

Death Magic 701

Chapter 701: True Demonlord [32]

"Played," a chuckle escaped, "-played."

"Sorry?"

"We were played," said she ominously, her mind clicked, a bit of her persona swapped, the cheerful side, magnet for trouble, didn't speak nor smiled. An empty hollowness spoke from the depth of her mind, "-people died, friends died, everyone's dead."

"Hey, get a hold of yourself," cried Ginka, "-sanity and patience," said a whisper.

"Why," asked a curiously childish innocence voice, "-why?"

"Because," interjected Kinka, "-we've seen family die, their blood, their last breath, it's all encroached in the memories. Once you pull the trigger, there's no going back. This is the world we choose to become a part of, a dystopia strong-armed by the AHA and military. Even if we wanted to escape, there's no way out." Slams against the metal plates resonated, a shiver went up Uoni's neck, "-he's waking..."

'Distant,' though the events played before her eyes, the mind projected a third person's view, an elevated scape; Uoni's fear, Ginka and Kinka's uncertainty, the shaky support structure, death could come any second, 'am I going to die?' flash images of one being mauled to death cut across her thought, "-help me," it said, "-help me, don't stand still."

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'Go away,' the images closed the gap, 'don't get any closer,' her feet physically kicked.

"GET AWAY," she screamed, "-I'M NOT RESPONSIBLE!"

"Calm down!" cried Ginka holding her shoulders, "-stop, snap out of it," *smack,* her pale cheeks reddened slowly, the blank stare had a spark of color twirl in the pupils, 'what am I doing?' the field of view returned to blurry, 'I saw myself in a pitiful state,' the images kept on flashing, 'be strong, can't afford to be the weakling here,' she pulled herself to a stand aided by the wall, "-Ginka, Kinka, I appreciate the help," she leaned heavily against the wall, "-I'll heal the wounds," her palms stretched to form a line around the trio, "-be healed."

"Don't strain..."

"Leave her," interjected Uoni, "-look closely, she's putting her best effort so we have a fighting chance."

"He's right, brother Kinka. The barrier won't hold strong."

Meanwhile outside, the dormant Antronla bore its empty eye sockets to the survivors, the ethereal bow pulled, a purple haze wrapped about the arrow's tip, *click,* bones cracked, the bow released.

"NOW!" screamed across the empty field, "-Joni, clean them out."

"Understood," he laid atop a rooftop aided by the grapple, 'I didn't train under Kniq for nothing.' *Art of the marksman, boon from the gods, grant me the foresight into my enemies, bless my humble self

with the ability to see and save all; Divine Boon – Precognition,* temporary shadows of where figures objects and anything in between lit the field in a volley of gunfire, “-I’ll take care of the small fries, save them, you guys.”

“Squad 33 will handle the big monster,” to which the wheeled tank dashed forth, “-it has a cool-down period of 30 seconds before the next attack.”

“Got it,” before the approach, “-we have one goal, and tis the rescue of the medics. We’ll gamble on Antronla using its bow, the moment it shoots, we gun it,” down on his feet, *Martial-Arts: Dreal’s fist,* a punch and the door flung across. A horde of turns glared their intent, ‘-just because I stand in the back, doesn’t mean I’m weak,’ he took on various stances, minimal movements, graceful as dormant water and explosive as waves against the shore, ‘-Use your ability for the sake of another. I’ll be very disappointed if I ever see you using what I taught to terrorize others,’ whispered a nostalgic voice, ‘-watch me, master, I finally understand what you meant,’ kicks, punches, grapples, the threatening turned flung outside one by one. The prior first arrow, fast and unseen, missed by a large margin, the responsible, a lady in Squad 33 who took up a spot beside Jonl.

“I’m beat,” she dropped to her knee, “-messing with a boss-level monster is exhausting,” they watched onto the confused behemoth being toyed by skilled driving, “-never knew Meza was a fighter.”

“He’s strong, very strong,” said Jonl, “-he’d make a great adventurer.”

“Aptha, Aptha!”

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“STAND DOWN!”

“IT’S ME,” he screamed down the hall, “-Uonl, it’s me.”

“Meza,” heart to his throat, *gasp,* “-way to scare a grown man.”

“Ginka, Kinka, where’s Aptha.”

“Meza, good to see you.”

“Where’s Aptha?” heavy steps halted immediate of the door frame, “-Aptha, I found you,” he ran to her side, “-Hey, are you ok?”

“Don’t worry about her,” said Uonl, “-she used her last strength to heal us.”

Ding, ding, ding, ding, rang simultaneously across the field. Fear flashed across their faces, Antronla firmed and kicked, ‘-no...’ *BAM,* it exploded on impact – the bow reappeared and drew. “-I’m out of bullets,” panted Jonl, “-Hey, hey, we need you,” shaking the lass gave no response, “-Squad 33’s d-d-dead...”

“Run!” screamed Uonl, “-KINKA, GINKA, RUN,” he took Meza by the arms and sprinted; the last words of squad 33 resonated deeply, the walls broke per a shock wave, “-RUN!” they leaped, ‘-Aptha,’ the arms stretched, ‘-I-let m-me s-save her,’ a friendly smile returned on his way down, ‘-don’t worry, it’s my turn to save you,’ mumbled across the parched lips. Reality settled to the normal pace, a flash of white

leaped out the building to halt the arrow, *bouf,* “-KINKA, GINKA, LAST ORDERS, TAKE MEZA TO SAFETY, WE NEED HIM ALIVE!” they landed.

“Understood,” Devourers flung from side to side, *Heatwave!* shockwave after shockwave, “-RUN!” he screamed and didn’t defend himself, the turn made for his ribs, legs, arms, and yet, the shockwaves kept on shielding Meza. The white light of before landed in a puddle of blood, “-Aptha,” coughed Uonl, *HEATSHOCK* a sphere of heat charred the remainder, “-you had the blessing of the gods, didn’t you,” no response came. Golden colored hair laid in crimson, the body curled, the arrow ran through her stomach, “-if not for the sacrifice, we’d have all died,” he dropped to her side, “-I swear, vigilantes are undervalued,” head to the floor, consciousness faded. *GRRRR* resounded throughout devastated grounds, the stolen transport laid in a whirlpool of flames; those who fought prior were left dead. A rescue operation turned bloodbath, ‘-I failed, I failed... I failed,’ tears ran down the brother’s cheeks, Uonl’s passage kept on burning despite the lack of consciousness, ‘-Aptha...’ he wept silently, ‘-I-I...’

“Why,” Jonl’s heart throbbed, “-I should have been more careful,” blood ran down the sharp facial features, “-WHY DIDN’T I SEE IT!”

“S-squad 33, d-dead,” whimpers clambered to the side, vultures swarmed the skies, vile and wrapped in a dark miasmic stench – the prey, bodies.

“Master, are you sure it wise to get involved. I thought the moniker of medic sufficed in this mission?”

“What have I always said,” black outline landed before Jonl, “-whims are the best way to live. There’s more to find and discover, legends often say, chosen heroes rise from the rubble of the chaos. Here we stand before true heroes; selfless and humble, they tried hard to rescue the comrades to no avail. The potential for is true, henceforth, I, Igna Haggard, pledge to save those who’ve fought arduously.”

“Why are you here?”

“Jonl, fellow adventurer, I must say, I’m impressed and moved. Such camaraderie needs to be cherished. Besides, I enjoy nothing more than to ruin well-established plots,” *Come forth: Box of Alche,* magazines, and bullets fell, “-new orders, keep an eye on the trio. I’ll clean up this mess.”

“Stop joking...” gritted the lady, “-Squad 33 couldn’t do shit against the beasts and you say you’ll clean the mess, DON’T TAKE US LIGHTLY,” she grabbed his collar, “-THEY GAVE THEIR LIVES FOR NOTHING?”

“Settle down, no need to blow a blood vessel. You’re under Igna Haggard’s protection-”

Watchers, spectators, names ring high and low, us, unknown to the world’s reality, unknown to the world’s knowledge, have lived in utter solemnness for millennia to come and go. Watcher of the Shadow Realm, beckons my might to be fully materialized without prejudice, reality is but my playground, neither god nor demon shall overcome my authority, face me in stride, face me in fear, reality’s what I wish it to be for knowledge is the true strength: Realm Expansion Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.

“-there’s a reason I bare the title of Devil,” *snap,* “-Monsters bearing ill-intent, drop dead,” he stepped off backward, “-Vengeance,” halted inches from the ground, “-go have fun playing with the boss.”

“Shall I hold back?”

“As you would,” returned he confidently, “-the result is complete annihilation, I care not for the means.”

“Right away,” it dashed and rattled Antronla by a fiery punch.

A heavily exhausted Loftha flew in circles around a strange barrier, *-huff, puff,* ‘-what’s this?’ hands on her knee, ‘-someone or something has created a sphere of strange energy. Closer I am, the more anxious I feel...’

‘I might have gone overboard in using Rantiam, Mantia would have been enough. What’s done is done, Origin’s too hyper,’ a smirk led to the ball of docile flames. “Return to normal, the fallen reawake from thy dreams,” the bodies hovered out the vehicle, ‘-there’s only so much I can change. Affecting reality too much might break the flow of time and space. Don’t overstep boundaries,’ hands to the sky, “-souls of the fallen, return to thy place and rest,” the palms clenched, “-injured, be healed,” mortal wounds restored, save the deep cuts and injuries brought by the curse.

‘These two,’ he ambled to Aptha and Uonl, ‘-she’s the one from earlier, the loudmouth. The boon of Healing, the purity in her spirit is frightening. Taking an arrow wasn’t the greatest idea now was it,’ he glanced yonder to where Antronla vanished in a cloud of dust.

“Master, the beast is slain.”

“Good,” he smiled, “-gather those who can be saved, I care not if they’re dead, regret should have bound their souls to the battlefield.”

Two seconds later, “-I found only this one.”

“Honestly,” he facepalmed, “-Vengeance, the lass has no torso, arms and legs were bitten off, how could I save her?”

“Master, you’re plenty strong, reality is what thee dictates. I’m sure the Shadow Realm is strong enough to overturn what has been set in stone.”

“Make it sound so easy,” he sighed, “-I can’t go around changing reality on a whim; I could, there’s no rule saying not; I ought to preserve the status quo. Well, who cares,” he shrugged, “-restore and be healed,” inner organs, bones, muscles, and skin clawed from nothing, “-I thought so,” it halted around her heart, “-the arrow hit her spirit. These two will need treatment, *-Spatial-Arts: Vacuum Sphere.* ‘-done,’ Uonl’s injuries healed to a manageable state. *Mana-Control: Wind Element Variant – Feather Touch,* the wounded hovered to the fully restored vehicle.

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 ought be reflected in the outside world. Realm Retraction Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.

A deep bellowing rumble boomed, ‘-the barrier’s down.’ Gunfire loomed in the distance; a new horde of beasts stood at the mouth of the street.

“Igna?”

“Fia, what a pleasant surprise?” unconscious fighters were casually guided inside, “-have you come to aid?”

“What are you doing here?” her face followed the back and forth.

"I came to watch."

"-To watch?" the expression dulled.

'Approach,' said a gesture, "-there's trouble in the hierarchy. Be on guard, today's operation seemed to have been a staged genocide. No matter, I'll heal the survivors. Same again, take credit for defeating the beast."

"Again?" she sighed.

"Better yet," moved towards the horde, "-let loose."

"Don't tell me twice."

"What did you do?"

"Jonl and the lady," said a straight face "-where's Meza and the brothers?"

"Here," said Ginka, "-Meza's a bit out of it."

"It's fine," hopped into the driver's seat, "-let's go," the others followed.

A whole day elapsed, a rescue party was dispatched to no avail, "-Status on Meza?"

"No luck. The masked assassin defeated the boss monster."

"Wench," he gnashed momentarily, "-no matter, we did what we came for. I expect the higher ups to be pleased by the outcome – potentially rebellious vigilantes have been culled," the gates opened for armored SUVs.

Chapter 702: True Demonlord [33]

'Good thing we had the extended wing,' the scent of alcohol and medicine permeated. A bold wind carrying droplets scraped against the reinforced alchemist quarters. A few days elapsed since the incident. The masked assassin grew in repute and strength, casualty on said day was in the tens, worst the outpost had witnessed. Questions about the operations bombarded the manager, of which he gave a nonchalant response. The fighters weren't pleased, the disappearance of Meza, Squad 28, 32, and 33 hit morale hard. Companionship from the respective teams was very much enjoyed by the tight community of fighters. A massive hole left their chests open, Apha, the sharp mouth lass's tantrums were duly missed. Rumors had it the bodies were taken to the alchemist quarters; fear of another attack stunted attempts at communication. Numbers were thin; assaults intensified; evolved monsters constantly materialized. Once a certain point was crossed, weapons and skills would be rendered useless, said fear forced the AHA to call in support from the military. Rationing grew harsher, the state didn't provide much – leadership hung in the grasp of the military and AHA.

Fia's exploits on the field kept what little humility was left. Without her, the soldiers would have forcefully invaded the dormitory and taken precedence in treatment and food. She fought and reached a deadlock, her true identity, hidden, for now, wouldn't matter even if it were revealed.

Leather shoes echoed along the tiled floor, the extended wing held beds, patients, and nurses – the latter being puppets summoned from the Shadow Realm. Trained at the arts of healing, the help was

very much appreciated. Immediately right slept the leader of Squad 33; Froy Emph, age 32, dark brown hair, large nose, a prominent forehead, and battle scars. Next laid the vice leader, Hina Loona, the same lady who restrained Antronla, her ability was mind control else known as puppeteering. Freckled cheeks, pimpled forehead, glasses, slightly orangish braided hair, average in height, and strong-willed. Her facial features were one common, albeit, the look of constant fatigue. Afterward, rested Henzh Yuel, an immigrant from the main continent – taller than average height and stature, he'd been unconscious ever since the surgery; crew-cut hair, small nose, and a bushy beard and mustache. Last member of Squad 33, Gilert Bart, an ex-soldier. Robustly built, firm rounded shape face, timidly grown hair, and an uncanny soft-spoken voice.

