

Death Magic 71

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Whispers

“Are you guys not going to bid Staxius farewell?” Julius stood, he waited for the strangers to react. “Not necessary, he’ll take care of everything.” Millicent walked to the entrance and left for the throne room. Everyone except Fenrir followed her out. “What about you?” He turned to Fenrir who stretched and hopped in place. “No clue,” her attitude changed massively. Out on the battlefield, none could be more diligent, responsible, and immaculate as her. For some reason, the moment Staxius arrived, her persona changed, it grew playful, like a pet seeing its master after a long time. “You should probably go speak with Millicent, Staxius welcomed you into our council, right? Better learn how things work here.” She walked side by side with the siblings. “If I remember correctly, the throne room is to the right?” Julius asked as they reached the doorway. Fenrir nodded and took a sharp left, her stomach growled. Autumn hesitantly looked at her brother, “fine you can go too, I’ll meet with Millicent first.” Two days of living out there were hard, but it was now behind them. “Thanks,” she smiled and followed Fenrir. Julius waited, he watched her sister joyfully skip down the curved hallway. “You haven’t changed a bit now have you, little sister.” He headed to the throne room.

“Avon, why is there two of you?” a crowd of people approached the car, the door opened, and another Avon walked out. “-again I ask, why is there two of you?”

“Its because two is better than one,” they replied simultaneously with enthusiasm, their eyes sparkled. “No, we are not doing this whole thing again,” Staxius carefully maneuvered around the people and reached Void. The car was covered with dust, snow, and dirt. The black body didn’t help either, it just made the whole thing look more disgusting and repulsive. Nevertheless, the interior looked clean as usual. As carefully as he picked her up earlier, he laid her down on the passenger seat which was reclined a bit just as smoothly. The door shut, he went around, “Avon, we don’t have space for you – and I don’t want you to sit on my lap either.” He sternly fixed Avon’s eye, as he made his way around, the people had left already. The car was too dirty for them to care for. The spirits kept standing still near the front, they returned the gaze with a hint of friendliness.

“I did stay in your shadow the entire time you stayed in Arda, or have you forgotten?” the once separated spirits merged once more. “Of course, I haven’t,” the door opened, Staxius entered. *Knock, knock,* Avon’s mood was playful, he tapped the window. “Let me in,” he said, Staxius rolled down the window. “Calm down, just return in my shadow will you,” he didn’t want to play, Ayleth’s health became a priority.

“I apologize for the rather late introductions, I’m Julius Garnet, a battlemage as well as a duke.” A thunderous roar made its way inside, Staxius left. “Greetings duke Julius.” Millicent sat on her seat, that looked down upon anyone. Her height was slightly more elevated than anyone else. “I know we may have been adversaries in the past, but I’m honored to join forces with you.” He didn’t seem fazed nor frightened. The remaining members sat at their respective seats and watched without the interest to jump in. The air felt tight, Millicent and Julius weren’t that keen on speaking to one another. “Can you please turn-off that light behind you?” Julius asked. The menacing lights behind Millicent were bothersome. “No, I’d rather not.” She defiantly refused. “Listen to me, Millicent,” his tone grew serious,

“-that isn’t a request, you’re going to turn that light off right now. Don’t make me remind you who I am, I’m the mage who slaughtered so many lives in the previous war and a duke by title, you shall show me the respect I deserve.” Everyone held their breath, this display of strength made everyone on edge.

“Fine,” Millicent rolled her eyes and the lights turned off, the room as a result grew brighter. The other lights turned on, “way to throw around your weight.” Undrar spoke, she sat in Staxius’s place next to Millicent. “Well done,” the girls spoke amidst themselves, none looked that scared as he had hoped for. “I apologize for that, my old habits came back for a moment there,” he scratched his head. “You needn’t worry, we’re well acquainted with such outbursts,” Undrar reassured him.

“Staxius has decided to include you in Dorchester’s noble council?” Millicent asked, to which he nodded. She sighed, “we were recently enemies and now you want me to be courteous towards you?” Millicent didn’t want to accept it. “I think that’s enough being childish for one day,” Annet spoke out, “-this man here has saved and helped strangers just because we were Staxius’s friend. Did going against our leader give you wings? I’m afraid, dearest Millicent, those wings can melt at any given time if you fly too close to the sun.” she took a quick pause, her eyes looked firm and relentless, “-I don’t mean anything bad by it, don’t get over your head just because we obeyed you once; if you do something to hurt this man here, I swear, Staxius won’t blink twice before killing you.”

“That’s a bit harsh, why did you have to say it that way?” Adelana jumped in. “-she’s just making sure that Julius is trustworthy.” An argument soon followed; part agreed with Millicent while others with Annet. “Ha...ha...ha,” laughter stopped the fight, they were taken by surprise. “I can’t believe you guys are the ones who Staxius thinks as friends. Take a good look at you, you can’t even agree about anything. I was invited to join this noble council by a friend, I don’t have the time nor pleasure of getting belittled by commoners. Frankly, I’d have chosen to send you all to die in Frostrest if I were Staxius. Indecisiveness can bring about total chaos; a weak foundation can’t support a growing kingdom.”

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“I agree with him,” Undrar added, “-we need to be working together, and not quarrel amongst one another. We’ve just fought a losing battle and won. By all means, we should be celebrating but instead, we’re here fighting about letting the one who most certainly saved Annet and Ayleth join us. We should be ashamed; how can we have the audacity to question his integrity.” Everyone fell silent, the words she spoke gave them a needed reality check. “On behalf of this council, I apologize for this rude and inappropriate display.” She stood and bowed. “You needn’t lower your head, and you’re right, we should be celebrating.” His serious tone changed to a more friendly one.

“As you wish,” Millicent spoke, “welcome to the noble council,” she forced a smile. “Welcome,” they all replied simultaneously and left. “Do join us in the tavern, we’re going to drink till we pass out; let’s party the old way.” Annet cheered. “No need to tell me twice,” he followed close behind, the throne room door closed. “Did I say something wrong earlier?” Millicent asked and Undrar listened. “You did nothing wrong, being cautious is something admirable. Sadly, that man is unlike any other, the expertise and talent that he brings will amaze you.” She in turn left, Millicent sat alone. She was frustrated, her fist clenched.

“Do you want power?” a faint whisper tickled her ears. “Who is this?” she quickly fired back and looked all around. “Don’t you wish to be listened to?” she gave up on trying to find out where the sound came

from. "No," she replied unwillingly. "Aren't you just being used, you're just a stepping stone for that man to walk, can't you see?" She shook her head and covered her ears. "No, I'm his friend, without him I'd have been left to die." The whispers stopped. "Call out to me if you desire power, the power to destroy and rule."

"GO AWAY," she screamed, her breathing got out of control. "T-this presence, I've felt this before..." her head felt light-headed.

"Come on in everyone, we've got food and drinks for all. The best thing about it? It's free!" the barkeeper shouted, she was young and was helped with many others. Everything was provided for free, that was one of the conditions. Practically every day and every night, this place was never empty. Though the food was for anyone to take, people still paid, not much, only what they could give. The inhabitants of Dorchester were very considerate, neither did they waste nor acted ungratefully. May it be children to adults, they ate and helped around the castle, some helped with the cleaning, some helped with general maintenance, and most helped in the construction of the inner-camp. The camp outside the castle's progress was regretful, most of the builders and skilled craftsmen were too busy with their daily workload and too focused on building the inner camp. Days had gone by, it began shaping up. Left of the castle as you came in, the merchants and travelers hailing from other provinces had set-up a small market. Next to them, the local blacksmiths, and such. Opposite them, on the right side, small shacks were built, it was the new sleeping quarters.

Day by day, the number of people rejoining castle Garsley was mind-blowing. With the inhabitants of Frostrest, the already crammed castle was now harder to work with. Left as you went into the castle; the room was given to the people; it was bigger than any other. Mainly children and women slept there, on the rock cold floor. Lucky were the ones who got anything remotely smooth to sleep in. The people weren't angry, they were happy, getting food and water was more than enough.

It shone through their eyes, as Julius walked into the fabled tavern. People smiled, and had fun, the kids were livelier. "Welcome stranger," the young barkeeper signaled Julius. He smiled and sat down; the counter was filled with familiar faces. On the opposite end of said counter, his sister was gobbling down food like there was no tomorrow. Fenrir desperately tried to get her to calm down, in the end, she choked – Fenrir laughed and shook her head.

"Can't believe days ago we were nearly killed; you people are amazing." He thought out loud seeing everyone happy. "That's the Dorchester we want to build, a haven for anyone who seeks shelter, a place where nothing is ruled by prejudice. A place free from hate and anger, a place welcoming everyone." Adelana replied. She overheard Julius thinking. "That's indeed a nice dream, I'll help however I can." The barkeep slammed down a mug of beer, the celebration begun.

The scenery went by faster than expected, the black car passed Savaview bridge, and had made it half-way to the capital. "don't you think we're going a bit too fast?" Avon asked. The spirit was one with the car. "Not really, we need to get there before sun-down, otherwise, it's going to be a pain to get in contact with Jona." He continued injecting mana; the car accelerated without any sign of stopping. A few hours had gone by, "Come to think of it, we're now in range to use the radio." The long drive to the capital continued.

“Thank you all for tuning into the afternoon news, I’m your host Aceline, and you’re listening to radio Amber.” The boyish voice stopped and music began. “As you all know, we’ve been through a lot these past few months. New inventions and new magical appliances have taken the market by storm. Not to mention how efficient long-range weapons are growing against mages. All and all, this is probably some bad news for some of you out there. However, there isn’t a thing to threat about, the Order has finally announced when the next inter-magical tournament is going to take place. Massive celebrations will happen throughout Hidros. It’s an edict straight from the emperor; all fighting shall be stopped, the Order is working hand in hand to find out which magical school will come out on top, this calls for festivities. Inter-magical tournament for the listeners who aren’t informed is a competition that pits the students from schools around the kingdom against one another.” The music resumed, Staxius intently listened. “I’ve just got news from my producers that this year’s inter-magical tournament is special. The Order has decided to allow any free-roaming mage or anyone below the age of twenty-five to partake in the quest to be known as one of the chosen ones. More information will be available at any magical school. You, young ones who want to try and test your might; head over to the nearest school and try your luck. Preliminaries will last a total of three months. I won’t bore you with any more detail, if you’re interested, do check in with your local school or just use the information network. On second note, fighting has stopped...” Staxius turned off the radio. “Is something wrong?” Avon asked. Something felt off.

“N-not really, I’m just getting goosebumps thinking about the tournament, I vividly remember the images of my dad fighting.”

“Isn’t it weird that the Order is allowing anyone to participate?” Avon raised a good question. “Not really, the tournament has always been something only the privileged could enjoy. However, students nowadays aren’t from noble factions, sons of wealthy traders and more powerful mages are being recruited each day. This is just an act; all they want from what I’ve guessed is promising talent. There’s been a fall in people who can use magic, it’s already rare enough to be a sorcerer, it’s even harder now.” He concluded, the giant castle walls finally came in sight.

“How do you know that mages are getting rarer, aren’t you just lying?” Avon asked sarcastically. “It was an educated guess, don’t underestimate me, I’ve told you before. ”

“How though, explain further.” Avon was trying to get Staxius on edge.

“Simple, I haven’t heard any rumors or anything about the Order and the inter-magical tournament for ages now. Well, it’s maybe because I was in Dorchester the whole time, but that’s beside the point. My trip to Dundee revealed something – usually right out this time of year, streets would be filled by people gossiping about a new prodigy or someone amazing. Sadly, it was quiet, all and all, it brought me to that conclusion. This may seem confusing for you, but that is what I think about the whole situation anyway.

“I was only joking, but you’ve piqued my interest.” The car drove, the capital grew closer. The previous inter-magical tournament occurred five years ago, Staxius told the truth. People born with the power to manipulate mana grew few, instead, another kind was born. This alteration had been happening over decades, human’s as a species were adapting to survive. New and more powerful humans were born as a result, not mages, but adventurers. Not the common adventurers who Staxius met in the past, but once who had the boon to gain strengths and ability surpassing the living. They could acquire skills

without training, the only thing they said about this matter was, “I don’t know, I get a feeling like I can do a move, and then

bam

it happens and I feel stronger somehow.” Their bodies were also incredibly resilient to poison and healed twice as fast, they were like mages who didn’t have to cast nor use mana. These group of people became known as adventurers, the meaning of that title changed massively. They were essential for a kingdom to survive, though not as important as mages, their strength was on par. The whole ranking system was revised, guilds grew more popular.

