

## Death Magic 751

Chapter 751: Aulia's...

A flash of white hung onto the word 'devil'. The darkened outside flared in a volley of dimly lit torches.

"D-Devil?" he cowered, heavy stomps halted at the door and tapped.

"Decide," said Igna, the taps discarded for full-on blows, each impact resounded across the wooden floor.

'They're after me, I'm doing to die,' he crawled closer to the fireplace, a growl of the smoke climbing the funnel didn't board well, in comparison, the sound would have been similar to one covering their ears with cupped palms. A bellowing rumble, the sound of flowing lava, loomed in terror above the boy, '-I'm sorry,' he wept, tears flowed, '-I'm sorry I wasn't able to help you,' he clenched his arms, "-I, Yognl Currinda, eldest son of the Currinda merchant family, offer mine soul to thee," every word hung, and he sniffled, the tears flowed silently.

"Good choice," he threw himself out the chair, reached for the circular table, grabbed his sword and a pistol, then dashed to the entrance, "-Igna to the sleeping Fenrir," fired through telepathically, "-could thee be so kind and keep the boy safe, I ought to pat the visitors in full for their rather invasive nature."

"Will do."

\*Thud, Thud, Thud,\* the lock clicked and turned, the bashes stopped, "-I have a few words for they who dared rudely perturb my night," he slipped, glared across the gathered crowd, turned towards the door, locked it, and refocused onto the guests. Dimness couldn't begin to describe the sight, torches scattered across various individuals, the light barely held against the coming storm. Even when the flames calmed, the tawny hue exposed part of the forehead and cheeks.

.....

"Hand over the boy," said a voice within the crowd.

"Hand over the boy?" requoted Igna, "-doth thee take me a fool?" he stepped out the shelter of the house and under a roof of clouds, "-where's the leader, I demand an audience."

"I'm here," said one amidst the crowd, he ambled through in the company of a blond-haired girl, "-Igna," the sullen eye sockets enrobed by the darkness, gave birth to a pair of black circles, no pupils nor life, an utterly horrifying image, "-hand over the boy, he knows not of the crime his family has committed."

"Which is the reason why I won't do so."

"Pretty bold for one who's outnumbered."

"Listen, threats won't do much in the ways of negotiations. Tis best we not head for the ways of battle; you wish not to see the remainder of the villagers to be slaughtered, right?"

"HOW DARE YOU!" yelled the crowd, the voices carried across the trees and fields.

***novelusb.com***

"I heard the story from the boy's mouth, he only wanted to meet the one whomst he sought love and affection from. The disparities in thy social standing are sad, can't say I'm too surprised."

"Love, affection?" the blond-haired lass strongly stepped forth, "-HOW DARE HE SPEAK OF SUCH WORDS." The description of skin and bones of which the boy gave was very literal, light brown rags haphazardly flung onto her stead, she watched firmly toward Igna who returned the feeling, "-my fiancé died because of him," she gritted, "-I knew love, I knew affection, we are poor but we loved one another... THE LORD AND HIS PEOPLE, THEY STOLE EVERYTHING FROM US!"

\*Sniff, sniff,\* a tiny drop escaped the door, '-it's bad to eavesdrop.' Behind the rectangular form laid a boy who'd dug his head into his knees, the heart and mind cried in pain.

"And?" refuted Igna, "-winter-killed thy lover, the youngling of the village and the elderly, what should he be responsible for. Tell me, wise one," he sarcastically flung at the girl, "-if he'd fancied, the young master Currinda would have easily abducted and enslaved thee. Tis not unheard of for people in power to crave lust beyond what is deemed moral. In the great picture, those who are born of lower stature are worth naught, words don't change the steadfast hierarchy, tis action, and I see the village leader understand those words very well. Kidnap the lord's son, kill him, send a message of revolt to the top," he chuckled and burst into laughter, the way the tone fluctuated was in a way to mock their belief, attack their source of courage. "-Leader," he pointed, "-the actions were for naught. I know the story and so does the boy – there's justification for punishment by death."

"Are you threatening us?"

Orenmir slid out the sheath, the condensed aura of death and suffering, materialized in the form of a weeping woman, long hair and pale skin, stretched her arms about the crowd in a tight embrace, "-do I need to further explain?" light from the torches reflected across the sparely bloodied sword.

"I don't care," voiced Aulia, "-I will kill the boy with my own hands if needed," she stormed forth, dagger in hand, and ran for the door. He moved one foot forward, a tempest of sheer raw-power blasted her off balance into the muddied garden, "-one more step and I'll cut thee where thee stand."

"IGNA!"

"..."

"What then, what will happen to us, the villagers. We've been done wrong, is there no such thing as justice in thy dictionary?"

"Leader, the cause isn't might to rally – my actions are very often extreme, they made no sense. I earnestly do not care about the survival of the villagers," the sword re-sheathed, he shuffled to Aulia and gave a helping hand, "-killing the boy would have only worsened the village's fate. A bounty for information, the greatest flaw in a perfect plan is the human side, sooner or later, one of the accomplices would have snitched. You know the rest."

"Are we too forget the paid he caused?" wondered Aulia.

"Yes," returned Igna pulling her to a stand, "-there's no way to fight against oppression."