'They seem to be doing fine,' he walked and nodded at the patients, '-Henzh should wake in a few hours, the healings complete.' Opposite laid Squad 32, or what remained of it – Uonl bore a common, friendly face save the thick eyebrows and darker complexion. Before the whole incident, one could say the smile and kindly shaped eyes were very social. Now, the latter seemed to burrow further into the sockets, dark circles, scratch marks from self-inflicted wounds. Horrid cries and yelped at certain nights sufficed to keep the ward awake.

Ginka and Kinka took up residence, both brothers were slightly on the chubby side, fluffily filled cheeks and kind expression, a faded for they boasted insanely physical strength.

'Uonl has flashbacks from the battle, emotional scars won't be healed so easily. Narcotics will help ease the pain, take it slow, you were a hero and will return home soon. The concoction should be readied, the ritual went accordingly.' Few steps deeper arrived Squad 05. Apatha and Jonl, able in mind and spirit kept to their beds for rest. '-Their exposure to Rantiam's sudden appearance shook their soul, my bad I suppose.'

"How's Apatha doing?"

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"Good morning, Meza," he pulled the curtains, "-no idea as of yet, I performed the last procedure yesterday. Angela shows signs of improvement, too bad her team leader's mentally scarred."

"A-A-Angela..." whispers turned cries, "-Angela," the bed visibly shook, "-don't die, don't die, don't die!" an orangish hue surrounded his body.

"Nurse," they nonchalantly injected narcotics, the tantrum cut short of a cacophonous mess, "-breakfast should arrive soon," returned to Squad 33, "-Froy and Hina, Henzh should break the spell later. Greet him in good faith – ask Gilert to not strain the legs, they've only just been reattached. Magic has limits," a wink later, the lab coat wearing alchemist left for the first floor.

"Didn't you hear the man," said Jonl, "-stop dilly-dallying, Hina."

"I don't want breakfast," she covered her head, "-I rather starve."

"Here we go again," sighed Meza, "-I'm sorry, there are those who unfortunately can't eat," her covers pulled.

"-You too, Froy?"

“Stop it,” said he, “-we need to be responsible; part of the recovery process lies on us.”

“It’s boring...”

“Good morning you guys,” hailed Ginka.

“Good morning, Ginka,” they hurdled around Squad 33, “-I wonder what’s for breakfast today?”

“Always thinking about food.”

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“Don’t roll your eyes at my brother,” fired Kinka, “-we require sustenance to keep such a luscious physique,” he struck a sensual pose in jest, they laughed.

“Honestly speaking, I don’t miss the dormitory at all,” added Meza.

“Say that again,” bobbed Hina, “-I miss the girls. We’d usually go out for a run around this time of day.”

“Then orders would arrive. What was the point of becoming vigilantes?”

“I know it’s been like a few days,” interjected Jonl, “-Hina, you remember, don’t you?”

“Remember what?” wondered Froy.

“The battle,” said Ginka.

“We nearly died, Angela and Aptha selflessly gave everything for a chance at survival.”

“I don’t remember much...”

“Antronla decimated the transport; Hina broke to her knees and screamed. We’d have died if not for the Alchemist.”

“I saw my squad be killed instantly, of course, I’d break down.”

“We owe our lives to him,” added Ginka, “-most of us here were either near death or were already dead. I haven’t had such a sensation before, a relentless force able to equal nature and the element, I swear, I’ve never seen such a spell before.”

Ting, ting, a maid arrived with breakfast, no emotions nor response, they split to give appropriate meals to the appropriate patients. The days were long and boresome, entertainment was few, going outside was permitted with exceptions. Read a book, watch television, or chat away in the lobby. Meza and Froy spend days chatting about the war, Ginka, Kinka, and Hina argued about food and the current events on the Arcanum. Jonl kept to himself for the most part.

“Mask Assassin,” the voice traveled across the room, “-you and your squad are to rest for the time being. The achievements are unprecedented; I feel as if the vigilantes have taken advantage of the strength,” shady and malicious, “-don’t take it the wrong way, we from the military have nothing but respect for the daily leaps into danger. There’s been an influx in monsters.”

“Be blunt, you don’t want me on the battlefield, scared a humble lady’s stronger than the soldiers?”

Cough, “-not exactly,” *grunt,* “-our fighters need the experience. How about a compromise, keep an eye on this supposed Alchemist. The doctors and nurses have sung praises of a man who can heal lethally wounded fighters. If we get him on our side, there won’t be anything to fear.”

“Humph,” she smirked, “-a mere officer thinks he has the authority to order that man around? Best not to strike a deal with the devil. Move against him and I guarantee everyone in attendance here,” she scanned around, “-will face judgment worse than I can imagine. How about this,” she spun, “-use my squad, I won’t get involved in the military’s affairs. Trying to weaponize the monsters is a hopeless endeavor. Keep treating the vigilantes badly and risk a coup d’état. The manager has a policy of live and let live. This is Ogdawoan, not land ruled by the military,” the door slammed, ‘-idiot,’ she took flight.

“Insolence,” he punched the table, “-who does she think she is, openly threatening the military. I ought to rule with a silver hammer. Listen up, I don’t care about appearances anymore, have the operation move to the second state; use the bait and lure the bosses. A member of the Cobalt Unit has decided to join our research, understand?”

“Yes, sire!”

‘I’m ashamed at how corrupt the military is. At least I have him.’

Two bodies levitated on a bed of light. Scrolls and symbols went in a circle, the curse energy escaped in little increments. ‘-Researching a cure is tedious,’ face to a holographic display, ‘-the analysis isn’t even done. Every time I reach the end it changes; self-aware curses are the worse. Shouldn’t be surprised since it comes from Hades’ realm.’ Multiple strokes conjured a faint line, *Grant me knowledge, library of the all-knowing: Mantia.* ‘-the symbol’s unfinished, I forgot the stroke of life. Here,’ a gentle push carried the faint lines to the table where it split into identical copies. A small black hole above the wounded swallowed said symbol, ‘-final touches are done,’ head to the desk, *Release,* the light turned black then faded in a crackle of lightning. ‘-healing them is easier than finding a cure.’ Heavy footsteps ran up the stairs, “-IGNA, IM HERE!”

“Good morning Fia, what about the quest?” he stepped into the generously sized corridor.

“They pissed me off,” she pouted and made for the kitchen, “-make me something to eat, I’m angry.” The open-spaced upstairs split to have a containment room and research area while the opposite held a kitchen and rest area. A strong barrier went through the middle.

“What happened this time?” ingredients were made for the chopping board.

“The military has shown their true selves...” a press toggled the television, “-another murder?”

“Don’t condemn, are the military truly the military or an independent section of a greater body. Think about it, what’s been happening goes against Alphaia’s citizenship rights.”

“No more, please,” she rebutted in annoyance, “-no politics, it hurts my brains.”

“-The reason why they walk over you,” a bowl slid across the counter, “-better earn your keep,” he smirked, “-clean those for me.”

“Fine,” she crawled to the sink, “-making a princess cook, have you no shame?”

“Hey, you ordered a meal from a prince, better keep up.”

“Always has to have the last word.”

In other news, Count Gustav Oathtall of the humanitarian organization Green Light has taken a firm stance on condemning law enforcement’s way of dealing with crime. Here’s the report from Sandia M’karnie, the scene shifted to a crowd-filled street, “-we mustn’t stand by and allow our youth to kill themselves in a pointless battle. Three days ago, four innocent high school students were killed in cold blood in an unfortunate exchange of gunfire. Stanley’s homage has become worse than a certain neighborhood. Law enforcement needs to take control of the situation, how many innocent lives must be lost until the populous wakes up. Green Light will lead in the campaign!”

“Yesterday, a mass gathering of like-minded individuals joined hands to protest against the growing violence. Though some oppose the movement vehemently, others say it’s a necessary action to reform the town.”

“The town’s turn to anarchy.”

“Lower the volume,” said Igna, “-they’ll keep on repeating the same things. The Chief of Police under close watch,” the stove toggled, “-we have our hands filled.”

“Igna, tell me, is there any chance we can win against the monsters?”

“Not in the least. The only way to win is fight fire with fire, an army against another army of monsters.”

“What if the Devil of Glenda takes to the battlefield?”

“Hard to say, it all depends on circumstances.”

Thud, thud, thud, “-Igna,” panted Meza, “-Henzh’s awake.”

“Good news then?”

“No, the eyes have turned black, he’s about to turn.”

“For the love of-” they dashed, ‘-he’s right, I feel the energy.’

Ginka and Kinka conjured barriers, “-he’s going to turn, get out, HINA!”

“No, I’m not leaving his side,” she buried her forehead into his, “-Henzh, look, it’s me, come on baby, remember who I am,” *grr* teeth sharpened, the transformation completed, ‘-baby...’

BITE, blood sprayed, “-idiot,” a frown had her in tears, sharp teeth dug into the neck, “-move back.”

Chapter 703: True Demonlord [34]

‘Keep sinking your teeth,’ *Blood-Arts: Extria,* ‘-there, continue.’ Pure malice and hatred exuded from what used to be caring eyes. Each press of the jaw splattered crimson across the clean tiles. Hina watched in horror, “-tell me,” he flinched, Henzh doubled down on the bite, “-decide his fate,” he gritted. The swallowed blood glued into a crystal, ‘-continue, the more you ingest the easier it will be to kill.’

"GET AWAY FROM HIM," cried across the hall, "-IGNA!" the princess charged in with spatula in hand. Open palm to the front, a green hue rattled the floor and beds, the very foundation shook, "-I'll kill him, I swear," her hair levitated.

"Stand firm," fired Igna, "-keep the area protected."

"Why?"

"Do as I say," rebutted an impatient voice, "-Hina; decide!"

"I-I-I-I..."

"DECIDE!" the head violently shook, tearing muscle and exposing bones, the sight settled on the neck, *bite*

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'-Too far, only a vampire has the right to bite there.' *snap,* faint crystals surfaced from the skin, the bite eased, and it fell. The eyes turned backward; the complexion turned white. *Bouf,* knees to the hard floor, '-the turned are a menace,' the wound bled profusely, the sight alone force many to avert their gaze. The pain resounded in the stomachs. Fia took it badly and made for Hina's neck, "-why didn't you decide!" and lifted.

"Enough," clambered to a stand, "-don't worry, Fia, I'm glad you cared," stumbled to her shoulder, "-Maids, clean up the mess and have the body cremated. Listen, people, here's the truth, death will come no matter the consequences. I might have saved the lives; I don't guarantee a full recovery. Hina, there was only one option, no matter the answer, I would have tried to rescue the man. Sadly, the lack of will, the unwillingness to answer resulted in his death. Yes, I blame you, and solely you, not the curse, nor my injuries, you killed a man, and thou art be ashamed. Heavier drips scattered across, Fia's relentless fury brought a sense of danger, soon, the duo climbed the stairs.

'Henzh...' head to the floor, '-did I kill...'

"Don't take the words lightly," interjected Ginka, "-stand up, Hina."

"No, I stand behind what the alchemist did," coughed the fatigued Froy, "-Hina, the moment of doubt on the battlefield would have resulted in countless deaths."

"I fear the worse," said Meza, "-the injuries were bad on top of which he was bitten by a turned. This might be the end for the Alchemist as well."

"-the end?" the teary cheeks lifted to tightly pressed lips. In said moment, five maids came in stride. Armed with mops and detergents, the cleaning began, not before the body was nonchalantly transported to the backroom.

Upstairs, the unfired stove blasted into life, "-what the hell?" narrowed Fia, "-Igna, are you or are you not injured?"

"Oh, did I forget to mention?" he casually pointed to the injuries, "-I heal fast."

"The wound's gone," her eyes widened, "-are you immortal?"

"No, no," he refused, "-I used a healing spell." The explanation seemed to ease her mind a little, '-being immortal is my ace; can't well let everyone know I can't die.'

"Still," she pinched his sleeves, "-I was scared..."

"I appreciate the sentiment," he patted her head, "-per her highness's wishes, I have prepared a feast worthy of thy title."

Growl, "-finally."

Unknown to the masses, a faint line of crimson went along the walls and into a jar, '-went according to plan,' he ate in the company of a relieved Fia, '-Henzh was the perfect test subject for the turned syndrome. The blood sample should suffice for a rudimentary cure, if the answer isn't in the curse, tis time to investigate the blood. Letting him bite confirmed a hypothesis, the curse isn't transferred so easily, there's another factor at play.'

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The morning moved tonight, besides recovery and trauma treatment, nothing of consequence happened at the alchemist quarters. The desolate land of monsters swaps for the well-illuminated Stanley's homage. Neon signs went around various shops and buildings of the famed Onimas square. A tourist hotspot and former property of the Luon Familia. A black van pulled shy of the square towards the east, a shabby alley in where moss, garbage, and water dripped from a broken pipeline. The beautiful front had a nasty secret.

"Everyone ready?" went across the earpieces.

"Asmodeus here, I'm ready," he stretched.

"Yeah, it's working," said Kul.

"I'm here too," voiced Starix.

"Today's operation is simple. We're working hand in hand with the police this time. Green Light needs a reality check; Starix, you take point, Kul and Asmodeus, hang in the shadows if matters escalate; have at it."

"Man, the wind is breaking my hairstyle," complained the prince, "-follow me Kul, we're moving to the roofs, up to you, rookie, prove thy worth," and off the figures scattered from building to building. The mixture of lights peeped over yonder.

'My first scheme,' he walked, '-two birds with one stone.' *Arise, helpers from the Shadow Realm, I, humble follower, require aid,* five well-armed men in tuxedos summoned from another world.

"Ready for orders," said one.

"Has the dud been prepared?" inquired he.

"Yes," to which another rose in the distance, a casual face and empty stare, "-the memories have been altered to suit the current operation."

"Good," he nodded, '-looks like necromancy works wonders.'

The target location, a tall building at the edge of Stanley's homage to the northeast, a straight line, and one would be at Fuda Mountains. The streets were clear, vehicles at a minimum, a range of cars crossed a bridge and made for Inexc, a rented building of various uses. The mob, mainly, the Saku, held rights to said property – one before which was owned by Luon. “-Target sighted,” said éclair, “-as you do, Kul.”

“On it,” a black orb fired from quite a ways away. The impression of gunfire shook the escort, “-BOSS!” cried one, the man fell noiselessly. In there, an ambush dashed from each corner and opened fire.

