light. The disappearance of people has local public safety in peril."

"And where might we find the nearest station?"

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“At the central district, the station in charge of Earn have sent announcements of the missing people.”

“Oh,” paused to check for survivors, “-Jeen’s Shipping has been taken-over. I’ll go visit the station, meanwhile, contact Cake. Phantom needs to acquire the warehouse as well as the private docks.”

“On it, sire,” the line cut.

The capital province of Elendor was divided into 5 districts. The latter was ruled by the district council who were in charge of the villages. Similar to how Hidros ruled by having differing provinces over massive lands – the districts here were of the same method though on a smaller scale. The line of command was as so: populous, village leaders, district advisors, district leader, minister(noble of rank Viscount and higher) to the court of Elendor then finally, the Queen. A well-established chain of command unique to how Elendor was managed. Any trouble would be sent in the same order. If the law was broken, the respective tier would intervene. For example, murder would be managed by the ministers while thieving would be handled by the district leaders. In the case of treason, the court would give primary sentencing to then have the Queen decide whether the punishment be too lenient or vice-versa.

The village of Earn was located at the edge of the Central District. Thus, upon sprouting wings, Staxius made due Northeast to the city of Asol. The journey took long for a mountain range stood between the village and the City.

Upon the crack of dawn, he arrived rather hastily at the city. Most of the buildings were erect with sun-dried bricks coated with cement. The warm beige color with strong contrasting dark-wood squares. The city itself was built over a canal – the water City of Asol. The towpaths, neat and cleaned around the edges of the waterway gave onto arching bridges to the bigger city. Boats with people inciting others to enter for a nice trip. Contrary to what one might have thought, the city remained odorless. Trading caravans were often spotted alongside the ‘dried’ part of the city. Built over the massive lake of Egoulo, Asol was in every sense of the word, a city. The point of access for the traders remained at the outpost of Conden, at the shallower ends towards the west. Build and made to lock the city in case of an emergency, the gate was the only defense.

‘Beautiful,’ thought he promenading along the elevated paths. Restaurants were obvious in placing their tables and chairs into the open. Visitors would most definitely walk and be slapped by the aroma of the opened style cooking. A lovely view behind, and succulent taste in front, what more could one want.

Hours prior, éclair sent an anonymous tip of the cult’s involvement in Earn. Public safety didn’t respond nor take heed of the information. Crossing multiple bridges, getting lost into dark-alleys, Staxius arrived at the station. A three-story building immediate to a bridge. People strolling past didn’t bother to stare at the building. The gaze would most often be on the ground. Opposite the station laid an open yard hidden by walls and two rough-looking guardsmen.

‘The air feels tight,’ thought he looking to the left. \*District Council,\* was engraved into a wooden post. Not wasting time, the door opened with countless men and women halting their activities. Signs above the halls showed where what was. Thus, following the trusty help, he arrived at the helping desk.

“Good morning,” scuffled he who stood listlessly to browse papers littered around.

“Good morning,” returned Staxius sharply.

"How can I help?" the voice felt even more so tiresome.

"I have information on the many disappearances in Earn."

"Information?" he yawned, "-sure, please fill this form. We will contact you later."

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"Surely you jest," he fired back, "-does thee not realize how valuable my intel is?"

"Sure is," glossing over what was said, "-fill the form, we'll contact you."

"No thanks," the papers flew across the desk, "-thank you for the worthless help." Sharp and direct, the man thundered across the building. 'There's no way they'll take me seriously.'

"Hey you!" shouted one of the men across the street, "-why did you slam the door behind?" they approached with broad shoulders.

"Because public safety is worthless."

"Mind your tongue, commoner," voiced the man loudly, "-there's no way the words of a pawn is going to be taken seriously. Tis the law of the town of Asol. We have daily reports of more serious happenings. Go apologize to the station."

"Commoner?" he chuckled.

"Hey!" the man's eyes spread as if he would eat the man alive, "-such insolence. We'll have you locked up."

"Let me guess," ending the enraging laughter, "-Asol works on a class system, the nobles are given priority and such?"

"Yes, you catch on quickly," they smirked, "-now then, scurry along the path."

"Oh, that I will," a step followed by, \*smack,\* the two guards flew across the street to crash inside the station.

"Hello everyone," said he ominously stood in the broken-doorway, "-I demand to be compensated for the disrespect I've endured."

"Who the fuck are you?" came another officer.

"Someone who thee mustn't address with such familiarity," \*smack,\* another punch had the lady land at the same spot. The stomach-turning sound of bone breaking had heightened their senses.

"ARREST HIM!" screamed a superiorly dressed officer. One after the other, people went flying until the supervisors stood as of last. Walls were broken, some thrown into the canal, others hung headfirst into the ceiling.

"Asol is a fun place," he laughed to grab onto the remaining lady-officer, "-thee live in the age of hierarchy. Thus, my actions are justified," slowly choking the life out the officer. "-PLEASE, MY LORD, THERE'S NO NEED FOR SLAUGHTER," rushed another to kneel at his feet.

\*BANG,\* a sudden push had the officer's head crack opened, "-INSOLENCE," yelled the king.

"Enough playtime," voiced a man with a gun, "-you've recklessly killed and assaulted people serving for the safety of the populous. It's time to give it up, you'll be killed right here and now."

"Killed?" a blink later, "-kids should not be playing with guns," said Staxius now aiming the weapon at the other officers.

"Who are you?" asked the superior officer unbothered by the gun.

"King of Arda, Leader of the Argashield Federation, Staxius Haggard."

"A-Argas-shield f-federation," the bravado cut short, "-m-majesty."

"Yes, I'm he who is known as the Hero King."

"W-why a-assault us so badly, majesty?" the few remaining prostrated themselves.

"For the simple reason of being ignored. I came with information of the happenings in Earn, regardless of my station, thee should have taken time to hear the voice of one of thine people," emotionless and cold, "-your head will be a most fitting apology." The king placed his foot atop the head of the supervisor, "-you, and you, come lick my shoe!" pointing to two others, they could but obey.

Just as they were to touch the shoe, he kicked sending them across.

\*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 green-hemisphere engulfed the building, the cracks and break rebuilt themselves. The people on the verge of death returned to normal, their injuries heal – the few who died were given life anew.

"What happened?" screamed one of the officers, "-I'm sure I died!"

"Nothing much," smiled Staxius, "-does thee understand mine station?" Utterly shaken by the events, some were scared whilst others hurled right where they stood. The man to first raise his gun apologized thoroughly.

Broken to be fixed, the king sat in the company of the supervisor named Eual. A man in his late forties with a buff body and grey hair. Other officials were called from the district council.

"Majesty, they have arrived," said Eual.

"Thank you," courteous and diligent, a slideshow displayed the events of Earn. "I've come to give my observation of the village. The Krestonian Holy Invasion took a lot from us which is why I've endeavored to track the remnants of war. Intel suggested that Kreto otherwise known as Kreton, to have made their way in to Elendor. Therefore, I've come to public safety. I want them arrested and put to trial. A quick and painless death isn't the punishment for them, especially since the Village leader is involved. The matter goes far deeper than wanting to kill the evil-doers. Thus, advisor of the district council, what does thee propose?"

"It was wise of you," said a man with glasses and curled blond hair, "-killing the village leader isn't going to stop the Cult. It would only aggravate their lust at killing," frequent to touch his glasses, "-Majesty, there's only one way I think this issue can be resolved."

"Leaking the message to the media?" asked he rhetorically.

"Yes," grinned the advisor, "-we can't take action. Tis the people who elected their leader, and tis their right to fight for the correct cause."

"Understood, can I count on the support of the public safety and district council?"

"Surely you jest, majesty," intervened the advisor, "-you have close relations with our monarch. A simple request and the whole cult could be killed without one being the wiser."

"I suppose so," he stood, "-the demonstration earlier must have enlightened the officers, isn't that right, Ecuat?" a glance had the officer cough.

"Y-yes majesty."

Although the killing and destruction were real, Staxius voiced that it was but an illusion spell. Arguing against the word of nobility, let alone the king, would be disrespectful. On that, the ever-flowing city of Asol witnessed the fear of the Hero King.

"Majesty, I've noticed something," voiced éclair.

"What is it?" asked he whilst eating along the bank under the nicest restaurant around.

"You've grown lesser tactful when it comes to human lives. Thee seem to not care about who dies and who lives. Is everything ok?"

"I suppose so," elegantly wiping his mouth, "-tis the appearance of Snow. I felt something break inside. Who knows really. We've successfully destroyed those who imported the narcotics. Lord Elon mentioned a war between the rivaling gangs, a war that concluded so many weeks ago. Snow sent guards to assassinate the other factions. They're adamant about staining our name in Elendor. There must be other similar plans around the continent."

"About the Cult," interjected éclair, "-I have a suspicion of them being tied with Cimier. Else, why would they only go after the 'tainted'?"

"Probably to have someone else link the events. The drug being 'tainted' thus some are killed. It's a good plan, associating the DG with the thought of Kreton burning one to the stakes. Too bad, we intervened first." On that, what was meant to be complete in Earn came to an end. Staxius would soon return to Lazuli for the confirmation of the contract between Phantom and Elon's Empire.

Meanwhile, inside Rotherham, Cake worked tirelessly to acquire Jess's shipping. Her efforts were trampled by the intervention of another force, another company quicker to jump into the fray. A subsidiary of Kura's Trading Cooperation stole the property from under her nose.

'It's bad. We're being watched by Patek. The allied company between us and Elon's Empire might fail before it starts. What a pain...'

## Chapter 444: Lord Elon's decision

Date 6th of July – News headline \*Kreton Cult's Massacre\*

The moment of truth came to pass. Staxius in the presence of a special unit of the Public Safety, allied themselves with the media for a singular goal. The latter being the destruction of any roaming cult. The village elder of Earn was trialed in the court of Elendor to be sentenced to death. Death by hanging on the 6th. Crowds of people came in stride to the high-prison of Lazuli. Built into a crater of a meteorite that fell many decades ago, the protection of the sides sufficed.

'The matter is resolved.' The man responsible sat on a beach chair peering over the pool. Lord Elon wasn't discrete for he'd rather swim than to be locked in the study. Giggles and laughter came for the pool wasn't empty, no, far from it, ladies, mainly girls who had just reached adulthood wearing bikinis and skimpy outfits. They worked hard to entertain the lord as he was, the Overlord. Alison stood beside waiting and watching like usual.

"He does seem relaxed in the water," commented Staxius as the clouds revealed the sun.

"Lord Elon is a water-mage," replied she arduously staring those in his entourage.

