

## Death Magic 681

### Chapter 681: True Demonlord [12]

\*Revert to normal.\* the sand-filled land of nothingness swapped for the manor. The all-encompassing sphere of Mantia who had gripped the hill eased its strength. Igna stood without concern at the very injured attacker, the land below bulged to accommodate the prior scenery. Forest took the place of the idle land, color and texture restored to reality.

One on his hands and knees, while the other before the restored manor, the discrepancies of such a power struggle would have made a child know when to back down. Then again, the wisest are often the dumbest in a weird paradoxical manner.

\*Skills acquired over the ages, transfer to my guardian Spirit, Vengeance, for he is to become the next God Slayer.\* A flash of red broke through the attacker's eyes, the sockets emptied and the mouth widened, a liquidy substance flowed outwards, the body-contoured strangely. It began to chant ancient words and sentences; the now fully blackened eye sockets bore its fury to Igna.

"Disgusting," he said, \*Become a somewhat eye-catching person.\*

"What have you done!" it cried.

"Given you a better-looking visage and body," he sneered, "-come on then entity of the underworld. Why not head on home and tear thyself apart, I don't care much for the words of weaklings, isn't that what thee said?"

"YOU-"

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\*You shall not speak unless I give the order,\* before insults formulated, the inches the words crossed to the tip of the mouth, an order to remain silent nearly bit its tongue. The mangled mess of broken bones whimpered at the jarring pain, \*Be healed and begone.\*

A whiff of neatly cut grass had the mind at ease. 'I've protected éclair's yard,' he humbly waited on the stone path, '-his kindness will be repaid in full.' Another gust of wind carried droplets of blood, most of which landed on the stone tablets, "-Master, I've returned."

"Vengeance, how was the mission?"

"I have captured the leader, he's currently inside the dungeon."

"We have a dungeon?" the intonation comically wondered.

"Yes my lord, every vampiric castle needs a good dungeon," returned a sloppy jest.

"True," he smiled, "-how very quaint, I shall take to the dungeon soon enough. What of the remaining insurgents?"

"They've been killed or worse, my lord."

"Did you utilize Ombres?"

“No my lord, the weaklings didn’t deserve such treatment. Overestimating their strength will reflect badly on thee.”

“Since you returned swiftly, I’ll allow the little transgression. Next time, don’t be so reckless, use help if needed.”

“Sire, there won’t be the next time,” he smirked, “-as your spirit guardian, I was bestowed with the talents of Absorption, Reproduction, and Perfect imitation. I can absorb, reproduce, and imitate any skill I see fit, the abilities are limited to demi-gods and lower demons. The stronger I get, the higher the authority will climb. I’m very grateful for said gifts. I forgot to mention, Magic Reflection.”

“Very overpowered,” he commented, “-I’ll count on thee to grow stronger. You’ve yet to inherit the powers to harm a god. Fret not, we mustn’t be too belligerent, the day will come when the title of God Slayer is inherited by another personage. From what I see,” he walked over and took his hand, “-tis the insignia of Scifer.”

“Is that what it is?”

“Yes, and I imagine you’re rather perplexed. Enough work for today, head on back. I’ve matters to attend to.” Once more, the enclosed space couldn’t be trespassed into, the unknowing drivers on streets alongside the hill were teleported one place to the other in a way to bypass the realm. The remaining reaction was of shock and joy, latter due to the windy nature of the roads.

‘I didn’t expect to have a dungeon,’ he faced the manor sternly.

\*Walls, thicken,\* the surrounding barrier reinforced. \*AFR controlled anti-air weapons, summon in a tube under the soil,\* and thus occurred. \*AFR-controlled mini-guns, be stationed at the gates and around the property in a docile manner.\* Heavily armed weapons moved automatically. \*A portable anti-missile silo, be summoned at the back of the property.\*

‘-Alright,’ he chuckled, ‘-I can really affect reality. The moment Mantia is dispelled, the items will remain – a heavy chunk of my mana’s gone. The items use the elements of magic to be conjured, very convenient since I don’t need to cast spells. Should I maybe have? Ok fine.’ \*AFR controlled DD5 X03, materialized atop the mansion.\* A threateningly beautiful helicopter, outlined by the sun, stood imminently. ‘-Should be enough for today.’ \*Manor, revert to normal, all harm is to be undone.\*

‘Got around half of my mana supply left.’ \*Conjured from the powers of which rules the law of nature, summoned to aid, mine quest art be left alone. Reality is as I dictate, matters affected in Mantia ought be reflected in the outside world. Realm Retraction Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\*

Layers of the barrier cracked and crumbled, the outside sun gleefully snuck through. The changes to effect, the ability to control reality were at the fingertips. The armored vehicles, now toys, were left weightlessly around the gate. Outside in, nothing changed. Reports of gunshots did make the emergency line. On closer inspection, there was nothing to be frightened about.

‘For a dungeon,’ the path took to the backside of the manor, a small hatch opened for a concretely sealed block of a room, ‘-it’s more modern than I thought.’ In it were two rooms, one for the prisoner, a long shaft of at least a few meters, and the control area, located above the cell. The circle shape didn’t allow for needless attempts at escape, the overwhelming whiteness and secluded atmosphere sufficed

for insanity. No beds nor chairs were allocated, in this case, blood was smeared onto the walls – Vengeance had a little test beforehand. ‘-The control room has a healing function,’ buttoned pressed, lid slid to reveal showerheads, droplets of potions fell, the injured man healed.

\*Tap, tap,\* “-mic testing,” the culprit gave a reaction and soon fell silent, “-signal if thee can hear.”

“...” no answer.

“Alright,” he teleported inside, “-you’re in rough shape,” said he with compassion, the culprit, a man in uniform, square-faced and rigid expression, cared not for the overarching sympathy displayed. “-I can’t help if you won’t speak.”

“Who are you?”

“My name’s Igna Haggard, I’m the lord of the manor. What about you?”

“The devil of Glenda...”

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“You know of me,” he smiled, “-makes the process even simpler. Tell me anything and everything. Contrary to popular belief, I’m a very kind and patient person. I’ll hear the story out, if you convince me or give sufficient information, I’ll allow thee to escape,” \*Snap,\* a sealed entrance opened, “-if you don’t want to speak, then take the portal.”

He immediately stood and made for the exit.

“-I wouldn’t be so hasty,” remarked Igna, “-Sergeant Zer D’Loa. I heard the family name of D’Loa’s pretty famous in the world of Alphian politics. This I say, is a very big scandal, to launch such an attack on a weak and feeble manor. I see here you have one wife, two lovely daughters, and an officer who you’ve asked for special favors to allow her easy promotion into the police career path. Looks like her name’s Zulia Konpth. Oh, how very interesting, Konpth is also a reputed family in the military. D’Loa and Konpth, there doesn’t seem to be any reaction from the family name. What about the lovely daughters,” the man gave a subconscious clue, “-there, a family man aren’t you. I understand since I have many children myself,” two chairs manifested, “-how about we take a seat and chat for a little, you know, father to father.” A reluctant step forward later, “-if thee wishes to leave, go ahead. I, for once, won’t safeguard the girl’s identity nor chastity. I have various connections who would enjoy plucking at their helplessness, a member of the police force must know how depraved and immoral the underworld is. There’s almost a market for everything, and they will surely peek as produce.”

“Don’t talk about my daughters in such a vile manner,” he spun and stormed to Igna, they practically butted heads, “-intimidation won’t do much,” rebutted Igna, “-take a seat and we’ll discuss a few things in detail.”

“Fine,” he sat.

\*Partial Realm Expansion: Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\* the orb hovered to wrap around the sergeant’s throat. \*You will speak only the truth, and nothing else.\*

“I warn you, I’m not going to divulge information.”

"What's your name?"

"Zer D'Loa," said a sudden reply, the cluelessness of his visage was priceless, '-what's happened?'

"What's your race and gender?"

"Sultrian, and male."

"How long have you worked in the police force?"

"10 years."

"What's your standing with the other higher-ups?"

"Pretty good."

"How deep is the nepotism of the family?"

"All the way to the rank of Deputy Chief of Melmark."

"What actually happened today?"

"We were asked to launch a raid at the Haggard estate by the Patek Dynasty."

"Why would they do so?"

"Don't know."

"What were the objectives?"

"To find the stored narcotics, kill the residents, and burn the manor."

"What of the children?"

"Sent to Tale for the young master to handle."

"Who was directly involved?"

"No idea."

"Try again."

"No idea, the orders came anonymously via messenger."

"What of the messenger?"

"Killed via a self-inflicted wound."

"What did the message say?"

"To invade the Haggard estate."

"When was the invasion decided?"

"A few months ago."

"Are you or the police force linked to the underworld?"

"Yes, I'm part of the Saku's family."

"Why would they attack us?"

"Because of the debt owed to the Patek's. Luon is to be wiped without a shred of resistance."

"Do you know anything about Odgar and his paperwork?"

"Odgar was a great detective. He was sadly killed for having known too much."

"Any idea how?"

"By a drug."

"Who supplied it?"

"No idea."

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"Who was it that gave the order to kill Odgar?"

"No idea."

"Who was in charge of the investigation?"

"Detective Anslo."

"Where is he now?"

"Killed in action a few months back."

"Are you in any way linked to a scheme in the destruction of the Haggard name?"

"No."

"What's your purpose?"

"To obey orders from the head of the Saku family."

"What will you do after this?"

"Head back to my family and try to alleviate the situation."

"Who knows about the drug manufacturing?"

"No one, the assignment was given to my squad."

"Are your squad in the underworld?"

"Yes."

"Have they assassinated any starlets?"

"No."

"Any idea on who would try and kill idols?"

"The Patek's."

"Why?"

"Young master."

'Should be enough for today.' \*Realm Expansion – Release.\*

"What happened?" the mind came too.

"You were unconscious for a little bit," said Igna, "-go on home, we're done here."

"You're not going to kill me, are you?"

"No, I've given my word. Go back and don't cross my path again."

"Thank you very much," he bowed and left, "-if the day comes where I must repay the kindness, please, I shall do whatever is must to appease thy heart, my lord."

"Yeah, yeah, go on," the cell felt comforting, '-there's a vague idea about why the attack was launched. Patek's are involved which means, Cimier see us as a threat, how much money did éclair make with the export alone.' A check of the bank account rustled his chair, '-alright, it explains why they're so angry. Stocks are low, very astute of him, he's controlling the supply and demand. Without the former, the grows exponentially, the Saku family must have seen it as ruthless. Doing business with us is a pain I never want to experience.'

The events of the manor attacks were resolved in a pretty mundane fashion. A check on the date showed a long time had elapsed, without details, moving in the dark would be foolish. 'I thought I would have killed the man after the interrogation,' the view from the refurbished balcony gave chills, '-I have changed quite a bit, the anger I felt when Vanesa and Asmodeus were in danger reawakened my thirst for blood.'

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'-Then again, maybe not. What's done is done, the injured were hurt and I got to let off some steam. The reawakening as a Watcher did have a big impact, I feel lighter and more mentally resilient. Origin's a very shrewd character, he schemed the downfall for us to rise again, what an interesting and enigmatic being. I should perhaps give the Chief of Odgawoan a phone call, she must have answers. Law enforcement in deep with the underworld should have known such a thing would happen. Where do I move from here, I wonder?' Without éclair present, information about the manor and overall connectivity to the world was cut, hence with a few nonchalant steps, a portal to the Shadow Realm opened.

The feeling, nostalgic and pleasant, he awoke under a familiar roof, one of olden reminiscent. 'Krigi of New,' cross his mind, the sun outside sneakily peeped through a dirtied curtain, the opened window was much to drive home about. 'A single bedroom, this is our old residence, well, after mother and father divorced. Far as I know, only burnt remain exists.' He humbly stood; images of his former self walked right past in ghastly figment of the imagination. In the shadowed corridor waited the strong presence of Tempest Haggard.

"Good to see you, father," he said and begot a distant nod of recognition. 'Mind's playing tricks on me,' he turned outside by support from a feeble wooden ledge. Before war and events culminated to the present, the small village used to be a hangout for travelers. Amazingly enough, children ran about the hardened dirty path in somewhat decent clothes. Albeit they were demi-humans, the place retained a part of his past long gone to the memory.

"Come one, come all, here we bet for the true winners," cheered a dwarf.

"Bring on the ale, lassie, the boys and I will spend the day and night drinking today."

"You all always drink," rebutted the waitress, "-get some job first before ye open them poisonous breath mouth."

"Ol' chipper mouth is at it again," laughed the gathering of close-minded people.

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"Fellow in the white shirt," said a lady in an apron, "-where you come from?"

"The room upstairs," he replied.

"Huh?" she narrowed to the waitress, "-Dielle, did you have guests staying the night?"

"None that I know of," her dexterous handling of plates and mugs had brought familiar faces. Distant cheery men betted on whether she'd fall or not, the overall atmosphere was friendly.

"Is that right," the lady's face contoured in fury.

"No, Momma," interjected the lass, "-I remember, he said he needed to stay the night. You know how travelers are," nervous laughter seemed to do the job, the lady gave a stern once over and left for the kitchen.

'Go outside, I'll be there right away,' said a voiceless murmur.