She cried into her elbows, “-UNFAIR,” she dropped into Igna’s arms, “-UNFAIR!” she wept, “-unfair,” the cries halted, the dagger gleamed, skin pierced, the muscle gave, she plunged it farther into his stomach, “-too bad,” said a sadistic sneer, “-if you won’t let me kill him, I’ll kill you then kill him.”

“My o’ my,” he reached an arm around her back and tightened, “-Village leader,” he spun, “-here’s living proof of what emotions can do,” blood ran down his leg, “-she took action and stabbed.”

“LET ME GO!” screamed across.

“No, not going to happen,” bellowed a deep monotonous voice, “-you attacked whilst I obviously sheathed my weapon,” the grip changed from her back to a full-on strangle, he pushed her body upward, her tiny feet lifted off the ground, a break in the clouds beamed moonlight onto her struggling visage, snot, tears, all projected the fear and pain she felt.

“PLEASE STOP.”

“No, they who dare attack me will have the feeling mutually returned. Aulia, consider my action a great honor for thou art reunited with thine lover.” A sharp outburst from behind dug headfirst into his back.

“Igna please, don’t kill her,” begged the boy, “-I’ll do anything, let her go.” He flung her across, her struggle eased, the life, short of being snuffed, gasped in chokes and loud breaths.

Day broke across the turgid scenery, last night’s events ended abruptly. After Yognl stepped in to stop the girl’s death, the villagers nodded to Igna, grabbed Aulia, and left. The village leader, after his people made for the houses, stayed and said, “-I’m sorry for what the girl did, the intentions were to scare and spook the boy into coming with us without violence. We know what would have happened, we only wanted to scare the lord into easing our pain. I’m sure the truth is known by now, the boy was drugged by people who I don’t have control over, as the leader, I must take responsibility for their actions, which is why I must offer penance for Aulia’s behavior.”

“There’s no need to go through such extreme,” he sat on a lonesome rock, the wound healed at a fast pace, “-the villagers needed to see what violence can do to a person. Look, Yognl, see the fate of they who work without pay nor compensation for the town’s mouth to be fed. Appreciate them more.”

‘Memories,’ he thought sat in the cold outside, dawn drew upon the town, the humid air from the forest gathered across the plains in thick fog. A shabbily lit lantern, as he watched in the vague direction of the village, approached through the dirt path. Intherna, Fenrir, and the boy slept peacefully whilst Igna lit a cigar, ‘-who’s come to visit?’

The singular orb approached till their glance met, “-Aulia,” he replied, “-how come thee decided to pay a visit, you thought I was dead?” he puffed.

“Y-you’re a-alive?” she exhaled, her hands laid upon her chest in reassurance, “-I’m sorry...”

“Come on over, let’s chat.” The fog dulled any sense of direction, he opted to walk and she followed, a frigid tenseness of the early hours ensued. The ground, tender under the humid atmosphere and sloppy upon each step, was sometimes met by hard objects, pebbles, and rocks. The trail ran two lines moving in parallel, after-effects from carriages.

“Listen, I’m sorry about yesterday.”

“No need for apologizes,” he replied and slowed his pace, “-you did what you did in passion. How was the sensation of piercing skin.”

“Don’t... I can’t get the image out of my head. One moment my mind burnt in complete anger, the next, a chilling cold sensation of absolute fear.”

“Happens to the best of us,” he returned nonchalantly, “-tell me about yourself, Aulia, what would force a foreign girl to expose herself.”

“Sorry?”

“Don’t play dumb,” they stopped at an intersection, any further would risk an encounter with monsters. A U-turn resumed the tête-à-tête, “-you’re not from here, the clue is blatant, blond hair and blue eyes, fair complexion, the physical self doesn’t match any of the villagers, nor the townsfolk I’d wager. When I spoke to the boy, he told me you were the prettiest girl he’d ever seen, which I linked to the effect of novelty – I’ve seen plenty of girls who bare thy traits, and most of ’em, forgive my saying, are prettier. Beauty is in the eye of the beholder, and my words are rather crude, still, the observation is fair.”

“No tact towards a lady,” she murmured.

“Obviously not, we’ve bonded rather intimately, thee did pierce my stomach?” returned a sardonic response.

“Sure,” her pace slowed, “-true, I’m not from around here. I don’t remember my past either, from what the village leader told me, I hail from the people of Eipea – a long trip from where we stand. I was abandoned, I guess. I was ostracized for my looks, the townsfolk aren’t so kind on fair-skin blue eye people, don’t know why. No matter my looks, the leader took me into his family and welcomed me with open arms. I couldn’t have asked for a better environment, I made friends and fell in love with a local boy, he had dreams of becoming a strong warrior despite being bedridden. He was weak in body but strong in mind, I admired him and the courage he showed, the local physician said the pain he feels is enough to make a person mad. Regardless, he always kept a kind smile when I visited, we’d play and talk about the future. Winter arrived and everything turned for the worse, I met the boy from town. Our farmlands over Kiano Hill were rampaged by a dragon, the season hit hard, monsters attacked and killed the cattle, the town’s gate shut, they didn’t want to waste food on us villagers, they stole the last of our stock. We had to live off snow and few berries, a morsel of bread seemed to be a feast, in the end, a lot of people died, a lot of people whomst I thought to be friend and family. The chief changed, the death of his wife and children sent him on a path of destruction, he resents the town more than anyone but keeps it under wraps for our sakes.”

