

## Death Magic 711

Chapter 711: True Demonlord [42]

“Good morning éclair, a grand day rises over the horizon.”

“Good morning master,” returned a confused little glee, “-my lord, I rarely see thee in a good mood, what’s the occasion?”

“I have some vague ideas,” he lined next to the counter, “-perhaps it was the thrill of death. I’ve reawakened feeling refreshed and ready to challenge the world. Maybe not the latter,” the bi-colored eyes gave an inkling of reassurance. What’s for breakfast?”

“Oatmeal,” said the butler, “-a healthy light breakfast to start the day. My lord, about the proceeding of yesterday, what are the orders going forward?”

“I’ve had my share of fighting for now. The invasion over Odgawoan isn’t severe, I spoke to a few and they say, the purpose is unknown to them. I suggest leaving the military to deal against the aftermath.”

“Won’t the influence spill over onto the town?”

“They’ve already adapted,” a flick of the finger toggled a holographic display, “-very ingenious folks. Fuda mountain’s out of reach, the roads are shut and redirected along a new path. Expansion of various properties has shifted to the south and west. Once the quest is accomplished, I’m certain monsters will depart, if it fails, we’ll shut the gates ourselves.”

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“If you say so, my lord,” the dishes readied in mere seconds. Behind, the hallway scattered by the sound of light feet, “-master,” echoed.

“Careful,” he responded, “-good morning Starix, how have you been?”

“Great,” she ignored tact and went for an embrace around the stomach, seeing the hands were occupied by plates.

“I’m glad,” he smiled, “-kindly let go, tis quite hard to balance dishes over an unsteady support.”

“I apologize,” she hastily stepped off, “-tis unbecoming behavior for a maid.”

“Worry not,” the head shook towards the dining hall, “-I don’t care about, workers under our family are treated with respect. Maid or not, your part of the family, don’t ever forget said fact.”

“You’re very kind.”

\*On later news,\* murmurs on the radio cleared by the second, \*-monster invasion situation has been overtaken by the military. Sources have reported the AHA to have maltreated the vigilantes, a lawsuit is being prepared to take the company to court. Among the big names are Lina Holseter, daughter of Duke Holseter. Time will decide. We conclude, the death sentence of count Oathtall was contested, the jury decided on removing the capital punishment in exchange for greater property of which will be bestowed onto the prosecutor’s party. Our morning show ends,\* cheery music played, \*-December is upon us, be ready for the festive season.\*

“Never knew the end of the year to be a great month here,” returned he head deep into the breakfast.

“December’s the month of buying and profit.”

“-And the month of love,” said Starix, “-back in our world, December was the month to reveal one’s intention to another. The month of love and affection. Pretty big hit if I remember correctly.”

“Master, are you intent on staying here or heading back for the holidays?”

“I’ll stick around until there’s nothing to be completed. The Count’s properties need to be glossed over, the casino and various gains need to be ascertained. Once Raven is on a stable footing, I’ll take a few days off and fly home. You’re most welcome to follow.”

“I shall kindly think about the proposition, my lord.”

“What about you, Starix, any plans with Cora?”

“My lord, please,” her cheeks flushed, “-I bare no physical traits to be viewed as a woman. Neutral and without the drive for reproductive functions.”

“Why look to the body, platonic companionship alone is sufficient. The man did leave everything behind, or so I’ve heard. Take care of yourself, I’m sure éclair has prepared a bonus for the workers.”

“Yes,” he smiled, “-they’ll have the pleasures of a party hosted in the backyard on the day thee fly to Hidros.”

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The conversation continued along a friendlier stream of words and a show of expression. Starix felt at home as did éclair, the distant master, who in their mind was all-knowing and strong, came to be viewed as a man with nice words and good intentions. To the comrades, he held affection and generosity, to the adversary he held contempt and mercilessness. Was he good, was he bad, the subjective prospect depended on the person, where the retainers were concerned, Igna Haggard was but Igna Haggard.

Shuffles shook the mattress, a pull to the right removed the blanket – slightly ajar window blew in the cold morning wind. A chill went from the feet upward into a contest to the left, the blanket slid.

“Stop taking the covers,” said a muffle.

“Stop talking,” returned another.

“...” eyes opened to one another, Lina and Loftha had shared a bed unknowingly. Bare-chested and exposed down to their legs, the worse sprung to mind, “-did we do anything yesterday?” gulped Lina.

“Of the sapphic nature?” returned the princess nonchalantly, “-don’t think so,” she sat up and wiped her eyes, “-good morning I suppose.”

“How brash can a woman be?”

“Drop the prudish act,” sighed the princess, “-get changed,” her mood worsened.

“Oh,” Lina followed, “-yesterday...”

“Correct.”

\*knock, knock,\*

“Who is it?”

“Midne my lady, I was asked by the master to wake the sleeping beauties.”

“Midne?” the door opened to a pair of ladies in their undergarments, “-what did you say about the master?” inquired Lina in a burst of wrath.

“The master waits downstairs,” returned she, her braided black hair, black eyes, and innocent expression was quite a hefty load to intake, the body didn’t once say of her being frail, rather, the subconscious aura of a veteran swelled, “-I’ll be going now.”

“éclair,” back to the dining hall, “-what’s happened of Midne?”

“I sent her on a mission in the company of lord Asmodeus and lady Kul,” returned Starix, “-hence my maid’s outfit.”

“A replacement for the Valkyrie?”

“More of a passing fancy. The mission was of the intimidation allegiance. Gang activity rose in the dozen, a few needed to be exterminated to quell the seed of revolution. The mafia is hard enough to deal with.”

“I presume the report of said action has been submitted?”

“Don’t frown at me master,” returned puppy-dog eyes, “-I’ve sent my report a few hours ago. Asmodeus and Kul are at the gambling den, I asked Midne to return,” she stood and twirled into he, “-I’m going to visit an acquaintance of yours, the two-faced Evalo.”

“Good fortune on the journey.”

“Thank you, master,” a keyring spun around the index, “-I’ve taken the liberty of buying a few sports cars to befit our station.”

“He did what?” fired Igna.

“He-he,” replied éclair, a thunderous roar led down the hill.

“I don’t mind,” shrugged Igna, “-money is meant to be spent.”

Soon after, Midne joined the table and kept to a few words per bite. Her visage and confidence seemed to rise, ‘-Starix’s mission for her was correct. Nothing increases one’s self-confidence more than a show of strength. Midne’s very strong among the humans, she’s on the complete opposite side of the good and evil scale. An angelic purity runs through the blood and veins.’ Louder footsteps leaped into sight, “-alive...”

“He is...”

“Speechless I see,” remarked a jestful comment.

"Midne and I will be off to household chores. The deal successfully passed through, information should be in the inbox – shall I ready transport?"

"Please do."

"By air or by road?"

"Latter."

"Understood," he bowed.

"Glad to see you back, master," whispered Midne on the way out.

"Likewise," he replied.

"Explain, right now," Lina's eyes watered, "-didn't you die?"

"I did die, does it answer thy questions. No need to cause a scene, take a seat and I'll explain."

"..."

"Speak."

"I used the last of my magic to illusion a fa?ade to fool the military. In no way can they have known there were survivors. Yet, the scheming went to the drain, the radio reported a lawsuit being filed against AHA, plaintiff, you. No matter, I survived on simple reason," hair whitened, canine sharpened, "- I'm not a human, I belong to the noble race of Nightwalkers. Immortality is pretty much a guarantee from whence a person turns. I never meant for this to be a secret. I appreciate the effort it took to carry a lifeless corpse here, to that, I must give my most sincere thanks," he stood and lowered his head in gratitude, "-thank you, ladies, I'd never think my actions to be so rash on the psyche. I apologize for the harm it might have caused." The conversation continued, food served, and time passed. In the end, the daughter of the duke made for the airfield, her family jet waited. Manager Brand played a big part in her family's worries about their daughter. The jet landed shy of a few hours ago, in it were her siblings and parents. The touching reunion happened at a nearby café.

Loftha stood silently before the parked car, "-don't be like that," the windows rolled, "-I said I was sorry, didn't I?"

"No," she stormed to the passenger side, "-I don't care about the secrets, I'm angry..."

"Because I choose solitude over asking for help?"

"-How."

"It's obvious," the door opened, "-get in, we're headed to town. Look here," a display told of a message from the emperor, \*Dear brother-in-law, if the message reaches you well, I have a humble request on behalf of the imperial family. Please bring back Loftha safely, the guards I had to watch have reported her missing. I can but think of the worse, bring my little sister back, she's important to us. I'll do anything in return, anything, the sky is the limit, her life is priceless to me, to us.\* "-Who's the selfish one. I take risks knowing full well what is at stake. My life isn't worth much in the grand scheme of things, the safety of those I care about comes first. I remained behind and fought for the simple reason of success.

The more shines the light of chaos, the greater becomes its shadow. At the end of the day, none's going to cry over my disappearance, neither would I, I'm cursed. You, on the other hand, have a family. Loving siblings and parents, the situation at home may be strained and awkward, the home is still present. I'm jealous, Sister Eira's part of thy household, her responsibility as empress elapses the Haggard name, she's focused on the Sultria name. Don't be foolish, strength doesn't excuse foolishness, take those words from a greater fool."

"The merciless killer has a heart?"

"No need to say it aloud," he laughed, "-I do have a heart, it pumps blood, nothing more, nothing less."

Tires to the asphalt, tall trees rose to the sky, the spotted foliage and tree-line sapped worries unlike anything she'd seen before, "-no one to cry. I'm not so sure."

"You say something?"

"No, ignore my babble. Guess our adventure ends?" melancholy washed her visage.

"Suppose so," he exhaled, "-listen, Loftha, you're a great girl. I'm not daft nor am I dense, the outfit is the one I gave – the blatant expression of affection can't be ignored. The way the lashes flutter in my direction fills me with pride to know you fell."

"Then," her cheeks washed red, "-do you?"

"This is the problem," he gripped the wheel, "-even if my feelings are returned, nothing good will come out of our bond. Think about it..."

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"What if I said I'd be ready to leave everything behind," her visage shone in a tinge of embarrassment and relief, her pupils widened, "-you knew how I felt for all this time, didn't you. I realized it when I saw the dead body... my heart shuddered more than when I asked for help."

"Leave everything behind for what?" he slammed the breaks, a clearing in the tree-lined gave onto the townscape, "-come with me," he rushed outward, "-a grown man like me is scared," the iris washed into white with flakes of red, "-I don't want to lose anyone else. Associating will but bring misfortune and death – Tempest, Adelana, Ayleth, Ancret, Alyson, Annet, Fenrir, Millicent, Lizzie, Deadeyes, Autumn, Julius, Leko, Alicia, the list goes on and on, they who trusted me have ended in a casket. I don't want the same to happen again," he shook her shoulder, "-understand, tis the reason why I can't," the head lowered, "-not anymore, no one needs to suffer on my account..."

"Selfish," she gave a tight embrace, "-you're selfish..."

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"If selfishness saves another life, I don't mind."

"What now?" she stepped away with hands clasped, "-what am I supposed to do?"

"I don't know really," he veered towards the townscape, "-I knew a confession would eventually happen. I- I'm sorry, I should have noticed earlier and made sure the feelings grew in the opposite end of the spectrum."

"Tell me," she inched closer, "-do you love someone?"

"I do actually," he smiled, "-three little bundles of mess and joy, Draconis, Vanesa, and the fiery Saniata. Why do you ask?"

"If you're allowed to be selfish," wind blew across her visage, "-goes the same for me, I'm allowed to be selfish too," her gaze landed firmly, "-I'll make sure my feelings come across. I won't give up easily." In said instant, when the words of her hearts of hearts uttered out her mouth, a shy ray of light landed, a playful gust blew to scatter the falling leaves across her stead, "-did I make you speechless?" she winked.

"Try again later," he patted her shoulder, "-we ought to head out." The following drive happened in a cheerier tone, the princess talked, he listened, at interval would make a snarly remark, she'd laugh or dismiss the comment, then continue on her tangent. In no way did it feel overwhelming, her casual tone of voice was pleasing to the ears.

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Rendezvous location, a building in Stanley's homage, coincidentally, the same meet-up place chosen by Asmodeus for later. Down to the road where many vehicles went back and forth, clueless passersby, infatuated by the car, made passing comments and ambled on their merry way. Attention was part of day-to-day life. A four-way intersection halted the advancement, this time, at the heart of Stanley's homage. Visitors were frequent, the day life went about without hassle. "-We're near," he pulled to the right and into an underground parking lot. The building above ground was tall, robust, and held various company names at its peak.

'Should be the place,' he halted, "-éclair," hands to the earring, "-relay our location to the emperor."

"Understood."

"You always talk alone, what's the deal?"

"Does it matter?" he stepped out, "-tis convenient to have my trusted butler leading the way."

"Honestly," she exhaled, "-no freedom whatsoever."

"Think what you wish," arms crossed and towards the lift, "-éclair's one of the best things to ever come into my humble life. Worry not princess Loftha, I don't play for the other team."

"Stop it," she pinched, "-no teasing whilst in public."

"Fair enough."

Up to the ground floor, the sheets parted before a crowd of white-collar workers. One on their phone, another stern on the watch, and some with head to the ground and bags under their eyes, "-the work culture is strenuous."

“Tell me about it,” they stepped out, “-I bet they work for her...”

“Her?”

“Excuse me,” hailed a man dressed smartly, “-are you perhaps Viscount Igna Haggard and Princess Loftha?”

“Correct.”

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“My name’s Thanoa, the personal secretary to lady Amber Sultria. Please follow me this way,” tall and confident, a private lift seemed to drop suddenly, “-my lady awaits.”