[Chapter 72](#)

Return to Claireville Academy

“Eira, Eira,” faintly, someone spoke as if whispering. “Yes,” stood outside in the open where the air felt chilly, Eira watched eagerly. “Can you please come and teach me how this spell works?” the same voice asked in a gentle manner, devoid of any imperfections; the voice felt perfect. “You always study and practice so hard,” she turned around and faced the girl who shyly stood. “B-but...” she tried to fight back, the sun’s ray got reflected and made her look away. “Well, there’s nothing wrong with that.” The wind flowed inside, Eira stood on a balcony overlooking the dormitories. “Will you or will you not help?” she pouted. “You’re always so keen, fine – the gymnasium should be opened.”

A few days had gone by since Eira arrived at the academy. Her enrollment didn’t go smoothly; first, the students spread rumors throughout the compound. Though it all changed right after the battle test, she turned into a celebrity. The small display of strength didn’t sooth the animosity growing by the kids of upper status. The battle to get a place to sleep went on for long until the girl she now calls friends made arrangements with the director. By all means, Eira Haggard was recognized as a noble and had the right to stay in the noble dormitory but it was full at the time. So were the commoner’s dormitory; in that moment of peril, a young girl from a powerful individual approached her. Said girl was fascinated by Eira’s strength, though a shy person by nature, she managed to make Eira her roommate. They both shared a room in the upper-class dormitory. The building was located behind at the extremity of the rather expansive school-grounds. It stood on a small hill and watched over the commoner’s student house.

As she found a place to stay, Red-Fury was left out into the open. It was parked near the upper-class dorm on a small asphalted area. From where Eira stood earlier, the car was right below her. All and all, Eira quickly adapted to her new environment. She was very bright in her academics and as well as talented in combat training. Her skill level was already above the first and second years, but the results from her battle report weren’t complete yet. Rumors went about that Paien were to retire in the coming years. After all this time, he never took under his wing an apprentice, “they are all worthless,” he said in an interview.

Echoes of a spell hitting a training dummy reverberated throughout the empty gymnasium. The latter was one of two, the first one was the massive battle-arena and the one they were present in now was the normal one. A place where people could partake in the pleasures of sports, though, most preferred the greenish pitch outside. As a result, the second building grew silent and lonely, with the expectation of eager students who want to sneak in some practice before sleep. “Ysmay, come on you need to focus

your mana." She took a deep breath, "-like this," an ice-spear shot out and destroyed the dummy. "My bad," Eira ran and replaced it. "Now you try," she wiped her forehead and smiled. "O-ok," her posture looked hesitant and unnatural, she was afraid of her magic. "Don't worry, just relax and you'll be fine."

"Rosespire is truly a place of wonders now isn't it?"

"You there stop." A guardsman signaled Staxius, the car dirty; wasn't that desirable to look at. "What's the matter?" he rolled down his window. "I'm afraid you can't go in today," the guard made up excuses. Behind him, other cars – expensive and elegant ones were let through without any question. "This place never changes, does it?" Staxius ignored the guards and spoke to himself. "Excuse me?" the watchman stopped and carefully stared. "Don't you have any magic spells that can clean Void up?" Staxius spoke to the car, the guard chuckled – it was comical. "I'm afraid not," Avon replied through the speakers. Hearing it, the unsuspecting man stepped back and unconsciously pulled out his handgun. "Step out of the vehicle this very instant." He yelled, the other soldiers heard and came to see what was going on.

"No need to raise a scene," the door opened, cars going in and out of Rosespire slowed their pace to see whatever was going on. "Want me to put my hands up in the air too?" he asked sarcastically. "Master, you're being awfully docile, want me to handle this in your stead?" Avon proposed, "-we need to get Ayleth to that doctor." A young boy appeared out of nowhere, the watchmen's vigilance rose. "You made this situation far worse." Staxius fired back, an argument between them both soon began.

"Are we nothing but jokes to you?" one of the men surrounding them spoke, "Shut up, this has nothing to do with you." Staxius and Avon yelled simultaneously. "Insolence," *Bang, bang,* a pistol was fired. "I swear, you people never learn," Staxius caught one, "-indeed master, they never learn," Avon caught the other. "What are you idiots doing?" heavily built men rushed outside. The way he was dressed and the symbols over his shoulder told his rank. It was the commanding officer of the main gate's in and out affairs. "I apologize for my subordinate's lack of knowledge." He recognized Void, and how precious the car was. "Is that all you have to say? My brother and I could have well died by your hands." Staxius spoke loudly, loud enough for people to hear. He went on rambling about how incompetent the ones watching the main-gates were.

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"I know words can't do anything to remedy the situation, but here." *Water Splash.* A giant bubble burst over the dirty car. All the dirt and dust washed away, *Gale Gust,* the car was dried instantly, it looked shiny and new. The true beauty revealed, the guards admired how gorgeous Void truly was. "If this doesn't please you then, by all means, do take the appropriate actions, however, I promise the ignorant shall be punished."

"You needn't worry," Staxius bowed and drove off. "What a nice man, don't you think, master?" Avon asked out of habit. "No, you're completely wrong. That man isn't normal, he used two magical spells without breaking a sweat, the trace of mana is too thin and faint, I could barely detect it." He sighed, he now drove further in. "Yes, and what of it?" Avon asked – Staxius sighed even more. "Don't you realize it, that's the next step in our evolution, that man was an adventurer. Truly scary and intriguing at the same time, I could not sense how strong he was, but I doubt I can easily win against him. Don't get me wrong, I know I'm powerful, I have my experience to back that up, but against the unknown, none can truly come out on top."

The time now was only a few hours before dusk. Staxius drove through the capital and left through one of the other entrances that led to Claireville academy.

“That’s enough for today, let’s stop here Ysmay.” Eira panted. Her friend was out of breath too. The area where the spells were cast froze. They trained hours on end in mastering ice-spear, but Ysmay was far from conjuring a proper one. Eira’s version made it bigger and better, the power oozing from each strike could be felt by the temperature. Each time her spell hit, the gymnasium’s aura froze, it was as if standing in the middle of a graveyard. Tired, both sat with their back against each other. “We should really wash up; I can’t stand this feeling.” Eira voiced out her discomfort, “lead the way,” Ysmay replied in a slow and exhausted tone.

The sound of water flowing from the showers and into the bath overpowered the overall loneliness. Eira hummed while the other sat with her knees to her chest. “If you don’t mind me asking, why do you train so hard every day, Ysmay?”

“Oh,” she coughed, Eira took her by surprise. “N-no particular reason, I just want to become strong. There’s also the inter-magical tournament, I heard the Order gave the green light to find this year’s prodigy. I just want to participate in a full out battle.” She smiled. “-what about you, Eira? I mean you’re already talented and bright, you even work harder than anyone here, why?” She stood. Ysmay wanted to hear more clearly what her friend had to say.

“There’s one man I have to surpass. Every day, every second, I feel like that man is going to go so far ahead that I’ll never have the chance to catch up. That man is someone I admire and cherish, but one day I swear, I’ll defeat that monster and finally say, better luck next time.” Eira clapped, her motivation was rekindled. It screeched, the showers turned off. “We better get going now, or the dorm master is going to get mad at us.” Footstep scurried into the changing rooms. “Right behind you, let’s get dressed and get out of here, I hate it when the gymnasium gets dark anyway. I get this weird feeling about it, it’s like something calls on me.” Ysmay followed Eira closely behind.

“Don’t worry about it,” She patted her head.

The gate came into view, the tree had grown bigger. It was years since Staxius paid this place a visit. The slope, it brought back memories, the gate luckily was still opened. The C-shaped building stood right before him, “this feeling of nostalgia.” The car took a right turn and went straight for the office buildings. “What are you going to do, master?”

“Wait and watch,” the door opened, Staxius got out and walked into the office. His posture felt more imposing than before, students still roamed the premises. It was time for extra-lessons, any student who wished to participate could attend any class they desired. On that front, the school was flexible.

“Hey, isn’t that car familiar?” the students strolling the entrance noticed Void.

“Now that I think about it, it does look...”

“Guys how clueless can you be, that’s one of the Xerxes series cars, the same one that transfer student has.”

“You’re right, that’s the shadow-variant. Do you think they are related?”

“Don’t be ridiculous, her family can’t be that wealthy. I mean, one of those cost a fortune, but two of them? That’s just plain showing off.” Gossips and conversations steadily went around the campus. Car enthusiasts and others came to catch a glimpse.

“Excuse me sir, but do you have a meeting or authorization by anyone here?” a woman spoke, the receptionist.

“This is urgent, can we please skip the formalities. I urgently need to speak with the director.” The tone he used was one of distress. “I’m afraid we can’t allow you to meet with director Josiah this instant.”

Death Element, Unleash Aura.

“Everybody get down, we’re under attack,” Josiah ran down the corridor, he sensed it, the aura. His sprint came to a halt when he laid eyes on a familiar face. “Impossible,” he stopped fully, they stood few feet apart. “Excuse my rudeness, but I’ve got a favor to ask of you,” Staxius paused. “-I really need doctor Jona’s help. One of my companions is mortally wounded.”

“No need to threat, you can go ahead and use the hospital, Jona should be on duty. Go save your friend, I’ll be waiting for you here.”

“Thank you so much, Josiah.” Staxius ran out of the building. “Let’s move Avon,” he spoke while approaching the car, a small crowd of students had gathered around. The car turned on, he opened the door and drove closer to the hospital. There, a stretcher was used to carry Ayleth inside. Seeing her condition, the doctor didn’t notice Staxius and took Ayleth for treatment immediately.

“Still diligent towards your patients, glad to see things are still as they use to be.” Tired, he sat down in the waiting room. The place brought a feeling of longing, the people here were the ones who first supported and helped him.

“Eira, Eira,” they were back in their room. “What is it?” she asked from the balcony. “There are rumors about another car that matches yours, parked outside the hospital.” Her eyes gleamed, “impossible, he can’t be here?”

[Chapter 73](#)

Clarity

“Where are you going at this hour, the dorm master is going to get angry.” The door to the balcony shut, footsteps heavily slammed onto the floor. Before she could add another word, Eira vanished. The rumors about a black-car reached her ears. Though skeptic, she ran, the dusk had begun to set in. The air grew chilly, Ysmay followed behind. “Aren’t you going to get in trouble?” Eira asked while running at full speed. “We probably will, but I’ll never leave a friend hanging,” Ysmay spoke in intervals, her breathing sped up. Soon, they pass the lower-class dorms, the clubrooms and laboratories followed and in the end, took a left. The main yard was a few feet out.

“How can that girl have so much energy left, I’m beat from the practice session we had earlier,” Ysmay tried keeping up but came to a walking pace, she was out of breath.

The waiting room felt empty and lonely, none were here. Randomly: helpers, cleaners, nurses, and doctors would pass from one hallway to another. Some walked hastily while others moved comfortably, it all depended on the situation. Ayleth was taken out of his view, somewhere further inside, a place

where he wasn't allowed; the operation room. Staxius sat, he leaned forward while his elbows rested on his legs and hands closed. The people walking around didn't notice him; this was because of that suit. Normally, out around the island, a suit-wearing man is rare, but here, it was common and people didn't really pay attention to their surroundings. It was tunnel vision: one goal, one task, and limited time, a life of haste and worry, a life not worth living. Upon seeing Josiah, Staxius's mood changed, he was worried. There was something that bothered him, he couldn't put his hand on it. Sophie Mirabelle's face popped in and out of his head, what had happened to her, he wondered. From what information he got, Sophie was presumably dead; Julius killed her, or so what he thought. The information only said that Julius had slain a high-ranking mage, but no identity nor clues were given.

Staxius stood in the dark, a place he didn't like, a place of ignorance and doubt. That place was home to evil, a place that could rupture any men's confidence, may they be strong or weak – anyone who fell into this pit was bound to defeat; uncertainty is what some referred to it as. Time went by rapidly, Staxius's decisions hadn't brought their repercussion yet if any. Slowly, as the sun set, the thoughts and the

what if's

, filled his mind. Even he who was smart and strong-willed had failed before this thing called regret. What if the silver guardians didn't go to fight that losing battle, what if he had gone instead? He kept on wondering; his legs begin to jitter unwillingly. That small instant of restlessness felt heavy, he grew aware of the burden he carried. A small deprived province depended on him, companions, friends, strangers, villagers, kids, and plenty more, they needed him. How many schemes could he possibly put into motion to fix everything, his mind started working. It had been a long time, the intellect he felt was lost slowly came back, his perception changed from viewing everything in the box, to viewing everything outside the box. He grew more aware of the things behind him, his perception moved around, though he sat on a single chair, he saw everything. A fruit of constant observation and prediction, the hidden savant came out, the true personification of who he was. This state was a state that only a few lucky individuals could experience, the state of total observation; Clarity. ?Monks have long tried to reach this pinnacle of concentration and focus. Some spent years meditating, but only a few reached it.

