

Death Magic 61

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Night Walker

The once silent and deserted mansion, though still covered with dust; felt alive. The numerous conversations Staxius and Julius filled every room with their vigor. Each time they smiled, each time they laughed, none tried to outwit the other – two persons, the same ideals; people were tools to be used. Though that rule didn't apply when they both met. One could try and influence the other but it would be too obvious no matter what method they used. The earlier show of strength proved it was futile. Avon and Autumn felt worthless; they sat near each other while peering through the dusty window that was wiped semi-clean. It felt boring; it was as if their mothers had met one another after what seemed to be an eternity. What followed next was to be expected: chatter, gossip, arguments and complaining. The vicious circle went round and round until the evening drew closer. Against all odds, they continued speaking, Avon fell asleep while Autumn zoned out.

“Are you sure you want to be part of Dorchester's council? Won't that affect your standing amidst the other nobles?” The conversation went back to where it all began.

“I've told you this before, I'm noble by title, but hold no land to rule. I do own a house, and massive amounts of properties, as well as the financial aspect, however, I don't rule any villages or provinces – as a normal duke is supposed to.”

“Fine, as you wish, who knew that we would become allies once more.”

“Yes, Staxius, old friend, who knew, fate is a mystery of its own.”

“Julius, my friend, the evening draws close; we've been conversing for hours on end. I do feel a little hungry now.”

“I agree, I do feel my stomach rumbling; screaming and begging for a morsel of food.”

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“Excellent, I shall go scour the kitchen, though I highly doubt I'll find anything consumable.”

“And I'll wake up Autumn and Avon, I'm guessing we are moving out later at night?”

“As perceptive as ever, we are in fact leaving for Dorchester in a few hours time.” The door closed as Staxius stepped out. The vibrations from his footsteps slowly faded into the distance. Left alone, Julius reflected, “he truly hasn't changed. This is great indeed – years of trying to be him haven't done me wrong just yet, I can now see fully how mind-blowing his charm over other people is.

That's a level of manipulation I can never hope to reach. I'm now in my late thirties, time has flown by quickly – Staxius remained the same. My plan at first was to use him to get more power, but it's a futile effort, for whom will it do any good? I surely don't want him to become my enemy. Time to throw in the towel, I've fought for too long, I can't keep this strong man act any longer, I'm human still and I want to rest. Dorchester will become my home; just like it is for him. Until now, I only had

Autumn's survival and upbringing as a sole objective, but I can now see that she's grown into a wonderful woman – bit on the innocent side but still a woman. This is the perfect opportunity, working alongside Staxius will be a chance in a lifetime, and if my experience can do him any good,

I'll be happy to help."

Julius was stuck, trapped, and confused. The question loomed over his head, should he continue following Staxius's footsteps, or become a part of his team. The answer was obvious; after witnessing how Staxius schemed his way back in Claireville academy – he became mesmerized.

"My friend," the door slowly opened, "- no food I'm afraid, there but dust and ants if you're interested?"

"Unfortunate, guess we'll leave on an empty stomach?"

"Correct, I've got a question."

"Speak, friend."

"Do you have a car or any means of travel?"

"Rest assured, Autumn did bring her car, it's a way outside town, but it's here."

"Shall we move then?" Avon didn't seem inclined to wake up. Staxius desperately shook his body but it was but wasted energy. In the end, he picked him up, holding Avon as if he were a princess and left for the car. Following close behind, Autumn, who was in a state of lifelessness, the boring conversations that transpired earlier sucked out all her strength. Her mind melted, she looked as if she were drunk, her rosy cheeks were redder than before.

"Your Majesty, are you sure it's wise to send out an attack this early?" The throne room felt heavy.

As opposed to when Theodore and the envoy visited, it brightly lit. One of her counselors or rather, most of her counselors were debating whether attacking the defiler was a good choice. Queen Shanna patiently listened to their arguments, their points, and their fears. It had been hours since then, her patience ran out. "Silence," she yelled, the whole floor reverberated. "I've made my decision, the Enbalar siblings are to set off for Dorchester this instant. The portal has been built, bring that man's head to me, alive or dead – I care not. Don't make the same mistake again, I'm sending out one of the Night's Wings with you. Melantha Aurora, please step out of the shadows and accompany my children on their quest."

"B-brother, d-did the queen really send out a member of the royal guards?"

"Shut it," Erlareo whispered through his gritted teeth.

"As you wish your majesty," out of nowhere, a soothing and refined feminine voice made itself

apparent. A mist soon took shape before them; then dispersed into bats. Emerging of that, a tall lady with a red dress, paired with red lipstick. Her long black hair was left alone to the wild, it flowed gently. Gracefully, she bowed and left, "we don't have all night, let's start shall we." She playfully licked her upper lips.

The moon came out to play, the night sky was partially covered with clouds. The feeling it gave out was gloomy and sad, though the stars could be seen here and there. The air felt fresh and nice. After a quick walk, Staxius reached the car, the concealment spell hid it perfectly. *Snap,* it revealed itself.

Behind, Julius was left baffled – being in the business of buying and trading various magical equipment, and being a Noble to boot; he recognized it instantly.

“The Xerxes’s series Shadow, Staxius, how did you manage to get a hold of this. Don’t tell me you bought it, one of them was recently sold for t-ten million gold p-pieces to a-another kingdom.”

He gulped; the breathing became more of a panting. “Guess it’s really that awesome, go on, get in, though it’s a two-seater, we can make space.” Avon still didn’t wake, having had enough, he stuffed the lazy spirit into the truck, Julius sat with Autumn on his lap. She wasn’t that big, so they fit inside without any hassle.

“How did you get this though?” Julius was adamant about getting an answer.

“I got it gifted to me from a close friend. Not to scare you or anything, but do hold onto something.” He smirked, “don’t you dare.” Julius warned him, he knew what Staxius was planning.

Fondly enough, with a quick smile, the car shot forward just like a bullet being fired. “So, where’s your car at?” Julius gave a fairly accurate description of where Autumn left it.

“Holy,” the door opened, Autumn jumped out and laid to rest on the grass; her heart was racing. Julius sat in the car; he was in another dimension. Staxius laughed, “guess we’ve arrived.

“No joke,” Julius added sarcastically. “Never again am I going to ask you for a lift,” he in turn laughed. Everyone stepped out and walked over to the only tree under which Autumn had crawled her way too. It was peaceful, Staxius thoroughly enjoyed it as did Julius. The journey took around two minutes, the noble district wasn’t far off. One could make it in fifteen minutes of walking.

Directly behind the tall buildings from the noble district, the moon shone as brightly as ever. As no one lived there any longer, the town looked quiet and abandoned, the Krestonian crest stood tall and directly in front of the moonlight. It was as mysterious as ever, Staxius was captivated by it. For someone else, said crest would be overlooked, but in this instant, Staxius looked at it. A day later, it still called out, he wanted to touch it. Randomly, caught by the gentle breeze, Staxius held out his left arm and made an L-shape with the thumb and index finger. He placed said L in front so that the crest rested on the thumb. Julius looked at him in awe, while Autumn scowled.

As he continued gazing the crest through the L-shape, something changed. The crest began to glow, it didn’t seem obvious, to Julius nor Autumn, but Staxius saw it. His eyes, after all, were inhuman, the focus automatically changed, he glared at it as sternly as an owl. The color it emitted was brown at first, then it changed into a greenish hue, a faint whiff of mana was felt. Three shadows jumped out of it, it happened so quickly he only saw faint movements. Simultaneously, the trunk of the car opened, Avon awoke, he ran furiously towards Staxius. “MASTER,” his sprint looked slow, everything slowed down, Staxius’s concentration grew denser, something within him told him to raise his guard. It was the premonition of danger, the survival instinct; his senses heightened automatically but he knew not the reason why. “-it’s smells of blood and disperse.” The words rolled slowly off Avon’s tongue. *Bang,* out

of reflex, he dodged what appeared to be nothing but wind. The tree under which they stood was sliced clean in half, vertically.

“Get down,” Julius grabbed Autumn and retreated, everything sped up to its normal speed. “W-what is happening?” Staxius asked confused.

“Nice reflexes,” staring him directly, a lady with black hair with the moon as her backdrop. She held black wings on her back, her teeth looked sharp. “-I’m impressed,” she smiled. Following close behind, the two-elves, Staxius recognized them. “Staxius, what is happening?” Julius yelled.

Simultaneously, without any warning, the lady made an X-shape with her right arm, a small explosion was heard and two highly compressed air-strike was sent again. Nimble as always, Staxius avoided it, “Julius, take Autumn and get out of here.” For an instant, his gaze met Avon’s and he signaled him to take the car and run. The car started up, it drove without anyone in it, Avon picked up both Julius and Autumn then sped off towards Dorchester. “Aren’t I supposed to help him? Julius asked Avon as he forced him inside, “getting to Dorchester is a priority.” He replied seriously.

“A night-walker,” Staxius stared up with amazement in his eyes.

“Why aren’t you phased by me, I’m a vampire, you should cower before a superior race.” She fired back instantly. “Superior, don’t make me laugh,” he snarled. “Are you looking down on me?” her tone sharpened – her gesture changed from X-shape to making an O-shape. *Soul-sap,* she conjured one of many spells unique to vampires, that one, in particular, had the power to drain a person’s vitality.

“How amusing,” in a single motion, he unsheathed and then sheathed his sword. The black bubble which was the soul-sap spell got sliced in half. “Funny isn’t it? I’ve nullified the spell from a superior race,” he sarcastically added. “You’re confident for a human, let’s see how you can match up to me,” she licked her upper lips, she enjoyed it.

Whoosh, her movement got twice as fast, an onslaught of attacks came barraging down from the air. Though it was hard, Staxius defended with all his might, he didn’t use any magic, only physical strength. The reason was, he wanted to see how well he could match up against another race, a race of legend; vampires. He held his own, dodging, parrying but it got old quickly. “Enough of this fooling around,” she stopped. “I’ve had enough.”

“Finally ready to take me seriously?” Staxius added.

“Shut it, *Vampiric second form: Unleash.* Her face began to morph, she changed to look more like a demon, her wings grew bigger, her nails sharper and longer, and not to forget her teeth. Her entire body changed from normal to larger in stature. Though she was bigger, she looked as refined as ever.

“Amazing, you’re as pretty as the first time around if not prettier,” Staxius spoke out in awe.

“Flattery isn’t going to do you any good.” She snarled. Little did she know that dark-arts was in full effect.

As the one whom you’re contracted to, I order thou to reveal this woman’s weakness and how to exploit it. Dark Arts, Sense personality.

[Victim: Melantha Aurora, age 350]

[Personality: Vicious but romantic]

[Prediction: Descendent from a pure noble bloodline of vampires, no ideal lover nor friend]

[Weakness: Someone to love her for who she really is and treat her as who she is]

“Now that was unexpected,” he read her personality, dark-arts worked against all odds and on a vampire. “-that vicious nature of hers is going to make it hard for me to get to her heart. I’ve got no interest in befriending her, but information would be good.” As he got ready to get serious, a soft voice spoke from within, “don’t forget that the more allies you have the stronger you’ll become.” It was Undrar, a message she passed down so long ago.

“Not going to happen,” his stance changed from careless to serious. “What happened human, why do you stand so awkwardly, have you perhaps felt my strength and have forgone the will to fight?”

“Dear Melantha Aurora, don’t underestimate me that much, for you see, I know your deepest secret. You want someone to like you for who you are, but let me tell you something, it’s not going to happen.” Her face changed, it turned gloomy, “shut up, you don’t know me.” She shook her head in denial, repeating “no, no, no” continuously.

“Easy,” *Death element: Shadow-step.* With his hands on the sword, he jumped. “Melantha, your vicious nature is what’s holding you back, fight to your heart’s content, I’ll prove to you that us humans aren’t that weak as you thought.” He rapidly approached her, his aim was to cut her wings

off. “HUMANS ARE WEAK, SHUT UP!” *Bang,* a shock-wave of dense mana shot out of her, it took Staxius by surprise and he fell, hitting the ground hard. “You’ll never understand me, pathetic

human.” She rushed down after him, her nails pierced his chest and went straight for the heart. Or so what she thought, a burning sensation made her take her hand out. “You’re right, humans are weak, but they are resilient and can survive in the harshest environments. Though it ails me to say, I’m not human.” He smirked, *Death element: Unleash Aura.*

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Demon

The sound of the engine working at full throttle was heard throughout the empty path leading out of Frostrest. Adelana had her guard up, they had made it a way out. Nighttime had now befallen, kids wanted to jump and play around while the elderly wanted rest. She had planned to pull an all-nighter and go as far as she possibly could. Sadly, that wasn’t possible, the villagers were tired and bored. If she didn’t hear their plea and cry, it would result in anarchy. Hand-tied and desperate, she ordered the few volunteers who came all the way from castle Garsley to set-up camp. It was freezing, the air around the foot of Brisnet heights was always chilly. The camp got set-up and she stood guard over everything. Their journey had been peaceful so far, though she worried deeply about her sisters who stayed back. It pained her to leave them to the wolves but sacrifices were needed to be made. Her gaze fixed atop Brisnet heights, “hard to imagine that you’re the only line of defense separating us from total chaos. If only I could stay back and protect you from invaders, but it’s all but dreams.”

“Adelana, we’ve got trouble,” Alyson said while panting. In her hand, she held a black rectangle, a phone. Her fears had turned for the worst. “Kreston has begun their attack, and as we speak, they fight over the village.” She quickly read out the last message received.

Fenrir and the others had to hold the village for longer than anticipated. The reason was that Adelana was still in the vicinity, and if the army were left to advance further, the innocent lives would be put in peril. It had only been a few hours since the camp was set-up, the villagers nonchalantly talked and ate to their heart’s content around a massive fire. This gravely annoyed Adelana, she wanted to order everyone to get back in the trucks, sadly, it wasn’t possible. All she could do was bite her lips and glare while waiting for the rest to recuperate. This goes to show that everything isn’t as predictable as it appeared to be; the plan was to evacuate the village, while Kreston wasn’t ready to attack. After the innocents were out of harm’s way, when they would inevitably march into Frostrest, a fire would be set ablaze, both slowing their pace and giving time for Fenrir to set up their ambush near Brisnet heights. Against all odds, the attack began so much earlier than anticipated, the fires weren’t ready nor were the defending party.

The sound of swords clashing against each other, the faint smell of iron and gun powder. Hidden within the shadows, Ayleth from close range and Annet from long-range picked off the enemy one by one. Their number didn’t decrease, rather it increased, Fenrir made her way inside the forest and wreaked havoc on their flank. It accomplished nothing but cutting off their supply route, the forest had been cleared out partly and a path was cut out. Its vehicles moved up and down quickly. Using ice-magic, Fenrir froze said path, built numerous ice-wall as thick if not thicker than stone-bricks, all the while slaying whoever she saw. It may appear that the defending crew was winning this fight but it couldn’t be any further from the truth. In reality, the army had other routes scattered around,

Fenrir only took out the main one, and the number of soldiers was mind-blowing. They came in waves that increased in number gradually, they were only the rookies and trainees. The real army hadn’t shown its true strength, the pope led the whole expedition – rendering them twice as strong.

A good leader makes an already powerful army twice as mighty.

Annet and Ayleth fought and hoped for Adelana to move quickly, it was necessary to ensure their survival. It all rested on the elder sister’s hand. Out of options, Adelana sent a message to Staxius, she knew full well that he was busy but he was the only one who could help. Avon read said message, though he slept in the trunk, he saw it and sensed it. A nightwalker and another powerful mage, the latter was Julius, he held no chance against the vampire, thus, Avon acted and decided to use both the siblings as support for Fenrir. On route to Frostrest, he explained everything. Julius’s aura changed, he was serious and ready to go, the bloodlust grew agitated. Autumn, on the other hand, understood the situation and was ready to fight to the death if need be.

