

## Death Magic 591

### Chapter 591: Empire's Invasion [9]

Acceptance of the fate at hand bellowed as a slumped posture. The pieces fit one after the other, her hands made to gently touch her belly, in a moment's tension, she sprawled to stand before Julius, "-am I going to die?" asked she to Igna, "-please, tell me, I need to know, am I going to die?"

"Listen," he placed a hand atop her shoulder, "-all I know about the curse is from the tales of old. I've never seen it come to fruition. One thing is sure, there are plenty of examples of mothers sacrificing their bodies into becoming food for their offspring. My cousin's taken a liking to you, and by the story told," motioning to her bracelets, "-the bubble through which one sees the world has been expanded, granted, by a lot of sufferances. The situation now isn't about liking one another, I honestly don't care for you," spun towards the lanterns, "-if you promise to not betray us, I'll grant any wish thee wants. Acceptable?"

"Why are you being kind?" her eyes watered, "-isn't treating an enemy as if human a sin or something?"

"Priestess," said he, "-I'm not being kind, it's an equal exchange," a few steps forward, "-I trust your word, best not break it." A heavier implication suddenly weighed onto her person.

'A steadfast belief that I won't betray my words,' she cringed, '-my legs are shaking, my hands don't want to listen. How can someone be so powerful, I don't get it. My mind says to move, the body refuses, what kind of play is this?'

"Steady the breathing," whispered Julius, "-the pressure is my cousin's presence. Something he keeps hidden to not draw suspicion."

"Presence?" she looked to see the prince with a playful grin, the blond hair hovered per the wind, "-I get it," she turned towards Igna, "-you cousins aren't normal humans, are you?"

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"Come on," said Igna, "-we're running late."

The multiple homes were tenderly lit, cheers and smiles escaped onto the slightly darker streets. Against the city of the world, he'd known, the village was in a pit of darkness and lesser advancement. The villagers weren't daft either, if not for their contribution to agriculture, the continent might not have hope to survive. Arda, the only significant advancement was at the capital and its surrounding vassals. Depending on how one looked at it, said piece of information may be both good and bad. Good as in troops of the Empire haven't the knowhow to relay information efficiently. Bad as in launching a full-scale attack against such a militarized fortress may end horribly. Slow in pace and quiet in conversation, the two newly bonded friends kept lightened expression.

'I guess Julius feels at ease. Treating a living thing as if garbage is a fate none wish to experience nor be part of,' hung onto said thought, the sloppy lighting of a busy inn came in view. Parting the stained curtains, "-hello travelers," said a lady dashing about the tables, "-we have rooms and food, take your pick."

"Lady Aoi, some ale please, we're running out," requested middle-aged men.

'Adventurers,' thought Igna beelining for the counter.

"Good evening sir," said a little boy, "-my name is Raulf Serlo, I'm the guardian of this inn, state your name and business!"

'Raulf Serlo, that's a name you don't hear often.'

"Mister," he perched atop the stool, "-are you an envoy of the demon lord's army?"

'What's wrong with this kid?' he wondered.

"What if we are," interjected Julius, "-is the divine blade going to oppose my master?" cackles drowned the cheeriness of the room.

"OTA!" screamed across the tavern, "-DROP THE ROLEPLAYING AND TAKE THEIR ORDER!"

"Oh, oh," whispered some regulars, "-Raulf Serlo's about to get his ass whooped," laughter broke into hysteria. Alcohol, bored men, and a mildly funny act, the perfect combination for nonstop amusement.

"Please my lady," gestured Julius, "-we're serious in fighting Raulf Serlo," he winked. Her responses were of a well-mannered bow and a smile, '-they're the two who helped out in the funeral earlier. He must have known about Ota's silence and sorrow.'

"I see a priestess has been taken hostage," arms crossed and face covered, "-release her at once!"

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"Not going to happen," said Julius, "- I shall defeat thee in a duel."

"No," gestured Igna, "-Raulf Serlo," he stepped forth, "-fight me in a duel of wits. Am I to think the strongest warrior has but brawns and no brains?"

"I accept!"

"Good, then we shall fight a best of three rock, paper, scissors match."

Ale continued to be distributed, Julius and the priestess ended up taking part in the celebration. Igna soon became the babysitter, everyone else partied whilst he kept watch and recounted stories of the battlefield. In the end, the duel was a stepping stone for the boy, he was able to smile and forget about a lost friend.

"ME TOO," a little lady darted across the slightly muddy floor, "-I want to play!"

"Annie, Annie," waved Ota, "-here, here."

'Great, another kid.' A glance at Julius returned with envy for he had melted into the ranks of the regulars.

"What?" her cheeks puffed, "-so tall," the eyes widened, "-mister, are you some kind of model?"

"I wouldn't know," said he, "-just a traveling adventurer. You must be the Annie everyone's talking about?"

"Yep," she winked, "-I'm Annie, nice to meet you."

"Here," he took out the phone, "-have you heard of games?"

"No."

"Then here," a holographic display sprung to allow two players.

"Awesome!"

Time went on till ten, the balls of joy slumped against one another. Most of the regulars left, Julius sat with a flushed expression. The priestess's mouth was another story, wide and ready for flies to dive into. 'Stuck with drunks again.'

"Thanks again," said she, "-Ota's been that way ever since he turned six. I don't know what happened, seems like he lives in a fantasy or something."

"The world is a fantasy," refuted Igna, "-he's better off living how he wishes for, something bad must have happened then, it's common for people to live in their worlds to avoid reality. The smile is genuine, he's a good kid. Annie too, they're like siblings."

"Impressive," she wiped the tables, "-and how would you know?"

"I apologize, speaking of someone else's private life is rude. Forget I said anything."

"No harm done," she chuckled, "-no need to be startled. Life as a single mother can be rough. His father left us this inn as a parting gift. God knows where he's at."

"I beg your pardon?"

"He ran off to seek adventure," said she, "-at the Azure Wall. Said the treasure was too good to pass up on. I saw him off as did Ota, he wanted to be like his father so badly. Next thing I knew, the guild sent compensation, he died trying to save another kid."

"I'm sorry I asked."

"It's fine, I'm over it now. Ota's the reason I have to stand strong. Us village folks aren't smart," her cat ears lowered, "-the youth take to the guild in search of fame, some return, most die without ever being found. Enough about that," a big inhale led into, "-the quaint village is the only thing we have. I'll be damned if the empire lays their filthy hands on us. At least the Blood-King was compassionate enough to send envoy each month. How I wish the Haggard's to take the throne again."

"Wait," the gaze narrowed, "-you know about the royal family?"

"Obviously," a mocking snarl escaped, "-there's no way I'd not recognize the Prince of Arda. And you," she moved to clean their table, "-you bare a striking resemblance to the previous king. I figured it's something to do with the war, else why would royalty step onto the field. Anyway, you should rest for the night."

'She knows about us, quite the well-informed lady. Then again, rumors and gossips go hand in hand with drunks and taverns.' Up the stairs to the farthest room. A healing potion returned the drunkard prince to his senses. "-let's go," said Igna, "-we'll take a gate."

"Wait!" rolled over to the sleeping pink hair priestess, "-what about her?"

“Don’t worry, I’ve cast a barrier around the room. She should be fine; the demons won’t attack her tonight. Think of it as a gift from me to you,” and off they vanished to the pitch-black nightly outlines.

“Cousin, you fancy her, don’t you,” commented Igna.

“Shut up,” he pouted, “-it’s not like that. Her story struck a chord in me.”

“Struck what chord exactly?”

“You’re impossible,” cried the prince.

The same monotonous routine, wake up, eat breakfast, head into the forest to gather supplies, return, have a shower, check onto the guild for any kill-quests, return to the inn, hang out with the priestess. Evening rolls in, hang out with the villagers, eat and drink, share the loot of the hunt, and wait for nightfall. In those moments of nothingness, Igna found the resolve to use the teleportation spell. The knowledge and know-how were there from the first instant he revived. Learning about what the queen turned the most sought-after spell in the world a nauseating prospect. Time wasn’t much of a help either, Phantom’s forces were readied to fight on the 20th of April. éclair’s constant information supply felt as if he were at the center of the world, news came from every corner. Those empty days without quests were the best. Julius grew closer to lady Malley, the priestess. The more time spent, the greater became their bond. Igna watched from afar, their little promenade would end in tragedy.

19th of April arrived; the duo made it past Town Glenda. Julius chose to stay at the village whilst Igna took on exploring a new landscape. Linked by éclair, communication was fast and easy. ‘My foolish cousin,’ the entrance of town stood in bold mossy stone. ‘Traders and adventurers prefer to sell their wares in this town. Most of the villages have their workers tread long journey for a slight chance at profit. The lord in charge is someone of the Empire. Quite the predicament, by the looks of things,’ he entered without trouble, ‘-demi-humans live the same as normal. The map says the lord’s mansion is way to the south on a cliff overlooking a lake. Should be a nice place to live.’

Mage’s Guild, Fighter’s Guild, Central Guild, Merchant’s Guild, Independent Guild, wrote onto multiple signs. A whole street of guild buildings after which came the town-square, else, the merchant’s paradise. Tents and screams were common, advertisement in form of a strong and convincing tone.

‘I guess it operates the same as Rosespire. The central guild should be more of an administrative building. Independent guilds don’t matter since I don’t see many adventurers around. Probably used to the bank for the adventurers to store the loot. Mages and Fighter’s Guild should have job offers. One thing bugs me, wasn’t the guild system dissolved after the invasion?’

“Ding dong,” cried éclair, “-the guild system wasn’t dissolved. Monsters are a bigger problem for the Empire. Most of the fighters have been forced to complete assigned quests in the protection of strongholds and clearing of nests and dungeon. Glenda and Ritenoot are the only towns with the same free system, as in people can choose what they want to do.”

‘Because of its location, the Empire can’t launch a full conquest. Hect and Ect are pillars keeping the remaining bastion of Ardanians free.’

“Igna, I have sad news.”

“Which is?”

“The lizardmen race have been exterminated on a decree of the holy church. The last of their kind were burnt to the stakes earlier this morning.”

“Damn it, what of the other races?”

“They were able to run away. The Lizardmen are extinct, there might be a few in hiding.”

“But the possibility is slim to none. This is bad if the church’s on the move – their forces must be ready to cleanse the province.”

“The campaign to Town Eden succeeded. People revolted against the servants of God and were put to the sword. The strong and lucky retreated into the eastern side of town controlled by the Federation. Under the alliance, the Empire can’t cross the bridge.”

“I see...”

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‘Quite ironic if you think about it. Town Eden was a side-project to promote exchange between Hidros and Arda. A long time elapsed before the alliance was truly settled. In a time of crisis, the town of scrutiny from pro-humans and pro-demihumans faced a rude awakening. The border between the two evolved into one of comfort. Once used to divide now used to protect. The Federation’s presence is heavy, good luck breaking the non-aggression pact.’

Amidst the wave of people moving to and fro; the lenses toggled into infiltration mode. éclair worked to scan, record, evaluate, filter, and relay. Each word said was captured and played back. Gossip from the ladies, rumors from the men, deals from the merchants, and much more. ‘Glenda’s the prime location for the hunt, or so said the dead bandits. They would often bring the children here, at a more or less rambunctious town to exchange the cargo. The next trade is set to occur at 13:00, time’s noon. I got an hour, the place is supposed to be a cottage, named Dead Man’s Entra.’ Across the mob of town-square and into the southern part of town, the overall atmosphere sucked into tense thinly lain tracks. Dark were the pathways and darker were the alleys. ‘My kind of place,’ thought he bursting through. Many onlookers were scanned, found, and displayed as outlines. Face against the world’s leader in technology and magic, wit could only take one so far. Phantom’s influence seemed to have no limits. There were rumors of another hidden research base where black projects were experimented with and successfully implemented.

He reached the end of the road, the mossy wall stood on high. Guards above slacked off and napped. ‘Dead Man’s Entra,’ stood on the right, cupped between two hefty buildings. No indication of their purpose led to an impromptu visit.

‘Bandits,’ he entered, ‘-a bar, inn, and a place of secrets. This must be the red-light district of Glenda,’ sat at the bar counter.

“What would you like, sir?” inquired the bartender.

“No idea at the moment,” said he with a charismatic smile, “-what’s your recommendation?”

“I’d say, Dead Man’s Entra.”

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"Then so be it."

Cigar lit, '-succubus, a lot of them. There's even incubus for the ladies, quite the operation, a place of pleasure owned by demons. Should be a cesspool of life-essence. I wonder who's in charge.' By the looks of things, the bartender was quick to alert those at the top.

"Excuse me," hailed Igna.

"What is it, sir?" he avoided direct eye contact.

"Where are the guards?" the tone dropped, "-who was it you contacted. Best be frank, else I'll rip the whole building apart."

"I apologize on his behalf," said a masked man in a suit, "-please, follow me this way, dear customer."

Reddish-colored curtains parted, moans and grunts were far too common. The more they walked, the farther the hall seemed to get. "-We're here," said he, "-after you," a peculiar door opened.

\*Slam,\* "Oh god, I'm trapped, someone, please help me."

"Was that supposed to be a cry for help?" asked a discordant voice, "-the words say one thing and the emotions say another, who are you, boy?"

"A wandering adventurer," atrocious lighting made for a chilling room, "-I suppose thou art the leader of said establishment?"

"How do you figure?"

"Pretty simple," he continued forth, "-why would a servant class demon come to fetch a customer. Why are there demons littered around? The bartender is a low-tiered demon, he could have easily killed me at a moment's notice. Still, he chose to call onto his superior," finally at the desk, "-might I ask your name?"

Cackles amplified, the chair rotated, "-good on ya," said a little boy, "-figured me out pretty quickly."