'Amazing,' he stepped into the street, '-the village's alive and well. I remember this sight fondly, albeit from a higher point of view. This is what it felt like to walk around the town back then,' he moved to a side alley, the closest memory was of the town being burnt, the screams somewhat echoed. Back to the wall and face to the skies, the cacophonous walks, weird as it sounded, brought a greater sense of fulfillment.

"Heya, hope I didn't keep you waiting."

"Not really," he replied gratefully, "-I appreciate the help back there. Didn't know what to say."

"Don't worry about it," she undid her headband, to a deluge of brown curvy hair parting down the middle, fell, while her bunny ears, perked up. "-Big momma can be a real harsh lady. Why were you upstairs?"

"No idea, I just awoke here, nothing more, nothing less."

"Awoke?"

"Yes, like, being transferred from another world, but I guess you won't understand."

"Not really," she shrugged, "-but I believe you. I don't sense lies; you seem like a good man. First time in Krigi?"

"Krigi of new?"

"Excuse you?"

"Sorry, don't mind me. Where are we?"

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"Trader Town of Krigi in the province of Dorchester. Many villages around the place come here to trade and get a living."

"What about you?"

"The typical village girl," she smiled and twirled, "-I'm a barmaid, the town's an amazing place to meet people."

"GET BACK HERE, BREAKS OVER!" thundered from the kitchen.

"I'll get going, see you another time, mister."

'Quite an interesting character,' he jumped to the highest building, '-here I come, Rosespire.' \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\* Save the stuffy feel of the interior, the estate in the noble district was home to Asmodeus and the likes. "Anyone home?"

"Over here," said a figure towards the left, "-under the blanket, I'm here."

"Look at you, the rest must feel nice. How are the injuries?"

"Not grievous," said éclair, "-I didn't expect such level of architecture for this estate."

"Tis a replica of what we own. The view onto the garden sure hasn't changed," the scan halted at a tombstone, "-yeah, it too hasn't moved."

"Master, I'm sorry I failed-"

"Don't even start," he drew a nearby chair, "-before I start, where's Aceline and Vanesa?"

"The ladies are at the castle. Lady Gophy insisted the generals care for the companions, I'm sure they're doing fine."

"With Draconis and Saniata, I'm sure it will be an entertaining piece to watch."

"Was the manor destroyed?" he had left in a hurry; the last images were fire and blood.

"Yes, we were invaded by the state-level military. Fret not, the situation has been handled."

"Rebuilding's going to cost a fortune."

"I've already restored our property, there's no cause for concern."

"..."



"I'll speak of the story at a later date. Tell me, why was the attack so brutal?"

"A culmination of things, my lord. After the events in which thee fell into a coma. I was left in command. Priority was money and a name in the underworld, I followed vague ideas thee provided. Raven acquired Luon, and the family began to do business with various organizations. First come first serve, the more we sold, the greater grew the profits and the larger grew the attention. The den in the red-light district garnered support from the nearby brothels, Lady Kul became very outspoken about the problems the workers faced. If ever a ruffian dared to harm a humbly working gentleman or lady, the punishment would be equal to the dished-out pain. She became a shield, and in doing so, garnered the disgust of the customers. The latter would often request crude favors, were met upfront by the threat of the name, Raven. Goodwill is scarce but not little as to be dubbed desolate. Time spent in their company says this, those who've experienced the worse humanity has to offer, are often those who unconditionally help others. None wants to see another suffer the same pain they've been through. Lady Kul is a crusader against the values of the ladies being powerless. Trust when I say, there wasn't a day passed where she didn't rough up cocky street leaders. Humbling another, especially in the underworld, there's a topic for an unjust attack, hurt egos. Before long, after the first wave, we dealt specifically to the Jonia family, they were prioritized on the list. We had them in our pockets, our prices, our schedule, and our way. The information must have leaked about Luon's deposit – the highest bidder bought the price and here we are, weeks of conflict exploded in a few hours. I couldn't do anything, we were so far from Phantom's base, no AFR meant no attack nor defense. Kul and Asmodeus stumbled on the anti-demon, the entity fought heartlessly, the abilities were those of the Rogue-Hero, Scifer. It could reflect any elemental magic. In both encounters, Kul nearly died and Asmodeus lost, tis how much we were outclassed. In the last moments before the raid went loud, I ordered Asmodeus to evacuate the den, we sent many off to the shadow realm for a chance at safety. Kul fought bravely and bought time, Aceline managed to escape and I died. Afterward, I have no recollection."

"From what I've gathered, there's no clear enemy nor associations to fight against. Quite the arduous task, the blame sorts of lie on everyone, even us for argument's sake. You amassed power too quickly and didn't have time to prepare against potential assault. I should have been clearer in the orders. One positive is we've figured our weaknesses."

"Master, I don't sense anger, are you well?"

"My priorities have changed, éclair. I bear a new title, Watcher of the Shadow Realm. Take as much time as you need to recover, a body is readied for the eventual overworld return."

"What's the priority?"

"The safeguard and evolution of this realm," he moved towards the veranda, "-I witnessed the residents of this place earlier, they're living and breathing entities. To them, this place is their reality, and I want to keep it safe. Who is to say what the overworld holds for us, Hades' arrival doesn't bode well. He might be after lady mother."

"Why?"

"Long story. Recover well, tell Asmodeus and Kul to return stronger versions of before," \*Ancient Magic: Teleportation.\*

Two figures emerged from the hall, “-he knew, didn’t he?” commented Asmo.

“Yeah, the master sensed the presence before he even teleported. You heard his orders.”

“I feel bad for our weakened state,” complained Kul, “-I thought we were stronger. Hold on a moment, if he’s back...”

“Good assumption,” fired Asmo, “-the master defeated the entity without breaking a sweat. The title of Watcher, a being transcendent of laws which somewhat bind us, higher realm entities, to a few rules and regulation, was utilized the same as breathing. He spoke and the fight ended. Take heed, Kul, we must grow strong, stronger to our current selves. The master mustn’t be left to face the vanguard alone.”

“Say no less,” firmed Kul, “-let’s walk alongside the master!”

éclair distantly stared the garden into the tree line, ‘-the master cares for us,’ he thought, ‘-look at him eavesdrop on the conversation. He must have been worried.’

Slopes to the Rosespire castle opposed to teleporting, he promenaded. The ground would often have a shadow scatter across. Before he realized, the castle gate stood harshly, the guards but nodded and allowed entry. The castle-town went through heavy redecoration, the same shadow kept on circling his stead.

“Are you sure pops is going to like this?” wondered Draconis.

“I don’t care, pops left us here for who knows how long. We can spy on him, can’t we?” she leaned back, “-what about it?”

“Actually, Vanesa’s sleeping,” said Draconis, “-wait, LOOK, HE’S GONE!”

“You’re right,” the griffin halted, “-did we lose him?”

“Well, well, look here,” said an angelic figure, “-three little spies trying to vex their guardian.”

“It was Saniata’s idea,” the rumbunctious Draconis leaped with no tact nor care for the location, “-pops, pops, pops!”

“Be careful,” he smiled and caught the boy, “-Been a while, hasn’t it?”

“Pops, pops, I need to show you my new attack spells,” the teeth sharpened as did the ears, the horns permanently glowed.

“Welcome back,” yawned Vanesa, “-pops, make me food, I want to return to the overworld.”

“Saniata, please be a darling and land.”

“Whatever,” a roll of the eyes later stood firm ground.

“How was the stay?”

“Fun, very fun, I got to fight a lot of brother Beelzebub’s golems,” skipped the boy.

"I learned music," said a very smug Saniata, "-I'm sure Vanesa didn't learn much from staying in the overworld."

"Actually, I learned how to cook."

"Since when?" returned Igna.

"I asked éclair to teach me," she rubbed her eyes, "-and I got to the part where you press something and fire appears. Place water in a bowl... then I forgot."

"Forgot or fell asleep?"

"No, I'm a genius," her slow speech dragged on longer, "-when I reopened my eyes, the food was served and ready to eat."

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"Sorry to burst your bubble, éclair probably made the food," snickered Saniata.

"No teasing," said Igna, "-run along, for now, I promise to play with later, is that ok?"

"SURE."

Chapter 683: True Demonlord [14]

'Way to make a man feel pressure,' another vague entrance opened to a large hexagonal room, the walls were enough to not mention the structure. Below, marble was replaced by carpets, benches were to one side, a tribunal rose in the front. There seemed to be four seats for very important people. In them were filled after an echoey impulse of a gong. The Generals, in the company of their respective associates, walked to said chairs and sat, the top two were Gophy and Miira, to their side, Intherna and Lilith, The latter, in her casual coy persona, winked and smiled. Gophy nodded firmly, Miira held a somewhat reassuring smile, Intherna's attempts at being harsh fell onto very obvious cues of awkwardness. In the seating area waited the four direct assistants, namely: Cora, Yuria, Kaleem, and Starix. Demeanor was of a treaded carefulness.

Unimpressed nor bothered, Igna stood firmly before the four ladies. Their gazes downwards were rebutted by a harsher flare-up, his face and expression burnt a fiery ire.

"Welcome back to the Shadow Realm," said Gophy.

"I'll explain why you're here," interjected Miira, "-we've recently built the tribunal, consider it a first-hand account of what is to be later down the line."

"Don't interject so harshly," said Intherna, "-I thought we'd be chastising the master..."

"Chastising you say?" glanced Igna, "-pretel, what are my transgressions?"

"Oh," she stopped, "-didn't think so far into it."

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"Way to ruin the trial," said Lilith, "-I don't care for it. The master's returned from an arduous battle, let's not aggravate the situation."

"As is wished," nodded Gophy.

"To the throne room, it is."

A short escapade deeper in the castle's maze layout of corridors arrived a somewhat familiar room. No throne room, for a seating area over the well-tended garden to the back, felt nicer. The terrace expanded atop the roof neatly, the decorations and craftsmanship shone in the intricate design. Here, he waited for the others, the mind wandered to and fro, '-what am I even here for?'

"Good to see you again," said Gophy. The other three went about the table and sat, their outfits and overall feel were of strong leaders, the confidence and reassurance carried the weight.

"Likewise," he returned, "-where's Aceline?"

"Currently taking a shower," said Cora stood behind his master.

"Fair enough." Tea and sweets arrived on plates, the maids were bland and uninteresting, "-I honestly have no idea why I've come here. I should take my leave soon."

"No, no, I excuse the strained way of conversation," said Miira, "-our mannerisms and current state of mind are in a not so ideal place."

"They feel guilty for not helping," said Intherna, "-I wanted to, Gophy and Miira refused for it."

"I was busy caring for our brats," winked Lilith, "-I wonder how Asmodeus is doing."

"Listen," voiced Igna, "-can we drop the helpless act already, what is done is done, I came to check on my companions, evidently, the feeling isn't mutual. Worry not, I expected more from me. Let's carry on, the Shadow Realm has merged with Mantia and I've acquired the title of Watcher. I heard from éclair, a being in the overworld acquired powers from the late god slayer. I proudly say, the man's been dealt with," he gulped the drink, "-I'll head out, good job on handling the realm, the people have smiles on their faces." Nothing they said would have done anything, the Watcher, stoic and earnest, disappeared into the castle.

"Way to make it awkward," commented Lilith.

"She had to do what she had to," argued Miira, "-tis best for us, and him, to not exchange words."

"How is that better for him?" wondered Intherna, "-I was never a goddess to care for intrigue. I take matters at face value, I don't care about the thought and suppose strategy behind the actions. Gophy, about time you revealed why?"

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"To make him stronger," said she, "-did thee hear, he acquired the title of Watcher. Our guardian's one step closer to the perfect being. Yes, I know, the perfect being is subjective, still, I trust his judgment. I also feel guilty for the attack, Aceline was distraught," she called onto Cora, "-take men to the Overworld and start a security detail around the manor. We can't allow a repeat of today."

"Understood ma'am," he knelt, "-might I ask for a favor?"

"Go ahead."

"Is it plausible for lady Lilith to allow Starix to accompany me on my journey?"

"Not up to me," she filed her nails, "-ask the homunculus."

"Cora still holds amorous intent towards the princess," winked Yuria.

"Oh, is that the reason," giggled Miira, "-I see no reason to stop lovers."

"Then it's settled," voiced Starix, "-I'll work my hardest!"

Later in the afternoon, Igna was spotted in the sky beside the children. They flew from place to place, fought monsters, and laughed. The time spent away didn't seem to matter, Saniata's skill with the lute bemused their crowd, her use of music to affect monsters was very impressive. Meanwhile, Vanesa wiped a horde with a yawn and a half-asked incantation. Draconis fitted the olden style of combat, flaming fists to the charge, a punch would explode the land.

"Come on here," waved Lilith, "-playtime is over."

"Alright, enough for today," said Igna. Vanesa quickly jumped to his back, Saniata and Draconis landed on their respective shoulders, "-nice work," he patted their hands, "-you've grown very strong, and I see Draconis's a bit taller."

"Yes, I'm like 4 years old now."

"Sure, you are," the head shook mildly, "-a very strong four-year-old."

The pretty Lilith waited beside water bottles and towels. Beelzebub cowered in her cradled arms, "-did you have fun?"

"Very," said Igna, "-Saniata and Draconis have grown more than I would have thought."

"Obviously, they are my children," she snuck closer, "-you smell stronger and more confident, I like it, Igna, are you willing to bear a child of your own?"

"No thanks," he kindly refused her advances, "-I'd feel ashamed for a lady of thy stature to bear mine."