Chapter 752: Yognl Currinda

“I’m glad you told me your perspective on the situation. I won’t promise resolution in the matter, the villagers have suffered enough, winter is over, maybe the young lord can do something to alleviate the struggle.”

“I doubt it,” she whispered, the torch within her grasp flickered, a strong wind ran through the path and into the great openness behind, a lock of hair fell prey and turned to follow the gust, her arms instinctively reached up to calm the already messy hair.

'She's really skinny,' he observed, '-and the garments aren't much to look at, how cold must she feel,' faced the front, '-people do struggle to live, I forgot how much harder it is to live in a world with no technological advancement whatsoever. Draebala, what sort of secret do you hide?' Their promenade stopped shy of the desolately beautiful manor,

'-the reason we gave you the house was to let monster quench their bloodlust. Many guests who took residence were found a week later dead in a puddle of their own blood, severely mutilated. When we asked the physician how they left the mortal realm, he replied with, '-they drew breath until the famished beasts saw fit to slay their prey,' it sent a chill down my spine – ever since then, I try not to wander around the outskirts too much. Well, since it's a long summer, we don't have to worry,' a cheerful smile broke the tension, and off she skipped into the wall of mist.

'Nice front,' he ambled to the door, '-a reserved smile and a fake cheery attitude; this place is torture on your people, isn't it,' the lock clicked to a warmly lit fire, the temperature change was welcomed. Intherna had an apron around her waist and hair tied in a bun, the sweat dropped from whence she skipped left and right to prepare breakfast.

"Someone's hard at work."

"Stop standing in the hallway and come help me," said a rough side-glance. He seamlessly handled the stove, chopped ingredients, and helped.

.....

"Igna," her erratic motions slowed, "-tell me something," a sincere gaze filled the inquisitive tone, "-do you feel empathy for the people?"

"Not empathy," he replied gravely, "-I understand their perspective, not the emotions, rather, I don't want to understand the emotions. Listen, if I were to take in the pain of everyone who I've met and who's suffered, it would require a century to fix their problems – besides, when the matter is resolved, another would spring. Here's an example, let's say a couple has been together for years, a problem springs up, how about, their car broke down and the wife's been pestering the husband to change the vehicle, he knows he can't afford it but goes through and after a few months, takes a loan to buy a car. What then, the wife would be happy, right?" he stopped, fixed her in the eyes with the wooden spoon in hand, "-yes?" she answered per the strong gaze.

"Wrong," he interjected, "-the wife will be happy for the next few weeks, afterward, another problem, the garage gate needs changing, springs up – what does she do again? Pester the man until he breaks. In said little story, the wife represents problems and the husband represents the fellow men and women in the world, a quandary solved and other springs. Similarly, if the food problem is resolved, they'd naturally firm on the other task, which I guess to be garments and basic necessities, fix what's broken, and the fixed breaks; the never-ending cycle of life."

"Very elaborate," she cheered, "-sounds more like excuses for you to not get involved."

"Can't blame me for being heartless, can you?" he stirred the pot, "-I care not for them nor do I for the world."

"I didn't say I blame you," she gave a friendly elbow, "-I only suggested the possibility."

“Nor did I implicate thee,” he smartly replied, “-no matter, let us have breakfast and see what the boy has to say.”

The outside grew silent and cold, summer was upon the continent, or whatever Aulia said. Igna stood outside, bare-chested, with Orenmir in hand, he swung and trained, the physique earnestly added muscle and definition, the boon of a vampiric body leveled the playing ground in terms of abilities.

“Come on in, the boy’s finished eating.”

Towel around his shoulder, “-yeah,” he wiped the sweat, “-I’ll be there in a minute.” Shuffled to a water-filled bucket, ‘-breathe,’ it hoisted up and turned, dowsing him in icy water, ‘-COLD,’ he shrieked.

“Good morning, Igna,” said Fenrir.

“Good morning,” he replied, “-sure slept like a baby.”

“Right on,” she winked, “-the bed felt awesome, I loved the cold breeze,” one side sat the unbothered blue-haired child, the other, a sniffing Yognl.

“Cold,” he said tightly wrapping a scarf, “-thank you for the meal.”

“No problem,” he took a seat, “-we’d better figure what to do from here on,” glared across, “-Yognl Currinda, you remember the deal we made yesterday, don’t you?”

“Yes,” the forehead tipped and faced the steaming brown bowl, “-I sold my soul to the devil.”

“Correct, in other words, I own you,” he smirked, “-listen, boy, I won’t ask much, just what is necessary for us to be on our way.”

**novelusb.com**

“Wait,” he interjected, “-please, discuss the matter in greater details to my father. I’m sure he’ll be of greater help than I could give.” The offer, grim and tedious in nature, had merit, two vague glances at Intherna and Fenrir showed lesser concern, ‘-they don’t care, do they...’

“Understood.”