‘Amber Sultria,’ he reflected, Loftha’s gripped tightened, ‘-we met in my past life if memory serves well, she had a strict mouth, didn’t care for emotions, and had her head deep into business and the survival of the imperial family. The mother figure of the Sultria family, by that logic, Loftha was described as lacking emotion due to her abilities. Maybe the powers were hampered in favor of her emotions...’

“Viscount Igna, I advise patience with my lady, she’s quite hot-headed.”

“I appreciate the word of warning,” \*ding.\* A cacophony of phone, erratic answers, typing, printing machines going full blasts, “-follow me,” said secretary once again. Workaholics drowned in the pits of keys, the small beige cabinets spoke volume – cheap and efficient. None cared about appearance nor comfort, the mutual feeling of forced productivity spanned. Loftha’s grip gradually tightened.

“Here we are,” stopped before a metal rectangle, “-here’s the lady’s office.”

‘More of a cell,’ they ambled through. A simple box was placed in the corner of the floor. Papers laid in multiple piles, the shelf, where one would put their accomplishments, was left empty save for cans of energy drinks.

“The runaway is back,” glared across the room, or rather, a few steps. The place was small and minimalist, “-how’s my little sister doing?” her head rose to block the outside light, dark circles, frameless glasses reflected the screen’s light focused on the visitors.

“Welcome back, sister,” said another sat against the wall without a chair, “-seems like our older sister’s on one of her tyrants.”

“Brother,” her jaws dropped, “-big sister, how can you be so cruel to the emperor. Does the prospect of hierarchy not worth its salt?”

“I don’t want to hear this from a brat,” her impaling words and cruel face didn’t help, the eyebrows, though trimmed and proper, were arranged in a perpetual frown, “-how was the little vacation, I heard the royal guards were left scouring the battlefield in fear of thine death. Tell me, Loftha, was it worth the excursion, might I remind, the little stunt cost us a pretty penny.” The sharpened tongue Loftha met her maker.

‘She’s the one she got it from, very interesting.’

“You,” turned to Igna, “-why does thee stand quiet and not speak?”

The Emperor's mien washed in discomfort; a warning sign to the lady of which brought naught.

'éclair, any information about the company?'

'Privately owned Sultria Corp. They focus mainly on the world of technology and accounting, failure to bring about a good income forced the Corp to split into two factions. One under Amber Sultria, and the other, ruled by Hyde and Xyra. Profits for the former's been rather tough, her ventures are sound in theory but lack a certain charm. Alas, on the verge of bankruptcy, the company was bought out by Kura's Trading Corporation. They mainly operate under the conglomerate. Further information will require hacking, shall I investigate?'

'Go for it.'

"Answer me boy, who are you?"

"Apologies," a few steps and he glared down onto her seat, "-Viscount Igna Haggard. Her ladyship didn't give the authority to speak, therefore, I kept quiet. Pretell, is the lady's high-pitch yelling considered the speaking tone, or must I order earplugs for a humane conversation?"

Her right cheek twitched, Loftha and the emperor averted her gaze.

"Viscount Haggard, to what do I owe the pleasure of said visit. Can't help but notice the intimacy my sister and you share."

"Surely a lady as mature as you can distinguish between an amorous venture and platonic companionship." Her lower lip deflated with a sudden bite, frustration went from left to right. "Lady Amber Sultria, any question I might answer?"

"No," the bubbling cauldron calmed to a menacing smirk, "-we're related by marriage from my brother and Eira. She did warn about her cousin's ability to get on one's nerve. The blatant aggression is a way to find weak spots in another's moral shield, mentally torture until they yield."

"Not really," he shrugged, "-I say what's on my mind. Mincing words was never one of my strong suits. Passive aggressivity is a nicer way of sending a message across."

"I see," she exhaled, "-I heard part of the story from the Markus. Care to continue the tale?"

"What he said is probably true. Lady Loftha was on the battlefield, fought monsters, and remained under my care for the longest of time. The incompetence from the AHA and the military appalls me. The lack of care for the fighters' life. Order for a mass-scale genocide barely evaded completion. The number of resources I had to use reaches far into the hundreds of thousands. Do I expect to be paid, no?"

"-Should I care?"

"Yes," he slammed the table, "-not about the money, but about the lives of your people. Is the imperial family of Sultria so weak they can't spare the authority to challenge the independent military factions, have the conglomerate stiffen away thy powers, tell me, lady Amber, am I right or wrong?"

"Shouting about it won't make a difference," she sharply stood, her chair fell into a loud crash, "-what was said is right, the military is growing strong. The nobles in favor of the imperial family are being



weeded out, the conglomerates have allied to the militants. We can't fight, even if we wanted. What would a young adult know about politics and troubles."

"What do I know about politics?" he spun and made for Loftha, "-Fia, tell me," eye to eye, "-what you said earlier, was it true, are those the true feelings?"

"Yes, why," she grabbed his arms, "-Igna, don't do anything foolish."

"I never do foolish things," he reached and tapped his forehead with hers, "-I've decided," hand in hand, "-Lady Amber, how much do you trust us?"

"Huh?" her face crinkled, "-what about trust. We've been screwed over so much it's out of the question. I care not for anyone else except me and the imperial family. I have to make sure the next generation advance without hassle, to fight the conglomerates, I'll work my way up the corporate ladder and topple the leaders, tis how I'll win."

"Very well," he pulled onto her soft hands, "-Amber Sultria, I, Igna Haggard, on this day forth, humbly ask for thy blessing."

"Igna..." her face reddened, "-don't..."

"Blessing in what?" Amber snarled, "-you stupid or what?"

"Blessing in marriage."

"STOP," she pulled her hand, "-IGNA, NO!" refuted Loftha, "- I mean, yes, but no. I want you to accept me for who I am, not what I represent. I sense what thee thought, political marriage to topple the conglomerates... still, I don't want that sort of relation. I want something pure, something greater."

"Igna," hands to his shoulder, "-I appreciate the thoughtfulness," smiled the emperor, "-still, I don't want our troubles to reflect on thee. The Haggard name has already given us my wife, I couldn't potentially ask for more."

"Viscount," hands to the table, "-are you serious?" the explosive expression mellowed, "-asking for my blessing in marriage to aid us – such a rash decision, I can't tell if tis sincere or an honest mistake."

"The imperial family truly are upstanding citizens. Good intentions alone will not win against the underhanded tricks. The reason why I asked for the princess's hand was to resolute the alliance between our family. I didn't mean for it to be viewed as a political advance, part of me wanted to know the princess. Affection can be born after marriage. Well, seems like I've lost this battle," he chuckled, "-I apologize for my outburst."

"Igna..."

"Don't give me puppy eyes now," he patted her head, "-you shot me down, akin to how I shot thee down earlier. Who is to say really, perhaps there's more to life," turned to Amber, "-my lady, young as I may seem, we have a common goal, the defeat of the conglomerate, no change that. The ascension of the imperial family."

"Let's say we agreed, what then?"

“Simple, I’m a noble of Hidros. Once married to Loftha, I’d have rights to what she owns and vice-versa – it wouldn’t have taken long to reclaim the vacant seat of count Oathtall considering I own all of the land and assets. After the title was granted, I would have had my company rise to a strong position. The five heads are busy fighting over Lumian O’dla, Stiol is only interested in arts and crafts. I’ll keep the rest, not much use speaking of an unachieved plan.”

“What about Loftha?” inquired the emperor.

“What about her, she’d be my wife, and I would do all in my power to make her happy. If she wishes to accompany me on the battlefield, I welcome it. If she wishes to stay and enjoy life, I welcome it, and if she wishes for us to hide, I’d welcome it.”

“I yield,” murmured Amber, “-if my little sister is guaranteed happiness, I’ll accept anything.”

“Hold on a moment, the what-ifs won’t do much. My proposal was refused and I bear no ill-will, what’s done is done, I suggest we move on,” he tapped her head, ‘-she looks happy enough. I nearly lost my composure. Damn Origin and the attraction to medium lengthened hair girl.’

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“Hold it right now,” exclaimed Amber, “-are you or are you not getting married?”

“We’re not,” returned Igna, “-Loftha has expressed her emotions sternly. I was ready to commit myself to her and the Alphian family for the sake of the continent, seems my advances were too curt. I’m baffled, to be honest,” a jestful expression escaped, “-I was shot down without so much as adding another word in,” shoulders relaxed and head facing the emperor, “-I’ve brought your little sister as asked. My duty has been complete, I’ll be off.”

“Wait a moment!” fired Amber, “-Igna, about the fight against the big five, can you win it?”

“Alone? No, an army is needed to rival another army. My force, rather, my mother’s and aunt’s army are in Hidros, waiting to pounce. Consider me the vanguard, once the tide of war changes, trust in us to invade without hassle.”

“Literally?” pondered the embarrassed Loftha.

“No, figuratively. I should get going. Take care from here on, don’t cause the imperial family trouble. Lord Emperor, if a problem ever strikes up, please do not forget about the support from the Haggards. I’ll aid in any way shape or form.”

“Igna Haggard.”

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“Third time you’ve uttered my name,” returned an impatient remark, “-tell me, lady Amber, is there perhaps something I can do for thee?”

“You said you had a company; might I know what’s the name and purpose?”

“Now you’ve gone and done it,” he blinked to her back, “-I’d really appreciate not digging further into my personal endeavors. I hate people who meddle – want to hear more, join me, tis the only way forth.”

“What sort of dark plot...”

“My lady,” he blew softly, “-you who bare a majestic figure, pretty facial features, and a complex yet entertaining personality, needs to let loose. A bit of advice from an unknown, forcing thy way forth isn’t the best course of action. Take a break once in a while.”

“Excuse you?” she spun, he vanished.

“Over here.”

“Stop teleporting around,” her cheeks flushed, “-such insolence in my presence,” the shoulders rose, “-whatever,” it halted midway through, “-a complex personality,” she grinned, “-tis the nicest thing someone has ever said to me. I’m either referred to as a tyrant or a sadist. Very good first impression, Igna Haggard, I grant permission to refer to me as big sister or sister for short. We’re tied by family.”

“Understood,” he nodded, “-big sister Amber. Time’s running late, good luck on your work,” the persona sparkled in an illusionary bring light-filled in glitter and stars, her mien melted in respect – the rectangle of a room quieted.

“Big sister,” said the Emperor, “-this is the first time I’ve seen you not get angry at someone so...”

“First time?” resettled on her chair, “-he knows more than he lets on. The ability to hide his abilities, a very fascinating young man. My gut and mind immediately said to be wary, after a while, it swapped to trust, I can’t explain it, there’s a certain allure to his mannerism.”

“I see,” paused he. The scattered thoughts landed atop a disgruntled Loftha, “-what’s the matter?” he inquired.

Head to her knees, “-I blew it...”

“Rejection,” said lady Amber, “-he rejected you, and you rejected him, I don’t care for the origins nor how the story went along, he won’t come back, I’m sure of it now.”

“What do you mean?” teary cheeks lifted to her big sister, the eyelashes were messy and defiled by the makeup, “-why won’t he come back?”

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“The persona changed the instant you said no. I get it, what you said was the correct choice, even mentioned the Imperial family being good citizens. Sadly, I feel as if that was the only chance you had to get a commitment out of him. He saw an opportunity, a greater landscape, and you said no – tis akin to throwing oil atop a beautifully painted piece, no matter the effort, the piece is damaged, and there’s no turning back.”

“Sister, I think...”

“Who gave you permission to stand, Markus.”

\*Gulp,\* ‘-oh god.’

‘I’ve blown it?’ her eyes widened, ‘-please don’t tell me it’s true...’

The lift arrived at the parking lot, a press of a button lit the car and toggled the engine, “-master, were you serious about getting married?”

“Yes, for a fraction of a second I was. The bond would have been a springboard for our advancement in the land of Alpha. Think about it, two marriages between the same families aren’t unheard of. No matter, I’ve returned to my senses, part of me knew she would reject said proposition, in a way, it played how I wanted it to play out. We met Amber Sultria, forced Loftha in a vulnerable position, the guilt of the rejection will wane heavy – and for the emperor, he thinks me to be a saint. We ought to gain favor from Amber, Loftha’s basically under my spell,” the car pulled forward, “-see, look to the lift,” purposefully slowed to a walking pace, “-she returned for the last chance. Too bad,” it accelerated, “-I’ve lost interest,” up the ramp and off into the 11 o’clock skyscape. From the center of Stanley’s Homage, of which a ten-minute ride to the east would bring to the manor of the prior overtaken gang. The traffic towards the south gradually intensified, the De Cospel stripe, also nicknamed the Rainbow Road(a name given because of the light display at night), or Highway to Heaven(those who lose money often have suicidal tendencies), stretched from the Stanley’s homage’s southern border and into Fulha’s district.

Aside from the growing market of show business, focused on the north-eastern side of the town, comes the gambling market. De Cospel, a four-lane highway goes across Fulha’s district to the southern expressway around the town. The main characteristic of the unique highway is being lower to the ground compared to the natural land. The banks are steep, countless bridges span from one end to another. An unlucky revelation during construction brought about said change, a massive tunnel was found underground, and thus, it was eradicated and replaced by the dip in the land (almost like a river and the adjacent banks). Once on the stripe, countless street climbs up and towards the Neon district, also known as the gambling district. The drive at night is a scene to behold, the lowered perspective onto the tall buildings of various shapes, sizes, color, and architecture, fills the mind and heart with questions, ‘-did humans really built those?’ Slowly but surely, after an infamous mobster known as Little Nick, built the River Fall, the oldest casino, others followed. Around said time, the gamble paid off, the world of cinema began to propagate, filmmakers and actors wanted a town of theirs to settle, thus, the rich and famous for said time period embarked. Over decades, casinos, hotels, apartments, and malls were erected along the De Cospel stripe. Nowadays, the land around the highway has been claimed and built upon. The constant fight to be brazen and showy to draw people’s attention birthed into a modern marvel of Alphan architecture.