"Aw, such a tease," she pinched his cheeks, "-I'm sorry about the others," her tone dwindled, "-they're pretty cold."

"Not really," he looked towards Draconis who fell asleep, "-goddesses have their own way of going about the mundane task of life. I won't pry nor demand aid, the help as generals of the Shadow Realm is already a lot. I'm very grateful for them, they make the domain so much stronger, and in turn, make me stronger too. It's nice to know I have a place to return if ever things are dire. What about you, Lilith, how's life?"

"Very nice actually," she smiled, "-I get to take care of my children, wander into town, and do whatever I want. Most of the days are used for training, the army's gotten more proficient in handling arms of the overworld. They should come in handy as soldiers, tis a guarantee."

"Well, a pleasure talking to you," he handed over Draconis and Saniata, "-take good care of them."

"I will," veins sprawled out her fingers to cocoon the duo, "-have a walk home, I'm sure you'll see more of the world."

"I'll heed the advice."

The battleground swapped for the heavy castle gates. Guards nodded to lower the heavy metal blocks. They touched the ground with a lower dissonant boom. Vanesa settled in her favorite position; purplish support formed for her to be carried as a backpack. Even a pillow-like structure appeared, her face and lips told of a peaceful nap.

'I see what she meant about seeing the world.' Blond hair was spotted cupped out of view behind a building, '-why can't they be upfront about their feelings. Best act oblivious.'

\*PSST\*

"Sorry, psst, is the latter acceptable to call for someone. Why's lady Miira stood in such an undignified manner?"

"Come here, don't make a mess of my evasion," she pulled him in for an embrace, her tall stature made for the exchange to be pleasant, "-I wanted to say a few things. I'm sorry about the whole Scifer incident, I don't know how someone could replicate his abilities. I fear there may be more, Hades' launched his attack, before him, you'll have to face the subordinate, the boatman will be the hardest fight – he's the representation of the death tunnel. Take time and master the Watcher's powers. I'll do what I can to make the realm stronger. Totrya's being readied for the eventual transmigration of worlds. I'll need time."

"Took the words out of my mouth. I appreciate the effort, thank you, lady Miira."

"Good," she tapped his cheeks, "-go, the others wait."

A guess of other encounters garnered a smile, '-the goddesses truly are generous deities.' Next came Intherna at the old Remington estate, the heavily fierce aura waited on the street, not even out of sight.

"Lady Intherna."

"Cut the lady crap," said she with arms on her hips, "-dude, I'm your friend. Just because I acquired the title of general, doesn't mean I've changed. I don't like how the others are treating you, I mean, I was the first-ever true ally you made. No matter what they say, if you ever need help, call out my name, I'll drop everything and rush to thy aid."

"Intherna," he walked closer and gave a quick peck on her cheeks, "-always the one who can be relied on. I appreciate it, however, if the others say no, then, there's a greater reason behind it. I promise to call if ever matters get dire."

"No, no," her face flushed, "-the kiss and now this, no way I'll agree to such a cliché situation of, 'I promise I'll be back,' cue the emotive piano. This isn't that kind of story," her impression of a manly voice brought a loud laugh, "-I'll visit more frequently," she returned his kiss, "-cause we are friends, rank, and title don't matter, I'll always be by your side, Igna."

"Enough to make a man cry," he sniffled in jest.

"Keep the drama for the overworld," a mini-tornado of fire carried her presence.

'She's very eccentric,' he walked to the manor, '-Gophy's the last.' The gate opened without signal, '-she's here.'

"Igna, over here," waved the goddess halfway up the curvy path.

"Might I ask why?"

"Nope," an umbrella fell and she landed inches from his face, "-I was on a stroll."

"Sure," he smiled, "-a stroll so happens to be the driveway. What's the matter, lady Gophy, something troubling you?"

"Yeah," she lowered her head to his chest, "-I had a premonition of Zeus eating the apple of the all-knowing. To this day I have vivid nightmares about the pain I had to go through, I'm glad I was freed... but part of me,"

"No more," he pinched and pulled her emotionless cheeks.

"Let go..."

"Sorry."

The pale complexion burnt, "-why would you do such a thing."

"To break the cycle of pity, I don't know. Gophy, look behind us, the realm is a newborn baby, and you are its mother. Take care of it, the best way to move on is often to accept what happened and embrace something else. If you feel guilty about the gate and the attack, don't be, I'm happy you didn't. The absence allowed for a greater picture to be painted. Who's to say what the future holds, thee art the general of this world, take care of it."

"Man," she exhaled, "-I felt bad for what happened. Turns out my master's a bigger idiot than I'd thought. Water under the bridge, as they say, we must forge on forward. My stance won't change," she sniffed, "-looks like the other three have made their marks," she gestured for him to squat, "-here," \*muah,\* "-I've made my stand too."

'Her lips were cold on the sweaty forehead; I wonder if she tasted the salt...'

"Head on back, the Shadow Realm will grow sturdier, I trust."

Back at the manor, '-my companions are very awkward,' a portal opened, "-let's head on back, people"

Chapter 684: True Demonlord [15]

Reality shifted; the Shadow Realm switched for the Overworld. Only a few hours ago, a battle of epic proportions devastated the landscape. Instead of returning, Lilith thought it best to have Draconis and Saniata remain, the training would be harsher.

"We finally meet," said Igna sat on the stairs.

"Master, please be kind and remove thy shoes in thy room?"

"Just for once," he leaned back towards the corridor, "-Asmodeus and Kul, you two, head to the basement right away."

"I'm going to sleep," said Aceline, her long legs swiftly stride across.

"-Aceline, wait," her steps slowed, the trio nodded and left.

"Are you irritated?" he approached gently as to not wake a bear.

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"OBVIOUSLY," she snapped, "-I WAS NEARLY KILLED!"

"Didn't éclair save you?"

"Save me?" her eyes narrowed, "-the images of him being shot in the face while protecting me is called saving?"

"He's a hero then, you should be glad for he arrived like a knight to rescue a princess."

"Drop the shit!" yelled across the hallway, "-I was terrified and sad, I thought the manor would be destroyed, I didn't know what to say or do, I have nothing else in this world. You selfish, the moment you collapsed from saving those two – the guilt they felt, the heavy the house got, I couldn't take it."

"And?" he held her hands, "-I won't apologize for my actions. What I did was right, and I won't argue otherwise."

"Don't you have a heart?" her lashes flickered.

"Me?" he paused; "-I have a beating heart. What I feel is numbness," he placed a hand onto her shoulder in compassion, "-the reality is a harsh pill to swallow. The reason we're in Alphaia isn't morally gratifying. I won't go into details, which is why I'll give you a way out. I understand my actions to bring you back were selfish, and I've done nothing to make the return worth the time. I was fixated on revenge, now I see, I should have kept a higher sight."

"So, you going to abandon me?"

"Yes," he firmed his resolve, "-I am, and the decision is final."

Words of grave consequence reached her ears, her face utterly embraced the epitome of despair and betrayal, for her, the idol who had been betrayed by all was going to be abandoned, the fear of solitude, her anger, it portrait across clearly. "-That's it," her voice lowered, "-since I don't have a use, and the plan of being an idol is out the window, I'll be sent away. Igna..."

"Don't," he placed an index to her luscious lips, "-think what you may. I won't give any excuses, having you here at this moment is dangerous. The prior events speak for themselves, Hate me, I'll still be by your side. Long ago, the Aceline I met before becoming her bodyguard, was a person dead-set on fighting the world with her music. Back then, I was a fledgling who knew not of the true depth of where we lived. I'm not ashamed to admit, I was ignorant. People change, and so do the priorities; Alphaia isn't the place to be. Gang violence, and the monster invasion, will become worse – Asmodeus and Kul, two of the strongest people I've met, were soundly defeated by a servant no less. If I allow a close



companion of mine, the best friend to queen Gallienne be hurt, I'll never hear the end of it. Take a step and breathe, your personality has changed from nervous to confident. Hidros is where you're meant to be."

"I know," she sighed, "-I know," she approached and stared his deep crimson eyes, "-part of me doesn't want to leave. Stop facing the enemy alone, stop facing the world alone, am I not support?"

"You are," the eyelashes blinked softly, "-you're strong, there's no denying," he smiled and shifted to allow a better look behind, "-who says I'm alone. I have éclair, Asmodeus, Kul, and, " two figures materialized, "-Cora and Starix."

"Basically, I'm unwanted?"

"No," he shuffled her hair, "-I'm saying to work harder in Hidros. Arda's yet to recover from war, the Federation need a beacon, someone to rally behind. The Pride of Hidros is still a title worthy of the name. Return to Apexi, show the new generation what it means to fight without violence."

"What about you?"

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"I'll do what I've always done, embrace the darker side of what the world has to offer. The greater the light, the deeper the shadow – become the light the people need, become someone they strive to be."

"I yield."

"Huh?"

"No way I'm going to win an argument against you. Share the burden with the others, I know there's much to be done," the troubled face forced a smile, one of which he knew the value, "-I'll carry your wishes to Hidros. We've yet to form the band, guitarist. I'll start the selection of members. We made a promise to perform as one, I'll hold those words until thee dies."

"If you can last an eternity, then I'll be happy to oblige."

Thus, the conversation ended. The prince and the demoness, aided by éclair, took off from the roof and made for a different airstrip. There, Aceline would return home without trouble. The jet would take flight at the crack of dawn, an aerial view of the continent, especially the warzone of northern Odegawoan, firmed what he told. 'He had our best interest in mind. The music world, here I come once more. Igna, don't get yourself killed.'

A few hours after the take-off, the manor's rumble increased at intervals. "-Master, I've stationed the guards around the hill, anything else I must attend?"

"Where is Starix?" the feet were kicked onto a smaller table inside the study.

"I have no idea, master."

"Send for her immediately."

"As wished," the door closed to a relieved exhale, '-how imposing can a man be. I still can't get used to his voice. I sense more power within, does he not know the limit of his own strength?'

"What's with the gloominess," inquired a chirpy éclair.

"Gloominess?" they walked to the ground floor; "-I don't understand."

"First time working for the master, right," he smiled with head held high.

"No, I was present when he laid another world to waste."

"Color me impressed," the lift arrived, "-the manor feels secure. Albeit, too much," they stopped to a peep, "-he's brought in heavy weapons to fend off attackers. Manor's basically a military outpost."

"What about the state, what do they have to say?"

"What state, the law doesn't apply to us. I speak not in arrogance but truth, the mortal world has no authority to lay harm onto what the master possesses. We do our best to fulfill his will. Take time and enjoy the company, I promise, life won't be dull." He drew up to the gallery where Starix waited before the paintings, "-the master called."

"Alright," she nodded.

'What sort of life awaits us in this world I wonder?' as he thought, the door barged opened, "-ÉCLAIR, WE NEED MONEY!" cried Asmodeus.

"What's with them," returned éclair angrily, he stormed to the entrance and unloaded a volley of insults. Weirdly enough, for the first time in ages, Cora felt serenity in the chaos, '-I'm glad we came.'

The study door shifted softly, "-you asked for me?"

"Starix, take a seat," said Igna.

"Alright," the genderless homunculus was easy on the eyes, an advantage of which the world held at high esteem. "Starix, when you reawakened, what talent did thee wish for?"

"To be someone of great wit and intellect, I wanted to aid in strategies."

"Strategy," he dug a few files and fired them across the room, the holographical display took her a few moments to digest, "-here's the current state of affairs. Raven's are locked in the great battle against three exponentially strong families, a three versus one. On one hand, the Raven has the backing of a few men, while the three others are of a whole army with an endless amount of supplies and money. What will it take to win?"

"Give me a moment," she scanned the documents effortlessly, page after page, her pupils went left to right, "-perhaps, a change of side is needed."

"Care to explain?"

"If Raven's are the supplier, they hold the market. It's understandable the trio will want to fight and get their share of the pie. If Raven's are to switch sides and ally to another party, the balance of power will come to a standstill."

"Stop right there, the Raven's mustn't have outside help."

“Simple really, use force. Take out as many of their members, fight a battle of attrition. There’s the invasion of monsters; might I suggest, as the King of Monsters, an attack under the guise of an assault isn’t far from the picture. How about an independent party blindsides the families, let them be unknown and the product of nature. It should be easy to pass off a massacre when monsters are involved.”

“I like the idea, tell me more.”

“More,” she paused, “-Raven stand no chance with Asmodeus and Kul. They need more members and a stronger core.”

“What if you became the core?”

“Me, core?” perplexion echoed about her visage, “-I don’t understand.”

“Starix, what you proposed was exactly what I thought a few hours ago. It’s yet to be decided how to go about the battle. We need the favor of the town first; I have the perfect puppet. The lady owes us more than she could ever repay. Establish a direct link to éclair, work together as the core of Raven. Money rules the world – the ultimate objective is to bring the Dark-Guild into Alpha. We need not wipe out the families, they’re backed by Conglomerates, murder alone isn’t going to win the battle. Change the mindset of fighting monsters to fighting people, you were a princess, you know how politics works, use those experiences. From today onward, you’re assigned to the Raven.”

“Are you sure my lord?”