Soon after, they made way to the town once again, the line of visitors lengthened, the boy made for the separate trader’s line, flashed his ring, received a bow from the guards, and ambled through the tunnel, “-he’s a young lord, alright,” affirmed Fenrir. Dirt path turned stone roads running into and throughout the town. Building’s line after elevated pavement, the architecture, though he said technology to not be advance, was far superior than expected. Rocks and stones proliferated across the roads, the colors matched between stone-grey till wooden brown, beige was most common on the walls. Forgo any sense of symmetry, the closely build buildings held various shapes, cylinders, cubes, and rectangles protruding out their sides. Horse and man-drawn carriages took the roads, “-follow me,” said the boy keeping to the wall. They circled,

“-very old and rustic,” said Intherna.

“Really, the town looks nice from where I’m standing, reminds me of Castle Garsley in a weird way. The old noble district, yes,” hand in hand with Igna, “-doesn’t this bring back memories?”

“Yes it does,” he replied, ‘-feels like we’ve jumped back in time, then again, the Rosespire I know still have the olden buildings interspersed by the newer concrete behemoths. The roads are very pretty,’ he observed, ‘-I miss the stone-brick paths, better looking than the dark-asphalt.’

Soon after in the vague direction towards the northeast of town – the clutter of buildings relaxed into open space. A clock rose above tents and the shouting of merchants, “-we’re at the marketplace,” said the boy, “-over here,” they beelined to a sternly built C-shaped building, the edges were curt and sharp, not rounded. “-Townhall,” he smiled, “-my father’s the mayor and the trader’s union’s leader.”

“Noble?”

“Yes,” he smiled, “-Tariel’s an independent nation consisting of traders.”

Therein, the boy entered inside, the trio followed suit, “-young master,” exclaimed a retainer, “-how good is it to see you,” the sudden announcement brought in maids and butlers from all over, the cacophony grew into a small welcome party, “-good to see you,” he replied.

“We were worried sick,” said the butler, “-the master had the carriages ready to go on a rescue mission. Tell me my lord, were you abducted?”

‘Trouble, if he speaks the truth, the village will suffer. What sort of person are you, Yognl Currinda.’

“No, I got lost in the forest,” he nervously scratched the back of his head, “-I know, I know, you always said to never go beyond the walls... I had to,” he rose his chin and spoke with chest, “-I wanted to see what laid beyond.”

“Young master,” murmured the retainers, “-please, go meet with thy father, I’m sure he’s worried sick.”

“Out the way,” rumbled from his back.

“You could at least apologize,” said Igna.

“Who do you think you are?” glared a richly vested rounded man, “-I walk where I please,” he looked up, “-do you know my name, impudent fool?”

“No,” he firmed his expression, “-should I care to know?” he leaned in menacingly, “-tell me, chubby o’ fool, how does one gain thy figure?”

“Guards, take this fool away,” he ordered, “-I wish not to breathe the same air as him.”

“Guards?” he laughed, “-you fat oaf, do you think a weak militia to stand ground against me and my companions?” the true statement for the militia, guards as was phrased proudly, were weak in body and spirit.

“Uncle June.”

“Young Yognl, how are you, my nephew?”

“I’m fine,” he smiled, “-what about you, dear uncle?”

“Alright, I think,” the expression shook momentarily, “-I see you made it back alive, must have been a traumatic experience.”

'Back alive, traumatic experience?' firmed Igna, '-he knows something we don't,' the joy of the long-awaited return lowered their guards. Elation died shortly, everyone returned to their post. They climbed stairs to a private area of the building.

"Sorry about my uncle."

"Why?"

"He's been on edge ever since his company went in debt."

"Doesn't look that way to me, the outfit and plumpness aren't sign of a man who's in debt."

"Well, he's in debt to my father, owns our family around 500,000 Rulze."

'A motive,' he thought, '-better keep the hypothesis in the back burner, without proof,' he stopped at a walkway, gazed on towards the village, '-maybe,' he turned to Intherna and Fenrir, the duo soon left the compound in a hurry.

"Are they well?" inquired Yognl.

"Yes, they should be fine," he smiled, "-by the way, this uncle June of yours, how well does he get along with the mayor?"

"Badly, the battle of inheritance from my late grandfather's left a bitter taste between our families. What am I saying anyway," they arrived at an imposing office, guards lined each side, décor wasn't overly blatant nor underly simplistic, a hard balance to achieve.

"Welcome back, young master."

"Is father in?"

"Yes, head on in. He gave orders to allow anyone who had information on thy station to enter."

"Understood," the heavy hinges cracked, it opened inwards to a large room of similar décor. An imposing man sat at a desk whilst a robed lady stood to his side in the company of a staff, golden ending with a star-shaped crystal.

"Yognl," he rose abruptly, the deep voice resounded, taking even the lady by surprise, "-where have you been, my son?" no care for appearance, the father rushed to tightly embrace his heir, "-I've been worried sick." Like father like son, the facial features were uncanny, a rounded nose, cleanly kept facial hair, and glasses under which resided a striking judgmental look.

"I apologize for the pain I've caused, father."

"And who might this gentleman be?" he rose and moved for a handshake.

"He's the one whomst I've sold my soul too," said the boy, rather, the words escaped.

"Pardon?"

"Right," said Igna, "-the boy speaks true. In order to survive the grueling night and escape death, he sold his soul to me."



“Yognl, are you insane?”

“No, father, I saw the atrocities of the village, so many people have died by the tax increase. The villagers tried to kill me, they would have and if not for him, I’d have died.”