‘Here we are,’ he pulled onto the main road, ‘-location should be around here,’ the flatness dipped into the stripe, a few minutes drive and he exited onto the road up, the building in question stood on high to the right, a behemoth of a structure. ‘-I never thought this place to be so beautiful,’ ample space moved from the structure outwards to a wall adorned with trees and plants. ‘Oathtall,’ wrote on the side in blocky characters, ‘-how very original,’ the gates opened to a very empty outside. The security guard, a man in his late thirties, firmly stared at the screen. Easily pulled into the first slot, “-Master, welcome,” said a distant voice. Starix stood in company of Asmodeus, éclair, and Kul.

“Good afternoon,” he replied and walked to their group.

“Good afternoon, master,” they replied.

“Master, the deal’s been confirmed, from today forth, everything the Count owned is now yours.”

“Everything?”

“Yes,” said éclair very happily, “-apparently, the emperor and his team of lawyers found hidden assets obtained through dubious channels.”

“The mob?”

“Yes. To not cause a scandal, everything was transferred to us, everything is clear. We’re exempt from property tax, however, must pay around 15% of the profits from gambling to the emperor directly.”

“A soft-spoken politician.”

“Master, éclair, pardon my intrusion,” voiced Starix, “-I’ve received an urgent call from Evalo. The count’s conviction hasn’t reflected nicely on the mobsters who’d invested in the man. They want their money.”

“Asmodeus, Kul, please escort Starix. Kill anyone who gets in the way, keep the slaughter at a minimum.”

“Understood,” they nodded, jumped into a four-seat high-end car, and recklessly drove out.

“Look at them,” he commented, “-the nonchalant attitude towards money,” walk and talk, the vicinity of the construction stretched from one end to another, “-Oathtall, innocent or not, had a lot at stakes,” said éclair, “-we were very lucky he got on our bad side. Feels like we’ve hit the lottery,” the casted shadow gave a chilly breeze. From the asphalted road and onto the stone-bricked sidewalk, “-the investment costs us a pretty penny.”

“How’s the account holding?”

“We have around thirty million remaining.”

“Refurbishing and remodeling are going to cost money, isn’t it.”

“Yes, however, we need not worry, we acquired everything, therefore, the machines, employees, are all ours. We can resume the business without worry.” It took a few minutes to reach the side facing Stanley’s homage, “-the casino’s very big.”

“Yes, it encompasses a very large area, he must have had a lot of investors behind the construction. I mean,” few knocks on the wall, “-the building material would have cost a fortune.”

“I have to ask, how much land do we own?”

“Look here, master,” he summoned a map, “-the layout of the area is done in cells, each of which is somewhat different. Here,” he pointed forward to a side-road beyond the walls, “-and all the way to the back, across the parking lot, we basically this block of land, and the one immediately across the highway.”

“Too much,” he smiled, “-we own so much, I can’t believe it.”

“I know,” smiled he childishly, “-which is why I’m so excited. To put into perspective, the manor at Eldow’s high including the land inside the walls is one-quarter of this particular block.” To the side

arrived another building of the same length but half the width, after an immaculately clean road, “-this is?”

“Rented office space. Here’s the list of the current clients.”

“Some recognizable names in there. Oathtall sure loved nature.”

“Yes, plants and greenery scatter the land.” They continued the walk around.

“What about the employees, I doubt such a casino will run on a few staff members.”

“Currently, two hundred are under contract. Termination isn’t an option.”

“No, don’t worry about them, we’ll transfer a few to the apartment and hotel across the street.”

“Might I ask why?”

“Asmodeus will supervise the casino, the prince of lust and gambling should know his way around. Besides, isn’t that a love hotel? He knew what he was doing.”

“Prostitution?”

“Such a foul word,” he coughed, “-tis not illegal. I view it as a humble profession; besides, does it even count when the ladies are succubae?”

“Fair point, I still recommend for it to be kept silent.”

“Yeah, I suppose,” they reached the entrance, “-the towering open building, parking lot?”

“Yes.”

“Fair,” they entered the building, “-we’ll decide what is to happen tonight. Take me to the office, has it been readied?”

“Yes, master,” \*incoming transmission,\* he stopped.

“Something the matter?” inquired Igna.

“éclair, we need backup; Kul’s been hit by a holy spell, demons are falling one by one, my undead army isn’t responding either.”

“Master,” shuddered éclair, “-ambush...”

“Again?” he stormed out, ‘-holy magic in this day and age. I thought the arts died after the war against gods and demons. If an angel is involved, they might be in trouble, holy magic always has the advantage over the darker side.’

“-Master!”

“Send me the location,” he exclaimed, “-whoever dared attack us will pay,” wings sprouted, the stare glazed in a murderous hue, ‘-I’ll kill them.’

Chapter 714: True Demonlord [45]

‘My body’s stuck in place. Asmodeus and Kul seem to be fine.’

“Look what we have here,” a uniformed man walked and watched, one hand behind the back and another to his chin, he’d often stop, gaze, then focus away.

“Asmodeus,” exclaimed Kul, “-you know this guy?” she panted.

“No clue,” chains of light tied them both onto the side of a silver-plated truck.

“Demons in this day and age,” he continued, “-I heard your kind wandered the mortal realm without rest. Taking lives and feeding off the dark emotions – how pathetic can a kind be?”

“Lord H-H-Hondo, a-a-are t-they?”

“Restrained,” returned the man frankly, “-why be scared of a few demons?” a glance back showed a secret gleam in his eyes, one of angelic property. “-Now, my creed is to forgive and forget,” he stood before the truck, “-I’m willing to grant freedom on the condition of absolute obedience. Become my servants,” fingers to the forehead, “-what am I saying anyway? We beings, closest to gods, are the epitome of light and power. Demons and their misguided sense of self will never accomplish much in the grand scheme of things.”

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“Don’t get cocky,” returned Asmodeus, “-I decided not to unleash my powers,” a black flame burst to outline the corner of his eyes, \*The foolish who dare stand in obstacle, there but one thing I wish to happen, break and fall. The dice falls, the number is 12,\* two cubes rolled, \*-probability is my whim, and my whim decrees for thee be shackled to the weight of fate,\* the dices stopped, one face showed one, the other showed three, \*-Ancient-Arts: Asmodeus’s luck.\* The spell canceled.

“HA-HA-HA, Demon, did you really think the goodwill of lady fate would bless thee? Think again, foul beasts, luck favors the righteous, and the righteous shall always prevail.”

“Lord Hondo, please kill them,” groveled Esvalo, “-the bane of my life, I wish them to die quickly so that time can wash my hands clean.”

“Esvalo,” he side-glared, “-you dare order me around?”

“I am paying the stay...”

“Correct,” \*cough\*, “-no use in wasting time, is there?” The sight of as struggling Kul halted the hand movements, “-no use conjuring magic, once under the spell of the Star of Light, no dark entity will be able to escape.”

“Star of light, an ancient angelic art used in the war against gods and demons,” said Asmo, “-you’re a warrior of said time period?”

“Don’t frown at me, the art is a reflection of my faith in my leader and god. I participated in the war; after many deaths, we replicated the spell ‘Astral Binding,’ one a certain god used to fight back and eventually force the demons to retreat. My actions are done in necessity, life in the mortal realm is hard,” he grinned, “-to live one must kill, and kill I have so many times now.”

‘No luck,’ exhaled Starix, ‘-my abilities are locked.’

“Lord Hondo, please do something about them,” still grasping the ground on all fours, “-the stares are imposing,” he gulped. ‘-if they escape, I’m dead. No way will I survive such a ploy...’

“Alright then,” the truck moved over to the solidified Starix. \*Arts bestowed upon me by the great god of war, heed my words, heed my presence, golden and shimmering in the light of the righteous, I summon the swords of Axel, guardian of the golden gates, come in hordes of thousands to slay my enemy,\* countless golden-white weapons levitated outwards of his palm, \*-Ancient-Arts: Sword of the Righteous – Usad Raol,\* the fingers flicked, steams of light fired forth.

\*Barrier to the left, barrier to the right, raise from the pits of darkness, Eloda and Cmia, devourers of light and guardians of the pits of hell, rise forth and swallow good and evil alike, gluttonous and unforgiving, quell thy rage for the time to feast has arisen, Death Element: Abyssal Barrier – Balo’s Stomach.\* Two pillars rose, a dark tapestry went from one end to the other, purple colored sockets shone onto the attack, the flat symbols detached into the manifestation of the jaws of an ancient beast, each bite swallowed the swords. \*Snap,\* a mist of dark rose from the prior conjuration, “-never expected to see angelic arts used in the mortal realm,” a strong silhouette exited the fog, “-Lord Hondo, else known as Angel Axel, guardian to Axia, fallen goddess of the Veneo belief. The death of the goddess at the hands of the titans must have been a shock. Were you awakened from thy slumber or have thee been in hiding?”

“Who are you?” he stood, confused and most impressed, “-the aura is hidden, are you a god in human form?”

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“No,” replied Igna, “-I’m a nightwalker,” they stood head-to-head. The sunny sky turned cloudy, exertion of heavily charged auras affected the feel-able surrounding, electrifying sensations spurted in small flashes.

“Doesn’t matter to me,” he watched closely, “-my goddess was recently reawakened. I know not the reason, and I care not, she ordered me to follow the will of Lucifer, hence my venture to the mortal realm.”

“Lucifer,” a swift glance backward, “-I see my companions are safe and sound. Angel Axel, we can do this the easy way, and talk it out, or,” a flash of white summoned from behind, he ducked and barely dodged the projectile, “-we can fight it out.”

“I’m right,” he proclaimed, “-you protect and harbor demons. Tis not right, the order doesn’t allow for such acts. Whatever you are,” a golden sword shone at his hip, “-I must rectify the error in thy ways. I shall face thee in the name of Axia, my goddess blesses me with her pure intention, her will, and her resolve. I will not retreat on accounts of a mere servant of evil.”

“Right,” bicolored pupils remained stern, “-should we take this someplace else?” a look around showed a C-shaped giant mall standing guard to the left.

“Why?”

“Needless property damage is a pain to pay. You live in the mortal realm, the importance of managing one’s finances is a must.”



"I see we have more in common," the blade sheathed, "-let us find a better place to fight. Shall we call a temporary truce?"

"Very well," he agreed.

A short flight from the niceness of the De Cosple stripe to the humid and cold exterior of Carter Lake, "- here we are," said Igna. The trucks hovered to a gentle landing, Kul's face reflected the urge to hurl.

"Stop," said Asmodeus, "-I broke free," he proclaimed, the dice landed on 12, the spell activated to only cancel the imprisonment spell, "-get off, Kul," he gave a hand, the moment feet made contact to the asphalt, her glance shot back and the stomach caved.

"I must have weakened the spell by accident," shrugged Axel.

"A lake is a good place for battle," explained Igna, "-we'll fight on the water."

"Are you sure?" he smirked.

"Positively," \*Return to the everlasting age of ice, Mana Control: Ice Variant – Niflheim,\* a storm of snow swallowed the lake bright blue, "-there we are, stable footing."

"Impressive," he clapped.

"About my companions?"

"I've lost interest," said he, "-they'll die sooner or later. My wish is to know thee better, unknown spellcaster. My orders were to guard Evalo – if the man is safe, my duty has been accomplished. Tell me before we begin, the two demons are being hampered by an external component. The Prince of Lust and high-tier demon Kul seem weaker."

"Met before?"

"No, tis my angelic sight," pure and innocent returned to his visage, "-why are their strength being stiffened away so heavily?"

"For the simple reason to get stronger," said Igna, "-they choose the path to absolute pain. Deprive their ability and return to zero, from there, restart training and begin anew. The climb upward is harsh and with peril unlike any other. Short-term weakness is nothing compared to long-term strength."

"The spell of retrial is one known to only the Goddess of Chaos, Gophy."

"Shall we begin?" they slid to the ice; '-angels are strange beings. A dead goddess was revived and the angel was sent by Lucifer. My mana supply isn't half of the capacity, blood-arts lack blood. I might be fighting a lost battle. Best not alter reality, calling down the power of the Shadow Realm will blow my cover if any. Guess I'll fight old school,' he breathed, '-father, I never thought I'd be able to use your magic.'

\*When odds are against you, no mana, nor hope of survival, choose the path of the warrior. Everything I've learned has been transferred into the artificial element. Remember, using the gift will transfer part of my memory. The shock might be too harsh to bear, use it only when the time is right. Hum the melody your mother and I used to sing when your sister had nightmares.\*

'I forgot about that,' he chuckled.

"Will the master be alright?"

"No, angels and demons are opposite sides to the spectrum. The former has the advantage over the latter no matter the situation. He bested us singlehandedly."

"The binding spell," cringed Kul, "-goes to show we're not the only ones of other realms here."

"Let's watch."

The somber grayness dipped the battlefield in a melancholic hue. "-I am the Guardian Angel Axel, one of three charged to protect Goddess Axia. My allegiance is to the north – the face forward and advance through the ages without falter. What about thee, unknown warrior?"

"Igna Haggard."

The golden sword unsheathed, "-right, let's begin the dance," he buckled and sprang forth, the flash slit his cheek, "-I'm sorry," he slid to a stop, "-I lost my footing on the ice," the latter cracked.

'Fast,' the heart raced, '-I couldn't keep up.'