“ACTIVE SHOOTING,” spread to the nearby streets, the citizens, washed by dread, made for the center – bullets after bullets, those of the Saku Familia dropped, enforcers and hitmen alike held no chance.

“éclair, send the signal,” voiced Asmodeus.

“They're on their way,” siren broke through the chatter-filled night.

‘Hook, line, and sinker,’ smirked Starix, “-retreat people, leave the dud behind.” The lonesome gunmen continued raining death onto the building, he fired regardless of the target. Law enforcement would arrive and contain the situation a few minutes later, ‘-scary,’ thought Odgar prowling the prior bloodbath. ‘Jula said the Raven's had a present, I wonder what they referred to?’

“Detective, we've apprehended the shooter.”

‘Really?’ the brows rose, ‘-the mob has a habit of killing themselves...’ then and there, a plausible scenario clicked, “-take him to the station this instant.” Bodies wrapped in white cloth were hoisted into ambulances, the few survivors bore the insignia of the Saku Familia. ‘-One prominent street boss was killed, the Saku will feel the burden soon enough. Looks like there's a break for the Chief to fight the backlash.’

Early morning rose to a bright day; the media was in a frenzy to cover the news. Odgar Codd, recently recruited from a private investigator, was placed in charge of the case. The phone rang on constant, in the end, tired by the bickering, gave a statement, “-we've apprehended the suspects of last night's shooting. The details will be made public later this afternoon, the captive has been very cooperative.”

“éclair,” resounded across the manor, “-how's the setup?”

“Completed,” he smiled triumphantly, “-good work, the chief will be more indebted to us.”

“Well, gathering bodies is one thing,” she facepalmed.

“Question,” wondered the butler.

“Shoot.”

“Do you always cross-dress?”

“Whatever do you mean,” she shrugged, “-I can be either man or woman; though I'll always be a princess by heart. Anyhow, they should find the lead. Tis wonderful how humans fixate on a single narrative to further their advance, the populous want someone to be held accountable,” the television flicked on, “-and here we have the perfect one.”

“Hear me, people of Odgawoan, this has gone on for too long. I can’t afford to stand on the sideline anymore. We’re launching a campaign against the corrupt police force. I promise to do all in my power, in return, I wish for support in the next council election. Support my cause and I promise this town to be rid of gangs.”

Before long, the count’s campaign gained momentum, the more he spoke, the harsher grew the townsfolk. Pressure stacked onto the police force, if results weren’t found, the heavy hammer of justice would fall.

3rd of December, a week passed, no report of shootings occurred in the meantime. Election for the council was to be hosted on the 5th – the count gave an ultimatum, a direct challenge to Chief Valentino.

Pride and overconfidence made the count predictable. Secret support for an underground organization of his own elevated the aura of grandeur. “Good morning master.”

“Good morning,” replied Igna, “-Starix, long time no see, how are you doing?”

“Very well,” he replied courteously, “-are you watching the scene?”

“Yes,” he laughed, “-I never thought this would happen, are you the schemer?”

“They didn’t know what hit them,” she cackled, “-enjoy the show.”

While the media fired the hatred against law enforcement, shadows worked on the sly in the investigation of the shooting. A key witness, unrefutable evidence, and a truthful story were brought to court, whereby Count Oathtall was ordered before a distinguished judge. The arrest was heavily publicized, the court hearing lasted a total of six hours, and in the end, the Count was found guilty. Long story short, the captive, after being subjected to a truth-binding spell, answered questions without stopping. He gave information on the hideout and their leader, an unknown man, bearing striking resemblance to the count. The leads were damning and led to Alice’s nightmare were evidence of the Count’s presence; electoral papers, private information, witnesses, painted a canvas of culpability. Lawyers of the count couldn’t fight, the accusers, a team of foreign attorneys, dressed in lavish suits, bore Phantom’s insignia. Given the situation, and pressed by the election, the judge came to a stern judgment. Count Oathtall was found guilty of conspiracy, murder, fraud, and kidnapping. The noble title allowed for leeway, and thus, after correspondence to the emperor, was stripped to the title of Baron. Land and property were transferred to the state, the money would be allocated to the various victims. A transcript of the hearing made headlines, “Count Oathtall, master manipulator.”

“Long day,” the evening sunburnt in amber.

“Long day indeed,” replied éclair, “-I appreciate the help in flying to Alpha.”

“Don’t worry about it,” said the lawyer, “-my job is to serve. We should head out, the jet awaits. Take care, éclair.”

“You too,” sports cars laid in wait. Far to the right, the ex-count, shocked and distraught, was taken to be executed.

“éclair,” hailed Odgar, the courtroom slowly emptied.

“Detective, the investigation went accordingly. Too bad the Saku were left untouched.”

“Not really, they very much jumped on the bandwagon to lay blame on the count. Tis a good day far as I’m concerned.” The press waited impatiently for the Chief, of which she answered questions and gave ample assurance.

“There you are,” gestured Starix, “-we’re going to have a drink, come on éclair, join us.”

“Suppose I should get going,” said Odgar.

“No, you too, bring the lady along,” voiced she.

“Drinking party at the manor,” said éclair, “-do visit us, we must celebrate a case gone right.”

“I’ll ask Jula, no guarantee.”

“Fair enough,” the sun gave to a cold sky, “-take care, detective.”

Puff, ‘-Master’s companions didn’t lie when they said we were under their protection. The evidence, the culprit, it all worked out perfectly, the media’s satisfied and so are the people. I shudder at those who dare move against us,’ a half-smile broke the frown.

Chapter 704: True Demonlord [35]

‘They sure got drunk quick,’ plate in hand, towel straddled the shoulders, sweat on the forehead; the entertainment area turned to a maze of unknown proportions. Between the stutters, slowed speech, and overall uncharacteristic behaviors of the guests, éclair had his work cut out. Maids and butlers were called from the Shadow Realm, those of which being trained in the ways of fighting and catering.

“I can’t believe you drank so much,” *hic,* “-holy hell Jula, you’re an entonnoir for sure.”

“Don’t dare label me a funnel,” her would-be stern gaze slapped across his visage, a gasp escaped, the frown swapped for a conniving smirk, “-I can drink, just not what you have to serve,” her sight lowered below his belt, “-I wonder what you’re hiding.”

“No, not right now,” intervened Asmodeus, “-my harem will be here soon,” he gawked the clock impatiently, the minute hand-laid short of midnight.

‘Drunks have the weirdest whims,’ he sighed and focused on cleaning the dirtied mugs.

“They sure are random,” replied Starix, “-let me help out.”

“Sure, dry the glasses for me,” a small line created, wash, clean, dry, store, “-today was a great day for us. The standing will grow fierce.”

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“Hey,” flushed and slightly dazed, “-where’s the master,” *burp*, “-the days don’t feel right without him abusing us on a passive level,” Kul’s cheek wrapped around a droplet filled glass then slumped to the counter, “-I want to meet him...”

“YES!” pink and purple flashed in the distance, a portal summoned to a volley of beautiful men and women, “-my harem is here,” cheered the prince, “-Kul, éclair, I’ll be off tending to my need, tomorrow’s

the day off, don't bother waking me for I'll be in tender heaven," the skimpily clad seductresses moved to suffocate his body with their natural 'weapons'.

"Don't cause too much trouble," refuted éclair.

"What's that about?" inquired the very drunk Jula, "-is he going to fu-

"No more," interjected Odgar, "-no dirty talk, it's rude."

"Someone's soft," she winked in return, "-do you love me or not?" woe filled her tone.

"Here we go," chuckled Starix, "-the alcohol is beginning to talk."

"I'll take them to bed," said Kul suddenly sane and fully sober, "-the buzz's worn off. The poison resistance has finally kicked in," curled in a punch, "-come on drunk birds," grabbed by the collar, "-we're calling a night."

"Feels lonely," voiced Starix, "-Kul raised a good question, what is the master even doing?"

"Fighting monsters or whatnot, the details are thin. He calls when it's convenient, the bare surface of the mess has been scratched. Did Lilith or any of the goddesses speak about Hades' and possible motives in laying claim to Alpha?"

"No, the only news is Lady Gophy accidentally messed up the spell and created the trouble we're in at the moment."

"Do you believe that?" he stopped and shrugged, "-a goddess failing a spell seems farfetched. Fine, I'll chalk it up to distractions, still doesn't explain why a high-tier god would care to invade the realm, does he not have dominion of his own to serve?"

"I don't know," she shrugged, "-best we leave the godly matters to the gods. I'm sure the master will find a way."

Rumbles of a helicopter startled the duo, "-looks like Cora's back."

"Where did you send him?"

"To clean up the remainder of Saku's forces in Stanley's homage. Don't worry, I gave the orders to kill without blood spilled, the bodies must be kept for better use."

"You're into the Necrotic arts, aren't you?" said he rhetorically.

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"No," came an embarrassed yet pleasurable expression, "-I-I."

"Don't lie," he tapped her head, "-you're my student after all."

"Can't hide the intent very well, can I?" her chin lowered to the counter, distant footsteps echoed to a sudden appearance, "-I've brought the bodies," proclaimed Cora in a bloodied outfit.

"Did you stain the floor?" voiced across murderously, "-Cora, did you stain the floor?"

Gulp, "-of course not..."

“Enough,” fired Kul, “-éclair, I need answers, is the master well or should I take to the Q-district?” *Clap, clap,* “-clean the floor, maids,” she ordered.

“Once again, I don’t know,” voiced he, “-the master’s preoccupied, I think, or I hope.”

“So much for being the personal butler...” her arms crossed.

“Lady Kul, I don’t think it is a good idea to stir the hornet’s nest,” murmured Cora, who indeed had stained the floor red.

“Enough animosity,” added Starix, “-don’t forget, we have yet to complete the mission. The state’s seized the Count’s property, which I remind are manors, villas, apartments, and the Valeria Casino.”

“Oh yeah,” the mood shifted, “-it will be auctioned off...”

“Not if we can pressure the leadership,” winked she, “-priorities are the apartments and casino, luckily, the count was smart enough to build both in close proximity. The price is unknown, however, there’s more than enough leverage to sway the decision. Properties are under the emperor’s jurisdiction. Kul, here’s the opportunity, check on the master and relay the information, he should know what to do next. I’ll use the Luon’s connection to hamper potential buyers.”

“Good plan,” nodded éclair, ‘-master was right to appoint her strategist of Raven. She’s loyal, adores the master, and has a conniving side hated by enemies and loved by us.’

“I’m going to meet the master?” quick to check her outfit, “-I don’t know what I should wear...”

“I’ll help,” winked Starix, “-I’m a princess by heart, don’t forget,” she sneakily wrapped her arms around the demoness’ waist and made for the upstairs, “-we’re going shopping tomorrow. Cora, investigate current status on the businessmen and nobles – if they persist on obtaining the late count’s property, kill them.”

“Understood,” stood in place, the ladies’ heels faded in the distance, “-I’m sorry about the floor.”

“No worries,” smiled éclair, “-late to the party, come and have a drink.”

“Yes please,” a shot back, “-nothing beats good booze after a day’s work,” head on the counter, “-éclair, what are your thoughts on Starix’s scheme?”

“They’re good,” he replied, “-she’s taken to her role nicely. I’m surprised about the foresight. Her intellect outclasses the petty businessmen of the area.”

“I know right,” he drank another, “-back in the old world, she was a nice and caring princess, always putting me above the rest. Maybe she had an obsession, I don’t know, I wanted to save the world and didn’t care about her feelings. Now that she’s changed into a homunculus, she doesn’t see me romantically. Sow what you reap, the eternal rule of give and take. Whatever, a smile on her visage is romance enough.”

“So, she is your type,” another drink served, “-between you and me, dashing forward alone will result in failure sooner or later. I’m duty-bound to keep my master’s possession spotless, it includes the companions and servants. Sadly, I’m but a single man, be there for her, catch her if she falls, and move as one. In the near future, akin to when he invaded the old planet, another instant might rise where

conquering an unknown realm to be a necessity. Competent leaders and fighters will be needed. Here," he slid another drink, "-have the last one, God's ale, and go to bed."

"Alright," last two drinks down, "-I'm off, thanks for caring, éclair, I love you," a peck on the cheeks and tipsy Cora shuffled out.

'I love you,' hands to the cheeks, '-a good sentiment. The manor feels homely, Odgar and Jula have grown close to us,' *click,* arms crossed and face to the stars, '-master, I wish you could see how much they've grown. Cora and Starix are on their way to being competent leaders.'

Night shifts to day, a black portal opened, '-tired,' knees fell to the floor, '-I'm glad I decided to visit the Shadow Realm daily. Vanesa, Draconis, Saniata are having fun, we had fun. Lilith sure was one to worry, constantly pestering about her lonesomeness, Queen of Demon...'

"Pops," parting words echoed, "-take care, the Shadow Realm is a good place to train. Lady Gophy has decided to train me," Draconis's voice seemed mature, "-I'm going to become strong and stand by your side, pops. Don't force yourself on my account, I love you either way."

"Cut the sappiness," sliced Saniata with her sharp tongue, "-there are more important things to be doing in the overworld, don't worry about us. Goddess Intherna's taken a liking to my skills – I'm going to get strong; I'll make sure you acknowledge my strength soon."

"Me too," yawned Vanesa, "-I don't want to be strong. Don't care about those two – finish the quest of whatnot, I want to hang out soon," she stood in a plain white dress, teddy in one hand, long nasty green hair down her back and sleepy visage, "-already stronger than these two. Love you pops, I'll come when everything is over. Also, Lilith is undertaking my training or something, I don't care, food and sleep and time with pops."

"Honestly?" he made for the trio hastily.

"-you going to hit us?" gulped Saniata, "-child abuse..."

"-NO TO CHILD ABUSE!" screamed Draconis.

"Stupid," said Vanesa shoving Saniata to the side, "-it's a hug."

"Come here," he knelt and held the trio, "-Draconis, Saniata, Vanesa, I'm glad to be called your father. I'll leave, the time spend in the Shadow Realm was nice, I enjoyed spoiling you," he patted Vanesa, "-playing with you," he flicked Draconis's nose, "-and you," he pinched Saniata's cheeks, "-you've worked hard to evolve from mermaid to siren. Always headstrong and fierce, keep at it, after siren comes the title of apostle, like it or not, I always know what you three are up to. I'm glad, suppose I won't interrupt the training. I'll visit once in a while."

