

Death Magic 51

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The Temporary Council

Soon after Piers left, the throne room fell into the abyss. It wasn't dark, but silent, you could hear everyone breathing or try too for some held theirs. That scroll really shook everybody – the contents were never revealed. Millicent began drinking; after that short minute of silence, given only when someone important has died – everyone began speaking.

“Millicent,” Adelana broke the ice. Everyone followed her actions carefully; none had any clue to what shall be their next plan of action. That scroll was a death sentence. Out of frustration, hearing no response from the Duchess, Adelana walked over. Her right hand firmly grabbed Millicent's left shoulder, but the latter didn't care and shrugged away said hand. The frustration got stronger and palpable; she unknowingly began to grit her teeth.

“Adelana, please be civil about this,” Undrar rushed over sensing her animosity growing. “What's wrong with you Viola; didn't you read the letter? It's a death threat, that princess. However, I forgive her but Millicent's attitude to just shrug away her duties is driving me nuts. I can't stand it, this haven of ours is about to get destroyed and she's drinking alcohol.” Her rant ended.

“How dare you question my integrity...” Millicent turned around with tears forming. “-don't you think I know that?” Her tone got sadder. Adelana on the other hand just stared at her with a look of disappointment. The burden to keep everything and everyone together for the past sixteen years took a toll on her. Her attitude changed from calm and collected to being agitated, her anger rested on her nose; she looked like she was about to blow up at any time. Everyone present knew how

Staxius's disappearance backed her into a corner, everyone... but they were too scared to speak out for what she just did wasn't justified. Lashing out at someone else for your own satisfaction, blaming others to feel better about yourself was cowardly, Eira, understood that fact. Adelana's eyes were beginning to turn red, her anger was reaching the tipping point.

“Auntie Adelana, please stop, don't you see that lashing out at someone else won't help to solve the problem?” Eira yelled, seeing that Adelana clenched her fist. “Eira, calm down,” Ancret told her to remain silent. They knew that Adelana's foul mood could bring about catastrophe, she may well kill her own companions if that anger of hers overtook her conscience. Willingly they formed a little circle behind Eira, Fenrir was nowhere to be found. “Don't say anything more.” Ayleth quietly mumbled.

“I'm sorry aunt Ayleth, but aunt Adelana has been acting rather childishly. Can't she see that if her attitude continues, we'll begin to separate.” The young girl spoke the truth; every one with guilt and shame stared at the ground, away from the innocent girl who spoke what was right.

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“Eira, how dare you...” her tone gained volume. “-HOW DARE YOU.” Her eyes went fully red, her magical element activated. “Don't you disrespect me like that...” They all were oblivious to what was about to happen. “-you think I'm being childish? Aren't you the one speaking out of line? Spare me that bullshit, I've worked my heart out to keep everyone together.” Her eyes got filled with hatred.

“Turn my hatred into the fire which burns all, I, Adelana Geua, order thee to burn whoever shall oppose me. Fiercer than the raging fire from hell and stronger than the purgatory flames; Infernal Blast.” Adelana’s hand formed a circle in which a blue flame manifested. *Booph,* the spell launched, it was headed for Eira. No one was quick enough to react; Annet managed to tuck on her dress and pull but it was too late. *BOW* An explosion rattled the whole throne room; all the liquor near the bar fell and broke as well as the book on the bookshelves. A heavy cloud of dark smoke blocked the entrance, as well as where Eira stood. “WHAT HAVE YOU DONE?” Undrar yelled.

“Shut up Viola, do you want to die?” Her rage wasn’t soothed.

Dark arts; Magical barrier. “I made it in time.”

“F-father?” Staxius conjured a barrier, he knelt and panted heavily. Hearing Eira’s voice, he turned around and nodded. The emotions in his eyes were gone, Eira felt it. “Please don’t kill aunty Adelana.” She whispered. “Too late, she’s a liability, and they should be purged.” From his knelt position, his stance changed to one more fitting for a sprint, and, *whoosh.*

Coming out of the black mist, he shot out like a bullet. Sword in hand, he had Adelana’s neck on his sights. His speed was tripled what it usually was; hence; no normal human would ever react that fast. Adelana’s life was forfeit.

Clang, Two swords collided, Undrar had stopped Staxius’s sprint. The sheer force from that impact blew away the black cloud as well as Adelana who stood directly behind where the sword met.

Undrar showed her true form, wings sprouted from her back, her nails grew longer, her usually rosy lips changed into a black color. Her hair changed to black as well; a vampire. “Long time no see Undrar, Bringer of Death.” Staxius jumped back and solidified his stance. “Long time no see indeed, master.” She jokingly licked her upper lips.

The smoke vanished, everyone stared intently at whoever that demon was. All were surprised to see Staxius casually speaking to said being for she was unknown to them.

“Undrar...” his tone got serious, “-why did you stop me?”

“I see that my spell has been broken, you’ve lost your emotions haven’t you.”

“Whatever do you mean.” He smiled; an aura of joy emanated from him.

“Stop faking your aura and emotions,” she scowled.

“I feel better this way, the world is much better in black and white.”

“And for your answer, Adelana was simply fooled.”

“Fooled? How can someone be fooled and attempt to kill one of their companion, that isn’t a matter of being merely fooled.”

“I do agree with you, but she was the most likely target to be...”

“To be possessed, I see that the princess is still lively.” He laughed sarcastically. “Can you break the spell?”

“Who do you take me for.” She smugly replied. “Also, good job on mastering that death element.”

She smiled as she headed for the unconscious Adelana. “I would say thank you but no, we still have much more to accomplish together, dearest sister.”

The short misunderstanding ended, everyone was still gazed and confused. Eira, the remaining silver guardians all sat down with their legs crossed. The throne room was more than a mess, Millicent passed out; not from the shock-wave but from alcohol – she couldn’t handle her liquor. Everything went back to being slightly normal until they heard Staxius say dearest sister. Promptly after that, Undrar changed into her normal self. She had kept her identity or rather forgot to reveal her identity for sixteen years.

“Mother?” Eira stood up and shouted.

“The one and only,” a grey light began forming around Adelana’s body; she was breaking the curse.

Seeking answers, Eira rushed to Staxius side who read the scroll. “W-who is Mother?” she tucked his shirt innocently until he gave in and showed her the crest; his crest. “I must say father’s crest is impressive but what does that have to do with mothers’ identity?”

“It has everything to do with it Eira, for you see, Viola is actually a dragon in human form.”

“No, you’re lying, mother isn’t that hideous.” She pouted, Staxius chuckled and Undrar got angry.

“You’ve hurt my feelings Eira,” she spoke through her gritted teeth. At the same time, Adelana regained conscience. “W-what happened?” She asked as her eyes adjusted to the brightly lit interior.

“Nothing much, just your usual brawl.” Undrar gave a comforting smile.

Minutes changed into hours, everyone slowly digested what transpired. No one asked further questions about Undrar’s identity. Unwillingly, Staxius made everyone clean up the throne room. The books were neatly arranged, the bar was restocked and the marble floor with spots of gold sparkled

for it was cleaned to perfection. The table which replaced the throne got swapped for one much more beautiful and imposing. It was now following the same design as Staxius saw back at

Thunderstain. A semi-circle facing away from the main entrance. A chandelier was installed above the table and it looked more like a court for judging people as opposed to your usual courteous arrangement. The center seat was used by Millicent, and to her right, Staxius sat.

The chairs surrounding said table were empty for no nobles had joined the council yet. Disappointing but true, however, Staxius had the bright idea to put every single member from the silver guardians into the empty seats. Left to Millicent, Adelana sat and next to her, Ayleth and Ancret. Opposing them, Alyson and Annet. On that day, the temporary council was established, a council that would later become permanent.

“What shall we do about the scroll?” Millicent asked, finally out of her drunken state; about five hours had passed.

"It doesn't have anything shady to it, the message clearly says to protect the castle and if we are in trouble, she will aid us." Adelana gave a short summary.

"Do we really trust her though?" Ancret spoke out.

"N-no..." Ayleth quietly mumbled.

"Should we be happy that the royal family has decided to aid us though?" Annet added.

"Sister, please, that princess doesn't do favors, she surely has a scheme in her mind." Alyson pointed out what Staxius had been thinking for all this time.

"What about you, brother?" Undrar spoke from right next to him, her size was miniaturized.

Previously, Millicent offered her a seat on the council but was ultimately rejected. Viola instead chose to be by Staxius's side rather than have a say in how matters shall be done. Her petite figure didn't go unnoticed but everyone chose to ignore it.

"Alyson is right..." he spoke at last; "-I think by aiding, she means letting us get slaughtered and steal the castle."

"Her plan is to let us lose the castle and take over Dorchester?" Ancret asked.

"No, that's simply not possible," Alyson replied.

"Why so, doesn't having more provinces means you're more powerful?" Annet asked.

"Yes, normally that would mean that the ruler would be more powerful but Dorchester isn't a thriving province." Adelana cleared the air.

"I agree, Dorchester is more effort than it's worth," Staxius added.

"What do we do then?" Millicent's head got heavy.

"Simple, just agree to her terms and smugly add a remark that her royal highness's presence won't be required for if she were to use her political standing, Arda and Kreston would back down,

however, judging by how the people know her, her attacking the revolutionaries would not be

surprising. Yes, provoke her, her ego would take a hit, and then she'll decide to negotiate instead of waging war." Staxius ended their first meeting.

All the unnecessary mess such as the bar and mini-library were moved next room, on the left if you stared at the entrance. The throne room was finally sorted, beautiful and pleasing to look at all the while being menacing and intimidating. This was all possible thanks to the inspiration given by Rose's office.

Nighttime soon approached, the moon was nowhere to be found, only the stars shone. Staxius laid atop the castle walls and stared intently at the night sky. The chilly breeze tickled his face, the temperature was low but he didn't care for it was the peace and quiet that he sought. A world like this was what he desired from the bottom of his heart – everything that got him here truly changed how he thought. He's growing blood-lust began to calm down. He held a genuine smile for the first time, maybe the spell Undrar put on him to feel emotion hadn't vanished, the one he despised so much, but none knew.

The quiet and peaceful atmosphere got lifted, the camp inside got louder. The tavern was booming with people, castle Garsley became a true asylum for the weak and fragile. His gaze changed from the starry night to the tavern inside. Aided by his inhuman eyesight, he saw people with smiles as big and bright as the sun. Kids ran around aimlessly, women and girls had food. Their clothes were torn and shabby, their bodies looked skinny and lifeless but for the first time, those skeletons had faces that would make the hardest man alive shed a tear. Amidst the crowd, he spotted his companions, they all participated, and he casually watched the scene unfold.

“Yes, what is it, Rose?” A transmission interrupted his moment of peace.

“Alright, thank you for the warning.” The call ended, letting out a sigh, Staxius closed his eyes and slept; something was obviously wrong, but he chose to leave that problem to the Staxius of tomorrow.

[Chapter 52](#)

Premonition

“Empty, everything has turned to nothing. What is this, am I floating? Last I remember I dozed off on the castle wall. This feeling, it’s familiar; Lord Death, is that you?” Stuck within the void, Staxius hovered. The body relaxed; everything was dark – it felt as if he had closed his eyes, but they were truly open. The feeling was nostalgic; what came to mind at that instant was the Hall of Rebirth. Not the hall but the portal separating the living from the dead and vice-versa. The confusion grew, Staxius swung his hand randomly in hopes of getting any reaction but to no avail. It was dark, silent, and fondly enough; peaceful.

“Greetings my prodigy.” A voice spoke, the darkness surrounding Staxius vanished a little for a speck of light manifested. It came out of nowhere and dimly lit. However, as dim as it may be, amidst the abyss – said dim light felt like the sun.

“I knew it,” he sighed, “-greetings Lord Death.”

“Why do you hold such contempt?” He asked rhetorically. “Is it because I’ve taken your conscience unwillingly?”

“What is the point of asking a question if you’re going to answer it.” Staxius fired back.

“My oh my, someone has grown over the years. No matter, my visit here isn’t purely for us to reminisce. I’ve come here to give you a warning, it’s more like a prophecy. I shan’t tell you some convoluted poem describing the end of the world – rather, I’ll say it however I feel like it.” The dim light grew closer, its amber flame fell atop and lit Staxius’s nose. “Years ago, I sent you premonitions about Krigi burning down. Yes, I was responsible for those dreams. Today, I was supposed to do the same but chose not to. My actions in the past have gotten me severely reprimanded by the other gods; especially Kronos. I wrongly tricked him into showing me your future; I say wrongly but I lawfully won that bet. Let’s put that aside, I often go off-track. Now back to the matter at hand.” The voice changed from cheerful to deep and stern, the words felt like thunder.

“The island of Hidros shall become a battlefield for the chosen. Thy world is teetering on the edge of destruction and salvation. A new dimension is about to be born, heroes will be summoned, champions will be born, and most importantly; the next god-slayer, otherwise known as the demon-lord shall be

chosen to purge mankind from their folly. Humans have disgraced our blessings and gifts to satisfy their lust for wealth and glory. The birth of the next god-slayer shall prove to be the karma they've sown collectively. Tis not my responsibility to aid you in saving or destroying the world, that is for you and your people to decide. Hell, this prophecy I'm telling you is only known to us both; even the gods are clueless to what is about to befall them. Now then my heir, what will you do in this new era, save the people, and become a hero or purge them and become said demon lord; whatever you do won't affect your ascension to the next death reaper – and with this, your dream ends.”

“Staxius...Staxius...STAXIUS.” The chilly morning breeze aided by Adelana who shook his shoulders – he awoke. The sun was rising, the sky lit with the same amber flame, the feeling of nothingness vanished. Desperate, Adelana sprinkled cold-water.

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“Enough, I'm awake.” Gathering his strength, the body ached all over; sleeping on the cold wall took its toll. She rose simultaneously with him as he got onto his feet. “Why are you causing such a ruckus early in the morning?” He asked while facing the sill rising sun all the while stretching. “We still haven't decided what to tell Piers.” He turned around and stared Adelana with eyes filled with pity. “W-why are you l-looking at me like that.” She slightly fell back; that same stare looked menacing.