"Once again," he blinked left and right, each passage drew blood, "-what's the matter?" echoed afterimages creating an illusion of a crowd, "-I'm not even warmed up yet."

\*Tap,\* Orenmir slid from its cover, a cry of extreme pain rattled the ground and broke the afterimages, "-don't get cocky, angel." \*Clang, clang,\* midair, along the dam's edge, under the water, the pace intensified, each clash sent shockwaves, the reaction rattled from handle inward.

A long exchange had him in peril, Igna barely kept pace, \*-crash,\* the sword flew backward from an upward stroke, "-I got you," grinned the angel.

\*Blood-Arts: Crimson Threads,\* a backward handspring gave an opening, Axel took the opportunity and rushed. A grid of red cleanly chopped off his hand, the resultant blood turned into dagger-shaped projectiles and impaled in a blink. '-Barely,' he landed and grabbed the sword.

"Very nice," said the angel, "-you cut off my arms and impaled me," the wounds healed, "-sadly, I have the boon of regeneration. Long as my authority as an angel is active, there's no hope of seriously wounding me."

"I'd look again."

'My wounds,' a puddle of blood rose into an orb, '-they're not closing. Angels aren't supposed to take damage, even if my arm is sliced, blood should never come out. Does it mean?' glanced to the torso, '-the daggers impaled my chest. He injured me...' the easy-going persona swapped, "-HOW DARE A MERE HUMAN HURT ME, I'M AN ANGEL, THERE'S NO WAY YOU COULD HURT AN ANGEL..."

"Guess my cursed sword developed the ability."

"Don't look smug," \*Angelic-Arts: True form of Axel – Golden Wing of Immortality.\* the wounds closed, "-try again, puny human."

\*I am he who slays without fear, I am he who shall be the last of what thy see. Heed mine call, thou whomst dared to fight the natural order, tis the day thou ought to be destroyed, Ancient Magic – Astral Binding.\* Circles of various order and symbols summoned overhead.

‘Astral binding...’ the face froze, ‘-only certain entities can use the spell. For one who knows my identity and name, he must be a warrior of the divine age,’ \*Angelic-Arts: Second From of Disruption – Ring of Loka,\* closed fist to the sky, \*Rupture.\*

‘The spell broke...’ calculation of the battlefield halted, ‘-all road leads to defeat...’

“Ancient magic isn’t worth the repute,” cackled the angel, “-what happened?” he stood peering over his shoulder, “-did I move too fast?” Open palm to Igna’s back, \*Arts bestowed upon me by the great god of war, heed my words, heed my presence, golden and shimmering in the light of the righteous, I summon the swords of Axel, guardian of the golden gates, come in hordes of thousands to slay my enemy, Ancient-Arts: Sword of the Righteous – Usad Raol,\* Light tore into the stomach with a beam of shooting light swords, “-spirit, element, and body – be vanquished.”

Chapter 715: True Demonlord [46]

\*Cough,\* he fell, blood gushed, the sky faded, sound numbed, the torso was but gone. Fissures formed in the ice, “-good triumphs again over the devil.”

‘I lost the battle,’ consciousness reawakened inside a blurry shed, ‘-this is my father’s memories.’ A nice promenade along a strange forest gave into the opening of a giant floating kingdom perched atop an island. The layout, below at the ground were various buildings, above, the heavenly castle. ‘-Why’s father here?’ without fail, wings of angelic property fluttered, ‘-he’s not human?’ the memory fuzzed and swapped into a room of featureless faces.

“Procreating to a mortal wife doesn’t befit the status as a god.”

“I dare argue. When Zeus and Poseidon happen to impregnate the women, the offspring are herald as demi-gods, heroes born to slay evil.”

“A mid-tier god has nothing to say to the action of the high-tier gods. The hierarchy is laid for all to see. There’s no purpose in thy stay.” The scenery changes to a sterner matter, “-we, a council representing the will of the god, on the sin of adultery, sentence thee to mortal life in the mortal realm. Thy symbol of power is to be sealed and thrown to the hounds of hell. Begone from our sight, low-born. The ascension from mortality to godhood didn’t befit the conviction, did it?” Rage, jealousy, regret, a tempest of emotions spun in the stomach, ‘-is this what father felt?’ more than so, akin to Pandora’s box, once evil escaped, love, of which bore the role of ‘hope’ glimmered amidst the emotions. The love for his family, a wife, and a newly born son.

“Tempest,” whispered an unknown voice in an unknown area, “-I wholeheartedly stand behind the actions. Gods make their own rules, there’s naught to be done. Your son is someone special, the soul is pure and unique, we felt it tremor across the hall of rebirth.”

“Lord Death, my son’s soul is artificial. My first child was born dead, her mother couldn’t bear the pain, there’s a reason why I was excommunicated from the heavenly realm, my actions align with the belief of evil. I’ve trained from a simple reincarnation of a fallen angel to the position of God in the thousands of

years I've lived. The cultivation was harsh, I'm at a point where my powers are far beyond my control. The fight is easy, easiness makes one wary. Frankly, I've grown tired from the constant malice, I want peace, the innocent smile on my family's face is sufficient enough. No matter how strong I am, I can't save someone, I couldn't save my son. Instead of giving to fate, I fought and discovered the grimoire of Rasal, there I learned the very fabric and composition of a soul."

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"Tempest, you didn't, did you?"

"Sorry old friend," he smiled, "-we've fought so much over the years, I can't tell how many times I've strolled around the Hall of Rebirth. My first son is dead, I'm going to rewrite the past – Kronos spoke on the day Zeus overthrew his position, '-I shall help any who desire my aid.' A quest across the ages to collect and gather the strongest soul a human could ever inherit. Consider this a gift to you, Lord Death, the tea parties we had were one of the best memories I could have ever had. Tarius Haggard will be reborn as Staxius Haggard. He will become the pinnacle of my power, the symbol of my existence. Death, if thee wishes for an heir, there's no greater host than the soul of ancient angels, demons, heroes, and gods merged into one. I'll go on ahead first. Please watch over my boy."

'Father was a god...'

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"Listen Staxius," the memories spoke to oneself, "-my memories and ability are my heritage to you. The future holds an unknown number of possibilities. I've fought my way until becoming God. Don't mistake this for a call to arms, my life, my past are mine alone, there's no need for one to get involved. Forge thy own path, knowing you, and what I see currently, you'll grow up to be a strong man. Use the power as you see fit, kill, destroy, save, rebuild, I care not. Promise me this, repay kindness in full, never bite the hand that fed you." The dullness swapped for an empty room split perfectly, one side white, the other black. On the white side, spots of black scattered around, and vice versa on the black side.

'I didn't expect this from father,' he smiled, a simple calligraphic word wrote in ancient writings, burnt along his arm, '-Tempest Haggard, the Godly General of Battle. Rival to Goddess Axia and Athena. I knew it, I'm truly my father's son.' Memories shifted on a subconscious level, '-every time I get beat, there's always something to push my climb forth. Thank you for the help, father, I've lived my life how you taught me to. Respect the kind, repay the cruel with the cruel, and reflect on actions. Be neither good nor bad, be and trust thyself.' Knees hit the harsh ice, the blood froze the moment it fell, the temperature dropped senselessly.

An angry Kul desperately tried to evade Asmodeus's grip, the prince watched with a look of despair. "-Don't interfere, the master has expressly said to leave the matter in his hand. Do you THINK I ENJOY SEEING HIM GET BEATEN... Please, Kul, don't make this any harder on me,' Dice clenched in his fists, her attempt at escape gave.

"Still, for a resident of the mortal plane, injuring a higher being is the basis for high praise. We might have been friends, if only I were weak and desolate," he crouched opposite Igna, "-the spells did throw me in a loop, how can't I remember someone from the olden war?"

"I'm not the one who fought," said a muffle.

"Impossible," he leaped back, "-I destroyed the heart, magical element, and the very fabric of thy soul. What are you?"

"Me?" clambered to a stand, the arms hung as he faced the ground, "-nothing important," he pulled back into a loose posture, a slight grin hid underneath a growing hunger for slaughter, the bicolored pupils dowsed red.

"Fighting will prolong the suffering," the golden sword materialized, "-there's no way to fight in thy physical state," he lunged into a relentless assault. Each slice left a golden unhealing scar. 'Why won't he fall?' the assault intensified till a sudden halt. Open palms to the sky, \*I call upon the heavens to rain judgment onto this stray lamb. Tear thy coat, prostrate to the ground, and worship the righteous power of good. Symphonic call of the Angel, Raptloe – Second Horn.\* Light scurried through the gray sky – distance and all resounded the sound of blowing horns. The beam hit and levitated the target, the louder the horn blew, the harsher grew the attack, skin, and limbs torn from the host in the angelic hue. '-Can't be too careful,' the palm clenched, \*Arts bestowed upon me by the great god of war, heed my words, heed my presence, golden and shimmering in the light of the righteous, I summon the swords of Axel, guardian of the golden gates, come in hordes of thousands to slay my enemy, Ancient-Arts: Sword of the Righteous – Usad Raol,\* resemblance to the iron maiden couldn't be ignored, the bright swords gathered in a circle around the beam, \*snap,\* it swarmed relentlessly. Blood, organs, none could be told apart. \*Clap,\* the spell stopped, a lump of red fell into ashes. The wind carried the remains.

"MASTER!"

'Impossible,' gulped an uninvited guest, '-h-he's d-dead... don't do this to me, I c-c-can't...'

"In the holy name of Axia," he sighed, "-I went all out, this mortal vessel has exhausted the current life force," the hands joined in prayer, "-Iгна Haggard, I, Guardian Angel Axel, hereon promise thy name to be forever etched in my heart. You'll live through my memories, the battle was one well fought," angelic wings sprouted and broke the icy cold air, the clouds shattered into radiant light, "-be at ease, warrior, and may the gods forever grace thy body and soul."

"Tis rather early," the entire area rocked, "-Guardian Angel Axel, the words spoken earlier were truthful. We could have been friends, we still can," wind wrapped around Orenmir, "-if only you were weak and desolate," he quoted.

"Who are you, tell me right now!" the brows crumpled, the wings disappeared into feathers, "-even a demon can't oppress the power of an angel. I killed you, element and all, there's no reason to stand so confidently."

"I might have omitted information," a single step froze the crumbling ice, "-I'm not a fighter from the days of gods and demons. My father and master are Tempest Haggard and Lord Death."

"The god of battle?" he laughed, "-the man who surrendered godhood to walk the realm in company of his family. Goddess Axia was devastated by his loss, they were friends, rivals who made one another laugh. The battle's personal," the complexion turned pale, lines of gold shone from underneath the skin, "-I'll defeat you with all my strength." \*Powers restrained for my own safety, release anew and flow into the mortal realm, angelic gate holding my divine power, open for I request so; Mesiae\*

'He's going all out,' hands to the sword, 'I should repay the kindness.' \*Death Element: Unleash Aura,\* spurs of raw aura chipped the ice. An even colder exchange of stares ambled towards one another.

"Rest in peace," marked the battle's renewal. \*Clash,\* Orenmir nearly shattered under the first stroke, '-I feel lighter than before,' he side-stepped, another stroke and he parried the attack, Axel's expression turned rigid, the attacks were predictable. \*Angelic-Arts: Ball of Light,\* five projectiles summoned and made contact, they cleanly tore off the skin. \*Snap,\* an explosion rattled the angel to retreat, "-mines?" he coughed, the icy fog dwindled, "-no matter," the assault continued.

'Why does he keep on the defensive,' strike after strike, spells conjured to break the monotonous blocks and perries, '-is he fighting a battle of attrition. What a pain, this body's nearly at the limits.'

\*Deep slumber, deep rest, awoken for the chance at retribution. Gate of which stands before mine way, open for thy master has come: Nevermore – Hell's Gate.\*

\*Crash,\* the adrenaline pulsed in waves. "What is it, son of Tempest, can't you fight, what happened to all the spunk. Regeneration is a curse for one who can't but stares as death comes."

"Death will come," thundered across, \*Span across the ages, fear is what held peace, fear is what caused War, fear is the root of evil. I, the harbinger of the ultimate fear, have come to spread and reclaim what is mine of right: Nevermore – Terror Gate.\* a low ended thump spawned from Igna's back, the aura briefly materialized and took the symbol of death's form, "-fighting an angel is simple," he smirked, "-wait until they run out of power."

"DON'T LOOK DOWN ON ME," they charged. Igna's wounds healed, Axel's overwhelming presence melted the ice, '-father, I knew you were amazing. I never once doubted your abilities. I stand here because of the swordsmanship, the artificial element, and the artificial soul you created. I feel like a kid again, a brat who ran away from home to follow his dad into war. I'm my dad's sword, which was and will always be someone created for battle. Never realized his gift to me would be useful in my second life,' a giant circle plastered onto the sky, \*Heed my voice, spirits of the mortal realm,\* lightning cackled into his sword from the symbols, \*-I hold in my arm the powers of Tempest Haggard, God of Battle,\* bodiless spirits gathered from all around the lake behind the blade, \*-Art of Destruction – Huana.\* White against gold, a giant ball of power exploded and blinded the Alphian scenery; communication, electricity, the balance of spirits knocked into a blackout, a singular plate of ice held the duo, steam rose from the listless figures.

"Good," backs to one another, "-I had fun."

"Me too," \*crash.\*

"I'M COMING, MASTER!" scurried a distance yell.

'-Amazing, I love it.'

Chapter 716: True Demonlord [47]

"Are they ok?"

"I don't know," returned a quick response.

"Whatever, just take them both to the casino."