'He noticed,' she smiled, '-I'm happy.'

"I'm off," a close embrace later, "-don't cause too much problem for the goddesses."

"Love you pops!" exclaimed Draconis.

"Love you," added Vanesa monotonously.

“Yeah, take care,” said Saniata.

‘There’s the reason she wanted a lute, to train her singing and musical prowess,’ faded lines of black left marks on the floor, ‘-the sun’s up,’ moved to the window, ‘-monster attacks sure have intensified,’ there on the street below, a stray vigilante fought hard against a Devourer, ‘-the poor lad’s about to die.’ A masked lady dashed out the entrance to slay in a single stroke; the fighter, heavily injured, fell. ‘Why’s she like this,’ an exasperated sigh escaped, not from the state of the fighter, rather, the way Fia noticed and winked, ‘-more work for you,’ wrote across the smug expression.

Clap, clap, clap, “-how’s everyone doing?”

“Good morning,” said Froy.

“Good morning indeed,” a new room beside the ward was added not long after the gradual recovery – training equipment, punching bags, and the likes scattered around the lavishly large room. Hina and Jonl sparred, for her side, the lass packed a punch, each strike echoed. Training under Undrar’s tutelage reawakened muscle memories.

“Kinka, Ginka, how’s Uonl doing?”

“Better,” returned Kinka, “-he’s able to walk and talk, the memories have returned.”

“Good morning, master Igna,” said Uonl in a shaky tone.

“Take it easy,” a wheelchair rolled over, “-rehabilitation mustn’t be forced.” *Pouf, pouf, pouf,* the punching bag cried per Froy’s assault, “-take a rest and sip on this,” a potion dropped on the man’s hand, “-the day isn’t far.”

“Igna, patient!” cried across the room.

“Fia,” he sighed and rushed to the ward, “-Meza, you’re on supply duty, take Fia and make for headquarters.”

“Understood,” they leaped into the armored unit and drove towards the deserted land of dust.

‘Another one,’ *snap,* consciousness dropped, ‘-no affliction by the curse, easy fix,’ thirty minutes later, the man stood on his feet, “-might I ask who you are?” the face gleamed.

“The Alchemist. Tell me, what’s the dormitory like these days?”

“Bad,” he sat, “-very bad. The army’s officially taken control of rationing, price of meals has skyrocketed.”

“Why are you here?”

“Nurse Ada asked me to relay this note.”

“Fair,” he took the letter, “-maids, bring the man some food.”

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Chapter 705: True Demonlord [36]

Greetings Lord Alchemist, I hope the note finds thee well. I would have opted for a more modern means of communication under different circumstances. The military has taken to restricting information in and out of the area. Trying times means I needed to improvise, what better way than analog. Rant aside, the reason for said letter is to request assistance. A certain individual from the Cobalt unit has arrived to conduct experiments on 'turned' and 'monsters'. An issue for doctors to leave the premises was issued, only certified medics were allowed to treat the patients. I currently write this from the hospice – far from what rumors say, the patients aren't necessarily wounded, liberty is taken whether one is hurt or not. More and more of the vigilantes are being ordered to permanently stay around Zone 3 and the dreaded infested land of Zone 4. Ever since the defeat of Antronla and the loss of Squad 28, 32, and 33, there is not much hope left. I have no idea what or why I've decided to write the note. How to start and end the conflict. It feels wrong, my conscience warns me, if matters do not change for the better, the military will turn the area into a research facility. The late Aptha's rescuer, the elven girl, was spotted walking well and good at the dormitory. The Alchemist Quarters has become a taboo subject in presence of the soldiers, the vigilantes are hopeful matters may change from Q5 Zone 3. I've rambled on long enough, word of warning, the dormitory isn't a haven any longer, either find a way to import supplies or be subject to the strictness of unbounded military power.

'Sign by Ada Rapt,' he paused, '-things aren't looking good for the vigilantes. Information blackout and the Cobalt unit, this doesn't smell so great. Why did a fellow Ardanian get involved.'

Incoming transmission, displayed across the lens, "-what's the matter?"

"Iгна, the dormitory isn't willing to grant access," gunfire diffused in pants and cries, "-more running less talking," reverberated in the distance. "-What should we do?"

"Retreat and don't turn back. Kill if you have to, I'll take responsibility."

"Understo-" *Transmission Interrupted.* 'Trouble follows like my shadow,' glimpsed to the unconscious ladies, '-at least the drug's moving along nicely,' he smiled, '-Henzh's blood was the right guess. A cure can be made to counteract the curse and perhaps undo the 'turned' effect.'

Knock, knock,

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"Who is it?"

"Hina here,"

"Enter," he stepped out the research room, "-the whole crew is here."

"There's something we need to discuss," said she in a somber tone. A look to the corner showed the messenger, '-he must have run his mouth.'

"Not here, the ladies are resting."

Snaps landed, Meza sprinted faster than ever before, soon after, the armored unit pelted out of sight, "-are they serious?" she gasped.

“The military for you,” he panted, “-I knew this would have happened. I’m sure we’re reported dead, there’s no reason to believe otherwise. Should have been more careful – I doubt they’re stupid enough to give chase.”

“Way to jinx,” headlights drove into the rear-view mirror, “-I’ll distract, focus on the road.” Stray boulders and rocks levitated and shot backward. A line of dust zoomed in the distance, “-look there,” she pointed, “-a bike and...”

“Yeah, looks like they’re being chased,” he drifted around a corner, “-do it now.”

Woosh, a harsh swipe toppled an already shaky structure, “-make for the biker.” The rider in black sped forth, “-that’s a blocked alley,” cried the princess, “-buy time,” out the hatch and into the fray. ‘-Crazy personality,’ it made directly for the pursuers.

‘If I’m correct,’ hovered, ‘-the alley should have flat slabs,’ a ramp swiftly built-in the nick of time, a growl of the bike ended in skids and screeches. *CRASH* smoke rose a few blocks away, “-I need transport,” transmitted across.

“Meza, what happened?” inquired a calmer voice.

“Bowling I’d say,” he sat before a cacophony of bundled flames, “-the pursuers are dead, the alchemist said to kill if needed right?” *Grrr* vibrations resonated, ‘-the structures’ shaking.’ A tall reaching building shadowed the streets, broken glass, a non-existent entrance blocked by furniture. Dark-brownish stains on the floor remain of rotten meat in a once flowerbed and a sense of uneasiness.

“Where are you?”

“Follow the pile of smoke,” the rumbles intensified, the heart raced, “-hey, I think there may be monsters hiding in the building I’m currently under...” strained to stare the upper floors, ‘-oh god, crawlers,’ quadruplets of disgusting appearances, roach-like in some instances and spiders in others, salivated. Goo landed to a slight fizz, ‘-acidic breath, seriously...’

“RUN THEN!” cried the earpiece.

“Thing is, I might have sprained my ankle in the landing...” a clueless chuckle upward didn’t help the situation, a bone-breaking sound and wings coated in green spread nastily, the foul stench of sulphur and rotten meat permeated. ‘-Stand up Meza,’ the hands glued in fear, ‘-why do they have to be insects,’ he cringed, ‘-damned phobia, I-I...’ The morbid grayness of the scene amplifies by a slow-rolling mist to the side. Streets, alleys, buildings, broken cars, and even the sky, was swept under a tsunami of fog. Slow-paced waves cherished the trip, Fia scanned the area erratically, the biker of before spun and left.

‘Just my luck, insects up top and fogs to the side. I had to try and be an idiot.’ Characteristic high pitch buzz fluttered; ‘-I so wished those flaps to have been pigeons...’

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“Stop being an idiot,” green hues surrounded, crushed, and squeezed the bodily juices, Meza gagged.

“-Seriously?” hands on her hips, “-the great strategist Meza is afraid of some insects?” a buzz stopped short of her neck, “-pest,” a grit and the latter tore into pieces, he hurled. *touf, touf, touf,* deep and prominent, “-Meza, we have trouble,” she gulped, “-that sound doesn’t inspire great news...”

“Why?” he wiped his mouth, “-another monster?”

“No, far worse. The fog’s here... the sound’s associated to the envoys of Satuel. Little insects able to replicate any monster’s ability,’ heavy footsteps gave into scraping metals.

“Stand up.”

“I can’t,” a look told of a different story, “-my ankle isn’t sprained, I’ve broken it...”

No sooner than a second, a figure flashed between the duo, dove into the fog, and eradicated the sizeable presence. Meza, still on his bottom beside the pool of vomit, crawled to the sidewalk. The outline of a lady exited the mist, orbs of black levitated in a circle. A show of the index and the orbs funneled out of existence. Heels against the asphalt, “-are you familiar with the name Haggard?” the bike autonomously followed.

“Who might you be?” inquired Fia.

“A humble companion. I appreciate the help earlier,” she took off the helmet, “-the place is far worse than I’d imagined,” locked onto the displaced ankle, “-the kamikaze who dove headfirst,” *snap,* he hovered, “-I’ll lock the bones in place, might hurt a little.”

‘Who’s this pretty lady,’ wondered Fia, ‘-there’s a familiar aura about her.’

“Hold on a moment, what happened to the monsters in the fog?”

“Killed them, those weaklings aren’t sufficed to be labeled monsters. Insects are but insects, they are to be crushed promptly. My question?”

“The Alchemist quarters a walk away. I don’t mind flying there...”

“Sure, take the lead, I’ll carry the headstrong gentleman.”

Another note was handed to the messenger, “-here, a few potions to aid in future combat. Come as a squad next time,” said Igna.

“Understood sir,” the man ran off while stranger outlines appeared against the cloudy sky, “-we’re home,” said Fia, “-Meza’s broken the ankle, care to help?”

“Sure, take him inside,” the nonchalant stare filled in a sudden gleam, the white pupil smiled, “-hello master.”

“Kul,” they launched into a tight embrace, “-never expected this visit.”

“Mere pleasantries won’t aid in the slight discomfort I have against you...”

“Fair deal,” they entered, “-head upstairs, I’ll treat the man and come right up.”

“Master,” voiced she in shock, “-I digress, this place isn’t suitable for the likes of a princ-”

“No more talking,” said he gently, “-take in the surrounding, dear Kul, adapt to survive. Go on, I’ll be there shortly.”

“She’s hot,” murmured Kinka.

“Not so loud,” they peeped and watched her climb the stairs.

“Don’t mind us,” chuckled Froy, “-been so long since we’ve seen a proper woman...”

“Take in the sight boys,” said Igna in jest, “-looking isn’t a crime.”

“What about a proper woman?” pouted Fia.

“Sorry, sorry,” Jonl jumped in, “-they didn’t mean it literally, let’s say lady assassin is lesser noticeable...” damage control didn’t work.

Trip into town didn’t help much earlier the day. Starix’s constant input, multitude of outfits, and facepalms ended in a standard modest business outfit.

‘-Kul’s already readied the ankle for further treatment,’ *Mana Control: Healing Element Variant: Restoration.*

“HA-HA-HA-HA,” escaped from the training room.

“She must have told how I got hurt,” exhaled Meza in disappointment, “-not my fault I get disgusted by insects, I hate them.”

“Done,” he stood, “-take it easy for the next two hours. Don’t worry about the supplies, I’ll figure something out. Supervise the others, the day isn’t far whereby the combined squads set to the battlefield.”

“Wait,” hailed Fia.

‘Well equipped for a supposed abandoned building,’ wondered the guest.

“I’m here,” the doors shut, “-I heard a brief story from Fia, care to explain?”

“You mean the princess?” she lounged about and dug through the various shelves, “-master, the books and papers are quite detailed. Am I to assume the research is about the plague?”

“Should I answer?”

“Therewith the sarcastic remarks,” she giggled, “-no matter, I came here to audit thy way of life. I know it’s selfish,” the flutters turned daggers, “-sworn to thy name, I must endeavor for my monarch to be in an agreeable way of life.”

“I appreciate the sentiment – no need to worry about my abode, tis cozy. Care to explain why the military gave chase?”

“They didn’t grant passage, therefore I wrecked the checkpoint and made for the location given éclair. Thought I’d lose them in the alleys, the princess gave ample help, thus I returned the favor, and here we are.”

Moved to the kitchen, “-want drinks?”

“Coffee should be enough,” her lips pressed, “-no allow me to make the beverages.”

“Sit down,” said he with a fatherly authority, “-for a demon to get nervous, the sun must have risen from the west.”

“Heh,” anxious laughter escaped, “-be truthful, are you well?”

“Yes,” he handed the cups and sat opposite, “-the princess and I have gotten to know one another pretty well. She’s a good person by heart.”

“If his majesty has no qualms, I have no right to object,” a sip warmed the innards, ‘-delicious.’

“Come to discuss plans about the count’s estate?”

“You knew?”

“Tis the logical path forward. The Chief will be handled by Starix – I’ll call in a favor from the emperor, he owes me much from the rescue. About my time spend,” he shuffled to the laboratory, “-here are a few samples of potential cures. Have éclair take them to Rotherham University. I’ll send the paperwork later.”

“What about the budget?”

“What budget, money isn’t an issue. Besides, the property will be sold at a lowered rate. Glad you could make it, the meeting’s over. Stay around or head on home, thy choice, Kul, I’ll be in the lab.”

‘I came all this way for a five-minute talk... why do I even bother.’ Cup in the sink, ‘-Starix did say he wouldn’t talk much. Does the homunculus know the king more than I do? Very annoying...’

Click, “-careful!” yelled Fia.

.....

“Eavesdropping,” glared Kul, “-waste of time, wasn’t it,” she slid along the handrail, “-tell me, the area’s infested with monsters, right?”

“Yes, why ask?”

“You,” she pointed to Fia, “-care to come with, I’d like to blow off some steam. Where’s the monster hideout?” killing intent froze the hall, disorderly glances, and petrified whispers jumped from person to person, ‘-I swear, monsters will be culled.’

Chapter 706: True Demonlord [37]

Another day, another fight; on verge of the gate, dust and rumbles approached. Soldiers perched atop ruins, head inside armored vehicles, a snarly grin, and overarching confidence, waned at the first sight of conflict. Decrepit-looking vigilantes ran at a walking pace to the frontline, consciousness left to a mediocre stare – explosions, gunfire, and noise, resounded. Battle for Q3 Zone 3 sped down the highway of certain death. Rash orders fired across the communication devices, the supposed oath to protect the people and country, sat in strong transports, mostly imagine grapes being fed by servants,

and waited. The special unit had no bearing on the real military, their rule – autonomous, independent, and beyond the authority of officers.