"Oh, a mage, very interesting," gulping the last drink, "-Lady Alison, I have a few questions."

"Really?" she pulled a seat, "-how can I help."

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"It has been a month since I came into Lord Elon's wing. He's taught me a lot and I learned with very great interest. The man is very much cunning and wise. I need to ask, what is the situation with the joint company?"

"Lady Elvira voiced her intent in leading the operation. All is in her hand; I'm merely waiting for her signal."

"I see," leaping off the chair, "-there are things I must attend to elsewhere."

"Staxius, boy, wait," swam the Overlord closer, "-I have a matter of urgency to speak of."

"Very well," he returned with a courteous nob, "-I shall wait at the study, please be ready."

Thus, the trio, after a few minutes, arrived at the place where it began. The study/office lord Elon loved, the minimalistic haven he called home. Today felt different, the old man arrived attired with a majestically well-crafted crimson robe embroidered with green and gold. The firmness of the visage, the look of utter certainty in the eyes, something must have happened. Stopped shy of the desk, Lord Elon glanced at the blinders to which Alison bowed and allowed the passage of light.

"Head of the Haggard family, Shadow, allied with Godfather Renaud," voiced she, "-please stand to greet the Overlord."

'What's the meaning of this?' throwing a glance at Alison, the glare back spoke volumes. And so, he did as was told and with them soon to sit.

"Shadow," spoke the man exuding the aura of a tiger, "-we need to speak of important affairs." No words left the mouth, Shadow watched with the aura of a demon – the presence came to a deadlock.

"It's of the inheritance of the Dark-Guild and the Elon Empire," the words came through without tact, "-I say this as there is no say in the matter. You, king of another country but a mere ally of my companion shall take the mantle of Overlord." The secretary held her breath and stared at the floor. "Do you hear me!" he shouted to get his attention. "I speak this as a man who has affirmed thy power and cunning. In the last month, I worked with you, I was shown the greater power of your intellect and ability to adapt. I'm impressed, thee are a murderer, a killer, have no sense of empathy towards others; the Jess Shipment incident is proof enough. Despite the blood lust, thee are smart in not killing all who stand – thee knows the importance of life and what it means to lose another, therefore, you, Staxius Haggard, were chosen to become the Overlord." The echoey room came to a sudden pause.

"Lord Elon, I understand thee said I have no say in the matter. However, will it be wise for you to decide the heir without consulting with the other Godfathers?"

"Yes, it should be fine," he laughed loudly and obnoxiously, "-the only prerequisite is to show your strength. I know the perfect target. The Kingdom of Konak, allies of Cimier, Snow." The name resounded deeply, the ever-beating heart sunk, the face of Lizzie flashed across.

"Allies of Cimier?"

"Yes, I know your past with them. The murder of Lizzie Haggard was a very popular news article since a noble-child was killed. The matters were soon resolved with the killers found dead. So, Shadow, what will it be?"

"I'll say this henceforth, Lord Elon, I esteem you as my mentor. You taught me much in the ways of business and scheming. Lady Alison too, thank you for the help. The mantle of Overlord is still far out of reach. I'm not worthy yet to inherit what thee have worked at, forgive if it comes across as pretentious. My words are what I feel, Phantom is a pebble compared to the behemoth of Elon. I'm afraid exterminating Snow will not be sufficient to prove our worth."

"You misunderstand," voiced Alison, "-Snow is unlike any other association. Tis the name of the Royal Family of Konak. Do you understand?" At that moment, the atmosphere dropped, the reality of the order given made itself apparent. Part of the Wracia Empire who was in a peace treaty with the Argashield Federation. Attacking would mean war, intel suggested Wracia be armed and ready. If he were to charge forth right away, the repercussion would certain to be the downfall of the Federation. Tis the moment the truth of being royalty and leader of multiple companies grew apparent.

Alison and Elon watched with a look of disappointment. The words spoken seemed to break Shadow's spirit.

'Maybe I was wrong,' thought the Overlord.

'In no way will he be able to wage war with Snow. It's a tricky question, one without a right answer, how are you going to get out of this?'

"Wait a moment," the head rose from admiring the floor, "-Snow is the name of the Royal family. Does the public know of the involvement in the underworld?"



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"No," voiced she loudly.

"Then," he grinned, "-they are the same position as me. There's a place to cover our attack. Leave it to me," stood with a grandiose stance, "-Overlord, I, Shadow, accepts the assignment to exterminate Snow."

"Are you certain," he rose in turn, "-if thee fails..."

"I'm certain. If I can't accomplish this task, then, being the heir to the Dark-Guild might as well be as preposterous as holding the moon."

"May good fortune bless thee," the handshake, an informal contract, marked the start of a new adventure. The news soon went around the Shadow Realm. Cleopatra licked her lips at the prospect of war. Intherna and Gophy were amused, as for Miira, her stance stood rock-solid with a book before her face. *\*The Chronicles of the Wielder of Death Magic. Written by Lord Death\*.*

The same evening, he took to Elina's castle. Security was tight as usual. The color of the setting sun had blazed the sky with an orangish glow. The trees reminded of autumn despite being summer. As if the season would matter in a province where the scorching heat ran rampant.

"Majesty," hailed the guards, "-why have you come on foot?"

'I flew,' he thought, "-wanted to stroll about," said he.

"The weather is most pleasant," said another, "-open the door you damned fool."

"Majesty," inside the palace, "-King Haggard has arrived," voiced a butler strongly.

"Has he now?" asked she rhetorically, "-fetch me a towel." Droplets ran down her face and body, the bath behind emitted steam. A faint opening allowed the sky to peek inside.

"Majesty," stopped at the white stairs, "-please, follow me this way," said a butler in haste.

"Do lead the way."

A forest, as seen from far, was actually a garden. The trees were heavy and filled with leaves, similar to those in the wild. Thinking logically – it made sense. Yet, things weren't always black and white. Thus, they approached a shrine-like structure with a goddess built-in parian marble. It reflected beauty with her sharp features.

"King Staxius," said she rising her head from prayer, "-you've come."

"Yes," he smiled and offered his respects. "What's with the strangeness?"

"What do you mean?" stood at an arm's reach, "-well, I guess you figured me out, haven't you?"

"Maybe..."

"That isn't an answer," she sighed, "-whatever. I can't believe you went to Lord Elon and became his apprentice. How foolish can a man be, I shudder to think that man be any close to human. Anyway, why did you come back?"

"You don't seem pleased about my being here."

"Stop it," she giggled, "-I didn't mean it that way and you know it. What's the real reason, Staxius?"

"I came to bid my farewells." In that instant, the trees shook eerily.

"Oh..."

"Before I do so," he reached out a hand, "-I want to thank you for everything you've done. That's why I'm going to help you for a week in pushing back King Juvey."

"Huh?" she frowned, "-push back King Juvey?"

"Don't act clueless," soon to place a hand atop her shoulder, "-we're friends. You helped me out, it's time I repay the kindness. The skirmishes at Netlo's Castle are getting out of hand. General Jei Lo's forces are close to 120,000 men strong. Don't be so surprised," said he crossing his arms, "-Jei Lo's acting alone and without the consent of king Juvey."

"Really?"

"No, that's the excuse being told to avoid trouble. The reason you called me here is to avoid the generals and officers inside. There's a war council isn't it."

"How..." her head lowered, "-it's true. Castle Netlo with their 50 thousand is holding up with the superior weaponry. I'm afraid the situation might divulge into chaos in the next week or so."

"Well then," he faced the castle, "-come with me. We have a war-council to attend."

The border skirmishes, an attempt of King Juvey the Cray to invade, grew out of control. Having ordered weapons, Elendor was still at a disadvantage. Rallying villages as in the days of old wasn't an option. The lack of manpower was a big problem. Luckily, the border between the province of Elendor and the rivaling King wasn't that big. The fighting could only take place in the north as further south laid the Emperor's lands.

General of Elendor, Eji Kao – revered as a military genius had forcefully focused the battle at the Northeast district of Deo.

"Majesty, what is the meaning of this?" asked the white-haired general.

"General Eji, please, don't worry. I have called upon the King of Arda to help with our battle," said she with a smile. The council table was filled with people side-glancing and thinking badly of this development.

"Gentlemen," said the king, "-I've come to exterminate the 120,000 men closing onto Netlo's castle."

"Impossible."

"Absurd."

"This isn't a place for games." The response wasn't favorable, yet, General Eji sat with eyes closed, "-care to elaborate?"

"I'll call onto my military for aerial support. The 50 thousand fighting should be running out of supplies right about now. I'm sure the rivaling general is hoping for a war of attrition. Thus, we need to crush them as soon as possible."

"You do realize tis a tall order," said the personal tactician of the general. "Unlike the Federation, we have but guns and not means of transport. The opposing army has a tank and infantry."

"The terrain isn't suitable for their tanks," explained Staxius, "-if we are to fight them before they cross the border, there might be a chance. However, the gamble might lose us the war."

"What is the percentage?" asked the Queen.

"25%," said Staxius.

"I see the glimmer in thine eyes, king of Arda," voiced the General, "-there's another plan."

"Yes," he smirked, "-for I to take the vanguard, alone."

"ALONE?" the council stood still at the mention.

"Have thee forgotten of my name?"

"The man who singlehandedly wiped out 40,000 men strong army," interjected the tactician.

"The mountains, hills, forest, should be advantageous. Queen of Elendor, will you entrust the task to me?"

"Majesty please reconsider, this is utter madness. A single man cannot possibly..."

"How sure are you?" her brows knitted.

"100%."

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"Then it's decided. King Haggard shall lead the vanguard, alone." Confused, mind-blown, speechless, the feelings were mutual between the advisors. The war council concluded as soon as he spoke. The pure insanity in this plan wasn't without reason. The tactician soon realized the real intent. 'He's going for the big prey. The terrain is perfect for guerrilla warfare, still, I doubt the famed Jei Lo army to be so ill-prepared.'

"Are you sure about this?" came a concerned voice through the chatter of the leaving guests. The balcony seemed fitting for the last exchange.

"There's no other way," said he leaned over the balustrade overlooking the entrance.

"You do realize, Queen Shanna might kill me for this..."

"Don't worry about her," the face relaxed into naught, "-she knows of my recklessness."

"I won't argue anymore," stood beside him, "-thank you for the help. I can't believe how we've grown as friends over the years."

"Yeah," said he coldly, "-you best return, the general is waiting."

## Chapter 445: Netlo's Castle

"Hello Cake."

"Hello boss, it has been a long time since the last call, how may I be of help?"

"A very long time indeed," the courtyard emptied with only him stood amidst the grass. "I need a favor," said he.