Carter lake, the remnants of highly charged auras resulted in sprinkles of ice reflecting in the warm sun. The ice melted, edges around the dam were somewhat damaged. A very disgruntled Kul spared no care for appearances. Time told 14:00, the battle lasted a few hours, an angel versus a nightwalker. Whatever may have been present left, including the silverback truck and barely drivable cars. Emptiness returned the forest to a virgin state.

"Come out of hiding," said Starix.

"You noticed?" said a shaken voice. Bushes shuffled to long legs of fair complexion scratched by branches.

"Obviously," said he in a suit, "-why would a princess hide in the bushes with such attire. The plan must have been foiled. I heard about the rejection from éclair, seems like our master suffered the cruel truth of relationships. Jumping willy-nilly isn't always the best choice."

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"Who are you?" wondered the princess.

"My name's Starix, I serve Lord Igna. Tis a pleasure to make acquaintance to my lord's friend, I presume?"

"N-no," her face didn't inspire much trust, "-I don't care about the title or name. Why aren't you worried, I saw him die so many times... what happened here?"

"Loftha," he moved closer, "-I'd advise forgetting everything that happened here. Far as you need to know, there was a battle. I say this for thy safety, get involved and your very life may be at risk. Besides, you need not worry, Lord Igna' strong," a carefree wave later, "-head on home, princess, walking the lake alone isn't a good look."

Care to the wind, she sprinted to the edge, the water boiled, '-what happened here...' steam constantly rose from the surface, the scent swapped for one of rotting flesh. A sensation of stickiness and humid air had her skin crawl, '-the auras aren't human... my heart,' palms to her chest, '-it's racing...'

Gates to the casino opened, the truck arrived with Igna and Hondo in tow, "-I'll take it from here," said éclair.

"I appreciate it," frowned Kul, "-where's Starix?"

"On-site already," added the butler, "-go show them the power of the Ravens. Those who dare oppose us will pay with their blood. Kill every single one of them."

"Understood."

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\*Gasp,\* '-the battle... an unfamiliar ceiling,' sat upright on a rather comfy couch, '-my wounds,' a quick pat around, '-healed.' Elbows to his knees and feet to the floor, '-angels are scarily strong. Managed to keep the Shadow Realm a secret. Father's symbol is gone...'

"Effect of the binding spell," said a voice to the left

“Pardon?” he turned, “-Hondo, Axel..”

“Call me Hondo for short,” said the man holding an icepack to his forehead, “-I’m surprised they brought me for healing too. They have a good sense of right and wrong.”

“Stop it,” cried he, “-my head’s about to explode with the whole angel and demon thing. Can we let it go, I don’t care.”

“Whatever,” he shrugged, “-I ought to be honest. We fought in a life and death battle; never once did I feel an ounce of anger nor hate. Look at us, we sit here in the aftermath and speak without care for consequence.”

“What’s there to worry about,” returned Igna, “-we fought, we survived, all that matters. I’d love to know why or how, instead, let’s call it even. What did you mean about the symbol?”

“I presume you know nothing of the God of Battle?”

“No, please tell me more.”

“Settle in then, son of Tempest, I’ll recount the tale best as I remember. The story of your father begins on the desolate land of gods and demons, a realm conjured for the purpose of battle. From what I heard, Tempest was born half-angel and half-human. His mother, the angel, died in the following years. The father, haunted by angels who blamed him for the death, trained in the arts to rival the gods. By this point, the story is shifted around depending on who recounts. Best of my knowledge, I say, he lived and learned to fight and grow under the tutelage of a demi-god. War broke out, demons invaded the realm – the fighting intensified. The father died in the war, whilst Tempest continued fighting to protect what was left. Times didn’t wait for any; he grew up on the battlefield to reach the position of an angel and make the blood of his mother proud. In an age of war, the purists didn’t care much for the worth of a halfling. Trial after trial, he overcame odds and fought until a certain incident involving the Goddess of War, Athena. Orders from the supreme god were to annihilate the birthplace in fear of two-faced warriors. He wasn’t going to stand around and wait – blade in hand, the single half-angel rushed the incoming army and held for 3 months, 3 weeks, and 3 days. It is said the solidified charred body of Tempest’s first incarnation rests in the forsaken realm. The actions rang true across the realms, gods and demons alike shuddered at the result. Hence, the title of God of Battle was bestowed on his second incarnation, this time, as a complete angel under the watchful eye of Kronos. Here’s where the story of Tempest becomes irregular and unchronicled, some say he went on ventures to slay the demons, others said he revolted against the angels, and lastly, retreat. Only the man can tell the story. One thing is for sure, mythical beasts were slaughtered and absorbed one after the other. The alienated half-angel returned to the heavenly capital many decades later, I speak of decades and years briefly, the application of time won’t do much for the story itself. Here, he swore allegiances to a newly crowned Zeus. The battle for dominion followed. Lady Axia and I came to the service of the supreme god. Tales about the God of Battle had captivated my goddess, she wanted power. The climb wasn’t easy – the end of the war approached; she acquired the secondary title God of War from the people of Veneo. Conspiring gods are the worse – on the day of celebration of the end of the war, Tempest Haggard disappeared, my goddess was killed and I was imprisoned. Reason, simple jealousy. The God of Battle fled to the mortal realm for a peaceful life. He remained in hiding for centuries, waiting and watching. Alas, when a visiting god of Zeus’s care never returned from a scandalous journey, the fate of the



aggression was sealed. I have reason to suspect the age of magic to have originated. Also, I've grotesquely glossed past a few events and leap straight into the third incarnation of Tempest Haggard, a deity who surrendered power to stay inconspicuously among the living. He played a major part in politics, gaining favors from many organizations and being known as a talented researcher and spellcaster. I have reason to suspect the war against mages to have been ignited by emissaries from the heavens. Your mother gave birth, and the first child died, not stillborn, but killed coldheartedly. The ire forced him to reascend to the title of God; insider conflict fueled the flames of his rage. Imagine robbing the heavenly library – he did so, stole a grimoire, and hid via help from allies made in war. Isn't it strange the war ended after Tempest Haggard died, I know not what he must have said on the death bed; the culmination of his multiple lives led to you," he pointed to Igna's chest, "-the legacy and story of Tempest Haggard, including the symbol, was soon erased. Such a stain on the tapestry of evolution didn't please the gods. The exiled mage," a short pause to inhale, "-take my words with a grain of salt. The events are what I remember, honestly, it could all be lies and we wouldn't know. Erasing a god's legacy isn't an easy feat, yet, it happened. Basically, the reason for the symbol's disappearance is the erasure from history."

"How do you remember, if the history is erased?"

"I was restrained, my mind and body froze without question. Luckily, I have my trusted pocket chronicler, a friend of mine wrote what happened over the long years of sleep. Here's how I've gotten to know my information. Igna Haggard, what say you?"

"What can I say, I inherited his memories and ability to wield a sword. Not to sound ungrateful, I know most of what he passed on through memory – I feel like I missed a step earlier on, the memories should have been unlocked long before now. No matter, my swordsmanship feels sharper, no arguments here. Tempest Haggard, the god of battle, now known simply by the Exiled Mage."

"History for you," said the angel, "-I know I sort of dropped a heavy load on thy shoulder, hate to ask this..."

"What is it?"

"Could I have something to eat?"

"Sure," he stood, "-let's grab lunch, there's a mall not far from here."

"How can you trust so easily?" said a baffled expression.

"Not trust," the heavy doors to the rest area opened, "-more of 'I understand the reason' kind of deal. I need to ask," he pulled closer, "-do you know why Cleopatra returned to the mortal realm, feels too coincidental for an angel to show up. What scheme are you planning?"

"I did lose the fight," he exhaled, "-Goddess Axia was reborn by the actions of Lord Lucifer. Between you and I, my lady acts and moves strangely. Orders from Lucifer were to stay in Ogdawoan and join one of the families, as for my true employee, Lord Lixbin, he told me to keep an eye on Cleopatra. The queen's been flirty to the demons after the death of Staxius Haggard," he grinned, "-I know what happened."

"Good, shall I reward thee with a cookie?"

“Such an attitude. Before you ask the reason for my cooperation, here’s the reason. The guardian angels and my goddess were once rescued by a party of two, one bore the symbol of death, and the other, the symbol of Tempest. In accordance with the dogma instated during the war, I, guardian angel Axel, must offer something of equal value to the victor. Do as thee sees fit, my actions will never betray my kin or endanger my goddess – so speaks the doctrine.”

“Another rule?” the lift arrived at the ground floor; carpeted floor gave to a stair leading into a massive gambling area. The lights fluttered nicely, the decoration had the angel bemused, “-where are we?” he gulped.

“In my casino,” returned Igna, “-the doctrine says you art to obey any of my orders long as it doesn’t infringe on thy beliefs?”

“Yes, consider it a crude employment.”

“Just to be sure,” he stepped outside, “-I won and you belong to me?”

“Yes, must I profess it to the world?”

“I won’t make the same mistakes again,” he patted Honda’s shoulder, “-any help from Lixbin and I’d rather jump into traffic. How’s this, continue the life working for the other families. Thy limit is not crossing Axia, crossing Lucifer or Lixbin isn’t out of the question. My orders are simple, keep a watchful eye over the balance between the two worlds. Gods mustn’t meddle too much in the mortal realm.”

“Understood,” he nodded, the car toggled in the distance. The gates opened to an incoming battered car, “-Master,” said the passenger, doors slammed, “-where are you headed?” narrowed Kul.

“Off to grab a bite,” said he nonchalantly, “-ouch,” a glance at the car behind, “-done a number on Evalo, haven’t you?”

“Obviously,” the door shut anew, “-I must implore for the master to stay here,” fired Starix.

“I see what’s happened here. They mistrust me, we did fight.”

“Ah,” he smiled, “-look, our wounds are healed. The battle happened underneath fair condition, Hondo here is an angel, the strong-willed type.”

“Worry not, Lady Kul, by the doctrine of war, I shan’t turn my blade against the victor.”

“Anyway, I’ll go grab a bite. éclair’s got a few things to settle,” jumped in reverse, “-Asmodeus, Kul, Starix, handle matters here until I return.”

“Stop him?” voiced Starix with a tone of worry.

“No, leave the master be,” the distance grew.

“Understood.”

Chapter 717: True Demonlord [48]

“Esvalo, Esvalo, sad Esvalo,” fissures ran along the walls, a ceiling fan spun on the lowest setting. Dirtied floor, spots of green, yellow, and brown scattered under the shambling tables. More than anything, water pipes growled, “-sad, sad, Esvalo.”

“Mhmm, mhmm,”

“Kul, can you not see the man’s tied?” commented Asmo reclined against one of the tables. éclair came by a few minutes ago, the sight of the man repulsed him to gash the teeth and leave. “-Should I untie him?” inquired Kul, “-I mean, the mouth on him isn’t worth the trash in this room.”

“Better get to mind reading then,” shrugged he, “-no way we’re going to understand a word he says.”

The chair shuffled dangerously, hands tried hard to break the tightly tied rope, “-mhmmh, mhmm,” part of the visage was ‘accidentally’ burnt.

“I’m back,” proclaimed Starix, “-hope I didn’t make you wait long.”

“Where did you go?”

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“To find him,” a behemoth of a man, bare-chested and covered by a black mask, entered, “-I was lucky to find a torturer in the employment of the undead.”

“A zombie?” grinned Asmo, “-this will be fun,” hopped on his steady feet, “-the camera should be ready. Let’s send a message across to the world.”

Loud steps halted immediately at the entrance, the sudden noise plunged the maliciously filled room into silence, “-torture but don’t kill.”

“éclair,” exhaled Asmo, “-don’t startle us.”

“I apologize,” he entered and dusted off his shoulder, “-the basement is falling apart,” returned a snarky remark, “-Esvalo,” inched closer, the fear and petrified aura about the man had Asmodeus and Kul craving for more; dark emotions subconsciously revealed their very lustful smirks, the want for pain and suffering blatantly wrote across their faces similar to a child’s greed upon seeing a toy. “-your crimes speak loud and clear,” arms crossed, “-I’m sorry to say, there’s no hope of being saved. Middle man of Vermillion and Yonak, tell me, what will happen when they find the true intentions. I forgot to mention, Raven’s have taken control of Luon. The godfather happily handed over this position to Asmodeus. Our hands are full fighting the Saku’s. I say, let’s spice up the drama a little.” \*Come forth, Undead fighters\* five men of facial features to the Saku entered, “-the torture is to be performed by torturer under the watchful eye of the Saku. Staged or not, you’re going to suffer a whole bunch. Bid farewell to what remaining memories thee have,” he turned to Kul, “-eradicate his memories once the torture is over. Killing him won’t do much.”

“Mhmm, MHHMM,”

“He wants to say something,” suggested Starix.

“Let him speak.”

“With pleasure,” said Starix. Hand on the tape, he pulled slowly and painfully, tears formed, the pace didn’t once increase – once halfway, he snatched.

“DEMON,” he exclaimed, “-My death doesn’t matter anymore. Control of the Red-light district will be handed to Hondo. He’s proven worthy, the man is a direct agent from Cimier, there’s no way to fight, you’ve lost. Control of the district will remain close to heart, no matter what happens, we’ve won. Kill me for all I care, it’s done.”

“About Hondo, did you forget?”

“Wait, no, no,” the realization hit, “-he should have killed you, he must have, stop lying!”

“Too bad,” shrugged éclair, “-the man was defeated. We’ve won the battle,” shifted to Kul, “-start the torture session. Saku is the one who captured him.”

“I have an idea,” exclaimed Starix, “-Stanley’s homage is still Saku territory, why not move the body to one of their warehouses. Should be easy enough.”

“Security is tight.”

“Leave it to us,” fired Asmodeus.