A shooting star cut across the clouds and sky; a boom echoed into a harsh landing. Stern face, dressed in trousers and a blazer and equipped with orbs. Questions were asked internally. No sigh of stop nor mercy, invaders, bear in mind were evolved beasts, fell per a single flick of the finger. She moved brazenly along the ‘guarded’ line of parked SUVs. An embarrassed soldier peeped his head fully intent on throwing a fit – instead, the menacing aura from the secondary partner, Fia, sowed their mouths shut. Deeper to hell’s gate, so was nicknamed – construction toppled over squad 17, leaving two dead, one wounded, and the remainder in shock. None so much flinched to aid, lack of sustenance led to starvation, starvation followed into hallucination and inability to judge nor decide. The moral compass was ruined, ‘-psychological torture,’ went across the mind.

“Go help the injured,” said Kul, “-I’ll take care of trash,” she levitated and blasted into hell. Bodies flung left and right, screech and plea for help had the viewership on the edge – the heart rattled with each breath. Despite the death, if the body seemed in good shape, the Alchemist could work the magic. In a matter of minutes, ire quelled to a manageable spot. Supervising heroes, in other words, spectators, sat in their golden cage of prestige and protection. Simple dust of the shoulder, few stretches, “-Fia, ready to head out?”

“My god, what about the monsters?”

“I said it before, they’re weak. Besides,” she smirked, “-weak prey is fun, the superiority is salivating.”

“You lost me there...”

“Don’t worry the pretty face,” quick to tap her cheeks, “-let’s head back, the injured are ready right?”

.....

“Yes,” blankets and petty cloth bundled the dead – black and green wrapped the cocoons and took flight. Bystanders who wished to speak were left speechless, today’s report was of a few deaths and extermination of the current horde.

Return didn’t once spark a smile. “-We’re back,” proclaimed Kul joyously.

“I see that,” said he in dejection, “-please tell me those bundles aren’t bodies...”

“Guessed correctly,” cheered Fia, “-the alchemist is able to heal them, right?”

“Hopeless fool,” whispered under his breath, “-take ’em in. I don’t care, if they’re dead, cremate.”

“Alchemist,” interjected Froy who’s visage was still wet from the washroom, “-can you not treat the dead?”

“Listen, maybe my way of treatment is confusing. All I do is bypass the limitation imposed by current research and delve into a world of my own making. The possibilities aren’t endless, think of a mirror, when a person dies, the soul, in this case, the mirror, is shattered. Once’s broken; the pieces can be made to reunite in a puzzle manner – tis what happened to you. Last time I was able to gather the pieces into a single entity. As for these warriors, the pieces have already crossed to the hall of rebirth, there’s no return. I can heal the body and add an artificial spirit, one can say it be revived. The memories

and personality will be preserved, alas, the inhabitant is gone forever, what is left is a shell, remnants of the past pulled to act for the sake of acting.”

“Creating Undead akin to the turned?”

“Good summary,” said he to Hina, “-take the critically wounded inside, I’ll be there a moment. Kinka, Ginka, dispose of the death, give them a proper send-off, body to ashes, and mana to earth, the balance of life and death spins to no end.”

Short of an hour later, Kul bid her goodbyes and left. Ginka, Kinka, Jonl, Meza, Hina, Gilert and Uonl, crowded a decrepit backyard. A stone edifice sprung along the grounds for the sake of cremation. Dirt mounds rested to the side of the walled-off rectangle; a simple robust tree arched to a prominent shadow. Those unknown to the ritual remained under said shadow, Hina and Meza chanted prayers – mild fire turned furnace, “-we come here regularly.”

“Ever since Henzh’s death, Hina’s been lesser involved with people. The trauma wanes heavy in her mind, I wish I could help out a fellow squadmate,” said Froy.

“Best not get involved,” added Jonl, “-people grieve in different ways. It was a shock to see him turn and bite down. I thought he’d die for her sake; guess I was proven wrong. The focus should be on the future, there’s no way we can keep to the Alchemist Quarters and do nothing.”

“Don’t be harsh,” said Uonl with much effort, “-recovery and training. Facing death isn’t an easy feat.”

“I’ve faced him head-on plenty o’ time,” side-glance to the first floor, “-the Alchemist is more than we would have thought.”

“I agree,” whispered a familiar voice.

“Assassin?” they turned in unison, “-what are you doing in the tree?”

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“Catching some z’s. I watched Kul fight earlier, let me tell you, the strength behind those seemingly understanding eyes is mortifying. Imagine the boss class monsters combined into a single entity and be elapsed ten-fold, tis the power I felt.”

“...”

“Fia,” hailed Meza wiping his brow, “-can I ask for a favor?”

“The holes are already dugout,” a brief gesture to the side, “-there, have at it.”

The burial came to an end simultaneously to Igna completing the surgery, ‘-two heavily wounded.’

“We’re alive?” reality came too, “-where are we?”

“Alchemist quarters,” he replied monotonously.

“Are you the medic in the rumors?” wondered the other.

“No, I’m just a researcher,” back to the patients, ‘-I need to order more tools,’ the tongue clicked.

“Where are we?”

“Are you daft?” said a sudden burst, “-Q5 Zone 3, alchemist quarters. The wounds are healed. Rest for an hour then head to the hospice, I’ll ask for someone to escort.”

“Alright,” and thus the day carried into the closed doors of the upstairs. Rumbles and laughter echoed below, three figures were spotted leaving the premises, “-éclair, you there?”

“Good afternoon master.”

“What is so good about Kul’s surprise visit. No matter, have the samples arrived?”

“Yes, and they’re headed to the university.”

“Excellent, direct my call to the emperor if you would.”

“Sure thing,” silence led to a click, “-hello?”

“Not very authoritative for an answer,” cut across the phone. The expression froze, ‘-what’s the matter?’ mumbled Eira. “-It’s Igna,” he whispered.

“Brother-in-law, the call must have startled thee. I wouldn’t put it past the paranoia of clandestine attackers,” the chair rocked on two legs, “-if you wish not to speak, do transfer the call to my sister.”

“No, no,” the voice firmed, “-I apologize, my private contact information is known to only a few. Congratulations on winning the court case, I heard the count had been in cahoots with multiple gangs. Very sloppy I may add, creating drama to further his ascension to the head of the council, very foolish.”

“The confidence’s returned,” an amber of pleasantness snuck through, “-Emperor Sultria VI, part knows why I have called, don’t you?”

“Consider me an empty vase.”

“Very well. The count’s estate is property of the state – the noble has been stripped of the title of Count to being a baron. Nobility is still nobility, I’m sure the noble factions are very angry. I’d like to make a deal, sell my company the estates. The prices are have dropped below the market value, the stain of a corrupt noble is one none wishes to accept.”

“Look at you go,” came in the distance.

“Empress Eira, has the call been transferred onto speaker?”

“Yes,” said a jestful Emperor, “-she wanted to hear the negotiations first hand.”

“I don’t mind,” the voice deepened, “-long as my wishes are complied with, there’s no need for worry.”

“Don’t be so standoffish, I’m still your loveable big sister.”

“Ha-ha,” sped across sarcastically.

“Fine, fine, no need to be angry,” she sighed, “-continue the negotiations, I’ll check on the lady mother.”

Slight shuffles later, “-she’s gone.”

“About my proposition...”

“Tis a tough decision at the moment. The noble factions are warring over who is to inherit the land and estate. I might have the rights, still need to consider the greater good of the continent. I won’t allow fellow nobles to fight one another over greed.”

“Brother-in-law, might I remind you my proposition is the best idea for a peaceful approach. If an independent party acquires the land, there won’t be room for argument. Nepotism is a fair excuse to the upper echelon. All they wish is to further their rank in court.”

“What about you, why so adamant on acquiring the count’s estate?”

“To further my agenda – I have the right to be greedy. The trial must have served as a trailer for what Phantom is capable of. I’m ready to call in favors if necessary.”

“The Haggard way of negotiations,” voiced a tired exhale, “-I’ve experienced it first-hand since the marriage. She’s ruthless and strict, the smiles are wonderful breaks.”

“Please refrain from unsavory thoughts about a family member over the phone, very awkward and embarrassing.”

“I wish I could do something...”

“Emperor, might I remind, Princess Loftha is currently under my careful watch. She’s caused quite the tempest on arrival to a warzone. Her identity was kept hidden due to my intervention. An independent military faction has invaded the land of battle, life here is atrocious – fighters are starved while those employed by the Imperial family live the good life. I’m sure a scandal of such proportion will rattle the very foundation of what the people believe in.”

“There it is,” he laughed, “-the threat I was waiting for. I’m sorry about playing hard to get, it was decided the estate be sold to the highest bidder under my authority. Please keep taking care of my sister, Igna, she’s weird and not honest with her feelings, a lone wolf from birth. She changed at a certain point in life – I’m pretty sure it was around the time the conglomerates bore their fangs. Wanting to marry into nobility and stealing the fame and fortune amassed by generations of Sultria... being allied to the Haggard has relit the passion I have towards my people. I’ll do what I can to actively change the state of things. Consider all the estate, including land, manors, and casino, sold for the price of 135,000,000 Exa, so is the rate on the current marketplace. I’ll settle for 100,000,000 Exa.”

“You drive a hard bargain,” another screen materialized, multiple balances linked to a singular account, ‘-looks like the entire stock was sold for 100,000,000 Exa. The current balance stands at 130,000,420 Exa.’

“I’ve sent the account information, how about it, Igna Haggard, deal or no deal?”

“Stop quoting game shows,” said a sudden refute, “-transfer ownership of everything to my name, the price is inclusive of all the count’s owned, right?”

“Yes.”

“Quite the quandary, a check on the prices say the worth has dipped harshly, I’m reading 86,000,000 Exa. Emperor, are you truly trying to make a deal?” he laughed, “-get sister Eira in the room,” firmed a passing threat.

“Fine,” said a grudging tone, “-80,000,000 Exa no more no less, are those acceptable?”

“Deal, send the paperwork, also, about taxes...”

“Nobility isn’t required to pay taxes – the property would have cost more. I presume the lawyers are to handle the affairs?”

“éclair will handle it,” he smiled, “-I trust my ever-smart butler more than an attorney.”

“Understood,” the call ended.

‘Good investment,’ he peeped out the window, ‘-a casino for the prince of gambling, we’re about to roll in the money.’

Chapter 707: True Demonlord [38]

“Captain Soong, reports from the Q3 zone 3. Mask assassin and an unknown lady stormed the battlefield and eliminated the invading force. Information about the biker points to said individual. Spotters have seen vigilantes go back and forth from the Alchemist Quarter. There’s also the incident about envoys asking for supplies. We’ve enacted the policy and refused access, what are your orders sire?”

“Leave it be,” said a nonchalant voice, “-priorities are on the potential of weaponizing the turned,” files laid atop the desk, ‘-tremendous physical enhancement from being infected, they’ll be happy about the report.’ Out the stale interior and into a wasteland of a yard, a presumed turned elf ambled in the company of a researcher. ‘-He’s taken a liking to her, hasn’t he.’

“Additional forces have embarked for Odgawoan. Ask the manager to send the vigilantes on expeditions in Zone 4. Space must be made.”

“Understood.”

A dark veil of intrigue shrouded the already despaired dormitory. Death counts increased by the hour, those on scouting missions never returned. Veterans were given no respect nor admiration. Soldiers guarded the Q3 street, deserters were faced by the wrath of a bullet to the heads.

A messenger from the army made promptly for the office, there, the secretary, who’d been strict and kind in her own way, was forced to listen silently. “-Manager of the Central Western branch, Captain Soong hereby orders under the authority of the army to rally the remaining forces into a frontal assault. Heroes are to be sent to Whuotan. Paperwork has been issued for leadership to be transferred.” File delivered; the wooden door shut.

“Manager,” voiced she loudly, “-vigilantes art be killed needlessly. We should send them home, the area’s turned anarchic wasteland. I beg of you, allow them to live – I regret not taking a sterner approach in securing our rule.”

.....

"I'm sorry, once the military is involved there's no turning back. If they want the people to die, then I'll have to obey. I'm not so much emotionless to not feel the pain of prospective fighters be send to their deaths – my hands are tied, politics is a harsh game, those at the top win, frankly, branch managers are little more pawn with clout, nothing more, nothing less."

"There's still time," she rummaged through her keyboard, "-I'll find a way to save them, I swear."

Dawn of the 5th of December, a miracle veered a gentle glow. *Knock, knock,* a reinforced window buckled deeply, *knock, knock,* '-who is it,' drool down the face and eyes bloodshot red, '-I told them to let me sleep,' off the numb arm and towards the side, *knock, knock,* two ladies dressed in humble sheets yelled furiously.

'Get us out,' figured from lipreading, '-the sample must have worked.' *click,*

"-WHY AM I NAKED?"

"-WHAT SHE SAID!"

"Shut up," hand around the sliding door, "-causing such a ruckus in the morning. It's been weeks, check the clock," no care to their outfit, "-check the bag, there should be clothes, I'll have breakfast ready."

Whistles paired to chops, "-Angela from Squad 32, right?"

"Yeah," fingers ran down her hair, "-how long have we been asleep, no wait," memories returned, "-I was killed by Antronla, afterward, a peaceful light, my body was curled into a cocoon of some sort."

"About what happened," she fully sat on the cold floor, flesh to wood, "-I vaguely remember going crazy. I saw people die – I jumped headfirst to save my friends; I think."

"Don't sit down for long. I'm sure there's an explanation... maybe we're slaves to his will, turned to suit his need, this place looks like a lair..." couches, clothes flung onto the floor, empty water bottles, "-not a lair," she stopped, "-looks more like my apartment, granted a little tidier.

"Let's get changed."

"Not so fast," voiced across the hall, "-you ladies, if I'm blunt, smell. Head downstairs and take a shower, necessary supplies are in the adjacent room. Do not dilly-dally."

"S-Sure," bare feet scattered in a plump-like noise. The stairs felt cold and distant – lighting differed for below had a clearer blueish feel. Chatter and laughter permeated, "-I hear people," voiced Angela.