"How so?"

"I've decided to help Elendor with the skirmishes against King Juvey."

"I understand, shall I call upon the private army?"

"No, I need but aerial support. Have the VT10-BSQD take to the skies."

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"An airstrike?"

"Load them with the Pabruska V1. Before I forget, go into the vault and take out Orenmir as well as Tharis."

"Sire, might I ask how many men thee are to fight?"

"Around 120,000."

"That's it," she yelled across, "-Boss, I'll send supplies and a few members. This is a decision made by the co-leader of Phantom."

"Do as you wish," the call ended. 'Orenmir and Tharis,' thought he gazing upon the crescent moon.

Far, far away from Elendor, inside Rotherham, the call finished with Cake deeply offended. 'Does he think going against that many people is simple?' the door barged with her powerwalking down the hall.

"Lady Cake, how can I help?" asked an assistant who stood with a black-suit.

"Prepare a car and contact the special unit. Tell them to meet me at the vault," the lift dropped as soon as she entered. The car outside was readied almost immediately.

"Where too?" asked the driver.

"The Vault," said she toggling a holographic display, "-Noie."

"Lady Cake, how may I help?"

"Noie, go request information on what the Boss is planning to do."

"I shall contact éclair right away," said the lady vanishing into the night. Noie was a lesser yet intelligent A.I. Since éclair controlled the whole of Phantom, Noie was based partly off him to help the workers around Rotherham. A convenient assistant who handled mundane tasks and such.

The car continued into the farthest reaches of town. The road came to a sudden stop at a particular area behind one of the laboratories. "I'll take it from here," said she now in the driver's seat. \*Beep,\* flashing

red lights came with a platform rising from the ground. A passageway heading underground with 'Vault 00' written beside above a keypad.

'Vault 00,' the sound of engines resonated with the very much emptied passage. It went down for quite a while, '-the place reserved for the Boss.' Similar to the road above, the car stopped before a great empty wall. "Lady Elvira Stepania Haggard, Co-leader of Phantom has been granted access by the leader."

"Lady Elvira," returned a manly voice, "-welcome to Vault 00."

"Thank you, éclair. The Special unit will be arriving soon. Grant them access as well."

"Yes, my lady," the walls unlocked with a heavy low thump. Hinges, machines, wheels, unknown mechanisms worked with one another, the harmony allowed for it to opened as if a normal door. The black road narrowed into a path of grey sterile floor.

Now on foot, the car drove itself to park for a timely exit. 'I've not been here in a while.' The walls shut with the long corridor lighting per her steps. There was nothing, nothing for meters, it kept on going endlessly until another door. Sealed tight, éclair took her fingerprints as well as the features of her eyes. 'Welcome yet again,' said he menacingly. If perchance the result came back negative, automatic guns were programmed to shoot on sight. Security was of utmost importance for a vault of this magnitude.

Fondly enough, the door opened into a small compartment guarded by another door. '-the last one,' she thought with the AI now crosschecking her mana.

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A wide circular room stood oblivious to the harsh security. Dark and homely colors mainly brown and darker red. Wallpapers with stripes of black, the floor was carpet instead of tiles. A circular table rested with a holographic display of the world. Bookshelves made their way around said table as walls. A doorway to the right headed for the storage room.

"Orenmir," thought she coming to two closed compartments. Two black cases locked in an unknown manner rested with skulls and ancient writings. 'There they are, the boss's trusted weapons. A cursed sword and a pistol. I've heard tales of the former,' she wondered whilst returning to the main-room. '- He used that sword ever since the first one broke, I think. Asking for these two means that a tough fight is ahead. What kind of war is he going to wage?' laid atop the central table, the door opened with the Special Unit stood with salutes.

"Yves, Elliot, and Lady Courtney," said she with a grin.

"Lady Cake," approached Courtney with a warm and tight embrace

"Long time no see," said Yves staring about, "-security sure is tight before the vault."

"It was built to keep the master's weapons," said Elliot, "-lady Cake, I'm grateful you called."

"Please have a seat," she offered, "-today is a bit of a hassle."

"I see Orenmir and Tharis were taken out their compartments," commented Courtney, "-has my brother gotten into trouble?"

"No," voiced éclair, the bookshelves sunk into the floor, a massive screen materialized at the front. "Master has endeavored to fight in a war on the behalf of the kingdom of Elendor. I was given orders to relay information if ever lady Elvira decided to call in help from others." Thus, an explanation on the matter was given at a much higher level of detail. It told of how they met with a certain individual.

The day passed without much happening at the border. Staxius arrived on the 8th. Castle Netlo stood immediate to a bridge out of the province. The land after was ragged and uneven. The thick forest with a faint path cutting across led towards the upper-plateau. The lands of the mountains and hill. Naturally, moving an army in such a condition would be foolish. Except, a dried gorge ran across the mountains until the flatlands of Juvey's territory.

Guards ran patrol along the battlements of the castle walls. Snipers would remain on standby and peer towards the land of the unknown. The bridge, made of stone and very sturdy, had gone through prior battles. The castle was famous for nothing having been breeched even since construction.

'So, this is Netlo,' thought Staxius closing the back of the massive walls. Troupes in uniform made regular patrols around the vicinity. They were hardened and ignorant of the boiling heat.

"Good afternoon," approached an officer dressed differently, "-you must be the King of Arda?"

"Yes."

"I do apologize for the lack of courtesy; a battle can break out any moment. We can't afford to pull any men off their posts."

"Understandable," checking the strangely opened land to the right, "-drought?"

"Good eye sir," said the officer, "-it's a dried lake."

They soon headed inside the compound. Tables stood with multiple radios, food, cigarettes, guns, and ammo. "Any battles lately?"

"No," they took to the castle walls, "-we fought around a week ago. It's been dead quiet ever since. Intel suggests General Jei Lo's army is coming to take the castle."

"I see. Who's in charge of the fortress?"

"A proxy of General Eji. Goes by the name Uthgare, a strange but talented fellow. You can catch him at the command post at the eastern wing."

"Guess I shall make myself at home."

The 9th arrived impatiently. Shots were fired at the crack of dawn. The vanguard of Jei Lo's army hid amidst the thick forest. The command center soon filled with multiple squads and platoon leaders. Time had come for war, the battle began. The king of Arda remained calm throughout the briefing.

Commander Uthgare's mindset came as one of caution and cunning. He voiced many o' counter strategies without ever stating retaliation. Fighting a defensive battle was harder on a country than leading the offensive. The soldiers in uniform and holding guns were at the ready. A squad died on their routine inspection of the borders. The men were anxious, the snipers reported faint shadows dashing left and right killing lookouts on the tower.

A slender body, short hair, a cap, and a green uniform. The multiple scars on his face, a crooked nose, and the aura of a veteran, the Commander gave off a certain aura of destruction. The expression the face held wasn't normal, they were close to one of a beast, a starved wolf.

"Listen, men," said he loudly, "-we're not going to fight. They have rhythm and momentum. I want the sniper corps to be the only people on the lookout. Have a team be ready to storm and destroy the bridge. Worst case scenario, we break access to the frontier. Tis orders from General Eji. Any questions?"

"What is the status on provision and ammunition?"

"Who might you be?"

"King Staxius of the Federation. I came last night to aid in defense."

"Forgive the insolence, majesty," said he with obvious intent at the insult, "-is it wise for royalty to be on the frontline?"

"Normally no," said he calmly, "-thee needn't worry."

"I'm afraid we can't afford men to assign to thy protection."

"I said to not worry," both spoke with harshness in their tone. The Commander subtly looked down on the king as if he were nothing but a spoon-fed noble weakling. "My answer?"

"We ran out a while ago. As for ammunition, we have enough for a few days," interjected lieutenant Bete, the officer who gave the warm welcome.

"Lieutenant, how dare you speak while the commander is talking?" gritted another giant with red hair and a peculiarly deformed visage.

"Captain Stalin, I apologize for speaking out of line," he bowed.

"Lieutenant Bete," said Staxius, "-there isn't a need to raise thine head. Commander Uthgare, the castle will be thy responsibility," at that moment, the frightful howl of a plane approached. "I shall handle the army of Jei Lo," a massive thump shook the very ground they stood upon.

"COMMANDER, A PLANE DROPPED A WEIRD METAL BOX!"

"WHAT?"

"There's no need to be flustered now," said the king, "-those are ammunition to last a few months."

"Are you serious?" they stepped out to see crate upon crates of ammunition and guns with three figures stood in the middle as the dust settled.

"Commander, tis a gift from the Federation. Leave the extermination of the army to us," he returned to his companions.

"Brother," said Courtney holding the cases, "-here."

"Good to see you all," he nodded.

"COMMANDER," screamed another lookout, "-IT'S THE JEI LO FORCES. THEY'RE CHARGING ON HORSEBACK."

"ON HORSEBACK?"

"Commander, order your men to mount the walls. If they cross the bridge the battle will be lost!"

"DO AS THE KING SAID," and so, it started. Gunfire followed by the dying yelps of the unfortunate.

"King of Arda," approached he who had been disrespectful, "-I apologize for my prior behavior. I'm grateful you came."

"Let bygones be bygones." The seal of Orenmir's case broke with a shockwave. A cloud of heavy darkness nearly devoured the castle, those close were motionless. 'It's been so long,' a gentle touch of the scabbard subdued the nauseating aura.

"Yves,"

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"Yes, boss,"

"Go assist the Commander," he turned, "-my companion here shall prove helpful in case we need to escape."

"Elliot, go forth and lock our defense."

"Understood master," he leaped into action. Soon a thunderous shot of Knightfall blasted the charging troupes.

"What about me, brother?" tilted she lustfully.

"What else," he shrugged, "-you're with me. There's a lot of prey out there."

"Can I go all out?"

"Sure."

The arrival of the King boosted the morale of the Elendorian fighters. Part of the force had trained under the Federation's offshore military school. In total, 300 of the horseback warriors died from the acute shooting. Miira, Intherna, and Gophy soon materialize to stand by his side. The forest was compromised with the army being a mere ten minutes away. General Jei Lo's camp stood further down the gorge.

"Time to fight," said he, "-go forth and enjoy the thrill of war!"

Chapter 446: Growing forces

"Master, I've infiltrated their communication channel."

"Good," said he promenading atop the sought-after bridge. Arches at regular intervals with inlays of dragons and other deities gave an idea of its origin. The opposing cavalry was naught but horses without horsemen. Staxius's companions took care of business. Mainly Intherna, her trail of fire burnt many to crisps.