A fast-food joint not far from the Crescent mall, located at the start of the De Costle stripe, kept a few customers. “-Igna, isn’t fast food too lowly a thing for a noble to consume?”

“What world are you living in?” they sat facing one another, “-food is food no matter the taste, price, or look. Eat to live my friend,” glanced to the counter where a waitress arrived with their tray.

“I’m impressed,” the food laid empty in the company of tissues and tomato packets, “-the food was very nice, didn’t look healthy one bit.”

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“Don’t complain and drink up.”

“A nightwalker and angel sitting around like normal folks and enjoying meals, this must be a dream.”

“Dreams aren’t so great a thing,” said Igna, “-we should part ways here. The rocky encounter did breathe fresh air in the monotonous lifestyle. Fighting to the death was very exhilarating.”

“Before we part, about the gates, tis the first time the incantation. What is it?”

“Nevermore gate, restraints controlling my element.”

“Yeah, the curse of the inheritor of death. The more they die, the stronger they get, and if a certain point is crossed, insanity settles.”

“Adapt to survive,” murmured Igna, “-adapt. Good meeting you,” they exchanged phone number, “-Hondo, remember what we discussed – none will get in the other’s way. I don’t mind us co-existing.”

“I know, I know,” he yawned, “-I’ll stick to what I do best, battle,” the humble outline made for the door and vanished in an incoming horde of hungry folks. ‘Hondo’s handled,’ glancing the phone, ‘-what now,’ he waited with a single elbow along the window’s edge, ‘-the mana supply’s nearly empty. Deploying

nevermore requires an internal component. Each death made me stronger in the short term, the influx headed straight to support the Shadow Realm. The domain feels stronger than ever before.'

\*Woosh,\* a cloud of purple hovered and sat, the fogginess swallowed into a human, "-my king."

"Vesper, what's the matter?"

"I apologize for the intrusion, forgive my insolence in stalking thee."

"I don't mind, what's the issue."

"Hades' faction has decided on moving northward. Our army has locked in battle at the border of east and west."

"They sure moved fast," said he, "-there's a deeper trouble."

"Yes," she breathed softly, "-certain individuals of other realms have tried to break through Totrya's barrier. We know nothing of them or their intentions. Finding our domain will be hard enough; I'd request for thee to return to Hidros as soon as possible, us, thy people, require assistance."

"Is it urgent?" he wondered.

"No, not really. If push comes to shove, the forces are ready to jump and annihilate the opposition. What worries me is the openness, without true support, there's naught to be done."

"I see," he smiled, "-I've discussed merging the realms into a single world. Let's leave it at this, once's enough knowledge and power is acquired, we'll merge the monster and shadow realm. Does it suffice?"

"Thank you, my king."

'Another quest put to the backburner. How does one merge a realm to another? Origin must know the answer,' he stood after a notification, "-Return to the casino, the matter of the count's property has yet to be complete," the time showed 15:00, '-I forgot.'

Aside from the Casino and adjacent office building, several properties came as part of the deal. Once he returned, éclair took charge and drove to the various locations. First, the obviously big and tall parking lot one street over from the casino. Many o' folks preferred the area due to the easiness of entry. Oval in shape, the edifice rose to at least six stories before stopping at the roof.

Next was the apartment and hotels located across the De Costel Stripe, an arch bridge carried the way to the other side. The land was the same size as prior, a somewhat minimally built hotel in terms of perimeter rose far beyond what could be seen around. Beside it were two smaller in height and longer in length stone-bricked rectangles. The first one stopped shy of the hotel's breathing space, the second stretched from one end to the other. The community was mixed, some rich, some average; the poor had no business, the district to the south sufficed their purpose better.

"There's the hotel," said éclair, "-should we walk around?"

"Why not," they stepped into the walkways leading to the inner area. Emphasis on nature didn't come as a surprise, the buildings were separated by tenderly cared-for grassy paths. Laundry dried on railings and flower pots in other areas, "-block A and block B?"

"The first apartment is more affordable to the public," he pointed to the left, "-Block B is a larger and more sophisticated in terms of security and comfort."

"Certainly looks that way," a U-turn to the car, "-what about the hotel?"

"Lower floors are for one-night stands, and upper floors are for guests."

"Love hotels," he paused and stared, "-seems like business boomed," a reference to a lady leading a drunkard by his tie.

"Tis all considering the business side of things," said éclair, "-for the property we move to Stanley's homage – the residential area."

"I thought the count to have land in Eldow's high?" suggested Igna.

"Should be apparent when we arrive."

A twenty-minute drive around the labyrinth of Stanley's suburb (placed at the south-east) gave onto a sloped hill. Stanley's homage, initially a smaller hill compared to Eldow's high, rose into well-maintained streets and the general air of restriction. A great view over the stripe was one of many reasons why properties here were expensive. At the center of it all, the peak as one would say, stood a multimillion manor, gates to the architecture screamed of modernity kindly intertwined by nature.

\*Beep,\* the gates opened to a clean driveway splitting towards a garage and entrance of the manor. "About Oathtall's family," added éclair reluctantly, "-they sort of have pleaded to stay..."

"Sure..."

'Pleaded to stay?' éclair led the way at a slower pace till stairs leading into the porch. It opened to a large interior, nothing out the ordinary, figured Igna, "-have you come to evict us?" fired a female's voice, "-my children and I will not move, this manor was gifted to us by my husband. The conviction was a lie, I don't care what thee says, I'm not moving!"

"What do we have here," said a slightly deeper voice, "-Lady Oathtall and her children."

"Who is this?" her serious expression crinkled, "-éclair!"

"My name's Igna Haggard," said he stood before the butler, "-I'm the new owner of what thy husband owned."

"You're young," she remarked.

"And you're old," he returned, "-age isn't the issue, I'm the rightful owner of this place," shuffled to the children, "-introduce yourselves."

"Evans Oathtall, aged fifteen," said the boy wearing glasses and devilishly sharp face.

"Ina Oathtall, aged twelve," said the girl beholding a striking resemblance to her mother.

"Tell me, children," he ignored the lady, "-what do you think will happen?"

"Eviction," said the boy, "-father lost in court, and the property was handed to state, I think."

“Evans, stop.”

“Quiet,” an index to the mother, “-speak only when I give permission, have I made myself clear?”

“You brat!” rage bubbled; “-I’ll make you regret-”

“Silence,” thundered a word of power, her mouth shut instantly.

“Evans,” he stood peering atop the boy, “-if you had to choose between your mother or sister, which would it be?”

The careless gaze looked back and forth, the grip tightened around his sister’s grip, “-I’d choose my little sister,” said he confidently, “-mother is an adult, she can find a way out of the situation. I knew deep down what they planned on doing would hurt us someday...”

“Why didn’t you speak up?”

“Father and mother gave us life. Being ungrateful is bad for a noble.”

“Good,” he smiled, “-I’m pleased,” \*snap,\* she dropped to the floor, “-good job raising the children. I sense no lies; the reply was sincere,” facing the girl, “-what about you, thoughts on the matter?”

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“Don’t know,” she shrugged, “-noble girls are bargaining chips... mother told me to limit my freedom and obey orders without questions.”

“I see,” the arms crossed, “-lady Oathtall, were these two homeschooled?”

“Yes, what then, you going to chastise the way of nobility?” worry filled her gaze.

“Evans’ very adept at academics whilst Ina is obviously the artistic type,” a holographic display materialized, “-let’s make a deal.”

Chapter 718: True Demonlord [49]

“What kind?” inquired the mother.

“The kind that states the children are to be sent abroad. Homeschooling is good and all, yet, how society works outside the manor is a must for growth. There will be no argument on the matter, Ina, Evans, do I make myself clear?”

“We’ll be apart?” wondered the boy.

“No, I’m not so cruel. You and your little sister will stay and share the same house or room, depending on how you perform. From today on, you are to become the best at what thee does. I won’t promise a life of luxury – I promise a life where freedom matters.”

“Freedom?”

“My responsibility is to make sure the children make it to adulthood, afterward, the roads are open, venture forth.”

“What about me?” fired the lady.

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"Adult must work for their stay," he called onto éclair.

"Yes?"

"Was I too harsh?"

"Not really, the intimidation seems to have worked."

"Right... have arrangements made to accommodate them three. Their qualifications should be enough to get into a renowned academy. The mother can find work in town or something, focus on the children, ignore her."

"Stop whispering," her makeup encircled eyes intruded vehemently, "-what sort of fate doth thee hath for a lady such as myself?"

"Oh quit it," sighed Igna, "-work the restaurant or find a job in some office somewhere. The nobility of Alphaia must have a good education, I presume, lest thou art but enticement for lords."

"I-"

"Good, head to the airport, I'll ask for a butler to escort thee to Hidros, is it enough?"

"Sir," said the girl, "-can I ask a question?"

"Go on."

"Why are you sending us overseas?"

"I see," he smiled at her slightly telling expression, "-worried about getting kicked out?" he leaned and patted her head, "-you children have nothing to do with what the father has done. The blame lies in thy father's court, he decided to take on a stronger foe. If this had happened a few decades ago in Dorchester, thy mother would have been abused, the little sister taken as hostage, and boy thrown in with the slaves. War is a nasty thing, Alphaia's lucky to not have experienced the cruelty of greed and thirst for power. Ready the belongings, a car should be waiting."

"Yes sir," the tiny feet scurried, whereas, the lady's cruel glare shifted between Igna and éclair.

"Have something to add?" inquired Igna.

"You bet I have," a great stride, ruffled by her long dress, halted short of his visage, a tinge of perspiration gleamed, the little display which ought to have been a show of power ended into a dubious display, "-you..."

"Out with it," returned he running out of patience.

"What's the true intentions here. My husband was wrongfully convicted, I know someone erected a scheme to trap both my husband and I. How do you plea in the greater picture, I doubt a young noble from Hidros to be so shrewd."

"Sadly," he moved close to her ears, "-I am the one responsible."



"I knew it!"

"No need to blow a blood vessel. You bite off more than could be chewed, my companions did most of the work. I have to say, the electoral campaign made thee rather lax in judgment. Never suspected those thee fought to have an ace up their sleeve."

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"HA-HA, you fell for it," she took out a recorder, "-with this I can clear up my husband's image."

"Are you serious," he paused and stared, "-heh," a chuckle escaped, "-what exactly is there to incriminate. Words alone isn't sufficient, the context applies," a glance over the shoulder returned a nod, "-thing is," he smiled, "-my butler's amazing."

\*Clap,\* the device fried by éclair's action, two big strides forward, "-allow me," he plucked the gray rectangle from her fingers and shuffled to the side all the while she followed his action speechlessly.

"Heed me well, Lady Oathtall, I've decided to take in the boy and girl. Tis similar to one sending his child to another lord's estate for education and growth. I'll foster till they are of age and able to make their own decision. If the boy is talented enough, the option to stay and study Magiology will secure a stable future in researching the unknown. As for the girl, we'll decide what is to become of her when I return, she'll pursue education till a decent level. My concern is you," fingers shy of her elbow, "-don't expect me to grant thee any help, financially or otherwise. Follow them to Hidros or return to thy parent's abode. The family's quite rich, could have returned home, well, what will it be?"

"If I follow them to Hidros, what will I be asked to do?"

"Nothing, I said it before, you're grown enough to make thy decision. I'll strongly advise staying away, let them grow. The loss is pitiful, I understand; the real world is stern. I'll assure one thing as a parent myself, the children will have a good life, no lack of basic necessities, they'll live a life of comfort if they choose so. I've offered the children a stable future."

"Do I have your word?" she grabbed his hands, "-promise me!"

"Why promise," the grip broke, "-I'll officially take them in, a contract should suffice?"

"Yes."

The burning whirlpool of fire set sights on the horizon, Igna, vested in plain shorts and an opened shirt, waited beside a crystal clear pool. "-Evans and Ina have boarded the plane and are off to Hidros. They should land in Rotherham."

"What of the lady?"

"She decided to move in with her parents," said he with tablet in hand, "-forgive my asking, is there a reason why you take to children so easily?"

"Force of habit, ever since Eira and looking at how she turned out, part of me thinks anyone, especially children, can learn to become great players in the world of tomorrow. Perhaps tis to quell my consciousness or perhaps the three devil children of mine, I wonder what they're up to?"

\*Art of Chaos: Rleome,\* the charred land of Dorchester buckled, a shockwave of tempest proportions blew sand and rubble alike, a mass of cloud rose to the sky, “-Is that all you got,” said she pulling back long black hair, “-Draconis?” down to the firm ground, the boy was nowhere to be seen, ‘-I might have overdone it.’

“GOT YOU NOW!” the outline of a dragon’s head flashed from above.

“Not today,” fist to the sky, the forehead landed squarely on her knuckles, the outline exploded, \*pouf,\* down on his bottom, “-not fair,” he pouted, the forehead shone bright red.

“Still a long way to go, kid,” she held a hand, “-ancient demon or not, thou art truly a child.”

“Leave me alone,” an embarrassed gaze to the right, “-I’m going to get strong soon.”

“Training’s over!” hailed from above a sandhill, “-come on.”

“It’s Lady Intherna,” thrill energized his step, “-WE’RE DONE!” he jumped and hailed.

“No we’re not,” a chop to the head, and he fell down to his knees.

“-This is abuse,” he murmured, “-child abuse.”

“What?”

“Nothing,” \*gulp,\* ‘-sharp daggers...’

“Stop bullying the kid,” muffled over the distance, “-the curse of Akina’s complete,” the outline of a giant creature swooped onto the sand, grabbed Draconis, and left. “-No more training today,” fired Saniata, “-aunt Gophy!”