“Adelana,” he sighed out of grief. “-haven't we discussed this yesterday in the council, as we speak, Millicent is probably writing the letter.” Realizing her own foolishness, Adelana patted Staxius's back as if comforting him, then left. The castle began to liven up, outside, people sleeping inside makeshift tents – awoke. The inner yard changed from silent to cacophonous. Mothers screaming at their kids, fathers getting ready to head out to hunt or scavenge items from the war that ended a few days ago. After a quick search through the yard; Piers Riverty was spotted. He passed out outside and slept near one of the horses – the clothes were ruined.

A few hours went by, Piers Riverty now stood in front of the castle gates. His pick up was a few minutes out. Standing beside him, Millicent and Adelana. Meanwhile, everyone else was either inside helping or outside aiding in the search and rescue efforts – many people were killed. As suggested by a young merchant, Staxius agreed for the burial of the innocent as well as the people who died. In life where they were once enemies now find themselves buried together in death. What irony to fight against each other just to end up buried together, a mass grave was dug north-west of the castle.

A thundering roar came blazing through the sky; with a hint of regret on his face, Piers Riverty left. Everyone got back to their daily routine; Staxius stood, still staring into the nothingness. Idle and unwilling to move, he continued piercing the horizon with his gaze. In his state of meditation; the same voice constantly disrupted his concentration. The conversation he had last night with Rose etched his neck closer to a sword, a sword of impending doom – he was told that Kreston and Arda were ready to invade in two days' time. Add that, the dream he had about the world-changing also sent his thoughts in multiple directions. Over and over, he thought, using all his might, he thought.

“Arda and Kreston have decided to attack, the princess only gave us a warning and Rose confirmed it yesterday. My question is how the hell did those elves manage to go to Arda in such a short time – that province is far away and not to mention the biggest and most resourceful compared to the rest. No wonder they want to be a free nation; they can be self-sustained. How though, did the elves use a

teleportation spell? Forgotten magic, practically ancient, it is possible for one to use said magic but how can one control it so easily. There must be someone or something more powerful and knowledgeable to use such spells. I don't want to believe it but by car, it's just improbable. If they used an airship which I doubt, then they still would have taken at least a few hours but I get the feeling that they vanished almost instantly." The wind blew roughly, the sun, covered by clouds gave the whole area a feeling of sadness. It seemed gloomy, sadly it was no rain clouds for that would have been a blessing for the already dry-lands of Dorchester. Staxius changed his position and walked over to gaze over to where the noble district was.

"Do people still live there? Most of the nobles here defected, I don't see a reason why someone would stay there. Come to think of it, I've never actually been there, I'm a noble and reason goes to say that I must also have a property of my own. A property that I would never use for I'm alone. The noble district is awfully close to Arda and Oxshield, if memories serve well – all the money was used to make that place. Castle Garsley isn't the real gem of this province but the noble district... Arda is close to said gem. No, this isn't possible." The realization hit like inspiration, after reflecting upon the same problem for hours on end, he got an answer that seemed to be the most probable. His stance changed from relaxed to cautious. As if preordained, the radio intercepted a message.

"S-Staxius, we've got reports that Kreston is going to invade in one day. Arda, on the other hand, we have no clue." Static white noise made it difficult to hear clearly but he knew.

"Kreston is going to invade Frostrest and make way to castle Garsley, and Arda will not join them. The distance is just too far out, my guess is that Arda will take its army and march from the other side. Kreston will take the blunt force while Arda is providing support; unless they have another plan in mind. I don't know yet, but Kreston and Arda will not fight as one. For the one time in my life, I hope the princess uses her not so pleasing personality and pressure Arda into not attacking. So many years has past and she still ails me, that princess, I wish I knew her personally."

Fenrir, god-slayer, and devourer of the sun heed my call, for I, your master has summoned thee. The previously gone Fenrir was called back from her mission. Staxius had sent her to check out the noble district, it was done when she was called forth in Thunderstain's headquarters.

"Hello master," she leaped in for a tight embrace to which Staxius graciously accepted.

"Greetings Fenrir," he smiled. "How was the trip to the noble district?" he asked.

"I... hmmm, oh, yes, there are people living in there – it feels like they are hiding from someone or something. The aura they are desperately trying to hide is one of fear and distress. Also, when you sent me there, I spotted what appeared to be elves going through a greenish portal just before entering the town. And before you called me back, I sensed a faint trail of magic; it's ancient and powerful – my guess is something has targeted the town." With that, her report ended.

"Thank you very much Fenrir," he patted her head affectionately, "-I can always rely on you. Now go, Eira was looking for you." With a courteous smile; she vanished.

"I guess it's time to start preparing for the impending battle." With that Staxius went into the throne room and waited. A few hours went by, life in the castle, as well as outside, had become somewhat peaceful. The atmosphere wasn't that threatening. The place truly was a haven for the needy.

One by one, the members of the temporary council all took their seats. The tension in the air was palpable, Staxius's face looked gloomy and serious.

"Now that everyone's here, I'd like to reveal to you some information I've gathered," Staxius spoke, minutes turned to hours, he explained in detail what he had found.

"And so, we need to send aid to support Frostrest; that village holds more credit than we acknowledge. If Kreston is to take over that village and monopolize Brisnet Heights into their advantage; we'll lose a good portion of our land. Not to forget that from there on they can establish a supply route and constantly attack us all the while conquering the northern part of Dorchester. Add Arda who will most likely attack us from the western side, I predict castle Garsley falling in less than a week. I don't like this but our fate lies solely in that princess's hands. I apologize for being weak, but seeing how we are now, retreat isn't an option nor is fighting. So, instead, I've decided to send Eira to the capital. I've made arrangements for her enrollment at Claireville Academy. We need to put her under the Order's protection as soon as possible. And for the rest of you, I apologize but you will have to fight a losing battle on my behalf. I'm sending you silver guardians to help with the extraction of the remainder of villagers in Frostrest, the trip will be slow seeing as you'll have to go around the mountain. By my count, it will take more or less two days to make it there and two days to get back. You'll be using the transport trucks that bring in food; we don't have that much but we'll make do with what we got. Adelana will oversee the extraction; Alyson will be in charge of defending and lastly Ayleth, you will be playing decoy alongside Annet. Ancret, on the other hand, will be station here, we still have wounded coming in. I know this is asking a lot but you girls are the only ones I can turn to. For me, I will be heading westward; I'll stall Arda on my lonesome. Millicent will manage things here and Fenrir will be part of the silver guardian's escort."

"Master, that's a lot to take in and process; but we trust you," Adelana spoke on the behalf of everyone.

"Before I conclude this meeting, there are two objectives that you need to accomplish if we are to stand a chance. Firstly, Brisnet Height must not be conquered at all, and secondly, you, my companions as well as the villagers are to make it here alive."

"Brother, what about me?" Undrar asked. Everyone forgot she was present. "Well you, my dear sister, are the last hurdle our enemies have to cross before taking castle Garsley; the final boss." No further questions were asked, Eira got the news about her father's decision; she was furious. The silver guardians got ready as well as Staxius who still wore the same old grey suit. For the first time, the fate of Dorchester laid in the hands of the ruthless princess and for the first time, Staxius and she saw eye to eye. A revolution was good and all, but bringing in innocent civilians and threatening an already war-torn country turned out to be the last drop of water that overflowed the cup.

[Chapter 53](#)

Shanna Islegust

"Father," a warm whisper came from behind. The sun was up high in the sky. Away from the glaring heat, Staxius sat inside the study. After the meeting was over, everyone parted and got ready on their own. Some needed weapons, some needed armor, and some even needed potions. Normally, potions weren't used for they were considered a luxury whose price went over two gold pieces at times. Though, today was an exception; Staxius's companion needed every bit of help they could get. The study

in which he sat felt cold and chilly; it was located on the topmost floor of the central tower. During the day, temperature outside got overwhelming; it wasn't unusual for people to pass out. Hence, he spent his time going over the material Sten had left. It wasn't apparent but Sten's research on necromancy and alchemy proved to be useful – all those bodies thrown out had their

uses.

Just as he approached the end of an interesting paper on how mana could be used to control humans as puppets; Eira's soft voice interrupted him. The voice, normally dignified and confident seemed to have changed into one of a puppy begging for her master to not leave her alone. In front of her, after pushing over the door left ajar on purpose for air to circulate more easily. Staxius had his back turn to her, he sat in the middle of the circular room filled with bookcases who looked like the walls itself. They reached up high and ladders were used to reach the higher books who were more precious. In the middle of this library, he sat, hunched over as he pierced the manuscripts.

"Who is it?" he asked out of courtesy, he didn't want to lose his focus just yet. Before Eira could state her name, he raised his right hand and waved; motioning her to leave. Almost instantly, he added, "do come by later, if you would." The hand lowered and firmly grasped the papers as if they were going to be stolen. Eira didn't budge an inch, instead, she stood, and carefully eyed the man she called father. One by one, she examined his hair, long and always tied in a ponytail. His face, a sharp jawline, and his figure – one of not a trained warrior but one of a scholar. Not too big, not too small; plainly average. The clothes he wore weren't that lovely to look at. They were torn, well once were torn, but now were patched up by other pieces of fabric: some were red, while others blue and some even went so far as pink. It didn't look that bad for the tears were small in comparison. Just as she was about to finish her examination; Staxius turned around, the face looked plain and in the same motion spoke monotonously, "is there something important you need?" After realizing it was

Eira, the plain face change unnaturally. A smile emerged; the gaze seemed to light up. "What brings you here?" he asked once more but the voice had more impact and feeling to it.

Amazed by how easily he controlled his emotions; Eira stared in awe. Her eyes grew wider, she knew about dark-arts, as Undrar had recounted her tales about how Staxius could manipulate people seamlessly. However, seeing it up close felt both like a blessing as well as a curse. The curse is the knowledge that the smile he gave out was undoubtedly fake and meant to ease up the victim's guard. And the blessing is the fact that he was doing it out of courtesy and meant no ill will. Her admiration broke when he seemed to teleport in front of her, a few waves before her lifeless eyes got her back from her dream.

Using the same tone as before, he asked yet again, "Eira, you with me?" Staxius let a smile escaped as she shook her head as she snapped out of her state of confusion.

"Forgive me, I've come at the wrong time, haven't I?" she asked innocently while her gaze befell the floor.

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"No need to look down, come on, let me see those ruby-colored eyes." Obediently, she stared up unwillingly. "Now, what is the matter?"

“W-why am I acting this way; I should be by all means angry. This is impossible, I should be frustrated and lashing out b-but, t-that man’s g-gaze... It’s soothing.” Eira thought out loud.

Hearing what she unconsciously muttered out, Staxius laughed. “My gaze is soothing, is it? And you should be angry.” He finally stopped. “Is this about me sending you to Clairville academy?”

Embarrassed, she nodded. “Listen to me,” he placed his hand onto her shoulder, “-I’m not doing this out of spite. Honestly, I don’t want you to go there for you see, I can probably teach you all that there is to know about your magical element. However, there’s one thing I can’t teach you, that is, how to socialize with others. I’ve heard from Undrar that you’ve never made any friends, and for a girl your age who’s just begun living, I want you to experience what I never could. I want you to experience everything: romance, friendship, betrayal, and revenge. Live the life that your father could not, I may look eighteen or nineteen but I’m old – very old. Right now, I’d say we look more like siblings. That is if you take away the part where you look like a princess and me looking like a beggar – that’s beside the point. I want you to go out and live your life, for your sake, become independent. I know I said I wanted to spend more time with you, however, that isn’t possible. Dorchester, as you’ve probably heard, is being targeted by neighboring provinces. Do what I couldn’t do, become a better person, be the heroine that shall save us all; Eira, you’re the light to my darkness. I’ve gone beyond the point of no return, and as a wise man once said, “A speck of white on a black canvas might stand out, but that doesn’t hide the fact that the canvas is indeed black.” Heed those words carefully as you go forth on the journey I’ve laid out for you. I’m only providing the first push; you shall need to find your own path. Heck, in the near future, your way of thinking might change and you may see me as the devil incarnate, thus setting out on a quest to kill me. If it ever comes to that, then I’ll willingly fight you as an equal, but that is for you to find out, you and you alone, my dearest Eira. Before I finish, there’s always been a dream I never could make reality. That dream was to make it into the inter-magical tournament, I want you to go and win it, just like your grandfather did so long ago; Tempest Haggard, a man who’s echo can only be heard off drunken workers senseless rambling.” The long speech ended, he slowly backed away and sat down. He faced Eira who stood speechless; Staxius made it so that she had no other options than to say yes. Her frivolous attempt at retaliating against his wishes ended in defeat.

“I understand father, but you got something wrong.” Her gaze sharpened.

“What is it?” he curiously asked.

“I’ll never hate you,” like a stray cat, she scurried out of the room. The one-sided argument ended.

As if nothing happened, Staxius held the dusty manuscript once more and resumed the lecture.

Far, far away from Dorchester, the sun who blazed the soil in an unrelenting assault of heat and light seemed to have been tamed by trees. A castle stood in the middle of a giant forest, the trees seemed to touch the sky and its clouds. The leaves and branched felt like artificial roofs, here, under the same cover, the greenish castle stood. It blended perfectly with the surrounding, nature hadn’t been disturbed, said castle felt like an extension. A small path cut through the labyrinth of a forest. It was the only point of access, up high, elves with their bow ready and waiting, watched. Any subtle movement of the leaves, whether it was animal or no, the perimeter around that fortress was shot on sight. An ancient tree, in which a hole as big as the two-story-high buildings in Dundee stood.

Within that trunk, stood the green fortress. A fortress who has only been seen by the residence of Arda. The scale of that tree trunk was indescribable, it was as large as castle Garsley; if not bigger. The bottom floor served as a checking point; the military stood there. A floor above, within that same tree, a small town: houses, huts, taverns, and other miscellaneous buildings stood. The same floor was repeated almost identically above them, and finally the last floor, the castle stood. A large staircase went round the edges on the inside. Outside, each floor had a small road leading out, a bridge but reinforced by earth magic, they scattered all over the forest; easy access was necessary.

Inside the castle, Shanna Islegust lived, the self-proclaimed queen of Arda. A fairy whose age is unknown. She is so powerful that the name Shanna Islegust is but an alias for her real name, anyone who dares speak it would be judged and if found guilty and not worthy was killed on the spot.