"Honestly," he sighed, "-why are demons such pains. Choosing the appearance of a little boy to conserve mana."

"Oh, you're well-versed," he smirked, "-go on, take a seat."

"Don't mind if I do," sat and without worry. Puffs of smoke obnoxiously flew towards the boy's innocent visage.

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"What brings someone like you to my humble abode?"

"Decided to talk, have we not?" straight and proper, "-first things first, get the hounds away from my shadow, it's annoying. Secondly, the masked man of before, would you step out of the feeble darkened cloak. Lastly, the arachnid on the ceiling, please get down, \*chip,\* it fell onto his arms, "-tis quite dangerous," said he with allure.

"I-I-I," her cheeks flushed. Early twenties, black hair, blacker eyes, pale skin, and awry hair.

“Don’t worry,” he parted her hair, exposing the lush forehead, “-I broke your fall. Go on, scurry back to the front.”

\*Woosh,\* “-oh,” the wristed snapped onto a poisoned dart, “-how nice of you,” the tip was cleaned and used to tie the lady’s hair, “-it shouldn’t be of much trouble now,” he gently smiled, “-a high-bun sure looks nice, few locks here and there should add to the natural female charisma.”

A hand rose to stop the needless trap, the lights toggled. The masked man stood behind the boy. He who shot the dart, joined by the arachnid, ambled to a sofa in the corner.

‘He didn’t flinch nor look around; the eyes were dead straight into mine. What a fearsome and powerful man. Those crimson daggers, a nightwalker, noble one at that.’

“Might I know the reason I was called here?” inquired he, “-masked man, you’re a butler right?”

“Y-yes,” returned he.

“Go fetch me my drink. I kindly asked of the bartender earlier before the rude interruption,” smokes puffed, the two behind enjoyed a party game of cards.

Glanced towards the leader, he nodded, and off the butler went.

“Who are you, honestly?”

“Igna Haggard, a wandering adventurer. I’ve come to seek information. Of course, I’ll give equal compensation.”

“Hmm...”

“And, no need to explain the reason. The long hallway isn’t nearly small enough to fit the tavern. The only logical explanation is the surrounding buildings, we’re in one of them. The multiple rooms are for the exchange of soul fragments. A contract with a demon can be quite the hassle.”

“We’re still better than the never present gods. We abide by the contracts and take on the promised payment. What’s there to discuss? Igna, you’re very smart. Figuring out the operations here and in such little time, how could you?”

“Experience,” said he, “-I’ve been in many places like these. The results are always the same, I enter, act suspicious, get called into a backroom, slaughter my ambush, move for the commander, and get what I need. A simple equation that never fails.”

“We were led in a trap from the beginning?” wondered he.

“Obviously,” he chuckled, “-there’s quite more to it than that. So, Mister demon-”

“Call me Harth.”

“Understood, Mr. Harth, my business here is to find the name and location of individuals involved in kidnapping and human trafficking.”

"I see," he held his chin in thought, the door opened with a tray and the drink. "As a rule, us demons, never directly get involved in the affairs of the livings. My purpose here is clear as day, to satisfy the demons and demi-humans. A few incidents happen here and there."

"I don't really care," voiced Igna sipping the drink. The eyes widened; "-this is excellent. It's been stirred with finesse and perfection. Bring me the bartender this instant." The conversation cut, they waited on the barkeep.

'What's he up to now?' wondered Harth, 'I can't quite get a read on his emotions or intent. The way he speaks is charming, there's no way to ignore the weight behind each word. A masterful show of power without displaying his card, this man is a phenom, not even a mid-tier demon can hold up to his immense presence.'

"You called for me?" the door opened.

"Ah, yes, barkeeper," hailed Igna, "-please, come over here," he stood.

"Was something wrong with the drink, sir?" he shyly asked.

"No, it was perfect. Tell me," he lifted the keeper's chin, "-are you interested in money or souls?" The eyes wandered towards Harth out of habit. The latter nodded to say, '-go on, tell him.'

"I'd prefer souls," said he after much self-deliberations. The answer had the assistants on the edge of their seat, what would the response be they wondered.

"How many?" he snapped back.

"I don't understand," the head lowered, "-a soul is enough to make a demon powerful, the more the better. I can't be greedy, maybe one or two?"

"Then it shall be granted," said he, \*Souls of the dead, thee who've sworn to serve me in life and death, come to my side. Blood-Arts: Ghouls Requiem.\* Five screeching visages materialized from a depiction of the pits of hell, tentacles snapped about, breaking bookcases and shelves. "Here, five human souls. They should be quite tender; my companions enjoy probing their prey."

"Hold on a moment!" cried Harth, "-five humans' souls, just like that, no hesitation nothing? We take on average two months to successfully capture a tortured demi-humans soul, humans are far more difficult."

"Well, how about you take two from here," said he, "-the remainder goes to the bartender for a drink well made."

The demons hurdled to discuss the division of said souls. Igna stood back and enjoyed the drink. '- Demons or not, they work the same. Show power, show fortune, and show the influence, I've laid out more than they can chew. He should start talking any minute. Just have to keep cool and wait. Take the bait, dear fish, take it.' For the duration of the discussion, the arachnid, a lady with very strange facial features kept on admiring. Her eyes were glued to Igna's.

"Alright," coughed Harth, "-Igna, we've decided. The souls shall be equally distributed."



“Why tell me, those five souls are nothing much to be wary about. About my question, will you reply or shall I take my leave?”

“No, no,” he interjected, “-the ones involved in trafficking frequent the bar on weekly intervals. Their next visit is in one hour, here’s how they look. They work for the lord of Glenda.”

‘Names and faces,’ he nodded, “-good, I’ll take my leave then.”

“WAIT!” fired Harth, “-please, promise us that you’ll come back soon.”

“Why would I,” refuted he, “-there’s no more purpose thee can serve. I got what I needed and I gave what I thought was correct.” \*Snap,\* another three souls materialized, “-here, that’s the payment for the information.” \*Teleportation.\*

“Damn,” ruffles ended in a crash, the elder fell off the dangling chair, “-Igna, do be careful.”

“Sorry,” he held out a hand.

“No problem,” pulled to stand, “-what brings you here?”

“I need a favor.”

The curtains flapped to bristle Elm’s remaining hair, “-what kind of favor?” the view gave onto Annie and Ota running about.

“I’ll need to take Annie to be my hostage,” said he.

“As a hostage,” the face strained into a robust denial, “-for what purpose?”

“To bait the ones who were responsible for Honye and his father’s death.”

“What if I say no?”

“I’m hoping you say yes. There’s no way she’ll be hurt, I swear on my name.”

“No, I refuse. Igna, I’m sorry. Using the youth as bait isn’t something I can allow.”

“Old man,” he sighed, “-fine, have it your way. Don’t complain if a river of blood flows onto this sacred land,” he teleported away.

‘Guess it didn’t work out. I’ll do things my way from now on. Julius and the elder asked for a painless operation. Not that it matters now, I’ll kill to get what I want.’ Orenmir reacted to the murderous intent, ‘-so you’re ready too, my loyal blade. Let’s carve our way through. The ones involved in the incidents at Apid and Oda are the nobles of Glenda. A man and woman, they usurped the barony and its land. We’ll have to fight; the capture of enemy land shall be granted to the victor. This works out fine, a solid base of operation. Time to acquire the title of Baron.’

Chapter 593: Empire’s Invasion [11]

“You called for me?”

Brown hair moved akin to waves, the look from the roof onto the desolate below sure was one to rile the imagination. “Yes, I did,” said a figure sat solemnly on the edge. Conspicuous figures stared left and

right, hid in corners, looked thoroughly until eventually stepping inside the cottage. Lust on their face and hands inside the pockets. ‘-The trade of the flesh,’ wondered he, ‘-profitable and in of itself secret, customers are mostly shunned for partaking, thus the silence. The workers never ask questions; as long as there’s pay at the end, it sufficed.’

“Are you going to sit there and wonder?” the presence approached.

“Come on, look,” said he, “-they’re so careful in not being found out, tis hilarious.”

“I don’t see you laughing though,” interjected the cunning voice.

“There’s no need for the attitude,” he stood, “-Gophy.”

“A job for me?” her face remained bound between frown and grin.

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“Yes,” he smiled, “-I require someone to act like a child.”

“And, why did you pick me?” her eyes narrowed.

“You’ve got the innocence of a young maiden,”

“Oh, is that right,” she glanced, “-the innocence of a maiden, is that the nice way to say I’m flat?”

“No, I never said that,” he facepalmed, “-why would the goddess of chaos care of such trivial matter. Gophy,” hands-on her shoulder, “-please, out of Miira, Adete and Intherna, your composure comes second to none. Also, if the job goes well, there might be a few things to destroy.”

“Destruction,” a shimmer flashed onto her alluring gaze, “-I’ll still argue it’s about my...”

“Please,” he grabbed her cheeks, “-drop the breast talk. It’s not befitting a noble lady.”

“Someone’s getting awfully flustered. Well, whatever. Fill me in on the details.”

13:00 came around, as a favor to Igna, Harth made sure the dealers were informed of the last-minute change. A silent room overlooked the empty streets outside. The sheets were new, though, the chamber itself could use some cleaning. Dirtied garments were stuffed into a corner. The demons sure didn’t care about causing a mess.

“Am I honestly supposed to wear this?” less than dignified clothes as in they were but rags. Patchwork shoes and discordant socks, her face mashed into a perpetual sulk. Unable to talk his way out, ‘-I ought to pay her back at another time.’ \*Knock, knock,\* three normally dressed men entered. ‘-Guns,’ immediately jumped into mind. ‘They’re strong, a good presence to them. I’m sure Gophy’s a little,’ glanced back, ‘-never mind,’ she returned a death stare.

“Hello, you must be the replacement for those three imbeciles?” asked a smartly dressed man.

“Yes,” to which they proceeded with boring introductions. The story went along the lines of, the adventurers were killed in trying to kidnap Gophy, now named Ilian, a noble daughter of an exiled noble. Emphasis was on her birth, it wrapped around to seem as if the best possible outcome.

“Let me get this straight,” said the man with foot kicked up on the table, “-she’s a noble girl from some noble of Arda. The three idiots died trying to escape. You were hired just before the deed. Seems a little bit too convenient,” he glared, “-well, I don’t sense lies. Where’s this girl at?”

“Come here,” ordered Igna. The petite figure who sat on the bed until now revealed a refined young lady. The three men stared with opened mouths, “-the boss’s going to be happy with this,” said one of the guards.

“Yeah,” added the other, “-she’s the prettiest thing we’ve ever seen.”

“Hold on,” said Loden, “-her face alone is sure to bring profit,” he walked over, “-go on, girl, undress. I need to see if there are any blemishes. My clients very particular.”

Eyes to the floor, the rags slowly uncovered to show a clean slate, “-good,” nodded he, “-she’ll fetch a good price. Girl, are you a virgin?” Her soft pupils rose to nod innocently.

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“She’s so precious,” exclaimed the guard, “-I wish I was rich. Even poor guys like us have a chance, money talks.”

“Silence you two,” ordered Loden, “-how much you want?”

“Well,” smirked Igna, “-if she’s so precious, I suppose I ought to take the deal to your client. She has claims on the Barony of Opean.”

“I see, she’s an inheritor, Fine, tis a rare occasion. Get her in better clothes and meet us back here in an hour,’ the door closed.

“That went well,” mumbled he.

“Igna,” sharp nails dug into his shoulders, “-what did you mean by composure. I, Gophy, high-tier goddess of Chaos, am being treated LIKE A PRODUCT!”

“PLEASE,” the palms pressed in apology, “-it was necessary to reel in the big fish. Come on, work with me here.”

“It’s not that,” she transformed into more befitting attire, “-I sort of wished you’d have stood up to him. Asking your goddess to get undress... it’s quite humiliating.”

“I-,”

“Shush,” fingers to his lips, “-don’t apologize. I’m foolish to think Staxius Haggard to be a new man. Anyway, I’ll head back, call me when the scheme’s ready to move,” she twirled in a puff of black mist.

“Igna,” said éclair, “-be more considerate next time. Lady Gophy came on thy orders, she deserves respect. A high-tier goddess of her stature could slay you and origin in a matter of second. Her power is fierce.”

“I know my actions didn’t account for her feelings. Why would I, rather, why should I?”

“Come on, Igna,” the crimson eyes swapped into white, “-don’t be a fool. You know what she meant, and so did I. This isn’t the way to treat a friend, be better, my other self, she cares for us, and you must repay the kindness tenfold, get it?”

“Origin... I suppose you’re right. I’ll be more careful from now on.”

Meanwhile, preparation for the raid of Castle Eldo was in motion. Sabbath and the Onyx’s clan were on the move. Multiple inside sources gave the enemy troops location. Phantom called in specialists, the subjugation Unit Platoon 05 and 04 commanded by Kendy and Konoe. Primetime to attack would be at night, an airbase raid. Eldo the impregnable was strong on all fours. As with any olden construction, builders weren’t so inclined in protecting the people from attacks on above. A critical flaw known only to Ardanian; one Phantom would exploit without mercy.

Time followed its course, the kidnappers waited inside an armored truck, repurposed to carry living things as opposed to supplies. A rocky ride lasting the bitter most of four hours. Forest cleared into open fields of flowers and sugarcane. Rice patties were spotted atop man-made hills. A softly sloped hill climbed on to overlook the tranquil lake below. The stories of Glenda’s lord living in an idyllic painting were true.

“Lady Gophy, I apologize for earlier. The blame lies on me, I promise to be better next time.”