Clarity isn't only bound to a single activity but influences many other things as well. Trained fighters, artists, musicians and many more, people who have trained in the art for a long time, the masters of their crafts, only they could reach it. The populous knew it as inspiration, however, that was just the surface. There's no feasible end to how engrossed a person could become, a place where the spiritual meets the physical, total harmony. In that moment of total clearness, it's then that the true potential of a human is brought out, the real strength. Staxius went through regret and into that state almost simultaneously, everything played out before him, all the information he gathered came together, he saw everything unravel. All the doubts he previously had got answered. The growing burden was felt by his mind, and this is when he broke through the barrier, it was an act of self-preservation.

Reality can be whatever I want it to be, Absolute control, World break.

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"father...Father...FATHER," it ruptured. "W-what is it?" Crouched before him, Eira shook his shoulders. "E-excuse me," he wiped his eyes and shook his head sharply to get out of the dazed state. "Are you

ok?" she continued asking questions, Staxius's mind filtered out most of it. "Absolute control...World break," he mumbled, he got a glimpse of something he should not have. "What did you say?" she asked eagerly. "Nothing," he fully awoke. She stepped back and stood, "what are you doing here?" Outside, footsteps grew closer. "Ayleth was badly injured, hence my visit here. I know a doctor who's amazing at what she does, but I doubt she remembers me."

"Why do you underestimate yourself that much," Josiah entered, Ysmay stood beside him. "D-director," Eira was taken by surprise, and so was her friend. "Dear Ysmay, go on and rejoin your friend." He said while smiling in a deep tone. She nodded and walked over to where Staxius sat. They both stared at each other, "underestimating me, but you were the one who did that years ago, uncle." Staxius stood and replied sarcastically.

"My dear Staxius, don't you remember my plea for you to not call me uncle outside my office." He replied coldly. "I apologize, I must be growing old," Staxius walked to him, they stared at each other. The clear difference in stature was apparent. For his age, Josiah was well-built and had a large frame, the muscles he had weren't for show either. Meanwhile, Staxius was lean, he didn't look imposing, he was plainly average.

"Do you bear a grudge against me?" Josiah asked Staxius who acted cold.

"Maybe and maybe not, but if I did, I'd have drawn my sword already," Staxius replied smugly.

"What is that guy doing, t-the d-director c-can kill him anytime he wants," Ysmay pulled Eira's uniform. "I don't know, but don't look down on him just because he looks weak."

"Someone has grown confident over the years, but I'm curious, you haven't aged a bit." Josiah continued without paying heed to the provocations.

"The same thing could be said about you, the same look, the same gaze, the same nonchalant personality, that empty and fake smile. You may have forgotten it, but I know, I know you were the one who gave a fake diary to the royal family, I know it." Staxius spoke adamantly.

"You're wrong, who in the right mind would even try and conspire against his loved ones." Josiah's eyes didn't look bothered.

"I'm staring at that very same person this instant," Staxius kept speaking out of line, he didn't care for anything. The moment he was sucked into Clarity, some holes that he missed were filled out, and one of those was how the royal family framed him so long ago, though it didn't matter now. He just wanted to pull strings and see what he could do and what he could not.

"Excuse me young man, but you're being very rude and out of line, how dare you speak to the director in this way." A sharp and strict voice was heard from behind Josiah; a whiff of something familiar, something nostalgic, a faint aroma of rose followed. A thorny rose crest was embroiled in the jacket, crimson-colored lipsticks and wearing glasses.

"Instructor Sophie," Eira and Ysmay cheered. Her attention changed from the boy to her students. "What are you girls doing out here so late?" she asked in a friendly tone. "Never mind that, you boy, how dare you disrespect this man here." She firmly stood before him, her presence filled with anger and hate. "A-are you Sophie Mirabelle?" Staxius's tone changed, he shuddered. His sister stood before him,

a sister who abandoned him, someone who never did care; someone who ruined his reputation. He knew thanks to Julius; they had a small talk about what had transpired. Staxius fumed, but calmed down – there must have been a reason to why she did it.

“Don’t worry about it Sophie, it’s fine,” Josiah placed his hand over her shoulder reassuringly. “No uncle, that boy has disgraced you, I’ll rectify that insult this instant.”

“You didn’t answer my question, are you Sophie Mirabelle, the crimson princess?” Shocked, the instructor took a step back, “how do you know my old nickname?” her eyes pierced his soul. “You don’t know who I am I take it?” He asked with his tone now formal. “No, I don’t know who or what you are, but what I’m sure of is that you’ve disgraced my uncle.” Her cheeks boiled with frustration. Staxius looked disappointed, a quick glance at Josiah told everything, he avoided his stare. “No matter, the past is the past, I care not for old reunions.”

“What are you going on about boy?” Sophie’s tone grew sharper.

“Would you have the delicacy to stop referring to me as a boy, I’m a noble by title, you should respect that.” He had enough, Sophie didn’t know who he was. “Father, could you not be so rude with my instructor, she’s the one who helped me settle down after all.” Eira stepped up and stood beside Sophie. “Eira, my child, you must be mistaken, that person there isn’t your father, he barely looks old enough to get a wife let alone raise a child like you.” Sophie tried to correct her. “No instructor, that’s my father.” Ysmay stood still, she stopped blinking, it was too much to take in.

“Eira, stop joking, your father is a person who’s rich and powerful. I mean, you own one of the Xerxes series cars, your family is wealthy, unlike this boy who looks like he stole his clothes off a peasant down the street.” Staxius got insulted repeatedly, he didn’t look fazed. Josiah hid his face out of shame, Ysmay froze and Eira, she fumed.

“Instructor, you’re the one whose speaking out of line now, I’ve told you countless time that this man here is my father, why don’t you get it. He’s Staxius Haggard, a noble hailing from Dorchester.” She broke, hearing her insult him was more than enough.

“Calm down Eira,” Staxius said reassuringly. “Fine,” her growing aura subsided. “Director Josiah, the past is the past. I’ve given you my daughter because I trust you can provide her with the necessary education for her to grow into someone like my father.” Sophie tried speaking but was stopped by Josiah who shook his head. She caught on and remained silent. “Worry not, I’ll make sure this young talented girl here can one day stand side by side with you on the battlefield.”

“Thank you for being considerate. On another note, how much will the hospital fee be, for surely this service isn’t free of charge, Claireville academy is a wealthy establishment for you to maintain.”

“As perceptive as ever, the charges will cost approximatively around two-thousand gold pieces,” Josiah spoke without filter; Sophie heard the price. “Uncle, aren’t you being a little delusional, there is no way that man can afford such a high price, I mean, he can barely dress, just look at those bloodstains.” Ysmay heard the price and so did Eira, they both looked as surprised, Staxius stood. “See, he can’t even say anything.”

“Do you accept guild-cards?”

“Yes, head to the counter and ask them about the cost.”

“Director, two-thousand gold pieces is a bit too cheap in my humble opinion, what is the real price?”

“You’re right, I haven’t the slightest idea, that is up to the people in charge of the hospital to decide. Time grows late, we should leave, come on Sophie.” They stepped out; the instructor tried to cause another scene but was eventually persuaded to leave. Ysmay followed close behind, Eira stayed by Staxius side, the director wasn’t opposed to it. Eira waited for her father to make the necessary payments, “how much did it cost?” he returned. “About eight-thousand gold pieces. It’s expensive, I mean, enormously expensive but that is to be expected, I came here from out of town, and her injuries were bad if you take all that into consideration then it’s fair.” A piece of paper on which a seal of approval for treatment rested on Staxius’s lap. Eira eyed it down, the price he told was accurate, they did charge that much.

“Sophie Mirabelle is indeed alive and well, what a surprise. If I’m being honest with myself then I knew deep within that Sophie wasn’t the same no more, this just proves my suspicions. No matter, my head hurts, I want to sleep.”

[Chapter 74](#)

The Church

Drip, drip, drip, blood fell on a stone path, two men walked. Nighttime had befallen the entire island. The moon was absent for a few days but had come back, the clouds were partly responsible. The greyish cover broke, a clear and starry filled night sky presided. Both men’s strength came from adrenaline, their body looked battered. Something kept them alive, adrenaline wasn’t capable of keeping a dying body for that long. A mythical phenomenon was at work, their posture didn’t seem natural either. A massive church stood at the end of said stone path, the yard was dimly lit. The trees all around whispered amongst themselves, the wind made it look as if they were conversing. Reaching half-way, a statue stood, a statue of the deity they worshiped. One whose name is a mystery to the church itself. Around that statue, the main path continued moving forward while two opposite paths leading left and right appeared. The men, badly hurt, hadn’t the strength to move. Their eyes looked dead, no ounce of life within, dead shells. This much was revealed thanks to the torch standing below them.

The struggle continued, at this time of night, the pope would usually give lectures about how life is meant to be lived. These types of teachings were available to anyone willing to learn, it was the foundation of their belief. Mysteriously enough, that night, it was called off, none expected it. The Pope remained adamant and none dared challenge him. People round Kreston knew about his demeanor, a man of religion upfront but a belligerent individual behind that well-crafted facade. This hidden persona of his was a boon, whenever war or conflicts arose, his true talent awoke, he thrived in such situations. Silence, nothing, not a single soul, complete peace and quiet. Benches facing two enormous figures that captured a single event. On the right, the same deity as the one outside held a sword. On the left, another figure, this time she knelt, her eyes looked as if crying. The point of the sword pierced her throat slightly, however her hands folded, she prayed. None knew the real significance of this picture, but some portrait it as good prevailing against evil. By good, the man who stood strong and mighty while the lady knelt and begged. ‘The spawn of the devil,’ another name given to women. Luckily, that line of thinking grew archaic, and people began to ignore such things. Sadly, here in Kreston, that practice was

still commonplace; the province's focus on being militarized for the good of humanity forced many young babes to be slaughtered.

Parents, some brainwashed while others simply fools often wrapped their newly born child into wet blankets and then drown them. Many other ways of female infanticide grew common, it all depended on the families. Raising a girl was seen as weak and feeble, almost like a curse. The church was in no way responsible for that line of thinking, but some speculate that they helped propagate that myth. All and all, it was unfair, but none paid attention to said thing, it was done secretly without anyone's acknowledgment. Six different provinces and six different types of thinking and ideals. Hidros was an island naturally born for conflict. Peace here was an illusion but people dreamed, everywhere, all around, they dreamed.

"Y-your holiness," the grand entrance opened. Before they stood he who controlled everything, a saint, the one who guides all, the pope. On one hand, he held a staff, on the other, a grimoire. Blood continuously dripped, the two men moved closer. "Speak my puppets, speak." The Holy-man's personality differed from when he woke in the morning. He bore a smirk, his fingers constantly twitched, it was as if he was a puppet man and threads were attached to his fingers. "Who did this to you?" the tone he used was one of power and total control. "G-girls, a d-demon, c-cursed-sword, D-Dorchester s-strong." The sound of bone cracking echoed, the bodies gave in. Their frame nearly became liquid, they cracked. The reason for this was the one who guides all, the pope. "Pathetic, controlling bodies with mana after their dead. Necromancy may be useful but this is far too weak, their bodies can't adapt to mine, what a quandary." He ignored the men who now screamed, they were still alive, but barely. They begged for another chance, sobbed, but ultimately succumbed to their injuries. "Sten Parcyvell, you are a man who I respect. If it wasn't for the feud between our provinces, your research on necromancy paired with mine could have changed the face of this planet."

The grimoire he held, closed, "you people hailing from Dorchester have slain men from my holy army. I shan't allow you to breathe any longer, this war is ours for the taking, I'm going to personally end you all." Sharply, he turned around, the white robes he wore continued flowing after he stopped. "I shall have your heads, I swear," his face looked calm and composed but he was out for blood.

The two battered bodies laid on his way out, one of them still drew breath. "Amazing you're alive," he said with disgust. "h-help m-me," he mumbled, a boy still young sent to war. "God shall help you, my child," without remorse in his eyes, the staff went straight through the boy's skull. "Humans are resilient, that's for sure," he gently tapped the weapon on the floor to remove the brain matter. "Disgusting," he complained as the tapping grew louder. A strange rumbling caught his attention.

Before he could take another step, someone walked through the doorway. "My oh my, you've done a number now haven't you." The sound of expensive shoe clattering reverberated throughout the building. "Duke Hawkin, what a big surprise." They both moved closer and shook hands. "What is this about, isn't taking care of a province like ours on your own enough? You should have called on me, I'd have made the visit, you needn't tire yourself on my account." He spoke courteously.