\*Realm of which I preside, grant me sight into a person’s true self, grant me the authority to bypass their psyche – True Sight.\*

‘I see,’ the blatantly shiny pupils scanned top to bottom, \*Partial Realm Expansion: Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\* a barrier entrapped her body, ‘-she’s stronger than normal humans but weaker than apostles. She’ll need to be able to fight, let’s increase her latent abilities to be on par with Platinum Ranked Adventurers. She seems more of the type to lead as the commander. I’ll grant her the ability to summon part of the undead army inside the Shadow realm.’

“Master?”

“Sorry,” \*dispel.\* “-I’ve bestowed greater abilities and the skill to summon and recruit undead fighters. Basically, necromancy. This should compensate for the lack of members in Raven, am I correct?”

“Yes, very much so,” doubt remained steadfast.

“Don’t worry,” \*snap,\* a heavy-armed insurgent of a puppet summoned, “-they’re strong and won’t die; they have the protection of the Shadow Realm. Only transfer those who are worthy of the title, the art of necromancy is a talent not to be taken lightly.”

“Alright master,” she nodded and left.

‘Sister Eira and Mother have become important figures in the world. The Federations are in dire need of help. The situation pertaining to the attacks has gotten worse.’

\*dring,\* “-master, unidentified figure inbound, permission to shoot.”

"Denied," he teleported to the roof, "-I know that presence." A massive gust carried to a soft landing, a figure with levitated hair stood with a tensed expression, "-Igna, the imperial family is in danger, I need help."

"Loftha," he turned nonchalantly, "-shouldn't my sister be there to protect?"

"She's on honeymoon with my brother, our land is being invaded by monsters, the leader is an entity who can replicate my skills," on closer look, her face and arms were in an utter mess, the fatigued forced her to on the knees.

"Why come to me?"

"You're strong, I heard the rumors. Please, I'm begging you."

"Don't beg," he knelt and held her chin, "-I like it better when you have a strong expression, not this mess of a woman. Don't beg, since my sister married into Alphaia, I share the responsibility." \*Mana Control: Healing Element Variant: Restoration.\* a polite hue eased the extreme pain.

"Don't patronize me," her vigor returned, "-I prefer men of actions."

"Suit yourself," he stood and offered his handkerchief, "-a princess mustn't lower her head, no matter the ordeal."

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## Chapter 685: True Demonlord [16]

Wings sprouted in an angelic manner, Igna swore into the skies with Loftha at the back. Her speed matched his, a tell-tell sign of the ability kept deep into her emotionless face. Side by side through the clouds, he handed over an earpiece, to which she accepted after a brief self-questioning session. "Why give me this?" she inquired.

"To have access to my personal butler." In response, éclair said, "-hi."

"Why?"

"Because he's awesome?" they flew northwest to the imperial estate, a newer addition in celebration of the marriage, "-Princess, tell me the situation, what's happened?"

"I don't know either. I woke up in complete sweat and the pressure of a strong being. My brothers ran to the beach, accompanied by the imperial guards, to fight whoever had trespassed. I saw snippets of the battle, a spell blindsided me into crashing a few hundred meters away. A remote stationed guard told me to get help. Big sister Eira and my brother were off, therefore, I had to reach for immediate help. Odgawoan's closer and the empress told me to seek out her cousin if ever things are bad."

"That woman," he cringed, "-if a hero of the AHA was defeated easily, I doubt the others to be any worth. Come on, let's speed up," the wings flapped violently, a circular boom had the missile of a figure fire across the land.

"PRINCE!" cried a guard, "-please, allow us to take the vanguard," the humble soldiers stood face to face with an army of an enlightened being, at the helm, a knight without a head.

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"Land of the unfortunate, is this where thy leader resides?" inquired the headless knight.

"Begone you!" yelled a fighter, "-this is a blatant act of terrorism. Thee shalt not harm the imperial family, us guards will lay down our lives for their safety."

"Strong warriors," said others with winged helmets, "-I respect your bravado. As a fellow warrior, I'd like to request a duel against thy strongest men. Needless death is a thing of shame, a fighter must be wise as he must be strong."

"Please, do no go against the wishes of our lady," said the knight.

"No, Lord Dulam, have you not seen the spark in their eyes. Let's honor their will and give a respectable death. What says you, my companions," a sword raised to harness the power of the remaining fighters, cheers and applause had the beach in terror. A loud cliff stood overlooking an idyllic beach, the imperial estate was a flight in community, here, access was either boat or planes, the sun, sand, sea was unperturbed, the blueish-green sea radiated its splendor.

"I'll fight," said Xyra, "-Hyde, take mother to safety, we can't allow her vacation to be ruined."

"Brother Xyra, you know full well I'm stronger in combat," returned a stern argument.

"Don't look at me in pity, dearest young brother, I'm the eldest, the right to protect my family is sibling is mine, and mine only, none will steal said authority."

"The lovely bond of family," said a wing-helmed fighter, "-I'll take thee with my strongest sword," it landed, a beautifully combed winged wolf neighed menacingly, stripes of blue went across the body, the straddled rider hopped to a soft landing. Each step taken influenced the other tranquil lagoon, the waves intensified.

"Take the battle this time," said the knight, "-I'm sure the lady will understand."

"My gratitude, Lord Dulam," the fiercely outlined stare locked onto the prince, he gulped. "-We shall decide the battle in a contest of swordsmanship."

"Brother..." he turned and made for the estate, '-I'll protect mother, don't worry.'

"How pathetic," said the fighter, "-turning his back on the enemy," the sword rose, "-state your name."

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"Xyra Sultria, 3rd Prince of Alphaia."

"Glad to hear, my name's Bryva."

Swords drew on each side, Xyra stood at a height advantage; the longsword had more reach than the opposition for they bore a short-sword and a circular shield.

"AHHHH," the battle commenced, Xyra dove straight in for a critical mistake, he used a downward strike, Bryva rose the left arm, parried the attack, and quickly transitioned for a mortal strike. \*Clang,\* the prince's reinforcement ability subconsciously activated and blocked her strike. Now out of balance,

he regained his footing and blocked the incoming upward diagonal strike, the swords clashed a few times more, the resultant force loosened his grip, the shock, akin to hammer on an anvil, forced a grit. Bryva took notice and ducked, the speed made it easy to slide close where his weapon was rendered useless – out speed and outmatched, he could but stand and watch, her final strike, a twirl into a backward horizontal slash won the battle. ‘-there, I hit bone, he’s beheaded, what a boring fight.’

\*Clap, clap, clap,\* a strange figure landed, “-excellent battle.”

“Who might you be?” she shook off the blood and stared.

“Igna Haggard,” he walked to stand before the prince, “-good fight, I saw the grit and dedication. Leave the rest to me.”

“He’s still alive?”

“Yes,” said Igna, “-what thee slashed was a barrier I conjured. A Dullahan as a knight, and a platoon of Valkyries, the host who choose the winner and loser of a battle.”

“You know much about us,” the remainder of the flying horses landed, each bore light armor, emphasis was on mobility.

“You’ve interjected in a battle to the death,” said Bryva, “-look at the man, he’s ashamed to be alive, true fighters must honor death.”

“Are you insane?” returned Igna, “-a battle to the death, such outdated thoughts. My lady, the land of Alpha is a place of modernity, the opponent was a mere child, he knows not to fight, much less how to hold a sword.”

“How insolent!” cried the others, “-must we teach you a lesson?”

“Quiet,” voiced Dulam, “-tell me, who are you?”

“I’ve stated my name,” he walked closer, “-Igna Haggard.”

“No, I mean thy title. The fierceness in those seeking eyes is a telling sign of a veteran. You’re a soldier, aren’t you?”

“If we are to speak of real title,” he struck a strong pose, “-Watcher of the Shadow Realm, Heir to death, inheritor to Origin and the Godslayer’s will. I doubt the words will mean much – fighters speak with their sword. Lord Dulam, tell me first, why the attack?”

“Out of respect for the various titles, I shall answer. We’ve come on behalf of our lady, she said to attack the land to the east.”

“Will you not back down without a fight?”

“Smug from the man who stopped the battle,” returned Brvya, “-hear me, Igna, I negotiate with the sword as our medium, tell me, are you worth my time?”

“Fair,” an exhale sent shivers across the spectators, “-Prince Xyra, Princess Loftha, take guards to a safer area. I’ll fight the invasion on my own,” he smirked.

"Surely you jest," laughed the black-knight, "-no way will a mere human win against a Valkyrie."

"True," the bicolored pupils reddened, \*Blood-Arts: Enlian,\* brown hair faded into pure white alongside spots of red, the canines sharpened, the expression dropped to a stoic barrier.

\*Weapons stored in the realm beyond reality, heed my call – Weapon Conjunction: Orenmir.\*

"Lord Dulam, my fellow comrades, allow me to vanquish this foul-mouthed man. He mustn't be allowed the honor of a heroic death; I'll guide him to the afterlife," she rose her sword and shield.

A dark mist summoned around his waist, the blank expression told nothing of what was to happen, the sheathed of a cursed weapon manifested. The sea rumbled harsher, guards and spectators alike relocated to the estate for a clearer view of the sea.

"Tell me," the voice deepened, "-does the battle have any restriction?"

"No," she returned, "-fight with all thee have," energy around her sword and shield created sparks, \*By the blessed name of Odin, I call forth the power granted by birth and heritage so I may strike down my enemy,\* she slammed her shield with the sword, the sound echoed in an enigmatic manner, the air grew harsher to breathe. A mystic symbol of a hammer faded above the Valkyrie, Igna returned her aura with one of his own.

A deadlock of killing intent was summoned from the duo, they unwillingly began to walk in circles, Igna had his palms on the handle, Bryva held her shield closer than before. Between veteran fighters, the prelude before the clash was more important than the actual battle. It usually came to a single stroke.

'The moment I mildly move the handle, she counters with a spotless defense. Good eyesight, this will be short, I can't afford to waste time on her. The real threat is that Dullahan. I've spent enough time on the battlefield, come on,' he dashed for an upward stroke, she repaid his kindness and parried, '-always the same,' she opened her sword arm and aimed for his. It began the same as the previous battle, a path to strike her opponent materialized, '-I've won,' her strike, a fake for his arm, flashed for the neck.

'Good try,' he backflipped, kicked her firm grip, and left her distraught. the counter came so suddenly it took a second too late to realize, the pain in her hand was from broken bones, her body instinctively reacted to the next attack, the sword connected to the side of her neck, the screams of the dead wallowed her judgment. '-Turn and counter,' her sword rose to no avail, her knees buckled, the cold tip of a sword rested on the back of her neck. "Kill me," she said.

"Not today I'm afraid," the sword sheathed, "-I had my fill of death earlier."

"Bryva was defeated?"

"Lord Dulam, as a judge to our bout, what's the judgment, should I slay the Valkyrie?"

"You know of their lowered numbers," the heavy armor clambered to the middle, "-was it mercy?"

"No, it was respect for a talented warrior."

"-on what basis?" she didn't care for the mercy, "-don't screw with us!"

'Guess it's time to let loose,' \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* arrows and spears forced a retreat, the warriors rejoined under the same banner, they straddled their steed and ventured into the skies.

'Here they come,' the attacks came in waves, a stream of horses forced for many desperate counters, out of which, many made contact. The land trembled by the Dulam, he rode in, impaled Igna, and threw the body across the beach. There, the Valkyries continued the onslaught, "-fool, who thought to celebrate a single win must be killed." Rage from Bryva's fall fueled the overall morale and strength, ancient symbols drew on limbs and cheeks.

'Holy hell,' he coughed, '-I knew it, my body's rusty. The regeneration's keeping pace. Dulam's a level above the casual; they have magical immunity. Must be the strange symbol.'

"Where's the bravado at now?" laughed Bryva, "-you're not a warrior, damned insolent brat."

'I've bought enough time. The barrier's ready; letting loose, fighting with all my abilities – this calls for one, and one alone. Forget the current persona as Igna Haggard, embrace the experience I cultivated as Staxius Haggard, become the true harbinger of death, go all out,' a pulse of dark energy hampered the incessant attack, \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* he stared the opposition, \*snap,\* four of the ten attackers ate the sand. Heads of the beheaded horses hovered to his growing aura, \*Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary.\*

"HALT YOUR ATTACK," exclaimed Dulam.

\*Sword kept untouched for the ages, the wrath of the queen, the ire of the fallen, and the despair of my enemies, the time has come to reawakened, materialize in thy purest form, Blood-Arts: Orenmir, Blood Blade of the Queen,\*

"I'll fight in thy stead," he rushed in, "-I won't allow for thy win." \*Dullahan's Reach: Oykua,\* the spear swapped into a lance of great proportions, "-rest and never wake!" the horse galloped.

"Do you know who I am?" he smirked and vanished, countless threads disabled the winged horses, "-let's see you try," he stared the attacker, \*Lightning Strike: Death Element Variant.

Chapter 686: True Demonlord [17]

Dulam's lance made contact, the sensation of flesh and bone being torn transmitted over the gauntlets; "-nice try," came a sudden reply, the head, of which hovered above the battlefield, shifted, half of the face was impaled, "-a substitution skill," commented Igna, "-else known as teleportation," they swapped places, "-must be hard to fight, dullahans have it rough," to that, the strongly armored horse neighed to a halt. The headless body stood still in fear of injuring its head; the latter, blinded to the right side and bloodied on the left, couldn't sense much, the connection to the outside world ruptured.