“Drop the formality,” said she, the ride was beneficial in clearing any misunderstandings, “-as long as it’s accounted for, I’ll be fair in my verdict. Igna, us goddesses aren’t obliged to help you or safeguard the shadow realm. We do so on our own volition; the old you were he who created a haven for us. Under no contracts does it say we have to abide you’re will. Igna Haggard is a different entity albeit it’s you. Get it through thine head, we’re not enemies, we’re friends. The only one who thinks differently is you, we’re bound by a stronger connection than petty emotions,” on those opening words, the truck stopped before massive gates. A palace of white and gold stood on inside, a domed roof reminiscent of Elendorian architecture, the vast land of flowers, and abundant forestry. ‘For a barony, this is excessive. It’s on par with riches of the upper echelon of nobility.’

“Ey, you two,” gestured Loden, “-come on down.” The back entrance had the Empire’s flag fly on high, security came in form of training guards adjacent to the truck.

“I’ll take her from here,” said Loden.

“Wait a minute,” interjected Igna, “-I’ll come with. This could be a set-up, what if she’s taken away and then the guards decide to attack, what then, I’m the one to lose either way.”

“It’s fine,” said the girl lowering her gaze, “-I’ll follow them, my duty is to become a slave to a new master, such as the way of war.”

“Damn it,” the fist curled.

“Go on,” said Loden, “-we might be a little shady, our principles don’t change. Stay here, I’ll inform the master and the mistress.”

A lavish assortment of pastries and clear skies led onto a marble-floored balcony. “My lord,” shuffled a maid, “-Loden has returned with a girl.”

"A girl," he stood, "-why a girl, I expressly said I wanted boys." Countless children stayed close to his company, "-girls are a hassle, nothing beats the pleasure they bring," he affectionately caressed their cheeks down to the hip. "-Well, if he brought her here, there must be a reason," dressed in heavy jewelry, "-where's my daughter."

"I'm here father," said a lady bearing silvery hair and reddened eyes, "-what's the matter?"

"Loden's returned," said the chubbier-sized man, "-what sort of product did he bring today." Looking back to the balcony, a crucial bit of information was skipped out of pity. The children were demi-humans without their unique features. By so, ears and tails cut, if the child bore hairier skin, bleached, or acid followed by a healing spell. Despair and torment, the innocent foiled by the lust of the fortunate.

"Loden," said the man, "-I see you're doing well."

"Yes, my lord," he knelt, "-I've brought new products from town."

"I heard it's a girl, care to explain?"

"I'm sorry, there happened to be an incident leaving a few of our men killed. Sire, the girl in question is of noble birth, has claims over a plot of land and is very pretty."

"Pretty?" fired the daughter, "-surely she cannot rival yours truly."

"Steady yourself, Ahira, no need to get worked up on some insignificant thing."

"My lord," he interjected, "-if I may, I have a favor to ask."

"Which is?" pastries were brought over by the hand of a child.

"The man who captured the girl wishes to negotiate."

"Who is this gentleman," her interest sparked, "-is he handsome?"

"My lady," grinned he, "-tis the only reason I brought him here."

"MARVELOUS," her eyes glimmered, "-you're truly fit to be a lowly turd."

"Your words praise me, lady Ahira."

'Alright,' down to the training area, '-I suppose it's time to clean out the trash.' \*Blood-Arts: Extria,\* unexpecting guards were killed instantly, the blood flow reversed. The ability to control the blood of any living being was as efficient as decay touch. With a bit of effort, the dead bodies hovered onto a single spot. \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* minced and grind; thirty guards died without making a sound. \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary.\* The blood lifted into the radiant crystal halo.

"Excuse me," the image of death sprawled onto the unexpecting maid, "-w-w-what..." her face froze.

"You're a demi-human," said he, "-they slit off the ears and covered it by a hat, how awful."

"D-don't k-k-kill me," she fell over on a flowerbed.

"Is that an order?" he smirked, "-come on," seeing her tense reaction, "-I've come to reclaim what was ones ours."

“W-who a-are you?”

“A member of the Blood-king’s faction. I’m a nightwalker,” he held out a hand, “-come on, get up. Show me where the other guards are.”

Up at the reception hall, the noble girl ambled gracefully. Clean and immaculately designed floors, ‘-I get what Igna was saying, a baron can’t possibly afford this.’

“The noble lady,” the jaw dropped, “-Loden, is she the one?”

“Yes my lord.”

“She’s stunning,” he ran over to grab her wrist, “-I’ll pay whatever the man desires. Bring him here this instant. She’s a masterpiece, how can someone be so pretty, gentle, and exude such charm.”

“Let go,” ordered she, “-fat pig.”

“HOW DARE YOU!” cried Ahira, “-Holy Order of the church, stop hiding in the shadows and restrain that little brat!”

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Chapter 594: Empire’s Invasion [12]

“Lady Ahira,” said another lady with silvery hair, “-we’ve won, please calm yourself.”

In the confusion of footsteps, Gophy escaped to be backed against a wall. Formidable foes stood before her, a few guards and a pair of twins. The real crest of Lucifer was engraved onto the neck in bold red. No armor, one held a book whilst the other held a staff.

“Princess Eira,” said one, “-Is this truly the place where will find the enemy?”

“Yes, that is true,” she sat atop a golden chair, “-if I’ve played my cards right, the one most dangerous to the Empire should step right through those doors. Wallen,” glaring the chubby man, “-that’s enough pretending. Unhand the girl and change into better-looking clothes.”

“As you wish, Saint Princess Eira,” he retreated into a back room.

“Highness,” bowed Ahira, “-why must we scheme so heavily to bring a single man onto our step?”

“No need to worry,” her lips playfully grinned, “-tis precautions before going against the kindling of the strongest foe to ever walk the earth, a man I once revered and called father.” The large room decorated with chandeliers, expensive curtains, intricately crafted pillars, and a pretentious throne. Wallen, the supposed lord, returned in a priest’s outfit as well as the word of god in his hand.

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“Highness, what should we do of the girl?” asked one of the twins.

“I’m getting bored,” cried the other. Green hair, oval-shaped face, beady eyes, and expression of extreme boredom. The only difference was the attire, “-Joln and Poln, leave her be.”

"Yes highness," a tongue pulled out to mock the prisoner, "-bahh, we won't have fun," childish skips led to the princess's side.

'Igna, this is bad. It's a trap, those twins have the curse of eternal life. They must be the real inquisitors. The ringleader, Eira Haggard, is the true threat here. The Librarian of Nexsolium, her powers are unchallenged. Her rank is close to a mid-tier goddess. Damn it, Qhildir, your heir is far too powerful.'

"You," called Eira, "-come over here, I promise the guards will not attack." Her hand raised to say, '-stand down.'

At the foot of the throne, "-who are you?" asked she with much interest.

"Someone of lesser importance," replied Gophy, "-I'm but a girl rescued by the adventurer named Kinless. He said to repay the favor in playing the part of a victim."

"I see," her long lashes shut in thought, "-sounds very much like him. I'm glad I escaped my mother's ignorant self. She's nothing but a shell of a woman. Not that it matters, today's the day I kill him once again," a burst of ire flooded the hall.

"Is that everyone?"

"Yes, we're all the servants in employment," returned the maid.

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"Head on back, someone must know how to drive. Take the truck and leave."

"Yes, sire."

Looking upon the carpeted steps, '-a familiar presence. A trap, we've been cornered. Regardless,' countless bodies left in his wake, '-my job is to capture this manor and the neighboring land.'

"Highness, I apologize for the man's tardiness. I'm sure I asked the maids to fetch him earlier," added Loden.

"Worry not," said she, "-patience is a virtue of which I possess. Let him be."

'Where are you...?' \*Clap, clap, clap,\* hot knife to butter, a distinct intent of malice climbed on till the hall, ire against the malice, a pair of boiling crimson eyes ambled nonchalantly. Instinct cried to say, '-retreat.' The guardians of her majesty spawned after greenish mist. Two inquisitors, the royal guards assigned to the princess's protection, knights from the Empire blessed with demon-slaying prowess, and ultimately, the leader, Saint princess of Arda.

"Sure took your time, didn't you," pouted Gophy.

"Sorry, my goddess," he bowed, "-please, head on back," \*snap,\* reality slit into a vortex. "-I'll get the others ready," said she, "-remember what I said, we're friends. Just say the word, and we'll come rushing," a gentle tap onto the strained shoulders resettled the tension.

\*Switching to battle-mode,\* commented éclair.

'It won't work,' interjected Igna, '-battle mode will not work against them. Their aura's disturbing the lens. Return it to normal and be on standby. Have the fighter jet make way to Arda and circle the vicinity. I'm sure enemy forces are lingering around.'

'Which jet?'

'The one made especially for utter destruction.'

'I like it,' he cheered, '-will do.'

Stopped a good distance away, "-dear cousin," said he in a rather strange manner, "-what brings you to a place like this?"

"Igna," the words spawn from the top befell onto her foe's face in a patronizing manner. Her sense of superiority was well-grounded, "-it would seem my plan has worked."

"Plan?" an eyebrow rose, "-care to explain?"

"Sure," she climbed on down with elegance, "-the kidnapping, the lord, and the sadistic rumors were a ploy. Since Julius disappeared from Rotherham, I knew you were up to something. Then the report of a few soldiers going missing reached the capital. I knew the precautionary measures had worked. The fort was an elaborate alarm system. The abductions and ruthless demands were to draw out the nightwalkers. The thought never crossed your mind, I'm sure. The village of Oda's direct vassal to me, the populous are indebted for their protection. Lady Aoi's actually my attendant from before the war, she was a member of the court. Ect and Hect, quite the show of strength. Too bad the troops were captives from the Empire's other conquests. King Lucifer is a far superior strategist and man than you'll ever be, Igna. All that happened was part of a greater scheme."

"What about the queen, what's her role in this ploy?"

"Your composure," she leaned, "-it's annoying," a step back, "-she's got nothing to do with it. Her role was fulfilled the moment she bore her father's child. Once the offspring is born, the god slayer shall be revived, and with it, we shall take to the heavenly realm and retake Elysium."

"Good," a pertinent smirk went from ear to ear, "-a masterful scheme."

"What's wrong with you?" she frowned, "-does the severity of this situation not bother you in the least. Let me guess, planning to fight and use brute force," a book summoned to levitate atop her palm, "-the way things are, I'm stronger than a mere human. The body of a divine can never be hurt, either one has the boon of divinity or is born a god slayer, no exception."

'Outmatched both in wit and strength, such a hefty conundrum. Eira's chosen to become my enemy. She's already surpassed my body's limits and schemed me into a corner. The signs were obvious, Aoi knew a bit too much, the reluctance in the fort guards, meaningless use of lust and power to scare villagers. Oda village being protected from the ravages of war. Then there's Glenda, the nonchalant guards, they were spies. My actions were monitored from the start. I guess they didn't recognize Gophy as her appearance changed. The cottage probably has nothing to do with her plan. Makes sense now, why would dealers in demi-humans so willingly accept my story. I was careless, I didn't account for someone working as an insider.'



"Igna, dear cousin," said she smugly, "-you're weak and a fool. Killings the only thing you're good for. I'm an idiot to ever look up to someone like Staxius Haggard. The man was nothing but a brute-forcing killer. All he did never had a purpose; here I was under the impression the man to be the smartest of the century. Looking back onto the schemes he had, one thing remains true, he was weak, unlike Lucifer. Killing you once made me realize, the goal of surpassing such a fiend would never serve to better myself. Look at me now, once I let go of my humanity, I was able to become strong, truly strong," a tear dropped, "-then why, why do I feel so bad, I've surpassed you, and still," head to his chest, "-why am I so miserable?"

"Simple," said he in a gentle tone, "-it because we're enemies."

"Get your hand off me," she slapped the intent of help, "-I don't need encouragement from someone weak."

"Eira," strong and deep, "-I'm proud of what you've become. My fear of the past has become a reality, the choice was made. Nothing will ever sway my heart, you, the little babe I found on the river, have grown into a strong woman. Go, free thineself from my shackles, Librarian of Nexsolium." In those words, her reserved nature found solace, the onlookers watched not knowing the implications, "-Eira, tis time we have a rematch," he jumped back with hands in his pockets.

"My lady," voiced one of the knights, "-don't let his words fool you. Let us, your subordinates fight instead."

"It wouldn't be fair for me to fight," said she, "-if you can't beat them, what the point of fighting me."

"You," six guards in heavy armor slowly moved to block off escape, "-there's no point in retreating. This fight is over and done with, we're the knights of the empire, our swords shall speak for itself." Drawn, they coordinated strike after strike. Downward, upward, diagonal, none mattered as he nimbly dodged each attack.

"Enough is enough," yelled the bigger man, "-I'll end this," the longsword rose on to touch a reddish light, \*Martial-Arts: Heavenly Strike.\* "-yahhhh."

\*Poof,\* the floor cracked, the air rattled into a mist, "-are you the best the empire has to offer?" it cleared. "How very unfortunate," he stopped the blade with a single hand, \*crack,\* an exertion of strength and it shattered. "Princess Eira, call off the knights. They're too weak."

"NO, MY LADY DON'T-" \*Smack,\* blood splattered like confetti, "-humans are weak," the mist of blood absorbed into the ever-shining halo. "-I've changed my mind," a gust blew in from the center, multiple bodies were sent crashing against the walls. \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary.\* Poor folks unknown to the ravages of war hurled at the gruesome sight. "Who is he?" inquired Wallen.

"A threat to the Empire," returned Eira. "-my loyal guards, escort the bystanders to someplace far. The little display proves one thing, the bloodlust is true. If left unchecked, the more a nightwalker kills, the fiercer he gets. Go, this is an order from thy princess."

"Cousin Eira," said he without much reservations, "-I forgot to mention one thing. No matter how great a scheme is, no matter who's behind the trap, the one who adapts accordingly will always win. Join and

Poln was it now? Blessed with the boon of immortality,” the hands moved to Orenmir’s handle, “-a god can be killed quite easily. The Sickle of Kronos is the perfect example of a god-slaying weapon.”