"Excuse me," voiced the Commander in utter amazement. The view stretched before was of a team seemingly indestructible. "Who are those with his majesty?"

"Oh," paused Yves who scanned for a path of exit, "-those are his majesty's personal guards and allies, I think."

"You think?"

"Didn't you see how quickly they dispatched of the coming waves..."

"Still," the tone came across as indecisive, "-I see no way how one could defeat 120,000 men alone."

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"He's not alone, you're gravely mistaken. Our leader is the owner of Phantom, and Phantom does war better than the countries fighting. He'll be fine. Furthermore, I need a map, if things go wrong, we'll need to escape."

"Sure," they bounced onto the stairs with nervous energy. Tis was the first such a large scale army came to wage war. The soldiers, with superior weaponry, were but sitting ducks. A shield versus a spear.

The narrowed path across the expansive forest came to end rather quickly. Nature had overgrown the only access further to the mountains. Quiet suspicious movement of the trees, leaves, foliage, branches, and all that move added to the overall harshness. Fighting as a vanguard in a coming siege was foolishness at its peak. Nonetheless, Gophy and Intherna sprouted wings to dash around the greenery, they killed and killed and killed until the head of their leader, a lieutenant (showed by the outfit and badges) was brought forth by a grinning Gophy.

"This should prevent any advancement into the forest," voiced she who had bravely took his life.

"I doubt that," said Miira curiously peering towards the right. A small clearing amidst the trees gave time to rest and strategize. Being strong didn't matter with such large numbers.

"I agree with lady Miira," said Cleopatra viciously eying a map, "-we took the head of one of the leaders. The forest is massive, it goes from here to here. To lead such an operation – there must be Sergeants of 150 to 300 men scouring the area. The prior charge was also quite a bold move."

"There might be another plot in place," wondered Staxius, "-which is why I'm not holding back this time."

"Excuse us?" inquired Intherna with a squint.

"What I mean is I will use any means necessary, and this includes the power of the gods." The visage sunk into a state of cold empty stare, the dormant crimson glance burst forth into a raging whirlwind of flames. \*Blood-Arts: All-Seeing eyes.\*

"Adete, could you explain?" said Miira towards the little lady.

"He's using the curse of the Nox clan. The all-seeing eyes, an ability that is crucial to warfare. Answer me this, what is important before waging a war?"

"Information," interjected Cleopatra, "-many o' battles are won using brute force, yes, tis true. However, the greatest battles were won with legendary strategist alongside the Great Generals of my era."

"Tis a bittersweet arrangement," whispered Staxius. "-Brains and brawns are most often enemies. Smart people refused to fight as 'orcs' and so can be said of the 'orcs'. Finding the perfect balance is another matter in it's lonesome. Those Great Generals which lady Cleopatra mentioned were smart enough to request the brains of another, and this, the foolish pride of riding into war for fame and fortune is rendered worthless." On that, the sun moved to allow the moon to take over. A darkened shadow laid atop the still to come battlefield.

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The crackling of fire burnt slowly into the night. The goddesses sat and jested with one another. The bond seemed strong, Cleopatra – a relatively new addition would often have her smile changed to one ingenuine. Staxius noticed and chose to remain silent.

"Master."

"What is it?" returned he using a holographic display.

"What is that?" asked Cleopatra with the others soon to approach.

"A prototype display made by the Elon Empire. It's newer and uses my theory on mana conversion to work."

"..." the cold wind blew to amplify the clueless glares.

"Fine," the shoulders relaxed, "-consider it a map," with a simple gesture, a three-dimensional chart of the area materialized. "We're currently here," he pointed at the blank spot. "The speculation of a plot being enacted is true. The remaining soldiers regrouped at the edge to plan for the next attack. Our camp is their destination."

"Sorry?"

"I knew it," laughed Gophy.

"Should have expected that much," Intherna rolled her eyes to then grin.

"I'm confused," Miira and Cleopatra could but stare at one another for answers.

"Let me explain," interjected Adete, "-the reason we stopped wasn't to plan. It's to wait in ambush for the coming forces. Vampires are strong, you'll see."

'Now for the waiting game.' He stood atop a branch with the other ladies taking a favorable position on their respective branches. '-We'll hit them hard. Strength alone isn't going to win the war. We need the head of their General as well as all the other leaders. The gentle sloped desert-like opening after the forest is troublesome. There are troupes there waiting. Their march continues – establishing an outpost to prepare for the siege. What would have happened if we didn't have the technology by our side.' As he wondered, the other army was lesser equipped in terms of modern gadgetry. King Juvey was

hardheaded and distrusting of the coming new wave of weapons. He only allowed the fundamentals, a single-shot rifle with a long reload time.

General Jei Lo, on the other hand, didn't think of such things. He took and bought weapons, radios, and much more to aid his battles. The successes in the many campaigns led towards the independent nations in Melinda was proof enough.

"Orders from the General. Troupes, go ahead and move towards the gathering point. We'll use the night to charge and capture the bridge. Mages of earth affinity, take point, and built the walls as soon as it starts." éclair easily intercepted the orders, and so it was redirected to Staxius.

'Combat mages. It's been a long time since I've seen them in war. I guess the ways of magic are yet to be overtaken by the world of guns.' Countless footsteps marched from the north. First came scouts dressed in black and faster stature. They were quick to scan the area and nod. The fire that burnt earlier was of Intherna's making, and so, there was no sign of anyone having remained here.

Following them came officers accompanied by robe-wearing men. The mages unit in a four-man diamond formation. Standard practice for fighting using magic – the formation had a focus on four differing affinities. Most common: Earth, Water, Fire, and Light. Earth and Light were charged with defense. Water as support and Fire on offense. Many alterations of said formation were popularized in the age of Magical Warfare and today, they but used the norm.

Soon enough, two sergeants arrived on their horses. They held olden looking radios with smirks. Infantry in armor with guns soon piled towards the left and right.

'Guess it's time to attack.'

"Time for us to move," voiced Gophy with them jumping onto the unsuspecting leaders. It didn't take long since Courtney (who had been on a recon mission) returned to behead the leaders. Shook to their core, the infantry charged with battle cries. Saying blood shed that night would have been an understatement. The way they were killed, the disrespect to human lives. Staxius stood with arms crossed, the companions gladly did their due. In total five-hundred were killed. The failed ambush had their head-quarters in disarray.

"So messy," thought he stepping over broken limbs, "-thee sure are vicious." Facing him was the euphoric visage of his companions. Bloodstained their attire; Courtney's blade was drenched in dried blood.

"You did say to go all out," said Gophy lustfully licking the blood of those fallen.

"I want more enemies," voiced Cleopatra, "-seeing the death here has given me a feeling of solace. Please, master, let's go storm their main-camp."

"Wait a moment," he shook his head, "-you are too anxious in wanting war. Give it time, we'll get to slaying soon." The figure soon returned to scan the dead bodies; '-this could not have been a better chance.'

\*Once living now dead. O' thee who've lost thine life to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghoul Revival.\* A giant crimson orb levitated to head for the heavens. It stayed with mesmerizing movement – a fake-

moon shining scarlet rays atop the dead. 'Jei Lo's arms is strong. They managed to hold against the slaughter of my companions. Respect must be given, and so I shall give them in form of being a part of my puppet army.'

The deceased arose once more, heads which were once torn reattached to their former selves. The paleness in the skin intensified. The eyes were blank and devoid of expression. Some had sharp canines grown as a side-effect. An undead army of low-tiered nightwalkers. The only power granted was immortality and inhuman strength.

"You're not serious..." said Courtney with a drained outbreath.

"Oh that I am," he smiled slyly with countless faceless bodies stood in rows behind. "-I present thee how we are to fight the Jei Lo's army."

"Killing their forces and recruiting the dead as thy own army..." commented Intherna.

"Yes, the more the merrier. Besides, isn't the Shadow Realm lonesome without people. They may be dolls in the real-world, however, the souls are bound to the shadows of mine."

"I suppose so," shrugged Gophy.

In total, around 2000 men, including the cavalry from before, became part of his army. The orbs shining overhead acted as a beacon for the lost, the attracted souls brought their bodies in tow.

'The lieutenant and sergeants evolved into slightly better ghouls. They hold the rank of 'guide' in the puppet army. I suppose it's all good. We march forth to their outpost tomorrow.'

"Rest up everyone, tomorrow's going to be a rough day."

"Seriously?" wondered Intherna with a look of dejection, "-are you going to have us sleep in such bloodied mess?"

"Obviously not," he looked at Adete who already began Bloody-Mary. Multiple apples hovered at her side.

"Want some, master?"

"No," he kindly refused, "-you eat them."

"Oh, thank you," to which she devoured the rest.

"Guess we'll be heading to the Shadow Realm," said Miira.

"Good night."

Mist followed by bodies, those captured reawakened in their former selves. Some stood sharply, others took their time. The place was new and strange – a stadium with unknowns stood upon above.

"Is this the afterlife?" asked many caught by the change of scenery.

"No," returned a thunderous yell, "-you are unfortunates who were killed in the battle of Netlo's bridge are now bound to the Shadow Realm. Tis a place ruled by the God of Death, thee might say tis a stop before the eventual journey to the Hall of Rebirth. You will live 'normal' lives without the fear of death.

The continent of Hidros is ripe for exploring – go forth and do what thee want. The capital cities are there but without inhabitants. Tis a virgin world,” Intherna’s words resounded deep, “-Any questions?”

“Why are we here?”

“Because thee are part of a puppet army led by the God of Death. Each time he calls, thee will be sent forth into the ‘real world’. There, consciousness will be lost. Tis a matter you needn’t worry since there won’t be any memory to recall upon.”

“So we’ve been brought into another world where we can do what we wish?”

“Be mindful, the world is ruled by me and lady Gophy. We’re the goddesses and guardians of said realm. Consider us the law, and on that, go forth and live a new life.”

Chapter 447: Real intent

“Commander, commander,” the radio communication of the Jei Lo’s first unit reached home after great atrocities. “The ambush has been compromised; we’ve been wiped out – please call back the second wave. Elendor has called upon a demon of war...”

“And is that the last message?”

“Yes sir,” replied the bowing messenger of the support unit. A large circular tent stretched on forth from the middle. The night was young and news of the failed assault reached in due haste.

“You may leave,” said a gentleman dressed in uniform. The coat was very much decorated with badges, a shimmering piece of metal showed, \*Commander Zu Lo\*. Jet-black short hair gathered before the brows, neither was it parted nor combed. It stood straight and still before the wind and forces of nature. A sharp short mustache curled upwards gently. Each time he spoke or took a breath, the larger round nose would move subtly.