Outside of Arda, almost no one knows of her existence except for a few who have been fooled about who she truly was. Nothing ever escapes the province of Arda, that nation is closed as a black hole.

The layout of the castle is ever-changing; instead of doors – portals are used to travel up and down.

Hence a correct map of that place is deemed faulty and useless.

Ever since Erlareo Enbalar and Ygannea Enbalar came back from Dorchester; the queen has been more or less agitated. “My queen, if you’ll excuse my boldness, may I speak out?” An elf bearing long blond hair with blue eyes spoke. He was dressed elegantly. Next to him, on each side, two other knelt.

“Speak,” she ordered while gritting her teeth.

“We’ve got a report saying that princess Galienne is sending over envoys to negotiate.” He calmly spoke.

“Yes and what of it?” she shrugged.

“Your majesty, her sending over envoys doesn’t bode well for us. You see, the portal to Dorchester’s noble district is just about done. The effort and manpower put into building that will go to waste if those envoys are to come peacefully.”

“Are you insinuating that we should not allow envoys from her royal highness into our kingdom because the portal I ordered you to build is nearly complete? How foolish are you, I don’t care if we spend resources on that trinket; my only concern is us becoming a free nation. I say this out loud and for everyone to hear, I will not tolerate any scheme or conspiracy that could hurt this dream of mine; a dream every demi and non-humans share. We shall receive the envoys but on our terms only, tell the princess to have her men sent to the edge of our provinces, we will be the one in charge. If she doesn’t accept our terms, then too bad, we’ll head for the noble district.”

“As you wish ma’am, I shall obey your every order.” He scowled, “this queen is but a coward, I need to show her that humans are not to be trusted; much less be given a chance to be compared with us, the superior races. I’ll have the envoys killed and hence begin a new war, Shanna Islegust is but a fraud.” He thought. The elegantly dressed elf was one of the people who support demi-human supremacy. A faction who only recently came into the limelight; also, said individual is ranked as the fifth most powerful mage in Arda with an SS-rank. He earned that right by defeating Kreston’s holy paladin’s

personal guards who were reportedly only three ranks behind the paladin. On their own, those guards could easily match the silver guardians; some could argue, even defeating them.

It goes to show that said elf was truly powerful. The aura in the throne room began to change, the queen's gaze went from agitated to stern. It was as if looking at medusa, her anger began oozing out. "I'm a fraud?" her tone pierced through the room. "Elves are the superior races?" she sarcastically added.

"H-how did you," *Lightning and light element activate; Lightning prison.* Five purple lightning bolts got conjured, they each got impaled around the queen in a pentagonal shape. A barrier was brought forth afterward; Shanna Islegust was immobilized. "Your majesty, you're but a fraud, I shall personally end your life gracefully."

"Gold element activate, watch my most powerful attack; a thousand swords." With a maniacal laugh, a thousand golden sword each baring differing shapes and sizes, some enchanted, while others cursed, all got conjured up. With a snap of the finger, each one pierced her majesty. The room went silent, the queen was killed, or so what he thought.

"Is that all you got," she sighed. *Ancient magic, Rose's thorn.* A small thorn appeared as she pointed her index finger up, "-die." The moment she pointed at the elf, he instantly fell.

"Servants please if you would."

[Chapter 54](#)

Departure

Still sat as if she were a statue, princess Gallienne waited. A day had passed since she sent Piers to Dorchester. The sun's blazing heat didn't affect her highness however, the same heat which melted people down in Staxius's home province – proved to be beneficial here. Neither was it cold nor was it hot, a perfect balance, the wind, and subtle breeze added to the picturesque scene. Eyes fixed on Brisnet Heights; her reflection was cut short by Theodore who brought her the scroll from castle Garsley.

"Cunning, very cunning." She smiled upon reading it, "- the people in charge of Dorchester are very perceptive. However, this attempt to provoke me into not attacking is but a waste of energy. Arda will have her freedom." Lazily, she crumbled the well-written letter, stood up, and threw it in the direction of Dorchester's noble district. Within that same motion; after the throw was made, she turned around and headed for her room.

"Princess Gallienne," two knocks were heard afterward. The young butler in training was sent to her room once more. This time, however, he didn't shudder for he'd grown resistant to her aura. The door swung open almost hitting him. Nimbly, he stepped back and avoided any injuries.

"What is it?" she asked sharply without wasting time.

"Her majesty the queen has ordered me to give you this." A letter bearing a red and gold seal with the Ardanian crest; a tree, was handed to her. "Insolence, how dare they order me around." Her hands tightened into a fist. Half of the letter tore apart by her fit of rage. "You boy," her gaze changed from the letter to the unsuspecting butler.

“Y-yes,” his voice broke.

“Wait for me a moment, I have a job for you.” The door slammed shut. On both occasions, the door wasn’t opened physically, rather, the princess used magic. His newly found confidence began to seep away; questions invaded his thoughts.

“Am I going to get killed? Will I become her new torture partner? Is my life as a virtuous man over? Mom is going to kill me.” The shoulders relaxed, the confident pose he held broke down, it was tiring on his stomach as well as lungs for it was difficult to maintain. The sliver of hope he had of living a peaceful life slipped away. Out of fear, he backed away slowly and crouched down beside the wall.

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On his right, a display figure bearing black armor and to his right a small table on which two cubes rested. It stood out among the plethora of relics and valuables, the cubes were mundane at best; one was black while the other white. The white one was laid to rest on the black one.

“Theodore,” she called out.

“How may I be of service?” he lifted the bed sheets and knelt beside the princess who wore nothing but a nightgown, during the day.

“I want you to escort that boy outside to Arda; I personally want him to be the envoy. He’s inexperience and lacks common courtesy, this lack of manners will anger the Ardanian people for they are very strict when it comes to speaking with that so-called queen. If they so much as lift a finger or let out a slight glimpse of animosity; I want you to defend that boy’s life at all cost. In no way are you to slay without prejudice, only the people who try and hurt the boy are to be eliminated. Now go, you have your orders.”

“As you wish.”

Nonchalantly, Theodore headed outside, grabbed the boy, and got ready. The boy was dressed elegantly and without holding back: the most expensive suits, accessories, and shoes were made available for him to use. A few minutes later, aided by Theodore; the young boy looked as handsome if not even more so than a noble. Hence, the envoy accompanied by his escort was sent out.

The evening drew close, the sun’s bright light changed into one of a dimmer and dormant color. Clouds were nowhere to be found, castle Garsley felt empty, in particular, the throne room. Only Millicent sat with Undrar beside her. In front, directly under the massive chandelier: Staxius, the silver guardians, Fenrir, and Eira. Everyone was ready to head out. Staxius looked the same with the exception of a blackish colored scabbard with a golden dragon embroidered in it on his hip. Next to him, Eira stood with a massive backpack and a hat over her head. The silver guardians were all armored up with the fabled adamantite armor which they had stored away as a sort of punishment for letting Staxius die. However, seeing as he was alive; the punishment to deliberately make them less powerful was lifted. Lastly, Fenrir, she wore nothing but a skimpy buttoned-up shirt with tight pants and a massive backpack filled with potions, spare weapons, and other items which may prove useful.

“I guess it’s time for us to part ways then,” Staxius spoke as everyone intently stared him down.

“Indeed, we shall be leaving first seeing as we have a lot of ground to cover.” Adelana soon left with everyone nodding their heads as a sign of goodbye.

“See you soon master,” Fenrir jumped in for a hug, and began to lick his face; she transformed into her usual wolf form. Ayleth and Annet were going to travel on her back seeing as she was faster than any normal vehicle in her true form. The decoys were to be sent to scout as well as disrupt anything that could hinder the evacuation process.

Only Eira and Staxius remained, their gaze continually met and averted each other. They both were scared to speak to one another, for Staxius it was out of necessity – he didn’t want to answer any of her questions. For Eira on the other hand, it was totally unrelated, she was embarrassed to look at him.

“Seeing as the sun is about to set, Undrar, Millicent, I’ll take my leave.” He turned around and left, giving his signature wave, the door closed. A pin-drop silence followed afterward.

“You missed your chance to bid him farewell,” Undrar added jokingly.

“It’s hard to speak to him when his face is devoid of emotions.” She sighed.

“Eira, my darling, I’m going to miss you.” Millicent jumped out of her chair and ran towards Eira. A tight and uncomfortable hug followed. “I’ll miss you too, aunt,” she freed herself from Millicent’s arms that locked around her like iron chains. “So, you didn’t convince him to let you accompany him in the end, all that talk about you spending some quality father and daughter time, a waste of time isn’t it?”

“Stop it, it wasn’t a waste of time; us spending time together isn’t going to happen. Father is secretive and stays alone, either scheming, trying to figure out some problem, or making weapons and inventing spells. That man is too much for me.” Her frown turned upside down.

“Well, he did give you a goal now didn’t he?”

“Yes, I’ll win that inter-magical tournament and make the Haggard name known to all once more.” She exclaimed.

“Keep that energy for when the car comes by, your trip will be long and not to mention you’ll be transferring during mid-year, without going through the examinations. You better stand out there, and lastly, enjoy every moment of it. For the next four years, you’re going to live alone, away from us. You better come back home with a trophy and an SSS-rank.” Undrar concluded her speech and smiled. As if copying Staxius, Eira left the same way and gave out the same wave. The room dropped dead silent.

“Now then Millicent, we’ve got our jobs to do, let’s make castle Garsley a haven as well as a stronghold.”

“Undrar,” Millicent’s tone seemed saddened, “-you knew, didn’t you. You knew that Staxius never truly was back with us; I get the feeling that he isn’t the same guy anymore.”

“Time goes by, people change, some die and some live, that is life, my dear Millicent. Don’t get swept under the flow of time, live for the present, don’t regret the past and don’t fear the future, that is how one is meant to live.”

Outside, a large obnoxious rumbling faded into the distance, the silver guardians were gone. As a gift for returning and as a sign of their newly reformed alliance, Thunderstain sent over two cars.

One had a fiery red color while the other was as black as the void. As expected, Staxius took the black one, the car that was sent over was newly made; a new generation of vehicle, more performing and much faster with a slick design. The engines on these cars were robust, any amount of mana no matter how dense it was, the car could take it.

The beauty of this iron steed took Staxius by surprise. He was baffled by how it looked, elegant as well as highly sophisticated. All the research and discovery made in the past sixteen years were embedded into that single vehicle. He wasn't the only one however, most of the villagers standing there were mesmerized, a crowd soon surrounded both cars. Some spoke of it being a curse while others thought of it as the god's transport. The people of Dorchester weren't really known for their intelligence; this was due to a poor upbringing, away from all the technology and knowledge.

"Hey," a soft palm grazed Staxius's back softly. "Hey there Eira," he smiled. "What the hell are those?" Eira saw the cars for the first time. "AREN'T THEY EXPENSIVE." She yelled, her legs shook, she realized that the vehicles Staxius got gifted were worth more than one million gold coins. Only six were ever made, the black one was named Shadow, while the red one was known as the Red-fury.

"F-father, those cars were made by m-mages, e-each one has different properties as well as functions; they are basically moving weapons. W-where did you g-get those." Her mouth remained wide open.

"I mean, there's nothing much to it really, Thunderstain gave me them as a sign of our renewed alliance." He casually explained.

"WHAT DO YOU MEAN RENEWED ALLIANCE WITH THUNDERSTAIN?" She took a minute to compose herself, "You mean that Thunderstain? The information brokers, the allegedly nonexistent corporation that only nobles have access to?"

"Yeah, that's them. They aren't that well hidden, to be honest, their leader is a bit on the shy side, but we get along just fine."

"S-so you p-personally k-know the leader of that organization? Anyone who knows that name is either killed or vanishes mysteriously." Her hand covered her face, she was embarrassed.

"What, I know I have good contacts, I'm not being cavalier about this, I know I'm awesome." He pulled out his tongue jokingly. "Here," he placed the key to the Red-fury in her hands.

"W-what are you doing?" She unwillingly dropped the key, instantly he caught it and spoke, "It's a gift from me to you. I have two of the damned things, sell it, crash it, do whatever, just don't let anyone else drive it if it belongs to you. Promise me that and you can enjoy it."

"Surely you jest father, that thing is more precious than my life." She continued refusing.

"Shut up," his voice got stern, "-have you forgotten that you're the daughter of a noble? You belong to the Haggard name, yes, unknown now but trust me, the Haggard family will become a force to be feared. You need to make an impression, also if the director of the academy is still Paien, send him my regards and tell him that you are my prodigy."

"T-thank you father." She accepted in the end. Upon closer inspection, said cars only held two-seat and the front bared a crest, the crest of a dragon, the crest of the Haggard family.

“Excuse us if you would, but you guys are in the way,” Staxius spoke, no one paid attention. “FREE DRINKS AT THE TAVERN,” he yelled. Almost like a pack of starving wolves, they rushed inside while screaming, ‘ya-hoo’.

“This is where we part ways now Eira, have fun in Rosespire, I shall see you soon.” Both doors closed, the car turned on, the sound it made felt like a thunderbolt hitting the ground; the flashlights turned on, “greetings Staxius Haggard.” Both cars simultaneously responded to the users.

“Staxius, I’m sending over two cars, one for you and one for Undrar but she probably won’t accept it so give it to Eira instead, I’ve already programmed the red one to respond to her mana. May they help you in the future battles to come. This is all I can do, I’m sorry.” While sitting, Staxius remembered part of the conversation he had with Rose last night.

“Rose, you truly are awesome. Time has come for us to depart and save Dorchester.” Like flashes of lightning, both cars vanished, one took the right while the other left, hence, each member took to their separate ways even if it’s temporary.

[Chapter 55](#)

Eira’s Journey

Nighttime befell the whole country. The bright blue sky was replaced by one lit a million times aided by glimmering stars. The moon looked bloodied; it bared a crescent shape that looked like a smile. Surrounding it, as if covering said mouth with hands; the clouds. The chilly night breeze shook around what little trees were left; mainly burnt and dead. After passing through the main gate; Eira and Staxius parted ways. Glimpsing back at the castle she once called home; Eira watched in awe, the taillights of his father’s car vanished.