"Don't worry your pretty faces," he turned to the Valkyries, "-doth thee embrace death?" a damning question meant to challenge Bryva. The strong warriors glanced and rose their weapons, the disabled horses were killed and turned to the blood halo, the more blood there were, the fiercer grew the energy. Fear alone forced a sidestep from the attackers, '-there,' he smiled, '-no matter how strong they are,' he leaped with a sword in hand, '-my rusty body feels lighter and more agile, the muscle memories are waking. The longer the fight lasts, the better I get.' Swords clashed against hammers, war-axes, swords, and much more, the formation made for a circle, simultaneous attackers launched, blind spot or



not, he had the matter in total control, \*Spatial-Arts: Killzone.\* An invasion turned massacre, the lovely sandy beaches were stained by the blood of the fallen. Each defeated fighter was thrown into a pile. The climax lasted around six minutes, Bryva stood alone before the comrades – the crimson liquid flowed for the darker sea.

“Look at you,” said she, “-dowsed in blood and without emotion,” her fighting stance could barely qualify.

“I could say the same thing,” he waited without inclination and faced the cloudy skies, “-I did it again,” he spun and watched, “-I left a pile of bodies. What happens with the guardians of battle are defeated themselves, who takes them to their master, what happens, tell me?”

“I don’t know,” she painfully gripped her sword, “-one thing is clear, I must fight until I defeat all odds.”

“Let’s be honest,” the sword sheathed, “-there but one-way thou art to win,” \*tap,\* the blade disappeared, “-and tis for me to be unarmed. Here,” he placed a hand behind his back, “-come, heroic warrior, prove the tales of old are true!”

“Bastard...” she reached into the pile and tore a piece of cloth to bind her hand, “-I’ll make you regret those words.”

.....

“No, you’re not,” her pace felt slow, her swing arrived at a snail’s pace, ‘-there it is, the moment I’ve been waiting for. The vision of battle,’ he nonchalantly shoved her sword over his head, her expression contoured into a berserker state, veins bloated, ‘-nice move to use her sword for a counter,’ he sidestepped, leaned on the shield, and hopped over her head into her blind side, ‘-by the time she makes it,’ \*woosh,\* the hand snapped to catch an arrow, ‘-someone’s still alive,’ he twirled, kept the momentum, and returned with an overhand right. Behind, the slow fighter just realized he jumped, her instincts to waived her sword without looking forced another dodge, ‘-enough is enough,’ she halted to none, “-you’re done,” he rested his index on her forehead, \*-sleep,\* an instant knock out. The greyness cleared for spots of sunlight, the sea’s anger waned to a normal rhythm, ‘-its awakened, or reawakened, my eyes have adjusted to high-speed battles, tis the same when I fought before, everything moves in slow motion, my battle sense’s back,’ he side-glanced the bodies, ‘-so is the bloodbath.’ The sand’s unsteady nature made it hard to walk normally, the blood-soaked beach was a sight not for the light stomached. The halo joined into a crimson apple, \*Crunch,\* ‘-an apple a day keeps the enemies away,’ he chuckled.

Stem in hand and faced against the near-death Dullahan, “-black knight of an unknown continent, here an offer, say you’ve conceived this battle and I’ll everyone to be revived.”

“...” blood flowed from the half-destroyed visage; the helmet didn’t do much.

“I know you’re in there, stop acting like a child and give an earnest answer. You were defeated by a single man, which is a shame. The law of survival dictates the strong decide when the foe is to die, and I’m offering a chance to undo what was done. Say it be mercy or pity, I care not, for in my mind, what I’ve done here is nothing, the battle could have gone into a darker path – my allies itch to draw blood, they itch to harm, and itch to kill. Will pride get in the way of survival, will pride mar judgment, or will thee see the waste?”

“W-w-we w-were d-defeated,” all the strength-focused into speech, “-I-I-I I-live.”

“Finalized. Return to how it be, harmed be healed, and those dead, reawaken,” a loud clap echoed into a pulse of transient energy, time halted briefly, \*Conjured from the powers of which rules the law of nature, summoned to aid, mine quest art be left alone. Reality is as I dictate, matters affected in Mantia ought be reflected in the outside world. Realm Retraction Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\*

\*Clap,\* another released the spell, the bodies hovered to their former selves, everything turned to how it was before the battle began. The ten Valkyries in exception of Bryva straddled their steed, reality buckled under his whim – the repercussion of said ability was non-existent. The invisible sphere tunneled into a vortex and hovered above his index finger in the shape of an orb and a ring. “How does it feel?” thundered a deep voice, “-how does it feel to experience death first hand, how does it feel to be defeated so easily without recourse to outside help, how does it feel?” the expression horned onto the knight.

“We yield,” he dropped to the sand and knelt, “-Lord Haggard, you have bested us.”

The others followed and knelt; the stern-faced Bryva couldn’t accept the results.

“Kneel,” whispered her comrades.

“We were defeated, the ways of the warrior won’t help thy cause,” added another.

“Don’t get a heavy head, the invasion was cowardly too.”

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“-Yes, it was cowardly,” said Igna, “-what thee felt was what they felt, the table’s turned, what will it be, fight and stand against me, who graciously allowed thy to live, or to take heed and follow.”

“I didn’t ask to be saved.”

“Very well, a mule’s best kept silent,” the eyes narrowed, “-my patience has limits.”

“She’ll understand!” interjected Dulam, who forced her head into the sand, “-please forgive her misgivings, the lass is headstrong.”

“I’ve witnessed it first hand,” he walked closer, “-Dulam and the valkyries, tell me,” he knelt, “-raise thy heads and watch my gaze,” they obeyed, “-what was the point of this invasion. I don’t see supplies nor do I see a boat, was it a whim or?”

“You see,” the head, of which was cradled by the headless knight, turned to the ground through the helmet, “-we were ordered to leave.”

“DON’T!” interjected Brvya.

“Shut up,” \*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* the lips sowed shut, “-don’t overstep thy boundaries.”

“Before I go into details, can you please answer my questions?” inquired he nicely.

“Is it about how I revived all?”

“Yes.”

"Quite simple really, the battle against the loud-mouthed Brvya provided sufficient time to erect an alternate dimensional barrier, in said realm, I become the sole ruler, what I say becomes reality, and reality is what I say. After I killed everyone, I simply forced my will onto the overworld and it kept the changes."

"You make it sound so easy..."

"Because it is; in a weird way," he lean and sat on his bottom, "-the whole ordeal's over. Have the pegasi return home, the beach is a place for enjoyment, not a bloodied battle."

"Excuse me, I don't follow?"

"Dulam," he stood, "-what I say is simple," he glanced at the valkyries, "-the battle is over, take a break and rest. The ladies can do whatever, just don't cause trouble. You and I need to have a little chat."

The giddied expression rang true, warriors or not, after the resolution of a fight to the death is removed, what remains is true intent and personalities; a single glance spoke volume, their actions, and way of rebuttal, more than female warriors, they were friends.

"Igna, what's happening?" inquired Loftha.

"Nothing much," he stared up to the cliff, "-I'll be using the beach, the threat's been dealt with. Hear me, don't allow anyone to roam around, I need to hear why they invaded, best to remove a man's weapon as opposed to having it be inherited by another. You know the old saying of teaching a man to fish, it's the same, with a twist, we get rid of the fishing rod and throw him into the pool to sink, a great idea isn't it?"

"You're a freak," she laughed out loud, the shakiness in her voice made an impact, "-thanks, I'm very grateful."

"Keep the gratitude, I did my duty as the cousin to your sister-in-law. Take the others and rest well, a drone is on way to deliver medicines," the transmission ended.

The landscape swapped, steeds were replaced for beach chairs and undergarments. Dulam and Igna choose to lay under the shade, once the armor was off, it told of a fair muscular man. The head rested on his stomach, short orangish hair, a very elegant mustache, and a kind expression, different from when he wore the black armor. The ladies took to the shore, some sunbathed, enjoyed a game of volleyball, or floated about in the clear lagoon.

"I can't wrap my head around it."

"What's the matter Dulam, you feel weird taking a break?"

"Yeah, I mean, the breaks I'm used to is beside the bodies of friends and foe alike, the stench of iron and death is replaced by the salty nature of here, I- 'm overwhelmed."

"It's obvious, the signs were there. Dulam, you and the girls were exiled. An invasion cut me some slack. It's a blatant attempt for provisions. Besides, the battle felt half asked, a sort of big production to scare instead of actual bloodshed."

"You knew..."

"Yeah, which is why I put on a show myself," he rose a glass of juice, "-the players got played. Tell me the story, what happened?"

"What you said was true, we were exiled to seek out another land. The invasion was partly true, we had to find a virgin land to occupy. Instead, we came across this continent, supplies were next to empty... you know the rest."

"My concern is the invasion, is it recurrent or a one-time thing?"

"The latter. You see, the girls and I were troublesome fellows back home, we never saw eye to eye and were eventually ousted when famine broke loose."

"Makes sense," he exhaled, "-I'd have done the same thing, taking the higher moral ground won't be much. Brvya's not a bad person. Look at her expression, she's loving the time with her companions, very admirable."

"I don't know what to do next. We've come here without a place to return."

"How about starting a new life?" a brow rose, "-take it as follows, if there isn't a home to return, why not make one."

"I don't follow."

"Simple really," he turned and smiled, "-you and the girls belong to me now."

"Sorry?" the expression froze, "-belong?"

"Yes, you heard correctly. Did you think I'd allow for enemies to frolic around the beach, no my friend, I gave permission because thine lives are mine to do as I see fit. Since I granted mercy, the ownership is mine, do you understand?"

"I do. We were kicked for not following the horde... nothing changed."

"Au contraire," he slid off the chair, "-serve me and I'll offer thee what was wished, a virgin land, a place beyond this reality, my domain, the Shadow Realm."

"An alternate world?"

"Correct, here are the options; kill yourselves or join my cause."

"Quite ruthless, don't you think?"

"You lost the right to argue, what will it be?"

"Mind if I discuss it with the girls?"

"As is wished," upon facing the sea, a rumble of chaotic proportion sprinted for their location, '-here it comes, the true boss.'

Chapter 687: True Demonlord [18]

Whatever it be, a monster slingshotted across the lagoon to shore or so said the many expressions. Dulam, in his exposed attire, watched in distress. A mangled figure halted from the rest, silence

permeated, the Valkyries gave looks of recognition. The head of an octopus, beard, and mouth spouted tentacles, upper torso was one of mystery, a shabby robe hid the limbs until the feet, where, the latter, showed a viscous substance.

Slots in the moist and shiny head presumably, the eyes, fell onto the Dullahan. It scanned and screeched, “-Lord Igna, we’re in trouble.”

“I know,” he replied with a hand held out, “-I conjured the barrier.” The sudden stop came on instinct – if it had continued, the beasts would have turned into sliced meat. “-What is that?”

“The guardian of the continent. An emissary of the great beast of the sea, Kraken.”

“The giant squid?”

“No, octopus,” firmed the man, “-what stands before us is part of Kraken’s body. It can create unlimited peons to do whatever it wishes. Basically, slaves, and bodyguards.”

“Why not fight the creature?”

.....

“Impossible. The closer we are to the sea, the stronger the Kraken becomes. By our belief, he’s the god of the sea.”

“Not really,” said Igna, “-the beast is but a giant without much elegance,” he fiercely stared at the tangled entity, “-am I correct to assume it’s connected to the greater one?”

“Yes, they share senses.”

“Well, should be great enough,” the open palm motioned to a snap, “-Come forth, Vengeance.\*

“-How may I serve?” whispered a chilling aura.

“Kill the eyesore.”

“Your wish is my command,” save for the footprints, none would have spotted the spirit. The exchange went as follows, in less than a few minutes, the headless carcass of the invader was held by the mouth, “-Job is done, master,” said a giggle.

“Good, take the body and leave. I’m hopeful it will make a great lunch; seafood is a favorite of Saniata.”

“Will do.”

From outside looking in, the battle ended with a few spells and slashes. Brvya and the others watched in bemusement. Heavy footsteps lingered in their shadows, “-We need to talk.”

“-stop!” startled one.

“Again with the sneaking,” exhaled another. “-Lord Dulam, you ought to be more careful.”

“Brvya,” he reached out, “-stop looking distant and face me.”

“O-okay,” she turned her sight into a circle.

The lovely sea breeze took the edge of a hot day, “-are we going to ignore what happened?”

“I think so,” answered Dulam, “-a peon of Kraken was defeated, there’s no way around the facts. The peons we were told to fear and hail as envoys of the great ones died easily.”

“I’ve seen them in action,” interjected Brvya, “-they are no joke, three against it and we may still lose. The best way is to instantly kill them; a battle of attrition is death,” she peeped over the shoulder, “-I wonder if the man knew the weakness.”

“Wondering won’t solve the situation. We lost the battle and he spared our lives. At the moment, there are two choices, either we serve him, or kill ourselves.”

“WHAT?”

“Don’t lash out,” he gritted.

“BUT...”

“I know, the warrior code and whatnot,” he side-glanced Brvya, “-the exile is tedious, we were abandoned by our motherland, there’s no beating about the bush. Separate truth from illusion; you know as well as I do, we don’t have a place to return.”

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“He’s odd.”

“I know, there’s something about him, the aura, tis not sane for a human.”

“He’s a nightwalker and inheritor of many symbols of power. Listen closely, and I mean you Brvya, what we fought wasn’t him at his best, he merely toyed with us. I mean, just look at him.” A simultaneous turn showed the innocently visaged Igna napping, “-he doesn’t even seem bothered.”