"A man of God shouldn't worry on such trifling matters," the duke took a pause, looked around, then spoke once more, "-I've got bad news. I'm sure your aware that part of our forces was annihilated. Not only that, the village we were hoping to capture is naught but a massive hole."

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“Interesting, if that’s the case then only one person is responsible, I’m surprised she actually decided to fight considering what transpired before.” The pope added, surprised, the duke asked, “-are you sure it’s her, the cursed-blade?” The pope nodded and slightly fell back, he now faced the statues. Hawkin walked and stood beside him, they both stared not at the statues but beyond it, they were looking further out – it wasn’t the eyes that saw, but the mind. “We are going to relaunch an attack and completely destroy Dorchester, we can’t have a place who once bore the presence of a pseudo apostle rival us. We may have been friends with the silver guardians but they’ve crossed the line. Duke Hawkin, I did tell you to claim Dorchester for us, look where we are now.”

“I apologize for not heeding your warnings, but running two provinces at the moment isn’t possible much less running one that stands on the verge of collapse.”

“It is settled then, we are to attack them,” the pope turned and faced the duke intently.

“I’m afraid that isn’t possible,” the duke replied while slowly turning as well. “The queen of Arda has told us to back-off from Dorchester and not attack nor try and harm that province. I know not why she’d act this way but that’s her message.”

“Are you saying that I shall kneel down and obey a self-proclaim queen? How dare you duke, how dare you.” He sounded disappointed.

“You don’t understand, your emotions are taking the better of you. The queen hasn’t ordered us to do anything, she just said to back-off and leave. We shall have our revenge, after all, they did kill our men. But the time isn’t right, if Arda grows hostile to us, then our future endeavors won’t come to fruition. We need allies who we can back-stab later. Plaustan is awfully quiet, we may need to start to grow closer with them, they are a wildcard, and are very close to Oxshield. Dorchester is a lost cause, even if we don’t attack, I doubt they will survive. It’s cursed, that place only brings chaos.”

After hearing the soothing and tamed voice of Hawkin, the previously agitated pope calmed down, the objectives were laid out. “As you wish old friend, let’s become the strongest province – our religion must spread throughout the island so that we can grow more powerful, a revolution through the guise of a holy crusade, that’s my goal and yours is the revolution through military and diplomacy, together Kreston will flourish.”

The night went on as if nothing happened. The message given to Kreston was delivered by the hands of two elves, the same one who wrongly framed Staxius. The queen, after he left, ordered the elves to be brought before her. It was there that they confessed that such allegations and lies were a plot devised by an elder elf who she already killed. It wasn’t made public yet, but the courtship between the queen and Staxius was still in the making. Rumors about Totrya acting up slowly spread. Taverns and the central guilds helped in said propagation. Large beasts were reported all around the borders, traveling merchants never returning, traders dying and mercenaries vanishing. The Order, leader of the magical guild, sent sorcerers to investigate but returned empty-handed. Only the fighter’s guild had problems, a guild comprised of adventurers.

Over the years, the guild separated into two different sects. One was for mages, and one for fighters, they became rivals. Not enemies for if a crisis were to suddenly arise from nowhere, both had

agreements to help one another. The only thing the fighter's guild hated about the mage's guild was how the Order operated. They were completely mysterious and moved in the shadows. This didn't bother people, as different as they may appear to be, the guild is still ruled by a single master. One of the strongest mages as well as current holder of the divine-blade title. The royal family's personal bodyguard, Raulf Serlo. Being employed by the king and queen, Raulf was very busy. Attending parties and banquets to other kingdoms was a must for him, maintaining relations with others was their responsibilities. As a result, he is often out of the island. Thus the reason why the guild separated and now had their own liberty and freedom. Raulf did work for the guild, he stepped in only when disparities between guildmembers grew out of control, he's the one who controlled all.

The rumors of people disappearing reached Raulf's ears. It was a matter of time until he returned and fixed all the conundrums. In the meantime, kill-quests were being given out left-right and center, both guilds paid large amounts of money for anyone or any other independent guilds to find out and fix whatever was happening. In one of the taverns situated in the capital, there was a man who speaks day and night. He recounted tales about fighting a monster twice his size and winning. Normally, bolstering like this was commonplace, but there was something new to this fantasy, he adamantly says that the beast vanished into dust and dropped some copper coins. Many other fellow adventurers just scowl at that tale and dismiss it as the dreams and rambling of a drunken fighter. None believed him, but every day, at exactly the same time, he would tell the same story over and over again, the look in his eyes was one of a man who spoke the truth, but people shrugged it off as nothing but a mere gesture of attention-seeking.

"You all will see my words aren't a word of fantasy, I've never lied in my life. For as long as this broken-down body of mine lives, I will tell this story over and over again. Adventurers, you've yet to see the face of true despair, the beast will swallow you all. Something grows inside our planet, something vile and something divine, change is here, change has come – you all will regret not heeding my words."

[Chapter 75](#)

God's Ale

"Excuse my rudeness, but I don't think sending more people to investigate whatever is happening near Totrya is going to do us any good." An average looking woman spoke, her apparel was one formal of which the primary colors were black and white. Another night had passed, the streets grew lively. "You needn't apologize, I do agree with you but if the populous lose their trust in us, then what's the point of even existing?" The man replied, his voice sounded old, he looked menacing; a retired warrior. He wore a suit, his muscles filled out the clothes and looked constantly on the verge of breaking.

Outside, in the business district within the capital; people rushed to work. The roads were wide and high-ranking people now use their cars as means of intimidation. The flashier the car, the more respect, and the more attention one will garner; business was another war, fought by thousands. Most of the local workers, people who could barely scrape by, used cycles given by the royal family. It was a campaign launched as a means of making life better; it worked wonders – people appreciated it. As if a flash flood, people would rush to work, a horde of struggling commoners. Some educated, while others helpers, everyone rushed in.

Rosespire changed a lot, slavery grew less common but was still ever-present. Cheap labor and replaceable, most of the guilds – except the mage’s and fighter’s guild, used them. The slaves differed in shapes and sizes, some were humans but rare, it was mainly demi-humans hailing from Arda. News about the royal family allowing Arda to become a free nation rattled this small community, it meant that blatantly abusing non-humans was going to be banned. Dark guilds, once dealing in trafficking, thievery and assassinations were greatly touched. Part of their already slim income was going to be ruptured thanks to that decree. Nonetheless, a new practice saw the light of day, something that was never meant to be, something malicious and vile; breeding. The slaves were forced to bear kids, one after the other; they became machines. This part of Rosespire wasn’t known, the capital’s secret. Often, drugs and medication were used to force uncompliant slaves to work, the addiction grew. They all soon lost hope, they did whatever was told for a taste of

God’s ale.

“Look outside, look at the inhabitant’s faces as they rush to work. They don’t care, they live like stones, no will nor desires, only survival matters. It’s tragic if you ask me. No matter, they are still the people we are sworn to protect, as vile and shrewd as the other guilds maybe, us as the main central guild must do out best to help out the populous.” Sat at his desk, after admiring the view outside, he resumed the pile of due paperwork.

“What should we ask the guilds then?”

“Let them do whatever, we only intervene when things go downhill; for now, remain on standby. Have all our top-adventurers brought in, we may soon be sent on an expedition with the guild-master.” He concluded. Seeing how engrossed he was, the lady bowed and left.

The building in which they stood was one of the tallest amidst the others in this street. It had seven floors and stretched on high. The place it rested in was the business district. The bank’s headquarters, many guilds, and other establishments stood there all surrounding the giant tower. The latter was own by the central guild, one in charge of all. The Order also made its mark here, as they had a six-story building made, it stood opposite the giant. Soon after, messengers were dispatched. Their jobs were spread rumors, news, and new quests. Thus, began a typical, ordinary day in the capital.

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It made no change whatsoever; young mages and warriors alike took to the quest in finding whatever was happening at Totrya by storm. All around the island, people made the long journey in search of glory. Day after day, hour after hour and minutes after minutes; someone was reported dead. Despite this, it only helped to add to the growing urge of conquering whatever stood there.

Naught was lost, the announcement of the inter-magical tournament being opened to all helped calm the frenzy. There was no greater glory than completing a quest for adventurers but the prospect of being recognized as a prodigy trumped all. On top of that, being offered the option to enroll in the royal guards; one of the highest paying jobs, as well as a shot at becoming a noble, did help. Acquiring noble crests grew more difficult, only a handful existed. Most were lost or had merged with others, the ancient book guarding said information wasn’t opened. It was an edict straight from the Emperor, the mystical book about nobles and crest shan’t be opened under any pretext.

The gentle snore of a familiar voice paired with whispers and chatter awoke Staxius. His eyes opened to a mildly filled waiting room. Unknown faces stared at him. He soon realized that the stares were from boys and girls directed to Eira, who rested her head on his shoulder. Her snoring grew loud, Staxius smiled. This white-haired girl here was supposed to be a noble. "Stop snoring," he whispered. "five more minutes," Eira mumbled. "People are looking at you." That sentence broke her sleep completely. "Where the hell do you see people looking at me?" she wiped her eyes, indeed, a few students stared at her. "I'll go check up on Ayleth, don't you have classes to attend to?" Staxius stood, "yes, I'll get going now." They hugged and parted ways.

A few hours went by, the doctors explained Ayleth's situation in greater detail. Staxius sat through all of it, the one who gave him the explanation was none other than Jona; sadly, she didn't recognize him. It was better this way, he thought. "Her recovery will take more or less five months as I said earlier, she nearly died." They walked down a familiar corridor. Nurses would pass by them often; they would stare at Staxius from head to toe then pretend he wasn't there. Finally, he entered the room in which his companion was being kept. Large bulky equipment surrounded her, a lot of tubes were strap to her face and body; it looked surreal. "I'm afraid we can't talk nor approach her at this early a state, I give a week or two before we can remove the life-support system and speak to her normally. For now, you'll just have to watch her from afar. I shall leave you to it, please take as long as you want, but don't disturb nor try and approach her." The door closed, Staxius stood alone with the patient.

"Five months to recover, that is going to cost a fortune; I need money fast." He didn't stay for long, the prospect of watching over her seemed like a waste of time. "Money, we need money fast. Ayleth's treatment, running Dorchester and Eira's education cost; I mean I could get more gold transferred to me by fooling the bank again." He thought and headed outside. Now that she was taken care of, the next plan of action didn't look obvious. Curious about how the Claireville academy had changed. He asked Josiah for permission; the strict looking director allowed it. First his visit began with the main building, he carefully observed the architecture then went towards the battle-arena.

It stood as immense as he remembered, a giant screen with advertisement about joining the tournament stood on high. Nonchalantly, he walked in. A few twists and turns after, he reached the battleground, a feeling of nostalgia whelmed him. The day he awoke the death element, the day his life changed, it all stood before him. Explosions, water splashes, gust blowing against the barriers, weapons clashing against one another reverberated throughout. A lesson was being taught, after getting closer, Sophie Mirabelle came into view. She sparred with four to five students at a time and destroyed them.

None noticed, Staxius hid his presence; people Sophie trained looked about his age. They were young and full of vigor and energy; their faces held a genuine grin. They had fun, fighting, sweating, and getting beaten. Just like every class ever, the students were divided naturally; the strong stuck with the strong and weak with weak. A natural selection, something they all had to live by.

Bam, a loud noise changed his focus; a great-sword broke and sliced training dummies. It was Eira, she was training hard as well, her sword-play didn't look that bad, Staxius got a chance to see what his daughter could accomplish. Unlike a normal parent, however, he entered the arena and leaned against the inner wall with his arms crossed. Sophie fought ruthlessly, her students all grew tired soon, their accuracy diminished. The spells they shot lost their initial impact, it looked dull and worthless.

“Instructor, you’re strong but today is the day we win,” two boys yelled, they were conjuring a spell. By the first look, one had an affinity for water while the other wind, “I’d like to see you try, bring it on.” *Combination spell: Piercing stream,* the spell looked powerful, it was powerful enough to kill a person. Staxius watched eagerly, the boys launched the spell. *Light element: Blinding flash,* Sophie didn’t realize it but behind her, the weak students practiced. One of the girls used a blinding spell which made her sparring partner move and jump backward. Their presence was weak and feeble, none paid attention. “Better luck next time, but a slow spell like that isn’t going to do much,” Sophie dodged. The spell, shaped like an arrow blew straight by her. “INSTRUCTOR,” one of the boys yelled, the spell shot towards the blinded girl’s head. “MOVE OUT OF THE WAY,” she screamed, but it was too late, the spell’s velocity increased. *Death Element, Shadow-step,* Everyone screamed, the spell made contact, the stream of water exploded into vapor, blood dripped onto the floor. The panic grew, Sophie rushed to where the spell hit and so did everyone. The vision was rendered blurry thanks to the small pocket of fog.