“What is the meaning of this?” he wondered with a large-scale map up in the center. “How can 2000 men up and disappear on a siege. Have the castle sent forth part of their troupes to take the fight to us?” As if a chessboard, he used little figurines to mark where the men were. “Peculiar,” arms crossed with one hand stroking the less than visible goatee, the feet unwilling turned to face a painting. An older man who with whom he bore a striking resemblance. ‘Tell me, grandfather,’ he paused.

“Message from the General,” ran a messenger.

“Enter,” he voiced loudly.

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“Commander Zu Lo, General Jei Lo has ordered for thy force to separate into three units and lay in wait for two days.”

“Understood,” he returned as the other bowed out the camp.

‘Splitting into three units. 13,000 per Captain and 1000 as a reserve. I wonder what sort of strategy the general has in mind.’ Zu remained in the dark of the plan the General formulated. Thus, the decorated military man could but think and ponder upon the map.

Later that night, three Captains from the main-army arrived to provide support. They were assigned 13,000 men each and tasked to guard the left, right, and center of sloped flat-land.

"Commander," voiced one of the captains, "are we only to guard or can we go on the offensive?"

"Depends on the situation," returned he with narrowed eyes. 'The strange aura coming off these men, how troublesome.' Present and not, the darkened mist emanating from their imaginary silhouette was tantamount to a battle-hardened beast.

Meanwhile, further up towards the main-camp, a strange figure stood outside the general's quarters. Long grey hair illuminated against the moonlit sky. "Holiness, please, do come inside," said a rough voice.

"Do give a moment," returned it with an angelic voice. The words rolled off the tongue as if one stealing a spoonful of honey. 'This is the place where my lord foresaw the disturbance.' The coat swam across as he returned; a blade caught the man's reflection. A disfigured and blurry crest flashed across said weapon.

The 7th arrived in stride. The scorching heat of the nine o'clock sun wasn't something to laugh at. The journey across the forest was long and harsh. Seemingly tiny on the map, the actuality of the range was far beyond the mind's imagination. Each step was met by a branch breaking or worst. Uneven ground meant slow pace, and so, he kept on walking despite the harshness.

'The defeat of their forces must have made it back. I haven't heard anything from éclair, meaning, they might be using an analog way of communication.' The never-ending path stretched without end.

"Hey, brother, are you ok?"

"What's this all of a sudden?" returned he with neither hate nor concern.

"You've made new allies. I saw the power of the Goddesses earlier, can't believe the Goddess of Destruction, Goddess of Flame, and the Guardian of the Dominion of Time. It's a strong-line up, I'm worried about Queen Cleopatra."

"Why do you say so?"

"It's a feeling. Don't forget, I'm the sword of Lord Death. Her alliance with God Lixbin isn't one that shallow. There most certainly something else in the making."

"Don't you think I know that?" he grinned, "-she's acted more or less normal with inconsistencies. Her allegiance lays someplace else, I know it all too well. However, her power is truly great – I'll use her as long as she allows so."

"It's not just that," her pace slowed, "-it's you," said she, "-I feel thy power dwindling with each day."

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"Oh..." he paused, "-tis the Shadow Realm. Most of my powers are redirected to aid in support of that world. Since my power keeps on increasing there was no other option to prevent the destruction. Suppose the realm is more of a task to handle."

“Do the rest know of it?”

“No, obviously not. I kept it a secret – if the mana runs out, the place will break, and tis something I can’t afford.”

“Brother,” said she halting, “-I need you to hear something.”

“What is it?”

“I had the vision of the Curse of the Death Reapers. It’s coming, I can feel it, the curse will strike home soon.”

“So, it happened to you too.”

“Yeah, a white-haired girl stood beside another god. The message is clear and cut, something big is to happen and we’ll be at the receiving end, that much is assured.”

“I know,” he sighed, “-I’ve had the bad feeling for quite a while now.”

“What then?” she asked holding his shoulders, “-going to give up?”

“Might as well,” he smiled, “-the curse will forever haunt us. I don’t know what to do, the only thing there I see is moving forward.”

“Moving forward you say,” she smiled, “-I, Daemonum Gladio, am forever grateful for the life thee have granted. I vow to answer thy call if ever the time arises.”

“What happened to the sister who always teases me?” he chuckled; “-I know you will. Thank you, Courtney, but I don’t see thee as a sword any longer. You’re a part of my family – I rather have you in flesh and blood than metal. If the day comes where I have to relinquish the mantle Lord Death so graciously bestowed; then promise me to grant thy strength to the next heir as a guide.”

“Stop,” her fist ended beside the face, “-why are you talking as if thee are to die?”

“Time stops for none,” he smiled, “-had to tell you what I felt and what I wish for the future to bring.” Thus, they continued towards the coming battlefield.

‘The premonition of my defeat is here,’ he thought whilst cutting across the branching paths, ‘-access to the Stairway of power is ruptured. I can barely open the Terror Gate. I guess that’s the price of hosting so many souls. The power required to maintain and safeguard Intherna and Gophy had me vomiting blood. Add Miira to the mix, it feels as if I’m to break. The damned dream of a god holding a book taking away my power, the crest of the thunder insignia, Zeus – the godly realm will make their move.’

“Master, we’re closing into the hill,” said éclair.

“Understood,” quick to jump onto a tree, \*Blood-Arts: All-Seeing Eyes.\*

‘Around ten-thousand men on each side. They’ve blocked off access to the gorge. Look at them patrolling. That’s a machine gun, no wonder they didn’t follow with the attack or bother to send a search party. Around three kilometers between each outpost. Storming the front is the only way. We can make the trip in 4 minutes while back-up will take around 10-15 minutes. Unless we pierce the

front, numbers will exhaust the goddesses' mana. The set-up isn't so simple, whoever came up with such a plan is witty. They know of our weakness and have played on it very well.

"Brother, how's it looking?"

"Pretty bad," back on the ground, "-they've set up for a long-ended battle. A war of attrition."

"We have to push the front-lines," materialized Cleopatra, "-have the puppet army attack the Eastern Outpost. Lady Intherna, Gophy, and Miira will take the Western outpost."

"Sounds like a plan," said Gophy stretching her arms, "-do we have permission to unleash our powers?"

"No," he returned sharply, "-you're plenty strong. Courtney and I will take the center force."

"I guess it's that time again," armed and ready, they dashed forth towards the Western outpost.

\*Souls of the dead, thee who've sworn to serve me in life and death, come to my side. Blood-Arts: Ghouls Requiem.\* Arms rose from the ground with the fighters climbing as if crawling from hell itself. Devoid of emotions, those of the 2000 army yesterday paired with the 200 from the AN-U and a few more, charged the Eastern front.

"Gophy, Intherna, wait," the charge stopped short of the Western outpost. They stood surrounded and hidden by trees.

"Cleopatra, what's the matter?"

"I have an offer," she smirked, "-don't you want to break free from his prison?"

"Whatever do you mean?" inquired Gophy with a frown.

"My time here is short. I'll ask this of thee both – I can grant thee the passage into the Godly Realm."

"I knew something was wrong with you," whispered Miira holding a knife against the Queen's neck, "-what does Lixbin want?"

"To save himself," she laughed, "-I came to see if he would inherit the symbol of Kronos, and that I was right. The God of Death holds the power of the dominion of time, tis something we mustn't allow."

"Why so," the blade pushed forth.

"Else catastrophe shall befall the heavens!" the words echoed deep in their soul.

"What do you mean?" asked Gophy with a feeling of old coming to light.

"Today's the day we kill the God of Death," she laughed, "-Qhildir has found the librarian of Nexsolium and with that, she has read and conjured forth the spells to bound and remove a being from godhood. We'll be taking the Symbols of power by force. That is why I asked before it comes to that, here's a chance to be on the winning side."

"You plan on stealing Kronos's Sickle?"

"Not just the Sickle, why just stop there," she laughed maniacally, "-we won't stop. Supreme God Zeus is very much offended by Staxius. Gophy, thee know the extent he'll go to crush what displeases him."



"Do you mean today is nothing more than a trap?" wondered Intherna with doubt in her words. The firmness in her lashes disappeared.

"Calling it a trap is so unforgiving. Tis beside the point. Today is the last day of Staxius Haggard. He made enemies of the heavens and another being as strong as Death himself. The God of Kreston, else known as one of the four princes of hell, Lucifer. He by name alone is the rightful inheritor of the throne many have sought after. It's been a long time coming – the defeat of the man who made a mockery of two powerful gods."

The name echoed deep into their hearts, the name many gods were afraid of. Dubbed light-bringer by the cult of Kreton – the fallen arch-angel, his name went from mythology to mythology.

"The Supreme dared to ask help from his enemy. How far are they willing to go for power?" implored Gophy.

"An unnamed boy inheriting both Death and Time mustn't be left alive. The power is rightfully for true-born gods. Lucifer shall rule death and Zeus shall take over time. So, you see, there's nothing he can do; I have been waiting for this day.

"Don't tell me..." Intherna fell to her knees, "-is the Wracia empire..."

"Astute," she laughed, "-The Emperor made his move per orders from the envoy of Lucifer. I won't be surprised he shows up to personally end the fight. King Juvey purposefully launched the attack, the Federation would intervene, and thus, all the small incidents led to this very moment."

"I see..."

"What will it be, art thou going to fight a losing battle or regain godhood?"

"That's simple," the goddesses stared at one another, "-we'll stay and fight the losing battle."

"What?" Miira's bafflement spoke for itself.

"We might call him master," said one.

"Staxius is more of a little brother to us," added the other.

"In no way are we going to abandon him. If the time comes where we must fight the gods to live, we shall do so," they spoke as if knowing what the other thought.

"FOOLS!"

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Chapter 448: Lucifer's Heir

"Any idea on what's happening over there?"

"Don't know and don't care," grinned Staxius, "-let's just cause damage on our end."

The outpost before had scouts scream for intruders. The machine gun fired without discrimination. Most missed for the duo dodged. Captain Lo, sat further up inside a well-built tent, peaked with a rifle in hand.

“Captain!” the sound of gunfire resounded behind the injured messenger, “-two intruders have breached the first squad. They’re being killed as we speak.”

“I knew it would happen,” he smiled shrewdly, “-order the outer outposts to make for us right away.”

“CAPTAIN!” came another, “-reports from the East and West army. One was breached by ladies in armor while the other has around 2000 men cutting the head of any who walked. Guns or swords aren’t affected, we suspect them to be Ghouls.”

“Signal the Captains to retreat. As for the remainder force, tell them to fight to the last men. These are the last line of defense before the general, MAKE US PROUD!”