“And, what does that matter to us?” she gritted, “-the inquisitors are enough to kill you.”

“Surely,” he laughed, “-have you forgotten who I am. Librarian of Nexsolium, remember, it took the power of a Prince of Hell, the Supreme God, and the God of Philosophy to kill me, then again, what does it say, I was reincarnated and the symbols of power were gone forever. I won despite the odds, and I’ll do the same today.”

“ATTACK!” she yelled.

“On it, highness,” book in hand, “-Lord, please bless us with the power to defy reality itself, bless us by the divine ray of retribution, those who refuse shall pay, and those who pay shall die by the hand of what is right,” the incantation by Joln transferred over to Poln’s staff. It amplified with a secondary incantation, “-I, wielder of the staff of Mznia, call on thee in my time of aid!” Pointed at Igna, “-FACE OUR WRATH!”

“It’s true that no being can ever kill a god without special abilities. The reason I mentioned the sickle is simple,” the blade slowly skimmed out the sheath, “-the countless souls I’ve killed include demons and angels,” \*Blood-Arts: Orenmir, Blood-Blade of the Queen,\* the halo crumbled to flow down his arms and fully materialize. A beam of tremendous power instantly darted across to the target.

\*Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from when thee were born until thee die, I, Igna Haggard, wielder of the Symbol of death, hold in mine hands the strings of which binds thee to reality, by my authority, I order said chain to be severed: Tactus Interitus.\*

Chapter 595: Empire’s Invasion [13]

Split and turned to dust. A pulsing charge dispersed from Orenmir; sleeves shredded under the release. “What say you,” tip to Eira’s infuriated expression, “-let’s dance.” \*Death Element: Shadow Step,\* the staff broke and the book burst into white flames. “Warriors without weapons are nothing more than bystanders,” arms around their shoulders, “-Go on, twins, stand down if thee cares for thine lives.”

“Highness, we apologize,” they darted out the room.

“Some relatively trustworthy companions,” remarked he, “-Eira, what now. I’ve come to claim this manor and its land. What about you, the plan’s been foiled. I’m sure the prerequisites were tough as is. As long as I’m alive, there’s nothing to be gain.”

“Oh, you’d be surprised,” a spiral of books hovered behind her back, pages were ripped to run along the elbow till her palms, “-I’ve always wanted to fight. Be on guard.”

\*Book of Eena, passage six, line five, materialize, ancient barrier spell, permafrost, Neltnaheel.\* a blizzard covered the hall.

\*Book of Ignatez, grant me the power of foresight.\*

\*Under the oath of Culmina, enchantress of the Isytic forest, I, the librarian, asked for the beast of Rosmna to heed mine call of aid.\* a mystical creature of humanoid form descended from an opening in

reality, just before the gate shut, a lush forest was spotted. Bold, hazy, and terrifying, the shape was familiar, the face and other limbs were glitched, flickering and snapping about.

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\*Bound by the oath of submission, raise from thine eternal slumber, heroes of old, ancient warriors praised in legend, awaken, Eracules, Permesus, Dienla, Geona.\* Spoken in legends, the shield, the bow, the sword and spear, guardians of the goddess Syhton's realm. In tales recounted to the youth, they were mostly known as the God of the Shield, Sword Maiden, Bow Empress, and Spear Saint, a title attributed to their roles in the multiple stories. Black pages hovered before her person; a quill inked by the blood of a demon wrote countless incantations to be cast at a moment's notice.

"So long," yawned Igna, "-summoning ancient warriors, and that ugly thing from the forest. How very cute."

"Let's see how well the nonchalant attitude holds up," the glitched entity ambled on with an unnatural posture. \*Boom,\* '-what just happened?' the figure vanished to land a hard punch. '-Holy shit,' a darker entity sprawled across his shirt, '-get this off, quick.' It devoured fabric. 'It's fast,' composed and on edge, the stance took on a more defensive approach.

Eira watched from on above, the four godlike fighters observed without conscience. 'Damn it,' he parried a heavy downward strike which nearly lobbed off the left shoulder. '-it's even eating away at my sword,' \*Dispel,\* the blade shattered into its usual form. '-Got to make the distance,' he skipped backward to no avail.

\*Ice-spike,\* cried Eira.

He ducked, '-that was close,' lost in the motion of falling back, a carefully planned trap nearly spelled the end. '-I'm out of ideas, she's controlling the whole area. We're inside her realm, the affinity for ice is the trump card. The glitch figure is strong, and if this is the first to be summoned, what sort of monsters does she have in store, those ancient fighters will be hard to beat. Should I unlock nevermore?'

"What's going on," cackled she, "-can't face up to my servants. Listen well, knowledge is power, the fact will forever be true. As the Librarian of the god of knowledge, I know just about anything that is needed to rule the world. This battle may as well be training." One of the five pages burnt, a heaviness filled the room, a cloud of grey summoned to instantly conjure lightning. \*Magical Barrier,\* it appeared at the last second, the resulting force charged to burst open his elbow. The right arm dismembered and fell followed by clumped blood. The cloud of misty white smoke spawned off the explosion eased to show a heavily injured man.

"Without your sword arm, there's nothing to the fight," smirked she, "-the battle is over."

"True that," said he, "-I give up." The entity halted inches away from Igna's neck.

"Wait, seriously?" she frowned, "-I'm confused, what happened to all that bravado earlier?"

"I must say," he smirked, "the fight's been quite entertaining. I now know how weak a human can be in face of otherworldly entities."

"What are you saying, I don't understand. Are you giving up or not."

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"I said you won," he grinned; "-however, this battle is far from over."

"END HIM!" she screamed.

'Nevermore isn't a viable option at the moment, my mana's running low. Teleporting all over the place is exhausting. The last barrier took the last of my reserves. Come on out, show me the way to victory.'

'He's dead,' thought she, the entity grabbed his neck, '-the beast of Rosmna is notorious for devouring the fabric of reality. Hence why it always seems glitched and out of place, any dimension lower than the those of the gods is insufficient to contain its power.'

\*Awaken, lost power of the first progenitor, the all-seeing eyes, I, Igna Haggard, inheritor of Origin's knowledge, summon thee to alter thineself and suit my need. Awaken into the true eyes for he who stands as the pillar of which is real and all which is fake, from today forth, be forever known as the Eyes of Truth,\* the lids reopened to an ever-moving sprinkle of white particles, \*Disentangle reality.\* The grip onto his neck slipped ending in the beast falling face-first onto the cold floor.

"WHAT?" she jumped back, "-HOW ARE YOU ALIVE?"

"Poor child," said he, "-Librarian of Nexsolium was it?"

'The presence's changed,' her fist curled, an iron maiden cage of ice summoned to imprison Igna. "Who are you?" the eyes widened, she snapped, the cages shut.

"A bystander," said he passing through the spikes.

"BEAST OF ROSMNA, CHARGE."

"Foolish," the right hand healed to catch the entity without looking, "-pitiful servant of the exiled dimension, return from whence thee came." \*Screech,\* it cried in agony, "-goodbye," the head crushed leaving snow-like dust.

"Who are you?" her hands trembled.

"Me, I've said it again, I'm a bystander, else known as Origin. The library of Nexsolium, quite a feat to memorize all that was passed down from gods and demons. The power is quite formidable."

"NO," she exclaimed, "-how did you slay Rosmna!"

"I didn't slay him," said he, "-an entity of another dimension can never be harmed, tis immunity. There's a reason why humans cannot kill gods, it all has to do with what realm they reside in. The stronger the god, the higher the realm in which he sleeps in. Death is at the top, equal to creation. Yet, the influence ranges from top to bottom, thus, making the heir killable in whatever dimension he stays at, tis their weakness and limiter."

"I know," said she, "- I know that how were you able to slay Rosmna, he was spawned by the supreme god, Zeus, there's no way to touch it, even for a god."

"Simple," an all-knowing gaze contradicted hers, "-I reside in a realm unattainable even by the strongest god, I'm the start and the end of which is real. Igna Haggard, else I should say, Staxius Haggard, was the

only man who ever reached to me in good faith. No questions asked, no promises, no expectation, he solemnly said to join him and experience the world as one of its residents. I don't have much power; my job is to watch and experience, nothing more, nothing less."

"How then," argued she, "-why are you protecting him!"

"I'm not," the face relaxed, "-the events being played is what is meant to be. My name's Igna Haggard, Igna Haggard is my name, understand, Librarian, I am Igna, and Igna is me."

"STOP SPEAKING!" her voice resounded; "-I DON'T WANT TO HEAR ANY OF IT!"

'Eyes of True, what an amazing boon. I'm grateful, using Nevermore would have endangered our recovering soul.'

Pages burnt, spells flew one after the other, '-I can see beyond reality, an empty space often referred to as the void, the place where only the will of Origin works, he said he didn't have any power,' a half-smile formed, '-stop being so modest.' \*Reality,\* the hands stretched out, \*- follower of the steadfast passage of time. Alter Void into what I see, change what is meant to be, obey what I have to say. Beyond thee stretches, far it goes to no stop. Real, fake, disrupt the woven fabric,\* locked onto the spells, \*Disruption.\*

A transparent wave throbbed, Eira's spell shattered without reservations. The summoned books and gateway into the Library split. The permafrost undid as if time reverted, "Eira, Eira, Eira," said he, "-there was a reason why people feared my name, a reason why my life was always filled by disaster regardless of how strong I was. Pain and suffering are the mediums that make me sane," he chuckled, "-nicely done in summoning the ancient warlords." The hands pressed together, "-everything ends now." \*Dearest companions of another world, I request thee to lend a hand in a quest for victory. My goddesses, bestow thine divine grace onto this humble friend.\*

"Someone's had a change of heart." Three stunningly beautiful ladies gently stepped on from a portal, "-Igna," remarked Intherna, "-are you seriously praying to us?"

"Yes," said he, "-I should pay more respects to my friends."

"Stupid idiot," facepalmed Gophy, "-that's not what I meant earlier," they gathered around to give heartwarming embraces.

"Is this your doing?" inquired Miira.

"I might have said some things," shrugged Gophy, "-not like I meant for this to happen."

"Chill out," said Intherna, "-we've got trouble. Look, it's the warlord of old."

"I see," smirked Gophy, "-this should be an entertaining fight."

Consciousness faded, the goddesses ran into battle, explosions and shockwaves shook the very core of the room. '-the eyes of truth are far too powerful,' he sat with a throbbing headache. 'The boon to see what is beyond what we know is amazing. I hope the day comes when I fully do Origin proud and use his knowledge. A nap seems fitting, my mana's drained, goodnight.'

\*Huff puff,\* “-Why’s the Gophy the goddess of Chaos, Intherna the daughter of Rah the sun god, and Miira the goddess of Kiant, together under Igna’s cause?” \*Huff puff,\* ‘, Eracules, Permesus, Dienla, and Geona were defeated so easily. If only my link to the library was still active.’

“Why you ask?” paused Intherna, “-I mean, he did save me once, gave me a body and a new home. He’s a good man, I like him, a good person to be around.”

“A good man,” she chuckled, “-are you blind, how is HE a good man?”

“It just is,” added Miira, “-my reasons are simple, he inherited what I vowed to protect, and thus, we formed a quaint little friendship. He did keep his promise and find the truth.”

“What truth?” she banged the cold floor, “-how can a weakling keep such a promise?”

“For me,” crossed-legged atop a few bodies, “-it’s simple,” she admired her nails, “-Zeus tried to force his child on me. When I refused, he ordered my death. Without much thought, that foolish kindling of a god jumped and secretly rescued my soul and powers. Going against the supreme one requires strength.”

“Anyway,” yawned Intherna, “-the fight is over, we’ve won. Go on, scurry back to Lucifer, tis not the last you’ve heard of our friend.”

Whispers of a fleeting figure tickled the ears, ‘-Igna, today was a great display of power. I confirm thy worth as my second self. Use the boon carefully, tis as hard on the body as it is on the world. Also, it’s been three hours, should be a good time to wake up.’

‘Him and his playful messages,’ the sleep broke, black hair on the right, red on the left, and blond over his chest, ‘-they never learn,’ sat upright, “-Gophy, Miira, Intherna, wake up.”

“What?” stretched Intherna, “-aren’t you happy to wake up beside three lovely maidens.”

“Believe me, I’m more than ecstatic,” said an apathetic tone.

“Back to the sarcastic comments,” sighed Miira, “-he’s returned.”

“Hooray, hoorah, or who... rayyy?” the tone rose.

“Good try, Gophy,” he facepalmed, “-I’m glad.”

Chapter 596: Empire’s Invasion [14]

Evening dawned on the lonesome manner. The aftermath of a gruesome battle, beautifully constructed walls were stained, tiles cracked, and a few empty armors coated in vile mushy-like substance. The many retainers fled to Glenda where at the far edge of town, near a crystal-clear river, laid a secondary manor. Smaller and less obnoxious of a build compared to the first. The size of its land was what made it worth the trouble. Trucks filled with passengers arrived promptly.

The amber sunset stripe of clouds marred into purple and pink shone dimly onto the banner of the Blood-Kings Clan. A promenade about the premises, especially the study, revealed crucial information, in it, the report of spying subject Ig. ‘Quite an intricate job,’ the paper crumbled into a ball which soon tossed into a trash can. ‘-The reports are mostly about the surrounding villages. Apid village is a

throwaway estate, the people are far too oblivious to make any progress. Oda's on par with Glenda, mostly due to Eira's intervention. Her vassals... I should visit lady Aoi. She has a few things to answer for. Now then, about the surrounding forces,' the interface activated to show a downward view of the area. "éclair,"

"Here," said he, "-I'm currently circling the region, no traces of foreign troops."