“I see,” silence permeated, the chair drew and he sat, the elbows to the chair and fingers interlocked. “-How much do you want?”

“Come again?”

“How much do you want for my son’s soul, I’m offering to buy him back.”

“Not going to happen,” said a cold voice, “-I’m not a fool to put a price tag on the boy’s life. However, I wouldn’t mind exchanging him for something of equal value.”

“What would that be?”

“Information,” he smiled, “-I care not for money; knowledge is what interests me. I’m greedy for the knowhow of this world.”

“Information for my boy’s life,” he leaned into his chair, “-pretty cocky for a nobody. Devil or not, money is the ruler of all, and if I wanted, I could frame thee to take the blame for his kidnapping.”

“Wrong,” the door barged open, “-I have proof that says otherwise.”

.....

Chapter 753: ‘Igna you were played for a fool, what a tantalizing feeling.’

“Proof, surely thee jests?”

“On the contrary,” three silhouettes arrived, Aulia stood at the front, “-I had my friends dig a few things out for me.” Moments prior, upon glancing at the village, an idea jumped into mind – one constant remained wherever the world might have been; none can be too careful during negotiations. Thus, to bring the battlefield closer to home, he asked the trusted companions for favors.

“My God,” spoke the robed lady, “-a blond-haired pale woman,” her arms rose instinctively, “-begone, damned spawn of the devil!”

“Quiet,” said the mayor, “-priestess, would behoove thee not to interject so frivolously,” the side-look shifted forward onto Igna, “-what proof do you have?”

“Firstly, might I borrow thy time and curiosity for a bit?”

“Sure,” he eased into his seat, the posture open and ready to listen. The boy, epicenter of the discussion, shuffled to the priestess’s shadow, whereby she patted his cheeks in reassurance.

“Good,” he turned and made for Aulia, “-are these the papers?”

.....

“What are you doing?” she tightly pinched a letter, “-the leader sought me to deliver this, what have you done?”

"You'll learn shortly," he smirked and made for the table, the distance shortened, power in his voice and tone spoke clearly and intensely.

"I'll start from the beginning, I'd like to speak to young Yognl's father, not the mayor of Tariel," the man nodded in affirmation. An inhale gathered his thoughts, 'I have all the pieces,' he unfolded the letter onto the table, the mayor, naturally curious, leaned for a better look, two abrupt taps refocused his attention onto Igna, "-the letter will come to play soon. The village in charge of the newer farmlands have been famished until recently. Your son, I'm sorry to say, fell head over heels for Aulia," she nodded and watched silently, "-the feelings drove him to sneak out of town and make towards the village. I'm sure he can fill in the details, later on, ask to thy heart's content, he'll be happy to answer, for a man's feelings must be true and without shame. Nevertheless, the day he disappeared wasn't a coincidence either, the young boy was kidnapped to be assassinated."

"Quite the claim, do you have the proof, let me remind, lying won't do much, the gallows are welcoming of anyone, regardless of race or stature."

"Hence the letter, if you'd take a look."

There it read, "-as per our agreement, I vow to make the unjust behavior to the village folks right. The boy will sneak out of town, my men will be at the ready to finish the deed. Keep watch and speak to none about this," signed J. N.

"What sense must I make of this, tis but words on a paper."

"Look closely, the seal on the letter," it slid across, "-and the signature," turned towards Yognl, "-tell me, what's your uncle's full name?"

"June Notila."

"J.N," he smiled, "-thing is, without the signature, the villagers wouldn't be assured, and without their support, a deed of such proportions won't be possible."

"He could have used an alias, forging a signature isn't unheard of," observed the man.

"Correct, which is why I had another ally of mine," \*come forth, Vengeance,\* "-there's additional proof, the seal and the paper used to scribe the message. Comparing the two shan't be an issue."

"Okay, you've implicated my cousin, what then, what's the point, recount the story."

"If you'd let me continue. Where was I," he paused, thought, then resumed, "-we can say without a doubt June is responsible. How do I know this, aside from the evidence, we spoke briefly, Yognl remembers, and I quote, 'I see you made it back alive, must have been a traumatic experience,' bear in mind, we had just arrived, in no way could one have known the boy to be outside the town, especially since you, and the retainers, resolved for him to have a sheltered life. As to what happened, it's simple, a powerful man swooped in on a barely sustained village. He offered to build another well as the prior didn't suffice for everyone and the fields as well. The masons, by which Aulia can correct me, aren't from the village, they're workers under June's control. Infer to the letter, '-my men will be at the ready to finish the deed,' which deed, the kidnapping and murder of Yognl. Currently, you must be asking why they would turn on you, the answer is simple, revenge. Unjustified tax inflation, snatched their harvest, leaving them stranded for the winter, many died, and you seem to care," he paused and watched, "-tell

me, Mayor, the first impression tells of a loving father, someone who'd never wish bad on another. The village isn't under thy jurisdiction, is it." the comment forced an exhale, the strong facade dwindled, "Aulia, sometimes, the story isn't truly unveiled unless the players are revealed. The mayor isn't responsible for the tax, rather, tis June, a man of his caliber, supposed to be in debt of 500,000, blatantly flaunts his wealth and grows larger than a pig."