‘These kids,’ wind swallowed and carried her feet, “-stop spoiling Saniata.”

“Stop abusing Draconis,” she returned, “-we ought to teleport.”

A dungeon, or so what was expected turned out to be a peaceful room in one of the apartments in Rosepire. Though technology was in its infancy, the constant stream of information from the overworld greatly affected the populous’ mentality.

“Greetings Generals,” nodded a group of students stopping at the corridor’s walls.

“Greetings,” they replied.

“Took long enough, didn’t it?” sighed a tall Miira, “-were you two at it again?”

“No, we’re not children,” looks of bafflement exchanged, “-whatever,” returned a spark of animosity.

‘Hopeless,’ exhaled heavily, “-Lilith’s already by her side.” Clean bedsheets spoiled by extreme conditions of the curse, even the ceiling held pieces of torn body parts, the opposite wall and floor slathered in blood, Lilith held a look of confusion, “-she’ll be fine?” returned a ‘-I want to go home,’ type of feel.

“What a mess,” tiptoes around the bloodbath led to the bed. Cleopatra’s feline expression bordered on the edge of insanity, “-no more...”

“Should have been careful,” shrugged Gophy, “-the stronger the cursed entity, the greater the pain. Not to worry, the body will be healed, the curse deliberately left a sliver of the life essence.”

“Sure...” plants grew around the bed, “-enough to not be of use...”

“The Queen of Demon has greater healing powers out of us four,” winked Intherna in jest.

“I swear,” her cheeks bloated, “-I’ll have my revenge soon.”

“Jokes aside, who did the curse revive?”

“Oh, Asmodeus is going to be pleased,” grinned Lilith, “-arise, my son, Mammon, representer of greed and wealth, thy sentence for eternal imprisonment has been lifted, WAKE!”

“Huh?” a black-colored wisp fluttered to closely examine those who stood, “-mother?” a burst of golden sparks landed on her lap, “-was I reborn?”

“Yes,” she smiled, “-released and freed from gates of Sarphe.”

“Oh, sure,” the infant levitated into a slender framed man in a suit, frameless square glasses, gelled back hair, golden watch and rings, and a savvy mustache. A dot underneath the left eye seemed to add to the intensity of the personage.

“Intimidating,” added Gophy, “-care to explain?”

“I should perhaps go into more details, hell, as is currently known to man, has four rulers; Lucifer, Satan, Belial, and Leviathan, the strongest beings to reside. Obviously, depending on what belief one follows, the names are changed and swapped around – our purpose doesn’t involve them. Under them are the seven princes of hell, who also have offspring and demons of their own. Tis parallel to the king and their lords, the closer one is to the founder, the stronger their powers. Draconis, an ancient demon is part of the realm. Asmodeus referred to being one of four princes of hell, in reality, there are seven – the numbers can go as high as one would imagine. Mammon here is one of the seven strongest, representing wealth and greed, below the four kings.”

“On closer look,” narrowed Miira, “-he looks identical to Asmodeus, I think?”

“They’re one of the same, greed, lust, hand in hand,” said she in a chipper tone.

“Mother, might I ask why there are three goddesses in our presence, art thou captive?”

“No, no,” she smiled, “-don’t worry.”

“I’m confused...”

“How so, Intherna?”

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“Aren’t you the wife of Lucifer... by my knowledge, Asmodeus, Beelzebub, and Mammon here represent fractions the seven sins – how can they be sons if the rank is same to Lucifer?”

“Allow me to enlightened thy clouded judgment,” voiced Mammon, “-all demon, regardless of rank or prestige, have sworn to refer to the Queen of Demon as our mother, we care for her without prejudice.

Lucifer dared to trample over her during the climb to King of Demons, I swear, he'll pay for the pain he caused."

\*Clap,\* a blind flash and they teleported to the judgment room. Mammon stood strongly in the center, "-Prince of Greed and Wealth, lady Lilith will surmise current events."

Hands clasped respectfully, '-brother Asmo and Beelzebub have sworn to serve the inheritor of Death, Time, and Origin. Draconis and Vanesa are here as well. I can't believe the Queen of Demon was freed by the actions of the Watcher. Goddess Gophy, Intherna, and Miira, whoever is at the top must be strong, very strong. I've been trapped for long, everything's changed.'

"The information has been given," proclaimed Miira, "-what will it be, Prince of Greed and Wealth, will thy action conform or shall we end the trial?"

"Where's brother Asmodeus?"

"In the overworld, aiding the watcher of the Shadow Realm," replied Lilith, "-he's unlike the ones who betrayed us," said she, "-believe in my word, forget the past, the future is bright."

"Last question, what side is he on, gods or demons?"

"Neither," added Intherna, "-we're independent, unbound by either power. The will is do all that we wish, the only requirement is to serve, betrayal equates to a fate worse than death."

"Understood," knee to the ground, "-I, Mammon, Prince of Greed and Wealth, swear on my name to serve the founder, Igna Haggard."

Chapter 719: True Demonlord [50]

December, the month of holidays, the month of vacations, and the month of fun. The significance of said time of year is partly to do with the Empire. Their culture, mostly acquired during the age of conquest, was notorious for absorbing the best of most and vanquishing the worst of all. In recent years, a global understanding through the use of the Arcanum has shown a greater impact on the overall intelligence and acceptance, like all else, there are limits to the rule.

The cold, a pleasant companion to the festive season, was either loved or hated. Alpha's northern end didn't much feel the cold as opposed to the south. Winds blew harshly from the southeast, Carter Lake and the surrounding forestry kept the cold to the lowest possible temperature. Located farther up compared to the other towns, snow was prone to Fuda mountain – rare was it for the white flakes to stick and visit the town.

9th of December galloped till 19th, '-same old, same old,' a gentle melody vibrated, '-guess I didn't sleep one bit. December always makes me weird,' he slithered to the bed's edge, '-how can I forget the 1st of December, what sort of friend forgets to pay respects to the fallen. Dorchester's so far away. Looking back, how many deaths have carved to my current station. Without the curse of misery, I wonder how many would have died instead. Ten-day went in a single breath...'

\*Brr, brr,\* [Notification from Julius Haggard] '-what's this about?' a video loaded, "-HELLO COUSIN!" yelled across, confetti canons, decoration in form of letters plastered across a poster filled wall, "-Julius, stop hogging the camera," said a drunken voice from the side, "-listen here," the camera sharply turned

to the right, Aceline cupped it to her chest than was pulled back from efforts by Suga, “-don’t get close, he won’t see anything,” he added nonchalantly.

“Give me the camera,” ordered a noble lady, “-I apologize for their drunkard stupor,” it moved back to show the entirety of Apexi, “-listen here, cousin. Apexi’s thrown an end-of-year party, the idols and workers will leave on vacation. I haven’t heard anything from Alphaia, what are you even doing?”

“Don’t forget about us,” fired Aceline, “-you promised... I’m working my ass off here, better come back soon.”

“Stop crowding the camera,” a mild dispute stole what little inkling of sense remained.

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“Nona speaking,” spoke from outside the shot, “-Alphaia must be a rough place for it to take so long. Julius wanted to shoot an update video, would have worked if the alcohol was kept far from their mouths.”

“Everyone takes breaks, you should too. Don’t forget about the lady,” added Aceline, “-the little girl you so heroically rescued from Alphaia. She’s working hard to live up to expectations – it feels wrong, a hefty burden on the feeble shoulders.”

“WAIT, WAIT!” echoed around the room, “-focus the camera here.” It panned to a bare-chested Julius stood seductively atop the table, whatever seductively meant to a drunkard – half-dead eyes, drool down the face, sauce on the tailored trousers and a flushed expression, “-the reason I called is this, I haven’t told anyone, you’re the first, my loveable cousin. Malley and I have decided to get married!”

“HUH?”

“HELL YEAH, I’M GETTING MARRIED,” he danced and flailed the shirt, “-I’m getting married. Better get your ass home, cousin, I’m serious, you need to get back as soon as possible. It’s happening in December, no idea on the date – there’s the reason to return.”

“Did I miss somethi-” the video ended the same time the sun rose.

‘Julius is getting married, a world-class superstar turned husband material. What will the fans think?’ phone to the pocket, ‘-I guess it’s about time.’ The morning routine shuffled along subconsciously.

“Good morning master,” echoed along the hallway.

“Good morning Starix,” they turned for the stairs, “-we have similar sleeping patterns.”

“Yes,” she smiled.

“Bearing the persona of a lady today, what’s the occasion?”

“Cora’s asked me for a date, the man returns to the Shadow Realm later tonight. I thought I’d reminisce for my sake.” Sizzling intruded the nostrils without mercy, “-good morning, éclair and Midne.”

“Good morning master,” they replied, “-breakfast is just about ready.”

“I’ll set the table,” added Starix.

“The manor sure is lively,” commented Igna, “-Midne, how’s adjusting to the new life going?”

“Pretty good,” she smiled, “-I received news from Brvya earlier, they’re loving the life.”

“Master,” interjected éclair, “-about the curse of Akina, the prince of Greed will join us at the Casino later today.”

“We should discuss business.”

Since the acquisition of the assets, most of the valuables were stashed into the Shadow Realm’s vault. “-today’s a big day,” added éclair, “-the reopening of the casino, a private party, and auction.”

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“Yes, today’s a big day for our company, Ravens,” the car pulled out the De Costel stripe.

“Can it be any more blatant,” he chuckled, “-an underground organization using the same on the surface; a bluff.”

“More of a statement than anything.”

The recently cleaned brick wall stood magnificently. The block letters of Oathtall were replaced by Von, a name chosen at random from Asmodeus’s arsenal of games. Lovely carpet went up the stairs inside, countless retainers went to and fro, the decoration sparkled in the coldish outside.

“Master,” hailed Kul in the distance, “-the interior’s ready for inspection.”

“Right on,” he nodded. éclair excused himself to tend other matters.

“Amazing,” professed she, “-I never imagined us to own such a grand complex. The ground floor, a place of light-hearted gambling prominently harboring machines, lit melodically. The outside gave but a glance – naught could compare against the actual feel of the layout. It seemed to carry on forever. The tall ceiling bore various shapes, lights, and symbols of status and luxury. After the first area, a curve on the left side cut across the hall to the right. The separation created two levels, climbing the three simple stairs spoke volume for the customer – here, the games intensified. Dealers were scattered about. Among the popular were; roulette, poker, blackjack, just to name a few. Familiar faces from the gambling den watched the tables. What would a place of entertainment be without a bar – the latter sprawled immensely to the side, shimmering bottles and darkened hue. Sane folks already had a hard time figuring the layout, imagine those tipsy and without care, a trap to seep money, the house never loses. Ground floor, complete. The first floor stood sternly. Guards stationed atop the stairs, well-muscled and bearing firearms.

‘This must be the host part of the building,’ they entered. A stage in the top right corner and seamlessly partitioned rooms.

“We’ve repurposed the club for the party,” added Kul, “-the stage will host the private auction.” Fountain of drinks, tables filled by food on silver wear dispersed to the left side, seats were readied before the large stage. The extravagant show cost a pretty penny, everything looked to be in excess.

“And the second floor?”

“The chefs are ready to welcome the guests,” said she proudly, “-the restaurant’s amazing,” no-cost was spared in the preparation.

Lifts to the top floor opened, “-master, the auctioning team has arrived,” said a retainer.

“I’ll be there in a minute, have Kul handle the arrangements.”

Trucks carried the items via a heavy-duty lift at the back, “-greetings,” hailed Kul.

“Greetings, my name’s Sophie Mirabelle, I’m in charge of tonight’s auction. I must admit, I never expected the young noble to host such a party.”

“Will there even be spenders?” scowled a younger man.

“Meet Candice, the auctioneer.”

“Lovely to meet you,” returned Kul, “-I wouldn’t worry – my lord has arranged for interesting guests to be present.”

“Master,” a flustered éclair scurried up the stairs.

“What’s the matter?”

“The guest list keeps on growing,” he panted.

“The party is privately open, the guests are free to bring along whoever they want.”

“That’s the problem,” he held the tablet, “-the guests are of high-caliber, we’re talking multimillionaires, collectors, nobility, stars, starlets, politicians, the favorable electoral candidate, are among those we’ve never met. Even the Godfathers are paying a visit to the newly opened casino; tis a recipe for disaster.”

“I invited them,” said Igna, “-Igna Haggard is the name of a Viscount in Hidros. I’ve invited the imperial family to visit,” cigar lit, “-everyone will be present. Security needs to be on point, I’ve already summoned veterans from the Shadow Realm, they’re on patrol. I wouldn’t worry, if matters go south, Vengeance’s already on the prowl.”

éclair watched,” he’s not even bothered.”

‘The domino effect?’ light skips against the carpeted stairs led to the ground floor, ‘-I invited the Imperial family, Thomas Edson from Stiol, Sophie Mirabelle from the auctioning faction, the police chief, don’t remember talking to any stars nor nobles. The centerpiece for tonight is a painting from the goddess of Arts and Craft, she made two identical copies. Jean Frank, Calious Bagard, and Julia Dahli have sent their pieces to be sold. Three heavy-hitting names in the world of arts. Oathtall sure had a thing for rare books, among which are the Grimoire of Youth and the Necrolaon by Kieoa.’

“Lord Igna.”

“Lady Sophie, good to see thee in good health. Have the pieces been taken upstairs?”

“Yes, they have,” she smiled, “-the guest list is very impressive.”

“I only recently learned of it myself,” he chuckled, “-there’s plenty to go around. Candice is here as well.”

"A hello would have been nice," he refuted.

"Still holding a grudge from way back then, how very admirable. There's plenty to go around, have a look after the preparations are readied."