“Thank you for understanding, Julius.”

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“No problem, anything to help out a friend,” he smiled and the black car vanished in the night – back-up was on the way.

“Why do you look so composed?” Alyson asked as she delivered the news.

“Support is on its way, Staxius is coming, though we have to move too. We can’t idly sit by. We’ll leave in two hours, go announce it.” The breeze grew colder, she smiled and stared at the night sky, “thanks for being our leader.” An image of his face crossed her mind as a shooting star flew overhead.

Miles apart from each other, Staxius panted. The vampire had done a number on his body, he got weak. “W-what do you m-mean you’re not human?” She carefully eyed him down. He coughed, he couldn’t speak, “d-don’t you g-get it by n-now?” Something shifted, the Enbalar siblings felt it and knew that feeling all too well. “Watch out,” the kid sister screamed. “He’s a demon,” the brother added. “They are right,” Staxius smirked. Out of reflex, Aurora continued piercing his stomach as opposed to his heart where it felt hot. Her hand went right through him, it was as easy as plucking a flower petal. “Stop, it’s getting boring.” He rolled his eyes and stared at the elves. “How d-do you s-still draw breath?” Her eyes filled with anger and hate, “why won’t you cower before me? Am I a joke to you?” Her ego took a hit, normally people would run away at her sight.

“Is it the first time you’ve stood up against someone equal to you?” he spoke monotonously, his gaze returned to her eyes. Her face, it bled, she bit her lips out of anger. “Let me tell you a secret, the more you kill me, the more powerful I get.” Quickly, he rose and got closer to her face than before, they were inches apart, her whole arm went through the hole she made. Blood gushed out, but he didn’t look phased at all. “W-who a-are you?” she asked, her face remained still, it looked as if it were stuck between happiness and dread. “I’m the one who is going to kill you,” she felt his aura and quickly flapped her wings to get away.

“Why are you running away from a puny human,” he smirked, the hole in his chest regenerated.

“Am I not worthy to stand close to you?” he made it seemed as if she rejected him. “Am I not worth being your lover,” he chuckled. *Death element: Unleash Aura.* She tried flying away but got swallowed up by something invisible. She felt as if she was drowning underwater, her movement completely stopped, her wings froze and she fell straight down. “Let me tell you something,” he slowly approached her. The look on her face changed, never had it happened for her to be so overwhelmed. Though her ranking was the worst out of the royal guards, a measly A-rank which translates into SS-rank here, she, in fact, was powerful. “D-don’t c-come c-closer,” she tried crawling away, her legs gave up on working. *Whoosh,* as gently and elegantly as a butterfly, Staxius dashed forward and appeared before her. Her face stared at the ground, the subtle movement of grass made her raise her head. Crouched down, she saw death staring at her, his face was inclined to the right, “is there something wrong?” he asked with a casual and friendly tone. “Because how you’re acting,” he stood up, “-is a complete reversal to what you were saying earlier.” *Crack,* he slammed on her right arm, it instantly shattered, she screamed, it echoed all around. “Is a superior race suppose to scream like that? Isn’t it strange how the role gets swapped around.” His eyes held no remorse nor feelings. “P-please d-don’t k-kill me,” she begged. “Oh I’m sorry did that hurt?” her arm begun to regenerate, “you’re a superior race after all,” once the arm healed, he slammed on it again.

She screamed louder than before, “you’re resilient, just like humans.” Staxius covered his mouth, he tried looking surprised. “Oh my,” *Crack,* he broke the other arm. She was in agony; his aura was so dense it seemed like an imprisonment spell. “N-no m-more.” Tears flowed down her cheeks; her massive stature turned back to normal. “Oh my, look at this now, you’ve grown smaller. Should I take this as a sign that you’ve given up?”

“Stop it you demon,” Erlareo jumped into the battle; he wanted to save the vampire. Meanwhile, the kid’s sister began shooting arrows. “Don’t interrupt me,” the brothers face got slammed into the floor right next to the vampire, he was knocked out instantly. He turned to look at the sister, she already shot an arrow. Out of reflex, he caught it, the tip was coated with poison, it was millimeters away from his eyeball. “Disturb me and I swear this arrow ends up inside your brother’s skull,” he pointed the tip downwards and shoved it into the ground next to his face. “I won’t be so kind next time.” The sister faltered, she fell to her knees and remained silent. “Now then, miss vampire, where were we?” Her injuries healed. “I-I’ll d-do a-anything.” Her sobs fell on deaf ears. “Those black-wings look so pretty.” He changed his target, slowly and gently, he caressed the edges. On the ground, Melantha twitched uncontrollably, “I see, this is your sensitive spot.” With a smile of satisfaction on his face, he reached for his sheathed sword. “Let’s see how you do against this,” he gently touched the cold tip of the blade on the wings, she moaned. “Not the reaction I was looking for,” he lightly let the sword’s weight pierce it, her sensitive spot. Her scream turned into cries, it was deafening, she screamed so painfully it made his ears hurt. “Shut it,” he grunted. Out of spite, he tore her dress partly, folded it into a ball and shoved it inside her mouth. “Let’s have fun,” he smiled and patted her head cheerfully. Her screamed muffled, he effortlessly began to slice her precious wings. She tried to fight back, her power grew stronger, “No, no, no,” *Death element, Unleash Aura x2* this time it was so dense it felt like the world rested on her shoulders, her body stuck onto the ground like two magnets getting attracted. He took his time, sliced, and played around like a madman. That part of him had been lost, he always loved to make people who look down on others suffer, he did it to anyone. The people who seemed to be almighty and untouchable, he loved bringing them down.

Melantha Aurora’s scream grew so intense that she ripped her vocal cords.

“Guess it’s time to stop.” The sun rose, dawn approached, it didn’t look that great for the vampire, her mortal enemy was waking up. Staxius tortured her for the whole night, and now planned on leaving her to suffer and die as the sun rose up. The brother woke up hours ago and sat with his sister, they both watched as silently as a picture. Their fear grew, they had annoyed the wrong guy. As he stepped away, the vampire looked at him, her eyes were filled with regret and fondly enough he sensed a bit of friendliness. She didn’t seem angry nor displeased by him, her whole emotion changed – after what she went through Staxius waited for anger but got a glimpse of joy. Her eyes slowly shut, deep inside, she accepted her fate to die out here.

“I forgot to ask her questions, damn it.” *Death element: Shadow-step.* A gust of wind flew by, it awoke the siblings from their state of lifelessness. Staxius and the girl had vanished.

Out on the path leading to Frostrest, Staxius’s car passed by Adelana’s truck. The former shot by like thunder while the latter moved at a steady speed. “Sister, was that just?” Alyson asked.

“Yes, that was Staxius,” Adelana replied.

Sat on Autumn’s lap, Avon grew tired. “Julius, I’m getting slower, the mana given to me by Staxius is running out, I’m on twenty-five percent. I can take you there but not back, not together with you; I may need to return alone. “Don’t worry about it, when are we reaching Frostrest?” Julius said reassuringly.

“Fifteen minutes,” the car shot into overdrive and went twice as fast as before.

“Get ready for an all-out assault when we get out, Autumn.” He warned her.

“Yes, count on it brother.”

Back in Arda, the queen grew impatient. Vampires were given straight orders to return before daybreak and had limited time outside. It was necessary for their survival as well as safety. That is to say that most vampires can last outside and live normally, those who've trained hard enough and reached a certain level of maturity that is. Despite that, the sun is still their biggest weakness, especially if they're hurt or injured. Queen Shanna Islegust paced around her room worryingly. Questions like did the elf get killed or were they captured ran through her mind. She wasn't a bad person, just overprotective and over caring though heartless when need be. All creatures were dear to her, especially the one hailing from Arda, but humans didn't see that. People often took advantage of her gullibility, if a young elf or any other race came to meet her and say someone else tried to harm them. Then may it be a lie or truth, the accused would be put through the harshest punishment. She knew deep down that people used that weakness against her, but she could not just turn a blind eye to a crying young one. After all, she's a fairy, almost like a mother but a lady as well.

None really knew how a fairy is born, some say when a child smiled but those were tales told to make kids obedient. Only she held the answers and secrets, people have said that the day when someone truly deserving of her comes around; she'll transform into an angel and devote herself to that said person. It's all speculations and folktales. The queen who leads Arda is real; her stature is one of a grown woman as opposed to what people in the villagers say fairies are. Usually, they describe said beings as child-sized and bearing green eyes with wings on her back. Here in Arda, away from all other eyes, that description could not be any wrong, she has wings but it's hidden. Her eyes are green but changes throughout the day and her mood affect it. Little do those cheerful kids know that a real-life fairy exists though that information is secure and only a handful of people know it. Some waited for that fated someone to come, while others just scowled at the idea of the queen being romantic to another being.

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Frostrest's battle

“They just keep on pushing through.” Ayleth panted, they had been fighting from night till dawn. “Bad news, I'm almost out of arrows,” Annet fired back, she crouched atop a house and rained down death. Though it ran out, a single arrow remained in the quiver. The endless wave grew more and more, kill one and two more raise up to take its place. Defending had gotten harder, “Annet, cover me.” She jumped down, her daggers were covered with blood, it felt slippery and had to be wiped using her own clothes. “Only one arrow left,” Annet drew the bow. “That should suffice, aim for that platoon behind using guns. Muffled screams made its way out of the forest. Paying no mind to it, Ayleth slipped into the shadows and intricately killed the few fighters who entered the village. Sat with his bald head exposed to the elements; the village leader watched as the final moments of Frostrest came to pass. *Boom,* an arrow imbued with a powerful wind spell exploded upon impact on the ground. The people who provided cover were blown to pieces; body parts flew all around. It accomplished nothing; the wave continued advancing.

Screams got louder, Fenrir pounced out of Rotten thicket and rushed into the village while clawing everyone in her path. Her once white and pristine fur had turned to red and sticky. “Over here,” Annet waved. Fenrir's strength drained, with what little power she had left, she jumped for Annet's hiding

spot. She landed and went back to her human form. "A-are you ok?" She asked worryingly as Fenrir landed harshly, the roof nearly broke. "Yeah," she coughed violently, "j-just tired."

"The sun is rising, but we can die at any moment now. Gunfire has gotten more proactive, we need to retreat now." Annet voiced her concerns. "W-where's Ayleth?"

A quick look below answered her questions, heads rolled like a dandelion after the wind had blown. The dirt paths were stained with blood and the smell of iron grew stronger than ever. Though it didn't look obvious, duel-wielding daggers and sticking to the shadows was harder than anything else. Ayleth had to constantly be on her guard and be aware of the battlefield. She was exhausted mentally as opposed to physically, her policy was one move one kill, efficient but time-consuming.

"W-what do we d-do now?" Annet asked as the look on Ayleth's face told that she reached her limits – everyone was. "R-retreat," Fenrir gave the green light. Adelana and her party were now probably at a rather safe distance, though it was unpredictable, they held their own. Fenrir signaled the only one fighting to get back. "Finally," just as she came, she vanished. Moments later, she appeared next to the other two. "Can we finally leave?"

BAM, a thunderous explosion rattled everyone. "W-what is t-this?" The roof gave in, everything collapsed. "A-AYLETH!" Blood dripped from her mouth, she looked confused. The voices from Fenrir and Annet grew quieter, "w-why a-are you?" her eyes rolled and she fell backward.

"Target down, your holiness." Removing his goggles, a young man spoke. He laid near the pope.

"Well done," the pope seemed pleased. Resting on the ground, a rifle as big as the boy using it. The menacing black color with a single red line across the scope told everything, that was Knightfall. A weapon made overseas with the collaboration from the Order; it was built by the same people who

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made the Xerxes car series.

"Let's move in." The pope ordered, following behind him, the real army; all armored and ready to fight. The path they used wasn't the same one taken by the scouts, but around the forest, coming from the sea's direction. Though the village held a height advantage, the young marksman, referred to as a prodigy, made the shot as if it were normal for him.

She bled, her breathing grew slower. Fenrir's rage grew, her eyes turned red. Ayleth was shot in the stomach. "S-stay w-with me." Annet kept on slapping her cheeks gently. Out of desperation, she removed her armor, it was heavy. With her upper body exposed, Annet tried giving first aid, she tried to stop the bleeding but the wound proved to be harder than she could handle. "C-can't b-be." She kept at it; Fenrir growled but hadn't the strength to fight.

"Send the grenades," a faint scream was heard. The ground vibrated, it was the army, they were destroying the village from afar. A silent click piqued Fenrir's attention. A grenade was thrown inside where they hid. "Get d-down," she jumped onto Annet and broke through the wall, landing outside.

Bam, it blew up, Ayleth's dagger flew out and landed next to Annet. Her gaze changed, it looked like Staxius's. "Don't," Fenrir tried to hold her back, but she walked inside, through the smoke. "Now

isn't the time to despair," instead of giving up, Fenrir rushed inside. There, out of pity, she helped Annet carry her sister out. Half of her face was burnt, and the wound still didn't stop bleeding,

though Annet made a makeshift bandage out of her own clothes.

"This is bad," Julius spoke, the village came into view. "Brother look," Autumn pointed at the girls retreating from the battlefield. "Avon stop," the doors opened. "Are you the silver guardians?" he asked, the explosions grew more regular. "W-who are you?" Fenrir asked, they gently placed Ayleth down. "No time for introduction, Autumn."

"On it," she quickly got to treat her wounds. "I r-remember you." Fenrir's memory came back, "you're that mage who killed mercilessly in the last war. You were present when we conquered castle Garsley, what are you doing here?" Though she had her doubts, Autumn's swift, careful movements, and healing magic made Fenrir trust them. Annet remained silent, she didn't speak, her eyes looked lifeless. "I'm Julius Garnet, a friend of Staxius Haggard; we've been called forth as back-up."

"You're a bit late but thanks anyways, the village is lost." She scowled. "B-brother..." Autumn's tone felt desperate. "What is it?" he asked. "I- c-can't h-heal her, t-the wound, i-its cursed b-by a-anti healing magic."

"Impossible," his tone changed.

"What do you mean cursed by anti-healing magic?" Fenrir asked. She didn't look bothered.

"It's Knightfall, the cursed-series rifle." That was the only information he gave out.

"C-can't you s-save my sister?" Annet spoke, she stared at her sister's burnt face. "Avon, d-do you have that h-healing scroll?"

"I don't sadly, I think I can recreate it – give me a moment." Grabbing a blank-scroll, Avon copied intricately all the symbols and incantation Staxius did. It worked, the scroll glowed green. After it was finished, Avon passed out, his body faded.

"Come on, use it." It worked, the wound healed itself. Something felt wrong, Ayleth was destined to die, but somehow, a twist of fate gave her a second chance. Avon vanished, the mana he was given exhausted itself – the black car felt lonely. Ayleth breathed once more, Annet's trauma left a scar that would reveal itself later. None could give a sigh of relief, Kreston still made itself present. "What did Staxius order you to do?" He asked out of curiosity.

"Save the villagers and not let Brisnet Height's be conquered."

"Impossible, holding back an army of that size from capturing Brisnet height's is but a fool's errand."

"We know, it's impossible. Regardless, those were the orders given by Staxius."

"Fine," he gave up, "I'm not his friend for nothing." The air changed; Julius began to use magic.