“Greetings Eira Haggard,” a voice seemed to come out of nowhere.

“Greetings?” she replied while suspiciously looking everywhere for the source of said sound.

“Please inject more mana, Red-fury’s performance level is sixty-eight percent.” A red light located on the steering wheel began to light up. “As you wish,” she gripped the wheel tighter and after inhaling; she released a mass of mana. The car’s meter changed from sixty-eight to seventy-nine. “This has to be a joke.” Eira scowled; said surge of mana was her injecting every ounce of strength she had.

“User’s mana capacity evaluated, rank assign, A-rank. The reconfiguration will now begin.” The same soft, girlish voice spoke. Dazed by what happened; Eira decided to focus on driving, and fondly enough, at the speed she drove, Savaview bridge came into view.

“Halt,” a guard holding up a loudspeaker in one hand and a stop sign in the other, signaled her to stop. Time had come to pay the toll. Unwilling to leave the vehicle, she drove closer and rolled down the windows. “How much is the toll?”

“One silver piece and three copper.” He muttered while eyeing down the beast that growled. Eira reached for her purse and began looking for change, meanwhile, the guard approached the car and circled around it to have a better look. The dragon crest gleamed once he reached the front; his eyes grew wide open.

“Miss,” he slowly back away. “Yes?” Eira answered while exploring the purse for change.

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“Are you related to a noble named Staxius Haggard?” he asked, the voice faltered when he spoke his name. “You know my father?” she continued her search.

“You’re his daughter?” *Gulp,* “You m-may p-pass.” He lowered his head and went back to sleep inside the little cabin near the bridge. “What about the toll?” her gaze rose up, “don’t worry about it, Staxius Haggard is a friend of mine.” He let out a small smile and covered his eyes with the blue cap. With his feet resting on the table, he went to sleep.

“Thank you?” paying no attention; Eira drove into Oxshield. After getting off the bridge, the dirt path on which that poor car was torturously driving finally reached roads. It separated into three different lanes: the one to her right headed to Dundee, the one in the middle directly headed for the capital and the one on the left headed to the villages and residential areas of the low-born. Said low-borns weren’t of noble birth but were financially rich, no one who lived in Oxshield was considered poor. The roads were clear and empty; a slightly dense mist formed. Her drive to the capital continued, the landscape that went beside her was naught but dark and fuzzy.

“Configuration complete.” One hour into the drive, it spoke again.

“Who are you?” Getting tired; Eira decided to speak to a car, even though it looked foolish. “What am I doing?” she awaited a response but to no avail. “I’m Red-Fury,” after a few minutes, the car spoke once more.

“What do you mean Red-fury?”

“I mean that red-fury is my name,” it responded to her question. Confused, Eira slammed on the breaks, the car screeched to a painful stop. “WHAT ARE YOU DOING.” It yelled, “that hurts, not physically, but it hurts.”

“W-who or w-what are you?” Eira let go of the steering wheel.

“I’m Red-fury, a car as well as a spirit. I was imprisoned into this machine – I say imprisoned, though I agreed to the contract for they offered me a lot of human souls. Yes, I’m a machine with a conscience, why do you think only six of this were made? And the price tag, have you seen it?”

“...” Eira took some time to process, “are you friendly?” she asked curiously with her right eye slightly closed while lifting the opposite eyebrow. “Yes, I’m friendly, are you stupid? You’re my owner, I can’t possibly hurt you.”

“You got guts speaking to your master that way but I like it.” She slammed onto the accelerator and headed for the Rosespire. A few hours in, the massive castle was in sight, the castle wall was so big that Eira had to roll down her window and stare up. Going around the massive fortress, she arrived in town which was enclosed using the same wall but the actual castle rose high above everything else. No-one was permitted up there, except nobles who served the council. The town itself was massive, it was ten times bigger than Dundee.

“Red, do you have any useful functions?” she asked while passing the giant gate; the only way in.

The guard seemed to not pay attention, probably because the car she rode in looked expensive as hell, and nobles were considered saints here.

“I can drive you to places without you walking? Isn’t that enough.”

“Again, with the attitude, I mean do you have a map of this place, I might get lost.” The car’s pace slowed down considerably.

Meanwhile, opposite to Eira, Staxius rode in his vehicle. “Greetings void.” He spoke nonchalantly.

“Greetings master,” a deep voice spoke, it was a man’s voice for once. “Can you please scout around in front of us, I don’t want any unwanted attention; direct me to a more safe and secure path.”

“As you wish, Master, please inject your mana for I to reconfigure the settings.”

“There you go,” he nonchalantly let a bit of his mana seep into the steering wheel.

“Configuration error, mana input has exceeded normal levels, switching to over-drive.” The car roared and as quick as a flash of lightning, the car sped or rather vanished. You could only hear the engine, the car was nowhere to be seen, as black as the abyss and as dangerous as hell, that was Shadow.

The car whose properties are yet to be found for the spirit contracted to that car is unknown to even the mages who built it.

“What do you mean overdrive?” the scenery began to fly by at neck-breaking speed. Any small rubble or rock or anything that would disrupt the car’s momentum could cause it to tip and crash, and possibly killing the driver. Over-drive was a feature included in every single one, however, reaching that point as proven by Eira’s attempt to fill up the mana gauge; is improbable. Entering overdrive means exceeding the mana capacity of SSS-ranked sorcerers, a feat rather unique and unprecedented. Though Staxius did it as if it were a piece of cake. The years stuck in oblivion proved to be a boon; he grew in strength. In a few hours, simultaneously with Eira, who now reached town, he approached the noble district.

“Void, trigger the concealment spell.” Earlier, next to the steering wheel, a strange device popped out. It was made of paper, and as per the instruction is given or rather; he stole, writing a spell and adding them to the car’s internal memory could be saved up and used later on. This was only available to the shadow variant; thus, he added a bunch of low-tier spells to test out how far he could push this machine. And not to forget that the machine isn’t just a car but also a spirit, one who is powerful and very much alive.

As ordered, the already hard to spot shadow went invisible. Inside, tired, Staxius decided to sleep seeing as there were only a few hours left till daybreak. Also, it’s because he was just lazy to investigate whatever the car had sensed earlier on. He now laid to rest with the noble district insight, the perimeter was surrounded by a wall, not tall nor short, plainly average. Through the mist, only the outlines of buildings could be seen, the tallest one had a slanted roof on which Kreston’s crest rested. A bit out of place for the people of Dorchester who only ever worshiped the goddess of destruction, Admis. The holy crest for Admis was a skull with two swords impaled into the eye socket, the rituals, and prayers for said goddess involved human sacrifices and other gruesome things. One even depicts kissing a black cat’s bottom and slaying its unborn kittens. The cat was obviously a female who was recently pregnant. After the deed was done, the members would dance around the dying cat’s body while drinking their own

blood. Obviously, these are just rumors but the lengths to which humans can push themselves into believing into whatever they see as being righteous is mind-blowing: gullible, foolish, but resilient – three words describing the inhabitants of Dorchester fully. With that thought going around in his mind, Staxius went to sleep.

“Come on red, find me a place to sleep already.” Eira was frustrated; the car, in fact, had a navigation system but it refused to work. “Calm down master, I’m trying to find the best place to stay with your budget. Come to think of it, why not spend the night inside the car. It’s tight and not that comfortable, but at least you’ll save money.”

“No way, there is just no way I’m sleeping inside a talking car. May the world crumble to pieces before I do such a thing.” Red-fury rode across the wide road that spread throughout the town. The place was lively, it was night, but people were still out walking up and down; admiring armor, weapons, and other gadgets. Some were out on dates, some wore expensive suits and dresses, everyone had a smile on their face. Rosepire was a joyous town as opposed to popular belief that the princess had enslaved everyone here.

The further she drove, the tighter the roads got until finally, a glowing panel caught her attention. It was weird and stood out, the other shops had a dignified look to them, and the hotels were even more so. However, this one had a cat as its logo and lit brightly with a pink and yellow glow. The outside wasn’t that striking, lightbulbs went around the window frames and inside a few pictures of cats was spotted here and there.

Come in for the best time of your life. A hooded girl who looked about twelve stood in front of the doorway and shyly signaled the passersby to check-in. Due to her short stature, everyone ignored her. Every time she tried speaking, people shrugged her off; which resulted in her opening her mouth and closing it. It looked as if she was eating air; nothing. “Master, that girl is a demi-human.” The car spoke.

“Is that so, Red, I shall be staying here tonight. Do you have an auto-drive function? I mean, I didn’t see anyone bring you to castle Garsley.”

“Nicely spotted, I do in fact have an auto-drive function. What are your orders then?”

“Nothing much really, just don’t stand out. Go do whatever you want, you’re a spirit, aren’t you? Just come back in the morning.” The door opened then closed automatically. Red rode off into town. The hooded girl desperately tried to bring attention to the shop. With her hair flowing gently with the wind, the lights from the shops made it glow, Eira approached. She looked more beautiful than ever, everyone’s gaze stumbled upon her, the white hair made her stand out. With her ruby eyes, she smiled and gently tapped the little girl’s shoulder.

“Excuse me miss.”

“H-hello m-ma’am.” The hooded girl slightly backed away, her whole body looked twitchy as if she’s constantly on the lookout for danger. Ignoring that subtleness, Eira continued speaking as if nothing happened. “Can you help me get a room inside?” Eira smiled.

“F-FOLLOW ME,” closing her eyes, the little girl yelled. Everyone turned and eyed her down intently, her cheeks grew bright red. Comfortably, Eira took her hand, “shall we?”

They entered the brightly lit room. On the right side, a circular table with small chairs with a kitten's face embedded in. On the left side, a table stuck onto the wall with high stools. Cups, flowers, and other miscellaneous items were found atop. A few steps in, a counter with a woman sat behind. She held a cigarette in her mouth and had a few shots of alcohol in front. Behind her, on each side, two sets of staircases faded into the darkness after the first few steps.

Seeing Eira approaching, the lady quickly hid her cigarette. Upon closer look, she looked about fifty, her face was brightly colored with make-up. She was desperately trying to not look her age; which in the end made her look like a ghost.

"Greetings valued customer," She smiled, few of her teeth were missing. "-how may I be *cough, cough,* of service." The smoke from the coughs slowly hit Eira's face. Her right cheek twitched a little, for an instant, an aura of animosity escaped. Though she quickly rectified that mishap by a smile as big as the one the lady gave out.

"I'd like to rent a room if that isn't much of a problem."

"You've chosen well, here at the Pussy palace, we have the best rooms in the whole of Rosespire." Obviously, the lady was lying, Eira caught onto that fact but remained silent. The place stood out, almost purposefully. It's normal for people to try and show off to get attention, but this inn had a feeling of overcompensation. It was as if they were hiding something. Her rant about the Pussy palace being the best place to stay at in the whole of Rosespire went on for ages. Normally, Eira would have walked out and not cared; but the little girl, she gripped her hands tightly.

The rant ended, the lady not realizing that Eira was still present as most of the possible customer would have probably left by now – took a shot of whiskey. "How much will a night cost me?" Eira asked once more. Hearing her voice, the lady whose name is still hidden, choked on her drink. It sprayed all over the counter but luckily missed Eira who dodged at the last possible moment.

"You're still here," she mumbled. "I'm sorry I didn't quite catch that," Eira asked courteously.

"I said it will set you back at around two gold pieces." She smirked. Two gold-pieces could earn you the right to stay for one night at one of the high-class hotels. The value of gold hasn't decreased but increased, it's more valuable than it was in the past.

"I'll take it," Eira smirked back and threw three gold pieces onto her counter. "One extra as a tip." The lady rolled her eyes and ordered the little girl to show Eira to her room.

"I'm sorry for wasting money like this." Eira bit her lips, the door opened.

[Chapter 56](#)

Eira's Arrival

The hooded girl took Eira up the stairs behind the counter. She unwillingly paid three gold pieces and regretted every instant of it. The first floor came to seemingly pop out of nowhere. There Eira stood, before her, three light bulbs with only two of the first one working. The yellowish ray it cast down didn't help for the hallway felt gloomy and dark. There were seven rooms in total, four on one side and three on the other where the stairway merged with the first floor. The third light bulb did, in fact, work for it

would sharply light up at uneven intervals and then die out. The sound it made felt awful, it was as if crushing insects.

With a rather hard tug, the girl led Eira to the first room. The door was brown and looked decent enough but the edges surrounding it began to rot. The door handle; out of every door in said hall, was the only working one. A sluggish click made itself apparent as she opened the door. Inside, the room wasn't even big enough to fit two people. It bared a bed which reeked, the curtains were torn, you could see the starry night. Few steps in, the toilet was spotted on the left side, with a look of discomfort, Eira just averted her eyes and made way to the bed. It smelled bad but didn't look the part. That was the extent of it, no furniture, nothing, just a bed, and a toilet.

"I wasted three gold coins on this..." she contemplated her foolishness; it was out of spite that she threw those coins. As she stared at the floor, the little girl approached her and gently tapped her rosy cheeks. "How may I help you?" Eira hid her foul mood and spoke gently. As experienced earlier on, Eira thought that her reply will fall on deaf ears and the girl would back away or plainly leave the room. To her surprise, she removed her hood; and revealed fox ears. Behind her, what seemed to be a ball of fluff fell out of her clothes. Staring up at her with bright brown eyes, the girl closed her eyes and let out a big smile. Faintly you could see her cheeks make dimples.

"T-thank y-you f-for staying." Her head unwillingly went into a bow. A subtle drop of tear fell to the floor as she stared down. The sound it made would usually go unnoticed but inside this pin-drop silent room; the tear she shed got Eira's heart racing. Almost like a big sister, she knelt and hugged the girl who now cried. As she gently patted her head and slyly played with her brownish-blond ears that matched her hair, the little fox let out an *awh*. Embarrassed, the tears stopped and she covered her face playfully.

"I'm Eira, what's your name." She tried starting a conversation.

"I-I'm Mai Circos," after saying her name, as if it was taboo, her eyes filled with fear. It looked lifeless.