“Are you insane?” a strange voice yelled from behind the crowd. “don’t you realize what that could have done?” it felt like an argument. The fog dissipated; the girl was nowhere to be found. “I’m not saying what you did was wrong, but do be careful.”

They all turned to see a boy dressed in grey yelling at Eira. This was a first, her head faced downwards, her arm bled. She looked vulnerable, the man who spoke this way to her; was young. “Is that Beth?” Staxius held her unconscious body. “Hey don’t speak to Eira like that,” the students rushed to help Eira, everyone argued. “I hope you realize you have not mastered shadow-step yet, you need to train more. You’re slow and if this is how you’re going to act then forget ever standing by my side.” He ignored the screams around him, his gaze was focused solely on Eira. “Well, don’t worry about it,” he patted her head.

“How dare a commoner like you touch Eira,” one of the boys spoke, he seemed from noble birth. “Will you guys shut the hell up,” Staxius said monotonously. “Who are you to give us orders, bloody peasant.” They spat. “Have you not learned any manners during your stay here. It seems that the mighty have fallen, how tragic, a worthless instructor and disrespectful students.” He spoke graciously, everyone got mesmerized by how the words rolled off his tongue. “Father please, don’t,” Eira held onto his clothes. “How am I supposed to feel at ease with a teacher like Sophie Mirabelle, once SSS but now a mere S-rank with nothing to her name. Am I wrong, is that what you teach your students? I’m appalled.” The disrespect he suffered yesterday didn’t bother him, but he wanted to remind her, her place and where she stood.

“I care not if you’re a parent or noble, but you’ve blatantly ruined, disrupted and insulted one of my students.” Her voice grew sharp, “how dare you to question the way I teach; I was the best mage in Hidros, and those experiences haven’t vanished.” She held a grudge too, Staxius also rudely spoke to her uncle, it showed in her tone, her blood boiled.

[Chapter 76](#)

Farewell

“I beg of you instructor, please don’t engage my father in combat,” Eira felt the tension. If a fight were to break out at this moment, the whole battle arena would surely be destroyed in the process. Sophie’s

anger and determination were shown brightly on her face. Eira saw it and so did the students; their instructor was serious for once. Sparks of flames flickered around her feet, the air warmed up around her hands. Wind slightly blew her hair upwards. Eira's plea fell on deaf ears, a fight was imminent.

"Eira, please g-get out of there," Ysmay, who's presence was feeble up to this point yelled from behind the crowd. Eira glanced, fear flashed on her face – Ysmay saw the unthinkable. Eira's face froze, her emotions stuck between fear and despair. Sophie was out of it, she saw blood; as a last attempt, she faced Staxius. "P-please, d-don't f-fight." Her voice feebly stuttered. "It's too late for reconciliation, look at your teacher – do you feel her hate, her killing intent? That's the kind of opponent I both admire and hate; their will power can surpass any human's limit. The time now isn't for chatting; I meant for this to happen, I want to fight Sophie Mirabelle for the last time." He spoke, it was as if he was saying farewell, the turning of a new page.

"It's been a long time since we've fought, you probably don't remember, but we had our last battle here as well," Staxius mumbled, Sophie looked unmovable, her face remained stuck.

"I hope you're powerful, hold back against me will result in your death, father of Eira, this battle will be fought without pity – death is the only outcome desirable." Unwillingly, Sophie said the unthinkable, she challenged him to a battle to the death. Her students shuddered, little by little, they backed away and ran out of the arena. "Someone, go get the director, if instructor Sophie really intends on fighting to the death then she may lose," Eira shouted, her fears changed into reality.

"Impossible, the instructor wields three magical elements of which she has mastered all. There is nowhere a former battle-mage can lose to a mere student like us." One of her classmates spoke, his confidence was heard through the way he uttered each word.

"You don't understand, that man standing there is a demon," Eira fell to her knees, none believed her. "Don't worry, I'll go get the director this instant," Ysmay ran out, leaving Eira to her own, she was petrified.

"Holding back, do you think I'm that ignorant to hold back against a former sss-rank mage?" He smirked, "yes, you've seen right through me, I'm going to enjoy this till one of us stops breathing completely." Staxius's face changed, nothing – empty as the void itself.

The flickers of sparks near Sophie's feet grew in intensity, they turned into a raging inferno. It crawled up all the way to her hips, the air around her boiled, lightning flashed up and down her arms. "Let's dance," *Lightning and wind element; Infinite flashstep.* A spell only dual-element wielders could master, an A-tier, difficult to master but easy to use – speed enhancement. Learning speed increasing spells was a must for any mage. Being faster than the opponent was one of the fundamentals, though that practice has long been forgotten. Only a handful of people use it; the reason for that is that a mage could well be faster than his opponent but if the brain could not react at such high speeds, then it was unnecessary. Faster velocity was a double-edged sword, either you limit your speed to how fast your brain can process or not increase your speed at all and focus on other spells. *Fire and Lightning elements; flaming daggers.*

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Two weapons were conjured, the students look surprised, none had ever seen her conjuration magic. “I still don’t know how that guy is going to fight back against the crimson princess, we may well see someone die.”

“Are you done with your performance, have you cast all the necessary spells to beat me?” Staxius mocked her, Sophie unwillingly was putting on a show for the students; demonstrating her abilities – part of it. “Shut up,” she said while jumping left to right. *Poof,* she vanished. Effortlessly, Staxius stepped to the right, something flowed down his cheeks. Sophie was still nowhere to be found; his movement increased. Bit by bit, the clothes were ripped, he fought without using magic. “Are you mocking me?” a voice came from behind him, both daggers pressed against his neck.

“See I told you, that man you call father is weak; he could not even budge.”

“...” Eira remained silent and watched; doubts filled her mind – was Staxius really that weak and did she overestimate him?

“Not really,” *Death element: Shadow-step* he vanished. “-was just getting a feel about how you fight; I must say – it’s changed.” He now stood behind her. “How did,” they both vanished, all that could be heard around were footsteps running, jumping, and stopping. “This is getting boring fast,” *Fire and wind element: Fireblast,*

Flames surfaced out of nowhere, part of the arena burnt. The battle continued raging on, Sophie fought, she used every spell, trick, and experience she gathered over her years fighting. Staxius remained passive, he dodged, his hands remained inside his pocket, he didn’t look fazed at all. “You are indeed underestimating me,” Sophie’s face looked tired but more importantly – the anger never subsided, it burnt like an inferno.

Staxius wasn’t being smug, he fought a different battle. A battle of wits, instead of using physical or magical strength, he was exerting what he was a master at, emotional control. Sophie, a battle-mage, loved getting close and personal to fight with all her might. Instead of falling into her ideal place of combat, Staxius changed his whole fighting style; instead of going head to head, he fought passively. This made Sophie hate him even more, he did everything she loathed, and in turn, affected her overall strength. Getting riled up was bad in one on one combat, calm and thinking with one’s head was more efficient.

“Sophie Mirabelle, stop being so reckless – you’ve fallen into his trap, fight like you always do, fight as you want; I’m cheering for you.” Someone spoke through the intercoms. The speakers around the arena deafened the students as well as the ones on the field. A quick glance into the monitoring booth revealed nothing, only their reflection was seen. Though hidden, it was apparent that Josiah was the one responsible, instead of stopping the fight, he added fuel to the already burning fire.

Staxius sighed, Sophie’s anger calmed down. “-that’s unfair now isn’t it?” he mumbled. It might not have been much help, Sophie’s aura felt more composed. Her true strength manifested, the look on her face was one of a new person; someone reincarnated. Sophie snorted, “you’ve read me like a book from the very start.”

“Enough speaking, I’m bored – are we going to fight? All you’ve been doing is rush at me like a raging bull, do make it interesting.” Staxius had enough of her speaking through the battle. She got the

message and nodded. Her stance changed, the daggers disappeared, a short sword was conjured in its place. "Guess I'll have to start taking this seriously now," Staxius dash to where the students left all their weapons and picked up a longsword. *Clang,* the weapons clashed immediately, Staxius got pushed back. Sophie's strength grew exponentially, flames covered her entire body, the wind served to ignite the fire even more. Lightning pulsed through her entire body, it glowed with purple color.

The real battle now begun, blocks, parries, swings became more common than the use of magic. Strike after strike, Sophie's strength increased. She became more powerful by the second, Staxius could no longer directly block all her swings, her muscle memories were awakening. *Death element, Unleash Aura,* the swords collided for the last time, it sent a shockwave all around the arena, the ground beneath them cracked. Sophie didn't look worried at all, Staxius's face looked emotionless.

The aura's battled one another, though the mages stood still. It felt like two barriers getting pushed closer to one another, they repelled, sent electric shocks. Sophie's mind was no longer here; her focus heightened so much that she now stood before a door. A door to Clarity, the realm of insanity, her aura responded accurately. Her sword changed from a transparent color into one of scarlet, the real crimson princess came out of her shell. Despite the aura's fighting, one swing from Sophie was enough for Staxius to be blasted away. Dust, wind, fire, electricity, everything was blown back.

Before Staxius could even get his bearing back, the sword had already reached his neck. *Bam,* he flew, a familiar face winked at him. Avon stepped in at the last second and took most of the damage, leaving only the resulting blast to deal with. Staxius flew half-way across the arena. "I could end this in a single snap, but no." Sophie charged at him without even looking left or right, "the only way to stop a mage who uses conjuration magic is," he stood, Sophie was ready to thrust the sword into his chest.

Death element; Daemon.... Before he could finish the conjuring spell, something inside broke, it made his head and heart sink, something snapped. Out of reflex, he changed the spell, *Dark-arts; Mana cancellation,* it vanished. All her physical enhancement disappeared instantly, she fell to the floor, the door to Clarity began closing. "W-what just happened?" she was on the floor, kneeling before Staxius.

"I guess I lost didn't I?" she spoke, she was disappointed. "Not really, you both won and lost, I can't explain it fully." He crouched down, "I enjoyed the battle though, thanks ...big sister," he whispered the last bit. All the students rushed onto the arena which now was beaten down with fire blast, ground carved in here and there, rocks, rubbles, and debris. "Teacher, are you alright?" she slowly got to her feet and reassured her students.

"Thanks for not going all out, father," Eira waited near the entrance, Staxius smiled and left. Sophie looked baffled, the guy she fought called her sister, a mild pain made her lose balance, a concussion from the battle.

The sun still shone, Staxius stood under a tree further ahead of the battle-arena. The wind calmed and refreshed the sweat onto his body. "My hands, they are shaking. I c-can't u-use a-anymore of m-my strength." Since he came back, something was awfully wrong about his body. Given his aura was powerful, a certain part of him felt uneasy. In that last battle, everything became apparent, the cursed blade. "I wish I could say I held back, but that was me g-going a-at full power..." his hands trembled further, Staxius was in shock. A few instants later, his legs gave in, and he fell; hitting his head on the trunk. "W-what i-is happening?" his body began sweating profusely, none were around to see what was

happening to him. “Vermillion meteor, I remember it n-now,” he could no longer speak. “It’s since t-that d-day... m-my s-strength is g-getting stolen from me.” He thought loudly. The eyelids felt heavy, he fell unconscious.

“Lord death?” each step echoed around the room; Jessica ran around. “I’m here,” he replied as cheerfully as ever. “Did you sense it?” she asked worryingly. “Yes, indeed I did – my prodigy is in deep trouble. Nothing life-threatening though, however, something is definitely wrong. I can’t wrap my fingers around it at this moment, but I’m sure it’s related to the world-changing. We truly are entering a new era. The god-slayer has already claimed many lives from deities – we are but spectators. I’m sure I’ve told Staxius Haggard this before, but us, wielders of the death element as well as the ones who rule over death are bound to ruin and failure. It’s part of the struggle, good luck my heir, good luck.” He concluded his soliloquy and returned to his duties.

“I just hope you hang in there, Staxius.”

[Chapter 77](#)

The Guilds

Far away, near the border of Totrya, the second group of adventurers arrived. The dusk set in, the road grew dark and dim. Hills, trees, and meadows of flowers, were commonplace. Nature wasn’t disturbed here. The royal family didn’t want to ruin the sight; though natural resources such as gold and diamonds were rumored to be present – they denied any constructions. The only bit of human infrastructure was the road that went all around the border. It was built as if being a wall that surrounded and showed where the other province’s land ended. This road-work held many advantages: mainly, commerce and trade grew faster and safer.