"Obviously," returned Igna, "-could you come around and land at the manor. I have a gut feeling the troops are hidden inside a barrier. Running away after three hours isn't easy, on foot and without vehicles."

"On it," the jet circled to arrive in mere minutes.

"Igna," hailed Intherna, "-you going out?" asked she in an apron.

"Yes, I need to clean out the remaining forces. We can't allow this land to be soiled by the blood of the enemy."

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"Be careful," added Miira, "-we'll have dinner ready."

With gentle smiles and provoking outfits, Igna jumped on the cockpit and made for the skies. 'Those three are teasing me again,' he thought.

"You there?"

"Yeah, I'm here. How's the jet holding up?"

"It's better than before, Phil did a great job on it."

"Was it a black project?"

"How did you know?"

"Because I never knew of Phil until we met. éclair, Phantom has more secrets than I'd ever imagine, don't we."

"Correct. We have a secret base known to only the elite of the research force. Our weapons are supplied by them, advancement into the missiles would have taken another decade if not for their intervention."

"A hidden research facility, well, doesn't matter if I know the location. As long as they're willing to work, nothing will go astray," scanning the controls and wings, "-the heart of the beast is very loud..."

"A spell's nullifying the sound. I tell you, Magiology is a subject of wonder."

"Oh yeah," a chuckle escaped, "-I forgot about that. The days of research are far gone."

"Not necessarily," interjected éclair, "-Igna, if you don't mind, I have a request."

"Which is?"

"Return to Phantom's research division. From unmanned planes to cars, we've done it all. One thing is yet to be accomplished, the synthesis of a magical element, the binding of a soul. In this age of rapid

advancement, we're miles ahead; imagine a war without bloodshed, soldiers of metal ravaging the battlefield. You had the same idea, an immortal army, not just an idea, it was turned into reality. The inspiration for said army did come from you."

"What of it?" the mind rattled in thought, "-what happens next, who's going to control the army?"

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"Me," he smirked, "-I'll be in charge of the army, or would have been. My core can be corrupt and exploited. I'm the only liability to Phantom as thing stands now."

"Worried about human intervention. Isn't the core hidden someplace..."

"Yes and no, the conversation with the other self-reminded me of an idea. Beings can exist in multiple dimensions. What if we copied my soul and transferred it to the Shadow Realm. Then, an identical replica would be here, I'd be able to operate on a grander scale without the fear of being infected," enthusiasm and a will to move forward.

'I can't possibly ignore éclair; he's done so much. The affair sounds hard and tedious... for someone other than myself that is.'

"Stop being so smug."

"Fine, whatever. I've already cast a detection spell; it should pick up any traces of life."

"Ok," they circled and searched.

'The All-seeing eyes, a power I thought I'd lost after my reincarnation. The Nox clan's curse. I've regained it, albeit a tidbit stronger. Should be fine,' eyes shut and focused, it reopened into the right iris embroidering multiple ancient symbols in a circle. White to a deep melancholic blue hue, the evolution completed. 'Halving the power seems to work fine. The pain is bearable at least.' Dots lit over the ground, '-let's see, those are monsters, animals, there,' pointing onto a map, "-that's their location." A seamlessly innocent hill covered in tall trees and vegetation. It had a direct line to the Manor, the closer one got, the more subtle details of a path lit as clues. 'I can see through walls, the innate mana inherits to people of the Empire, the eyes of truth are an unrivaled tool for reconnaissance.'

"They're at least a Battalion's worth of fighters hidden inside the hill. A strange device bestowed by the power of gate, a lower tier of teleportation. Uses relay and constant mana supply to work. Tis how they arrived, Lucifer... the plan was so all along, he was in cahoots with the church from the very start. I doubt they know he's the lord they pray to every day."

"The coordinates are locked and loaded; we'll dowse the hill in missiles."

"No need," said he, "-a forest is a sacred place for the animals and monsters. The dryads might be angered. Instead," the fingers twirled, "-there's a gate."

"What of it?"

"Fire missiles, the portal leads inside the hill, are you so daft?"

"Excuse me for not expecting such a high-level spell."



“Actually,” he exhaled, “-it’s not that big a deal. Go on, fire, I can’t hold the portal for too long, my mana’s running low.”

“What a cry baby,” the targeting system automatically toggled. Target, the portal, four rockets fired and disappeared.” The darkened ground lit in a flash; loud explosions burst the hill’s summit into a tunnel of smoke. ‘Casualties, a thousand soldiers, and the loss of Lieutenant Colonel Amrose.’

“Let’s continue the onslaught, I have two rockets left. Would be wise to use ’em.”

“No,” he gasped for air, “-I’m at my limits. Head on back.”

On said night, reports reached the Capital. Eira barely managed to leave the area, her presence was met by one of Lucifer’s generals. In a spat of whether she had failed or not, the news eroded a piece of the advance party. A thousand men lost including promising officers left a quiver. Who could have done such damage – no idea nor clue. A single attack forced Major General Alpath to order a full-scale retreat. The advance forces stuck in skirmishes over Hect and Ect acknowledged the orders. Months of constant defensive battles were to come to an end.

The next day rose after much hassle, pain from the newly inherited power had the entire body tremble. The purple hue eased into vivid crimson; the feeling of pain simply disappeared. A night of assimilation, one very common to those of special abilities.

“Good morning, clan leaders,” greeted Serene in good spirits.

“Why’s the mood so blissful today,” inquired Alaric slipping into the warm seat.

“Why you ask?” grinned Elvira, “-have a guess.”

“Lady Elvira, this isn’t the time for games,” commented Julia, “-we’re on edge about the decisive battle.”

“Wrong, wrong, wrong,” her index bobbed in disagreement, “-yesterday, my nephew captured the barony of Glenda.”

“How so, we had reports of a secret base controlled by a nobleman of the Empire, did we not?” wondered Aurora.

“Indeed, I remember it quite clearly, the reason why we couldn’t make a move on Glenda. Bringing the people into battle wasn’t worth the victory. He basically held a whole town as a hostage,” said Alaric with much information.

“How did the boy manage such a feat?” inquired Julia, “-seems too good to be true.”

“Remember,” said Elvira proudly, “-the boy is a member of Phantom. I have the full report right here,” pages flung across the table. It took a few minutes to read, the baffled expression was most befitting. Her ego rose, a little nudge from Serene returned her to reality.

“He fought off the princess and defeated the true inquisitors. No sign of their dead bodies. The Librarian of Nexsolium is too strong, she’s a threat to our campaign. The slaughter of a battalion should force a retreat.” They quoted many sentences to build an image of the fight.

"It bodes well for us," exclaimed Elvira, "-the news of the lost fight must have instigated fear amidst the troops. We need to add fuel to the fire. I'm certain, once the airfield and fort have been captured, we'll launch a pincer attack and destroy the retreating forces. We'll exterminate the Scouting Division and end the pointless skirmishes."

"They can always ask for support from the Empire."

"Wrong," said she, "-the invasion was triggered by the Church. Intervention from the Empire will break the agreed pact. No matter how strong a kingdom is, if there's no trust in the ruler, the land is sure to fall. We'll be able to buy a few months' time. We've effectively gained the upper hand."

"Frightening," said Serene.

"Also, Phantom will be providing air support. I'll have the jet move to a closer location and wait. If things backfire, the report speaks for what damage can be done." In the span of a single night, a relatively unknown man turned the tide of battle. Success rate going into the next operation heightened, morale's at an all-time peak.

"We agree on one thing," voiced Elvira concluding the dialog, "-Igna Haggard shall become the Baron of Glenda and its villages."

"Agree," nodded they in tandem.

\*Beep,\* a text message lit the phone, "-good job on the fight. I'm proud to have you, Igna. Guess the money was well spent. Carry on with the plan and don't worry about the war, we'll take it from here. éclair spoke of the injuries, rest, for now, my boy. Tis only a step in a marathon, the objective is still fighting against the Empire."

After breakfast, a messenger from the faction arrived with a degree and the crest of nobility. "-Baron Igna," he bowed, "-here are the papers and crest."

"Good," held in a pinch, '-go on Mark of Undrar, swallow the crest of Glenda.' A black-mist led into the dragon devouring the newly acquired title.

"Lord Igna, messengers have been sent to the villages. Your conquest has been made known to the public. They shall be grateful for the man who saved their lives from the tyrant of the Empire."

"Very well," dressed in a simple turtle-neck shirt and pants, "-I'll head into town. There must be things to attend to."

"Sire!" exclaimed the messenger, "-leaving the manor unattended is an invitation for bandits to invade."

"Don't worry so much," at the entrance, \*Open, door to another realm, I, Igna, humble comrade of the Goddesses of the Shadow Realm, implore for thy assistance; Dimensional Transfer.\*

A legion of hardened fighters donning weapons and armor arrived to respectfully kneel. "Lord Igna, Lady Miira's asked for us to assist thee."

'A hundred men, should be good enough for the time being.'

"How can we be of help?" wondered the strangely serious officer.

“Might I have your name first?”

“Major Ehta, leader of the Runa Force. We’re here to serve.”

“Using the same military grading system, yes?”

“Affirmative, my lord, we were split into ranks per lady Intherna’s request. Said it would be easier to discern members from members.”

“Very well, Major Ehta, my orders are simple. Defend the manor and its land from monsters, enemies, and any who acts suspiciously. There should be a direct relay to my personal butler, he’ll give orders as need be, is that understood.”

“YES SIRE!” loud salutes reverberated.

Chapter 597: Empire’s Invasion [15]

Should take care of the protection business. I have a bad feeling, something today’s going to be full of surprises. Julius’s going to experience a whole range of despair, I told him not to get close... very unfortunate.’

A ploy taking countless weeks to be set in motion, events timed perfectly to lead here, at the manor. Brains over brawn or so they say, the ability to adapt to any situation didn’t require either two, the greatest asset of them all, luck. Mauling over possible encounters and situations, the ride to town took a little over four hours. Mana and stamina were low, using mana in the atmosphere wouldn’t help. The eyes of truth were yet to be fully accustomed to the new body, and so, disrupted the natural flow of the mind.

Grey clouds rolled to cover the able sun. The weather had been rather lackluster for a few days. Unbothered, ‘-the mossy-covered walls are a sight to wonder. How can it be so repulsive and attractive at the same time. From far away, tis as if an elaborate decoration, up close, egh, better not think.’

“All hail the new lord!”

“Hail Lord Igna!” cried the guards in steel armor.

‘What’s the matter with them?’ swords were raised to honor the arrival. Further along, were the oblivious townsfolk.

“My lord,” said a formally dressed slender demi-human, “-my name’s Undre, I’ve been appointed as your steward and spokesman.”

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“Undre.” Top to bottom, a normal once over of the average looking person, orange and white-colored ears, a smaller tail, rounded nose, and sharp lashes, if not for speaking out, one could easily confuse him for a lady, if they squinted one eye and were drunk that is. ” Steward Undre.”

“No my lord,” he bowed, “-please address me as Undre, no need for titles.”

“As you wish, Undre. As a steward, what are your responsibilities?”

"It's customary for the steward to aid the lord in advancing the town and its villages. I'll handle public affairs, trades, and overall supervision. Think of it a regency in a very mild proportion."

"Understood," hands-on his weak shoulder, "-I'll leave Glenda to you. It's going to take time before the title of Baron of Glenda comes in handy. My order is to help restore the town, make the people at ease. Send messengers to the nearby villagers and ask for stray adventurers to make their way here. I'll put up a quest later on this week."

"As you wish my lord, anything else?"

"Is there perhaps a chance the administration here is accustomed to the ways of technology?"

"Yes, a matter of fact, we are," smiled he.

"Excellent," the grip tightened, "-have all the necessary papers forwarded to my butler. Here is the contact information."

Across the town and vaguely to the secondary manor, "-Igna, I ought to ask," he leaped over a small ditch, "-why am I the one who has to handle all the grunt work?" complained éclair.

"Huh?" he landed on a small patch of flowers, "-isn't it obvious, you're the best fit to dig up information. Glenda isn't out of trouble yet, we might have bought time, the war still rages. The only best thing to do is fortify defenses, the town shall become our headquarters in the coming expeditions."

"Very well, am I to pump money into the town's prosperity?"

"No," pushing aside a few branches, "-no need to be so generous. They're prosperous as is, my intentions are for a few upgrades. Give them the technological advantage the outer world already possesses."

"Forgive my saying, those items would be best served at Hect or Ect, not a recluse town."

"Wrong," the pertinent onslaught of foliage, veins, and weeds halted at the start of a stone path, "- Glenda is a trader's town. The de-facto place for people all around. Didn't the abundance of adventurers seem wrong, they're concentrated there, if we can form good relations, the strain on the excessive military would dwindle. No public safety, vigilante interventions, and good Samaritans are the only means of protection. No incentive means no work, should work out just fine. As long as there's no risk of revolt, we're clear." A heart-touching melody of flowing water coyly leaped into hearing range. The path forked into a slightly idyllic bank of plants whilst the other led towards a very-well kept building.

'The one who built the manors sure was a lover of nature.'

Murmurs amplified; two sleep-deprived watchers practically leaned onto their spears. "Wake up," he clapped, "-the shift is over, go rest."

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"Who are you?" asked one in a lousy state of mind.

"The new lord."

"I see," newfound sense security buckled the knees, "-Glea clocking out," head to the mud, any feasible discomfort was refuted by the blissful expression."

"Everyone," hailed a maid, "-our new lord has returned," her voice echoed around the lobby. Most of the refugees were stumped, a perpetual limbo between safety and despair. Countless efforts to encourage the destitute returned in naught.