"Nice, you have ears," refuted Apatha immediately prowling along the vague corridor.

"What are you doing?" whispered Angela sharply, "-you'll get caught."

"-Ha-ha, I'll visit the toilet," diffused outwards.

"Don't worry, I'll be fine," said she with a wink, the open doorway stood a few centimeters away.

"-Hina's too funny," a strong figure turned the corner, "... the eyes locked. Apatha tried to give a smile, "-A GHOST!" reverberated.

'I better run,' went across Angela's mind.

“What you mean ghost?” a horde of steps ran out, “-a monster dares invade our asylum!”

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“H-hey g-guys,” said she, “-s-surprise?”

“APTHA?”

‘Looks like the kids have met one another,’ the stove toggled, ‘-the quest here has been accomplished. They were good test subjects; the cure’s ready for sale after a few more tests. Still haven’t found the reason why Hades’ wishes to invade,’ then and there, a rash idea came to mind, ‘-why am I worried about a few monsters. If they’re from another land, I should be able to converse.’ Out the coat and into Kniq’s uniform, ‘-if I want answers, I’ll go get them.’

Clap, clap, clap, ran up the stairs, “-Igha, where you headed?”

“Fia,” they cross paths, “-I need to check on a few things. Angela and Aptha have awakened, I’m leaving them in your care, see you soon.” *Blood-Arts: Enlian,* wings sprouted to a harsh flap, the ecstatic guests were blown under the sheer strength.

The signet ring glowed, ‘-I’m the king of monsters, why should I be worried about other monsters.’

Wake from thy deep slumber, humble follower of Scifer’s domain, heed me, the ruler of monsters summons thee, chosen one, rise, Phenox, the spirit of Fire! a ball of blinding yellow, an entity of four wings, majestic in glow and strength flapped to sprinkle ambers. ‘-The spirit of Fire, a mix between a dragon and the legendary phoenix – the first guardian of Scifer’s Domain.’

“You summoned me, majesty?”

“Sorry to impose,” stood on its back, “-I require strength and thy aura to get a message across.”

“Per thy wish, majesty, I shall obey.”

The journey cut across the warzone and into Fuda Mountains, ‘-there’s the portal. They’ve surrounded it with a high-tier barrier, the monsters look strong, very good fortification for an outpost. I sense heavy curse energy, the ground’s turned dark-purple, cause of the monster curse, maybe?’ they circled intimidatingly.

“Kazalon, Kazalon.”

“What is it sushi?” returned a lanky silhouette.

“How very rude,” it moved at a snail’s pace, “-look above, someone’s located the portal.”

“The vibrance, it must be of angelic nature.”

“Kazalon, Voraum...”

“Lord Cimi!”

“Not up, look down.”

“Lord Cimi, you’ve taken the small form. To what must we owe this pleasure?”

“To survey the current progress,” it stared up, “-care explain who dares move into the demon lord’s territory?” the robed fellow grew.

“Dive for the earth, Phenox,” an arrow fired against a hemisphere, the respective auras countered each to a tremendous shockwave, dark woods charred to nothingness, a noticeable circle sprang forth.

“State thy name!” smoked from the aftermath.

“King of Monsters,” said aloud, “-Igna Haggard,” he leaped and landed in an intense wave.

“King of monsters?” the body buffed to a sizeable entity, “-wait...”

“Hold on...” remarked Igna, the transformation halted and reverted, “-Cimi?”

“Correct,” returned a shorter humanoid outline, “-what you said was true, you’re a Demonlord.”

“Yes,” he nodded, “-great, we can skip the whole intimidation thing. I’ve come to ask why Hades’ decided to invade Alphaia.”

“What’s the purpose, would you stop us?”

“Depends, if the conquest of the world is at stake, I might have to step in. Otherwise, if it’s only occupying Fuda Mountains, I’ll be happy to look the other way.”

“Decision isn’t mine to make, for I serve the son of Hades. The conquest is nothing more than a hobby. We’re not using our whole army for such a trifling matter. The Underworld is a harsh and boring place. The portal was something like a chance to let loose and run around. I’ve heard Hades’ looking for a wife. Who knows?” it shrugged, “-about you, to control such an angelic beast, what is thine rank?”

“I was once a god who fell from grace, betrayed by those I trusted. Regardless, I’ve gained more in starting over.”

“Other questions?”

“Will you invade past the gates?”

“Those flimsy things?” Voraum laughed, “-the thrill in the pursuit. Long as they fight, we’ll fight.”

“Silence Voraum.”

“I apologize, lord Cimi.”

“Back to us, the orders are unclear. It’s been said to scout, make notes, gather intel, and fight. All is up to my lord; afraid I can’t say much.”

“It was enough for me,” he sighed, “-here’s a proposition, the land here isn’t ripe for many conquests. The town itself is naturally secluded, gain control and there’s no way to expand outwards. If possible, investigate the north,” a map conjured, “-the monsters under my dominion currently lay siege in a war of attrition. Similarly, I care not for conquering the land – training is what matters. If thee wishes to fight stronger enemies, I present a grant occasion to fight my minions instead of human weaklings. Who is to say, the northern province is large to sustain both of our forces. Take my offer into consideration,” hopped on the radiant Phenox, “-send my regards to Zagreus.”

“Should I take him down?” inquired Kazalon.

“No, wait,” interjected Cimi, “-he knew who lord Zagreus was. The thought of defeat never crossed his mind, any questions about it. The King of Monster isn’t one to be trifled with. Strong as we are, he provided a map and gave supple information. The lay of the land is correct. Voraum, see to it the northern region is investigated. Kazalon, marshal the forces, the humans are coming to play.”

“Phenox, I appreciate you answered my call to action.”

“Worry not sire, I shall always be ready to aid the monarch,” they hovered far into the sky, above the clouds and close to heaven, so was the impression, “-may fate be on thy side,” the wings stretched and vanished into a ball of light fuzz.

The wind blew across the body, ‘-freefall,’ he smirked and dipped towards terminal velocity. *Incoming call,* interrupted the tranquility, “-Igna, where are you?”

“Quiet down, what’s the matter, Fia?”

“A heavily wounded messenger is at the doorstep; he’s barely holding onto life.”

“Aptha’s awakened isn’t she, ask her to administer first aid, I’m on my way,” the call ended, the miniature scape gained in size, ‘-if it’s not one thing.’

“Where’s the alchemist?”

“On the way,” said she pushing across the crowd, “-Aptha, how’s the boy?”

“Barely hanging onto life,” sweat dowsed the visage profusely, “-I’m in no shape to use special abilities.”

“Don’t worry about me,” he panted, “-nurse Ada wanted this note to reach the a-alchemist,” the pulse slowed.

“Not yet,” she cried, “-not on my watch.” A cloud of fear, sorrow, and anger deadened the ward.

.....

“I leave for a few minutes,” footsteps echoed, “-I’ll take it from here,” *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

Leader of squad 05 had doubts, ‘-those were gunshot wounds... has the military crossed the line of no return?’

“Lord Alchemist, I appreciate the fast response. Matters have sadly taken a turn for the worse, more and more fighters are being sent to their deaths. The hospice is being monitored heavily by the military. Please investigate the matter. Claudia’s alive and well, she visited a few hours ago in the company of a scholar. There’s a big plot brewing behind the scene, only a man of connection can remedy the situation.”

‘She honestly sent this boy to die for this note, is she daft or useless? The monsters are gearing for their next assault. Zagreus, son of Hades’ pulling the strings. Searching for a wife it said.’

Knock, knock,

“What now?”

“Someone has come to visit.”

“Injured?”

“Yeah.”

‘I want to die...’

Chapter 708: True Demonlord [39]

“Careful, my arms are precious commodities you know,” flitched the lady.

“Nurse Ada, care to explain why,” a trail of dirt followed till the current spot, for injuries, they were mild. Uonl and the rest were cooped in the training area, Angela and Apatha were the star of the show, ‘-so dirty, éclair’s rubbing off on me.’

“I had to,” returned she, “-the note, did you receive it?”

“This one?”

“No, there was another. They must have captured him,” she bit her nails, “-listen, I was told by the Manager’s secretary to transmit this,” an odd little trinket laid on the table, “-I should get going, my absence will be noticed sooner or later.”

“Ku-,” quick shake of the head, “-Fia, care to escort the nurse to the hospice?”

“Sure thing.”

.....

‘Little gadget,’ clambered upstairs, ‘-I wonder,’ it connected perfectly to the interface. There, éclair took charge and figured the bits and bobs, “-a communication device,” said he. *Beep,* red dots flickered in temporal pitches, “-hello?”

“Good, the device is working,” returned a muddied and noisy voice, “-I, Lina Holseter, daughter of Duke Holseter of Eastern Dostein, request thee, Viscount of Glenda, Igna Haggard, brother-in-law to Emperor Sultria VI, to aid in my moment of plight,” the connection ruptured.

‘The secretary was a noble?’ he gazed to the flashing screen.

“The last known location is here my lord,” displayed éclair.

‘Understood.’

The loudness of patrolling troupes dulled the supposed ‘free’ land. Two humble outlines stood in the shadow of an office building, “-sure this is ok?” wondered a lesser impressed voice.

“Manager, see the bigger picture,” returned a softer yet present voice, “-if we do not make a move right away, the military might cause irreparable damage.”

“I don’t see why a duchess would get involved in such a dangerous task. I mean, the army isn’t shy of hostage killing nobles to further their plans.”

“Which is why us royalists have decided to fight against the militants, they want to sway Alpha into total military rule, a dictatorship emphasized on weapons opposed to human rights.”

“Human rights are such a tasking subject. Implying human alienates the demi-humans and vast majority of the habitats on our planet.”

“Manager, shall we have the discourse at a later date.”

“Why are you so hyper?”

“Look yonder,” a speeding bike broke through the already devastated barricade and made for the office. Trees blocked the road at intervals, ‘-this may be the only chance we have,’ her palms clenched in prayer. The spark of black greatened to a stop, “-over here,” she hailed.

Helmet off, “-good afternoon, princess of Dostein.”

“Shush,” said she timidly, “-let’s head upstairs.” Intrigue was tantamount to a person’s daily need to eat, drink, and sleep. The longer the days were, the more involved Igna found himself in Alpha. A globally admired leadership held vile secrets. Office swapped for a restroom, bland, a white table, empty water cups, cheap plastic, and metal chairs – an unnervingly uncared carpet, and lastly, black-out curtains.

“Viscount Haggard,” said she.

‘...’ he turned listlessly akin to the manager whomst laid on the couch with an open book to the face.

“-my name’s Lina Holseter, daughter of Duke Holseter,” a slight bow and a curtsy.

“Viscount of Glenda, Igna Haggard, a pleasure to make thy acquaintance Lady Holseter.”

“Lina is fine.”

“Igna should do as well,” they walked side by side to the nearest window. The scene was of melancholic disarray of buildings and constructions fallen to the whims of monsters. Military vehicles roughly surveyed a perimeter, the office seemed to be held hostage. Search parties diligently scanned trees, no rock left unturned, a broken barrier was humiliation.

“I’ll cut to the chase. Mass genocide is planned to occur in two days. See over there, the troops marshal dormant squad members and brand them with an armband. Red for high priority, yellow for those to be left alive if found breathing, and green for those to be killed regardless of the battle’s outcome.”

“Isn’t it the AHA’s fault?”

“True, the organization is lax, cares for public appearance, and abstains from getting into publicly damnable situations. The heroes are powerful and obedient, they care for the company’s image and would never go against the policies. Vigilantes, firewood to lit the bonfire of repute. In accordance to the policies, the deeds are published and fed to the media, on the contrary, tis snuffed without a chance to surface.”

“Nothing wrong in a cynical way of thought. I’d perhaps follow the same ideology if the company was centered in such a huge scandal. Takes mere flickers to light the flames of revolt.”

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"I understand too," said she distantly, "-still, the carefulness has grown into uselessness. The death count has increased, families implore to have news of their loved ones. Unlike the military, the AHA hasn't the means to gratify death in the field of battle. Was a long time coming, the directors struck a deal for the transfer of operations."

"What's the problem then?"

"To start anew, the plate must be cleaned. The fighters are to be killed, genocide, does the word not sway thy heart a little?"

"Genocide, my lady?" he exhaled in refute, "-have you not read the atrocities of Arda, the death of thousands? Mere hundreds won't shake my emotions."

"The devil of Glenda is heartless as rumor says."

"Never presented to be viewed as a hero or savior."

"Will you not aid my cause?"

"Tell me, lady Lina, the world moves on give and take. Why should I accept the offer, is there perhaps anything of value I can gain?"

"A good reputation?"

"Risking my life to be a good Samaritan, such outdated ideology of a hero. The selfless one isn't true, I apologize, my lady, thy prince shant arrive in silvery armor."

'Hopeless,' her mood swayed, her forehead locked onto the cold windowpane which foamed, '-I should have prepared a more tantalizing offer...' her fist clenched.

"Worry not," fell onto her mindless ears, "-I never said I won't aid. Tell me of the royalist and the militant, what's the greater goal?"

"Really?" her lashes gleamed, "-thank you, viscount," she grabbed his hand tightly, "-I promise to do whatever thee wishes," she pulled closer.

"Understood," returned an unphased demeanor, "-lady Lina, forgive my asking, was that the attempt at seduction?"

"Damn it," she snarled and stepped away, "-I tried, I guess?"

"So much for the innocent friend next door act. In summary, the royalists wish to halt the militants to gain power. The latter wishes to gain control of the land and expand to encapsulate Ogdawoan – thereon, use said clout to fire at the noble faction, who also wish to gain control of the town. Considering the Count Oathtall's conviction..."

"Correct," peering onto the broken land, "-personally, I care not for what the factions want. My goal is to rescue the remainder, the ungodly amount of 'return home safely' emails and letters I've read is heartbreaking. Wives, sisters, husbands, mothers, fathers, name and there's one to refer."

"Save the vigilantes?"

“Yes.”

“What about the plague?”

“Those infected will be forced to stay no matter the circumstance.”

“Basically, abandon the fallen and help the able?”

“Realism,” said she.

“Understand,” he placed a hand atop her shoulder, “-the reason I even considered to help is so there’s an excuse to leave. My time spent here was short and informative. I now understand what the enemies wish to accomplish. Live and let live.”