Slowly, small towns like Dundee were built throughout the province. It was beneficial, some thrived on metals, while others on agriculture – all and all, they worked together and made Oxshield one of the richest provinces. Following close behind it was Arda and at dead last, Dorchester with virtually nothing to its name. In said newly immersing towns and villages, smaller guilds also appeared.

Seeing the increase in adventurers and how rare mages grew; the Order with the help of the main guild allowed individuals to form their own party; that could eventually form into a union. Each had to get registered and authorization from both the fighter’s and mage’s headquarters before officially being recognized. The process was daunting at first, but as years progressed, it grew simpler. Nowadays, all that is required is a suitable location to operate in, a town or village was preferable. A large amount of money and a minimum number of members. It may look like a big undertaking, however, that wasn’t the case. Popular guilds, independent from the two main overseers, had the capability to bring in hundreds of thousands of gold on a monthly basis.

As time flowed by, small groups of friends saved money and officially got registered. It was like this that all the popular guilds now were born, out of friendship and companionship. Not all had that same idea however, some specialized in fighting using any means – mercenaries. Traders, merchants, blacksmiths, and many more guilds formed in the same manner. Owning a noble crest was still sought after, but nowadays, bearing the emblem of the guild one is associated with; especially if its one of the popular ones, made you an instant celebrity. The hold the royal family once held over the kingdom subsided, it changed. No longer were they able to rule with fear – commoners, people with no noble blood could

easily lay siege and conquer them as adventurers were mainly from the lower echelon. This obviously struck fear into the heart of the princess; despite being strong.

In recent years, scholars from the Order with the help of MARS, a name you don't hear often, had published a study. It clearly stated the decrease in people being born with the affinity to become mages; instead, more hybrids grew common. People who could learn skills at incredible rates and were unbelievably strong. Thanks to that, Claireville academy had to put a hiatus on the inter-magical tournament. In the five years that went by, adventurers practically exceeded the number of mages registered.

No longer were the commoners oppressed, no longer did they suffer. It alleviated the pressure but working hard to stay alive was a must. In no way were the villagers out of poverty. Oxshield is rich and most of the people are wealthy. This is only twenty-five percent of the population, excluding the non-humans. The remainder hid in Plaustan and Kreston. Plaustan was the more obvious choice; the council ruling over there was more docile than any other. The birth of independent guilds offered the youngsters to flourish and become someone respectable. Whether as a fighter, a trader, a farmer or anything that piqued their interest; a quick visit at the local headquarter in their village or town would make finding a path in life simpler. Nevertheless, the majority of parents wanted their children to enter the ranks of the royal army, it was a sure way out of poverty. Many tried, many failed, and many died.

Out of all the guilds, an iconic name surfaced during the war. A small band of friends, mercenaries, considered heroes by some – Blades End. They helped save many innocent lives when Kreston first went to war with Dorchester, many of the villagers were evacuated to Plaustan. They didn't pick a side, they fought both provinces or anyone who got in their way. With only twenty members, they fought back platoons of hundreds – they were the first people with the boon of becoming full-fledged adventurers. Their emblem, a warrior, knelt with his head bowed and offering his sword. It symbolized their conviction of not fighting. A wandering sword not bound to anyone, a sword that will help whoever was in need.

Their rank remained in the first position in terms of raw strength and wealth. They diversified into other fields, this guild though friendly to one in need of help. The strictness in the recruitment of new members was on par with Claireville Academy's entrance exam. A powerful union of brave souls bound under the same ideals.

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The night seeped in, stood near the border, many adventurers waited. Their faces tired but filled with conviction. Some used abilities that went beyond normal human comprehension. For example, a girl, aged about sixteen didn't use magic but conjured

Will of the Wisp

. Normally a spell that uses the light element, but this differed from the original. The wisp moved and obeyed her every command, it looked alive. The original on the other hand remained bound to the caster's hand, more like a fireball but with better light and without the heat.

They all stood, waiting, some dressed with heavy and expensive armor while others with cheap protection. None looked superior than the other, after all, they were all commoners trying to make a

living for their families. None the less, the presence of two members from Blades end made the atmosphere heavy. They looked like recruits but the armor they wore, light with a black and white design, the signature black-knights, made them nearly invisible in the dark. This made the other members from differing guilds a bit competitive. The current quest given out to them was to find out and investigate whatever terrorized the surrounding roads. After a few kilometers inside Totrya, the scenery changed, it begins with a long climb that goes deeper. The gentle slope that faced Oxshield, made it climbable, but the reality of Totrya began when one reached the height where breathing got harder. None dare ventured inside, it had an eerie feeling to it, the trees looked normal on the outside but moved frequently. Some speculated it was the wind, but how the leaves and branches moved, proved it to be more than something a breeze could do.

A fog always remained near the edge of Totrya, it wasn't thick. Seeing a few meters remained a possibility, but after that, it was complete darkness. The adventurers remained focused on the mist before them. Camps were built, and they took turns sleeping and standing guard. Occasionally, growls, snarls, and hisses would be heard coming from the mist. It would be accompanied by footsteps and movement through bushes. This didn't bother them, but a loud echoing scream of a woman who seemed to have died – woke most of the people. It confused them, some heard it while others plainly didn't.

This misunderstanding brought around conflict amidst friends and guilds. The people who heard it remained adamant, while the people who didn't call them cowards. It escalated quickly, some drew their weapons which weren't limited to swords and close range, but guns as well. The arguments grew louder and obnoxious. "Excuse us, but would you guys please keep it calm and quiet; we don't want our parties to end up killing ourselves now do we?" One of the two members from Blades end spoke, his armor reflected the warm campfire. Everyone was mesmerized by how humble and friendly his face look. His eyes looked as if he were going to sleep, always lazy and nearly closed. He always held a smile regardless of the situation. The long hair falling onto his eyes both helped increase how creepy he was. A friendly weirdo, the arguing members didn't take that lightly.

"Don't come here and act all mighty, you may be from Blades end, but we ain't afraid of you, little boy." A shady looking man, wearing a hooded cloak replied, his tone filled with animosity.

"I'm only trying to help, please don't take this out of context." He placed his right hand onto his chest and slightly bowed – an act of respect.? "Being chivalrous here isn't going to do you good, little boy." The same hooded man approached. They stood inches apart, the young recruit could smell the man's breath, filled with the odor of alcohol. "Yet again, I apologize," he remained true to his manners. "Move along, Gurdan. Don't you see conversing with that drunken man is a waste of breath." A blond-haired boy added smugly. His eyes contrary to Gurdan were filled with disgust and hate, he looked intimidating. "But Edward," Gurdan tried to argue back but remained silent. "No need to worry my friend, we have things that are more important than resolving internal conflicts. That is their job and theirs alone, how can they hope to survive if their bond isn't even strong?" they walked away, the drunken man tried following them but was stopped by the opposing party.

"Gurdan, you should really stop trying to help everyone you see. I mean, being a hero and all may seem easy, but life isn't that simple." They walked closer to the current guards who stood close to the road. "It's not that I want to be a hero, but I can't help it, I want to help people."

“That isn’t any of my business, help whoever you want but don’t bring me into it. I don’t want to come and rescue you.” The few adventurers who stood watch whispered.

“Hey guys, I’m getting a bad feeling, I feel like something is going to jump at us,” one of the boys from the other parties spoke – everyone around him laughed and reassured him. Edward’s attention changed to what the boy spoke. Gurdan scouted the mist from afar, it was the first time he had gotten closer to Totrya. A howl got everybody on guard.

They had their hands on their weapons, most took their fighting stance. Something did, in fact, grow close. The footsteps and savage aura sent chills down everyone’s spine. The long-range fighters ran all the way back and took a more advantageous position.

“Something grows close I can feel it,” Edward placed his hands onto the ground. *Skill: Detection,* a faint blue light surged from his hand and went forward. Gurdan’s always smiling face changed into one focused. “Anything?” he asked. “Nothing, I can hear them moving around but can’t sense them, what is this?” Edward stood, there was no point in retrying.

“AHHHH, SOMEONE HELP ME,” gunfire broke the silence, screams, and people charging into battle were heard. Both partners rushed to where the screams came from. A pack of wolves rushed out of the mist, their eyes glowed red. Their fur black with purple spots, and bigger than your average wolf. They looked ruthless and clawed anyone who stood in their way. *Skill: Strength enhancement,* they both rushed into battle. People were mauled, some had their heads ripped off. The fight remained in favor of the adventurers. Their attention refocused and the wolves running out of the mist were killed after a lot of effort. Each one took hits that could slay a lion in seconds. The battle raged on, the two members from Blades end fought bravely. Despite this, the adventurers managed to slay only two wolves and the rest retreated. Two wolves killed for the price of six adventurers, the odds didn’t look that great. The bodies of the slain beast vanished into smoke, none paid attention; they were too busy helping out their injured comrades. Only Edward and Gurdan noticed it after the bodies vanished, a few copper coins were left behind.

[Chapter 78](#)

A Hero’s will

“Edward, are you seeing this?” the monster vanished. “Indeed, it left behind copper coins. The rumors about something brewing around Totrya is true; we need to get this information to the guild as fast as possible.” Cries echoed through the land, people were killed – some grieved. “Can you hear it, the sound of anger and hate, look behind us.” Gurdan’s attention shifted to the injured: some young boys, girls, aspiring adventurers, people who had so much to live for. Seeing their partners cry beside the lifeless bodies, some mauled so badly it was unrecognizable, Gurdan’s spirit lit ablaze. Something deep within burnt, he could no longer bear the sight of such tragedy.

“Gurdan, we need to report this to the guild as fast as possible,” Edward shook his shoulder. Gurdan was lost in thought, he wanted to avenge the people hurt; his ideals, his morals, everything turned upside down. He no longer wanted to see them suffer – at heart, he thrived for something greater, he wanted to become a hero. A hero heard in stories, a hero who helps, a hero who protects, a hero present and ready to serve, a hero born without prejudice, a hero who raises up every time humanity needed him, a hero of legend. “Edward,” Gurdan’s voice changed, the look in his eyes was one filled with vigor and

pity. “-if this is what we must come up against, I’m ready to stay here and protect the others. None will die on my watch; those beasts shall pay for the suffering they caused. I care not about being a hero, I want to save those kids, they have a life ahead of them. Please report to the guild on my behalf, I’ll stand watch, my body is pulsing with emotions I’ve never encountered before. Behind that fog, I can feel it, someone has come forth to wreak havoc onto our already torn island – please, my friend, do me this favor.” His hands already grasp the handle of the long-sword he used. “Gurdan, you’re spouting nonsense about being chivalrous at the worst possible time. That’s the reason I like you, my friend, I shan’t leave until the night is over – we must still secure those kids a future, don’t we?” Edward jumped and stood right beside Gurdan, the duo was ready and waiting for the next attack.

“We don’t have time to grieve over the lost ones, my brethren, follow the example of those who still stand before that mist: let’s fight for us, let’s fight for our hometown, and let’s protect this province. Their safety remains in our hands and our hands alone, anyone who still draws breath, pick up your weapons and follow Blades-end to the battle. Forgo your ego and emotions, adventurers unite.” A tanned, tall and well-built man spoke. He bore an emblem, an emblem hidden by bloodstains. He held a great sword, his voice resonated with all, it filled them with a new will to fight – it was one of the many other mysterious skills; Rise-up. A skill that motivates anyone who has lost the will to fight, a skill only certain guild leaders have. The crowd drew closer to him, weapons in hands, they all cheered. The beast’s aura grew close, everyone felt it. Their eyes burnt with the thought of revenge, adventurers were all people that defied the laws of nature. Their morals were something spoken in legends, the ancient text depicted this as the morals of the chosen one, the one who fought back hell’s invasion onto the Earthly domain. The will to never give up, the will to always protect their friends, the will to become stronger.

“ON GUARD,” Edward felt an army march behind him, the adventurers came to provide back up. “Ready,” eyes glowed through the mist, growls, snarls, and screams. The real fight now began. Birds flew, and it started, the same wolves charged out of the mist. This time, the ones defending were ready and waiting. The battle commenced, everyone fought, but this time, they were united. Subconscious people helped one another without speaking, they reached another level of understanding. Everyone had a small flame inside them; that flame was their will. Their resolve to save all, the will to protect. Only a few could see that flame, and the intensity at which it burnt almost went to astronomical heights.