"Correct," added the mayor, "-my hands are tied by the trader's union. I won't go into too many details, suffice to say, our family currently has no means of surviving without the support from the other trading families. My fool of a cousin owes us half a million, rather than to pay back the due, he chose to infiltrate the noble faction and lead them, he's a very shrewd person, their kind always flocks to one another," the deep voice swelled in rumbling anger, "-never thought he'd go so far as to kill my son for vanity's sake."

"How about we strike a deal?"

"A deal?"

"An eye for an eye. I'll happily dispose of him; an accident shouldn't be hard to scheme. Tell me, Mayor, what is important, thy family's life or an ever so fluctuating sense of justice?"

***novelusb.com***

"End him."

"Understood," Igna eased to Fenrir and Intherna's side, "-worry not about payment – the lord's estate should have much for me to borrow."

"No, no," he refuted, "-please, you wanted information, the priestess lady Yuio Kinoa has been blessed as an apostle by God of chronology, Oris. She's a walking library of information and events."

"I welcome the offer," returned Igna.

"WHAT ABOUT US!" exclaimed Aulia, "-what of our people, what of those who died."

"My sincere apology," he stood and bowed, "-I had no idea of the pain my foolish cousin caused. Justice has arrived in an unexpected form – I promise for the taxes to be lowered, tis all I can achieve at the moment."

She grudgingly accepted, they exited the town hall and made for a nearby cheap tavern.

"I'll check on the room," said Intherna.

"I'm coming with," added Fenrir, off they went into a darkened interior presided by a tilted sign barren of words. Benches laid sloppily towards the street's back and forth. Aulia sighed heavily.

"Stop it."

"Stop what?"

"The sighs," he narrowed, "-what's the matter now?"

"I don't understand how a person can go into such debt."

"The burnt farmlands," he added, "-I'd wager tis how the debt arose. At least the village will be relatively safe, can't say much about the outside threats."

"We're used to it," she smiled, "-thank you for the help."

"No need for gratitude, I merely recounted the tale of a man who thought the world to be his playground."

"I'll go, the chief must be worried."

"Send him my regards."

She rose strongly, held up her chin, and walked in relative confidence. Bystanders were taken by surprise; her appearance was much to be desired. Hence, ended an unexpected encounter amidst an unknown world. Later said night, the news of June Notila's death would shake the very foundation of the opposing faction. The next day arose under a clear blue sky, wooden windows opened vertically to a crowded street, "-good morning," yawned Intherna, "-sleep well?" she rubbed her eyes.

"Yeah," he replied with elbows against the ledge, "-the events feel too similar for my liking..."

"You caught on," the doors opened widely, he shot an uncaring look behind.

"Priestess," the back straightened, "-about time."

"I do apologize," her slightly tan complexion and timid gaze never once openly looked at Igna, "-the mayor wanted me to wait until the deed was accomplished. He's very pleased by the results," she entered the room lightly, "-here are letters from the master and the young master."

"Great," they disappeared in a black-portal, "-tell me," \*snap,\* wind blew away her hood, four horns, two big and two small, lined against her forehead, short black hair awry onto the shoulder, the crimson-colored pupils sternly looked forth, "-why would you do that?"

"I had my doubts," he smiled, "-demon posing as a priestess. Where you the mastermind behind the scheme?"

"Maybe yes, and maybe not," she revealed a very conniving smirk, "-Igna Haggard, I was informed by a voice that you were in Draebala; the one who's inherited death, time, and Origin's will. What brings such an entity to our realm?"

"I came shopping," returned nonchalantly, "-Fenrir, get ready," he leaned over his bed and shook, Fenrir's snores interrupted, "-wake up," he kept on shaking, \*grr,\*

\*Bite,\* "-FENRIR!"

"MASTER," she rose, "-I'm sorry, I have a habit of biting in my sleep."

"For the love of what..." said a disappointed sigh, "-Intherna?"

"Deal with it," she winked and left, "-I'll go pay the manor a visit, we need money, don't we?"

"Thank you."

“No problem,” she yawned, “-anything to make the trip easier.” The change in atmosphere garnered a frown, “-lg-” formed on her lips.

“Don’t,” he interjected, “-I don’t have time to play,” in saying so, the actions proved otherwise, her forehead crinkled by their energetic display.

“-don’t have time to play... pretell, what’s sort of dance are you and the girl doing?”

“The rain dance,” he smartly replied, “-priestess or whatnot, go sit at the tavern, I’ll be there in a minute.”

“HOW INSOLENT,” she stormed out, slamming the door behind.

“Igna?” returned Fenrir knelt on the bed.

“Don’t worry,” he smiled, “-it’s a plan to lower her confidence. Don’t give her what she wants, and she’ll offer herself to what we wish to hear. For the sake of dignity, put on some clothes whilst you sleep.”

“Understood,” she slipped onto the cold floor, stretched and tiptoed to his ear, “-you say that, I know you loved cuddling my fluffy tail.”

“Fenrir...”

“HA, I KNEW IT,” she twirled to the side, “-can I have some clothes?”

“Already on the table,” he pointed, “-I’m headed down, join me when you’re done.”

“Okay!”