Q3 Zone 2, a prominently deadly silence held the atmosphere in a chokehold. Squads were broken into Red, Yellow, and Green. Noncombatants, medical workers, were also rounded in an evacuation exercise.

“Ada, are you well?”

“I’m fine doctor,” she replied joyously, ‘-goddess Syhton, I humbly pray for the success of my comrades’ venture. Help us thwart evil and guide our way to light,’ her watch kept a mild unnoticeable blink.

Days passed to the 8th of December. The sun rose abruptly, ‘-this should do it,’ *snap,* the last bundle of equipment teleported. The alchemist quarters stood empty; chatter displaced into mild ticks of bugs. ‘I wonder what Cimi decided.’

Incoming Transmission,

“-Team 01, ready,” Uonl, Angela, Kinka, and Ginka remained on standby.

“-Team 02, ready,” Froy, Gilert, Hina, stood in wait.

“-Team 03, ready,” Meza, Jonl, Apha, walked to the rendezvous spot, a warehouse in the muddled concrete jungle.

“Understood,” he stepped into the morning shine.

“Iгна,” waved Fia, “-I’m happy,” she smiled, “-today’s the day we alter fate.”

“Don’t get so worked up,” he tapped the back of her head. An overview of the battlefield manifested in his thought, ‘-talk about a risky operation.’

“Master, the gate is about to open.” *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.*

Pale-faced figures shuffled forward; a heavy guard of soldiers blocked the escape. *Beep, beep, beep.* ‘-we’re going to die.’

‘I wish I could have eaten mom’s cooking one last time.’

‘The end is near, no more starvation, no more abuse.’

Heed the decree of thy king, monsters hidden in the earth’s belly, the sky’s clasped hand, and the prison of space and time. Free thyself, the street covered in a slowly moving thick liquid, *-conjunction – Realm of Monsters, Arknic Gates.*

“Begin the operation,” fired across the many receptors.

Blood, bodies, and death, washed from the opened gates. Team 01 stood prominent before the coming horde; the outer gates parted to aid in an easier cleanup operation.

“Fia, go help Team 01.”

“Understood.”

“-Uonl, the vigilantes are on their way, convince them to head eastward.”

The thickly coated streets spawned goblins, manticores, serpents, golems twice the size of certain buildings, “-ENEMY REPORTED,” yelled across the army’s channel.

“AMBUSH!” the monsters rained death, armored vehicles swept to the side effortlessly, ‘-we’ve taken the offensive.’

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“Army’s sending reinforcements.”

‘The battle finally begins.’

“VIGILANTES,” cried Angela, “-Hear us, time isn’t for death, rather, tis for survival.” Kinka and Ginka leaped to the front and manifested humongous barriers, “-if you wish to survive, aid us!”

“Squad 32 is alive,” screamed an unknown from the crowd, “-I don’t want to die here. Follow Uonl, they’re going to save us.”

“He’s right,” the aura shifted, “-no more senseless deaths.” Yonder rose the smoke of chaos, “-enough being used, the time has come to reclaim our freedom!”

‘Instigators,’ he leaped into the fray, “-Good job, Kinka, Ginka. Meza’s team is ready to evacuate.”

Bang, bang, gunshots rattled the hospice, guards fell, “-Now,” cried Ada, “-transport is here, start evacuating the patients,” workers ran from ward to ward. “-Jonl reporting, the hospice is just about ready for extraction.”

“éclair, you heard the man,” transmitted Igna. Rotors menacingly flew into the restricted area. ‘-About time I leave,’ he grappled to the helicopter, “-Jonl speaking, the noncombatants are on their way out, good luck.”

‘Here’s the hard part,’ he stood before a coming horde, ‘-buying time for the fighters to escape.’

‘He had to give me the worse mission,’ complained Lina tucked into the tree line close to where Kul made her explosive entrance. The somewhat guarded garrison bore their guns inward, explosions and gunfire marred the focus. Armored vehicles sped along the road, *beep,* she clicked and ruined the barrier. Meza gave a thumbs up in passing. ‘-I better run too.’

“ENEMY’S BROKEN THROUGH!” cried the remainders.

“Captain Soong,” headquarters rang, “-the vigilantes have revolted. An unknown insurgent organization has broken through the ranks.”

“Captain Soong,” shoes menacingly halted before the desk, “-allow me to neutralize the escapees, there’s only a single way out. Marshal the forces there, have reinforcement move from the other side.”

“Listen to what the man says.”

“You’re going to kill them, aren’t you?”

“Yes sir.”

“Go on my modified killing machine, show them what it means to mess against the Cobalt Unit.” Down the alleys and towards the alchemist quarters, batch upon batch filled the various trucks, vans, and cars. At the helm stood Meza, fast and efficient. Before the army realized what hit, those sentenced to death were evacuated.

‘Seamless,’ gunfire nulled in the distance, ‘-a well-coordinated assault.’

“Uonl reporting, the last transports headed out.”

“Froy here, the monster nor the army have attacked yet. We’re pulling out.”

“Jonl here, noncombatants and workers have landed safely – moving to the last phase.”

“Iгна, what about you?” inquired Fia.

“Don’t worry and retreat,” an army stormed forth, ‘-here begins my battle.’

Chapter 709: True Demonlord [40]

“Is it wise to leave him alone?”

“Worry about the others for once,” exclaimed an impatient voice.

“Understood.”

‘Good, get away from here, the place is about to become a warzone,’ the nonchalant confidence dulled to a frown, ‘-I had a dream, a bad dream. My death was written and played out in slow motion; the whole point of death was to reincarnate without the curse of misfortune. Perish the thought, I know the curse is gone. This is different, time felt faster, precognition of a dire outcome. Death of the vigilantes, the destruction of my acquaintances. At the helm stood a crown, a signet – Cobalt Unit.’

Monsters rampaged through the open gates – meanwhile, at the opposite end, the summoned monsters vanquished the soldiers. Heavy, light, strong, agile, footsteps of various characteristics, inclusive of slithers, crawls, and growls, the King of Monster’s army sped past. *Woosh,* a severed head flung to the back, the brutal massacre between monsters began.

Crack, “-you’ve come.”

“...”

.....

“Cardie,” her hollowed sockets peered outward, the expression remained strut in discomfort. ‘She’s a shell of the former self,’ noise echoed at her back, a platoon of soldiers, reinforcement by the looks,

beelined to the escapees. *Go forth, Vengeance,* ‘-protect until the evacuation is complete. Afterward, kill those who dare show malicious intent.’ Unrecognizable limbs landed shy of his stead.

“Alchemist of the University of Rotherham,” a manlier voice spoke through her empty lips, “-never mind, I should use the title of Demonlord, shouldn’t I. My name’s not of importance, and I care none. My master, the new leader of the Cobalt Unit, has decreed this to Phantom and the Haggard lineage. Long has thy tyranny outlasted this realm, an army of God slaying puppets will be thy downfall. Hades’ might I add, is also complicit in the scheme.”

“And, should I be worried?” mana expelled at an increasing rate, a dark mist manifested in his shadow, “-go after me, leave the Haggards out of the scheme. There’s no need to involve innocents.”

“Don’t preach innocence, damned hypocrite. Watch closely,” she pulled out a dagger and stabbed her heart, magical circles lit around the handle. Emptiness in the eyes fermented in a reddish glow, “-rest in peace, Igna,” she levitated and glowed – behind, the allies were bested, gathering forces closed the distance. ‘-Barrier,’ *BOOOM,* shockwave resounded across the whole town, monsters had skin and flesh torn by the shimmer of light. *Crack,* ‘-strong,’ the protection fractured and pushed him backward. Palms to the ground, eyes barely able to look straight, the light intensified, skin melted to barebones, ‘-holy light?’ the expulsion of power rebounded to an amplified effect, physical damage neutralized, elemental and spiritual entities fell instantly, the mana in the atmosphere vanished – an ulterior domain rose.

“I’m awake,” said an entity of old, the armor, the visage, the hairstyle, and the undeniable allegiance to the gods, “-you,” a decorated sword rose toward the fallen man, “-on thy feet, vile beast. Thee who dares assault and insult the god’s art be vanquished. Raise thy head and face me in faith.”

‘My element’s out cold,’ the skin regenerated, ‘-no blood nor sustenance. Blood-Art’s immortality’s been nullified. The dream was real,’ clambered to a stand, “-who are you?” priority of healing focused onto the arms and hands, the burnt cheeks partly healed, the charred flesh replaced to a large black scar.

A thunder-shaped crack enlarged, “-my dear Staxius Haggard,” adorned in golden jewelry, a darker complexion, feline eyes, and the beauty rivaling that of an angel, “-have you forgotten my name?” she stopped. The muscular warrior, bearing the mask of a pharaoh, knelt.

“Cleopatra,” he gritted, “-why are you here?”

“You remember me?” she chuckled, “-same reason I was here long ago,” *snap,* countless mirrors summoned, “-where is the symbol of Kronos?”

“What symbol?”

“Play the fool,” the mirrors focused onto escapees, “-and they die.”

“Go ahead and try,” he smirked, “-bluff does not work on me.”

“Fair,” she made for a golden throne, “-have at it, Aeeil.”

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“Your wish is my command,” an arrow-shaped projectile summoned out the portal.

“Too bad there’s none who can protect them,” said a smug shrug. A raise of the hand pulled a staff from the differing portal, “-don’t sneer at me. The domain of Eduipt is a place of happiness and joy, for me anyway.”

“Look again,” he smiled, the projectile reflected to the sender, *crash,* a cloud of golden specks rained onto the throne. She sat unbothered; the warrior took the attack without prejudice. Once the dust settled, another rose from the shadow of her bare feet, of which held a golden anklet.

“Seems there are stronger foes outside the domain. No matter, the priority isn’t them. Threats won’t shake the heart of a cold murderer, would it?” she smirked sadistically, “-come forth spiritual guardians of Pharaohs, thy queen, Cleopatra VII Thea Philopator, orders for the man’s utter defeat. Spare no mercy.” Identical masked warriors appeared from the closed portals, the blood-filled street cleared into a land of sand and heat. The throne was distant to look down from a pyramid, servants waited beside her throne, big fans gently swayed her black hair, her feet kicked onto a prostrated half-naked man. “-do make the fight entertaining,” spoke directly in the ears. Scimitar swords clad in golden-yellow slashed and drew blood. ‘-my abilities are being neutralized,’ he dodged and sidestepped, ducks and hops didn’t do much, the faster he moved, the quicker the opponents learned and adapted.

A downward strike came suddenly, he guarded with crossed forearms, the blade halted midway through the bones, pain shot throughout the body, the moment of idealness sufficed, the four remainders thrust, pulled, and thrust again, each blow rang harshly, life in the eyes emptied, ‘-I knew it,’ he fell, ‘-the nightmare was precognition of my coming death. What a pain,’ the head hit the sand, ‘-this is what it’s like to fight myself. No hope of refuting, escape plans blocked, and no chance of survival. Cleopatra knows my weakness,’ he rolled over to stare at the sky, tears of blood dripped, ‘-no regrets, suppose death has been part of my life ever since birth.’

“How pitiful,” *crunch,* “-the reincarnation of Staxius Haggard,” her naked foot laid atop the bloodied stomach, “-if you can’t defeat this easy of a domain, there’s no way thou art ready for the godly realm. Lixbin was wrong about you,” she shamefully kicked the carcass, “-the boon of godhood is gone. No matter the strength acquired, vampire or Origin, it won’t help.”

“Stop playing dead,” said a sharp response.

“Let me go, Lilith.”

“Don’t intervene, Intherna, this isn’t the time.”

“Miira, tell her to let me go this instant!”

“Intherna, I’m sorry. We can’t jump in,” an undertone of rage and anger spooked the others, “-we promised, didn’t we?”

“Yes, we did,” said Gophy, “-leave him alone.”

“Heartless!” she cried, “-I’m jumping in, no matter the consequences.”

‘I know those voices; they’re fighting for real. What’s happened to me anyway,’ *thud,* the hands snapped to her ankle, *thud,* the ground shook, *thud,* “-LET ME GO!” she screamed.

"Cleopatra," the eyes opened in deep crimson, the symbol of death lit in the depth of the abyssal gaze, "-death was for naught."

"ATTACK HIM!" warriors summoned in dozens.

Burnt eternal in my domain, I, Igna Haggard, the inheritor of death, calls forth the flame which purges gods and demons alike. Set ablaze for I've ordered so, Death Element: Abyssal Wrath, flames conjured from a somber realm, the attackers fell into dust. *Death Element: Chains of Alok,* stakes summoned in a star shape (an X in the middle of which held a firm straight line) threads of white linked her limbs and forcibly pulled onto the edifice. Her arms and legs stretched, the head glued to the backbone of the construction, "-centuries ago, before magic was accepted, the story of a white witch, lost to the passage of time, speak of her tragedy and misunderstood kindness. The priest, Alok, foolish to the ways of the spirit, performed the first burning to the stakes. Her regret, seething rage, and light heart turned dark, cast a powerful curse onto the descendant and allies to his cause. Long story short," he rose, the wounds healed, "-emotions have the power to engrave into the very fabric of history."

"What have you done?" she gritted,"-Eduipt is my realm, there's no way to move without my approval. IGNA HAGGARD!"

"Since we're old friends," he smugly climbed to the stake, "-why not have a little watch party," scimitar in hand, two strokes sliced off her clothes, "-how about a little deal," pulled closer, the emotions of the trial ran through the stakes and into her body, "-I've dialed her pain to a minimum."

"What do you want?" her strong glare didn't halt, "-is my body the only thing thee cares for?"

"Don't think so highly of yourself," the remainder of the garments fell, "-I'm not interested in carnal pleasures. Instead, the humiliation of a queen is way entertaining."

"IGNA HAGGARD!"

"Stop screaming," *smack,* "-I'm right here, I can hear you, understand?"

Blood dripped from her mouth; "-how can you move in my domain?"

"There, wasn't that easy to formulate?" he dropped onto the sand ridden ground, "-the plan to defeat me was perfect," he side-glanced, "-until greed and the sadistic nature took over. Killing me was the fatal flaw. You gave death his source of power, how foolish," the mana flowed violently, "-I haven't forgotten our last encounter. Tell me," he sat on her throne, the stakes hovered to the pyramid, "-how does it feel to be at the receiving end?"