"Behold my strongest spell," *Fire and lightning element: Meteor shower.*

Over the village and its vicinity, a giant cloud covered everything. A thunderbolt struck the middle of the village and soon after, fireballs and lightning rained over Frostrest. Whoever stood in that zone died, this was one of many spells deemed too dangerous for the caster – though Julius mastered it.

“Come on then, we need to hide the car away from prying eyes.” He nonchalantly went back inside and tried to activate it. “Not to be rude, but your brother is a bit on the weird side.” Fenrir chuckled.

“Tell me about it,” Autumn sighed.

Whoosh, three hours went by since Staxius took the vampire with him. He waited, a sudden heavy feeling in his chest woke him up. The room in which he placed Aurora was right next to where he met Julius. A room with only a bed, an empty bookshelf and dusty window panes that looked out to the east, further into town. “My chest, it just felt heavy for some reason, what happened?” He settled himself on the chair, “why does my stomach burn.” The pain grew in intensity then died out.

The bed-sheet slightly moved, it was Aurora, she awoke. “Perfect timing,” he picked up his chair and placed it right next to her. “T-this c-ceiling, it’s different.” She mumbled.

“Good morning,” he moved his head closer, “- did you sleep well?” he smiled.

“PLEASE, DON’T KILL ME,” she yelled out of fear, then realized that her death would have already taken place as the sun rose up. “Back to your senses, I hope.”

“I apologize for s-screaming,” she faced away. “You do scream an awful lot.” He backed away and sat formally. “May I ask why you saved me?” her head turned.

“To be honest with you, if it were up to me, you’d be dead by now. Though, that last gaze you gave me and the feeling of friendliness I sensed sort of killed the satisfaction. And I had some questions for you.” He spoke courteously, the previous hate and anger in his voice disappeared, he spoke as if she were his long-lost friend.

“Will you kill me after I’ve answered your questions?” She politely asked, her mind was set on dying.

“Why do you think I’m always out to kill people? Never mind,” he chuckled, “-it does look like I’m a heartless killer, but in fairness, I’m not that keen on getting my hands dirty.” Her eyes grew heavier, she had lost too much blood and mana. It was dangerously close to depletion. Sweat profusely rolled down her face and cheeks, her temperature shot up. “Are you ok?” Staxius asked, confused. “B-blood,” she mumbled then covered her mouth. “Did you say something?” she shook her head in denial. He obviously heard it, vampires needed blood to survive. Their bodies converted that bloodily fluid into mana. He read about it from the hall of rebirth’s library. “Open up,” swiftly he drew his sword, and sliced his palm. Blood flowed rapidly, he held it over her head. She looked hesitant, “drink it, or you’ll die.” She gave in, the taste of his blood riled her inner beast. Out of instinct, she went straight for his palm and bit the already sliced up wound to have a better grip. She quickly gulped up blood, she was parched.

“Are you done?” he asked.

“I-I apologize,” she backed away and laid on the bed again. “Impressive,” the wound on his hand closed faster than before. “I guess you subconsciously cast healing magic after you’ve drunk out of your victim; how considerate.” He smiled.

"T-thanks," her whole body regenerated, the feeling oozing out of her was of youth and happiness. Her face, once swollen by tears and injuries went back to normal.

"Breathtaking," he admired her closely.

"W-what is it t-that you want from me?" she asked once more, her voice seemed more feminine and refined.

"I want you to tell me who and why you were sent out to kill me."

"Honestly, I wish I could tell you but we are bound by a curse, a curse to never speak of Arda and its secrets outside of our province." She said the truth. "Is that all?" after a quick examination, from out of nowhere, he shoved his finger inside her mouth. *Dark arts: Mana cancellation.* The top of her mouth heated up, her eyes grew bigger. "Done," he removed his hand, her saliva was all over his index finger. "Gross," he casually wiped it on the bedsheet. "W-what d-did you just do?" her cheeks flushed, she asked.

"Nothing much, I just stopped the curse, now speak freely."

"It's not that simple, here let me prove it to you." Deep breath in, "I was sent by Shanna Islegust."

She froze up. "What's the matter?" he asked.

"Impossible, saying her name out loud would have ended in my death."

"Idiot," he slapped her forehead, "did you really try and kill yourself after I gave you my blood?" he said in a dramatical tone as if implying she betrayed him.

"N-no." embarrassed she lowered her head, "I apologize."

"Don't apologize, just answer my questions and then we can decide to kill you if that is really what you want."

"As you wish. I was sent by queen Shanna Islegust, ruler of Arda. My job was to find and bring a man named Staxius Haggard. Whether alive or dead, you were to be brought to her feet. The Enbalar siblings accused you of defiling the younger sister and abusing the older brother. Thus, my job was to enact revenge and deal out severe punishment onto you. Sadly, that quest has failed, and if I return there now it would be for naught."

"Is that all?"

"Yes, I'm afraid so."

"Do tell me what will happen if you return empty-handed to Arda, my interest has been piqued."

"Nothing major, I'll probably be demoted then sent into exile or killed. It all depends on the Enbalar siblings, their word in the report to her majesty will define how I will survive."

"Are the Enbalar siblings that important?"

"No absolutely not, they are orphans, commoners, but the queen has a soft spot for anyone young and desperate."

“Gullible and foolish,” he stood up, outside, the sun’s ray grew fainter. Dark grey clouds covered the sky, it began raining. The sound it made felt relaxing, the rain was rare out in Dorchester. He walked over and stared out the window. “Will I finally die by your hands?” she asked.

“Even better,” he turned around. “You’re taking me to meet that so-called queen. I sense great fear coming from you every time you speak her name.”

“W-what are you talking about? You can’t just stroll into Arda and say I want to meet the queen.”

“That’s where you come in, you’ll say you’ve captured me. But before we do anything, I need to check up on something important first, you can rest a few hours more, after all, you hate the sun don’t you?” He walked out. “He’s serious isn’t he.”

Staxius stepped out of the mansion; something didn’t feel right. The gut feeling he had was that of disaster, earlier he dreamed of Ayleth, and her soul flying away from him. It was just like that time in Krigi of new when his friend died. “I need to make sure everyone is ok, Avon and Julius are gone, I’m guessing something has turned for the worse.” A picture of Undrar popped inside his head. “Always reliable aren’t you.”

[Chapter 64](#)

Millicent’s decision

“Over here.” After an uncomfortable drive through the torturous path leading out of Brisnet heights; the rough ride eased out. A straight path now laid before them, and on the end of said path, castle Garsley. Adalana’s heart raced inexplicably, everyone was on edge. For all they know, death could come down knocking on their door. Children and elderly alike all looked perturbed. Earlier, the camp was taken down rather hastily and their leader; Adalana – seemed angry. They all looked at her while she carefully stared out the back. Dust and rubble lifted behind them; they truly were on Dorchester’s desert soil. The land looked empty and vast, no sign of plants nor life, a desert. The only thing present was destroyed vehicles, rotting corpses, and used weapons.

Occasionally, a group of people, mostly surviving soldiers abandoned by their faction would bunch up and kill themselves. It was common practice, a soldier who doesn’t die in the war and who is left behind has to kill himself. That practice was brutal and unfair, but they obeyed without any regrets. After the deed was done, scavengers would loot the bodies. Torn arms, flesh, body parts, they left none to the wild. Necromancy existed and body parts fetched for a good price, war-torn provinces like this were an untouched treasure waiting to be conquered by them. Those scavengers were most commonly referred to as the Merchants of death and consisted of run-away fighters, mercenaries, and robbers. Working for dark cults was their only source of income and having a bounty on their head proved to be more of a hassle. Anything associated with necromancy and the illegal use of magic was a crime deemed so bad that killing on sight was the only judgment they got. Merchants of death, their insignia was a blank and grey circle, sign of being alienated from society.

The trucks swiftly passed them; the grey circle stood out. Instead of being aggressive and attacking Adalana and her party, she waved; and they returned the greeting. People thought of those people as heartless monsters, but she knew better for she had personally met the ring leader years ago. They just did whatever was needed to ensure their survival. Most of the members knew and had heard about the

silver guardians, unofficially they were friends, but that was off the record. After the war was over, many corpses that weren't lucky enough to get buried as Staxius ordered were handed off to them – at night, under the cover of the shadows.

The journey continued, the hill atop which castle Garsley stood, came into view. A sigh of relief was heard. "Over here," Undrar yelled, she anxiously awaited their return. Everything felt peaceful, the truck entered through the main gate and into the castle's front yard.

"Is this a village?" one of the kids whispered. "Yes, this is a village, a small but friendly place for you to live." Her face eased up, she smiled. A load was taken off her chest, but it still hurt, something bothered her. Everyone got off, waiting for them, the people who've lived here since the news that the duchess had asked any surviving soul to come to take refuge. "Welcome to castle Garsley,"

Millicent spoke, she came to personally greet the villagers of Frostrest. With their head bowed, they thanked her and soon left to explore the vicinity. The kids quickly became acquainted with the other younglings and the whole place grew livelier.

"Congratulations on making it back," they entered the castle. The tavern still worked at full power, mercenaries from other provinces heard rumors of their peril and came to look for work. They hoped to be hired as bodyguards; seeing that Dorchester's army was close to nonexistent. "Don't breathe a sigh of relief yet, Kreston still is a threat," the footsteps increased in pace. "Take a breather," the door opened. "I can't rest on my laurels just yet." They entered; the throne room looked as imposing as ever.

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Following them behind, another pair of feet. Whoever that was, ran. "What is it?" Adelana turned around and asked, it was Alyson. "Good to see you again," Undrar came from the opposite hallway.

"N-no time to talk," Alyson ran inside, it was urgent, Undrar followed close behind.

"I-it's t-the defending p-party, Annet just reported than Ayleth was mortally injured."

"Impossible," Adelana's face changed for the worst. She nearly took off running, Undrar held back her shoulders. "Let go of me," her voice felt faint and filled with sorrow. "She said was, and not is mortally injured, implying that Ayleth is out of harm's way." Her surge of emotion subsided. "W-way to s-spot the intricacies." Alyson regained her breath. "That's not the issue, from what Annet reported, the village is destroyed. Though they have back-up, holding and keeping Brisnet heights from being conquered is impossible, as quoted by someone named Julius."

"What do you mean quoted?" Adelana asked.

"That's what Annet wrote, she also said that if it continues at this pace, their chances of survival will go down to zero. Fighting with only three fighters is hard a burden, and her strength is exhausted, not to mention she's out of arrows and equipment."

"Did she say anything more about Ayleth's situation?" Millicent ignored the part about not being able to fight.

"She said that if not given proper treatment, she's going to die," Alyson replied.

"We need to get them back here," Millicent's tone grew serious. "what about the orders given by Staxius?" Adelana asked. "I'm the one in charge here, officially and by name, I'll take the blame later, just get everyone back here safely." Millicent's eyes filled with conviction. "Don't worry about Staxius, I'll handle him," Undrar patted Millicent's back, "-go bring them back home."

"Thank you for that, Viola." Millicent included; everyone ran out. The mercenaries looking for jobs were hired as part of a rescue operation. Undrar headed up the castle walls, "you knew this would happen, didn't you, Staxius." Her gaze fixed on how efficiently Adelana ordered everyone around.

"Gather and bring equipment." Undrar faintly heard her. On top of that, in such a short amount of time, she mobilized a small platoon of twenty men. "Impressive," she now stared at Brisnet heights.

"Undrar? A familiar voice spoke or rather came from nowhere. "Are you there?" It continued intruding her peaceful moment of rest, she knew exactly who it was. "Yes," she unwillingly answered back. "UNDRAR," it screamed. "No need to scream when using telepathy, it gives me a headache, greetings to you too, Staxius." She replied, her eyes closed, she sat down.

"What do you want?" she asked, her eyes reopened, she stared at the sky.

"Sorry, but I've been feeling restless, is everything alright?"

"No, of course not, you did send some of your friends to die." She fired back sarcastically. "Did anyone die though?" the tone remained calm. "Ayleth is badly hurt, but we've already sent out back-up to bring them back."

"Let me guess, it was Millicent who gave the order?" he added smugly.

"I was right, you planned this from the start, didn't you. You wanted to make Millicent realize her authority and that she could not always rely on you, a bit unconventional and filled with faults but it worked. I'm happy to say that she took initiative and made sure that everyone survived."

"You give me too much credit, Undrar. I just wanted Millicent to have a glimpse of what it's like to hold the lives of loved ones in your hand."

"I bet you didn't envision Julius going out to save Frostrest as well as provide support."

"He did what?" after a quick pause, he resumed, "- guess he did what he thought was best, that man still has his humanity. It's just hidden behind the tough guy act. I'll just assume you have everything in control."

"Yes, what about you, did Arda attack?"

"Indeed, they did, I probably won't be back for days, weeks and maybe months. Tell Millicent to welcome Julius with open arms, he will join the noble council of Dorchester as another duke and will bring years of experience as his asset."

"As you wish, but what about you?" she remained adamant.

"I'm going to meet the queen of Arda, as a prisoner." The telepathic link cut. "Good luck, a fairy isn't someone you can play with, Staxius, be on your guard." She breathed a sigh of relief. "Guess it's my turn

to go help,” wings sprouted from her back, her hair changed to black as well as her lips. “It’s been a long time,” a single flap of her wings, she vanished.

“Why was I even worried, my companions are far more reliable than I give them credit for.” He entered the mansion and went straight to where Aurora rested. The bed-sheets were covered with bloodstains from earlier, she rejoiced the smell and held a massive grin. Staxius had planned on acting like a convict; from what the vampire told him. The queen didn’t care if he was brought in alive or dead, though it was probably favorable for him to be alive. It would make dishing out punishment and judgment upon a criminal more satisfying. Not to mention, it would scare off anyone trying to wrong her. He was of the same mind, in her shoe, he would have done the same.

“Knock, knock,” instead of physically knocking on the door, Staxius just said it out loud and entered the room without waiting.

Aurora heard it and hid out of fear. Then realized her mistake, and removed the blanket. “Alright

Aurora,” he came closer, she sat upright. “Are you sufficiently heal and rested?” he asked out of habit. “Y-yes,” she faced him but her gaze laid on the dragon under his neck, Undrar’s blessing, and insignia. “As I’ve told you before,” he leaned back, sat on the chair, and stared outside. It looked as if he was visiting someone special, the room could be mistaken to be a hospital. The empty bookcases, a single painting hanging in front of the bed, slightly inclined and the gloomy light cause by the rain – gave a feeling of unrest yet romantic. As he had read in the rare short stories, he got his hands on back in the day, this fitted exactly the scene on one said book. Here the protagonists were to profess their love to one another, remembering that scene, he chuckled and forgot what he was about to say.

“Years waiting, years searching, years failing, and years of contempt for my existence, I finally, at last, find you. Sadly, fate has made a mockery of my poor soul, you lay there as peacefully as the sea on a windless day, while I stand here with the opposite effect. My heart rages as if possessed.” He quoted a passage from the book out of boredom.

“Raging as you may be, I’ve waited for your return, oh – dear thief; the one who stole my heart so long ago. My body holds no more strength nor vigor to make my traitorous mouth move. I’m trapped between life and death; I now walk through a tunnel. At the end of the said tunnel, I see your face, your smile, and your kindness. I grow weak, my heart beats slower and slower, how I wish I could feel your tender lips upon mine.” Unexpectedly, she quoted the next bit.

“Marvelous, I didn’t know anyone else had read that apart from me.” He leaned closer.

“A sad story about two lovers never meeting each other, the ever-growing distance between two individuals brought together by death, I thoroughly enjoyed it.” She smiled.