“What should we do. I don’t want to become slave to a man.”

“You already serve me, what’s the point?” shrugged Dulam.

“No, Lord Dulam, you’re more than man...”

“Oh please,” he breathed, “-we need an answer. The attack on the land was unjust and ignorant – we thought we were stronger... look now, defeated without a say in the matter.”

“I say we follow him,” urged Brvya.

“Sorry?” exclaimed the crowd.

“The days of Valkyries have passed. We’re nothing, we mean nothing, and will probably become nothing. Tell me, Dulam, who proposed the idea about us resting?”

“It was him, I thought you heard.”

“For an enemy to kill us viciously, alter reality, and then propose for us to take a break and play – the man must be out of his mind, and I think,” her shoulder rose confidently, “-working under him might prove beneficial. There a slim chance we could go back and change our homeland...”

"I didn't consider."

Shadows marred the already shut eyes, countless figures gathered about the beach chair, "-has a decision been met?" the eyes opened.

"Yes, we've decided to serve, my lord," said Dulam.

"Great choice," he teleported into the sandy beach, "-hear me, Valkyries and Dullahan, the world I offer is subjective. Happiness, pleasure, serenity, they can be found if thee seek long enough. I know the ladies are very opposed to serving a man, and I agree, I shan't do so. There I say are other options, serve me directly which involves staying in this continent, move to the Shadow Realm, presided over by four goddesses, or move to my homeland as a resident of my estate, the Town of Glenda. I strongly recommend the second option; in said place, there's no need to fight nor protest, the generals will make sure life is adequate."

"Do we have to fight?" wondered one.

"Only if thee wishes. The worth of a fighter isn't in brawns, but the ability to see a greater picture," he paused. The intense chatter came in waves, at times, close to an argument, and other, a silence respace. "-Break into three groups."

The majority picked the second, among which was Brvya. Dulam opted for the third option, Igna's land piqued his interest, what better way to learn about his master than a visit home. Lastly, a singular lady of short stature picked the first.

"Midne," called Brvya, "-why are you there?"

"I want to learn more about this world," said she, "-respect my choice, tis the way I wish to move forward."

"Looks like young Midne wishes to find her path," commented Dulam, "-good, I for once am happy about the outcome. The choices have been made," he looked forward.

"Drop the angry expression," commented the others, "-she'll be just fine."

"The choices have been made," said Igna, "-three groups will now depart on their journey. Word of advice for the second group, don't act out of line, especially before Intherna, she has a short fuse," the expression altered, "-I forgot to mention, you have to die first," a white line cleanly went across their necks, \*Once living now dead. O' thee who've lost thine life to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghoul Revival\* the severed heads rejoined almost instantly, \*Living or dead, I invite all to the realm of absurdity, serve me and my companions, be one of a greater family. Forgo of the past and look towards the future, one in which thou art be immortal and without regret. Box of Soul: Shadow Realm Transmigration.\*

A darkened mist shrouded the first and second group, the latter vanished whilst the former remained still. Dulam stared cluelessly, "-what happened?"

"Ascension to my domain requires death, and thus, they've been reincarnated as better versions of themselves. The memories and bodies are the same, worry not. I've spared you for the time being.

Hidros is a land of monsters, who knows what will happen. Once you're teleported in Glenda, ask for the stewardess and say I've sent thee."

"As you wish," he donned the black armor, "-off I go. Take care Midne," a nod, and the beach fell silent. Braided black hair in the style of the ancient warriors, an innocent oval-shaped face, black eyes, a tan complexion, and the figure of a seasoned fighter, the muscles didn't overly give the air of masculinity, instead, they complimented her overall feel, if not for her shorter stature, she'd have been very imposing.

"Midne, was it?"

"I-I sorry," her head lowered, "-I decided to stay for a selfish reason."

"And?"

"I want to be confident... like you."

"I see," he held out a hand, "-I didn't think someone would be crazy to serve under me. Welcome to the land of Alpha, I should properly introduce myself. My name's Igna Haggard, Viscount of Glenda, a town in the continent of Hidros. From what was said earlier, you must hail from the land of Marinda, the one mentioned in ancient writings?"

"Yes," she answered softly, "-Marinda's a divided land of many entities. Only the strongest is allowed to rule the people, for now, the spot is occupied by Goddess Freya."

"Queen Freya the wicked."

"Don't say... never mind, I forgot."

"Her title is taboo to speak, goes to say about the state of affairs. No matter," he firmed his grip, "-Midne, I don't know what thee seek or wishes. Are you any good at chores?"

"I can somewhat clean and cook, why?"

"Good, you'll be working as aid to my butler," he smiled, "-the confidence you seek can only be found deep within. I guarantee food, shelter, and a moderately lavish lifestyle. Don't feel awkward, consider me a friend before master. Very obnoxious from the man who killed thee twice."

"No, no, I'm grateful," she bowed, "-I'll try my hardest."

"Next question, how good are you in a fight?"

"Fight?" her eyes narrowed, "-depends."

"Well, what about this," he turned to the sea, \*-Powers inherited by the authority of king, I order servants deep in the sea, sky, and land, to manifest and obey my word,\* the signet ring shone, \*-appear and fight.\* Rumbles heightened her senses, monsters of various kind rose from the sea, the sand, and the sky – a horde of fifty leaped in ambush. The precariously dressed Midne swiftly made for her weapon, swung, ducked, used her height, and masterfully slain the remnants. \*Huff, puff,\* blood on her cheeks warmly turned to dust.



\*Clap, clap, clap,\* “-very good,” he complimented, “-the title of Valkyrie is earned, from what I’ve seen, you’re very strong.”

“Excuse me,” she held her bra, “-why?”

“To test your abilities. Come on, I see there was a wardrobe malfunction. Should be more careful next time, imagine if the bra had been your neck, what then?”

“I understand,” she followed.

‘The mystic land of Marinda, point of mana convergence, the land of the gods. Tis said, the first divine beings occupied said land and thus expanded to the other continents. The place of floating isle and idyllic streams of pure mana essence, I wonder how much is real and how much is fake.’

“Here we are,” they stood before the imperial estate. The architecture strayed from castle to symmetrical and rectangular, the sharpness of a slightly sloped roof broke the tension.

“Who goes there?” wondered a guard.

“Empress Eira’s cousin, Igna Haggard.”

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“-Let him in,” said the intercom. The entrance gave for a magnificent yard.

“Is it fine for me to come?” inquired Midne.

“Stop being shy.”

Loftha waited at the porch, her face somewhat mixed between gratitude and anger, “-Igna...”

“Princess.”

“WHAT HAPPENED EARLIER?”

“Nothing much,” he laughed, “-before we continue, meet my new maid, Midne, she’s part of the gang who attacked the continent.”

“WHAT?”

“Don’t shout,” he sighed, “-I need a favor.”

“I see,” she followed his gaze, “-the lady needs undergarments?”

“Yeah,” he nodded, “-how’s Xyra?”

“Come on in,” her breathing softened, “-I’ll look for clothes, he’s in the living room.”

The gracious inside was a slap, ‘-here I thought the manor was obnoxiously decorated. This takes the cake.’

Chapter 688: True Demonlord [19]

The grassy land felt peculiar, Brvya in her moment of bafflement at Midne's choice remained still. A scan around displayed plenty of buildings in which were people who returned the favor. A familiar presence to the nose, and not the eye, appeared, "-Welcome to the Shadow Realm."

"And you are?"

"My name's Vengeance. Guardian spirit of our watcher. You've been granted the honor to reside here, a realm of infinite possibilities," during the introduction, a wave of hot energy cut across, "-I'll take it from here," said a lady straddled atop a skeletal horse of open flames. "-You're the Valkyries," she blinked, left a mist, and reappeared after a ball of flame, "-how foolish to attack a continent where my comrade resides. In any case, welcome, the days have only begun. The other goddesses await patiently in the test arena. Prove thy worth, else," she glanced into the distance, "-he'll be disappointed."

"Here starts our journey," they remarked.

Similarly, over yonder, the town of Glenda's evening went in two fashions, a long night of drinking, or a peaceful night of rest. Depending on who visited, the townsfolk were excited to party, the adventuring life was one much desired, especially after the many current reforms. "-Headless knight," cowered the first guards, "-call for backup."

"Hear me, I have come to meet the stewardess." Just so it happens, the discrepancy caught the eye of the council. She crossed the arched bridge and paused at the peak, '-who's that?' her steps, a promenade mere seconds ago, turned to a little run.

"Stewardess."

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"Guards, what's the matter," she panted and stared at the behemoth

"Here," said a voice, "-my head is here."

From the neck to the stomach, "-a Dullahan," she exclaimed, "-apologies for the rudeness. Who are you?"

"My name's Dulan, I've come on order of Lord Igna. He told me to ask for the stewardess."

"You've met the viscount," she mumbled. Already, the guard's faces told of another tale, the mention of their lord filled the hearts with pride and confidence. The tale of the devil of Glenda was one sung frequently at the tavern, her observant demeanor scanned a few points and exhaled, "-I see, welcome to Glenda. Were there any tasks he assigned?"

"Not that I know of," they dove into the heart of the town, an aerial view showed crowds upon crowds, merchants, adventurers, travelers, the list knew no bounds. In more ways than stated, Glenda became an important part of Arda. Luscious fields of crops were spotted due north, the granted land became integral for combat against famine. There on, the headless knight's adventure would only just begin, the tales of Arda and the continent of Hidros would be known sooner or later.

The imperial family's beachside estate, or resort, was one of great riches. The sharply designed interior affected Midne more, '-I hope I don't break something,' galloped across her mind. Igna remained

nonchalant and arrived at the living room, a grand set of sofas puzzled in a C-shape with sharpened edges. It gave onto the crystal-like pool.

A butler, soft in his touch yet stern in expression, tended to the prince's injuries. The younger brother, Hyde, stood as a shield to their mother. 'Now that I remember, I haven't met her before.'

"You're Igna Haggard, right?" inquired Xyra only managing to side-glance his savior. The butler adamantly held, rather, gripped his chin for an extensive look at mild injuries.

"Correct," he replied confidently, "-how are your injuries?" they inched forward, Midne showed no interest to follow.

"Stand back!" yelled Hyde, "-don't let her anywhere close to my brother or mother."

"Excuse you?" turned Igna, "-Is there perhaps something you wish to say?" he centered on the prince.

"Yes, isn't it obvious," the chest buffed to hide most of their mother, "-she's the one who began the attack, don't expect me to allow the invaders a place to rest."

The words made sense, '-he's right,' her hands eased in a way to say, '-I give up.'

"How convenient," refuted Igna, cold fingers ran across her arms and gripped the bra, "-for someone who didn't naught but stand and watch, very strong words I must say. I digress however, my sister has married into the Sultria family, I wish not to cause her relations trouble."

"-don't let go," whispered Igna, "-else it is indecent exposure."

"I'm sorry," her hands perked to hold the undergarment.

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"I'm back," echoed down the hall, "-what's happened here?"

"Loftha, how could you allow our enemy in our home, are you insane?" chastised Hyde, "-mother could have been hurt."

"Looks like kindness isn't repaid in full," he gave a disgusted glare to the princes and turned, "-Loftha, I appreciate for her change of outfit," he took the shirt, "-we should get going, the imperial family has worse manners. Even an alcoholic knows to pay their respects to someone who've saved them, alas, naught is be done. Carry on the legacy of the Imperial Family, I do wonder what my uncle saw in such a family of ingrates."

"Stop," fired the princess, "-just because you've saved us, don't mean there's any leeway to fire insults."

"Look at me," he physically slammed his forehead against hers, "-do I look like a person who cares?" a vicious aura of killing intent hovered above his head, "-if the family is ever in trouble, best find another who'll jump in for the rescue," he touched his ring, "-then again, monsters are prevalent, a simple order and this estate could have monsters lay siege."

"What do you mean?" she caught his mumble.

"Nothing," Midne slithered into the oversized shirt, "-we'll get going."

An icy cold presence dropped in the middle of the yard, the Empress, dressed in a lovely blue dress waited in the company of the emperor, who'd grown muscular and facially pleasing over the years.

"Igna?" the door opened.

"Empress," he replied.

"What happened here?" inquired the emperor, "-Loftha, tell me right now," her dejected expression, fueled by annoyance, refused to look, let alone speak.

"Igna, what happened to you?" she spotted a few scratches.

"Don't touch me," he blocked her hands, "-Ice Empress, I hope you have a nice life at the Sultrian household. I'm sure the emperor isn't one to take disrespect lightly."

"You," he glared, "-what have you done to my sister?"

"What is it to his imperial majesty," glared Igna.

"Such blatant insolence..."

"No," he smirked, "-not insolence, I see it best use, reality check, instead. Tis what the new generations are using."

"Guards."

"Emperor," fired Eira, "-isn't it too much?"

"I'm sorry, Eira, I have to know what happened. I can't disregard what the boy might have done."

"No," interjected Midne, "-don't fight on my account. I was wrong to think I had the right to accompa-"

"Shush," he placed an index to her lowered head, "-Midne, you're a member of my family, life ahead will be rough, and as your friend, I've vowed to stand up for who you are. It doesn't matter who stands in my way," he frowned at the emperor, "-King, god, demons, no matter, I'll fight even if tis the end of me."

"GUARDS!"