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“YES SIR,” they screamed to go deliver the messages.

‘I wonder if will please his holiness,’ wondered Captain Lo jumping on horseback.

“Captain Lo,” said another dressed in the same attire, “-I see that the plan has worked.” They galloped towards the gorge.

“Captain Guneo, how’s the outpost?”

“Honestly speaking, I never expected ghouls to show up in thousands. I suppose his holiness counted in it being a tough fight.”

“Yes, that much is true,” added Lo presumptuously.

“Captain Lo, Captain Guneo,” hailed another from the left to join their group, “-you made it out alive.”

“Captain Hao, don’t make it sound as if we’re weak.”

“I mean, we could have taken that man by our lonesome...”

“No, Captain Hao, we’re not going to underestimate the man whom the holiness has deemed a danger. I’m to expect there are higher-beings coming to the mortal plane today.”

“Was what his holiness told about the god coming to us true?” wondered Guneo holding tight.

“It was what I was told, tis the reason we’re retreating.” Just as he said so, a shot like figure flashed by their side leaving a trail of rocks and dust.

“Was that?”

“Yes, tis his holiness. I supposed the extermination process is underway. Let’s return to the Commander, he must be waiting for our arrival.”

“Let’s,” thus, the captains headed to the second base of operation.

Leading up to today, many forces had worked in the shadows for the opportune moment. The fate of Staxius Haggard, he who dethroned and broke the Kreston’s belief and way of life was very much shunned. The hate made way towards the place of origin. The continent of Iqavea where Lucifer and the princes of hell were viewed as saviors. One could say the good fate and fortune turned to anguish

after the end of the war. A large target was painted on the King's back. Conspiracies from both the higher-beings and the mortals would come to strike. Cimier, more specifically, Snow, was known as the Crusaders of Kreton. They would often lead wars against the infidels. Their worship to the god was so great he, the great one himself, bestowed upon them a statue from which they could draw power. Around it, a massive Cathedral was built. Arch-Bishop Fiene, a child much like the king; an heir to the powers of Lucifer, began his growth into being the strongest in Konak and arguably Iqavea.

'My lord has asked of me to restrain the King of Arda,' sprinting faster than a bullet, he soon came upon the battlefield.

'This presence,' the mountainous avalanche of fighters overwhelmed Courtney and her brother. Being strong didn't matter – similar to how strong a swimmer might be if a wave was too harsh, he'd most often drown and buckle. \*CLANG.\* White hair flew back a few meters.

"Holiness," the army all but knelt at the presence of he who had pushed back Staxius. Grey-hair, grey eyes, a well-tailored robe fitted for battle. Two swords rested on the back in an 'X' shape. The crest of Kreston was engraved on his glabella.

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"Raise your head," he lifted a hand. The sharp-jawline's contrast against the long almost feminine hair was beautiful. In all the sense of the word, the man was pretty.

"Holiness, please, slaughter the infidel for he has slain many of our companions!" And so, the emphasis was placed atop the dead bodies. Noise from the right and left grew to naught.

\*Once living now dead. O' thee who've lost thine line to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghoul Revival\* an abyssal whirlwind, unknown to most, swallowed those defeated bringing the amount to around 28,000 ghouls residing inside the Shadow Realm.

"éclair," spoke he softly, "-have the VT10-BSQD take-off and aim for the General's headquarters. Don't fly above us, take the long route, be discreet."

"Roger."

"Who the hell are you?" asked Courtney with sword drawn in the distance.

"Arch-Bishop Luper Fiene Combold of the Kreton Church else known as the Luciferian Cult."

"Luper Combold?" returned she with a dense and powerful stare, "-what is your business here?"

"To fight," he smirked, "-Is that not obvious," not even a blink later, the swords drawn to aim at her neck and heart. \*Clang,\* the impact cracked the ground into a smokescreen.

"I'm impressed," said he tilting the head gently, "-I must say tis the first I've seen someone block my attack."

"You call that blocking?" she spewed blood, "-how very much insulting," a deep cut severed her arms and the other barely stopped the horizontal strike at her head.

"No matter, I have no interest in dealing with you," the mouth moved to her suddenly kneel. A semi-transparent hemisphere conjured forth chains. Her arms and legs were bound and forced to stare up. Soon, swords materialized to relentlessly pierce her vital spots. No scream came, she but laid without emotion. The weapons kept on killing over and over again.

"About you then," the figure vanished, "-I'm flattered to meet the well-decorated King of Arda," he appeared behind with arms wrapped around the king in a hug. "Heir to the Death Reaper. I'm Heir to Lucifer, one of the four princes of hell."

"Why are you here?"

"Didn't you know? Cleopatra was sent to see if you bore Kronos's symbol of power. I'm very much pleased to see it wasn't a waste of time."

"Cleopatra you say," no emotions came.

"Come on, don't give me that look. I'm acting per orders of my lord," he let go and moved forward.

"What's happening?" Intherna's bunch arrived soon after the explosion.

"This pressure," a colossal aura of perpetual anger and hate had created a type of barrier.

"It's him," laughed Cleopatra now on horseback, "-the heir of Lucifer is here."

"This is too much," commented Intherna, "-do you sense that power?"

"Yeah, I know," said Gophy disappoint at staring her master, "-Our leader is in big trouble."

"The gods have allied with the demons to take him down," sighed Miira lowering her head, "-it wouldn't have happened if Lord Scifer was here. They killed him and now the next inheritor. Why go through so much trouble?"

"Didn't I say it earlier?" shrugged the spy.

"Cleopatra, you best shut it," gritted Gophy, "-I've had just about enough with thine mouth."

"No need to take out thy rage upon me," with a humph, she galloped to be closer to Lupher.

'Gophy, Intherna, and Miira are exhausted by their fight. Their aura is at the breaking point. Unless I willingly release their constraint, they'll be of no help,' he glanced westward, '-if they step onto this battlefield, I'm sure they'll be defeated like Courtney. It's obvious, this person isn't human nor god. Courtney is just as powerful as I am, and with her ending in such a state, there's no doubting his strength.'

"I honestly thought the man who had done my lord so much harm would have some backbone. Come on, King Staxius, don't you want to taste my blade?" the pride and confidence were real.

"Can you truly say that without being able to defeat my protector?" returned Staxius blankly.

"What do you mean, can you not see?" he turned, "-the lady has been impri-"

“Mind thy tongue,” a sword pressed against his neck, “-the spell sure was a nice addition,” said she with a deadly expression. The scars of injury healed, the blood of the latter remained atop her cheeks and neck.

“Color me impressed,” unhinged by her slowly adding pressure, “-never figured you to come alive so quickly. Tis was but a game.”

“You piss me off,” her feet dug into the ground, “-why can’t I slay you?” the blade halted as if a shield protecting the man.

“Don’t you know,” the aura dropped, “-only a god-slaying weapon can slay a god?” \*SMACK,\* her body broke the outpost up the hill to then disappear.

“Now then, Lord Death?” facing the opponent once more, the King stood with three guardians at his side.

“More lackeys?” a sigh followed by a spat.

“No,” said he walking forth, “-I’ll gladly fight you.”

“MASTER!” voiced Miira.

“No room to argue, return to the Shadow Realm.” The orders were harsh, and they did so with shame. ‘Sorry, my companions but the puppet bodies might break if thee overdo it. I rather not see the soul disappear into dust.’ Eyes on the target ahead, a touch revealed the concealed blade. ‘I’m glad I brought you along.’

“A fight, do entertain me,” he leaped to be at a good distance.

‘Orenmir,’ merely grabbing the handle had the damning screams of the fallen lash.

\*Woosh,\* the first strike from each was countered with the sound of the ground breaking. It went on far as would an earthquake. Deadlocked, Luper drew the second blade and aimed for the jugular. Noticing the intent, Staxius dodged to have the tip meet his neck. Thus, on an unbalanced posture, \*Death Element: Void Flame – Fireblast,\* the explosion gave time to readjust. However, the heir to Lucifer didn’t stand ideally – being faster, he dashed into Staxius’s blind spot to instantly pierce the heart from the back.

In the motions of falling, Luper lowered his guard for he had won. \*Woosh\* the long blade twirled with the king and slashed Luper’s cheeks. Astounded by his own blood, he jumped with ire and the full-intent of ending the battle. The fighting from then only intensified. It had been the first in a long while that an opponent was strong, demonically strong. The strength needed to even have a scratch on Luper was the same as bending a coin with one’s thumb and index. Each strike, each attack would most often glide along the body.

Meanwhile, far, far away from the battlefield of Elendor and towards Hidros. Eira awoke from her nap to be suddenly standing inside the Library of Qhildir.

“My lord, what is the meaning of this?” asked she scanning the strange faces of the new guests. A man with blond hair and another with a yellower shade. One bore a halo whilst the other had horns.

“Eira, my dearest Heir, please meet the Supreme God Zeus and the Prince of Hell, Lucifer.”

“My apologies,” her head bowed, “-I didn’t mean disrespect.”

“No worries child,” smiled Lucifer, “-are you the Librarian of Nexsolium?”

“Yes, my lord,” said she still staring at the floor.

“I’ve heard you deciphered the Book of Divine Arkna?”

“Yes, I did so on behalf of my lord Qhildir.”

“Very impressive,” added Lucifer with charm and class, the way the lashes fluttered was heart pounding.

“No, my lord, tis not the whole story,” she interjected, “-I’ve deciphered the passages to no avail. I can perform the spells but not write on paper. I tried to speak the words...”

.....

“Though it came out as nothing but useless noises,” said Qhildir. “Arkna’s a tricky book to open let alone decipher and use. She’ll be most useful in the flesh, sire.”

“Very well,” nodded Zeus, “-Librarian of Nexsolium, in no way are thee to refute our orders, have I made myself clear?”

“Please, Supreme god, there isn’t a need to be so harsh on the girl,” interjected the chivalrous Lucifer, “-would you kindly do as we say?”

“Yes, my lord,” her cheeks unwillingly blushed hard.

Cracks here, holes there, craters over yonder, the forest and hill alike became the duel arena. Luper stood with little injuries while Staxius barely had time to breathe. The symbol of Nike activated – the wings had sprawled from the forehead downwards in curly lines. The Hell-gate was opened and yet, no change came onto the battlefield.

“Here they come,” smiled Cleopatra, “-Lord Lixbin, look, tis the day he dies

Chapter 449: Heaven, Hell, and The Mortal Realm

\*Yahhh,\* a last upward stroke slit the bishop’s chin. The shock traveled to the brain and he fell. Staxius stood with injuries, dried blood, sweat, the face half-covered in ashes. The suit was torn beyond recognition – the army that once stood vanished. The symbol of Nike reduced, ‘I beg for the apology, my child, tis time for I to rest.’ Naught but a dormant symbol. The triangle of the death element burnt vividly.