"Nice to meet you, Mai." After uttering her name; the girl's persona changed. She became more silent than before; it was as if she had turned into a robot. She slowly put on her hood and left the room without making any noise. The way she walked felt mechanic. "Is she possessed?" Eira asked while getting ready to leave. In no way was she going to sleep in this filthy room. Grabbing a blanket that looked fairly clean, she leaped out the window and climbed the roof. The chilly air didn't bother her, and it was there that she fell asleep.

Miles away from both Eira and Staxius who now both slept. The silver guardians also slept. The temporary camp they set up was being guarded as each one took time to rest. Their journey was half-way done. To their amazement, the truck they borrowed made it some ways before nighttime befell. Fenrir, on the other hand, had already reached a third of the way there, they rested close to Brisnet heights.

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Daybreak came faster than anticipated. The sun's ray awoke Eira. She slept the whole night on the roof. Today was the day she had to meet up with the director. Facing the sun who rose alongside her, she stretched, yawned, and clapped her hands together. Effortlessly, she climbed back down from the roof only to see the young lady from the night before unconscious out on the floor. Worried, Eira rushed to

her side to find only that she slept as peacefully as a baby. Not wanting to disturb her slumber, she tucked her in the same bed she refused to sleep in and left. While rushing down the flight of stairs; she picked up on some strange whispering oozing through the walls. Sadly, she didn't have the time nor patience to stay another moment in this so-called palace. Without so much as saying good morning; she left the building.

The door to the outside opened, a gust of wind nearly took her hat away. Holding tightly the hat, a quick glimpse revealed the vacant streets. Most of the shops were closed apart from bars and inns.

A strange rumbling made itself known, slowly and surely, it got closer. Her car approached from the left side. The scheduling could not have been any better, with a frown on her face, Eira got inside the car and drove away.

"Would it cost you that much to say good morning?" Red spoke.

"Would it cost you that much to stay quiet?" she fired back.

"Someone is in a foul mood today." Red sarcastically added, "-I hope you realize your acting like a brat."

"Did I ask for your opinion?" She drove out of the city and made way to Claireville academy's town.

Few minutes into the drive; she realized being angry over something so childish didn't bode well either for her nor her new comrade.

"I-I a-apologize for lashing out earlier, Red."

"Don't worry about it. Anything else on your mind?"

"Wow, I'm impressed, you do have the ability to be compassionate," Eira let out a quick chuckle.

The massive C-shaped building came into view from afar. Eira passed through town without ever realizing that her father once helped people here. With the scenery blazing past, she reached the hill on which rested Claireville academy. The roads got bigger compared to the town. Out on the pavement, students were seen climbing the same hill. Some laughed, some joked around, and some held hands. They all looked rich, their uniforms practically sparkled. Paying them no attention, Eira accelerated. Everyone's breath cut short. Many of them recognized Red-fury, it was considered a national treasure – in the eyes of the Order and sorcerers anyways. The lesser people couldn't have cared any less.

The C-shaped building came into view, the massive fountain stood out. Taking a left turn, Eira parked her car. "Red, guess it's my time to go shine, please don't stand out."

"It's a bit hard, master, look outside, people are already eyeing you down. They all are curious to see who will exit this piece of jewelry."

"Don't flatter yourself, Red, I'll be back soon."

"Take care." The door opened on its own once more. "This is the place where I'm going to spend four years of my life." Eira stepped out, as opposed to wearing a fancy dress like the other nobles of her age, she wore tight pants and a buttoned-up shirt with a scarf and the black hat which she at the end left inside the car. Her style closely resembled Fenrir; a teacher, but she added a bit of her own charm to it.

There was a specific reason why she wore such an outfit, maneuverability. A few hours had gone by since she left the Pussy Palace. The sun was out and shining, the trees rattled.

Eira finally stood on the same ground Staxius once visited. Her ruby eyes closely examined everything; her guard was up. A few breaths in, she made way to the office building. Even though it was her first time here. Earlier, Red gave her a quick tour of the layout using a map they borrowed. Eira walked as gracefully as a butterfly; everyone's gaze fell onto her. That white hair and rosy cheeks of hers truly made her a snow angel. Most of the students who saw her exiting, Red, were baffled.

The majority of the nobles here couldn't even dream of affording such a vehicle. Some were jealous while others just mystified. Fondly enough, gossip spread like wildfire.

"Have you heard of the new girl who just arrived?"

"Some say she's a princess."

"Yeah, the car she rode in was one of the six of the Xerxes series."

"Don't they go for like a fortune? I last heard that one was sold off to another kingdom for ten million gold pieces."

In that same manner, gossip filled the campus, throughout the hallways, into the upper classes as well as lower classes. Eira obviously didn't know that she pulled in so much attention. She stood out like white on black. Her walk concluded when she arrived at the office building. With a deep breath, she entered. Her walk continued confidently; the director's office was in sight. Suspended by a nail and some string, a metal plate read, 'Director's office.' Three knocks followed, "enter." A deep voice answered.

"Greetings Director," she closed the door behind. The room in which she stood wasn't that big.

Bookshelves on both sides, pictures about students winning some competition hung behind the man who sat. His arms rested on the brownish table, his hair white and short accompanied by a mustache, he smiled courteously.

"Greetings to you too," his posture relaxed, "-you must be the new student who shall be joining our academy starting today. Honestly, if I had the authority to stop any mid-year transfer, I'd gladly do it. However, since the Order and some other high-end personalities have pushed forward your admission, I can't help but agree. I hope this will clear things between us."

"Excuse my rudeness Director, but I was also sent here against my own will."

"Guess that makes two of us. Sadly, we can't but accept their decision. I'm Josiah, director of this academy."

"My name is Eira," she took a quick pause. "-Eira Haggard, daughter of Staxius Haggard." She smirked. The director's face slightly turned pale, "Staxius Haggard you say, isn't that man dead? Why would you use the Haggard name, the whole kingdom knows that said name is cursed and unholy."

"Excuse me but I'd humbly ask for you to not tarnish my good father's name with your prejudice."

He did speak highly of you before sending me here and has told me to send you his regards. And yes, my father is very much alive.”

Josiah’s eyes squinted, he wasn’t fazed, rather, he was suspicious. “Is that so, do you have any proof to back that? I’ve met that boy years ago and let me tell you something, you don’t resemble him in the least.”

“I agree with you on that front, sadly, I’m not related to him by blood, however, Staxius Haggard took me in when my traitorous parents, their faces, their identity who still remains a mystery, abandoned me after enjoying the carnal pleasures. I almost forgot, father told me to tell you that I’m his prodigy. I have no clue why he would do something like that but I’ve accomplished my job.”

“I see, well then young Eira, you shall first go through the examination to determine your rank; then we’ll assign you to a class. If you would,” he got up, “-follow me.”

“That boy is still alive; I shudder to think that that monster still draws breath. Sophie, he lives.” Their walk continued; Josiah finally stopped after they reached the training hall.

“Here we are young Eira, please get in, we shall see how strong you are.” Nonchalantly, Eira walked through the door which was used as a detection device as well. A faint beep was heard, her mana capacity was evaluated, the monitor displayed B-rank. “Is that your so-called prodigy,” Josiah let out a sigh of relief. He now stood in the viewing booth that overlooked the training grounds. Eira stood dead in the center, she stretched and watched as students from all over took their seats.

“If ever things go bad, I want you to break the seal and something magical will happen. However, it’s only a one time use thing, I’ll leave it to your own discretion.” A flashback from a conversation she had with Staxius passed her mind. “No, I shall never break that seal father, I’ll make it on my own terms.”

“Eira Haggard, are you ready to start your evaluation?” With a thumbs-up, she signaled yes.

Immediately afterward, four mechs shot out the extremities of the stadium. They didn’t look that menacing but had a big S engraved on their chest. “Defeat those S-rank mechs and then I’ll allow you to stand amidst the elite.” The training dummies he had brought forth were almost never used, the highest rank a student had to fight during their evaluation was A. Gossip filled the entire stadium, “what is the director thinking?”

“S-rank isn’t possible for fourth-year student much less a beginner.”

“That’s the girl everyone has been talking about, right?” A guy bearing blond hair spoke. “Yes, that’s her, the one who drove in with one of the Xerxes car series. This will show her, her place among the pecking order. An unknown noble like her shouldn’t be allowed to even transfer during

this time of year.” A girl beside him spoke in turn, she bore red hair.

“Don’t you think S-rank is a bit too much, the first years can’t even hope to fight against a D-rank much less A. And us third-year students must use all our reserves just to scratch that bloody A-rank. She’s definitely going to die; the director is insane.”

The door to the viewing booth broke open, “uncle, what the hell are you thinking?”

“Shut up and watch, I’m not doing this out of spite. If that girl is truly the daughter of the man I know, then this will be a piece of cake. After all, there’s only one student in the whole history of Claireville academy who single-handedly took down an SSS-rank mech, and this girl right there is his prodigy as well as her daughter.”

“You don’t mean that boy, do you? The one who you’ve constantly ailed me about for the longest time.” With a big smile on his face, Josiah nodded.

The mech took their fighting stance, Eira stood in the middle, her breathing became more controlled. “Father, my journey starts today, thanks for teaching me even though you weren’t here.”

With eyes burning with flames as dense as the void itself, Eira held a grin. *Shadow element activate; Shadow-step.*

[Chapter 57](#)

Eira’s battle

All the training dummies before beginning the test stopped momentarily. Confused; the crowd of students who had filled half of the stadium divided into two factions. One shouted in anger and animosity towards the new girl for she was deemed a nuisance by prejudice. The other half of the student body let a sigh of relief for she didn’t want the girl to get hurt. The side who was against Eira did so out of spite because the established hierarchy among the student would topple over. As she owned one of the Xerxes series cars, her standing would shoot up and reach the same level as daughters and sons of marquess and dukes – and even going toe to toe with royalty. Naturally, that faction was small compared to the others who supported her. Rather, they seemed to rejoice this change, an unknown noble going against the egotistical upper nobility.

This sudden stop in movement caused an uproar, the cacophonous chatter among students came to a halt when the director spoke. “I gravely apologize for stopping your momentum. I know full well that your glaring to fight, however, as custom follows, I’m obliged to ask if you would like any weapons. Battle-mages who use weapons and magic together isn’t something new, and it’s not surprising to see up and coming students training in martial arts or swordplay. Thus, my reason for pausing your assessment, do you wish to equip yourself with a weapon?” The transmission stopped.

Eira stood in the middle and stared at the director right in his eyes through the one-way mirror. Shocked, the director slightly stepped back. She smiled and agreed. Soon after, beside her, a table filled with various weapons emerged out of the ground. Even though the mechs were on standby mode, Eira constantly held her guard up. In front of her, weapons: a gun, a rifle, swords of various size and length, daggers and fondly enough, darts. Amidst the plethora of swords, the biggest one present was one as tall and if not taller than her, a great-sword, the blade seemed dusty, no one had ever used it. The other swords, on the other hand, had wear and tear, some chipped, while others coated with dried up blood. Said great black sword stood out, it was impressive but no one could efficiently use it.

“What is taking so long, can’t she just choose one already.” The blond boy spoke impatiently.

“Shut up, and watch.” The red-haired girl lashed out, her curiosity was peaked.

“She’s just scared,”

“COME ON, CHOOSE ONE.” The students began to get agitated – screaming and yelling followed.

“Uncle, isn’t this taking a bit too much?”

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“Worry not, that girl knows what she’s doing. To the untrained eye, it may seem like she’s just wasting time, don’t let that deceive you. Look at her fingers, she’s speaking to the weapons; choosing which will serve her best. She’s going to pick the great-sword, I can practically guarantee it.” A grin resurfaced from the always stern face of Josiah. It had been a long time since his heart throbbed this way, students come and go, but someone resembling Staxius had finally reappeared.

“That great-sword isn’t fit for battle, we’ve ordered the guards to remove it from the table.” The lady snarled. “-It’s just too heavy and cumbersome, I think your age has caught up to you, uncle.”

“Students, please quiet down,” Josiah spoke. The crowd whose noise invaded the whole premise around them finally died down. Said disturbance brought in even more viewers. This was the first time that an assessment had grown so popular.

“Out of this bunch, I choose you.” Her finger came to a halt on the handle of one of the swords.

“-you’ve laid to rest for too long.” Her eyes closed; her concentration heightened. “Just like master

Alyson always told me, it’s not the man who chooses the weapon but it’s the weapon who chooses the man. Hence, you, great-sword, I hear your plea, I hear your frustrations; you want to fight, and today is the day you will fight.” With one fell swoop, she took the sword by the handle with one hand and plunged it inside the ground beside her.

“I choose this one,” she mumbled to the director.

Silence befell the entire stadium, no one had ever used that sword, and seeing a girl so frail in stature use it as if it were nothing put a lock on the lips of those who badmouthed her. “Excellent,” the smile grew bigger, “may the gods be with you.” *Beep,* in the heat of the moment, he slammed the switch. The eyes of the mech turned on and the table disappeared. A force-field automatically got conjured.

“Time to dance,” she smiled. The mechs surrounding her were the same, nothing stood out in particular. After the initialization was completed, the signal to start was given. *Whoosh,* dirt lifted, and all four mechs began to run around her in circles. The speed at which they ran wasn’t at max velocity, their engine still needed to be warmed up. *Bang,* a fireball spell landed right next to her, one of the bots began casting fire magic. She didn’t move an inch, instead, she observed calmly. *Bam, bam,* another two spell landed, this time they were aimed correctly at her. One was of

lightning element and the other of wind.

“UNCLE, DIDN’T THOSE SPELL JUST HIT HER?”

“HAHA, WRONG,” he laughed out loud.

The spell hit but she dodged it so fast that normal perception didn’t catch it. Finally, the last bot launched its attack, the ground froze. “Time to fight,” grabbing the sword, her sight befell the bot using ice-magic. *Clang, clang,* the sword bounced off the heavy armor of said mech. They weren’t S-rank for

nothing as they were hard to slice through. Baffled, she retreated but was ambushed by the lightning element bot who cast lightning bolts. Her body temporarily paralyzed; her nervous system got hit. Unable to move, the fire and wind element mechs combined their spells and launched the raging inferno spell. A combination spell that could boil water just by being a few feet away. The ice ground melted; a puddle of water formed. She still stood paralyzed; the lightning bolt used said water to launch another attack. Water is a good conductor of electricity and her body took more damage.