"Emperor," a feeble man managed to answer, "-I apologize, the guards are scared of the young lord. The Devil of Glenda is one not to be taken lightly," he dropped to one knee, "-we faced an invasion of strong beings, stronger than ever before. Lady Loftha was defeated so easily; most were petrified by fear. Prince Xyra took a stand and nearly died if not for the young lord."

"Tell me more."

"-The lady in his company was a member of the invaders. She's strong, stronger than our whole guard regiment put together."

"Tell me, guard, how many were there?"

"Ten valkyries and a Dullahan," answered Xyra.

"Are you well?" inquired the emperor.

"Yes, my brother, I'm very well," he stumbled out the manor, "-Hyde showed blatant disrespect to our savior."

"No, he also insulted our family," interjected Loftha, "-by all means, have the insolent bastard taste his medicine. Empress, you're duty-bound to us, use whatever means thee can and hurt him."

"-HAHAHAHA,"

"-Igna..." whispered Eira.

"This is great," he stared at the sky and facepalmed, "-the imperial family has grown daft over the years. Tell me," the expression froze upon crossing the emperor, "-where's the man my uncle saw fit to marry my cousin."

"What do you mean?"

"Igna, stop."

"No, no," he held a finger to her, "-allow me to take the blunt of my actions," he stared emotionlessly, "-emperor Sultria VI, what makes thee think thou art deserving enough to have wed my sister. Is it nobility, is it the power of being an emperor, or was it the endorsement from my late uncle?"

"What do you mean?"

"Did I stutter, tell me your worth."

"BROTHER!" cried Hyde, "-don't listen to him, we're the Imperial family, there's no need to answer."

"Silence," fired Igna, "-overstep your boundaries and I'll have thine head."

"-Don't you even try," rebutted Eira, "-they're right, I'm duty-bound to this family now," flowery iced-petals hovered, "-I must keep the vows of marriage."

"Empress," smirked Hyde, "-hear that, we have the ice-empress on our side."

"-Ice Empress?" he nonchalantly grinned, "-I knew it, Emperor Sultria VI, you're worthless. Here thee stands unable to act, my words sound harsh, and they're meant to. I've noticed one thing, the family doesn't seem to have accepted her as a person," he moved to the side and stared each party, "-I apologize for thinking the life would be easy, dearest big sister. We've gone through a lot, and I had hoped for thy life to be a peaceful one."

"What's all this talking going to accomplished?" shrugged Loftha, "-apologize and scurry to where ever thee've crawled from."

"-My point is proven. Emperor Sultria VI, how can you allow them to treat my sister, they refer to her as the empress as opposed to her name or even a nickname. The imperial family is nothing, you're worth nothing."

"You're getting on my nerves," gritted Hyde, "-even if my brother owes a debt..."

"I said, don't interject," a pulse of dense aura, unaffected by the ice-barrier, knocked the siblings onto their bottoms.

"Enough," said Sultria, "-Igna," the head rose with a timid smile, "-you're right, we're worthless. The imperial family doesn't have much influence, the power we have is what's allowed by the conglomerates. There's no need to keep up faces, he saw right through us. I honestly don't deserve Eira, the many letters I sent were to end relations, then one day, she flew over and we spoke, in a way, I confided and she listened. Even if I try, I can't, I want to make her proud to have me. Take away the title, and I'm naught but a spectator. The Haggard name," he exhaled and dropped onto his knees, "-I'm envious. The dynasty has done so much in the greater world, you've affected entire kingdoms, people fear, others love, it's amazing to see the influence. The prodigious pianist, Lizzie Haggard, the ex-pop idol who once had the entertainment world in on his finger, Julius Haggard, and you, the son of the Queen of Arda, the devil of Glenda, I've followed the adventures without stop. My family name, Sultria, was once great and lawful, the people looked up to us, to my father... I can't help it, I've disgraced the family," the façade of anger subsided, shamed glances went around, Loftha and Hyde tried to keep a strong face, alas, when their loved brother broke down, they could but follow.

"I knew it," said he, "-the imperial family is worthless." The sun broke to illuminate the yard, "-stand up, brother-in-law."

"Excuse me?"

"Drop the melancholic expression," he leaned and gave a hand.

"Didn't you say I wasn't worthy?"

"You aren't," they clasped hands, "-the sign of a strong man is acceptance of weakness, the will to face the lies and confront himself. I knew from Loftha's unusual expression, she displayed a soft and innocent look when she came for help, and then, here, I noticed it all. Xyra, Hyde, and even the lady mother. Big sister Eira, you're easy to read," he pulled the emperor to his feet, "-he's a good husband, congratulations."

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Chapter 689: True Demonlord [20]

"Easy to read?"

"Yes, big sister, very easy," he pulled the emperor to a more dignified stance, "-the imperial family sure has a thing for going on their knees," he side-glanced Loftha, "-no matter."

"Are you going to gloss over what happened?" fired the very red-cheeked Hyde, "-mother."

"Enough, child," said a very mature stoic voice, "-you have done enough. Let's go inside, we need to accommodate our guests."

"I'll kindly refuse," said Igna.

"Don't be stubborn," winked Eira gently pitching his back, "-we're going to talk, and I want you to answer." Hyde and Xyra weren't kept for longer, the obvious unhappiness to the outcome presented into a less crowded living room. Loftha and Eira headed upstairs to freshen up, the remainder, Igna, Sultria VI, Midne, and the lady Kirr Sultria. Split into groups of two, they waited on one another under the ever-watchful gaze of the maids. Snacks and drinks were readied for the parle.

"Lady Eira, I apologize for before," said Loftha in a shared changing room.

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"Apologize for what?" she slid on plainer clothes, "-what happened to my strong-hearted Loftha."

"Please," her saddened lashes locked onto Eira's, of which, the latter returned a comforting expression, "-again, you look at me with compassion and understanding. I yet accepted you as my brother's wife. I'm ashamed to say, but I saw you as the princess of another continent, and not as my own."

"What about now," she moved closer, "-how's the feeling?"

"I feel better, and I mean it. The exchange outside, albeit, crude, after consideration, made much sense."

"Glad to hear. Let's hope Hyde and Xyra aren't lost in the folly of battle. You know how belligerent the boys can be."

"Tell me about it," her face swapped for distress, "-I can't imagine their conversation, best we ignore."

Time wasn't long until the others rejoined the quiet living room. The emperor seemed to be caught in a land of incertitude. His mother, who'd aged very well, kept to herself before a rustic typed television. Her lips, glued to a perpetual grin, didn't falter, images of the show reflected against her face, curtains drew for a dimmer inside.

"I'm back," said Eira.

"Where's Loftha?" wondered the emperor.

"She's in the shower. What's wrong?" she sat beside her husband, "-what happened, the silence is jarring."

"We were waiting for you, since, her imperial majesty threatened for I to be..."

"They need not know that."

"Emperor, empress. If there's nothing of worth to be gained here, I rather depart," he glanced at Midne, "-look at her, she's ashamed beyond comprehension. Do have a bit of empathy."

"There's the reason," added Eira, "-I need to know, why?"

"A trade must be equal and not one-sided. There's nothing of value to exchange, my thoughts are my own."

"Since when did you get so prickly."

He firmed with; "-I don't need a lecture."

The undertone of the meeting didn't feel nice nor friendly. The empress had an ulterior motive, '-she wants something and I don't want to know what it is.'

"We're back," returned the brothers, "-brother, sister-in-law," attention faced the corridor, "-Hyde and I are ready to apologize," they arrived in suits, "-please forgive our misconceptions."

"What's this about?" fired Igna.

"You heard it well," said Hyde, "-I was very heated earlier, you brought the one who laid harm on our land, I couldn't stand and watch. The protection of this continent is part of our responsibilities."

"However," added Xyra, "-even if the greater picture says our actions were wrong, I personally don't feel so. We did what we thought to be best, and the results were somewhat unacceptable."

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"I don't need apologies, what is done is done. Instead, I want one thing, and that's for you to see my cousin as a person, get to know her, she may be strict and a little like the weather, her thoughts and action mean well. Above all, don't get her on thy bad side, trust me, we were at each other's throat for god knows how long. The Haggard Dynasty isn't as simple as portrayed by the news or over the arcanum, we're a family, and families have misunderstandings all the time. Who am I kidding anyway, words mean nothing, actions are resolute."

Being the better man, taking responsibility, noble traits of which those at the top need to possess. The living room was soon filled by the imperial family and the two guests. Hyde made the first move in talking to Midne, the awkwardness was stomach-turning. What counted was the effort, and they respected said action. Close-ended questions went back and forth, the demeanor felt more of a negotiation, opposed to a gathering of family. Then again, Eira saw the potential and acted accordingly, Igna nodded to her efforts, thus returned the feeling. They made jests of which Loftha laughed loudly. The subtleness of doubt faded into curiosity, '-best outcome we can hope for. They're on guard, and so are we, I've displayed our human nature; should be easier to relate and talk.'

"Igna, on behalf of the Imperial Family, I'd like to say thank you," bowed Eira, "-you saved my family though it was my responsibility."

"How many times must I repeat myself, dearest sister. Lowering one's head isn't befitting of a monarch. I did my part, a simple and understandable reason."

"Still, you saved us."

"..." he leaned and waited; '-how can I reply to such a sincere thanks.'

"My turn," said Loftha sat towards the right, "-tell me, about what happened earlier, sister Eira said you planned it?"

"Not really," he answered.

"Come on, say it..."

"We must know," firmed Xyra.

"Keep your secrets if you don't want to," shrugged Hyde. Even lady Sultria pulled her hair behind her ears and gave her earnest attention.

"Where to begin, suppose I should start where Loftha and I first met. She came across as a spoiled brat. She had power, intelligence, and beauty; the typical traits observed among said category. In a way, I knew we'd meet again, and thus the second encounter at my manor. She rudely ruined my butler's yard,



lastly, her tone and persona when she asked for help. The façade of a strong lady shook at times; in a moment of extreme fatigue and pain, the mind eases and a person's true intent is shown. There was more to the story. Thereon, in the battle of the lagoon, I defeated and recruited the invaders. Yes," he locked onto Hyde, "-the Valkyries and Dullahan are part of my family. Under normal circumstances, I'd have headed home right away, sadly," he turned to Midne, "-her bra was torn in a test. The rest is known. Big sister Eira gave the strongest clue, her action to stand behind the family wasn't fake nor was it a show, her intent to slay was true. A combination of factors painted the greater picture – and yes, it sounds simple, alas, tis not. Rumors and information gathering have been a priority duty for my butler; bits and pieces assembled to create a hypothesis. I took a gamble and called the emperor worthless; since Midne was present, I knew we'd fight off any premature attack. The gamble paid and he broke. The words were meant to be crude and heart tearing; for one who waited almost a decade to marry she who he loved, questioning the feelings was a simple choice. There you have it, my thoughts put in words."

"..."

"Igna... you sneaky devil," winked Eira.

"Hold on a moment," voiced Hyde, "-did you set up the schemes and tone of voice for a specific reaction?"

"Perhaps," he smiled, "-depending on the response, I adjusted the projected image to benefit the end goal."

"Which was?"

"To create unrest, I don't take kindly to my companions being maltreated. Regardless if we met two hours ago, she's part of my family, there's naught be discussed."

"Eira is Igna truly your cousin or someone greater. He's the same age, perhaps younger, than my brothers... there's a limit to how far a man can manipulate his surroundings, who is to say he's not scheming right now?"

"He's not," firmed Eira, "-the imperial family has no value."

"Sorry, sister Eira, tis a very disrespectful thing to say," commented Hyde.

"No, tis reality. There's no value in pursuing further, is there, Igna?"

"True, I'm already bored."

"A breath of fresh air, I'm glad we met," said the emperor.

"Likewise, brother-in-law, I hope our families grow closer."

"Time for us to get going," he stood, "-good luck on the future, Imperial family of Sultria."

"I'd have hoped Amber to be present," added Loftha, "-she'd have given Igna a run for his money."

The living room changes to the calm pool, the gates open for a view off the cliff. The sky turned orangish, Midne waited patiently, so much happened the mind nulled. "Wait up."

“Emperor?”

“Yes,” he panted, “-Igna, what’s your plan for the future?”

“What do you mean by the plan?”

“The conglomerates,” the face froze, “-you drove out Lum from Odgawoan.”

“Suppose the emperor’s information network is grand. The current objective is to topple the balance of the over and the underworld. Odgawoan will become a battlefield, monsters have invaded and the families may start to war, rather, will war.”

“The imperial family is bound under the remainder conglomerates. My older sister, Amber Sultria, has taken a hit for the family and works without rest to make ends meet. The policies aren’t very favorable to us, the powerful have an overabundant flow of money.”

“Basically, you’re being manipulated from the shadows?”

“Yes, and I’d advise caution, they control the continent.”

“The Patek’s and Cimier, right?”

“How did you know,” the eyes widened, “-how...”

“Listen, emperor, I do not pity the Patek’s, I’m sure they killed my lover, and I swear, I’ll get revenge one day.”

“I see.”

“If that’s all, I’ll take my leave. Enjoy, brother-in-law, enjoy. Treat my sister well, she’s a very strong player; when the day comes where she steps on the battlefield, we’ll either be friends or foe. That, my friend, is yours to decide.” Wings sprouted, the dignified figure flapped and held a hand to the lady – far into the distance, Loftha and the bunch watched enviously. A strong gust outlined against the setting sun, “-he’s gone,” said Loftha.