"Sure," came a reluctant nod, "-lady Sophie, why did we accept to host the auction?"

"Connections are what pushes a man forth; the viscount knows how to make an impression."

Time flashed 15:00, preparations were in full swing downstairs. Black mist fell quietly across the tiled floor, "-MAMMON!" a portal shut.

"ASMODEUS!"

"Good to see you, brother," they tightly embraced, "-you truly were reincarnated from the curse, I never thought the day would come."

"Same here, you've grown in the centuries, how big's the harem now?"

"Words won't do them justice," a snarky grin foretold of a bad idea.

"-Not now," quick to pinch his ears, "-Prince of Lust, best keep the libido in check till later."

"I'm sorry," side-stepped, "-why be so forceful... Kul."

"Mammon," thundered across the room.

'The renowned watcher of the Shadow Realm, if brother's taken to the man, I wonder how impressive he looks,' the view cleared onto the desk, the chair rotated to a slender man bearing a pretty visage and a nice suit.

"Huh?" escaped, "-who's the kid?"

"Shut it," gritted Asmo.

"No, this has to be a joke, come on brother, the prince of lust couldn't have bowed to this..." large strides to the desk, "-are you really the watcher of the Shadow Realm, the man who's subjugated gods and demons alike?"

"Yes," smoke puffed, "-the generals must have recounted the stories. Mammon, Prince of Greed, tell me, what makes a man strong?"

"The aura," returned immediately, "-the aura of oppression and power."

"Aura?" fingers to Mammon, "-Kneel," a burst of energy forced him onto the ground, "-lower thy head."

'What is this,' the body cowered under pressure, '-I can't even look him in the eye, is this...'

"Should I continue or?"

"I y-yield."

"Fine," jumped to the front, "-Mammon, Prince of Greed and wealth, I'd like to welcome thee to the family."



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"-I apologize for the insolence. That was foolish of me," he accepted the helping hand, "-what are my orders, sire?"

"Work with Asmodeus, twins need to be together. Greed, Lust, Gambling, and Wealth; a perfect combination for tonight's party. Head into town and purchase appropriate attire."

Chatter escaped, the room dulled, '-the view onto the stripe sure is nice. The Crescent Mall, a marvel of architecture. Hopefully, the families won't cause trouble.'

"Master, preparations are complete. Princess Loftha's arrived earlier than predicted."

"Send her up; have the staff take a break, there are three hours before the event."

"Yes, master."

Chapter 720: True Demonlord [51]

\*Clap, clap, clap,\*

\*Knock, knock,\*

"-come in."

\*Thud,\* the room echoed, "... " striking beautiful eyes peered towards the center. One arm held a handbag, simple in color and adornment, a radiant dress matching the light-grey hair, gloves, the crest of the Imperial family, and a mien of fortitude. Her eyelashes were long and neat, difficult to ignore considering her whole outfit. "-I gna..."

"Yes?"

"Do you have something to say?"

'She's onto me or what?' he paused and waited, '-I thought her role in the current events to be over, we rejected one another, there's no need to continue.'

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"Stop thinking and speak," blustered out the otherwise tightly pressed lips, "-I need to know," hands clasps to her chest, "-I need to know, WHO ARE YOU!" the yell roared across the room, an illusion of the words taking the form of a gust had him left stumped.

"The introduction is well past due."

"Don't ignore me," she moved closer, "-Carter Lake, the fight against that thing... the place took damage, water boiled, smoke rose for hours on end. A massive event didn't once make it to the news, I saw law-enforcement on the scene, yet, there's no media coverage..."

"Loftha, it would behoove thee not to get involved," elbows to the desk, "-tonight's my farewell party. I'm returning to Hidros tomorrow. Might not be much, but I have people waiting home, I'd be a fool to ignore the request."

“-You’ll return, right?” fear disrupted the breathing, “-back, right?”

“Who is to say,” he ambled over, “-depends on how the continent develops,” gently grabbing her hand, “-Loftha Sultria, you look absolutely beautiful. The outfit befits you, the simpleness, unwillingness to draw attention.”

“Sorry?”

“No matter,” the grip eased, her preciously tender hands slipped, “-I know it’s easy to say, but, you have to forget about me. Forget what thee saw, forget the feelings.”

“You’re joking,” she backed off, “-how can I forget one of the times where my emotions overwhelmed my powers. I don’t want to return to stone, I want to feel and experience more things, can’t you see, even if we rejected each other, I’m still here...”

“Which is the reason why,” he held out an index, “-I must erase thy memories.”

“Don’t kid around,” her palms stretched and pulled a chair before them, the object hovered in a green tinge, “-my memories are mine, don’t you dare. THEY’RE PRECIOUS, I’LL FIGHT IF I HAVE TO!”

\*Snap,\* ‘-he’s done something...’

“Big words,” leaped over her shoulder, “-I want action,” arms around her shoulder, “-close your eyes and breathe,” he pulled her to his chest, “-enjoy part of my memories.”

“ENOUGH,” resounded, “-MY HEAD,” she cried, “-IT HURTS, STOP IT, PLEASE!” the legs gave.

“See,” cleanly catching her fall, “-how was part of my past. The death and destruction, the pure malice in my words and mind. By the time I return from Hidros, have an answer readied, either embrace the darkness and become one with the devil, or choose to forget and never contact me again. The experience must have left a scar,” \*clap, clap,\* a butler summoned and stood in the corner, “-take her to one of the chambers, notify the imperial family about the stray lass.”

“Yes sire,” the lasting images of her traumatized expression vanished into the fetching hallway.

‘There’s that.’

The roof, ravaged by the cold and wind, held two suited men sharing a smoke, “-Mammon, how was the time spend in imprisoned?”

“Hell,” he replied, “-I hate to say it, they got the better, anything with an inkling of faith has my stomach churning. Their constant prayers and forgiveness towards my action, release myself to the lord they said,” a brief chuckled gave time to puff, “-screw that.”

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“Must have suffered a lot,” returned Asmodeus brazenly, “-the tale of the man who controlled the seven vexes, remember?”

“I know, our true ruler, the man who managed to ensnare the seven princes of vex, he became the sole entity to rule hell and the mortal realm. Those days are so long gone it’s not even funny. He who wield the seven sins shall reincarnate as the epitome and root of evil.”

“Too bad the godly army ambushed us and killed the man, he wielded tremendous power – the curse of forgetfulness, last-ditch attempts to preserve the identity...”

“It worked, don’t get me wrong, I don’t remember squat,” \*-puff,\* “-If not for mother, we’d never know. Why bring it up now?”

“Asmodeus, Lust, Beelzebub, Envy, and now, Mammon, Greed.”

“And?”

“Use the brain cell,” he puffed.

“You mean lord Igna’s trying to collect the seven?”

“Not master, I think tis mother’s doing. Lucifer: pride, Beelzebub: envy, Sathanas: wrath, Abaddon: sloth, Mammon: greed, Belphegor: gluttony, and lastly, Asmodeus: Lust.”

“Our brothers and sisters,” came through a little smirk, “-I miss them.”

“Us seven standing under one master will never happen. Lucifer’s too prideful, he won’t even join the brothers, the only hope is for another pride to take his place. Didn’t mother say the titles are free to be swapped around granted one of the four demon gods accepts the plea? We need sister Sathanas, her powers go beyond what we possess.”

“Time will dictate if our family will reunite. I severely doubt it, the days of battle are far gone. Look at townscape, ever imagine this from our pits of hell, a place of constant murderous intent. Mother Lilith has more secrets, maybe the reason isn’t simple.”

“Mammon, you truly are my twin,” they laughed, “-let’s put the idea behind us, the focus is on conquering the mortal realm. Greed and Lust, there’s no greater vices to ensnare lower lifeforms.”

“Question, is Lord Igna truly competent?”

“He fought a demon without the boon of godhood or a god slaying weapon. The only way he damaged the angel was through sheer force of will. I was truly useless, defeated so easily; shames me to say, we’re still weak. Reawakened princes are little more than newborns. Besides, can’t thee see the casino, tis decided I’ll take command of the operations, my harem is itching for the human souls. What about you, Greed, what will it be?”

“I don’t get why I’m referred to as greed, I enjoy the companion of a fair maiden same as the next guy, why isn’t it lust? Dumb question, I already know the answer. The greedy always flock to me, the big shiny coffers of an endless supply of money, abled to skyrocket the value of just about anything. Once I used the greed of power and fake promises to trap, now, the real application of wealth; how many kings and kingdoms have fallen to my whims, I don’t know, one thing is for sure, I love to spend, and I love money.”

“Welcome to the mortal realm,” two pats on his back, “-money and power are what rules this world. Let’s work together, combined, none will ever resist.”

“I’m down,” they locked elbows, “-brother, I missed you.”

“Missed you too, Mammon.”

A touching reunion at the top, and trouble below, “-éclair, what’s the girl doing here?” inquired Kul.

“Loftha?”

“Yes,” she glared, “-she’s caused nothing but trouble; let me at her.”

“Calm down,” sighed the butler neck-deep inside a truck, “-here, catch,” wires flung across, “-don’t worry about the princess, she’s one of the master’s possible paths to a greater future.”

“Why are we setting up the stage... should this not be the job of audio engineers?” piles of boxes hovered inside, “-I’m wasting mana.”

“Stop complaining,” cried éclair, “-we have JIO performing after the auction. Leina’s decided to send their stars – word spreads fast.”

“Sure...” shuffled backstage, “-the always reliable butler surely has nothing to do with the influx of guests.”

“Very cynical, I confess I might have pulled a few strings, not to this proportion, I never expected so many high-profiled individuals to make their way.”

The clock struck 17:00, an hour remained before the event started. Courtesy says to arrive before the appointed time, thus, the guests followed slowly. The guard details were stern and without blind spots. éclair ordered marksmen to scatter and raise a protective radius of at least 1.5 kilometers. Some blended with the would-be guests, others disguised as waiters and some even took the appearance of the normal townsfolk. In addition to the Shadow Realm forces, the law enforcement and the imperial guards were also present, all information and reports circled to éclair.

“Master,” the doors opened, “-we’re ready to welcome guests.”

“About time,” the tie tightened, “-how do I look?” a three-piece suit specially ordered for the occasion, a rectangular dress watch, the signet ring, new earrings, and the hair tied in a low hanging ponytail.

“Very classy,” returned éclair

“My many thanks,” a slight nod, “-you look great yourself, éclair. About the security detail?” skipped to the ground floor, “-holding up alright?”

“Yes, the pool of information isn’t the least bit worrying. I’ll transfer what is deemed suspicious to the lens, I’d advise using infiltration mode. Can’t risk looking ignorant, a good host knows the guests and a brief of the accompanying story.”

‘Décor’s come alive; we might have overdone it a little. Chandeliers and statues, the fountain of drinks, a private orchestra next to the bar, so much detailing, truly reminds me of functions I used to attend. The game area is inviting, bright lights, free drinks, tonight’s going to be fun.’

First to arrive were the auctioning team, the somewhat expensive SUV pulled to the entrance, whereby a valet took the keys and left.

“Viscount Haggard.”

“Lady Sophie, Candice, and Thomas Edson, tis pleasure.”

“Viscount, you look very fetching tonight,” added Thomas.

“Same could be said about you,” brief exchange of pleasantries followed, “-enjoy the party until time for the auction.”

“Will do,” maids in wait led the guests in, for the next thirty minutes, prominent figures arrived, the greeting was very dull, exchange of compliments, a brief moment of laughter, and they headed on inside. Arrangements were made for all – a unique trait of said parties were the conversations, people knew one another either by proxy or acquaintanceship.

“There’s a limousine coming,” said éclair, the long display of wealth slowed to a stop, Leina’s prominently stood near the front.

“Hello,” said a lady in somewhat formal attire, “-I’m the manager for JIO, tis a pleasure.”

“Ah, yes,” nodded éclair knowingly, “-follow me this way,” they headed inside. Asmodeus and Mammon arrived shortly to keep company, “-hotshots?” wondered Mammon.

“No idea,” shrugged Igna, “-I don’t follow Alphaia’s world of stardom to care,” five young gentlemen exited the vehicle, ‘-JIO, a phenomenal boyband that took the world of social media by storm. Each member is deeply affiliated with the world of show business. The jump from movies to music carried over a lot of clout, “-good evening,” said the taller gentleman, sharp features and well-cared-for skin and appearance, the norm for the industry.

“Good evening,” returned Igna.

“I know you,” said one towards the back bearing brownish blond hair, “-you’re the Alchemist, my folk loves food, they always wanted to taste the famous food of Chef Leko.”

“No,” added another, “-Viscount Haggard goes by the alias of Kinless,” an argument soon broke.

“Don’t fight here,” thundered from the side, “-head-on inside and enjoy the drinks.

“I apologize, my friends and I are excited to perform, the adrenaline’s pulsing.”

“There’s no need,” nodded Igna, “-enjoy the night.”

“Bunch of famous kids,” sighed Mammon.

“Hello,” said another voice, “-if it’s not the man who tried to start a career in show business.’

“Romeo, I should have expected thee around,” kind on the expression, “-I’ve yet to yield my dream. For now,” he sidestepped to present the casino, “-I’ll focus on getting by in life.”

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“Ignore him, well met, Igna, I’m glad to see thy success to have grown further. We should discuss business later,” said Runo.

“Agreed.”

Harshly toned whispers headed inside, Romeo's flare extinguished.

"Up ahead," nodded Asmodeus, "-a representative of the Vermillion Familia's here. Keep your guard up, master, they might be here to wreak havoc."

"No need to tell me twice," firmed on the armored cars, '-nothing will go wrong tonight, I personally made sure everything's in order. Bring it on, I'm ready.'