It was completely irrelevant, Staxius said it out loud, but getting an answer back from Aurora made him joyous. “We do have something in common after all,” he said while looking at her.

“Were you serious about going to meet the queen?”

“Yes, you’re to take me there as your captive.”

“As you wish,” she stood up and conjured a binding spell around Staxius. “I’ll do as you say, don’t blame me if you end up dying.” She pulled out her tongue. “You’re getting rather comfortable around me

aren't you?" he asked with a grim tone. "Is that a bad thing?" she shuddered. "No, it's completely fine. I'm glad to know that you bear no anger against me, who've tortured you out of spite. Do remember that out there in Arda, you'll be the only one I'm familiar with, but do not by any chance stand up for me if I'm put to death. Let it all play out; I'll figure something out." She nodded.

"Follow me," she stepped out. "Aren't you weak from sunlight?" Staxius followed close behind, they climbed down the stairs. "I'm not that weak as you think," she opened the door and stepped into the open as if it were nothing. "It's your funeral," he mumbled. She took him to the middle of town, where the church was located. That Kreston crest, the one that called out to him, was, in fact, a portal brought in by Arda. It was the only way that they could access Dorchester. The elves were the ones who brought it here, news that the noble district was abandoned had reached her majesty's ears. They climbed the roof, she carefully explained how and why the crest was put here. And some unrelated matters which could prove to be important.

The crest now stood in touching distance. "Before we walk in, I want you to remember something, Arda is a place unlike any other. You better not speak if you don't want to end up dead. Do look down when we walk, don't stare around, because the instant we step in, we'll be in the royal palace. Leave all the talking to me, and you should be able to see the queen before she kills you. I mean, that is what you want right? You want to see her strength for yourself. Now, I don't have the right to say this but there are rumors floating around that she's a fairy, a powerful one at that."

"You're piquing my interest even more." He said in a joyful tone, "I guess it's time to see what the future has in store for me."

"I forgot," she conjured cuffs, not metal hand-cuffs but a spiritual one. It appeared transparent but had a faint red color moving all around it. "That's the vampiric version of an unbreakable imprisonment spell taught by her majesty herself."

"Doesn't look that powerful to me," he tried pulling them apart but was surprised by how efficient it was. The crest vanished and the portal opened, it shone as brightly as staring at the sun. Practically blinded, he closed his eyes and followed Aurora inside. Everything felt lifeless, it was as if flying. It held similarities to the portal separating the living from the dead, the gateway to the hall of rebirth. "This feeling of nostalgia, I fully expect Lord Death to nonchalantly appear before me and say something rather stupid."

"How dare you accuse me of being stupid," Staxius opened his eyes, he thought he heard his mentor but it was just his imagination. "Fairy or not, here I come, Arda."

[Chapter 65](#)

To Arda

"We can't hold out for any longer." A barrage of bullets came from Frostrest. The army had marched forward, the spell Julius cast's effect diminished. The only retaliation they could muster were fireballs of varying intensity, Annet was focused on defending Ayleth's body. Fenrir used ice-spears to provide support, Julius did all the heavy work. He truly was a battle-mage, despite fighting a desperate battle, he remained calm and composed. Every spell he cast had a purpose, the ten years of experience came to

fruition. Autumn changed to a supportive role, Void, the car was hidden by a concealment spell. Earlier, Julius tried budging the car to which it responded, it now laid to rest underneath Brisnet Heights, cover by foliage and bushes.

Fenrir voiced her concern, the village wasn't that far away. They were behind the cover of a little cave inside the mountain, small and easy to spot. Ignoring that fact, they hid, Julius peaked out here and there to fight. Fenrir and he made a good team, it worked in their favor; for the time being. The small cave had two openings, one lower while the other higher up. Saving mana was a priority, so they took turn going up and firing spells from there. Autumn stayed inside; their situation remained like this for hours on end. Kreston was in fact firing but didn't know where they were, so it was more suppressive fire than a full-on assault. "I agree," they swapped places. Julius was now on the offensive. "How did we ever think we would be able to hold Kreston back," Fenrir spoke, her voice lowered in sharpness gradually, her friendly and charming side became nonexistent. "It's all Staxius's fault." Annet let out a bit of her thought, unwillingly. Everyone, except Julius; turned around and stared at her. "You know its true," she continued. "Do you really mean that?" Fenrir's mind fumed with anger and disappointment. Annet's grey eyes lost its vigor, she lifelessly stared at Fenrir. "Yes, I do mean it." She lied to herself, Annet wanted to blame everything on someone else.

"Disappointing," Autumn stepped in uninvited. "-here I thought this man named Staxius Haggard, a person I vaguely remember, had companions he called family. But now I see that all that was a lie, your only pawns for him to use."

"W-what makes you say that?" Annet asked.

"It's pretty obvious, weak allies make a kingdom weaker; he's probably clearing out the trash." A faint chuckle was heard. "Autumn is right," Fenrir answered. "we're weak, and that's maybe the purpose he sent us here." Baffled, Annet spoke up, "he also gave us strict orders to return alive." Her eyes gleamed. "I was being a fool, I apologize."

"Anyone can play the blame game," a quiet whisper was heard. "Ayleth,"

"Don't be so rough on him, I'm sure that help is on its way, I can feel it." She regained conscience, at last, the scroll did remove the threat of instant death. The crisis wasn't averted just yet. "If help is truly on its way, we'll need to hold out for one to two days." Annet bit her lips. "We'll pull through," Julius yelled. "Focus on the enemy, brother." Autumn fired back. "Meanie," he replied in a childish tone, it alleviated the gloomy feeling that presided over them.

The engines roared, sitting in the back, a small platoon of mercenaries, they were armed to the teeth. "We're on route to Frostrest, our sole objective is the search and rescue of the defending party," Adelana said, as she stood menacingly in the center. "Understood," everyone respected her authority, the leader of the silver guardians is well known throughout the land, not to commoners and villagers, but to battle-hardened fighters. Her strength with a great-sword had the power to crush anyone, it nearly earned her the title of Devine-blade; a title given to the strongest swordsman or swordswomen in the kingdom. Sadly, it never came to pass, the princess didn't enjoy the thought of a commoner having such a privilege. From that day forth, she went by another nickname, Cursed-blade. It wasn't because of her rejection at attaining the Devine-blade title, but the curse of total annihilation every time she took to a battlefield. During the last war, countless outposts were destroyed with a single slash from her, she

grew to fame quickly. A master-swordswomen by all rights – it had been years since she held a sword for the purpose of killing. She swore after accidentally killing innocents that she would never hold a sword to fight. Today, that all changed, her eyes filled with anger and hate, she looked serious. The great-sword rested on her back, the blade's edges were dull and dusty but not chipped. The handle looked like two pointy teeth staring at the end.

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“The cursed-blade steps onto the field once more, this should be interesting.” One of the mercenaries spoke out, he and his crew were cleaning their guns. “I can't wait, my body is going numb just thinking about it.” Another one replied. “No that's just you getting lightheaded.” The same guy replied sarcastically. The ride went like this back and forth with jokes and petty comments about ladies and guns. Some discussed politics while others just ranted about their frustrations with how the kingdom was being run. Who would have imagined that those mercenaries would have conversed about how states and currencies worked. They added rumors and plain old speculations, having traveled all over Hidros – their repertoire was filled with virgin tales about legends and myths.

Out of the bunch, a story stood out. “I once went face to face with a being I've never encountered before. Look at my right eye, this scar was given to me by said monstrosity. It was as big as a lion and twice as aggressive and powerful. In the end, the boys and I managed to slay it. A bounty had been placed on its head. As we were about to slice its head and take it as trophy, the body vanished, it turned to dust. I never saw anything like that ever again, and to this day I still have nightmares.” The truck continued its voyage.

It reached noon, Staxius stepped through the portal. The weightlessness of the teleportation spell was the first time he ever experienced anything like this. “Amazing,” he mumbled while being transported by the vampire, Aurora. “Get ready, it's just about complete.” A sudden feeling of pressure broke through the portal and they stepped out. As requested by Aurora, he acted like a helpless and weak convict. Dark-arts activated; he changed his whole aura to feeble. “What's this feeling, mana, I feel it, it's all over the place.” His gaze remained on the floor, it was dark-brown, like soil but harder and shinier. The walls around the small room he reappeared in were dark-brown. “Raise your head, Staxius.” She whispered. “What is it?” before him a door, the ceiling was made of wood, and so were the walls. A strange symbol presided over the door. A quick glance behind, the portal was gone, all that stood was another wall. Next to the door, on the right, a torch, it burnt with a greenish flame. The look on Aurora's face gave a feeling of anxiety, she was scared for some reason. Her hands trembled, “we're about to step out into the palace, please don't do anything rash and keep your gaze on the ground and if too hard, stare at my lovely bottom as much as you want.” She said it jokingly, she wanted to clear her mind too. Although her hips were curvy, the red dress she wore was torn, courtesy of Staxius. “I'll pass, I'd rather stare at your face than those bottoms; it's more appealing in my opinion.” He replied with a speck of passion. “Alright, let's move.”

The handcuffs binding him suddenly glowed, a chain materialized from it. It shot forward with enough velocity to reach Melantha's hands without looking. *Click,* the door opened, expecting to see guards waiting, Staxius quickly glimpsed up and stared down. Sadly, the door opened to nothingness, it was black – another portal. The whole castle used portals instead of doors, it was to keep uninvited guests out. They walked through, his head remained lowered.

“Greetings Melantha,” a strict voice spoke. They emerged into the clearance room, a semi-circular table with files on top of files with an elf sitting behind. All around them, doors of various sizes and colors. This didn’t bother him as much as the presence he felt. They pierced him with the gaze of contempt; the ones responsible were two lizardmen, armed with spears and stood twice as big as him. “Who is that you bring with you?” the elf asked, “never mind, raise your head.” He obeyed. “Is that the supposed defiler?” she wrote something on her notepad, “here I thought you were going to kill him. I shall notify the queen of your arrival, please take the next portal and leave this monster to us, he shall be sent to the dungeon while we wait for her majesty.”

A quick glance behind, Aurora blinked her eyes twice. It was her own way of saying good luck.

“Guards.” She called out, instantly both lizardmen took him by the arm and forced him down another portal. “Aren’t we a bit forceful,” he smirked while getting pushed inside. *Bam,* he landed. The smell of rotten corpses made his eyes water, it was dark and grim. By the touch, it felt squishy and disgusting. A single hole with four iron bars provided what little light he had. He landed on dead people, or rather, dead creatures; ones from mythology. “Lizardmen, it was them – they look even more imposing than the illustrations I saw in the book about ancient civilization.” He stood up and walked over to the corner, where it was dry in comparison. He sat and waited, time had come to make a plan, but he had no inspiration. Making a scheme was normally his bread and butter, though today, he lacked inspiration. “The ever-flowing stream of mana, this place is truly different from Dorchester. It’s pure and untouched by filthy hands, it’s as it was years ago, Arda even if I haven’t seen it – is a place where people respect nature.”

Meanwhile, upstairs in the throne room, Aurora was called forth by her majesty. With her confidence regained, she walked in as if she had slain a dragon barehanded. As she approached the queen, her gaze fell to the ground and she knelt out of respect. “Glad to see you’re doing well,” her tone was as piercing as ever. Aurora didn’t reply, the queen didn’t give her permission to speak. “I’ve gotten reports that you’ve brought the defiler into Arda, what are your reasons behind it?” Melantha waited, “Excuse me, your granted permission to speak, and raise your head.”

“Thank you, your majesty,” she looked up. “-as you ordered, you didn’t specify if you wanted me to kill or bring the defiler alive. I thought the latter would be the better option, my reasoning behind this is that you personally dishing out punishment to that vile-human would do the elves’ justice.” Shanna closed her eyes and let out a sigh. At first glance, this little display would look as if she wasn’t pleased or was offended. Luckily it wasn’t the case here, “the blame lies on me for not specifying.” She took a quick pause, “-it matters not, you bringing that man here will be beneficial.”

Quickly, she asked one of her counselors to come at her side. She whispered something in his ears, “good job, you’re dismissed. If you so choose, you may stay here and wait, for we shall bring your convict shortly.” A quick nod and a bow, Melantha left and stood to the side, within the shadows.

It came faster than expected. Staxius sat – it had not even been thirty minutes. A portal opened up and the same guard who threw him in came back. “You’re to be judged before the queen herself, stand up, scum, death awaits you.” Staxius didn’t look phased, rather, his face said something else, he was ready to confront anyone, may it be god or fairy, he itched for a fight. As slowly as possible, he stood and walked over. This provoked the lizardman, out of habit, the guard took out his spear and gave Staxius a hit so hard that it broke. “Bit uncalled for, won’t you say?” Staxius walked through the portal

nonchalantly. "That god damn hurt," his face remained as emotionless as ever. The pain subsided; it triggered his body to heighten his senses. Confused, the guard took him by the arm and brought him back to the clearance room, or most commonly referred as the portal room.

"Not again," something triggered his death element. His eyes went blank, "guess it's time to meet the queen." Coming out of another portal, two other guards, this time knights. They wore black and golden armor, Staxius stood still. *Slap,* one of the men struck him so hard his head nearly broke. Staxius sighed, "really? First the stick now a slap, you guys are sadists." His gaze felt cold. "Why am I in this mood now? I thought I changed my persona to a timid and shy criminal but subconsciously I'm acting as if I'm the strongest man in the universe. This is so unnecessary," he let out a little chuckle. "Are you mocking us?" the same guard punched him twice in the stomach. "Let's go on with it." Staxius shrugged, the knights looked angry.

"Gentlemen, please, don't vent your prejudice and frustration just yet, let the queen decide." The elf spoke, she calmed them. "I apologize," the knight tugged on the chains connected to the handcuffs.

Finally, he entered the throne room. The place was gigantic, a total of eight pillars beautifully crafted stood by four on each side. In the middle of said pillars, a red carpet made from some material he didn't recognize. The ceiling had a massive painting engraved on it, it was something mysterious. The queen, though sitting far away, was visible. She sat atop what looked like half a pyramid. The throne presided over everything; height meant power. Behind her, a wall made from vines of exotic plants and trees. It sent out a message that Arda, in fact, loved its forest.

"Stop walking slowly," the knight sharply tugged on the chains. Staxius didn't care, he was admiring the architecture of this place. Out of the corner of his eyes, as he walked closer and closer, Aurora gave a little smile. "We've brought the defiler, your majesty." Both knights knelt, Staxius remained standing. Gossip filled the room, he didn't notice it before, but there was another floor, hidden away behind the pillars. A place where her counselors and people of interest, sat. "Get on your knees," one of the guards gritted through his teeth. "Should I or should I not? Decisions, decisions, I'm bored, let's have fun." He arrived at a conclusion, ignore courtesy, and do whatever he wanted. "I apologize, I physically can't kneel down. Have you conveniently forgotten that you've assaulted me before bringing me here?"

"Is that true?" the queen heard it. "D-don't b-believe the word of a c-criminal, your majesty." Her eyes changed, "criminal or no, I hate liars more than anything." She reached behind her head, and with a quick motion, threw a thorn.

"Don't mind if I do?" with his hands still in cuffs, he leaned down and caught said thorn.

"Something has been stuck in my teeth for some time now," he cleared his teeth and threw it down."

The queen's gaze changed, Staxius smiled.