‘Honestly,’ the short-uncleaned corridor, lit via a poorly fueled lantern, led to the stair. The carpet sheathed a bunch of differently colored stains, the walls – cracked at parts, were hideous, ‘-for a legendary beast, her attitude fluctuates between mature and childish. Vengeance completed his assignment; I had my doubts about June, the way the information and signature were easily obtained, tells me someone had planned for him to take the fall. Hold on a moment,’ he halted at a turn in the staircase, ‘-priestess...’ it clicked, ‘-that fucking guy,’ he clenched, ‘-he used the priestess to do his bidding – a demoness should easily be able to lit farmland ablaze, are you serious, did he really orchestrate the scheme and play the victim. I was played a fool,’ he chuckled, ‘-he got what he wanted and I gave it to him,’ chuckles turned laughter, ‘-Igna you were played for a fool, what a tantalizing feeling.’

“What’s with him?”

“Don’t look, must be the Lejo plant.”

“Let’s go before we catch crazy, I told you we should have picked another tavern.”

“Come on love, you know well we can barely afford protections...”

“Pull out.”

“My timing sucks.”

“Too bad.

The laughter calmed, he threw a stern look around the stair into a darkened hall, ‘-so, they’re the couple who constantly moaned last night, honestly,’ he facepalmed, “-it would be nice to sleep without someone having intercourse next door.”

“You heard us?” fired the man.

.....

“Obviously...”

“I’m embarrassed,” the lady hid her face and ran, the man promptly followed.

‘I wonder if her soul would work for the sister system, I mean, if she laid the foundation for such a scheme, I wonder what greater darkness looms.’

Chapter 754: Déjà vu

By the time he crossed into the tavern’s not so admirable seating area, the priestess, hidden under her hooded robe, sat with a menu sprawled onto her face. Slid into the L-shape seat, he faced she who had her attention firmed onto the alcoholic-drink section.

“Demoness, I’ve arrived.”

“I see,” the large cardboard laid onto the table, she fixed her fist onto a slightly crinkled edge, “-I want to order some rum.”

“This early in the morning?”

“Yes,” the hood fell backward, to which affectionately shaped eyelashes and a slight sneer, landed on the displayed diagram, “-I want that,” she smiled.

‘Photos in this day and age?’ paused to stare, ‘-looks like there’s more to Draebala than imagined.’ “Fess up.”

“No need for impatience,” she replied smoothly, “-have thee read the letters?”

.....

“No?”

“Read them meanwhile I wait for the cocktails.”

“Understood,” he reluctantly resummoned the letters, residual darkened energy dissipated with a few shake of the hands, ‘-let’s see.’

The first, addressed by Mayor of Tariel to Igna Haggard, “-Greetings, I hope the little message of mine finds thee well. Then again, I do wish I could have done more to present the letter in a more dignified manner. Long story short, the priestess of mine is a rather tricky individual, by heart, I’d like to think she’s a good person, however, her actions and usefulness elapse the dubious personality. God forbid you to meet at a tavern or anywhere remote, if there’s alcohol, I shudder thinking about her habits. No matter, I’m glad to say the faction of which my late-cousin June controlled has been relinquished. Brings me joy, at last, I can fully exert my powers over the town. The village will be rewarded for their

cooperation in unveiling the scheme. This lady, Aulia, no matter her appearance, is subject to my son's fancy – I'm not one to care for noble-blood, thereon, I wish to convey this, he will pursue her in his own time, and if they fall in love, I'll be a happy father no matter his partner. Time is short, I wish I could have done more to aid in thy quest. Once again, thank you very much, might not seem apparent -death comes with more life. Last thing, the priestess, if she is deemed worthy to accompany thee in thy journey, do have her drop by the town hall, we ought to discuss the replacement," signed, Tohha Jone Currinda. The paper swiftly folded, a cast over the envelope showed the priestess, inebriated at the mere thought of booze, patiently waited, her fingers interlocked and laid atop the table.

The next letter, "-Hello master Igna, perhaps the title is bolder than first appears. I've never written formal letters before, this is hard. I'll cut to the chase and say sorry and thank you. Thank you for rescuing me and sorry for my uncle's behavior, you were pulled into family affairs without reason. I now know that my father isn't the evil dictator I painted in my head, he's a kind man whose resolve is that of a hero going to battle against death. No matter the outcome or circumstances, I vow to make the town and the allied village grow and prosper. Until we meet again, I wish thee a good trip. So long, friend, and about my soul, tis still yours."

'Brat,' smirked a half-smile, the display dropped to a frown upon sighting the waiter who ambled, balancing a few drinks atop a mat-brown plate.

"Here's your order," he said.

"Awesome, here it is," she fully drooled, "-don't mind if I do," one after another, she inhaled the drinks, no volume nor outwardly strong scent swayed her feelings – a true veteran at work else a radically sad person who'd drown their sorrows in alcohol for a moment's bliss.

"I read the letter," the white rectangles vanished, "-Priestess, time to speak."

"Where should I start," she paused, whilst a blue-haired outline exited the darkened shadow of the stairway, her fiercely light-blue pupils locked, the ears flashed as did her eyebrows, "-Igna," she scurried to his seat and ordered.

"How about we talk about a doubt you had," her mug rested onto the moist table, "-there must have been events which are somewhat similar to what has been experienced before, you know, a déjà vu. Herein ties the link of strong emotions to the realm we call Draebala – events happen for a reason, a minute amount of occurrence often materializes by the will, conscious or not, of a person or else sentient being. Similarity can be drawn to certain events, think, isn't their one which stands above the rest?"