‘What a battle,’ coughing deeply, the man laid face up onto the dirtied floor.

“King of Arda,” said Fiene back to conscience, “-you’ve bested me,” said he readied to go another round. “-I’m impressed,” he moved to sit back to back, “-and also disappointed. If this is the power you hold, then there’s no way thee art to win in the coming battle. Those who are coming will not hold anything. My Lord has told me of a coming age of terror. You should flee. Tis the only advice I can give to the victor.”

“Heir to Lucifer, you sure are a peculiar individual.”

“The same can be said of you, I sensed the same amount of power as a high-tier god during that last strike. There’s more than meets the eye, yet, the overwhelming weakness that rises is unforgivable.”

“You’re strong and put in a position of power, in some way, we’re the same.”

“I agree, King of Arda, if not for our differing position – I might have had you as a close rival and friend. Fate is a lady we can’t but obey.” The words he spoke were close to identical to what Staxius used to say. There was a definite connection.

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Over yonder, a portal emerged with differing figures. The weather changed into one dark-grey and thunderous. The entirety of the area grew morguelike silent.

‘There he goes.’

“My lord Lucifer,” bowed the heir atop the hill, “-you’ve come,” said he with the utmost respect.

“My child Fiene, you’ve done well to exhaust the God of Death,” complimented he with a heartwarming soft tone.

“Over there,” pointed Zeus, “-Qhildir, that’s the boy. He’s tired from what I see.”

“Master, might I ask where we are?” marched Eira out the doorway.

“Hold a moment!” implored Qhildir, “-please, hold on a moment,” moved to block sight towards the defeated man, “-think back to the spell, I need the utmost focus.”

“What’s wrong with him?” whispered Lucifer to Zeus.

“The Librarian of Nexsolium and King of Arda are father and daughter. We mustn’t allow them to know one another is involved.”

Warning or not, Staxius stood somewhat rested from the battle. The strong figures in front were intimidating. Three gods and a girl who seemed clueless. ‘Eira...’ he thought slowly and deeply, ‘-you’ve gone and became a demi-goddess. I’m proud,’ he smiled, ‘-I guess the lady with ‘white hair’ was you.’ The inside tore into a rampant mess of anxiety and fear. ‘My defeat is here...’ \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* using the lost blood, a scarlet mask materialized to cover his face. \*Slash,\* he cut the red color out of his hair. Medium-sized, it tied into a small pony-tail. ‘I can’t allow her to see me.’

“Qhildir, are thou ready?” asked the Supreme god with a stab-like glare.

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“Yes, my lord, the preparations have been made.”

The wind blew, Staxius approached, the mana grew close to exhaustion. Many o’ things activated. “-éclair, begin protocol Death.”

“Roger,” the robot-like tone seemed to carry woe, a passing moment of crying. Protocol Death activated – a will in simpler words.

‘Tharis, Orenmir, this is our last battle.’ No words need to be uttered, \*Void Aspect: Mana Cancellation Variant,\* the pistol charged to fire a massive beam.

“How foolish,” refuted Zeus conjuring a thunderbolt shaped sword, “-die!” the shot dispelled with lightning relentlessly striking the unknown man. The body fell onto his knees then rose once more.

“Zeus,” voiced Lucifer, “-if this continues...”

“I know, I know,” he sighed, “-Librarian, cast the spell Arkeo upon that man there!”

“As you wish, my lord,” her palms held out with confidence. The incantation of which she formulated went unnoticed by even the higher-beings. “ARKEO.” Tis the only word they heard.

A needle embedded inside his forehead. Electricity generated to force him onto the ground, no amount of gritting could counter the pain. It broke him from the inside out, the spell targeted the brain and heart. Emotions and wit, during the battle, either one was the originator of power for those on the losing end.

‘I need to protect the Shadow R-Realm,’ he shook in pain. Lucifer jumped into the fray with a sword in hand. Unsheathed, he proceeded to beat the already fallen man. No pity, no emotions, the assault broke arms, legs, ribs, neither of which regenerated. At that moment, the powers of hell, heaven, and the mortal plane allied with one another. Zeus’s lightning imprisoned, Lucifer’s unsheathed sword paired with the demon magic attacked relentlessly, and lastly, the power of a human turned demi-goddess, had cast a spell to break the Godhood of a deity.

“NOW, DO IT NOW!” screamed Lucifer.

“I have to protect THE SHADOW REALM!” simultaneously, Staxius called forth the remainder of his power. \*By my name as the Ruler of Death and Time, HAVE MINE REALM BESTOWED WITH THEIR DOMINION.\*

‘Listen to all who have been trapped by me,’ the voice echoed around the dominion, ‘-I will be slain in a few seconds. Miira, Intherna, and Gophy, I know not what is to happen to my soul and body, however, make me this promise that thee will set to find me wherever I am. Miira, the Sickie of Kronos is what’s holding the Shadow Realm in place. I knew the day would eventually come. Thank you for being with me, I shall take my timely leave.’

“LIBRARIAN, DO IT NOW!”

\*ARTK\* the other spell called forth a giant palm. The impact upon the dying god was similar to a meteorite.

In the distance, jet fighters flew to drop a bomb atop the General’s headquarters. ‘Check-mate,’ thought he standing, “-Lucifer, Zeus, Qhildir.”

“SHUT YOUR MOUTH!” screamed the Prince of Hell.

“I will find you, and I will kill you. Death can’t be killed nor will it be defeated, try as hard as thee might; tis but a prelude of the coming age of chaos.” \*Death Element: Xenosious.\* A black-hole levitated to swallow all that stood around.



"Not today," smirked Zeus, "-By the power of the sword granted to me by Hephaestus, thee who art naught but the weakling of the mortal plane, art to die a thousand deaths."

\*Thud\* in an instant, the sword impaled he who had stood strong, "-the God of Death has been slain. Second most powerful entity art naught but a shame."

"Zeus," coughed Staxius to gently rest his head against the killer's shoulder, "-I'm grateful you saw fit to allow my child to kill me in the end." \*crack,\* the mask broke, "-the world of gods has always been a mystery to me. I was nothing more than a boy brought up on a battlefield. I found most and lost even more, tis the curse I bear as the wielder of death element. I know not what thee have sought for," he smiled, "-the Sickle of Kronos, Wings of Nike, and, Scythe of Death, have been distributed. None must hold the power I once wielded, this is check-mate supreme god for I've won." A push sufficed; the emotionless body of the King fell in slow-motion. Lucifer and those gathered around held discontent. Eira caught a glimpse of the man to suddenly break.

Connection to éclair broke, the Death Protocol went live and the body dissolved into dust. What remained was the crest of Undrar, the platinum guild-tag, the wedding ring, and the very same glove which marked their marriage.

"The scoundrel managed to hid the symbols before we stole it..." gritted the prince with dark-black hair.

"No need to fret, I shall have Hermes dig around the mortal realm. Let's leave, the godly realm awaits us."

"My lord Qhildir..." she held onto his collar, "-WHO WAS THAT MAN?"

"The ruler of Death and inheritor of Time, Staxius Haggard, your father..." said he with a smile.

"YOU KNEW!" she ran towards what remained.

"Any problem?" asked Zeus readied to strike the girl.

"No, my lord, she'll come to reason soon. Besides, she aided in us slaying her father, did she not?"

"I suppose your right," they returned to whence they came.

A message soon flashed across her phone, \*My Will\*.

"Hello everyone, if this message ever goes out it means that I've been defeated and killed. I doubt anyone to read this however, we know not what fate has in store. I'm a proud husband of the best wife one could want, proud father of three angelic children. My wealth will not be distributed equally, I'm sorry to say that only the estate will have an inheritor. Phantom and the other companies will be taken over by lady Elvira. She's the only one who can carry the burden of such proportions. Don't cry over my death, it's natural, I rather have a happy send-off. What happens next is up to you, I don't want revenge – promise that thee will be happy." An additional message went across with details on the inheritance. However, amidst it held private messages.

"Dear Xula, I guess our time together has come to an end. I don't want to make it sound dramatic but I love you. I've done and always will. Free yourself from me and live an earnest life as the true Queen of Arda. I promise, my legacy will come to aid in the coming months."

“Dear Eira, I’m sorry we didn’t have time to adventure together. I’ve always seen you try your best to stand by my side. You were always stronger; I couldn’t have been prouder.”

“Julius, come on Heir to Creation. Are you that dumb to still be in the mortal realm after I’ve died. I’m glad we met, you’ve become part of my family and I view you as my own blood. Keep doing what thee want, and if the day comes when you return to the godly realm, do come by to say hi.”

“My angelic princess, Lizzie. In a few years, you will regain memories of a time that was pretty harsh on us. I want you to forget it and continue living. Strive to become the best pianist, I’ve heard the songs – yes, I had Rile secretly record them for me. Be safe, and be lovely, I love you.” In that manner, multiple messages went from person to person around the kingdom. From Queen Gallienne to the Queen of Elendor. Even Lord Elon received the details. Lady Elvira was she who was most affected. Her face changed into utter murderous intent. Serene of the Blood-king faction went forth to meet Elvira, the newest addition to the nightwalkers, lastly, the old companions – Undrar and the others.

The Shadow Realm also received the messages in letter form. The dimension became it’s own and lived alongside the ‘mortal plane.’

“Lady Courtney,” voiced Goddess Gophy watching as the lady stood atop a cliff.

“...” no response came forth, “-did Master really die?” asked Intherna not wanting to believe.

“Yes,” said she showing the symbol of death, “-I’ve inherited the Death Element. My brother is a damned fool, who the hell would be so foolish as to give away their only source of power in a moment of trouble.” Tears flowed, “-and he always said he wasn’t a hero. THE FOOL WAS THE DEFINITION OF BEING A HERO. ONE WHO SACRIFICES HIMSELF FOR THE SAKE OF OTHERS, IS, IN EVERY SENSE, A HERO!”

Far, far away from Elendor, inside Hidros, most precisely, beyond the Azure wall. The ground had grown grass with rocks and trees at scarce intervals. The enormous behemoth stood on high without stopping.

“It’s time to wake up,” said a mysterious voice.

The galloping of horses had the ground tremble, the pebbles onto the dirt path shook. A bell rang on loud with ‘MONSTER INVASION’ being screamed by the man. Date: Monday 1st December XX99.

Chapter 450: Boy

“CHARGE!”