A single glance told the story, '-their morale is low. Most of them must have endured torture or worst. Their 'inhumane' features have been cut... quite a shameful display. Hard to think this was the same a few decades ago. Demi-humans were always subject to abuse and slavery. A docile sense of self and humility always brings about the worst in those of lesser wit. They think confused peace with weakness.'

"My apologizes," bowed the maid, "-even after you saved me earlier, I can't do anything to help, please forgive this worthless servant. Do as you any disobedient dog, punish me," her thumb melancholically slipped to disrobe her basic attire. The strap slid without much effort, the rags fell, she turned to expose the scarred back. "-Please, do as you wish, young master."

"Give me a break," he coldly threw a piece of cloth, "-cover yourself, do I look like to type of men who enjoys torture?"

'Yes, you do,' interjected éclair.

"What do you mean, sire?"

"As I said, I don't care for such trivial ways of repentance. Apologize and do better next time. Leave the others to me, go have a shower or whatnot, the stench of sweat is repulsive."

"Yes, my lord," her tiny stride scurried out the front.

'The refugees,' \*clap, clap, clap,\* at the center, mindless glances scratched off his person, "-RISE!" he thundered across. "-Will wallowing in self-pity bring about salvation, or art thee waiting for death. Speak now, as the Baron of Glenda, I shall grant death upon any who wishes so. Tell me, was the abuse of the prior lord so pleasurable that thee'd give into despair. Say, what of the villagers, what of the children who was abducted, what of the unfortunate captured as fodder, what of their pain, does thine compare or is it but an excuse. The door is wide open for any wanting to leave. A lord is only strong by the people who he keeps in the entourage. I, sadly, don't care for weaklings," he turned and left.

'Wash, wash, wash,' whispered a discordant melody.

"You!" he shouted.

"W-what," a basket of bathing supplies fell, "-what's your problem?" she fired.

"Return to the manor after a day or so. Leave behind anyone who seems lost."

"M-my l-lord," her mouth froze open, '-I've done it now,' a scowl broke the amiable expression, '-No way he's going to ignore my rude tone. I try so hard to be courteous... what a drag.'

"Don't stand there looking dumb."

"W-what a-a-about my l-lack of coutes-"

“Shut it,” he sighed, “-I don’t care, just get going.”

“A-are y-you sure?”

He glossed past her attempts at being cute, “-drop the innocent act,” at the opening of the forest, “-be yourself, none’s going to judge. See you at the manor,” off he disappeared amidst the trees.

‘What a strange man... a strong presence, and open-mind. Is he a good or bad person, I can’t figure. Whatever, anyone who says a maiden stink should be sent to hell.’

As quick as the sun rose, afternoon past and dusk loomed over the horizon. The day was spent moving about the town doing administrative work. The guilds were happy to help and assist.

The warm glow of lanterns mourned the death of comrades. ‘Tonight’s the night the curse fully manifests. Julius, I hope you’re ready.’

Twilight dawned, “-Malley, I never thought you’d enjoy partaking in the hectic way of relief,” bare-chested on a bed, a simple vacant home at the village’s northern border overlooked the forest, “-it’s been little than a week and I feel like we’re so much closer to one another.”

“I mean,” head on his chest, “-I didn’t expect a prince to fall for me.”

“Oh come on,” sat to hold her reluctant face, “-the curse is gone, isn’t it?”

“I sure hope so,” she smiled, “-Julius, I’m happy I met you,” closed into a tender embrace, “-I have a favor.”

“Whatever you wish for, I’ll do anything I can.”

“Promise me you’ll forget about me,” she stood with a blank expression, “-I had fun, my wish of finding true love came true. I can’t believe it, after so much oppression, talking with you every day felt relieving. My stained body was purified, I feel so happy right now.”

“What are you saying?” he stood, “-why so sad, what about us, I want to know more about you, why talk as if you’re leaving.”

“That’s because,” she caressed her stomach, “-I’m going to die.”

“NO,” his body wrapped around her, “-you’re not going to die, it’s fine, I don’t care what happens, I’ll protect you.”

“Let go,” she escaped his hold, “-I don’t want to leave the one I love with so much sadness. Let me go, promise you’ll find someone else. A deflowered priestess of a foolish empire doesn’t have the right to be anyone’s partner. I love you... our story must end,” a pulse blasted across the room, the eye sockets lit in a redden flame, air twirled, the body levitated.

“MALLEY!”

“Julius, I had fun-” another pulse emptied her lung, her fingers trembled, horror of death painted the expression black. ‘It’s over.’

\*BANG,\* “-did the curse activate?” hands in pocket, “-hey there Julius,” said Igna nonchalantly barging inside, “-sorry about the door,” stood shoulder to shoulder, “-as much as I don’t want to say it, I told you getting attached would be the end.”

“Cousin,” said in a murderous tone, “-why did y-you do this?”

“Don’t lose your calm,” returned he with a stronger presence, “-don’t do anything you’ll regret.”

“I know,” dropped to his knees, “-I can’t win even if I go all out. Cousin, please, do something to save her.”

“Why should I?” a look of disgust stung the prince’s pride and heart.

In a time of desperation, swallowing pride and all, “-I FUCKING LOVE HER DAMN IT!” the head lowered to touch Igna’s foot.

“For fuck sakes,” facepalmed he, “-don’t grovel, you imbecile,” he knelt, “-Julius, you’re more of a pain than I’d imagined. She must really mean a lot.”

“More than I say,” the eyes watered, “-I don’t care what needs to be done, save her... she’s the best thing to happen to me. I’ve always wondered what love felt like...”

“Say no more,” hands around Julius’s back, “-if she really means a lot, then, consider it done. Create a barrier around the house.”

‘I might have bitten more than I can chew. I apologize for what’s about to happen, my other-self. We might need to activate nevermore.’ The sleeves rolled, ‘-the curse of Akina... it had to be the strongest one, lady luck never smiles on me, does she.’

The body rose higher, the ground cracked, the walls slit and broke, her presence skyrocketed.

“Thee who resides in said mortal vessel, Akina, princess of Balone, heed my voice!”

“Akina,” mumbled the possessed priestess, “-I’ve longed to be referred as a princess... who is the one who called upon my name?”

“I did Igna Haggard, wielder of the Death Element. Akina, goddess of Balone, ruler of fallen demons, and defiled princess of war, I’d like to make an offer.”

“HA-HA-HA-HA,” she cackled, “-how dare a mere human make an offer to the ruler of demons, you must be insane,” a single glance tore off his arms.

‘Damn,’ blood gushed, “-would you reconsider if I said I could liberate thine soul from Balone.”

“Why would I believe such empty words,” stern and composed, “-try again.”

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Chapter 598: Empire’s Invasion [16]

“Reason, will action suffice?”

“Actions?” the flamed eyelashes lowered to gaze upon the mortal, “-what can you accomplish?”

"A whole lot of things," said he with mild intent, "-a barrier's been placed around this house. The Curse has yet to fully activate."

"Igna, what's the curse actually do. The subject's been changed every time it comes up."

"Didn't I explain?" \*snap,\* reality split into an eye-shaped portal. Translucent steps of purple block materialized, "-I've come to help," proclaimed Gophy.

"Goddess," gasped Igna.

"Stop being sarcastic," sighed she, "-is the curse ready or not?"

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"Could you explain what's supposed to happen?"

"Want me to tutor the prince?" glancing back, "-I suppose there's nothing much to do, is there."

"You guessed it," a struggling grin returned, the energy around the soles reacted to the ground. Inner locks were being picked, any moment, he stared, the aura would run wild. The mind ran in conjunction with the body, there had to be an answer, a solution to please the rightful heir to the demons.

"Listen here," another barrier summoned before Gophy, "-the curse I inflicted upon that girl was of perpetual agony. It cannot be easily cleaned; I doubt even the various religions to stand a chance. Not that it matters," she picked up on his emotions, "-the curse, after fully activating, will give birth to a demon, which one, tis up for debate. Think of it as one of those mystery boxes containing toys."

"Please," the face sank further, "-I implore thee to cut the humorless jests."

"Fine," her eyes rolled, "-no sense of humor. After the host gives birth, the babe devours the mother and her soul to be granted unlimited power akin to a demi-goddess awakening her truest of potential. It's a simple procedure of give and take."

"What about her," he pointed, "-will she make it?"

"No idea," she leaned seductively atop a cheaply made table, "-depends on Igna. Never expected Akina to possess the priestess. As legends say, Akina was a beautiful chaste maiden unlike anything demons had ever seen. She was stolen from the garden of Angels, a bud of a blossom, and taken to the world of Balone. There, after the demons refused alliance to the princes of hell, were invaded – the rest is history. One truth stands strong, the princess was meant to be an angel of love and compassion, a lady of virtue and righteousness. To this day, some say, her soul gets intertwined by whoever is cursed. The stronger one feels love and affection, the higher the chances of her appearance. I guess," a lowkey side-glance showed a distraught Julius, "-she felt strongly."

"Boy, what's the hold-up."

"Give me a moment," asked he without much tact. Faced against the ruler of demons, the composure stood ever strongly. 'Preparations have been done. I've linked the outside mana source to my own, it should supply and bypass when needed. This would be a whole lot easier with Goddess Nike's symbol.' Deep breaths later, 'Awaken, eyes of truth.' All-knowing glares scanned, searched, and yearned down the tiny room.



\*Death Element: Unleash Aura.\* A cocoon of dark aura surged to link atop his head, the pressure sank, nausea soon hit Julius's stomach. "Princess Akina."

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"Have you decided to speak?" her head tilted, "-might not look it, the curse is seeping throughout the girl's body."

"I have a proposition."

"I TOLD YOU BOY-"

"-Please," he interjected, "-do not speak unless I say so." A rival sword of a glance stumped her flow, "-let's start with an introduction, I've inherited the will and symbols of many powerful gods. Look behind, Lady Gophy, a high-tier goddess, stands as my forever watchful companion."

'Surely a mere human cannot do so.'

"I bet you're thinking, surely a mere human cannot do so," he smirked.

'How did he?'

"And now, it's, how did he?" a snarl broke the barrier of refusal.

"Go on, I'm all ears now," the body lowered to a stand, "-what can thee offer."

"A new life," he smiled, "-I have the ability to split the curse of Akina and grant a body identical to that of a divine being."

"Stop it," she refused, "-no one has that much power..."

"Oh, but I do. I have the support of Creation's heir," glancing back, "-I'll explain only if thee agrees. As a man of my word, I guarantee safe passage. Looking at thine soul, tis locked in limbo between Balone and Estna, the fragments must have been split to keep the princess of demons from reviving."

"I admit," the rampaging flames moved to hover above her palm, "-no one except I, knows of my situation. You," she sat with a firm stance, "-there's more to that puny body than wit."

"Oh, I also forgot, my being has merged with Origin. In a way, I have power over the strongest entities in the known multiverse. Therefore, remedying said situation is child's play."

"Good, good," she laughed and smacked her legs, "-that confidence is going to be thy end."

"Back to the matter, will you accept or not?"

"Well then," she paused, "-why adamant. What drives thee, depending on the answer, I'll either accept or refuse."

"Oh," straight in her eyes, "-my goals are rudimentary. My whims are what guides me to do what I wish. Currently, I've made my cousin a promise to save the girl whomst possessed. What I yearn for, in the greater picture," leaned back, "-is to bring down and take what was once mine. Lucifer, Zeus, and the conniving Lixbin, I'll take them all down a notch. Balone was invaded by Lucifer's army, the demons were enslaved and you were made a breeding ground for stronger demons. I know because I was

there,” said a disfigured voice, “-I’ve seen it all, bliss to wrath, the curse of Akina is a manifestation of thine hatred.”

“Boy, if my story is known, tell me my greatest wish.”

“First, you wanted to return to heaven, then, seeing the way demons are treated, chose to be the guiding light. Efforts were shunned, the ancient ones were angered, though, the younger accepted. A division of prospective sowed the seed of mistrust. Deep down, the angel of love and compassion was nothing more than a conniving pest. What thee wants, is power, the body, strength, and boon of a god. Angels are servants, the planned destiny didn’t quench thine gluttonous palette. Getting kidnapped, what a bullshit lie – it was all planned, wasn’t it, Lilith, Queen of Demon, wife of Lucifer. The reason Lucifer invaded Balone was to take back his lover, who was reincarnated as an angel, a great ploy spanning across space and time. The ultimate goal, kill Lucifer and rule as the sole queen. He knew, and thee failed. The greatest wish – salvation.”

“Boy... you’re quite fearsome. It’s true, I want salvation, I want my soul to be freed, I want the curse of perpetual agony to end.”

“Then,” he held out a hand, “-join me, I don’t care what is good and what is bad. I said it before, my whims are what moves this story along, come on, join me.”

“Quite a strange story,” the aura pulsed, Gophy’s barrier broke, the walls thundered, “-I say this right here and now, if what I wish comes true, I’ll swear allegiance to thine name.”

“Then it’s settled.”

\*Come forth: Box of Soul,\* the skull-bearing black chest levitated into sight.

\*Come forth: Box of Alche,\* ‘-I forgot about Creation’s gift. Such an idiot. Time to start the procedure, don’t break on me.’

\*Deep slumber, deep rest, awaken for the chance at retribution. Gate of which stands before mine way, open for thy master has come: Nevermore – Hell’s Gate.\* The ground cracked, the floor crumbled into dust.

“Lady Gophy, mind explaining what happened?”

“Oh,” she spun with hand locked behind her back,”-Igna just negotiated with a very scary person.”

“Negotiated?” the eyes narrowed, “-cut the crap.”

“My goodness, heir to Creation. Haven’t thee realized? Igna’s a master at speech, he’ll convince just about anyone. Look at me, I sure fell for his words. Not to be a bother, he’s going to need help.”

“I get it now,” he stood, “-he wants to split their souls.”