[Chapter 66](#)

Audience with the Queen

Click, the thorn fell on the floor. The once gossip-filled room turned silent. Staxius moved swiftly. The knight in question, the one who lied to her majesty felt a gust of wind. Everyone's eyes turn to where the faint click came from, something laid to rest near the knight's feet. Greenish and brown, with the tip

so sharp a small touch sufficed to pierce the skin. It glowed faintly and was instantly recognized by everyone present. That little and harmless-looking object was, in fact, the queen's instant death spell. More of a conjuration type spell, like Staxius can conjure forth his sword, so could the queen. Conjuration magic was rare but effective, ethereal weapons were considered powerful and a display of strength. However, using said magic isn't fit for anyone. Only chosen people, have the ability to summon a weapon, spirit or familiar. It's common knowledge that it's the weapon who chooses the master and not the other way around. Hence, any weapon used through that is deemed exceptional.

Said weapons don't only come as a normal magical weapon but they also bring with it special abilities and hidden perks; unlocked only if the wielder is powerful enough. The queen's weapon was something told in legends; Prophecy. None except the wielder of Prophecy knew what it really is. Some say a sword, others a spear and some even go to argue that it's a bow. Those arguments have been put to rest since Shanna ascended to power. Prophecy was revealed as being nothing more than a spirit who could take the shape and copy perfectly any ability from another weapon. It also retains the previously copied abilities making it one of the strongest, if not the strongest weapon you could conjure.

Its signature, a faint green light – was what gave it away. Said light was the overwhelming mana imparted from the queen. Time has changed, less and fewer people choose to use conjuration magic for it's a waste of time with no guarantee of success. They now defect to alteration, the ability to alter anything they desire, and that includes physical enhancement. "W-what j-just happened?" the knight's breathing grew faster. The sight of Prophecy at his feet made him shudder – everyone else held their breath. The queen only brought out Prophecy when she wanted someone dead, quickly and effortlessly.

"This burning sensation," Staxius looked at his right hand, it decayed. The skin melted, the bones turned to dust, his hand was disappearing. "How lovely, a curse." He mumbled gently. The burning turned into an amber color and crawled up slowly, like a parasite. Behind, it left a trail of nothingness, the fingers were gone.

"Defiler, in a desperate attempt show of bravado, you've called forth the god of death upon thyself. Time isn't fair, you shall perish before us without having a body nor a legacy." At first, she was shocked, but seeing Prophecy's curse, she felt at ease.

"Your majesty, you speak the truth." The curse ate his right hand fully, the handcuffs broke loose. "This is, in fact, a quandary," he held up the now cursed right arm. "How dare you speak to me; I didn't give you permission. You'd have been put to the sword for such a lack of courtesy towards me, however, today, your death is already assured. Do as you wish, I shall rejoice in witnessing how desperate one comes when faced with death." The knights stood and walked away. The floor on which her council rested all stood to witness the defiler's death. "It's been fun knowing you." Aurora stood in awe.

"This is a bit unexpected, am I going to die here? Honestly, I don't know, my body does whatever is necessary for my survival. The throne room sure has got a lot of people eyeing me down." He watched as the curse slowly took his arm. He remained composed and at regular intervals stared at her majesty, smiled then looked back at the curse.

"Why don't you scream, do you not fear death?" Confused, she broke the silent room's atmosphere. "Did her majesty expect me to scream and beg for my life?" his eyes remained on the arm. "Why fear death? It's always here since we're born. A looming feeling of dread, it can snap at any moment and our

journey ends. Why fear it, why not embrace and be proud of it? After all, despite everyone being unique and different in their own way, shouldn't we be proud that we all have something in common, we'll all die sooner or later." He changed his gaze to the queen. Her reaction remained stern but it triggered something inside her, the way Staxius had an outlook on life was different and mesmerizing.

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"Quite the prospective you have there, though our time is limited, why not converse, I'd like to see how your mind works." She was right, the curse was now half-way near the elbow. "What are your thoughts on demi-humans and Arda's quest for freedom?"

"To ask such a complicated question to someone who's dying." He shook his head. "I don't have any particular thoughts on demi-humans or other non-human related beings. I care not for disparities in physical appearance, we all have a will and a conscience; we have the ability to develop and converse. It's already better than the animals in the wild whose only rule is survival of the fittest. Strong isn't one who is powerful, brutal, and violent with unprecedented battle prowess, but one who is wise and smart. Using wit instead of brawls is better in the long run; war, for example, it's the worst thing a kingdom can possibly go through. I have the right to speak about this subject because I'm a Boron in the council presiding over Dorchester. War only brings pain and suffering, most of the villagers were killed, that includes my birthplace; Krigi. I know full well that speaking about the problems isn't going to magically fix the quandary, this may just be ideals and fantasies but I'd like to hope that one day, everyone would be safe. I'd like to see the people walk without fear at night, kids, and women alike; walking reassured that none would bring them harm."

Her face changed from stern to angry, "How dare you speak about peace and wit when you assaulted the envoys I sent."

"Don't make me laugh, those weren't envoys." He rudely spoke out, "envoys would not threaten to kill us, and not to mention, their one-sided debate about us aiding you in your quest for freedom. We never asked to be a part of your endeavor, despite the duchess kindly saying no, they were persistent. When I asked their name, they said no, though I learned about their identity, the instant I spoke their name, they dared to put a sword to the duchess's neck and assault her. Only a fool would believe the words of overly emotional kids. An envoy is someone respectable with a certain calmness. Not some overly aggressive duo who at a drop of a hat, tried to fight their way into success."

"That is no..." she tried speaking. "Do not interrupt me while I'm speaking." The curse stopped moving forward. Opposite it, Staxius veins had turned black, the line went all the way to his chest, the ancient writings glowed. The pentagram on his right hand somehow moved away from the curse, it was alive. It now stood opposite the amber-colored flame, it fought against the curse.

"As I was saying," he didn't notice the arm slowly regenerating. "Having the nerves and audacity to knock a duchess unconscious under a so-call premise of a peaceful talk, do you think it's a game? I've kept my cool until now, but enough is enough; I can accept the fact that I did assault the big brother. I swore to protect my companions at any cost. Those elves should be grateful my sister stepped in, otherwise, they'd be laying in a coffin right about now."

He cut off her majesty, this was never done before. "Insolence," both royal guards tried assaulting him with the swords fully drawn. "Didn't I say not to interrupt me," his voice grew deeper than before.

Ashes to ashes, dust to dust, from when you were born and till you die, I, the god of death, hold in my hands the strings which binds you to this world, by my authority, I order thy chains to be severed, spell, Tactus Interitus.

The arm fully healed, the pentagram's outer edge where other ancient writings were present, moved.

Snap, snap, using both hands, he snapped. The guards who came rushing behind him instantly fell to the floor, their sword hit the ground twice as hard. It echoed throughout the hall.

"I hate when people act above their given rights," he faced the queen. "And that includes you too, you do not have the right to deem someone guilty without the proper investigation. A self-proclaimed queen playing the role of Tharis, don't make me laugh. Justice isn't something you can play around; the words of kids cannot out weight the judgment of someone wise. I'm ruthless, a cold-blooded killer but I do what I think is right and never trust a word coming out of anyone's mouth before I've checked the fact for myself. Honestly, I'm not the best person to ramble about justice, it would be hypocritical; I'm no hero, I'm far worse than the devil." He paused, regained his breath and spoke once more, "you asked me about my thoughts on Arda and its freedom. I care not -a kingdom with a gullible queen standing is bound to ruin. Don't tell me that you will close off access to your province and make life better for demi-humans, that is just another fantasy. Self-sufficient as you may be, this act of seeking freedom could be interpreted as treachery if it reached the ears of our emperor. Information could be easily manipulated to a decree for the annihilation of your kind to be issued. I'll even go as far as to say that the princess has the same thing in mind. I won't argue that demi-humans are being oppressed, that's a fact I've seen for myself. Freedom would, in fact, provide a haven for them, but you're going at this the wrong way. No one can survive without allies, if you try and close yourself off from the world, you're only making yourself a target."

He took another pause, the queen's face looked distraught, he was speaking the truth.

"I've learned this for myself, I used to be alone, but I've realized being strong isn't that easy. This instant, I've got comrades fighting for the safety of Dorchester, Kreston has begun their assault – this is all due to your frivolous attempt at striking fear into the princess's heart by using us as bait. Don't you think it's a bit unfair? We reject your proposal and get assaulted. Peaceful and righteous wouldn't you say, I can't fathom the thought that you still think you have the right to judge other people, pathetic. My heart burns with anger, one of my friends could well die in the next hour but that isn't of your concern. Rest assured, Kreston is going to pay, though you're partly responsible."

He shook his head in disappointment. Everything around him stopped moving, the queen's expression was indescribable. Her long green hair moved gently; her head trembled. Her green eyes looked lifeless, the words from Staxius perfectly struck on all her weaknesses.

Her council stood, they held their breaths, the man standing below them was someone strange, dangerously strange. None dare to make a move against him for he killed two royal knights with a single snap. Aurora watched in awe, none had ever dared to speak to the queen that way.

"What do you know," her face changed, her frustrations built up. "Don't you know I know all that? I know I'm not a good ruler, but that doesn't give you the right to look down on me, a queen." A single tear shed, "Prophecy, go kill that man," a spirit materialized behind her and jumped straight for Staxius's

neck. *Clang,* it stopped, Avon appeared, Staxius was taken by surprise. "It's unlike you to be caught off guard, master." He pulled out his tongue and threw back the other spirit. "Weren't you with Julius?" Staxius whispered. "Yes and no, the car is with him, but after I lost all my mana, I

got pulled towards your location, master." His eyes sparkled as brightly as ever.

"Don't listen to him your majesty, we love you." The council spoke out. "Yes, don't let someone unworthy like him look down on you." Her eyes regained its vigor. "Prophecy, come back." Avon disappeared once more. "You hear that? They see me as a worthy ruler." She said proudly. "There's no doubt in my mind that you are, your majesty." His tone changed to friendly, "I just wanted to meet the fabled ruler of Arda and give her a quick taste of reality, that is all. I apologize if I acted out of line." His personality changed.

"What do you mean to give me a taste of reality?"

"Consider it a warning, you're only a pawn in this big game of chess. The world is soon to change, I've seen it first hand, you'll be the first to fall if you keep going down this route."

"How dare you think I'll heed your warning after such a display, and did you forget that you called me gullible?"

"That is why I think you'll heed my warning."

"I don't know your name nor where you hail from, I've heard that you're a defiler but I'm guessing those are an assumption. At this time, I can't take your words seriously, but I apologize for causing you all this trouble. I'll overlook everything for now."

"You need not know my name, Queen Shanna Islegust. Though that's not your name now is it?" he smirked.

"How d-do..." Staxius knew more than he let on.

As the one whom you're contracted to, I order thee to reveal this woman's weakness and how to exploit it. Dark Arts, Sense personality.

[Victim: Xula Elmbush, age, unknown]

[Race: Fairy]

[Personality: Caring]

[Prediction: Unknown]

[Weakness: Being called unworthy]

[Best Approach: A taste of reality]

"Surely you jest," she cleared her throat, "Shanna Islegust is my name."

"You're the one who jests, Xula Elmbush." He spoke her name, something felt heavy, his hands and legs began to tremble." It was the judgment of the fairy, she wasn't weak but extremely powerful. The one

who speaks her true name will be judged and if deemed worthy, will be allowed to live, though it's rare, for fairies are angels who've lost part of their power. Hearing her name being called out, the queen's eyes changed from green to red, it was judgment, her subconscious checked if the man who spoke it was good enough. She stood up and jumped to Staxius who was frozen in place, it took a toll on his body. "You who speaks my name, do you acknowledge whatever you've done? A weak and feeble human cannot hope to pronounce it, you've passed the first test. Are you sure you want to continue?" a blue orb enveloped the queen and Staxius, it hid them from prying eyes. "I'll ask again, are you ready to be judged?" Though he was helpless, he didn't care, "do your worse." He smiled.

"Then judged you shall be," she clapped and silence, the orb grew brighter.

[Chapter 67](#)

Judgment

"My body, I can't sense it any longer. This feeling, its neither of death nor of rebirth, I'm stuck." Imprisoned in an orb conjured by her majesty, Staxius was left clueless. Said orb shrank, tighter by the second until it vanished; leaving a trail of sparks behind. The throne room felt lighter, her majesty's heavy presence disappeared. None knew what happened, they looked around aimlessly. "Judgement has begun," an old-looking man, dressed fully in white, sat at the farthest corner on the upper floor. With the aid of his staff, one with an orb similar to what she conjured, he stood up. He didn't look too powerful and most of the time went unnoticed. That was the royal court sage; the strongest mage in charge of teaching the ways of magic. Though none knew who he truly was, a single clue was left out; he accompanied her majesty on the day she claimed her throne. He has been her shadow since the start and like a shadow, went unseen.

"Years in the making and waiting, will that man prove to be the one?" He stumbled his way towards the railing and looked down, where once her majesty sat. "Time will tell all."

"One who dared speak my name, arise once more – we've arrived." A soothing feminine voice broke the feeling of bewilderment. A forest, a river, floating rocks, everything changed. The one responsible stood beside him, her green hair flowed gracefully with the ever-changing background. She snapped her fingers at regular intervals. With each snap, they teleported to a new place, until finally, it stopped. The floor looked white, the sky above looked normal though two suns shone brightly than ever. From miles on end, it looked vague and empty, an open field of whiteness.

"Where are we?" he asked, the blinding sun rays getting reflected off the surface forced him to cover his face. "This is your proving ground." She spoke and walked away.

"What do you mean proving ground?" seeing Staxius struggle, in a wave-like motion, the queen conjured clouds to help with his sight. Baffled, he stared in awe, she controlled everything here, making her the goddess of this plain. "Not even I know how this works. Is ancient magic that powerful?" She now stood away from him, a throne was conjured, the same golden throne she used back in Arda. "I sense a battle coming," his senses heighten. On one hand, a small void-flame fireball was conjured, while on the other, he prepared a magical barrier.

"Having spoken my true name, you shall now face my true strength, in order to be able to call yourself worthy, you will need to first defeat one of my replicas." Just as she finished her sentence, something

shot out of her. It landed and soon took on her appearance, without missing a beat, said clone rushed Staxius down. "Prophecy, I summon thee to fight by my side." A blinding light blocked his vision, out of instinct, he jumped back and held up the magical barrier. Three loud bangs were heard, the last one broke through and nearly pierced his right shoulder, unexpectedly, he reacted. "That was close," with his body inclined to the left, he glanced below the smoke from the first assault. Another three-beam came charging for his head. *Bam,* he used the fireball to push himself out of

the way, he flew and caught a glimpse of his adversary. She wielded a bow, with a quiver that shone as brightly as the second sun of which it was amber in color. "This is harder than expected," a barrage of arrow rained down, he repeated the same pattern. Dodging, blocking and desperately trying to get a shot across.

It was all for naught, when mages battle one another, the stronger presence always hinders the ability of the other. Thus, why mages from low-rank never try and attack high-rank mages. It was a worthless effort and they'd most likely end up getting killed. Despite that disadvantage that grows when two mages are unfairly matched, some people came out on top. It's not advisable but isn't impossible, just impractical. "That teleportation spell she used earlier took a toll on me, I can't think straight." His stomach turned upside down, it grew harder to keep up. "All you do is dodge and block with that feeble barrier, don't you have a sliver of pride, fighting in such a cowardly way. All that talk earlier was naught but a useless ramble from an imposter, you're not strong." The real Xula spoke, she had enough.