“OVER THERE,”

“Group five, circle them from behind.”

‘What’s happening?’ wondered a boy opening his eyes for the first time. The hot soil felt blurry to the sight, dirt rose from the horses. People in armor, weapons, and magical items stood strong.

“Garr,”

“Huh...” a green beast bigger than a human came from the right. “S-someone...” fear settled in, the beast bled from the arms, an arrow pierced its shoulder. The look of dejection amidst the sharp teeth, long crooked nose, and perky ears, it ambled forward with a club over the shoulder.

'I need to run... I'm going to die... W-why c-can't I m-move.' The sight had triggered fear.

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"CIVILIAN," screamed another who then delivered a downward slash.

"Are you ok?" -light brown hair turned with him giving a smile. Big, ever watching eyes, sparsely crowded eyebrows, the nose was big and the lips bigger. A tag of black-color caught the attention.

'W-Who is this?'

"Can you hear me?" asked him leaning to check on the unknown boy.

'The b-beast is still alive,' in that instant, '-why is he moving so slowly?' A blurred image of pain flashed across the mind and body, it unwillingly made the visage cower in pain.

"HEY, ARE YOU OK?" said the brown-haired man quick to shake onto the boy's shoulder.

"MOVE," mumbled he.

"Move?"

"MOVE," hard as one could, he stood to push the rescuer aside.

\*Crack,\* the goblin launched into the last attempt and caught a hefty bite of the left shoulder.

"IDIOT!" \*SLASH,\* the beast dropped with a few coins.

'W-why did I do t-that?' he fell with tears wallowing from within. The jolting pain, masked by adrenaline, soon gave. "MY ARMS!"

"Hold on, you'll be fine," the bright sky made it hard to see the man's expression. One thing was sure, the way he did first aid was efficient and painful. "Thanks for saving me kid, I'll go get back up right away. Hold on a moment," to that, he sprinted away. The lonesome tree stood lifelessly amidst the carnage of the battle. Squads were hard fighting, warriors, mages, they all but fought to push the monsters. The beasts who came from the unknown land of Totrya.

'Who am I?' upon asking said question, the mind fell into a state of slumber. A dream of four people, a blade running into his heart, him falling onto the floor. The cries of someone who he didn't know, the faces were blurred, the words empty and the scenery, unknown. More than relief, the vision carried a feeling of never-ending sorrow.

"Leader, leader," panting, "-I need help in carrying a boy!" the shadow of the wall covered the ropes heading upward.

"A boy?" returned a fierce-looking lady with a tag flashing the red-color. "Are you serious, Arnold..."

"Please, ma'am for me, the boy saved me from death."

"Let me guess?" her arms crossed with a look of disappointment, "-you got carried away trying to play the hero?" The words had him blush wholeheartedly.

"There's no need to tease the boy," laughed another with a massive rifle, "-come on, we're the back-up squad. We support the front-line. What do you say, leader, will you not help a child in need?"

"Fine," she gave, "-Konne," she smirked, "-since you vouched for saving the boy, accompany Arnold. Aiea and I will cover, is that sufficient?"

"Damn it," the shoulders dropped, "-should have never vouched for you, little Arnold."

"Thanks, Konne," smiled he with a sigh of relief.

"Don't worry," soon to swap to a smaller gun, the duo made for the lonesome tree over yonder. The fighting further up lessened, the monsters retreated one by one.

"Lady Misna, how do you suppose a civilian crossed the border?"

"Honestly, Aiea, I don't have a clue," the fierceness of the crimson hair followed by an eyepatch with scars showed the telling of a strong one.

"Ok, ma'am," replied she with a gentler look. Her figure was one well-built and ready for battle, the short pink hair added to the feminine charm as did her elven ears.

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"Hey, hey, wake up," firm strong hands gently tapped the cheeks. It grew overly robust after a few tries.

'Who is that again?' the eyelids narrowly parted.

"He's conscious," the voices were even more silent.

"No time to waste, I'll carry him, you watch for the stray monsters?"

"Understood, Master Konne, I'll defend us if that's the last thing I do."

"Come on, don't go dying yet," soon the duo made way across the field. Lady Misna and the half-elf Aiea waited patiently at the foot of the wall.

'Big...' thought he gawking at the never-ending climb, '-my shoulder hurt but doesn't bother me. Where am I, who am I?'

"There," the green field came to a gravel path. An elevator was called from the top.

"Someone's requested evacuation!" reported one of the Azure Guardians.

"Who is it?" asked another who seemed to be in charge.

"Lady Misna's party."

"Oh, the support unit," giving a few minutes, "-sure, the battle is nearly over. Have them brought up."

"Yes, my lord," the guard returned to the post.

"Alright men, have the adventurers get in formation to return. The battle is ending, the Guardians will take over cleaning the remainder."

"They always take so long," mumbled Konne with the boy laid on the wooden elevator.

"They ought too," nodded Misna, "-it's all part of the process. If the wall gets breached, everything will end." So, the hinges pulled, the piston turned and the elevator climbed. The stone walls were massive and grey. Parts of it were dirtied with the remains of few who dared fight the Walls. Bit by bit, the ground changed into naught but a far-away sight. The strong adventurers became small ants, and the squad reached the top. Guards walked from left to right, the wall-top was of a stronger material. Few garrisons were posited at the interval with machine guns and snipers.

"Lieutenant Mello, Misna's squad have an urgent report to give."

"Huh?" came a fatigued reply of a man who frowned. "-What's her deal all of a sudden?" dropping the file atop his table, the man clambered out the office outpost with mouth wide open.

"Sir please," said one of the assistants, "-there's no need to move as if a zombie. We get it, you're tired."

"Such a harsh tone," he laughed, "-oh, please, my lady would you not take over the whole day for me?"

"Shut it."

"Ice-cold."

A hexagonal-shaped building perched on the backside of the Azure-wall. The command center, information outpost, many names for many people. The purpose was to monitor the fight and send help as was needed. Also, the transmission of information across the five other centers. Each was in charge of their immediate outpost.

"Lady Misna," the door opened, "-rare to see my lover come personally."

"Thee jest," she side-glanced

"Ouch, such a dense glare," he walked with the short curly hair swaying with the wind. The outfit matched his personality as well as face, neither could have complimented one another as great as it did for this man; the slacker of Stonegrove.

"Why did you ask for me?" they stood watching into the continent.

"Has there ever been reports of civilians getting through the wall?"

"Obviously not, there's no way," said he adamantly, "-security is tight, and one needs the permission for the guild and above the rank of Tier-9. An unknown will never have access."

"Can you explain how this boy managed to get inside?" returned she facing the 'unknown.'

"What do you mean?" peering over her shoulder, "-oh, that boy, never seen him."

"Yeah, me neither," exhaled she.

'So big...' the face stuck at the sight of the outposts.

"That's Camp Reforge," explained Misna, "-and further up is the town of Meke. It's an adventuring town that links with the six other outposts. Adventurers come here to fight and look for glory."

"Adventurers?" returned he with a tilted head.

"Yes, adventurers," she smiled, "-people who fight against the monsters."

"HEROES LIKE ME!" proclaimed Arnold loudly.

"Heroes..." The others broke into laughter, "-there's no way a tier-9 will be a hero any time soon."

"Don't mock me!"

"Awe, look at him blush," teased Konne by pinching the cheeks.

"Hey boy." Footstep menacingly came to stand at his back, "-how old are you?" he frowned.

"Don't know..."

"Any parents or relatives?"

"Don't know..."

"What's your name?"

"I don't remember..."

.....

The responses were the same, he had no idea who he was. A boy aged around 17 with a slender frail body, black long hair, and a feminine face.

"No name?" leaned Arnold with narrowed eyes, "-are you sure you're ok?"

"Wait..." voiced Konne, "-wasn't he gravely injured earlier?" The moment of shock set-in, "-YES, HIS SHOULDER!"

"What do you mean shoulder?" asked the lieutenant with a suspicious stare.

"Come on, show us the injury," voiced Misna.

"Ok?" he lifted the bloodied and torn shirt to see naught but a fully-healed skin.

"Impossible..."

"Did you give him a potion by accident?"

"I don't remember, Master Konne, what about you?"

"Yeah, I did," he laughed, "-I forgot."

"Forgot," said the lieutenant strongly, "-whatever, I'll go have coffee. Misna, make sure the boy has someone or something to do. Leaving alone while he doesn't remember anything is the bane of inhumanity."

"No need to tell me twice." On that, they parted ways. Another elevator headed for the inside. A massive road came immediately after the wall with buses doing transits.

'Everything is so big and elaborate...'

"Hey there, don't daydream, we have a bus to catch," voiced Konne holding onto the boy's hand. Thus, the transit arrived and they made for the outpost of Stonegrove. The place expanded over the many years; one could call it a town if so wished. The military was ever-present. Farther inside, people in armor walked, chatter came from merchant stalls, the clanging from blacksmiths, and the laughter from adventuring parties.

"Lady Misna, where are we going?" asked Aiea who rarely spoke until now.

"To Meke, the tram should be waiting. Let's go, with the boy in tow, there's nothing else to do."

"I know," they spoke secretly, "-don't you think it's suspicious that the Lieutenant..."

"I know," interjected the leader, "-that man can be a pest sometimes. Don't worry about it, he won't do anything too strenuous. The problem at the moment is we've rescued a boy who doesn't even know his name. The only thing we can do is tell the guild. They'll decide, our job is support, remember that."

"Yes, ma'am," nodded the half-elf. The boy remained silent throughout the walk. Cutting into alleyways, moving through crowds to arrive at a tram station. A dark-black trolley waited for passengers, most of which were adventurers.

'Who am I really?' wondered the boy who sat at the window seat. The rough start shook the tram a little before gently cruising along the rail. The scenery changed from buildings to flatlands followed by forest. Misna sat beside the boy with a serious expression. The others gossiped amongst themselves of what was to come. A person with no home, no name, and nothing of physical value would be bound to the harshness of poverty.

And so, not wanting to think of the coming misfortune, she shut her eyes to reality and napped.

"The adventuring town of Kene," said Konne, "-lady Misna, we've arrived," he gently shook her shoulders.

"Oh, sorry about that." The others stood outside with multiple warriors with strong weaponry heading to the center.

"Let's walk to the guild," proposed Arnold.

"I agree. We'll drop off the loot at the base then continue." And so, they headed to the center through the Guild District. A place made especially for independent guilds of any rank and stature. Plenty of ten-story buildings or higher served as bases for them. The strong were on the upper floors while the weak on the lower and some forced into shacks just outside the district. A slum more or less, a place for the less than amicable.