The combination of spells didn't stop there, the onslaught continued. Still unable to move, young Eira knelt with her hands still on the handle. The battle was over in the eyes of the students; however, it was all planned. Before the director could use the radio and ask if she gave up, she screamed, "Don't underestimate me." The fire which slightly burnt, blazed up. Her breathing regained control, the bots surrounding her all lunged for the final blow. *Shadow element, flash-step.* She vanished, the bots simultaneously stopped and looked around rapidly, their UI scanned the arena over and over again.

Eira reappeared and continued to fight, her attacks made contact but didn't do much damage. In the end, it was her body who took those impacts instead, using magic was an option but having chosen a weapon; she could not betray it. For the next ten minutes, she fought, swing after swing, slice after slice, not a single dent. The sword grew heavier by the second, the bots grew faster. Dodging spells and parrying attacks became harder. Everyone present got enchanted by how she fought, her will, her resilience. They grew to respect her, however, defeating said bots was impossible, they all accepted her attempt but with results like that, she couldn't hope to join Claireville academy. The upper nobility laughed at her, the other quietly watched as she desperately swung with no grace nor fineness. She looked like an amateur swordswoman; the people who practiced martial arts grew to be offended.

They all shook their heads in disappointment. Her breathing got out of control, Eira gasped for air.

Her vision grew blurry. The amount of spell she had to take upfront wasn't even something to laugh at. Her clothes were ruined as tears began to form, her face grew to be bloody. At that moment, everything stopped, something wasn't right.

"Impossible," she wiped her bloodied forehead, "-I'm not this weak. This isn't possible, I've fought stronger opponents, I even won against auntie Alyson once. Is it the sword? Am I being burdened and held back by this piece of junk? No wonder no one chooses you," with a look of contempt, she stared the weapon. Behind her, the ice-mech lunged at her with an ice-spike. "I guess, I'm going to be defeated."

"The swordsman doesn't choose his weapon but it's the weapon who chooses the swordsman. If you try to tame something that has a will of its own, you will never reach my level; let alone Staxius's. Trust in what I've taught you, swordplay is simple, all that you need is rhythm, natural flow, and trust in the weapon you're wielding. At the end of the day, your life lays to rest in said weapon, don't force the invisible. After all, what if one day someone came, you placed your trust in him but in the end, he just discards you like trash. How would you feel?"

Eira's white hair slowly turned into a crimson color thanks to all the blood coming out her head. "I've been a fool, I apologize, a bad workman blames his tool, and I've been doing the same." Her reflexes heightened once more, the red hair made her look like a whole new person. Her ego had caused her to underestimate mages in general, but this battle had taught her how far she really must go to stand

beside Staxius. Knelt, her head rose, the bot behind her was in striking distance. "Give me your strength, great sword." As if responding to her will, the blade that once looked dusty shone as brightly as the sun. She turned around, her movement changed, her aura was one of a different person. After her body faced the mech who approached so close, a gentle swing sliced her opponents' body clean in half.

"WHAT JUST HAPPENED?" the battle arena felt as if it shook. Everyone held their breath; the once snow angel had turned into the crimson princess. That strike proved to be the beginning of something new. Her stance changed, she now fought more gracefully, the bots held their own.

Dodging, blocking, attacking, all you could hear was the sound of metal on metal. Then came the spells, the mech's eyes brightly lit. Their fighting stance had changed to overdrive. More powerful spells were released, it happened so fast that only smoke was seen. The bots had grown more

powerful as well, the battle raged on. With her newfound strength, she still couldn't keep up with all three mechs whose velocity seemed to only increase. S-rank truly was on another level.

Bam, an explosion rattled the force-field that in turn flickered. Emerging from one side, Eira was sent flying, she had hidden her body behind the giant sword. The one responsible for such a powerful attack was the wind-mech. With the help of the fire-mech, it conjured a fireball that exploded on impact. Thus, her sword took the blunt force instead of her. The wall came close too fast, in desperation, she plunged the sword into the ground and came to a halt after carving out part of the stadium.

"I can't believe Staxius won against an SSS-rank mech, these guys are monsters. I'm out of strength already, trying to stop that blow took everything out of me. There's nothing much more I can do, but I must win against these guys. I'll have to use it, the move I've been trying to master since aunt Alyson showed it to me."

For an instant, all three mechs lined up perfectly, the time was perfect. Eira's stance changed, from a standing position, she placed the sword on her left side. She held it as if it was sheathed. It was the lightning-strike stance, Alyson's most powerful attack.

Shadow element: Unleash aura, her eyes' blurriness shut close, all she saw was the dark abyss.

She put everything she had on a move she hadn't mastered. "Lightning strike, shadow-variant, please work." Her concentration maxed out, with her eyes closed, the outline of three bodies lit as brightly as fire. *Shadow-strike,* her eyes wide open.

Whoosh, the ground behind her cracked, the force by which she propelled herself was unbelievable.

AHHHHHHH she yelled, the three mechs lined up. *Clang, clang, clang.* From one end of the stadium, she ended on the other. Within her hand, only the handle remained. The sword's blade broke, it laid to rest behind her. They had stopped moving. Three loud noise broke the now silent room. It was the mechs, they were cleanly sliced through.

"YAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH," the students screamed indiscriminately, after watching such a battle, they were thoroughly entertained. They cheered, with her crimson hair flowing as the wind blew by her. The arm in which she held the handle rose, applause was heard. Josiah was left baffled. "S-she a-actually did it." He spoke, "-unbelievable."

“Your evaluation has been carried out; sadly, your rank will be assigned after we review the footage. Students, please return to your classroom. The lady beside the director, who was still stuck in amazement, spoke instead. The force-field lowered, the upper nobility scowled and headed back to their classrooms.

“She’s worthy to stand among us, don’t you agree, President?”

“Indeed, no need to say that twice.”

Barely able to stand upright, Eira fell to her knees. She held the broken blade tightly to her chest,

“thank you for believing in me, I’ll never forget you.” As if saying goodbye, it gleamed and turned to dust. She now sat, her eyes lifeless, her gaze turned to the blue sky.

“No need to threat, that sword was going to be thrown out. Thanks to you, that sword, who for years now looked for a decent fight finally had its wishes granted. Thank you young Eira.” Josiah spoke while he approached her.

“You know, I’ve regretted my actions in the past, your father was the only student who dared to do the impossible. Not to forget your grandfather either, I guess that’s the beauty of the teachings of Tempest Haggard. I’m glad you came here; this year will be the year our school shines once more.” Not realizing everything he said fell on deaf ears, Josiah continued his speech. Meanwhile, Eira heard nothing of it, she fell asleep. Her strength was drained, but she managed to make history; just like her father.

[Chapter 58](#)

Avon

The once filled stadium began emptying out. The order to go back to class was given. Some were joyous while others were angry; everyone headed out. The evaluation match had instantly placed Eira onto the list of most powerful sorcerers at school. With that came the attention of some rather strange and mysterious students; namely, the student council. Josiah kept on giving a long and tedious speech. As his eyes were closed and had enclosed himself in his thoughts, he didn’t realize that Eira was taken away. Barely able to stand, the middle-aged lady bearing glasses helped her get up. They soon headed to the hospital. As she passed through the hallways and ended outside; everyone kept on staring at her. Someone who had the power to defy the school’s hierarchy had just arrived. The crimson hair turned pale once again, the blood began to disappear thanks to the lady who carried her. She used water magic to wash Eira’s wounds and bloodstains; a lady should not stay in such a pitiful state.

“And this is why you must train hard to be able to participate in the inter-magical tournament.” Josiah’s long dialogue ended. Eira was nowhere to be seen; instead of getting mad – he shrugged and went back to his office. Preparation for Eira’s rank assignment became a priority, after all, she defeated four S-ranked Mechs. It was obvious that she was going to join the top-class in the first year, which is A-rank. However, her display of strength had shown that she’s way above the first years in terms of mastery and power. It surpassed the second and third years but putting her in fourth year which is basically trainee-battle mages wasn’t an option. She had talent, and had the strength to back it up; only way she could reach her true potential was to train under a mage and becoming an apprentice. However, since the war ended; most mages were sent back to the main continent as ordered by the Order.

Josiah now sat inside his office; his chair faced away from the desk. It was unusual, normally he would be head's deep into work: signing, reading, writing, and disapproving projects proposed by instructors and students alike. "Eira's results far exceeds anything I had hoped. You truly are Staxius's prodigy. I'm growing old now, my family, my daughters have now been married to dukes and princes. I've lived a fulfilling life. Sadly, I regret not having an heir to pass down the knowledge I've acquired as a fellow sorcerer. I may be retired now, but I was once someone powerful. The arcane holds no mystery to me and I wish to give someone this gift; someone worthy, someone whose conviction is never changing." As he reflected; an image appeared from seemingly nowhere, it was Eira's. "Is that so? Very well." He spoke. "-someone worthy has indeed appeared, Eira Haggard, I've decided to make you my apprentice. This is the only way I can atone for deceiving my niece and nephew so long ago."

Meanwhile, directly opposite her, Staxius awoke. Time was now noon, the same time Eira won her first battle. A feeling of burning came from within; this, in turn, broke his slumber. The eyes desperately tried to focus, however, the blinding sunlight had made said task harder. It squinted, not wanting to open, the battle to wake up was one hard-fought. In the end, Staxius won.

"Status update, Void." He ordered as his window rolled down. Outside, the noble district was insight. The ground leading there was much better compared to the whole of Dorchester. The path was made of stone bricks arranged meticulously. Along the edges, grass, and trees. Plants actually grew here, the soil seemed healthy for you see, grass and other plants grew around the town. The scenery changed, from a desert to this town which looked like an oasis. Oxshield's border was close, but a ravine separated both provinces. The town itself now was distinguishable. The tallest building present at first glance was the church, or what appeared like it; surely it was a church for the Krestonian holy crest overlooked everything. The district was surrounded by a mild high stone wall that looked extravagant. The wall surrounding this place was probably worth more than castle Garsley's weekly cost. The craftsmanship was to intricate for an accurate description. Each stone brick was perfectly placed, like a giant puzzle made of millions of pieces, each different yet placed harmoniously to give out a design that signaled nobility. The stone path led up to the iron gates, in which the noble crest of each inhabitant was engraved atop. Said gate remained closed. As he examined everything about such a magnificent place, the status report was complete.

"Status report; nothing out of the ordinary. A mild fluctuation in mana has been detected coming from within the town; mana's identity and type are unknown for even I. Also, there is a faint trace of mana being used for healing purposes detected, the user is at his limits. Only a few hours remain before said mage's mana is emptied. Threat level E-rank."

"Void, you're amazing." Staxius's eyes gleamed with astonishment and pride.

"I do as I'm told, master, there's nothing impressive about it. Or rather, I should say, I'm impressed by your strength, something so potent and dense in a human's body – you make me look like an ant as opposed to you, an elephant."

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"Don't flatter me that much, you see, an ant can take down an elephant – hence, overestimating or underestimating your opponent is never a good idea. It makes you subconsciously lower your guard if

you underestimate the enemy. Or makes you frightened if you overestimate said adversary. You have an auto-drive function, right?"

"Yes, and how may I be of further service?"

"I do wonder. If you can use magic, and if you're a spirit as you say you are, can't we form a bond?"

"I'm afraid not, master, for you see, my soul and spirit have been emptied and trapped inside this vehicle. Forming a blood contract isn't possible – hence I require your mana to survive."

"You say your soul is trapped. Do you wish to be free?" Staxius asked seriously, his mind had come up with an unusual plan.

"Yes, I want to be free from this vehicle but it will serve no purpose if I'm set free. The car might never work again."

"Is that only it? You worry about the car not working; foolish spirit, I care not for such a piece of junk. As expensive and valuable as you are, your soul is worth far more to me." The eyes turned blank; he had decided to set the spirit free.

"Void's spirit is bounded to the car, it's under a strong imprisonment spell covered by other seals.

The scholar really did a number on Void, to restrain it so much must mean his powerful. Void did say, his soul has been emptied and trapped, didn't he? I got it, its simple, scholars, you can't beat me yet." A memory was triggered; the hall of rebirth, the first time he was transported there. Undrar held the answer to this quandary.

"Undrar..." he tried calling her over the telepathic link they held since the adventure began. A few tries later, "-what is it?" she replied annoyingly.

"Someone's frustrated now isn't she."

"Why have you used the telepathic link, I'm in the middle of answering mother nature's call, can't you be any more discrete." She fired back with her cheeks red.

"I apologize for interrupting, but I need your help."

Desperate, Undrar crossed her legs and gritted her teeth; she didn't want to make any noise even though Staxius couldn't hear anything. "Go ahead, speak." Her eyes grew wide open, she now bit her lips.

"Remember the first time I called out and asked for someone to take me to my master, the death reaper?"

"Yes, and what of it." Her speech grew in speed.

"You extracted my soul and..." Staxius knew what was going on, instead of going faster, he began to speak slowly and paused. He wanted to see Undrar suffer, playfully of course.

"AND WHAT, I'M GOING TO EXPLODE HERE." She screamed.

"I do wish I could see your face, but here, let me help, psssss." Hearing that noise, she broke, her eyes relaxed, her whole body in fact. She couldn't hold it any longer.

"You disgusting little..." Staxius changed his tone, he toyed with her further.

"Honestly, why don't you crawl up a wall and let me smash you with my heels." Her tone filled with anger. "Whatever, what do you really want?" she laughed instead, Staxius had always been like this; things never change, it brought a smile on her face.

"Alright, back to my question. Remember when you extracted my soul?"

"Yes, I do, and what of it?"

"Well, is there a way I can do it? I have to free a spirit bound by soul as well as seals and contracts."

"I mean, it depends, but breaking seals, contracts and soul bound is normally simple and easy if you're a high enough mage. No matter how complicated and thick a lock is, if you have something that can melt said lock, it's straight forward. Your mana and strength act as the heat to melt said chains. And yeah, you can use it, the bringer of death's specialty. After all, you're my master, reason goes to show that you can do whatever I can, that's all. If you want the spell, I'll recite it directly, just place your hand on whatever you're trying to set free and repeat after me." For a moment, Staxius's mouth began to move independently, something had taken over it. The right palm rested on the dashboard.