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Prophecy, weapon change: Holy-sword. The glimmering light from the quiver morphed into the blade of a long-sword, it shone as brightly as ever. "I'm not that weak, don't underestimate me." She charged forward in a vertical strike stance. *Death element: Shadow-step,* He moved to the right, conjured a fireball and released it on her exposed back. It happened so fast only an explosion was heard and the sound of something metallic falling on to the ground followed. After the explosion, a giant cloud of smoke got released. "Void fireball does have it's advantages," he stepped out. "W-what are you doing here?" the queen stood up briskly. "I came to pay a visit?" he replied sarcastically. "No matter, your test has just begun." She moved, disappeared and instantly stood face to face with Staxius. "W-what just happened, I kept my eyes on her, did she really move faster than

me?" he smiled. "Do you know why we call this test judgment?" She stepped away and looked up as if the answers were written in the clouds. "Fairies are fallen angels, not rejected but fallen as in we lost our powers. Don't get me wrong, we aren't weak, our powers were locked away. As you probably know, gods are entities just like us, I mean, you're the heir to Lord Death." She glanced back at Staxius, "don't look surprised, the moment you used your mana I knew you were his prodigy. Back

to what I was saying, gods are entities like us, they live and breathe but don't die. Their power is so strong they can each create a new universe if they so wished. But that isn't the issue, if a god's power grows too strong, he would be seen as a traitor." She took a deep breath.

"In order to keep the peace between gods, the first supreme god, Kronos, ordered everyone to limit their powers and relegate it to angels if it grows too much. That's how angels are born, we're just a god's power who've got a shape and conscience. Fairies, on the other hand, are angels, but limited, we are more like a storage unit, we store up the excess and are sworn to never use it. There is an exception

to that rule, a fairy can, in fact, break the oath and use those untapped strengths. However, a strong partner is needed, a medium, a conduit for the excess to flow out off. It's like this, the excess power will flow through the chosen one, and if deemed unworthy, it will instantly kill him, both physically and spiritually; total annihilation. Either way, the fairy is released and has the chance to regain her angel status. That's why our name is hidden, only a person strong enough to be a conduit can say it out loud, it's the first test. The only one who has called their forbidden name is allowed in this dimension." Her tone lowered, she looked exhausted, the queen was someone good by heart.

"Basically, I'm worthy to become your conduit?" he asked, while he approached her slowly. "Yes, but I'm afraid it might end up killing you, I'm not an ordinary fairy. My strengths are locked for a good reason, I'm destined to be defeated by the god-slayer and have all my powers stolen from me as well as my god. We're martyrs in this ever-changing world, it's all written in the prophecy."

"Don't act all helpless with me," he grabbed her shoulder, "I care not for the rambling of one who says he can see the future, may it be angel or god, my life is in my hand, and I'll do what I wish with it." Her face changed, a small grin surfaced, her once animosity and doubt towards him subsided.

"Are you sure you want to become my conduit?"

"Nothing would make me happier." He stopped, "I have a condition."

"Is it money that you want?" She asked, her newfound respect for him faltered. Her belief about men being greedy resurfaced. "Of course not," he replied as if offended. "All I wanted from you is to be able to call you friend, but I see that you don't trust me." He pouted, Avon's mannerism was copied.

"I a-apologize," she bowed her head. "Idiot," he raised her head, "you're truly the dumb queen aren't you." He smiled reassuringly. "I'll put you to the sword," she pulled out her tongue. "Shall we get on with the conduit thing?" Staxius asked.

"Yes," her cheeks flushed. Her green eyes wandered everywhere, each step she took felt painful and sluggish. "What's the matter with you?" Staxius asked but was cut short. It was the queen, she teleported again and kissed him on the lips. Her hair levitated, the pent up power she had locked away transferred over to Staxius. His eyes turned white, they burned with the same intensity as the fires of hell. Bit by bit, he felt it, the power wasn't a spell or anything complicated, it was just mana. Mana so dense and injected with spells, and the ability to increase one's magical affinity greatly. As the kiss prolonged, a heavy feeling grew around his chest, it burned, she wasn't even half done yet and the power getting transferred only grew in intensity. The heavy feeling turned into burning, Xula ended the kiss. However, the transfer continued, her green hair turned to white, her green eyes lost all their vigor. A halo appeared over her head, wing sprouted from her back. They weren't fully materialized, the more power she lost, the more solid they became.

It grew unbearable, he fell on his knees. She ran to his side and spoke, but all he heard was a loud buzzing noise. It amplified, and he finally lost consciousness. His body laid on the floor, it twitched as if pulsing. "I knew you weren't strong enough to be my conduit, I'm sorry." A few hours went by, it ended. The man she kissed had died before her eyes, he stopped moving, breathing, any trace of life went silent. The outcome was as she predicted, he couldn't handle the power she kept hidden. "I guess it's time for us to say goodbye," Staxius rested on her lap, she waited for him to wake but alas that didn't come to pass. Time had come to part ways, as carefully as a surgeon, she carefully placed his head on

the ground and stood. "Heir to the god of death, you've freed this fairy from a heavy burden though you sacrificed yourself to do so, I humbly thank you." She bowed her head. "Countless times I've said the same thing," a faint mumbled came from below. "-don't underestimate me." Sharply he stood.

"D-Didn't you die?" she yelled. "Is a queen supposed to act so childish?" nonchalantly, he dusted off his already dirtied suit jacket. "I apologize, I shouldn't have acted that way." Her tone regained the composure it usually held. "Much more like it," he gave a thumbs up. "Back to your question, have you already forgotten who I am?" he paused. "... " silence befell both of them.

"Excuse my rudeness, I'm Staxius Haggard, heir to the god of death." His right hand pressed tightly on his chest, he bowed courteously.

"I'm Xula Elmbush, queen of Arda." She returned the greetings. "With this, judgment is complete, you've been blessed by me as well as the god I serve under – your worthy to call me by my real name, hence today forth, we shall be known as friends." She clapped.

The background changed once more, they teleported to her throne room. Nothing had changed for the people staying there, time past was only a few seconds but for Staxius and Xula, it had been hours.

"Hence today forth," her speech wasn't yet done. Instead, she now stood with Staxius kneeling, as if being knighted. "you shall be known as a friend and given the right to come and go as you please. If you so choose, Staxius Haggard, I, Shanna Islegust, queen of Arda, I'm willing to form an alliance with you and only you, not Dorchester nor the council you preside in, but you personally. What do you choose?"

"I'll humbly accept your offer, your majesty." The outcome was far better than he had hoped for; all that he wanted was to meet the ruler, but instead, after granting her the only wish she wanted, to regain her status as an angel, her mind was cleared of doubt and she trusted him fully.

Hearing her grace Staxius with such honors, the council didn't standstill. They revolted, they were against it, her many counselors rushed to her side. Staxius still knelt, paying no heed to him, they ran and pushed him aside. "You can't be real, your majesty. A human considered as our friend will send the populous in a riot. The nobles from the vampire clans won't sit idly by as you do what you wish. They might try to overthrow you, please reconsider, that vile thing isn't worth standing by your side."

She slowly got overwhelmed, "how foolish am I? of course it would be a problem, creating an alliance isn't that easy. In that case, there's only one option." He stood.

"Your majesty, or rather, Xula Elmbush, I don't need any privileges nor favors that may ruin how you rule your kingdom. I say this as a friend and not a noble, don't do anything rash and uncalled for just for the likes of me, I'm but a wandering mage. I swear if that is what needs to be done for me to never step foot in Arda ever again. Then that is what I shall do to calm your council. I've done my job and have made you happy even if it was but for an instant. A smile really suits best on your always stern face. Say the word and I shall leave."

"How dare you speak so openly to the queen, guards." A mustache paired with a bald head; the main counselor spoke. His stature was small in comparison with the other elves present. Though he looked weak and feeble, the vampire's teeth showed a great deal of strength. Shanna's eyes lowered, she gave in to the people's word around her.

"Listen to your heart," a whisper came from behind, it was the sage. Her eyes regained confidence.

“Thank you, old friend,” she whispered. “Silence, I shan’t hear any belittling comments made to Staxius Haggard here. If it’s him human that is an issue, then I’m pleased to say that, he who stands in front of us, isn’t least bit human. Though I guess that it’s his standing as a noble that troubles you. If that’s an issue, then,” she took off her glove and threw it at Staxius’s feet.

Confused, he leaned and picked it up with his right hand. “Why did you do...” the moment he looked up, the people who were spouting nonsense about him earlier on, knelt. Shanna smiled with her cheeks brightly lit.

[Chapter 68](#)

The Proposal

The act of throwing down a glove to someone of the opposite sex. An act now used for issuing a challenge was once used as an indirect proposal. It hails from the now-extinct ancient civilization; the pioneers of magic to which to this day, their secrets remain tightly sealed by the ineptitude of the current civilization. Before throwing your glove to someone else, as told in fables about heroes and dragons, was about a hero throwing an apple to her highness, the princess. Though it changed throughout history, throwing apple changed from being something noble to barbaric. People instead threw gloves, and by people, it wasn’t humans but demi-humans and the other races. Their histories were vast and complex that most of them were lost to time. Books, stories, sayings, everything ended when humans tapped into mana and its uses. No longer was it fantasy, it turned to reality and the other races as their abuse grew alongside the disparities, fled to Arda.

In this day and age, where throwing a glove at someone is considered a challenge, none would have known that this was in fact, a proposal. Not only did he agree, but by picking up the glove with his right hand, he also agreed to take care of the one who first threw the glove. Intriguing sounds of loud clothes, armors, and jewelry hitting one another made Staxius cautious. As anyone would, he looked up and saw people kneeling. It made no sense whatsoever, he thought Shanna had challenged him. Being right-handed, it made the situation even more complicated. Per how he was brought up to be, he picked up the peculiar object and now stood in awe. The pressure in the room grew tense, some snarled while others voiced their dissatisfaction by making a ‘tsk’ sound. Faint whispers were heard, it built up over time to the point it got to arguments.

he queen had clearly done something outrageous and unbefitting royalty. She informally proposed to a commoner; a foreigner to make matters worse. At regular short intervals, one of the many counselors would glimpse backward to check on the queen. They tried arguing but the sage stood, as imposing as a mountain and as cold as ice, his gaze felt like death. Feeble in appearance only made people underestimate him but tales about the battle he fought against vampires, werewolves, and beast-men were sung as poems by bards who traveled up and down the province.

“Excuse me but what is happening?” The long and painful silence broke, Staxius grew impatient. “Didn’t you challenge...” He stopped midway, something brushed against his shoulder. Looking back, it was the sage, he moved or rather teleported. Same magic used by her majesty moments ago.

“Calm down,” he said calmly, the eyelids remain so tightly together that it looked as if he had closed his eyes. Every single bit of facial hair had turned white. “I am calm, but what is the matter?” Instead of a reply, the sage nodded his head, the queen took charge and dismissed everyone. The footsteps echoed

throughout the hall, and one by one, it grew empty. In the corner of his eyes, he spotted Aurora, she mumbled something and left with the others. Only Staxius, the queen and the sage were left standing.

"Please follow me," the sage tapped his shoulder.

"Lead the way," Staxius thought best not to ask any further questions. Her cheeks remained flushed. Time and time again, Staxius tried staring her in the eye to get visual confirmation on what was happening. She always averted her eyes and left the room through a portal she conjured.

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"Follow her, we'll explain everything." The old man reassuringly led the way. Nonchalant about the whole thing, Staxius neatly tucked the glove into his pocket and followed.

"My eyes, this is so bright." He stepped out into what looked like an indoor garden. In the middle, a tree, so majestic and beautiful he didn't know what it was. A blinding light came from what looked like a yellow orb, surrounded by a wave-like golden pattern. He stood on a stone path, that once reached the middle separated into three different directions, one forward, one left and one right. The middle tree looked more like a landmark. As he further walked, the sheer size left him speechless. It stretched onto forever, each path covered by trees, plants, and flowers. Nothing looked out of place, it was alienated from anything mildly dangerous.

"This way," they took a right turn and headed deeper inside. The queen was nowhere to be seen, "can you explain to me what happened earlier?" their walk slowed down in pace, the sage had intended for this. "As you wish," despite being indoors, a gentle breeze of which its origin remained a mystery, blew past them shyly. The temperature was perfect, it was hard to imagine a place like this existed. The sage proceeded to explain everything, from the origin to how it was changed from apple

to glove.

"In conclusion," their walk reached its end, the queen was spotted sitting underneath another giant tree. Her green hair complemented greatly the surroundings, she truly was a fairy, a beautiful one at that. "-after centuries of waiting, she saw something in you. Something genuine and something important, however you try to say that you're a bad person, deep down, the teachings of your father, not the ones about fighting but the ones about aiding people stuck. Yes, I knew your father, he was a prodigy, as well as my student many years ago. That's a story for another day, now, the moment of truth has come, will you accept the proposal?" Only a few meters stood between them, Staxius momentarily stopped. "This is a quandary; I have not thought of anything remotely that close to marriage or having a love life. Honestly, I'm not cut out for it, I'm not that great a guy.

However, that doesn't trouble me, I'll have to settle down sooner or later, and as they say, nothing ventured nothing gained." He replied with a smile.

"Well then, I'll leave you to it, go decide about what you want to do." *Poof,* he vanished, a whitish smoke was left behind. "I should probably turn off dark-arts," as he got closer to Shanna, he faltered and nearly tripped. "I-it's turned off," her green eyes looked joyous.

"You knew didn't you." He grabbed a seat next to her.

“What do you mean?” she playfully tried to avoid the question.

“You know full well, don’t you. I mean,” in an instant, he filled his thoughts with killing intent.

Ancient magic: Forest barrier, she yelled out of instinct. A wall made of wood sprouted from out of nowhere. “Ha-ha-ha-ha,” he laughed. “I fooled you, now didn’t I?” he leaned closer. She averted his gaze. “Don’t worry about it,” he relaxed into his chair and admired how bountiful the garden was.

“I guess we’re cut from the same cloth aren’t we,” she looked out into the distance where he stared. “Nothing really, but we do bear similarities. You read minds while I toy with emotions.” He answered.

“That is not exactly true,” she was doubtful. “I cannot read your mind that clearly, I can only glimpse the strong thought such as that killing intent you showed earlier. This is the first time

anything of this kind has happened. I’m left breathless to how someone like you has such power.

And so is it vice-versa, you cannot influence my emotions that easily despite it working slightly.” She stared back and snapped her finger. A maid dressed in black and white walked out of another portal, she held massive bunny ears. “Bring us some snacks and a cup of tea,” she ordered and the table, once empty, got filled with whatever she requested. “From what I’ve understood so far, you’re trying to say that you and I make the perfect duo?” he took a sip. “Yes, if put so simplistically, then that is what I’m trying to convey across. Also, isn’t it a bit rude to unintentionally ask if a woman truly likes you?” she pouted then took a sip.

“I apologize if it appeared that way, but you did propose to me and I did unwillingly accept. I still don’t think I’m cut out for this but I don’t mind it, heck, I’m grateful for the opportunity. Knowing myself, I’d have died alone.” He looked serious when he said it. “Being cynical isn’t healthy, but you look different, my emotional control doesn’t work on you – the perfect counterbalance.” He ended and placed down his cup. “Are you sure about undertaking this, do you really wish to become my p-partner?” she asked unwillingly, she didn’t want to bring up that subject despite talking about it.

“Yes, I do. Even if I barely know you, I do wish it. Let’s not discuss this any longer, it’s making both you and I uncomfortable.” They didn’t want to stare at each other, both were thoroughly embarrassed, even Staxius who thought had escaped his emotions fell prey to it.