"Kill me already," fired she, "-I won't reveal information."

"I know," the legs crossed, "-and I don't care for the information. Zeus and Lucifer are partly involved. The Cobalt Unit, the elf's self-destruction, a rift in the realm, I know the gist of what has happened. Don't forget," he tapped his temple, "-my strength has always laid up here."

"You're a fool to think I'll give up so easily. The demonic and godly realms are wary. Creation, Death, and Time, the trifactor of power have grown distant to the heavenly world. If I die, expect both realms to come in stride – you won't survive the assault, my domain is in its infancy. Besides, Hades has already found his match."

“Silence,” her mouth shut, ‘-infuse power into words, nice idea.’

The disgruntled generals saw the Shadow Realm’s sky turn blue; a gate materialized.

“Told you,” winked Miira, “-do not underestimate the watcher.”

“Cleopatra, there’s one thing I forgot to mention. I don’t care if I’m strong or not,” four portal summoned in the throne’s shadow, “-I have goddesses to guard my back.”

“Took long enough,” reproached Gophy taking a stand to his right.

“We should have run out earlier,” voiced Intherna grabbing his arm to the left.

“Now, now, no fighting you two,” said Miira stood behind the throne.

“What do we have here?” snickered Lilith, “-my poor old husband’s side dish?” her arms crossed mockingly.

“Goddesses,” said Igna, “-I appreciate not intervening, thank you for trusting in me.”

“Stop being modest,” winked Intherna.

“We have business with her,” Miira’s caring self-vanished, “-Gophy, care to do the honors.”

“My pleasure,” her finger rose, “-Cleopatra, the curse of Akina is known to thee, right?”

“No,” her face froze, “-DON’T YOU DARE!”

“Why squirm now?” they surrounded the stake, “-don’t worry, I’ll only conjure my elder daughter.”

“Lilith, Queen of Demons, don’t you dare!”

“Awe,” warm fingers went about her chin, “-the queen feels humiliated?” and down the chest to her hips, “-hey, we promise to be gentle.”

“Igna,” fired Gophy, “-we’ll handle matters from here,” the domain ruptured, “-there’s more fighting to do.” Miira held the queen’s jaws tightly, sapphic lust gleamed.

‘Better not question,’ the realm broke, he fell, the wounds materialized, ‘-conniving queen, she planned for the injuries to remain,’ headstrong before the newly gathered horde, Orenmir unhid from the belt, ‘-use mana and my wounds will deepen. The regeneration should activate sooner or later,’ hand on the grip, ‘-looks like the others are in trouble.’ Metal slid against the sheath, ‘-time to fight.’

Chapter 710: True Demonlord [41]

Skyscrapers, casinos, and the unique infrastructure of the town layout swapped to the south, the extreme end of where matters grew worse. Helicopters of allegiances to Phantom landed. Rescued noncombatants and vigilantes alike ambled to parked planes. The stairway climbed onto freedom and a sliver of happiness.

“There they are,” hailed Jonl, the remainder arrived without trouble. A loud gust blew onto the bystanders, regardless, he strongly made it to Team 01 and 02.

“How was the escape?”

"Frightening," gasped Kinka.

"What about the army, I saw reinforcement make way from the other side?"

"Worry not," winked Ginka, "-we were saved by a strange entity."

"I agree," nodded Meza, "-an ethereal being who vanquished our opponents nonchalantly."

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"Right," a butler walked into view beside whom stood a maid, "-gather round, people."

The crowd waited nervously, "-my name's éclair, I serve the Alchemist known as Igna Haggard. I'm sure the guard is raised and tis fair, I'd have it no other way. The reality of the situation is, we were asked to rescue you from certain death. Comes to no surprise the military had asked for a culling. In response, Lina Holseter, of the Holseter family, pleaded for thy safety. There are multiple jets readied to takeoff – check with the maids for further information. Three flights in bound, Melmark, Hidros, and Dostein. Hidros is for those who wish to escape life in Alpha and start anew. For those critically injured, the trip to Melmark is onward to the hospice, the escort will handle the procedure from thereon. Glad to say, the mission was a success. Congratulations to everyone, luck of retrial and freedom has been bestowed."

Collective relived glances diffused, the butler made for the evacuation teams.

"Uonl, Froy, and Meza," he called, "-might I have a word?"

"Sure," they followed to a somewhat secure location.

"I wish to relay a simple message, a suggestion I dare say. After the battle is concluded, the military will take control of the infected area. There's nothing to be done – the spy network knows no bound. Sooner or later, hitmen will knock on thy door. This comes from my lord, fly to Hidros and start again. Alpha's a place of misfortune, long are the days of the land of dreams faded."

"We run away," murmured Froy, "-fine."

"Are you serious?" refuted Uonl, "-what about the others, are you going to run away?"

"I'm running, I don't care," he shoved Uonl's arms aside, "-I've had enough of seeing my comrades die. So many of us left to be eaten, not once, NOT EVER, did I think my actions would bring peace."

"Calm down," said Meza softly, "-we'll split into three teams, same as before. Uonl, don't mistake arrogance with confidence," he walked to the distraught Froy.

"Shut up," he grabbed both their arms, "-don't walk away, I'm not finished talking. I never said I wasn't coming with. We're sticking together until the whole situation is resolved."

"Glad to see an agreement," added éclair, "-life in Hidros should be easier gained. If working doesn't pan out, there's still monster problem – perhaps sign to an independent guild and earn thy way to a sustainable future."

“We appreciate the kindness,” they broke towards the respective teams. Lines were readied to board the jets, as expected, one bound to Hidros didn’t hold many passengers, not until each team decided to follow the alchemist’s advice.

“éclair.”

“What is it, Starix?”

“Problem,” said she in a maid’s outfit, “-the master’s dot has gone offline.”

“Offline!” the outburst didn’t pull attention, “-I apologize,” they shuffled towards a hangar, hidden from the passengers, “-what’s the meaning of gone?”

“I’d tell you if I could, highly suspect death or worse...”

“Death?” a shiver went up their spine, “-what about death?” a zombie-like creature rose from the pits of shadows, “-what about the death...” heels clapped against the polished floor, “-tell me what happened?” the mask returned to her pocket, the faded outline leaped into view.

“Lady Fia, I’m astonished.”

“How did you mask the presence?” fired Starix, “-should I dispose of her?”

“No, no,” he grabbed her fast arms, “-don’t resort to violence,” he pulled between the maid and princess, “-lady Fia, I have a favor to ask. My lord has gone missing from the radar.”

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“Didn’t he evacuate?”

“No, I’m sad to say, the operation never stated his departure. He is likely to have conjured doppelgangers to fool the military. I should maybe explain how all were able to escape. The instant he dropped onto the battlefield; the evacuees were shuffled into a premeditated escape path. The vehicles, high-end stealth transport, gemstones of Phantom’s research, evaded detection and made for awaiting helicopters. To the army, a replica of the trucks and passengers traveled at a slower pace. That alone wouldn’t fool them for long – create a loud enough mess to set sights on him. Reinforcement was the perfect bait. A trusted ally jumped in, exterminated the forces, and left; they’d be forced to investigate.”

“Can’t he escape?”

“No, I wasn’t finished. After the destruction, the escapee’s trucks would crash against an incoming armored tank and explode. Fake deaths to fool the combatants.”

“What about Igna?”

“He’s cast a large illusion spell, the amount of mana required to keep the show alive is extraneous.”

‘Idiot...’

“My lady, stop!” interjected Starix, “-heading to a battle zone is unwise, reconsider.”

“I’d rather die,” she took flight and left.

“Why not stop her?”

“Starix, a princess should know about the prince charming. Master’s dot vanished; we can’t argue the facts. She’s strong, we’re wise to goad her into scouting the area. Enough talk, let’s end the operation.”

Most of what was said came from hypotheses. Knowledge of the battlefield was long gone, a communication blackout to stall the enemy. An educated guess turned reality. The night wrapped the continent by storm. Fire glared into clouds of smoke. The decrepit land of monsters cleared to a moment of tranquility. The outer gates shut not after an insurmountable amount of carcass spread around the cracked road. Blood and bodily fluid stained the grayish gate yellow, brownish orange, and black. The stench of death choked unfortunate bystanders. ‘-Damn,’ *huff puff,* ‘-regeneration isn’t kicking in,’ he sat with back against the shut gates, head rested to the cold robust metal sheet, the eyes shut. The right leg of the pants tore from the knee down, a devourer got the better earlier in the fight, it cleanly bit off the leg, which regenerated soon after. Marching soldiers’ beeline across Q3, at the helm, Captain Soong.

“Alchemist,” guns hoisted, “-are you alive or dead?”

“Dead,” said a tired response.

“Shortly, yes,” he marched forth, “-tell me, boy, what happened to the vigilantes?”

“Dead,” he coughed, “-same as me,” emotionless crimson-colored pupils glared into his soul, “-the ringleader’s out to play.”

“Son, don’t make this harder on me,” hands clenched behind his back, “-there’s no doubt in my mind the vigilantes are dead,” a slow-moving behemoth crawled to a stop, “-the tank took care of the valiant escape attempt.”

“Guess you had an ace.”

“Correct, an ace which turned the outcome of the war. The match was one very rudimentary I must add, I thought the elated Igna Haggard to be more of a shower than a talker. Guess my genius outshines even I.”

“I was thoroughly beaten...”

“Yes,” *snap,* “-here’s someone we captured. Lina Holseter, daughter of that damned duke, stupid royalist,” hands tied to her back, “-come on then,” he cut the cloth gag and shoved the lady to the same wall, “-how very sad. Two conspirators and high-ranking nobles no less,” stood behind a firing squad, “-the pleasure has been mine, my lord and lady.”

“I don’t want to d-die,” her body shook in fear, “-I don’t want to d-die. I-Igna I-I’m s-s-sorry, w-w-we’re going to d-die because of me.”

“First time facing death?”

“A-are you not s-scared?”

“Look at me,” said he monotonously.

'Fatal wounds,' she gulped, 'h-he was d-dead.'

"Attention," the guns rose.

"Lina, no matter what happens, keep the eyes closed and don't make a sound."

"Why?"

"Listen to me, do not move nor speak, I don't care if you have to piss on the spot, don't do anything."

"Why now," the line readied to fire, 'I'm dead anyway.'

"FIRE!" *bang, bang, bang, bang, bang,* muzzles held tinge of smoke, spots of light flickered into the humid dusk, rain droplets sprinkled.

Spatial-Arts: Wormhole.

Mana Control: Dark Element Variant – Mirror of Lies, the projectiles made contact, 'seriously, mana canceling bullets?' consciousness faded, 'my mana's empty anyway,' he buckled to the side, 'dying two times in a day, what a pain...'

"Halt," a hand rose, "-check if they're dead."

"Affirmative," said a rookie, "-no signs of life, Igna Haggard and Lina Holseter are dead."

"Leave the bodies," he turned, "-can't risk the monster plague's affliction. Today's mission is complete – the royalist will shudder."

'Why me,' hands to her mouth, 'why me...' she crouched inside an abandoned building, footsteps left one at a time, 'don't move,' resounded across the mind, 'don't move,' the eyes firmly shut. Droplets turned into a downpour; the rain washed the dirtied his face.

Stood before the gates, 'Why did you save me?' pale skin and lips gave no reply, 'why me...' dropped to the knees, 'I made the mistake, why did he have to pay...' the secondary person, a decoy, bearing her face, faded into the charred expression of a turned.

'Please make it in time!' a green bullet flashed across the sky, 'where are you, Igna?' landed atop a building, 'what happened?' she looked around to no end, 'the military's retreating?' they reached the dormitory, 'éclair was right,' scanned to the right, 'no.' *Woosh,* water sprayed from the harsh landing, Igna's dead body sat peacefully beside a distraught Lina, tears or rain washed down her face, the empty stare looked on to the passing unchanging gray. Puddles of brown had spots of faded red, brown hair partly turned white, half of the face burnt – a brutal death showed no cause on the last expression.

"H-hey, h-he's just sleeping right?"

"Masked Assassin?" said a timid voice.

"He's sleeping right?" clueless laughter hid the sudden burst of emotion, "-Lina, tell me, what happened?"

"Princess Loftha..."

"Tell me what happened!"

"He used the remainder of his magic to save me."

"He teleported..." Lightning crackled; the 8th of December marked the day when the military gained a stronghold on the infected area.

Knock, knock, the manor rang loud and harsh, *knock, knock.*

'Who in the godly hour of midnight dares pay a visit...'

Knock, knock.

.....

Click, "-STOP BANGING AT THE DOOR, oh, sorry. Princess Loftha?"

"éclair," she fell to her knees, "-I need help," Igna's body hovered inside.

"Starix, bring towels."

"Don't worry about us," said Lina, "-please do something about him..."

"Sorry to say, we're not gods," the maid turned the corner in horror, "-MASTER," escaped a yelp.

"Quiet down," towels wrapped about the ladies, "-Starix, lead them to the shower room, I'll ready a change of clothes."

'Master,' he knelt, '-was this the correct choice?' hoisted onto his back, '-I'm sure there was a reason. It was a hard fight, wasn't it,' up the lift, he cleaned, dried, and readied the body for sleep. The guests were left traumatized by the events of earlier.

"I'm sorry for imposing..."

"I'm grateful," said he chopping vegetables, "-death can come to anyone."

"Aren't you angry at me?" sniffled Lina.

"Master chose to save thine life, therefore, I have no right to interject in the decision. I wouldn't get so worked up. Eat and head to sleep, tomorrow will be a new day."

Bullets wounds healed overnight, *thud,* mana regenerated, the white hair turned dark brown.

Driing, '-what?' scrambled to the alarm, '-I thought I'd wake up on the battlefield. Guess they returned me home,' the palms closed, '-most of me is here,' a quick scan,'-Cleopatra had to intervene and suck out the mana in the atmosphere. Using the inner reserves is bad, still haven't recovered a quarter. Shot after a deathly battle against an army of monsters, very heroic death me,' the doors slid to the balcony, '-fresh air, finally free from the alchemist lifestyle. December's rolled around, perhaps I'll take a vacation and visit mother for the holidays.'