“Good,” said he from a distance, “-Julius, here,” the Box of Alche moved over, “-use that to create the body. Lady Gophy, please take care of the rest.”

“Don’t call me lady,” fired she. The next instant, Miira, and Intherna swooped in for help. Other barriers were summoned around the house.

\*Span across the ages, fear is what held peace, fear is what caused War, fear is the root of evil. I, the harbinger of ultimate fear, have come to spread and reclaim what is mine of right: Nevermore – Terror Gate.\* He coughed blood, the pressure began to break the shaky foundation of the soul. ‘Don’t falter now,’ gritting his teeth, \*Unbound by the laws of Heaven to Hell; unshackle mine power, from Nevermore, I call upon the power of the Annihilation-Gate.\* Consciousness faded, he stumbled to only catch the balance at the last possible instant, few shakes of the head and the grueling ritual continued.

“What a sorry sight,” said Gophy, “-the body isn’t ready to handle the power of a saint, let alone a god.”

“Well, that’s Igna for you,” added Miira, “-he’ll do anything to get what he wants.”

“Look well, Julius,” ordered Gophy, “-he’s suffering for the sake of the head between your legs. Appreciate it.”

\*Gateway to the afterlife, gateway to life, gateway of those who live, open, for I order so: Nevermore – Eleo Gate.\* ‘-My heart’s about to give out,’ \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* the thumb split, ‘-just in time,’ the throat closed, ‘-my heart’s stopped beating. \*Blood-Arts: Extria,\* ‘-I’ll pump it manually. Last gate, here I come.’ \*Pinnacle of power and strength, the last stage of a men’s life, the stage where all is turned to dust and forgotten. Elapsed over the ages, come forth o’ power of mine who has remained bound, unleash thee at thine full potential: Nevermore – Death Gate.\* \*Crack,\* a sudden implosion littered the ground in fluids, ‘-it tore a hole in my chest. Keep it together,’ the air burnt, the roof and walls exploded from the release.

‘I have to make the circle,’ down on all fours, ‘-the symbols of power,’ written in blood, a convoluted circle stood erected. ‘-I got a few minutes left. \*Reality, follower of the steadfast passage of time. Alter Void into what I see, change what is meant to be, obey what I have to say. Beyond thee stretches, far it goes to no stop. Real, fake, disrupt the woven fabric: Disruption.\* A wave of immense proportion crashed against what was known and truth, ‘good, the mess should make it easier.’ The eyes strained till tears of blood flowed, ‘-found the fragments.’

\*Destitute, the passage of what’s known to the masses – fallen in the grace of the depths of Kanigula, remembrance of the fallen, woven in tapestry, heed mine called.\* Unintelligible jumbles flowed, \*-grant I, humble watcher, the power to knit reality.\* Brightly lit threads erupted from the fingertips, clear vision marred into a tinted hue of red. ‘Got it,’ fragments in hand, \*Box of soul, holder of those who’ve sworn allegiance to mine cause, bind those deemed worthy and free their will; Box of Soul – Soulfeld.\* The chest opened, Malley’s body dropped – the queen’s soul flung across, the lid fastened with a beckoning cry.

Clambered to a stand, “-the body,” ordered he, viciously shaped claws dug into his chest, arms, legs, and face, the muscles shirked, hair fell like leaves, “-Julius,” the lips parched too a lifeless white, “-the body.”

“Here,” said he, shock from the sight dulled the mind. A blank canvas sat at the center of the room, \*Box of souls – soul bound to never be free, come forth Lilith, retake what was stolen.\* Down on his knees, shaky fingers tediously carved the final symbol, \*Soul Transmigration.\* ‘Done,’ the body dropped.

“Got you,” smiled the newly formed body, “-a man of his word,” lights of the rebirth dimmed, the body altered to suit the host, “-quite the strange individual,” soft fingers rang along his forehead, “-rest.” The heart gave, the eyes of truth followed soon after, the glimmer of life departed – blank.

## Chapter 599: Empire's Invasion [17]

Location, Castle Eldo. Garrison is stationed currently at three hundred men. Dusk settled in a few hours ago, the chummy scape of trees reclused into unforgiving darkness. Red beady eyes darted from bush to bush. Guards on duty were mostly lackluster in focus.

"Another boring night of standing still," yawned one staring down the southern gate.

"I know," sighed another, "-we got the worst deal of the bargain. Tonight's when the squad leaders bring in fresh produce from the villages. Rumor has it they managed to get hands-on few younger lasses."

"Yeah," he facepalmed, "-slaves to be sold, a good way to bring in money."

"I guess, don't you think it's wrong. We're Ardanians but sell our kind to the enemy..."

"Shush, don't speak loudly," exclaimed the other, "-the only reason we're living is because of the Major, be grateful. Besides, the castle is a great asset to the province, no way they'll oust us, especially since the Advance forces were soundly defeated in Glenda."

"Oh man," said the other, "-look," he pointed. Horse-drawn carriages ambled over the slope. In front sat a shabby-looking beastman. Lifeless gaze fell upon the guard, he tipped a shabbier looking straw-hat.

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"OPEN THE GATES!"

Loud crashes of gears creak the iron bars. A glance inside showed children in rags, some of the younger ones were completely naked save for an older girl who had tightly embraced them. "Wow," gawked the guard, "-ey, she's good looking for a peasant."

"Shut your mouth," fired the other, "-don't get excited, she's probably a gift for the Major. Get back here, we need to shut the gates." Horses neighed to a start; the produce entered in an orderly manner.

An hour passed; the moonless night made for poor visibility. "-Hey, you sleeping?"

"What's up, I just dozed off. So cold, my balls are frozen."

"Oh yeah," he chuckled, "-cats do hate the cold, don't they."

"Don't patronize me," he snarled back. "-Look towards the airfield, there's smoke and fire."

"No, I don't care," cried the other, "-listen, the others are having fun inside. Whips and moans, god damn it, should have been us tonight... WHY."

Out in a remote location, a monstrous-looking plane laid in wait. Dim lighting, easy-going conversations, the distant sound of gunfire, a typical holdout for fighters. Makeshift fences gave a little sense of safety, "-Kendy, Konoe," said a voice over the communication channel, "-I'm éclair, the duty of directing the operation has been swapped over to me. Orders came from lady Elvira." No response came, they intently listened, "-a map of the area has been transmitted, the mission will go according to plan. I have a jet ready to launch an airstrike if things are to go loud. Remember, the operation is prominently

stealth. The marksmen unit has reported strange activities, kill the guards, capture the Major if possible and free any prisoners. Be at the ready, take-off is in thirty minutes.”

What appeared to be fire was the blood-soaked ground of the airfield. The nightwalkers appeared from nowhere, took out the whole enemy base with time to spare. A powerful Blood-Arts by the name of Yeua, controlled the battle. A single infliction by said arts and the victim’s blood would explode out the body. The following sight was one of utter disgust.

The clock struck 23:00, the normal rustle of trees intensified, “-who’s there,” cried a guard without response. \*Bang,\* a single shot and the man dropped. \*Bang,\* another, and the southern gate was cleared. Eldo wasn’t going down easy, the stealth operation soon went loud as alarms rang. Another spotter took notice and fired in a vague direction. The castle’s dungeon, filled by beasts preying on women, emptied at a faster pace. Spells and gunfire soon unloaded down onto the southern entrance, the gates shut, canons rolled to fire. A silent night turned into a concert of bloodshed; long empty halls echoed by gunfire.

“Major, we’re under attack.”

“I know,” said he strongly gripping the hair of a lady. The latter was gagged, blindfolded, and placed on her knees, “-the precautionary measures have been taken, right?”

“Yes sir,” nodded the messenger.

“Then we’re good,” he smirked, “-no one will ever break through the defenses. Have the adventurers jump into the fray. They ought to bring a bit of entertainment,” \*smack,\* “-isn’t that right, lassy.” The fight continued, adventurers leaped to their death, any who’d step outside was shot instantly.

“The gunfire, it’s stopped, we’ve won the battle,” said a rookie of the garrison.

“Keep your guard up,” refuted another, “-we’re still in the midst of battle.”

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“Shut up,” added another, “-says the man with his rod hanging out, what is it, you weren’t able to put on pants?”

“FUCK YOU!” The real attack had yet to come, flares shot on towards the southern side. Bright and obnoxious, most of the garrison were awestruck, never had they seen such a thing before. Covered by the night, a monster flew noiselessly to their location.

“Subjugation Platoon 05,” said Kendy, “-get ready to jump.”

21st of April dawned, orangish hue served to lit the beaten beasts. Yards filled with body and blood, soldiers patrolled the walls, the stench of death made many nauseous.

“Major Cond,” said Kendy with feet kicked up, “-you have two choices, either give us the information we want or die.”

“I’d rather die,” he spat, “-the Empire will send backup, just you wait,” an ignorant smirk went from ear to ear.

"I doubt it," said Konoe, a man in his late twenties with a passion to wear facemasks. Brown hair and grey eyes were the only facial features available to see, "-the airfield's been taken over." In the greater picture, rumors of Eldo being impregnable were true to some extent. Phantom's forces used rudimentary tactics to launch their assault. Obviously, the mission must have gone silently and would have done so if not for a failed shot. Platoon 04, were tasked to be a diversion, heavy gunfire at the south, flares, and more. They were drawn and ease their guard, an attack from the top, a silent invasion of Kendy's Platoon who parachuted in. Evacuation of the stationed forces began as soon as the new garrison, members of the Sabbath's Clan, took uphold.

Back in Noctis's Hallow, "-the operation succeeded," said Elvira.

"Not over yet," interjected Aurora, "-the advance squad is moving to the capital, let's intercept them, wipe out their forces."

"Understood," they nodded, the war had yet to end. As a bittersweet show of strength arrived at the capital, Major Chod was impaled and placed on stakes. A message read, "-retribution for the Lizardmen," burnt alive, not the greatest way to depart. Frowns cut across the Church's patronage, the King of Arda sat solemnly. Inquisitors of the prior battle of Glenda knelt at his feet, "-my liege, we sincerely apologize for our failure."

"INSOLENCE," cried a lady with darkening wings, "-thee dare apologize for failing," tangible hatred and disappointment.

"Take them to the gallows," ordered the King, "-revoke their gift of immortality and bring me Eira."

"SIRE, PLEASE," they begged to be dragged across the floor.

Tranquility soon settled onto the vibrant throne room, "-Eira," said the King, "-I've heard the facts from the report. Care to explain to fight thy cause?"

"Majesty, the enemy was stronger than expected. He has allies who are of greater strength."

"Might I know his name?"

"Igna Haggard, sire, my cousin," her eyes narrowed, "-the Haggard Dynasty has infected themselves into the world's politics and private affairs."

"Very well, I understand the situation. No matter the obstacle, the Empire will win, tis the truth. Rest, for now, order the army to retreat and rest."

Birds chirped; a warm breeze tiptoed in to tickle the cheeks. 'Wake up,' said a whisper.

'What happened?' the eyes opened gently to a mosaic ceiling fashioned into a spiral of various shapes. '-oh right,' few blinks resettled the mind, '-the outside, I remember that view – the second manor.' As did the breeze so did running water from a fountain, a melodic respace. 'My right arm... it hasn't regenerated. I feel so heavy,' he sat upright, the room swayed innocently at nature's whim. '-My throat's dry.'

A mirror showed the body's state, '-oh god,' skinny, parched, lifelessly pale, a bald head, wrinkled face, '-what the hell happened?'

'The body couldn't handle the full release of Nevermore,' whispered Origin, '-we barely made it out alive... no never mind, let me rephrase, we did die. The body has gone through decay... it explains the ghastly state we're in.'

'How long?'

"We're the 30th of April, you tell me."

'My limbs and organs must be dead...' he sighed, '-I get it, the regeneration resumed after the element rekindled.' Arm against the window ledge, '-Origin, were you conscious?'

'No, I said it before, we're one of the same. If you die, I die, if you're unconscious, so am I. Did manage to overhear the final moments but I forgot.'

'Should have expected so,' he chuckled, '-I'm back, so it's fine. There's barely any mana left – why am I so whimsical, I don't get it.' A shawl wrapped around his person, '-let's see what's become of this place,' the door opened to an empty corridor.

'No signs of dust,' he walked, '-someone's here, I guess. I wonder what happened to the invasion of Eldo, did we win or lose?'

Weird chants cut across, pink hair flowed to a stop, '-isn't that?'

"AHHH," plates dropped, the lady darted down the stairs.

'What was that about?' he followed her steps to the ground floor, a clearing into the yard showed tender vegetation, the jeep and figures moved to and fro. 'Here I thought there were only a maid or butler around.' The stomach growled, the ears picked up on a sizzling pan, '-food,' off the first step, the mind went dark for a second, '-damn,' he merged against the wall, '-nearly passed out. How weak am I?' The legs soon numbed; a desperate struggle of leaning against the wall led to the kitchen. There, the pink-haired girl voiced her concern loudly, "-I SAW A GHOST!" she cried.

"Enough with the jest," returned a handsome man in an apron, "-it's nearly lunch-time, we should bring in everyone."

'Who's that?' he squinted, '-blonde hair tied with a piece of cloth, he's handsome, I'm jealous... wait, that's Julius.' Footsteps tremored the wooden floor.

"Believe me, Julius, I saw a ghost!"

"Yeah, yeah, I believe you," he spun to lay out dishes, "-a ghost," blue pupils briefly locked onto a pale-looking old man.

"AHHH," screamed she, "-THAT'S HIM, I TOLD YOU, LOOK!"

"Wrong," a quick smack to the back of the head, "-Malley, for the love of God, look closer," unknitting the apron, "-it's Igna," he darted for an embrace. "-Welcome back, cousin, I've missed you."

"Y-yeah, sure," said he.

"Is something the matter?" he leaned to give space, "-are you ok?"