“Then the matter is settled, starting today, you and I shall be courting one another.” She sharply stood up, “as you wish.” He whispered. One a fairy who turned into an angel while the other the heir to the god of death. One whose mind-reading powers can’t affect the other while the other can’t use manipulation to have their way. A perfect counterbalance with the same yet differing line of thoughts. Expecting to only give the self-proclaimed queen of Arda a piece of his mind, Staxius ended up in a courtship with her majesty. A relation he thought would have never happened, a relation that was given birth to a moment’s decision. “this piece of garment,” he held up the white and embroidered with diamonds and gold glove. It shone and reflected the light coming from orbs scattered around. “W-what are y-you doing?” he forgot she was present. “N-nothing, just thinking that’s all.” He stood up in turn.

“Xula, isn’t this going to upset your council of nobles?” She headed back to the entrance, Staxius followed behind. “Obviously, you needn’t worry. I shall take care of everything; all you need to do is but wait. Your standing as a noble does ease my job a little.” The portal opened once more. “After we step foot through that portal, we’ll part ways. After all, you’re a queen, and I’m a foreigner.”

“Foreigner?” she stopped his sentence, “I’ve proposed to you, and we’ve entered a courtship. Neither one of us is a stranger to the other, time will play its role, but we’re bound by something more. Don’t forget, you’re my conduit.” She smiled reassuringly. “You’re truly an angel aren’t you.” He followed behind. Staying in the castle for this long was daunting, Staxius lost track of time completely.

“Staxius, remember the portal you found back at your noble district?” They entered a room, a bedroom that looked unoccupied. “Yes,” he walked around. “I shall link it to this mirror here,” she pointed in front of the bed. “Can I come and go as I please?” he asked while inspecting the rather gloomy and dimly lit room. “Yes, I can sense your mana more sharply now, thus I’ll know when you’ve arrived.” The bedroom in question wasn’t that large though it could accommodate a small family of three. The bed was gigantic, the windows were hidden behind red and brown curtains. Few inches near said window, a small table with chairs. Opposite the window, on the other wall, wardrobes with stands and sheathes for weapons and armor. The wall leading to the bed held a mirror and was decorated with shields, portraits, and other miscellaneous things. On second thought, it looked more like a storage room, but he didn’t mind.

“Alright then, I shall return to my duties, you’re free to stay though I doubt it. You did mention one of your friends was on the verge of dying. It’s partly my fault, I’ll try and remedy the situation, I’ll see you another time. Do visit often, we’re courting and I’d like to know more about you.” Her confidence grew as she could now hold a straight face while saying it.

“You’ve exceeded my expectations, master.” Avon materialized. “Now isn’t the time to joke around,” he stepped through the mirror. The cold-chilly air of dawn took him by surprise. “How long has it been?” he asked not expecting an answer. “One day I think,” Avon stood beside him, he had fully recovered. “Good to see you safe and sound,” Staxius’s body lost all its strength for a second and he fell from atop the church. “Ouch,” he wasn’t that hurt. A strange pulse caused that reaction, looking up, he saw it. A bloody looking shooting star. The tail was vermillion red, a bad sign. It flew over his head and disappeared behind Oxshield. The ground shook, the soil seemed to scream. A high-pitched noise practically rendered him deaf, it was continuous.

“No, this can’t be possible,” his heart sank, it got heavy to breathe, he slowly felt his mana get seeped away. “Lord Death was right; I don’t know but I know that the god-slayer has come forth.” The usual calm and soothing dawn changed to a waking nightmare. Everyone around Hidros felt it, birds flew, what was left of wildlife ran around aimlessly.

“It has begun,” the sage spoke. “Indeed,” the queen replied.

“Princess Gallienne,” her envoy came yelling down the hallway. “I’ve told you to stop screaming.” She opened her door. “I know b-but i-its urgent.” He took her to the top of the castle. It was the southern province, Totrya. A province virtually untouched by human hands for resources are scares and hard to obtain. It’s mainly valleys, mountain ranges and always snowing thanks to its height. Some nobles lived there but low-ranking ones, just so that the land isn’t totally abandoned. Coming from behind one of its mountain ranges, a mushroomed shaped cloud as big as the mountain itself. It was unbelievable, she felt a sudden pulse and fell to the ground.

“This strange sound, can you hear it?” Eira spoke, “no silly, focus on the target ahead.” A friendly voice gently whispered. “As you wish,” *Bang,* an explosion followed.

“This is interesting, you came earlier than we expected,” Undrar landed atop a tree and stared backward. People, once naturally gifted in the arts of magic felt it that day. It was the beginning of the end, they had arrived. The harbinger of chaos and death, the god-slayer, and his minions. It happened so suddenly even the gods were taken by surprise. The normal populous only saw this as a sign of good luck, some took photos, while others made videos. The capital grew louder that morning, everyone was baffled by its sight.

“Master, master,” Avon came rushing down. “Are you alright?”

“Define alright, are you asking physically or mentally because from what I just sensed, things are about to change. His prophecy is coming to pass, that devious and foolish god, my master. I highly doubt anything will come out of this little show of strength, we’ll need to prepare. Even as I am right now, I’m pretty sure I’d get killed straight away. A true story about a hero and a demon, this shall be interesting.” He sat upright.

“Aren’t you going to become that hero?” Avon asked curiously. “Not interested, I want to watch this fable play out from the sidelines and help whoever the chosen one is. How ironic would it be if a hero was summoned from another world to come and save this one, just thinking about it makes me laugh. Who would in their right minds risk their lives to save another world of which they know nothing of? Maybe I just hit my head too hard, either way, that isn’t of our concern. The Order will do something about it, I’m just a wandering noble.

[Chapter 69](#)

The Cursed blade

Panting reverberated through the small cave. Julius stood strong, he covered the entrance. A faint red-trail broke his subtle lost of conscience. The air felt cold, each breath he took pierced felt like a thousand tiny needles assaulting his lungs. A single fire provided the minimum required heat to survive. They were stranded, the Krestonian army didn’t push for some reason. Frequently, loud thunderbolt sounds rattled the ground. Frostrest had been lost; nothing could be done. Death loomed over their heads, if not the weather, the invading army would be the ones to deliver the final blow. Autumn had passed out due to hunger, Fenrir had turned to her normal wolf form. Using her body heat and fur, though partly bloodied; she protected Autumn and Ayleth from the mountain.

“Time to swap,” Annet stumbled her way to the fire. “Alright, rest up,” Julius painfully climbed up. “No need to act tough, we all know you’ve helped a lot.” She crossed her legs and held her palms to the fire. “Now this feels good,” every time she spoke, a mist came out of her mouth, it looked like clouds. “That’s the job of a big brother, I’ve got Autumn to take care of you know,” his voice faded as he got farther. “We all have someone to take care of,” her eyelids grew heavier by the second and she fell asleep.

Bang, bang, rocks crumbled near the entrance, a faint sliver of snow followed suit. Everyone awoke, Annet’s well-deserved nap abruptly ended. “What is it?” she shouted hearing the thunderous explosion grow closer. “I-It’s Knightfall, they’ve locked down on our location.” Julius said as he slid down, “we don’t have any time to spare.” Ayleth’s right eye opened, part of her face was damaged from the explosion. Even her right arm broke, with its skins charred. Not to forget the still critical stomach wound. She wasn’t in any position to move; her consciousness went to and fro. “L-leave me, alone sis,” she mumbled. “Don’t say such things,” Annet yelled. “Don’t argue with me.” She paused, coughed, and

continued; “-did you forget that I’m older than you.” Annet tried to argue but the now awake Autumn touched her shoulder and shook her head.

“We need to move, now,” Julius grew impatient, a tear flowed down Annet’s face. The assault had now reached their hideout. Bit by bit, bullet after bullet, it pierced through. “Watch out,” the trajectory was dead set for Autumn’s head. *Purgatory fireball, inferno,* before the cave broke, using sound, he predicted where the bullet would come out from. A highly condensed and burning hot fireball was conjured. A pssh was heard, It sounded like extinguishing a fire with water. The bullet melted, but Julius ended up hurting his hand in the process. “Brother,” Autumn immediately used healing magic to no avail, it was Knightfall’s curse. Each shot grew more powerful, escape was no longer an option. The defending party was being held down by a single weapon.

“Your holiness, are you sure it’s wise to continue firing at that spot?” the marksmen spoke, his left eye was covered fully by black colored hair. Using his right eye to scope in, a cross appeared on the face of the mountain and he shot. “Yes child, keep following the cross and you’ll surely kill the ones who’ve escaped us earlier. The pope used a tracker, magic, and some new gadgets they obtained from the earlier shipment of weapons. “I see it, time stops, my target moves and I shoot,” a figure jumped out from the entrance. *Click,* long hair was the last thing he saw before pulling the trigger.

Bang, “Nooo,” Fenrir tried to grab her, everything went silent. “Annet, why did you?” Julius crawled to the entrance, Annet had jumped out of spite. She acted like the sacrificial lamb, each shot took about two seconds to reload. “Come on, we need to run now,” Julius jumped in turn. *Bang,* “brother.” Autumn yelled. “This is stupid,” Fenrir spoke casually. “Why do you look so nonchalant, two out of our party members just threw themselves to the lion.” Autumn fired back; her cheek boiled red out of frustration.

“Can you be anymore reckless?” A familiar voice came through the opening, “you sure took your time, didn’t you?” Fenrir spoke, “sorry, I got lost.” Black hair flashed through the hole, black lips and two unconscious bodies in each arm. “Phew, you sure do make my job harder.” She smiled, Undrar landed, her wings stretched then relaxed into a neutral stance.

“I-impossible,” the long hair now covered his eyes, he looked up. “What happened?” the soothing voice asked out of curiosity, “why do you look so pale?” the pope pressed on forward. “Knightfall’s bullets were stopped as if it were nothing,” he gulped and his breathing grew faster. “Calm down child, this isn’t nothing to threat about.” His giant palm patted the boy’s head reassuringly. “Outrageous, how c-can I m-miss?” everything got filtered out. “I see you’re no longer of any use,” the pope sighed as the boy tightly hugged his legs. “Main troops, advance forward and kill anyone on sight, I shall be returning to camp, relay any useful information. May God enlighten your path and bless all of you.”

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“How, what, who are you?” Autumn stood as perplexed as ever, this lady who seemingly came out of nowhere stopped Knightfall. “I’m Viola Haggard,” she replied and checked on Ayleth. Outside, the sun finally broke the never-ending dawn. The sound of engines was heard, the army resumed their march. This time, it was the real army, not the scouts, fully armed and ready to kill on sight. Their gaze looked like hungry beasts, they hungered for blood.

“Get ready people, we are approaching, a little bird has already told us where our targets are hiding,” Adelana shouted, she burned with anticipation. “Alright boys, you’ve heard the boss.” Everyone loaded their weapons. Frostrest came into view, the trucks went straight towards it unknowing of the danger awaiting them. Faint flashes of light were spotted thanks to the slightly dim morning. “Everybody, get down,” hearing someone scream so loudly, everyone obeyed. Behind them, the path on which they had just driven on got rained by bullets. “Get into cover,” the trucks sharply left the path and drove onto the mountainside where they were out of sight. The vehicles took a beating but she didn’t care.

Still driving on the rather gently sloped mountain edge, Adelana spotted something. It was snow and rubbles. Looking up, she noticed it, the entrance that was thoroughly damaged. Bullets continued to hit randomly all around them. “Continue moving forward, and stay behind cover; don’t get shot and die aimlessly.” She leaped; the truck lowered due to the pressure. Unluckily, she leaped into an oncoming barrage of bullets, “annoying pests,” in midair, she turned around and swung her sword flawlessly stopping the projectiles. “Ayleth,” she rushed to her side, Undrar held her head.

“Who’s this now?” Autumn crossed her legs and watched intently. So many new people rushed into the cave, she practically got lost in thought. Julius and Annet woke at the same time. “You’ve finally come,” Annet smiled. “Did you have doubts?” Adelana’s tone got filled with anger and hate. Laying before her, Ayleth whose face and body were badly hurt. “Kreston is going to pay,” she took her sword in hand for the second time. It gleamed; she gently stroked the blade’s edge. The once dull and dusty blade responded to her, it felt as if it got reawaken after years of sleeping. “You’ve been to rest for far too long, old friend,” she held it with one hand. “Anyone able to fight, follow me, Kreston’s army will pay.” She leaped out, “brother you’re not going anywhere,” Autumn held his shirt. “Don’t worry about it, leave the clean up to us,” Undrar finished whatever she was doing. “Use healing magic on her now, the curse has been lifted,” her wings flapped, a brisk wind blew across their faces. Fenrir changed into her human form; her help was no longer required.

“Fenrir, who were they?” Autumn asked.

“They are the silver guardians, my dear little sister, Staxius Haggard’s friends. But I know not the girl with black hair.”

“That’s Viola Haggard, Staxius’s sister. I’ve never seen her act this way, she’s normally calm and collected without the drive to fight. Though she feels off today, that smile, that grin, it looks the same as him when he gets serious.” Fenrir stood up, “after your done healing, let us get out of this abyss, I want to go back to sleep.” She yawned.

Soon after, the defending party rejoined with a truck that waited further up. Said truck was brought especially for them. Orders were given that; after they’ve entered, the driver would get them out as fast as possible. On that front, everything went smoothly, Ayleth got partially healed by Autumn. All that she needed now was a doctor, a good one at that. Julius, Autumn, Fenrir, Ayleth and Annet all left – Adelana, Alyson and Undrar remained.

“Undrar, are you sure you’re doing alright? This is the first time we’ll be fighting together.” The duo of Adelana and Undrar climbed down the mountain at neck-breaking speeds. Adelana ran while Undrar flew, despite that, their pace was identical. “I just needed some exercise.” Following close behind, Alyson who led all the mercenaries, they were hidden behind the foliage. Instead of going through the

main path leading into the village, as the silver guardians previously got acquainted with the vicinity. They climbed the small hill on which the village leader's hut rested. The height advantage was one thing and knowing the terrain was even better.

"Dear God," Adelana stopped to catch her breath, the village leader laid face down in a puddle of his own blood. He had been shot in the head, it left a hole as big as a human fist, the remnants of the brain matter sluggishly laid on the already bloodied top. "That's him alright," Alyson spat out of disgust. "We don't have time to waste, the army is approaching." Undrar got everyone back on track. Looking down from atop, soldiers walked, they were carefully scattered all around. All the military vehicles stationed were jeeps with mounted guns and trucks painted in green and brown.

"Guys I don't want to alarm you but our men are getting restless." Alyson notified Adelana.

"What is it Floyd, are you scared?" Adelana addressed the mercenary leader. "No ma'am, we're restless because we want to fight, our guns are begging to reign down death." He smirked.

"Well, strategizing has always been our back-up plan. Everyone, are you ready?" She stared at Undrar, to which the latter nodded. "Floyd, before we charge, I want you to keep most of your men up here, we don't want to lose the height advantage, and guns being fired from atop is better than on the uneven ground down there. The girls and I will handle the close-combat, this is for my sister's honor." As per her order, most of the men laid down and stared through their scopes. Alyson physically enhanced herself with lightning magic, Undrar conjured a shield and Adelana, at last, broke the seal. "Death awaits our enemies, spare no one," Adelana leaped headfirst into battle, Undrar followed behind and close to her, Alyson. Bullets reign down, the battle begun.

Fire element: Hades' blessing, her entire body was wrapped around a blue-fire. Her blade burnt even more so, a single swing from her nearly destroyed half of the village; she wasn't at full power yet. Coming up from the right, Undrar casually flew around and touched anyone who tried shooting at her. Instantly, they turned to dust. Alyson took her lightning-strike stance and single-handedly wiped out most of the remaining members. This was the true Kreston army, despite being overwhelmed by this surprise attack, they rose up and fought. Bullets rained from behind them, blood everywhere, the girls were caged monsters who were just unleashed. The years traveling from battlefields to battlefields proved to be more than enough, their experience alone rivaled the remaining combatants.