“Xyra, tell me, brother, why did you jump headfirst into battle earlier, we could have fought as one.”

“Hyde, I’m sorry brother, I didn’t want to see a part of me be hurt.”

“Those two and the bond of brotherhood,” her head shook.

“What happened?”

“I don’t know. For the record, I hate Igna Haggard, he’s stuck up and has an air of superiority, the words he uses don’t have tact nor does he care about the other’s feelings. I dislike him a lot...”

“Why the doubt?”

“I don’t know, he’s kind to ‘family’ I suppose?”

“Igna’s an enigma. He’s changed a lot, no idea if for the better or worse. My aunt said he lost his mentor and lover to unknown attackers. In a way, he figured out the former and still couldn’t find closure.”

“Lost his lover?” her head tilted.

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"Yes, she was drugged and killed. Guess it's one of the reasons he's here, the death of starlets in Odegawoan, I don't know the full story; ask him directly."

"No, not going to happen," she frowned, "-perish the thought."

"As you wish."

The trip back lasted a few hours, the nightlife was one Midne hadn't seen before.

"-We're back," they landed, "-welcome to the manor." Emptiness and heavy tree-line didn't immediately speak '-peaceful'.

The lift descended to, "-welcome home, master."

"Good to be back. Where are the others?"

"The Raven's have taken to the red-light district."

"I presume Starix has taken to his role?"

"Yes, very well actually. Asmodeus and Kul are present for support."

"Where's Vanesa?"

"Having dinner."

"Right. Here's Midne, a Valkyrie and your new assistant. Train her well."

'Wait, no, don't leave me...' her unspoken thoughts fell short, '-he smiled and left. My life starts anew.'

"Welcome to the manor," firmed éclair, "-I'll be your mentor from today onward."

Chapter 690: True Demonlord [21]

Day shifts to night. Alpha's nightlife, a wonder for many from foreign lands, lit vividly. Neon sign lights were prominent around the red-light district. The news played on suspended televisions; radios omitted olden tracks. Back and forth grew, customers cross for the land of possibilities, the gambling sector. The casinos and hotels battled in a war of first impressions. Light shows along the walls and multiple decorations were simply a sight to take.

The prince of gambling and lust ambled through, the sidewalk, filled with families of various races, glanced at the Fairy River, a flow of water in which lights were placed. The holographic technology provided by the Elon's dynasty greatly influenced the name. Bemused by the sight, he stopped atop a slightly crowded arched bridge, "-beautiful isn't it?"

"Very much so," replied Kul, "-come on, we ought to move."

"Wait up," puffed another figure, "-you guys walk too fast, what's the deal?"

"Starix, the choice was yours," firmed Kul, "-we gave options, walk or drive, you chose and now suffer."

"Come on," she pled, "-I didn't think the place would be so far out."

"Well, no use complaining," shrugged the prince, "-let's go."

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Soon, the landmark before the den lit in the distance. The building seemed to be lively; for once, very seductively dressed ladies prowled the streets. They hunted no matter the gender.

"Look at you," said a bigger looking man, "-are you free?" he obnoxiously wrapped his hand around her neck, the lass, glanced up invitingly. "-How deep is your pocket," her fingers strolled along his legs and to the stomach.

"Very deep," he replied in a fluster.

"Follow me inside," the duo soon disappeared.

"Was that?"

"Correct," said Asmodeus, "-welcome to Raven's property."

"The seductresses sure are hard at work," she replied, "-are they using telepathy or what?"

"Aphrodisiac, my dear, tis their scent," replied Kul, "-they are the best at playing on a person's vices. A few minutes later, the scattered crowd took notice of the trio and swarmed Asmodeus, "-welcome back, master," they purred.

"Not in public," the gates shut and the outside lights dimmed. Potentially aroused customers were distraught at the sudden closure. A horde of lust-driven silhouettes scattered for the brothels.

"The house wins," echoed, "-come on," followed the sigh of disbelief. He turned to the play area, the ladies made for the corridor.

"Asmo," hailed a private table.

"Head of the Jonia family, how goes it?" an infectious smile conquered the table.

"Very well," he replied and double-tapped the table.

"Long time no see," returned another.

"I see the top of the family is present today, will the lady not get angry?"

"My wife's always angry," returned a distant voice, "-we're in the middle of a divorce case. No matter the pressure, she's adamant on leaving," the other shook heads to say, '-don't probe further.'

"Well, what can I say," he gestured a butler.

"-Yes?"

"Get a bottle of the best ale we have; I'll sponsor this table for the night."

"Really?" the faces lit, "-you're the best, Asmo!"

"No worries," he shuffled to Palla, stepson to Markus Jonia, the head of the family. The cards weren't flipped yet, "-word of advice, fold this around and go all in the next." Baffled at the comment, he chose

to obey. The interaction outlasted its welcome, and thus, he locked eyes with the bar and slid onto the stool, “-the usual.” The room felt bigger, an illusion from the many members, high-stakes players faced one another in life-changing hands. ‘-Current heads of Jonia,’ the glass of alcohol slid over, ‘Markus and his sons, Franklin, Squando and Palla,’ the butler from before arrived with a lusciously dressed bottle – the whole room enviously watched, ‘-addicts to the God’s ale,’ he sipped, ‘-they sell and don’t consume. The taste of the finest ale is enough to keep ’em bound to us.’ The stairway stumbled, an intoxicated man clambered down, the high was much, no sense of self-respect was spotted. No pants, a half-heartedly buttoned shirt, and a punchable face. The visitors next room over, a place of lesser challenge and stakes, took notice and hid, ‘-there goes another one,’ they thought.

‘I told them to keep the pleasure at a minimum,’ he stared at the ceiling, ‘-my girls can’t help it.’

“YES, I WON!” cheered Palla, “-I WON THE POT.”

“Congratulations,” applause went around the room, “-Palla of the Jonia family has won 530,403 Exa, the biggest pot tonight,” said the dealer, “-by the rules, you may take the challenge to double the money or continue.”

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“I’ll take the challenge,” the words brought fellows together in the hall. The challenge was simple, three dart-throws under the pressure from a lady of the house and the purest ale available. In comparison, the one brought earlier, fetches in the ten of thousands a bottle. A single shot of the purest can fetch five-times said price.

‘Come on Palla, you can do this,’ he stood at the end of the hall. A crowd amassed to see a rare challenger. Soon enough, a very fine lady walked down the stairs with ale in hand, her beauty was on another level, “-Goddess Raven,” came waves of cheers, “-goddess Raven, goddess Raven.”

“Asmo, can you not do your friend this favor, I want to know her...” begged Markus.

“No, no,” the fingers shook childishly, “-the goddess of Raven is for display only. After all, the lass my closest confident, her beauty is divine, and I won’t allow any to sully her fair skin. Besides, I don’t want anyone else to die.”

“Die?”

“A deadly poison my friend. She’s very hungry, once her sight is set on a man, there’s no salvation. Death will come after pleasurable torture, don’t get me wrong, she may look like a jewel, an ornamental dagger, sharp and relentless.”

“It makes her more attractive.”

“Whatever you say.”

‘Why am I getting flustered?’ the lady approached and held a seductive smirk, ‘-she’ll eat me,’ he gulped, ‘-don’t look in her eyes, I’m scared she might turn me to stone...’

“Here little sheep,” a gentle circle, “-take a sip and shoot,” her lips drew to his face, “-don’t miss, if you hit, I’ll reward personally.”

Eyes shut, he downed the first shot, ‘-No... my vision, what’s this sense of pleasure, I feel elated...’

“Take the shot,” said a whisper. The first dart fired and fell, it didn’t reach the board. Another shot meant another sip, the more he drank, the deeper the consciousness faded, ‘-I got this,’ he threw, “-yeah!” returned the crowd, “-he managed to hit the wall.”

‘The last try,’ the head barely kept straight, \*crash,\* the knees buckled, the surrounding grew distant, ‘-I feel nothing.’

“Good try kid,” exhaled the crowd.

“I’ll take him upstairs,” said Asmo, “-return to the games.”

“Alright,” said Markus, “-come on everyone, in celebration of my step-son lasting two drinks, the nights on me boys, have at it!”

“YEAHHHHH,” the corridor cleared.

“By all means, take your time,” returned the lady.

“Oh please,” he knelt and helped the man up, “-what did you add this time, Medusa?”

“Nothing much,” she winked, “-a little splash of my charm. About our promise, when can I meet the master?”

“Later,” they climbed, “-I’ll introduce you later, for now, take care of this man.”

“Asmodeus,” stormed Kul, “-we have trouble,” she dashed down the stairs, “-enemies from an unknown source. Report to éclair, I’ll take out the trash.”

“Be careful.”

“Don’t worry, I won’t be defeated ever again,” the door barged opened to a clear night. The supple scent of intent, she took to the skies, ‘-I was right, someone’s spying on us. Nothing’s changed, we’re still weak, how many gangs will it take?’

“You guys ready?” a narrow alley held fighters. A scouter hid in the shadow of the night, “-we’re ready to storm the den. Team A and B, ready weapons. Team C, start the distraction.”

“MURDER!” raged deeper inside the district, “-ACTIVE SHOOTER,” panic ensued.

A transmission linked Kul and the rest, “-listen up Kul, there’s a scouter on one of the buildings. éclair’s intercepted the logs; at least fifteen men.”

“I’ll go handle the shooter situation,” said Asmodeus, “-follow me, ladies,” they leaped out the windows, each flap of the wings sprinkled a numbing powder, the high discarded any threat to their lives.

‘I’ve found them,’ she landed noiselessly.

“Good job, now attack,” said the man.

“Attack who?”

“Who stands there?” a terrified expression flashed atop his face, “-it’s you...”

"Obviously," \*snap,\* "-who else can it be?" she nonchalantly stepped off the building. The remainder of a disintegrated body laid in miasma. The would-be attackers were massacred. Far as the public was concerned, only the prank of murder, crossed their mind. Asmodeus's word sufficed.

"Another night, another attack," sighed Kul, "-They never learn, do they?" she stood atop the den.

"Are you tired?" whispered a strange voice, "-don't you feel restrained to work for another man?"

"Ha-ha-ha," she turned, "-are you here to sway my mind?"

"Very perceptive," said a hooded figure, "-tell me, demon, are you loyal to a worthless leader, or will you join a greater family?"

"Listen, geezer, I don't care who you are. I've made my peace to stay here."

\*The foolish who dare stand in obstacle, there but one word I wish to impart, die. The dice falls, the number is 10,\* two cubes rolled, \*-probability is my whim, and my whim decrees for thee be shackled to the weight of fate,\* the dices stopped, both showed five, \*-Ancient-Arts: Asmodeus's luck.\*

"What is this?" it reached under the robe.

"Listen up, geezer," smirked Kul, "-whatever being you might be," the visage didn't care for kindness, "-because of our arrogance,"

"-our master was hurt," interjected Asmo.

"We swore on said day," they stood inches from the being, "-to never disgrace his reputation again."

The cubes exploded into chains, "-FREE ME!"

"Not going to happen," \*Ancient-Arts: Eternal Despair,\* an orb of unknown origin snuck into the entity's head.

"NOOOO."

"So long, foolish pest."

Clearness of the night soon greyed by the clouds, the moon helplessly watched, "-we made good on our promise."

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"For the incident to never happen," smiled Asmo, "-we shall become the strongest gathering of like-minded individuals. The Watcher of the Shadow Realm will be known worlds apart; the Demonlord."

"Really, Demonlord... isn't the title being held by Lucifer?"

"Tis a matter of speech. I'm a prince of hell, similar to Lucifer," the incoming breeze didn't help, loose hair tickled his nose, the stern expression divulged into one midway between sneeze and disgust.

"Not impressive for a Demonlord," she shrugged.

"Come on," he pouted, "-didn't you see my amazing spell?"

“What was that even?”

“I say what I want and I throw a dice. If the predicted number is spot on, the spell will act no matter the restraints.”

“If it misses?”

“Simple, closer the sum is to what I predicted, the more effective it becomes. In the low chance of scoring a total of five, it might backfire badly...”

“YOU GAMBLED,” her head glued into her palm, “-IDIOT!”

“HEY, SHUT UP.”

‘Seems like I’ll have fun here,’ thought Starix, ‘-the world is big, there’s much to do and much to conquer, what’s the master doing I wonder?’

The manor lit very modestly, the tranquility hampered. Sound of rotors immediately responded to the AFR’s activation. éclair pinged the craft for identification, “-Chief of Odgawoan, Julia Valentino Rozemal, and Odgar Codd.”

‘Couldn’t have been at a better time,’ he waited in the study. Midne remained beside the door.

“Sorry to intrude so late,” said Odgar, “-is the master home?”

“Odgar,” returned éclair, “-I’m sure you’ve read the report I sent,” he glared.

“Yes,” he gulped, “-tis the reason I brought lady Julia.”

“How do you figure?” they stop short of the lobby, “-how can a mere detective have so much reached to reach the chief of police?”

“Oh,” he shuffled closer, “-Julia Valentino and I are a thing.”

“A thing?” she pulled her head and stared, “-don’t mind him, the man is too softspoken. We’re in a long-time relationship ever since the police academy.”

“Interesting,” he gave a once-over, “-the master is in the study, follow me this way.”