“Do I look ok?” the words barely escaped.

“Cousin, please, I don’t understand what you’re trying to say.”

‘I c-can’t speak... my mouth won’t move,’ the legs buckled.

“IGNA” hastily catching his body, “-answer me, a-are you ok?”

‘I get it now,’ the eyes shut, ‘-it’s my payment for my mistake. I’ve turned into a burden.’

“COUSIN, COUSIN...” the voice faded, “-answer me, cousin...”

‘Julius, such a worrywart, I’m glad...’

“Julius, Malley, what’s the matter?”

“Lady Gophy, look, it’s Igna,” he pointed.

“Wait, Igna’s back?” inquired Intherna, “-oh,” she arrived to a feeble body, “-d-d-doesn’t look good.”

“We might be in trouble,” said Miira, “-if the element hasn’t healed his body, there’s no saying what could happen.”

“WHY IS THIS HAPPENING?”

“Lashing out won’t alter the fact,” said a very seductive tone. Long carefully cared dark-brown hair, a figure befitting one of a model, facial features of an angel, a beauty mark next to sweet-looking rosy lips, “-I’ll take him to his room. Do care for Lyon, the boy wishes for a toy,” side-glancing Julius, “-bring him what he wishes for.”

“Not so fast, Lilith,” interrupted Gophy, “-he might have granted salvation, doesn’t alter the truth. You’re the queen of demons, wife of Lucifer, what guarantee do we have you won’t betray him. Ever since Cleopatra...”

“Lady Gophy,” stood with Igna in a princess carry, “-keep thy insecurities to thyself. Igna needs rest, and I’ll do what needs to be done for his sake.”

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Chapter 600: Empire’s Invasion [18]

A bad taste pestered; Lilith’s appearance had left quite the maltreatment to her person. None to guide nor none to watch, she stayed despite the cold-shoulder, a single person mattered, one whomst she carried gently to bed.

The chirping of birds dawdled beside the sound of wooden swords hitting one another, ‘-I passed out earlier,’ eyes reopened to the same room. A few hours had passed, side-glance to the bedside clock showed 10:00. ‘-am I being spooned?’ warm, slightly moist breaths strolled down the neck, ‘-her scent, she smells of the forest. Well, judging from the long hair, it’s Lilith. Still can’t move, my limbs are so numb.’ Ruffles in the sheet broke the ‘spoon’, she turned to be assaulted by a beam from the sun. The latter almost felt as if mocking the lady with a wink.



“Goodness,” she sat, her feet tinkled once on the floor, “-I must have dozed off,” gently leaning back, “-I’m sorry, did I wake you?”

‘A man-eater,’ he gulped, ‘-she’s unbelievably pretty. A fresh breath of air from Gophy’s rumbustious personality, Intherna’s energetic and lively side, as well as Miira’s all comforting presence. This one’s like the definition of charm and allure.’

“Oh please,” her face dropped closer, the sweet-scented lips meaningfully prowled about his nose, “-why not say something, am I so repulsive?” Her brows knitted, Igna’s lips and mouth desperately tried to pronounce, the shakiness gave to anticipation, her cheeks seemed to soften, the eyes widened and her ears fluttered.

“Yes...” excitement grew, “-I’m here, tell me what you need.”

“B-b-b-b-”

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“You wish to make a baby with me?” hands to her cheeks, “-no, we mustn’t,” the tone swapped to childish, “-I suppose,” her index playfully went up the legs, “-this body is still pure, I don’t mind sharing the bounty.”

“B-b-b-b-l...Blood,” he whispered.

“Blood,” she facepalmed, “-honestly, I was ready to offer myself. Way to ruin the moment,” quick to drag a silver-knife lost inside a fruit-filled tray, “-if tis blood thee wishes.” A cut, the liquid fell bit by bit into the lifeless mouth.

\*Thud,\* the body shook, ‘-the intensity,’ the numbness faded, ‘-her blood is a thing of wonder.’

A few droplets gave strength to move, “-Lilith,” propped against the headboard, “-come to me,” the paleness dissolved at a slow pace.

“What now,” she pouted, “-I gave blood, what else you want?”

“Y-you,” ordered he, “-come,” the arms stretched, “-I need you.”

“Oh,” her lashes fluttered, “-don’t mind if I do,” her body melted into his. Without warning, her shirt brushed aside, her cheeks flushed, the head moved to sniff her neck.

“Quite the experience one, aren’t you,” remarked she, “-toying with me in such a manner... it does feel pleasant.”

“Lilith,” inches from the tender skin, “-someone’s hormonal,” \*bite.\*

Downstairs lunch stuck in limbo, what the lady said earlier hit home. Gophy sat with her face plastered on the table. Intherna could have cared less, her last words were, “-he’ll be up in a few hours. You worry too much,” and off she was to the wild, shooting fire spells and creating dummies. Miira lounged facing a lovely forest with a book in hand, the title read, ‘-Chronicles of the Haggard.’

“Julius, why are you in such a mood?” wondered the priestess.

"Malley," hands atop hers, "-I'm sorry. Looking at Igna felt relieving at first, then, I felt anger... I'm angry at myself. I didn't realize... maybe I did and chose to not see it. The moment the Curse activated; I selfishly made my mind to not lose you. Igna had to swoop in and go against Lilith, the Queen of Demons. It makes me mad; I swear."

"I don't get it myself," her head lowered, "-my memories are fuzzy, all I picture is a man of unfathomable power splitting my being."

\*Aahh,\* a satisfied scream echoed from the upstairs, "-LILITH!" gritted Gophy.

"Wait for us," said the prince to no avail, footstep trampled up the stairs and into the room, \*bang,\* "LILITH, what are you doing?"

Kind rays blessed the bed, the lady completely melted into Igna, the latter slowly moved to watch the intruders, blood trickled, the wind seamlessly caressed the long brownish-white hair. The pupils fetchingly stabbed their aura with a crimson and white shimmer.

"Cousin, are you well?"

"I'm fine now," returned he, "-thanks to Lilith here," he kindly lifted her head, "-she's a bit on the hormonal side. The blood's truly potent, I've never had anything like it."

"Hormonal is an understatement," commented Malley.

"She's shivering, look at her legs and mouth, drooling as if a freak," added Gophy, "-makes me queasy," she covered her mouth.

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"Don't be that way," said Igna standing before the window, "-Lilith will be a great asset to us."

\*Dup, dup, dup,\* bare feet against the floor, a tiny figure slipped in between the barred entrance, "-HEYA POPS!" a bullet of energy shot to land in a tight embrace.

"Pops?" he frowned, '-horns, a diamond shape tattoo on the forehead, dark circles, slightly tanned complexion, vampire-like canines, and a sharp nose. Who is this kid?"

"Sorry about that," mumbled Lilith, "-my emotions ran a little wild," sat with knees to her chest, "-that's Lyon, your son."

"Lyon?" the eyes narrowed, "-excuse me?"

"Hey pops," said he very full of energy, "-you're the one who saved mother, didn't you. I know it all, I was there when the souls were being split, you're strong, very strong, that's why you're pops."

"Hold on there," index to the boy's forehead, "-be quiet for just a minute."

"Alright pops," he swam up the back and sat atop Igna's shoulder, "-you heard my pops, BE QUIET!" arms crossed paired with a pout, "-did I do good?"

\*Exhale,\* "-Lilith, everyone, shall we head downstairs. I'm at a loss for words at the moment."

Stumped for words, the mind subconsciously led him to the kitchen. There, using the remainder of ingredients, hearty plates soon filled the counter. Miira and Intherna soon joined the fray. Little Lyon, as he came to know, ran about with a toy car. 'A demon with the body and mind of an eight-year-old...'

"Hey pops, I want to ride in one of these cars one day."

"No," returned Igna.

"WHY NOT," the face tightened, "-I WANT TO RIDE IN THE CAR!"

"Not going to happen," refuted he.

"B-b-but," the eyes watered, "-I WANT TO RIDE," he dropped to the floor in a fit, "-I WANT TO RIDE, WANT TO RIDE," mana sucked to generate flickers of lightning.

'This brat,' \*Mana Cancellation.\* "No throwing a fit when I'm around." The mana dispersed.

"Pops?" the cries stopped, "-what did you do?"

"Enough acting," said he, "-come on, I know of the true identity, little Lyon. Reincarnation of Draconis, elder demon."

"Whatever pops," nonchalantly dusting off the clothes, "-I ought to give praise. Igna Haggard, tis true, I'm the reincarnation of the Elder Demon Draconis, the protector of Void, else known as the Demon King of Destruction."

"There," he handed over a plate with fried fish, "-go on, Demon King, have something to eat."

"Food," the innocent glee could have fooled anyone, "-ahem, back to my tale," emotions shifted tremendously between serious and enjoying the morsels, "I'm Draconis. To be fair, I was the demon king until the war against gods and demons. We lost the battle, my being sent to the farthest reaches of the abyss. Our home of Balone was invaded and taken over, I swore to protect the Demon Queen but failed. Her majesty's attempts at killing Lucifer ended in naught. Casualties were great, so the story goes. I don't remember much of it myself, the time elapsed and I slept. Well, until I heard her voice again, then there I was, reincarnated as Lilith's son. You saved me and saved mom, tis the reason you're pops. No fighting it, I've deemed you as my guardian."

"Whatever, kiddo," calmly roughing his hair, "-take this to the others."

"Alright, pops," and off he skipped to the dining hall.

'Well then, events have taken a turn for the better. Lilith and Draconis were revived and brought into the mortal realm. They should be great additions to the Shadow Realm. Can't assumed she'll willingly join my cause. Lucifer's wife, what awaits us?'

Tension flickered in the exchange of glares; the ladies were thoroughly on edge. Julius kept to Malley, mostly likely ashamed for the selfish demands of before. The little kid ran around the table with a plane. Aroma-filled plates brought animosity to a pact of neutrality.

"I suppose it's time we speak," said Igna, "-my only request is of a civil parley."

"Cool with me," said Intherna.

"Same here," nodded Miira, "-no qualms to speak of."

"As long as Julius doesn't fight, I'll remain silent," said Malley.

"If I must," said Gophy.

"The food's great, I rather spend time chewing than speaking," fired Lilith towards Gophy of which she replied in a snarl.

"Don't forget about me," whispered a familiar voice, "-Hey there, my prodigy," \*bite.\*

"Adete," shaking the head, "-please no drinking blood from an injured man."

"Oh please," said as if there were more, "-hum," \*Bite,\* silence. Plates passed around, few morsels in, "-Lilith, what are your intentions?" inquired Gophy.

"My intentions?" her head tilted, "-whatever does that mean?"

"Please don't elude the question," requested Miira, "-we need answers. Staying here was an agreement until Igna awoke. Be truthful so the barrier can be set. Enemy or foe."

"Fine then," fork into the table, "-I'm neither," proclaimed she, "-my objective is still to become strong and take what was mine. I'm sure," the boy scurried to sit atop her lap, "-my son here will aid in the conquest."

"Try again," countless fireball spells summoned above her head,"-Lilith, Queen of demons, I care not about thine ambitions save for one small margin. If Igna's targeted, then expect no mercy."

"Resorting to violence?" she smirked, "-very well."

"Who dares direct killing-intent to my mother," the horns grew, "-I'll slaughter you all!"

"This was a bad idea from the start," cried Miira summoning a head of a dragon.

"Told you she was bad news," sighed Gophy, a darkened aura rose from within.

"Cousin," whispered Julius, "-this is bad."

\*Smack,\* knife into a steak, "-excuse me," frowned Igna, "-what about my request," a malignant aura wrapped around the table, "-shall I repeat myself?" \*Ancient Magic, Spatial-Arts: Disruption.\* reality wobbled, the table and surroundings melted, "-w-what h-happening?"

"My head, it's about to explode."

"I'M GOING TO HURL!"

\*Release,\* a snap quelled the belligerent atmosphere, "-Lilith, please, for my sake, tell them the truth."

Faced by genuine concern, "-I apologize," the visage lightened, "-a little test never hurt anyone. My ambitions are to take back what was stolen from me. This little guy here is my son, an Elder Demon who has reincarnated thanks to the curse of Akina. In a way, my being here is a result of Gophy's actions. I've attained salvation, my mind and heart have been cleaned from the all-encompassing hatred of betrayal and weakness. Igna Haggard is the first man who ever held out a hand of help. The look in your blank

expression reminds me of myself. Lucifer must pay for ruining Balone, he must pay dearly. My allegiance will forever be to the god of death. I have a tiny request.”

“What is it?”

“I’d like Igna to take me as his wife,” she smirked, “-I mean... a man must take responsibilities for his actions.”

\*Cough,\*

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“Cousin,” stared Julius, “-did you cheat on poor Alicia?”

“Don’t make it so scandalous,” facepalmed Igna. The table went silent, “-Lilith, as a man of my word, I’ll take responsibility.”

“We’re going to get married?” her eyes glimmered.

“Quit it with the jests,” he laughed, “-by responsibilities, I meant tending to little Lyon’s every need.”

“I knew you’d say that,” she smiled, “-then it’s settled. Igna Haggard, I pledge my body and soul to thy cause.”

“Good,” he smiled, “-welcome to the family, Lilith, Lyon.”

“Pops,” hopping from chair to chair, “-don’t call me Lyon. I want something new, something better.”

“How about Draconis, no need to forgo a great name.”

“AWESOME,” the cheeks bloated.

“Question,” interjected Intherna, “-why’s little Draconis so small, he looks like an infant but is eight years old?”

“Simple,” he stood proudly, “-I don’t have any idea about my age. I just saw eight randomly.” Echoes of disappointment diffused across the manor. The gathering, constant arguments, and pointless jokes reminded of Kniq, ‘-I’d have never thought this moment would ever come.’