Swords clashed, guns fired, spells, explosions, it all echoed. The people fought with all their might, some felt their strength increase, after killing each beast, their movement speed augmented. The more they defeated the enemies, the more powerful they grew, everyone felt it. This only served to reignite their passion, the swords swung without mercy, the guns fired with dead accuracy and the spells healed and created diversions. This was the first-time guilds united under the same cause. Leading the charge, two boys, still recruits, Edward and Gurdan. The former, reserved, and quiet while Gurdan had the grit of someone who charged in without fear. He fought the beast despite them being twice as big; everyone stared at his valor, they were motivated by how he fought. Every time he blocked or got pushed back, he rose up as if a man possessed. He got clawed, but was healed by the people, they had his back. Trust built up over the few hours till the sun rose.

The sunlight broke through the gloomy night, everyone’s faces were covered with blood, sweat, and tears. The monsters came in hordes that increased with each passing hour. At the crack of dawn, however, they all retreated; a strange rumbling made those monsters run away. Stood on the road with

his sword chipped and broken, Gurdan panted. Edward stood right behind him, they fought as one. Each one compensated for the other's mistake, their bond was unrivaled. Around them laid the vanishing corpses of their foe, ones who nearly wiped the adventurers out. The battlefield lit, body scattered all around, many lives were lost. The remainder of the survivors all knelt beside their lost comrades. They didn't cry nor shed a tear; a smile was what was seen through most of their faces. Even Gurdan and Edward smiled, the fight they had fought was one of many.

"We did it," Edward replied monotonously. "We sure did but to what ends, look behind us. We may have won the battle, but lost many of the people who unwillingly helped us. Just look, my heart, it's still not fulfilled. I want to do something to help them, this feeling of regret can't be quenched, I want to do everything I can, but alas I'm weak." He said with a regret-filled tone. A tear flowed down his cheek. "No, my friend, we did everything we could – a war can't be won without sacrifices. Those who died for us shall be remembered, burn this image in your heart, you will need to carry their wishes into future battles. It's a given, I might have laughed at your ideals of being a hero, but I now see that you are truly different from us. You fought harder than anyone present, you defended me, you took full on mortal injuries and your sword broke; despite that, you stood strong. For our sake, you were the first line of defense we had, I dare not think about how that is possible. A recruit like you fighting off horde after horde with only determination, I'm impressed my friend – very impressed."

"Young man, he who has stood firm for us, I thank you." A familiar voice spoke, it was the same guy who motivated everyone else to fight. "Blood, sweat and tears, I applaud your valor. You're one who had the gut to stand up against the unknown." The emblem hidden by blood could be seen. The emblem, a horse, a mythical one at that – Pegasus.

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"You're from Pegasus?" Edward's jaw dropped. "Indeed, I am," the well-built man answered. Pegasus, the second most powerful guild compromised with only the best of the best when it came to fighting. A full out mercenary guild, with a rather low member count. Despite this, their strength rivaled Blades-end. "Time isn't right for idle chatter; we've lost too many people by the claws of the beast we've never seen before. Just look at the battlefield, most of the people who died were young adults that hoped to find fame and glory." He shook his head in disappointment. The man spoke the truth, only a handful of people drew breath.

"Yes, and I'm sure you've noticed it, but after slaying them, the monsters vanished. In their stead, coins are left behind." Edward pointed out what he had found. "I agree, at first I blew it off as the beast having swallowed people with coins. But now I'm certain, each one drops two-copper coins. There's no face nor anything inscribe on it. This is pure copper." He held out the coin, it looked flawless – no trace of any imperfections. "The purity means that no kingdom is implicated with this. Another question is raised now if this is indeed pure copper, how will the market and bank react. Most importantly, how will the guild respond?" Edward continued to examine the coin, "I mean, I'm no expert on the matter, but you could probably exchange this copper for two standard issued coins by the kingdom. We'll need to check the purity of the metal first – the guild will handle this I'm sure." He gave up, the situation was dire.

"Edward, my friend, now isn't the time; we need to give the people who died a proper burial. We can't leave them out for the likes of the Merchants of death." Gurdan said while still gazing at the people who grieved.

"I agree, take off their guild collar, we'll have to report back the death count." The well-built man, whose name is still unknown spoke, the two recruits agreed. Everyone helped, things of value were removed, armor and weapons were left on the lifeless bodies. The swords if sharp, were broken down to the point where none could use it. After the grave was dug, the corpse was covered. One hole for one person. Atop said grave, the now broken weapon got used as a marker, they were imbedded deeply. And for their helmet rested on the handles – this battlefield soon changed into a cemetery. Countless swords, bows, spears, and other weapons sprouted off the ground as if they were plants. The grave wasn't dug out close to the road, rather, it was made deep into the forest, on a small plain hidden by enormous trees. Everyone agreed on said location. With their final respect and prayers said, the remainder of people set off to their respective guilds.

"Hey, mister, this isn't a place to sleep." An innocent-sounding person gently tapped his cheeks. Half-heartedly, Staxius awoke; he slept under the same tree. The sun had reached its highest peak. "C-could you give me the time please?" Staxius asked, his face still gloomy. "It's nearly about noon, you should really get going. You're lucky I'm the one who found you, the teachers in this academy are pretty rude you know." The voice felt refreshing, Staxius's mind felt at ease. "I apologize, I just dozed off," he smiled gently and took a good look at whoever woke him. Light brown hair that covered the eyes, a pointy nose, and freckled cheeks. "isn't it time for class though?" confused by what he saw, Staxius engaged in conversation to try and find out more about this person. "Not really," he replied, the voice had a hint of masculinity in it. "You have my thanks either way," Staxius stood up while using the trunk of the tree as an aid. "You look in bad shape there, do you need help?" the boy asked, "I'm fine, honestly, thanks for looking out for a total stranger."

"Louis, where are you?" a fading shout was heard from afar. "My friends are looking for me, I'll see you around, mister." The boy ran off, he gave off the same feeling as Avon.

"I'll see you later, yeah." Staxius's voice changed into one of a man suffering. The moment he tried standing up, every part of his body froze, it sent jolting pains throughout. A part of himself felt strange, he didn't know what was happening; the fact that his body was growing weak remained true – he became aware of it. "What is happening to me, I don't feel normal, I can barely even think – my body hurts so much. This is the first time I've felt anything like this. I can't describe it... oh, I think I know, it's like having a toothache but imagine that ten times stronger and throughout your body." Staxius struggled, he rested his back against the same tree and stared to where a small garden was built. "I need answers, but most importantly, I need to continue putting on an act of being strong. I can't look weak even for a second, it will ruin everything otherwise." He sighed, the cold wind brushed against his lifeless face.

[Chapter 79](#)

The Curse

The sun reached its highest peak; noon was now. The adventurers who helped in stopping the first horde left. None was foolish enough to stay behind – it would only result in more casualties. They all set off to their individual guilds; their arrival was to occur in one to two days. With blood on their hands, everyone set off with a feeling of regret on their faces.

All around Hidros, things were moving rapidly. The calm and usual subtle atmosphere in the capital changed, princess Gallienne had finally awoken from her unconscious state. The vermillion meteor crashing onto the island ruptured something inside her – she felt drained. At last, she awoke; beside her stood Piers Clyfford. Though he and she didn't get along – a feeling of duty forced him to pay her a visit despite having ended a long journey to have an audience with the Emperor. Next to her husband, the King, and the Queen – they came as soon as the servants gave news of her improving health. Last but not least, Theodore stood with his young prodigy in the shadows. This put a faint grin on her face; none knew that someone as cold-hearted as she could smile.

They were all shocked to see her eyes and mouth look joyous. The aura around her felt different – a glimpse of light and hope made itself apparent between her cruel nature. Only Theodore noticed the change yet he remained silent. The meteor had brought about many changes; one more mysterious than the other. As blissful as she might have looked, the princess could not utter a word. Her body laid, fragile without the strength to move. The room, colored in red and gold shone as the mid-day sun came through the balcony. A breeze of fresh air made everyone feel at peace, this moment was picturesque. Her conscience wasn't fully recovered, thus why she looked like an angel. Her white hair gently spread around her pillow; her rosy cheeks turned into a fiercer color. Piers out of all people, one who hated her the most – felt something, the princess truly was a beauty.

The same breeze that blew against the castle traveled all the way from Dorchester. "Millicent, please bring me the papers about the rights concerning the noble district," Julius ordered, the castle felt more active than ever before. Millicent ran around checking official documents and bringing them after Julius requested it. After the welcoming party that happened a few days ago, the duke adjusted to how things worked. Everyone felt a bond of trust building. They slowly but surely began working as one. All the prejudice about Julius being a stranger were put aside. Millicent subtly acted weird on occasions; she would lash out at anyone who crossed her way. Whoever was unlucky enough to be assaulted by her verbal abuse only replied with a smile. Whether it be commoners, servants, guards, soldiers and even the silver guardians; they all knew how much stress she went through. As time went on, the duchess became the most frequent drinker at the tavern, she drank with everyone and had fun.

Julius took it upon himself to help Dorchester, and take away the pressure off Millicent's shoulder. In no way was he the ruler, he held no authority. The only thing that went in his favor was that of a charismatic leader – he knew what to do to get what he wanted. Autumn, on the other hand, grew attached to the kids who ran around aimlessly all day. The camp slowly expanded outside the castle walls. Foundations for stone brick houses, though expensive, were laid out. Getting the gold required to rule the kingdom was hard, but Julius pulled through. He invested in the castle and the future of the province as if investing in the many successful business endeavors he had in the past. That man was renowned not only as a powerful mage, but a witty trader and merchant who could accurately guess what the market would do and how people would react.

Anyone who dealt with him knew how smart he was, they admired him. The name Garnet, now unknown thanks to the popularity of guilds, was once famous. Famous for being the second wealthiest family in Oxshield. The first spot was the royal family, none could rival how much gold they possessed. Dorchester was left in the hands of someone competent; an old friend – someone who once tried to oppose Staxius but was given a cold hard pill of reality to swallow. It was predicted that in the coming weeks and possibly months, the temporary camp inside the castle would be moved out. Another wall

was planned to be built after all the necessary buildings were made. An even higher and stronger wall; something that could rival an army on its lonesome. At this stage, this was only a dream, a hope – Julius had no clue to what material he should utilize. After conversing with the local craftsmen, they still remained in the dark. They needed something stronger than stone and infused with magic. For that to happen, they'll need to get a hold of a powerful mage that focuses on enhancements. That sadly was a rare pursuit for sorcerers nowadays. Even if they did find one, the level would be mediocre at best, the more talented mages worked for the Emperor.

It was then decided that the wall should be built in the presence of Staxius. For now, the focus was on expanding the domain outwards. Housing so many people in such a cramped place felt inhuman and outright cruel. The villagers didn't complain, but the one's ruling them had that burden on their hearts. It could be said with full confidence that the majority of people in Dorchester, lived inside castle Garsley. Some made camps outside; for hunting and landmarks purposes so as to not get lost in the vastness. A feeling of belonging and companionship formed, it bounded everyone together. Devoid of any prejudice, bards who stumbled across this castle were shocked. Never had they seen such accord between people, none cause trouble for the other – they all lived in peace and harmony. It was said stumbling bards that spread the word of castle Garsley throughout Hidros.

People's interest piqued; soon after, on a regular basis, one or two strangers would pay a visit out of curiosity. The local merchandise got sold, and a slow and unviable source of income formed. Julius saw the potential; Dorchester was a war-torn region. This was a curse, but he saw something else – something that could open the eyes of many. The true reality of war, how people had to endure, and how together a community could work and help one another out. Alone people were vulnerable and weak, but together, the weakest stick could be made to be the strongest if put in a stack with others.

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The loss of strength weighed heavily on him. He had stayed under the same tree for hours on ends, the will to rise up vanished into dust. Staxius felt worthless; he lamented how feeble he had grown; answers were what he desperately needed. By all means, he wanted to try and reach out to Undrar but he felt ashamed. Speaking out about his troubles and woes wasn't something he would do, it went against his personality. After the little altercation between Sophie yesterday, Eira remained in her room. Sophie visited the hospital, the classmates continued to ask questions about who that man was. Josiah didn't pay much attention; he knew that Sophie would inevitably lose. The image of Staxius turning an SSS-ranked combat robot into dust was burnt deep inside his heart.

Preparations for the preliminaries of the tournament began throughout the provinces. Magical schools had to organize an internal tournament to choose who was best suited to participate. Five members were required to officially enter. Now with the implementation of the rule that anyone could join if they pass the trials prepared by the Order. One had to wait longer for many young ones rushed in to try and secure a spot. This was the chance to change their lives, Claireville academies' training ground began to fill up. Chatter, screams, and yelling grew common, the battle arena behind Staxius was where the trial was set to begin. One after the other, the queue grew longer by each passing minute.