Immortal yet mortal, I, Staxius, master of the bringer of death, order thee to leave thy mortal vessel and follow me, soul-extraction.

"M-master... w-what h-have y-you done... Error... Spirit h-has b-been u-unbound." The car's interior began to heat up. All the notifications began to flicker, it worked. The engine began to scream, it felt as if it was crying out for help, everything felt weird and painful. As the heat grew

unbearable, Staxius jumped through the already opened window. A strange humming grew louder and louder. Curiosity befell him, instead of helping, he watched as the spirit's soul got released. A

black mist, as black as the night slowly hovered above the car. It was Void, the spirit had been set free, the mist grew denser; it changed into a cloud. Finally, after a few seconds, the sound grew so

loud, Staxius had to cover up his ears. The same cloud began floating and hovered over to the unsuspecting Staxius. A snap was heard, the car fell silent, the mist disappeared. It morphed into a humanoid shape; a figure stepped out of it.

"Greetings Master," a young boy appeared. Compared to Staxius, he was short, his hair was long and tied in the same fashion as him; a ponytail. The eyes grey and complexion fair as snow. The hair color was of a light brown shade. The nose small and pointy, he looked more like a girl than a boy, confused; Staxius stared intently.

"P-please, is t-there something wrong?" He asked as the way he moved felt feminine.

"Void, is that you?" Staxius asked eagerly.

"Y-yes," he shyly looked around trying to avoid Staxius's gaze.

“God damn it,” Staxius moved closer and patted his head. “-you look more like a girl than a boy, Void. Talk about anticlimactic, I thought you were going to be like some demon, but instead, you look like the kind of boy I must protect; a little brother. Don’t judge a book by its cover.” He shook his head in amusement.

“S-sorry?” he whimpered.

“Stop it,” Staxius chuckled, “-talk about being a powerful spirit.” He laughed out loud.

“B-but I am powerful,” Void pouted, his voice broke. Staxius’s laugh got more intense, he could not believe it, all that talk about not wanting emotions and there he was dying of laughter which was, in fact, an emotion. This man named Staxius Haggard was an enigma even the gods could not solve.

“Alright, alright, you’re powerful.” His laughter stopped.

“Void, is that your name or do you have something else?”

“As a spirit, I don’t have a name,” he looked away out of spite and crossed the arms defiantly. “Void, you’re a bundle of joy, aren’t you?” Staxius faced the car.

“How does Avon sound? Much better than Void I’m guessing.” Hearing the name Avon, Void’s eyes sparkled, it had stars running around it. Staxius quickly glimpsed back, saw the eyes, faced away and laughed. He could not believe it; this was the guy named Void; a spirit who was deemed too strong so many seals had to be put in place.

“Avon, can you please check if you can still control the car,” Staxius composed himself.

“On it,” he girlishly ran back and desperately tried to open the door. After trying a couple of times, he gave up and slowly stared back at Staxius with puppy eyes. Staxius had enough, it was too much.

Unwilling to give into laughter he looked up and fought against his mouth which began to grin.

“Damn it,” he sighed, a few breaths in, he calmed down.

“I guess your mana is empty,” the door opened.

“Yes, that’s definitely the reason for my lack of strength,” Avon spoke confidently.

“Alright, move along and see if the car works.” Like clockwork, the moment Avon entered the car, it turned on. It was still linked to him; this, in turn, put another question in Staxius’s mind. “Please step out of the car, Avon.” He requested courteously; his personality changed to match Avon’s. “Now what?” Avon asked, confused to why he was standing in the glaring heat.

“Try and start auto-drive,” Staxius asked gently.

“Try what? I should, by all means, be inside for that to work.” He pouted.

“Do it,” unfaltering, Staxius stared out the left window. “-need an invitation?” He added sarcastically.

“Fine,” Avon accepted. Just like Staxius predicted, the car drove forward. “Alright, come in already.” Both Staxius and Avon sat in the hot car, the interior hadn’t cooled down from the earlier spell.

“Any other orders master?”

“Yes, in fact, re-scan the district once more and pin-point me the locations where you sensed the other people’s mana.” Obediently, Avon closed his eyes and scanned the area. As the heat grew uncomfortable once more, Staxius stepped out and continued to eye down the district. There was something strangely appealing coming from the crest on the church. It felt like it was calling out to him, reaching out. It wanted to be acknowledged.

“Scan is complete, please step in for I have got their location right here.”

[Chapter 59](#)

The noble district

The walk to the car ended abruptly; a strange noise or rather a strange feeling was felt. A quick glance towards Avon’s face said it all. Staxius was just as confused as Avon. “M-master,” he quickly waved and signaled for Staxius to get inside. Desperate as well as curious, he rushed in. “Status update,” Staxius asked while getting ready to drive.

“I’ve got no idea, it feels like magic or something like it, it’s throbbing, the mana it’s pulsing; like a beating heart. This is the first time I’ve sensed anything like this. Normally, only humans can release such pulsations – it happens when a person turns into a mage and accesses their inner mana reserves; otherwise referred to as Soul-Tap. It happens only once in a person’s lifetime and lasts about two seconds at most. Sadly, this pulsation feels different, it’s continuous and has a wild nature to it; almost like a wild animal. The more I feel it, the more I get chills sent down my spine. Master, we might have found the reason why there are people hiding inside and using healing magic.”

“So you’ve made that connection too.” He added with a little tone of confidence. “There’s no reason why people should be hiding let alone using healing magic in an abandoned town. Whatever that pulsation you and I sense is weird but familiar.”

“W-what d-do you mean familiar?” Avon asked with his eyes sparkling with curiosity and gleam.

“It happened many years ago, I fought a beast so powerful that I still have vivid flashbacks to that whole ordeal. In the end, I won the battle but lost the war, let’s not go into more detail. Point is, I’ve sensed something like this before.” He gave out a sigh.

“W-what d-do we d-do now?” Avon asked as his fist tightened.

“No need to get worked up. First of all, I need you to write the location of the people in distress’s location on my palm, using a paper will take the time we can’t afford to lose. Also, give me an estimate of how much time I have left.” Obediently, Avon did what he was told too, touching Staxius’s hand made him jumpy but that was part of his charm. Seeing how he struggled, Staxius

could not but smile and forget whatever trial awaited him behind those closed iron gates.

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“Done,” he smiled proudly as the map he drew was clean, immaculate, and not to mention, scarily accurate. “Anything else?” The sparkly eyes stared up. “Job well done,” Staxius patted his head as compensation. “Do you have any blank magic scroll?”

“Yes, Master, we do have magic scrolls and they are indeed blank. What do you need them for?” Avon asked, this time he was skeptical, what could a mere unlicensed sorcerer do with scrolls. Logic says that only a master of high education, ones who’ve devoted their lives to magic and its secrets can properly utilize such a piece of equipment. He’s doubt was correct for he didn’t know Staxius for long.

“Avon, why do you ask such frivolous questions, hand me the scrolls and you shall see.” His tone deepened, it began to reach that emotionless and serious state he used when things got desperate.

“O-ok,” unwillingly, he handed over the papers which costs a hundred gold piece each.

With eyes closed, right hand holding a pen, and the paper laying to rest on the dashboard next to the steering wheel, he let out a sigh. “I can’t possibly hope to use healing magic, it’s beyond the capability of the death element and dark-arts. I’m here to fight and destroy and not to mend.

However, don’t forget that I’ve spent years of my childhood in the company of the greatest sorcerer who walked this country; my father. Time to put this knowledge to use.” The aura changed, the interior of the car felt heavy, Avon struggled to breathe. It felt as if the void had been summoned.

Staxius mumbled something at a very fast pace, his hand grew to match that speed, on the scroll, it began to light up. With every stroke, the pen felt as if it spewed out fire. A pentagram drew itself, ancient writings began to fill the empty spaces and done. Everything went back to normal, “alright, time to head into town.” Staxius spoke nonchalantly.

“Master,” Avon stared intently. “What is it?” Staxius asked while the car turned on.

“Did you just create a spell...” His voice trailed off on the last word.

“Yes, and what of it?” The car drove forward, the scenery began to move faster by the second.

“Just who the heck are you? You’ve made a spell so complicated that I, a spirit of unknown origin can’t even decipher.”

Shadow Variant, Fireball. An explosion followed soon after, the gate broke open, and Staxius drove in. Oblivious to what was happening, Avon remained intent on getting an answer. “Avon, I’ll tell you all about it later, for now, I want you to take this scroll and head to where the injured is.” Without realizing it, Avon now stood in front of a mansion, the exact one where healing magic was being used. A thunderous sound broke his day-dream, Staxius drove away to where the pulsing mana emanated from.

“...” Few breaths in, “I give up, the one who freed me is someone I’ll never figure out.” Without paying much attention to the surrounding, he opened the giant wooden door, in which the crest of the family who owned this property was engraved on it; a sunflower. The door opened, a layer of dust resting for god know how long arose. Part of it escaped into the wild. In front of him stood an empty hall. Quickly following behind, a door directly opposite the entrance and two stairways going up. Everything was covered with layers of dust and cobwebs. It felt heavy and tedious, but Avon pushed through, his vision grew tighter, the only thing in his mind was following the order Staxius gave him.

The location from where the mana was being used came from upstairs. As he slowly and carefully climbed the stairs, in the railing, traces of blood were spotted. Fingerprints, multiple footsteps left on the floor thanks to the layer of dust. Following said trail of blood, Avon arrived on the first floor.

Immediately, on the right, a single hallway headed deeper inside. Facing the opening, the hallway continued further on the left side as opposed to the right which held a window and a small table.

The footprint continued inside, there were four in total, which meant two people were here.

Slowly but surely, as quietly as he possibly could, Avon eased his way near the door left ajar. All the footprint headed inside. Breathing was heard, one panting while the other one muffled. Curious, he tried sneaking a peak. The moment his head turned to look inside, a knife shot out. With both hands, as if clapping, Avon stopped the blade masterfully and rushed inside. The door fully opened, everything slowed down – two people laid down, one badly injured, and one of a girl. It was said girl who threw the knife, it was apparent, her posture was facing the door. Her mana was practically

empty. “Stop, I come as a friend.” Avon moved too fast – he vanished. He now stood behind the girl who fainted. She had exhausted her strength, her blond hair laid to rest, her rosy cheeks felt brighter.

The injured man coughed blood, his stomach was gravely injured. Amazingly, he was conscious. “W-who a-are you?” the tone monotonous, his face held no emotions. “I doubt you come as a friend, but please leave this place, a beast roams the place outside – he is going to come soon, the bloodlust on that monster is demonic.” Avon chuckled before the warning, “I come as a friend, and you don’t have to worry about that beast, my master is on his way to end whatever pursues you.”

Adamant, he continued, “you don’t understand, t-that beast d-defeated me, an A-rank sorcerer. Even with the help of my little sister here, defeating it was but a fantasy. Everything is growing dark, I t-think It’s the end for me...”

“Stop with the dramatics,” Avon casually interrupted him. With an effortless motion, he unrolled the scroll and placed it onto the man’s injuries. *Snap,* the scroll activated and both the man and the girl were healed. Said scroll worked so well that his injuries regenerated. The mana they both had lost partly got filled, it was enough for them to wake up and sit up straight.

“Who are you?” As soon as the blond girl awoke, she rushed behind Avon. Sadly, that didn’t work, he vanished once more and reappeared behind the girl. “Calm down sister, that man there or rather that spirit saved us. Even if you managed to hit him, you can’t kill someone immortal.” She scowled and sat near her brother. “Mind telling me what you’re doing here?” The man asked rather forcefully.

“I don’t know where your confidence is coming from, but using that tone against me isn’t going to affect me in the slightest,” Avon replied courteously.

“I guess you can’t fool a spirit, now can you?” he sighed. “Fine, why are you here?” I mean, how does a spirit like you end up in a place like this?”

“Oh, I’m a spirit contracted to the mage who’s now outside looking for whatever beast you fought.”

“A spirit contracted to a mage, now that is something that rarely happens. Aren’t you magical being supposed to be so powerful that you overlook us mere humans?”

“Yes, normally that is the case but I’ve found myself someone who’s pretty interesting.”

“And is it by choice that you use said tone of voice and girlish appearance? Do you want people to underestimate you – because I can sense strength oozing out.”

“Impressive, I didn’t think you’d be able to sense mana of such purity, well then boy, I was wrong about you. Now then, isn’t it time for us to acquaint ourselves with each other.”

“Before we start, are you sure you don’t want to help that mage outside? He may die...”

“Not really, I’ll just end up standing in his way. Now then, I’m Avon.”

“I’m Duke Julius Garnet, and this lovely quiet girl here is my beloved little sister, Autumn Garnet, a B-rank mage.”

“Now, would you please explain to me why you’re hiding out in the noble district?”

“That is of no consequence, it was nothing malicious – we were on our way to the capital when this beast attacked us, and we fought, day and night, we fought until we reached this abandoned town. We managed to get away but I was gravely injured in the process, and had to hide here for god knows how long.”

“Quite the quandary,” Avon added nonchalantly.

“Avon, if I may ask, who is the mage you’re contracted too?” Autumn spoke, her voice wavering from fatigue.

“Oh, that’s a question I don’t have the answer for, my master is someone peculiar, to say the least, but for now, you should rest.”

Outside, having ditched the car near the entrance, Staxius ran up and down the roads and alleyways tracing with all his might the pulsating aura. Near the upper end of the district, close to the town square, he caught a glimpse of the beast. Its appearance hidden with a dark mist, it fed on some unlucky maid left behind by the nobles. “I’ve found you,” he slowly walked closer. A big growl was heard, the monster faced around, eyes filled with murderous intent, it got ready to pounce. “How lovely, you’re a wolf.”

Both opponents stared at each other, the wolf with gray fur and a rather large stature stood ready; it waited. The same went for Staxius, he slowly reached for the sheathed sword. “Let’s dance,” the wolf jumped, the first strike came from the right. Effortlessly, he stepped to the left and parried the sharp claws. Having missed the first strike, it followed up with a strike from the other paw, and yet again, Staxius parried and dodged to the other side. Frustrated, the wolf howled and charged Staxius from out of nowhere. Caught off-guard, he tried to block but was too late, he was thrown back a few meters. “That was foolish of me,” he tried regaining composure, but the wolf was right on him. Another strike from the claws pierced Staxius’s body and impaled him onto the ground. “Damn it hurts,” the wolf began tearing him apart. “What just happened? Hold up, I don’t feel anything.” It clicked, “bloody illusionist magic.” *Unleash Aura,* the illusion spell broke. He awoke, and the wolf jumped and was in striking distance. The sword sheathed, he half-heartedly took the lightning strike stance and slashed the wolf’s head clean off its body as it got closer.