"Boss, are you sure it's even worth wasting our ammo?" one of the recruits spoke out.

"They did hire us; we can't do anything about it. Fire at will, though I doubt we'll do anything major, I mean the cursed blade has stepped onto the field. Just look at that devastation she left behind, she carved out the left side of the village completely with one strike. This is her after a sixteen-year rest, just imagine how that strike was long ago." He stood, hands crossed, the sun shone, he watched.

"They just keep on coming back," Undrar said while flying over Adelana. "Yeah, I agree," Alyson added while falling back. "If we prologue this for too long, they'll adapt and we'll lose – let's end it all here." Before now, Adelana was using her left hand, but now, the blade pointed straight in front of her, she held it with both hands. Looking at her stance, Undrar quickly retreated. The enemies kept on firing, luckily, the mounted guns weren't an issue for Alyson took care of it. "This is why I swore to never wield this blade ever again, but time has changed." She took a few breaths in, the aura changed. "I'm called the cursed blade because of this move," *Fire element; Mystic Burst.*

All the blue-flame that covered her body converged into a single dot near the tip of the sword. It grew so small it vanished, but suddenly, it all shot out and enveloped the weapon. "Goodnight," she leaped and swung vertically. The sword did a semi-circle and a giant crescent moon shaped light flew out. It lit so brightly staring at it could burn anyone's eyes. It made contact with the remainder of the village. A high-pitched sound followed and fell silent for a second, nothing happened. Shocked, the recruit stared at his leader, but he eagerly pointed at Frostrest. A faint crack made its way out, then, *BAM,* everything turned to dust, nothing was left standing; total annihilation. Frostrest was gone as well as a massive portion of land leading up to Rotten Thicket.

"Come on, let's go," the sword looked blazing hot, just like metal being smelted. "Should have left something for us," Undrar landed beside her. "You've lost strength sister, that move would have normally made it all the way to Rotten Thicket."

"You're overestimating me," she scratched her head in denial and climbed the hill. "Hopefully this demonstration of strength will put Kreston in check for the time being," Undrar said casually. Behind them, what remained of Frostrest, a village that once welcomed them – was nothing but a carved-out piece of land reaching several hundreds of meters in length. Witnessing the power of the cursed blade, the mercenaries felt compelled to stand up straight and salute. Adelana nodded accordingly and the search and rescue ended. All and all, the operation went as planned. No-one died, and it all ended without any more trouble.

Seeing as Frostrest was now unusable, on the way home. Adelana called on the Merchants of death to scavenge and clean up whatever was left. They praised and thanked her, she still had semi-close ties with them. "Ma'am, are you going to use that blade again?" Floyd asked as the ride became stagnant. "Yes and no, I'm not opposed to using it now but I also have my misgivings about it. Time will tell, if anyone tries to hurt the small community or any one member of my family and friends, I swear that I won't hesitate to unleash all my pent-up anger." The picture of Ayleth's broken down body continued to ail her; she was furious despite killing so many people. She wasn't satisfied, the one responsible still lived, she didn't know who it was, but her gut told her that he was out there. The vermilion colored shooting star at dawn was peculiar, she noticed it but was far too on edge to fully comprehend what was happening behind the scene.? "What is Staxius up to I wonder," she didn't blame him for anything.

[Chapter 70](#)

The Dark-Age

"Do you think we're all going to be killed by this god-slayer being?" Avon spoke, the sun reached half-way into the sky; it shone brighter than ever. Staxius walked beside him, they looked like brothers. The red-shooting star piqued Staxius's interest so much that he spent half of the day thinking about it in the mansion. Though, they both left the noble district; exploring it wasn't their priority nor were they happy about it. Being a spirit himself, Avon felt something completely different; it was a feeling of nostalgia. The vermilion color looked familiar, it called out to him, just like the Kreston crest called out to Staxius before. "I haven't the slightest idea, as far as I'm concerned; Dorchester and the few survivors are what I'm worried about. As the makeshift camp grows, our cost will increase without stopping; feeding all those mouths is going to be a hurdle. Millicent might be praised as a duke, but the people don't know how much that is going to weight overall. I'm so stupid, I acted recklessly," annoyed, he kicked standalone rocks laying on the dirt path.

The noble district stood far away from them; the car controlled by Avon rested near Brisnet Heights. This meant that Staxius had no other means of travel. The vehicle Autumn and Julius supposedly used was badly damaged, they checked on it earlier, it laid outside with its engine blown. The sheer amount of things happening around them was mind-blowing, Staxius could keep track but his attention was elsewhere. A place where his conscience could not enter, it was out of his reach, thus the slight mistakes here and there. The reawaking, and breaking of Medusa's curse left a big void inside him. He felt empty, it was unlike anything else, it was his intellect; he knew something was wrong but could not pinpoint it. This frustrated him, he tried to focus on one goal but to no avail.

"Master, are you feeling alright?" Avon stopped, castle Garsley came into their field of vision, it looked more like a dot, but that was definitely it. The ground around them burnt with heat, the soil looked like dust, no plants nothing. The only bit of greenery left was on the other side of the ravine; Oxshield. The land looked vast and infinite, there was no real indication to where one was, easily one could get lost and die. This was a recurring theme, boys set off to go train in Dorchester's harsh environment but end up getting lost and die. The nobles who once lived here made signs to help with navigation were all now destroyed. A sixteen-year-old war between Duke Sten Parcyvell and Duke Hawkin Normannus, Staxius's home province fought hard, a losing battle but they fought. It left considerable damage; the royal family turned their back on them. The neighboring provinces did naught but add to the burning fire, war heroes were born, technology advanced further and lastly, the Order, none heard from them. All those things went around Staxius's head perpetually, he asked so many questions but never got any answers.

"No need to worry, Avon." He placed his hand onto the feeble looking shoulder. "-I'm just anxious that's all, things happened so fast I was taken by surprise. First Kreston picked a fight, it was instigated by Xula, but she's just foolish. I can't blame her fully, Kreston are the one who itched for a fight, greed can ruin even the greatest man. I mean, imagine working for a province for six years and then getting backstabbed?" He referred to the silver guardians aiding in the battle against Sten Parcyvell. "Isn't that how the world works? Survival of the fittest." Avon resumed his walk, Staxius followed suit. "Yes, that is true, maybe I've just grown soft." At that moment, the slaughter of Thunderstain's army came into mind. "-Or maybe not," he smiled.

Behind Oxshield, in the land of mountains, a gigantic crater deformed the mountainside. A once gently sloped mountain face was turned into something hideous. In the middle of it, a black and red sludge made its way out. Soon, as hours went by, the crater was filled with this dark substance. As well as expanding upwards, it went down, deeper into the ground. It overflowed and made its way to the mountain feet where it reached into an enormous valley, full of green pastures, animals, and trees. This was one of the lowest reaching valleys in Totrya, one of the only habitable lands. Away from the cold and snow, this place was close to the sea and as a result, was warmer compared to the actual Totrya. Places were rarely named as none lived here; the nobles resided near the border. This valley, however, bore a name, Neuburg's Valley. A name was given to it by the one who discovered it, an ice-sorcerer who lived years ago. He set off to explore Totrya as rumors of ancient relics being hidden away there grew more common. It was a valley described as the portal between paradise and this world; none apart from a few wandering mages ever came across it. The only reference of this place was made in a book written by Neuburg titled; My life on ice.

The paradise changed however, from today forth, the blackish substance crawling off the mountain touched the plain. It all changed, the speed at which it infected everything could not be put into words.

The animals changed, their gaze turned red and proceeded to slaughter themselves. The plants instead of being subtle and flowing gently with the wind now ate up anything that passed before them. *Crunch, Crunch,* everything stopped, the animals, now turned into beast all faced where the sound came from. The footsteps paused and resumed with whistling. Whoever or whatever that came too close to the carnivorous plants, it charged. "Shhh," it stopped, the plant's mouth halted.

"Master, master," footsteps scurried behind, "is this place desirable?" three small looking green creatures asked. "Yes, this place is adequate. My slumber has been broken after so long, make this place my domain. My comrades are to arrive shortly, I feel it, their strength, my beloved servants approaches." The whistling resumed; the valley soon changed. "First order of business," the same being after a few hours leaped from the valley all the way to the peak. The peak of the mountain that bore the full force of the crater. "this world is far too ugly; I've been reborn once more." The right-hand shook, a staff appeared.

I am he who controls everything. My will is absolute, may you be gods or angels, the only one who can stand against me is myself. I'm the god-slayer, the harbinger of chaos and apocalypse, by my authority, I order thee, portals to the abyss and void, open. Change this already changing world, fill the Earth with dread, fill the sky with blood, and fill the living with fear. Us monsters who've been alienated and cursed to never be born; I now sever it. I reject all, reality is what I want it to be; Absolute Control, World-break.

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The crater in which the meteorite landed glowed: howling, snarling, and screaming came through. *Poof,* one by one, beings from another world rushed out. Some looked human, some looked like beast-men, they didn't look that dissimilar from how the people in Arda looked. The aura around Totrya changed, this all took place in a single day, while Staxius and his party made way to castle Garsley. Alongside the beasts that rushed out, a dark vermillion colored mist began enveloping the vicinity. It reached astounding distances and heights, to the point it covered the whole province, it looked as if the clouds had descended onto Hidros.

"Far too long have we stayed in the shadows, and far too long has the gods oppressed us. Time has come for us to build our rightful domain, the place we can all call home, today is the start of a new beginning, none shall be allowed to leave nor enter until I give strict orders. I'm your god now, I've earned that title by slaying gods who ruled for too long, obey me and you shall be able to roam free and terrorize as you please. For now, I order you all to help my servants, we need to build our forces, this new world is ours for the taking. Now go and don't report to me unless you've got something urgent." The god-slayer sharply moved his hand, everyone dispersed. All the creatures who were summoned through that portal obeyed and never dared to look up. The god-slayer was more powerful than all the mages combined throughout the world. On that day, the world entered into a new era, a new age; the dark age or otherwise known as the era of heroes. Despite how it looked, the dark vermillion mist went unseen to normal sight, it was condensed mana. Only gifted people that had the boon of clairvoyance could see it. A rare and sought-after blessing, the ability to see the unseen.

Nighttime came faster than usual, the trucks drove. The defending party who first left had made it a third of the way, the driver took no break whatsoever. Adelana and her party, on the other hand, were now reaching the half-way mark. Today was a success for everyone, and everything went by as

soothingly as possible. Staxius and Avon decided to stop long before dusk, Staxius felt drained. As he slept, Avon decided to try and control the car from afar. It worked, part of his spirit was called back, and now two versions were brought forth. One stayed with Staxius and the other controlled Void.

Night fully took over; Julius's truck didn't stop. The driver slept, it was Autumn who drove, they decided to drive throughout the night. Ayleth was the main reason, she desperately needed medical help. Purely by coincidence, Adelana's party made the same decision. Thanks to this, their arrival was predicted to be somewhere after dawn.

"Master, master," Staxius awoke, the sun had risen hours ago, the night went by. "What is it?" the strength he somehow lost yesterday had returned. "Time for us to move."

"Alright, the castle is a few hours off, let's get going."

A menacing roar came from behind Adelana's truck. As if lightning struck, Void drove straight past them. "Damn that's a fast car," Floyd yelled out. "Keep your eyes on the path ahead," Adelana slapped the back of his head. She was next to drive, the engines worked tirelessly.

"Finally, I can see it, the castle." The small hill onto which it rested came into view, Julius drove, a few hours went by. "Wasn't that long ago that we were about to fight in this very place," Fenrir added. "Yeah, it's weird, isn't it. Honestly, I was ready to die that day, Sten had been a good friend to my family; I wanted to repay the debt with my life. But alas, he chose to die by himself. I know full well that his personality wasn't that welcoming but deep down he cared for Dorchester, not the people but the land." They closed onto the path leading up to the front gate. On the way there, on the right, Autumn spotted Staxius and Avon.

"Master, your comrades have arrived just as we have." Avon pointed out to the truck, badly damaged to the point of no return. Having heard the news of Ayleth's injuries, Staxius ran, he knew she was on board. The truck entered the castle walls before Staxius. Carefully, Annet took charge and ordered people to help carry her sister inside. Everyone around here helped, one of their guardians was hurt. Millicent came out with Ancret, and her unconscious body was carried into nearly built sleeping quarters. It was allocated just right when entering the castle. The tavern, usually brewing with activity felt lifeless; everyone held their breath as Ayleth got carried inside.

"Everyone, thank you for your help but can you please clear out?" Millicent courteously asked; they all left without making any sound. Almost like swimming against the flow of a river, Staxius forced his way against the incoming hoard of people. A few pushes here and there and he arrived. The room was dim, only three beds were present, all placed on the left side, facing away from the wall. The temperature was cold and chilly, the perfect opposite to the outside. Ayleth laid on the nearest bed. Fenrir, Julius, Annet, and Autumn all stood on one side, while Ancret was crouched down showing her back to Staxius. Millicent stood near her as Ancret tried to heal her sister.

"How is she doing?" he asked as he gasped for air. "Viola took care of the curse from Knightfall but her body needs a doctor, not healing magic. We've passed the point of no return, honestly, if this goes on, we might lose her in a few days." Ancret replied. She was already informed about everything thanks to Annet. Staxius slowly approached, what laid before him looked pitiful. The right side of her body was destroyed, the limbs didn't work, her skins charred and her face nearly gone. "How is she still alive?" he asked, mesmerized by how she fought. "Her vital organs weren't touched, that's beside the point. We

need a doctor now, but as far as I know, no one in this entire kingdom has the talent to pull that off.” Ancret rose up, “you knew one of us was going to die, we don’t blame you, master. We did agree to that suicidal mission.” She rolled her eyes defiantly, everyone looked at him with disgust, they were disappointed.

“Isn’t it funny,’ Staxius laughed, his face went blank. “-how people always look for someone else to blame for their mistakes?” He sighed. “Look, I’m not that heartless.” He closed in on Ancret’s body, it still drew breath. “Why do you always worry, I know someone who can help you, my friend.” He leaned close and patted her head, “a doctor who saved me long ago, I don’t know if she remembers me still.” Staxius glanced at Julius, he nodded, they both knew who it was. “Doctor Jona?” Autumn asked curiously.

“Yes, that’s her, and I know full well she still works at Claireville Academy. I did check on all their personnel before sending Eira over.” He replied and approached Julius. “Good job, old friend, you’ve done far more than I can ever repay.” He whispered gently and shook his hands. “No old friend, thank you for allowing me to be by your side once more,” Julius smiled. “How are you going to get her there?” Millicent asked, “-our trucks aren’t that inconspicuous and I’m going to guess that it’s broken as well.” She looked at Fenrir who just averted her gaze.

“No need to worry about that issue,” a loud roar came from outside. “-our ride has come,” Avon added smugly. “You’ve done it once more, good job Avon.” Staxius leaned over and picked up Ayleth gently, he took his time, everyone watched how immaculate he was. “Master,” Fenrir came up behind him, “who is that boy?” she asked playfully.

“That’s Avon, Julius will fill on you the details later, I really have to get going.” He walked and reached the doorway, “-Millicent, you can trust Julius, his my long lost friend, a powerful mage as well as a duke.” He walked out. “Wait for me,” Avon scurried behind. The once tension-filled room eased up, Staxius’s presence set everyone’s worry aside; they all relied on him.