“Look at all those future legends, one of them may well become the next prodigy. Just look at them, there are people who came in with only a sword and no magic. Guess it's true then, being a sorcerer isn't that big a thing that it was all those years ago. Look at me, a failed-sorcerer who's only powerful

thanks to the blessing received by a god. Alone, I'm nothing but a fraud, someone who makes people think I'm more powerful. In reality, I'm just weak and overcompensate with my wit." He sighed; "-I've never defeated anyone using strength alone. I've always fought my battles with something up my sleeve, I'm always thinking ahead of anyone – this doesn't make me strong. However, I know that somewhere out there, someone draws breath, someone who fights for the sake of others. Someone who can stand up to anything without faltering, a real hero, someone who fights for others. A person that you could rely on despite how dire the situation becomes, he'll always rise to get the last strike – the true savior of humanity. The hero my dad always tried to become, the hero who is spoken in myths." The murmurs behind him grew quieter, the exam started. "I wonder where I went wrong, am I just a failed mage. Who knows, I'm just Staxius Haggard, a man who is both blessed and cursed by the boon given to me by the god of death."

The pentagram on his palm began to burn, more ancient writings began to engrave themselves onto his chest. Reminiscing about who he was triggered something deep within, the memories of someone flashed before his eyes. They didn't belong to him, it was the memory of someone else, someone who resembled him. Only faint glimpses were seen, no sound nothing, only a high-pitched tone could be heard. His heart throbbed; his head felt as if it were going to explode. The blood circulated around his body increased in velocity, it pounded against everything inside him. The headache intensified, Staxius furiously gritted his teeth. His fists all clenched to the point where blood began to flow, the bones in his finger cracked. His entire body trembled, "you, heir to the god of death, I'm the one who knows all. Your power belongs to me, the pathetic ancient text on your chest isn't enough to keep me out. Lord Death has grown sloppy, you, my friend, are the first victim I shall devour. Without an heir, the mighty death reaper is but a cheerful little kid." The internal organs began to give up, the pressure at which the blood traveled began to kill him from the inside. His eyes moved independently of his will to the point it snapped. Everything was rendered black; the high-pitched noise grew so intense it popped the eardrums.

"D-die..." Staxius tried to fight back whatever was happening to him. His mana and body were being controlled from afar, all he saw now was black. A faint line stretched far beyond where he could physically see. The place burnt with a purple flame, it burnt stronger than the sun. "D-dark a-arts... M-mana c-cancellation," The line linking them both snapped. Staxius's body relaxed and fell onto the floor. "Impressive, you're not worthless at all, however, the death element you're so proud of, it's now worthless. The blessing given to you by Lord Death has been nullified, you no longer his heir, you're but a human with a worthless magical element, you should have chosen to die instead of fighting back, with this, I wish you luck on your pitiful journey. You don't have the power to fight against me now, weakling, the god-slayer is the one who shall end it all and revert to the beginning of time itself."

The strange mysterious voice vanished. The ancient engravings on his chest all lost their color, it looked like scars. The pentagram on his hand vanished; the death element – he could no longer feel it. It stopped responding, the only thing alive was the artificial element, dark-arts. The bond between Undrar severed, the blessing on his neck faded. Two of his senses were gone, he could no longer see nor hear. His body laid on the ground, blood seeped out. The only expression on his face was a lifeless smile. The man named Staxius Haggard broke and on that fateful day; lost everything that made him, Staxius. This was the fate of the wielder of the death element, the curse that binds them to eternal suffering and ruin. Nothing comes without a price – he knew that fact very well and chose to embrace it as his last moments came to pass.

[Chapter 80](#)

The End of an Era

'It's dark and quiet. I can't see nor hear, complete darkness. This feeling, it's familiar – I'm traveling inside another portal. This time, the portal is much denser. The gateway leads into my subconscious, the place where all magic and magical elements are controlled. It's dark, I can't make anything out, my body is gone. I don't feel anything. Whoever tapped into my psyche is truly powerful. I wonder how can one stand against that. At that moment, all I saw was strength, true power – the ability to make your enemies cower before you. I'm happy it happened, I lost yet another battle. It's always the same, in the face of true strength – I lose. I can't take it any longer, a part of me wants to become strong while another part wants me to give in and just rest. The latter is the better choice, I'm nothing but a fake.'

Up high, the sun began its descent. "Master," Avon felt an urge to manifest, he could no longer feel Staxius's presence. "What happened to you?" a feeling of dread came from within – Staxius's defeated body laid under the tree, hidden from prying eyes. The ground around him dampened and bloodied. 'Impossible,' Avon got closer, 'Staxius isn't that weak.' A faint odor of unknown mana source lingered in the air. 'I knew it, that vermilion meteor wasn't just for show, it's the mark of a new beginning.' Avon remained calm; the feeling of dread dissipated. 'Master felt it, I'm sure of it. He felt what true strength is, the god-slayer has awakened.'

The ground trembled, a humming noise grew closer. As black as shadow, Avon brought the car. Despite looking skinny and feeble, he picked up Staxius, placed him in the car, then drove off. Neither did the car stop for the hospital nor did it stop for anyone, it rushed out like a lightning flash. Blood continued to flow down his face, the eyes were destroyed completely. Blood poured down his ears as well, his limbs looked unnatural. Even in how bad of a state his master was, Avon didn't care any less. Deep within he knew. He knew that Staxius would pull through somehow.

"Master, some unsightly humans came near the border to our domain. As you ordered, I asked the wolves to take care of the pests, however, the intruders were more resilient. We lost some, but casualties were limited." A strange figure spoke, it knelt. It wore a suit and on its head, it bore grey horns. "How many times to I have to repeat myself." The man who sat down overlooking the valley stood. "-I don't like to be interrupted whilst thinking." The eyes turned grey, he stared right at the demon wearing a suit. It turned to stone, the strange figure could not even respond. "Servants, come take this piece of trash out. I care not for your worries; I've got more on my mind. Gathering power at this instant is more important than dealing with curious pests. Do whatever you want to stop them, give the orders to my guardians – I care not if most of our minion die. This realm will soon merge with the realms of monsters and demons." Two well-dressed ladies with horns on their heads took away the frozen corpse.

'There is only one person in this entire kingdom that can help master. The ones who are more in-tune with mythology and legends – the people from Arda. More specifically, the queen.' The shadow changed into a lightning bolt and the car headed to the noble district. A journey that would take one to two days; the only question in Avon's mind was, 'will he last that long?'

'I'm falling deeper into the abyss. Losing the ability to see and hear does take a toll on your body. I felt someone pick-me-up earlier but I don't know who it is or where we are. All I know now is emptiness and

silence. This is the peace I've always sought after; a place where you can lose yourself without worrying about materialistic things. Little by little, I feel the death element dying. The immortality bestowed to me by Lord Death only works if our magical elements are active. Sadly, I can feel that seep away too, I don't feel anything anymore – it's numb. Even if I tried, I could not move.'

Time went by faster than expected; everyone went around minding their own business. Staxius Haggard lost everything yet again, but this time – he had someone beside him. A spirit who he liberated from a car out of all things.

The god-slayer, an entity so powerful a god could not hold a candle to him. What could an heir do to stand up against someone so powerful; death was what awaited him but in desperation, he saved himself and lost everything in the process.

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Two days went by; the central guild got news to what happened out in Totrya. They didn't believe it at first. More and more adventurers came out gradually and claimed that monsters prowled around the borders; they were forced to act. To help in said situation, new orders were given out to every individual guild. Any piece of copper, silver or gold that got dropped when they slew a monster, the central guild would be the only one who could exchange it for standard issued coins from the kingdom. The purity was checked and the faceless coins were indeed pure – their price was evaluated to twice a normal coin. For example, one could exchange a monster dropped coin for two kingdoms issued coins.

Over the course of a week, to stop any financial crisis, merchant guilds and any parties connected to said guilds were called in for a meeting. Royal advisors were present too. After a debate lasting two days, everyone came to an agreement. The faceless coins now known as Qaisar were to be banned from any public trading. It was the only way to prevent people from exhorting and raising up the price; for it would surely destroy the commoners. Instead, any Qaisar collected were to be exchanged at any guild or bank. The price of Qaisar varied, some coins were purer than others. This impacted their cost but averaged out. None really cared about the purity unless dealing with a blacksmith; though only a handful of people held that right.

This only made being an adventurer something to thrive for. The source of income was what inspired many to pursue that route. A new ranking system, separate from sorcerers was put in place. People argued that ranking adventurers using that old system wasn't viable. The ranks always changed there, it depended on your skill and not how strong you were, though mastering a skill can make you sharp – it didn't consider your innate strength. To that end, with the help from the Order to get a basic reference for the ranks should be given out. The new ranking order was divided into ten different tiers. Tier-one being the strongest and Tier-ten being the lowest. Tier-two was SSS-rank for sorcerers which proved how futile that old system was.

The strongest mages could barely make it as Tier-two if they wanted to become an adventurer. It became harsher but it was fair. With the rise of people trying to join their ranks, acquiring, and leveling their standing in the guild had to be tough. This was to separate boasters and money-hungry freaks to the competent. This new order was only announced but not implemented. MARS, the guilds, and other organizations came together, every scholar and geniuses were brought in to make an accurate evaluation device. This was done to limit human error, the thought of having someone weak in a high

tier would surely crumble everything. Slowly, after years being hidden in the shadows of mages; adventurers had a place to call home. The era of mages ended when long-range weapons got invented. They grew lesser and had come to the point of extinction.

In response to that, any previous SSS-rank mage given the title and standing of a noble was revoked. The Order had demanded it so, the Emperor gave his approval. With that, the era of adventurers began. It would be months until the few magical academies were to be turned into normal institutions. This inter-magical tournament was the last, the final hoo-ray before everything ended. The populous didn't really care and neither did the sorcerers themselves. Most of them lived outside Hidros; and were well off. The apparition of new beings required new blood and not some overused overpowered hierarchy of boasters and selfish individuals. It didn't mean the complete end, but it sure seemed that way.

The practice of magic remained fundamental in how people lived, therefore – it wasn't mages that grew unimportant but battle-mages. Learning how magic worked still remained a noble pursuit but in a different field, the field to improve the technology. For the few people remaining out in the field as battle-mages, their ranks were soon to be merged with the guild's ranking.

That following week where Hidros adapted how they viewed sorcerers and adventurers; Staxius remained asleep. Avon brought him to Arda, seeing the broken-down body of her partner, the queen personally decided to heal him. Ancient magic did naught but worsen his condition. It grew hopeless, even the sage was left baffled. All the knowledge about ancient magic did nothing, Staxius remained in a bed with aromatic flowers and plants around him. Their scent gave the patient peace of mind and lowered how they felt pain. No medicine could heal him nor could any magic; thus lowering the pain he felt became the only option.

Julius got worried; Staxius didn't get back to him. A call to Claireville academy to check on Ayleth proved to be more than enough. Staxius disappeared, none knew where he went. After trying to reach his phone, Avon finally answered the old friend. This call only served to confuse Julius further, Avon averted everything masterfully. In the end, Julius gave up and continued working as the changes in commerce made him envious.

"Sage, how's Staxius doing?" nighttime had come, Arda still dealt with paperwork concerning the independency from the royal family. "Not to well I'm afraid. There haven't been any improvements in the past week; we've done everything we could." The old man replied in a quiet and mesmerizing tone. "Are you sure we can't do anything else?" the last stamp and signature were filled out. The queen laid back on her chair to take a breather – Staxius's condition continued to ail her from within.? "I'm afraid so, Shanna, please take a break now and then, smothering yourself in work won't make his situation any better." He asked out of concern. "I know that very well, you needn't remind me. I'm only but lost, Arda has to come first. I'm not doing this as a means of escape, the paperwork has to be filled out before I can think about anything else." She stood and headed out. Her path was set on Staxius's room, the same one she gave to him, though now cleaned and more appropriate. Plants scattered everywhere; the place looked like a garden more than a bedroom. In the middle, like a flower, Staxius laid. The face turned pale, the same color as someone who had died, the eyes were gone; all that could be seen was black. From time to time, the left index finger would move gently.

'What is the concept of time, I'm lost. This is way worst then when I got imprisoned by medusa's curse. Is this how everything will remain now? My magical element has gone quiet, I can't sense the mana

anymore. It's gone – surely this means that I'm dead right? Mana is a person's lifeforce and I'm pretty sure mine is exhausted. I dare not fathom what has happened to me, all I wish for is another chance. I've had enough of these dreams – I don't want to experience someone else's memories. The vagueness compared to the first time has lessened. I feel like I'm that person, I'm reliving everything he went through...just who are you, and why do I feel so at ease when I relive certain events.'