“Illusion magic, I guess even I was fooled, but how can an animal use magic.” The body of the wolf began to burn away. “That’s not a wolf...” He stared as the carcass faded into nothingness. For something living to just vanish like that was unbelievable, there was some other force working behind the scene. Paying no mind to what just happened, he walked back to where Avon was. Little did he know that this was the first of many encounters, the world had begun to change. Throughout Hidros, the monster just like the

one he fought, much stronger in comparison were going to be born, the fated day where the whole kingdom changed was soon to come. The birth of the new god-slayer or commonly known in legend as, the demon-king. A being so powerful even gods are no match for him, hence the god-slayer title.

The walk towards the house ended quickly. "Avon, I sense someone approaching." Julius stood up and conjured purgatory flames, the strongest spell he had, a mixture of fire and lightning magic. Meanwhile Autumn conjured five fireballs. "Please keep your animosity in check." Avon tried warning them but it fell on deaf ears. The footsteps grew closer, Avon backed away. Staxius walked right into the room, *PURGATORY FLAMES,* *FIREBALLS,* both spells were released. "What is this?" *Dark-arts, Mana cancellation.* The spell stopped them from using mana but their spells were already released. The attack headed his way, *Dark-arts, magical barrier.* An explosion rattled the room, heavy smoke rose from where he stood.

"Avon... did you not tell them I was coming?" Staxius nonchalantly walked through the fog. Instead of replying, Avon closed his eyes and smiled. Ignoring whoever stood before him, Staxius made way to Avon and patted his head.

"B-brother... t-that man j-just b-blew off our a-attacks like it was nothing." Autumn's mind was baffled.

"I-it c-can't be... t-that p-ponytail, t-that c-cold aura." Julius recognized it, the aura of an old friend, the mannerism, the way he ignored things not worth his attention. "E-excuse me b-but a-are you S-Staxius H-Haggard?"

With a grin on his face, "yes, that's me. Long-time no see, Julius."

[Chapter 60](#)

A bond

The wind grew cold, the weather changed from sunny to gloomy. Behind, overlooking Frostrest as well as Rotten Thicket; Brisnet heights with its always snowy peak. The clouds seem persistent, the sun felt weak and powerless. Everything seemed sadder and more depressing. The village of Frostrest had just been warned by the silver guardians. It had only been a few hours since the main unit arrived with trucks and supplies. Fenrir, on the other hand, had made it there before everyone, convincing the villagers was a hard battle. Though, in the end, they complied. The village had begun to break down, food got scares and most of the youth either got killed during the war or fled towards Kreston. Elders and kids stayed behind for they were burdens; and in turn, made surviving harder. Elders are weak and feeble while kids are innocent and naive and not to mention clueless. After careful persuasion, Annet, the always cheerful and friendly sister out of the bunch managed to win over their hearts.

It only happened due to Ayleth scouting further into the forest. There, with the help of Fenrir, they located what appeared to be scouts from the Krestonian army as the holy crest brightly shone on their chest plate. In the heat of the moment, Ayleth carefully killed and dispatched a small platoon of five soldiers. After bringing back whatever the unfortunate souls had in their possession – the villagers were convinced. The order to pack everything of value was given. At last, after hours of waiting that felt like centuries – the trucks with Adelana and Alyson arrived. Thus the extraction begun, children were given priority and then came the elderly. The total count reached around thirty.

The truck was filled as everyone got on for the exception of one man. The elder, the village leader, the one who took Staxius in so many years ago, the man who miraculously draws breath. The years didn't do him any favors for he lost the ability to speak, though that didn't stop him from leading everyone. The last words given to Adelana after she desperately tried to pursue him is, "it's better to burn away than to fade away." He was adamant about staying even though the village was going to turn into a mini-warzone. With the pressure of the evacuation weighing heavy on her mind, Adelana called in a meeting.

"We've been lucky so far, the evacuation is going at a favorable pace. We should be able to depart in less than an hour. How's the status of the Kreston army?" She looked at Ayleth.

"I've slain the scouts, that didn't stop them from marching. Traversing the forest is going to be hard on foot. I doubt they are going to walk into Dorchester, they probably have armored vehicles who are ravaging everything as we speak." Ayleth voiced her fears.

"Even though that's just a guess, I do agree that we should move fast. As you know, we've all thought about it – but someone might die today. Holding back an army with only us as the defense is basically suicide." Adelana's tone lowered. The realization that one of her sisters might not make it back weighted heavily on her mind.

"Snap out of it," Annet gently pinched her cheeks. "-don't forget who we are." She smiled.

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"They are ready to leave, Adelana, take Alyson with you and get out of here," Fenrir spoke.

"Annet, Ayleth and I shall defend until you guys are cleared to go. And don't forget that we have two objectives, one is to not die and the other is to not let Brisnet heights be conquered. Rest assured that we will fulfill said requirements, now go, they wait."

Also happening at the same time, province away, the envoys sent to Arda by her royal princess have finally got an audience with the queen. The throne room felt darker than usual, the queen sat up high and overlooked Theodore and the young butler. As ordered by her princess, the inexperienced butler spoke – rather harshly and not paying heed to the queen's authority. This lack of respect riled up the people overseeing this meeting. In spite of their growing animosity; their faces remained calm and composed.

"Thus, princess Gallienne has agreed to give Arda it's independency and wants you to stop your attack onto Dorchester." His eyes fixed on the fairy's, he didn't move nor blink, he spoke without fear, the task he had been assign to do was complete.

"Is that so, tell your princess that Arda will comply. Sadly, what Kreston does is out of my jurisdiction – we indeed made an agreement to attack Dorchester. Though now as our wishes have been answered, we do not wish to engage in barbaric practices." Her tone relaxed, the envoy's shoulder relaxed as well.

"There is one thing I forgot to mention," her tone grew sharper, "-there's a man who I simply can't forgive. He's a noble living in Dorchester, I want him dead by all means. I will, in fact, march into Dorchester, but we won't cause any more trouble, the noble in question is named Staxius Haggard.

He's defiled and insulted the envoys I once sent to visit castle Garsley. This I cannot forgive; we will slay that foul beast who dares not respect us. Tell princess Gallienne that we are to be considered friendly, though, there's a man we have to kill to seal the deal as they say. Now go, this audience is over."

With a snap of her fingers, both Theodore and the butler now stood near the border. Everything went as wished, none wanted to scheme their way for war only brought devastation. Against all odds, the princess was in favor of a peaceful relationship with Arda. If the latter became independent, it would lower the financial burden on the royal family; not to mention the fact that trading with them could prove to be fruitful. Also, as known by the public, Arda would become more secluded, thus making demi-humans and other non-human creatures raise up in value. Previously own slave's price might right up, and underneath all that filth, the one pulling the strings is someone of royal blood, and in that, you can see how this change will affect both parties for the better.

"Job well-done kid," Theodore broke the ice.

"T-thanks," he fell onto his knees, the pressure finally got to him. As mysterious and noncaring as Theodore appeared to be, seeing a young guy like him, one who is the perfect replica of himself when he was younger sent a little flutter in his heart. A soft spot for the clueless and shy boy grew.

A small grin appeared on his face and held out a helping hand. Out of respect, the boy, whose name still remains a mystery, graciously accepted the courteous gesture. The audience ended without being overly complicated, and they were back on the road, direction, Rosepire.

Everything happened almost at the same time, Adelana was on her way to castle Garsley with the villagers. Annet, Ayleth, and Fenrir stayed back to defend and hold back Kreston's holy army as they now advance through Rotten Thicket. Eira had settled down at Claireville academy, she's slowly adapting to the new environment. Undrar and Ancret still guard the castle. Thunderstain on their end, after Staxius killed part of their army; recruited soldiers.

As opposed to where Frostrest was, the noble district felt sunnier and more joyous. The air felt warm and friendly. His right hand rested atop Avon's head; his gaze met Julius's, an old friend. The room slipped into silence, Staxius kept on eyeing Julius from head to toe.

"S-Staxius?" He still could not believe it. Autumn's face said it all, she was clueless for it was so long ago when she met this man. Since then, her memories were jumbled up. Leaving Avon's head, Staxius placed both hands onto Julius's broad shoulders. "Yes, I'm Staxius Haggard, the one you met so long ago, the one who made you promise to take care of Autumn." After a quick glance at the now grown-up Autumn, he continued with, "-you've done well on your promise."

"I-impossible, y-you look just the same as sixteen years ago, h-how is this p-possible?" Julius asked.

The one whose footsteps he was following in for so many years stood before him. It brought a joy unrivaled anything he ever felt. "It must be confusing, I told myself that I would try and not meet with the people I knew in the past. Though that was but a lie, guess fate has another thing planned out for us." Julius grew more confused, the expression he held was something unlike another, his eyebrows were questioning whatever was happening while the face cringed.

"B-brother," Autumn tugged on his shirt. "What is it?" he asked as he continued staring at Staxius.

He feared that if he closed his eyes or moved away, the man he called friend would disappear. “D-do you k-know this m-man?”

“D-do I know this man? Of course, I do, he’s the only person I admire and respect.” He answered loudly, Staxius heard it. Embarrassed, he shifted his gaze onto Avon. “I appreciate the thought, but going as far as saying you admire me is a bit farfetched. I’m naught but a heartless killer. A person as honest as you should not lower your standard and respect one such as I.” Staxius shook his head in disagreement. “I’m not as honest as you think, old friend.” Julius’s tone changed to match Staxius’s. He changed from friendly to serious and emotionless. “Old friend or not, I’ll still kill you if you stand in my way.” Julius tried showing that his ideals were changed. “You really think you can kill me? Old friend, surely you jest. I see you’ve trained your emotions and mannerism perfectly – fool the world you might but I, one who’s whole identity reflects that of the person who stands in front of me, it would do you no good. Become aggressive, and I shall double said aggressivity, try to be witty and I’ll surpass your intelligence, try to be cold and menacing and I’ll turn into the nightmare you wish you’d never have dreamed of. I’m Staxius Haggard, someone with no personality, someone strong yet weak.” His aura slowly filled the room, he showed Julius that trying to be cold towards him will only result in failure. The atmosphere grew dense, both Julius and Staxius locked eyes, they seemed to want to kill each other. The killing intent was palpable, until, out of nowhere, they both chuckled and laughed. That little display was just a show, Julius and Staxius were always friendly, said act was only there to show they other how long they’ve come. The laughter continued for a good two to three minutes, in the end, they tightly embraced each other. Nothing else was to be said, even though they knew each other for a week at most, their bond truly was strong.

“J-Julius,” the laughter died down. “I was planning to visit you but I heard you were out of Hidros.”

“Is that what they said, pathetic.” He spoke to himself.

“What do you mean by is that what they said?” Staxius quickly followed up.

“After the war was lost, I made my way back to the capital. There, I received a message telling me to take an airship and fly out. Apparently, I was going to be promoted to S-rank. Thus, I took the airship, but midflight, something strange happened. I-I was rendered unconscious. After that I don’t have any memories, all I know is that I awoke in my home, or what used to be yours. Some people found me near Savaview bridge and brought me there, or so what I heard. After that, Autumn came to visit me. As a Duke, I had duties to attend too, so she decided to accompany me on my various trips. We went to Dundee, for trading purposes, then back to the capital. It’s there that we heard a rumor about Dorchester’s noble district having properties up for sale. It’s on that trip that the beast came out of nowhere and attacked us. We fought, day and night until we fell into a strange portal and mysteriously ended up here. Don’t ask me how and don’t ask me when – I’ve got no idea.”

“That some story, Julius. Honestly, I don’t care for it. I’m glad we’ve both met yet again. Sadly, you’ve grown old and look scarier as opposed to the young charming Julius I knew.”

“And you still look the same, old friend.” They smiled. “What’s your plan after this Julius? You’re headed back to the capital to try and find out who is responsible for the airship incident, I assume?”

“Not really, I’ve done my investigation. After carefully analyzing everything, I found nothing. From what I’ve gathered, they wanted my crest which I luckily gave to Autumn. After the princess framed and killed you so many years ago, I was both shocked and baffled. Sophie, your so-called sister, didn’t even try and clear your name. On top of that, she had the audacity to claim that you left a notebook in which you had written down plans on how to dethrone the king. No need to worry, I did my part as a friend and demanded that her name be removed from yours. I grew stronger and more powerful. I severed my bond with my family and started anew, on my own, just to clear your name. I’d like to think I did my job, nowadays, no one even knows who Staxius Haggard is, I’ve removed every trace of your existence.”

“This is why no one recognized me the first time I awoke, Undrar did say I was accused of defiling her royal princess, but I guess it was Julius’s doing for wiping that foul stench off my name. That dragon was right when she said Julius didn’t betray me.”

“Staxius? Say something, what do you plan to do now?”

“Sorry about that. I came here because I got a tip that Arda was planning to attack, but I guess it’s not going to happen.”

“I guess that’s fine, but why go out of your way to come to this rejected province? Who is ordering you to put your head on the line?”

“You’ve got it wrong Julius; I’ve come here on my own volition. You see, I’m a noble serving the council of Dorchester.”

“Amazing... I didn’t expect you to be a noble, so where is your mansion located at?”

“We’re standing in it.” He laughed. “Julius, this is but a request, but will you help me in making Dorchester change into the Hidros’s most powerful province. My sole goal is to make the people who’ve abused my natal province cower into submission.”

“Mhmmm... I don’t really think I’ll be of any use to you. However, I’m all for joining up with you, let’s make Dorchester the strongest province that ever existed, I’m duke by title but hold no land, which means this is perfect.”

“Thanks, Julius,” they embraced again, one might think they were brothers or rather lovers instead of friends. A bond that was created over a week but lasted for over a decade, their journey begins, in a world which also changes.