"I thought it was weird," he returned, "-after I paid a visit to my friend's grave, Fenrir's strong image stayed with me. I never figured much of it, she was the first-ever strong companion I made, someone who never waver or leave, her adoration and admiration were ones I couldn't ever repay or properly thanked."

***novelusb.com***

"-And, tell me this, where did you meet, remember the circumstances?"

"We fought at a mountain-"

“Looks like you’ve figured the answer,” said a smug smile, “-onto the real truth of the realm. Igna, would it baffle thee if I said Draebala is a representation of your world?”

“Care to elaborate?”

“Keep the thought warm. Draebala is by all means the previous incarnation of your world. The technology, the magic, they were all once part of the realm, people lived in relative peace – protected by Kronos’s mighty power. Then came the war, and everything changed, a massive battle involving the domains of power between Zeus and Kronos ended in the latter’s defeat. The story should be known, to cut right into the heart of the matter, this realm and yours are fundamentally linked. If we take light and dark, Draebala is to be the darkness whilst Orin is to act as light. Thee both share the priority of being first to Creation; here’s the reason why magic is sternly prominent.”

“-And, should I care?”

“I suppose not,” she exhaled disappointedly on his anti-climactic response, “-I thought you’d exclaim and be amazed.”

“I’m sorry for not caring,” he shrugged, “-I understand this, Draebala is important in the greater picture, it maintains the balance of power, doesn’t it.”

“Seems to me you know more than is shown.”

“Hiding one’s ability is primordial,” he looked towards Fenrir, she ate peacefully without care to the conversation, her hunting instinct locked onto a large slab of meat. Say what one might, regardless of the muddied appearance and grim expression on the workers, people flocked to taste the food, “-let’s go over the reason why I’m here,” he smiled, “-what’s your rank and true title, Yuio Kinoa.”

Her chin rose as did her horns, the tame intent in her gaze glazed, “-Yuio Kinoa, Mid-tier demoness of intrigue.”

“A very smug title – tis a blatant proclamation to being the queen of schemes.”

“Accurate,” she smiled, “-I won’t say otherwise.”

“And, you work for a noble as a priestess, what a shame.”

“Are you making fun of me?”

“Yes I am,” he leered, “-Yuio Kinoa, I have an offer – I will need the answer right away. How would you like to join my faction and depart for Orin?”

“Go on, list me the advantages,” said she intently.

“How about I list my companions,” her stare narrowed, suspicion washed the flushed expression, “-Goddess of Chaos; Gophy, Goddess of Fire, inheritor to Rah; Intherna, Guardian of time; Miira, Queen of Demons; Lilith. Asmodeus, the prince of lust and gambling, Mammon the prince of greed and wealth, Beelzebub, lord of flies, Archangel Raphael, just to name a few.” Silence said it all, the drinking escapade ended – the last mug dropped.



“Are you insane?” she rose and grabbed his collar, “-how dare you casually list such powerful entities so calmly, even if tis truth, one mustn’t take their name lightly!”

“Cut it,” he held and pinched her wrist into letting go, “-they’re my companions, part of a bigger family,” his grip eased, “-how about this; as the demoness of intrigue, how about a greater battlefield where failure and schemes stand around each corner. A fight to outfox similarly devious individuals,” the compelling look of sternness forced her back into the chair.

“Tell me more.”

“A world where money makes or breaks someone’s status on the social hierarchy. Nations fight proxy wars, kingdoms struggle between inner and outer peace – a place where one’s force of might in intellect dictates the standing. Consider the ploy and the mayor conducted and amplify it on a nation-wide level, the chessboards move, and change, failure isn’t an option.”

“I’m not convinced.”

“You don’t need to be,” he shrugged, “-the balls in thy court, I care not if thee joins. From the ploy I experienced, you wouldn’t survive a moment from where I hail. I’ve seen strategist be bested at the last possible instant.”

“What about you, have you been bested?”

“Multiple times and I’m not ashamed to say so. However, I lost in a way which meant I’d take the brunt of the fall, as a result, the empire and company I started, flourished until our world’s current state.”

The table shook, Fenrir’s locked onto the entrance, “-bad,” she said, “-a strong presence approaches.”

\*BANG,\* the street exploded in dust and rubble forcing its way inside, a pebble hit a guest the next table over, blood gushed, the expression went numb, life drained in the few seconds he gasped. \*ACHOO,\* the risen dust and noise had many hide under their table, “-we’re under attack,” commented Yuio.

“Very astute observation,” remarked Igna, “-Fenrir, can you sense anything?”

“Strong people, angels. If they aren’t stopped, the people will suffer, the killing intent is palpable,” she growled.

‘Angels,’ the eyes shut, the auras of the surprise guests blatantly exuded, ‘-strong is an understatement, the aura’s on par to a god.’

“They’ve eaten the fruit of Zem,” she observed, the dust settled, moans and murmurs of the scared snuck in-between the distant explosions, “-damned devils,” she gritted.

“You do know you’re a demon, right?”

“I know,” she side-glanced, “-which is why I use the term devil to define those who nonchalantly destroy and kill, they’re the worse of the worse, the Eipea Empire,” hidden on all-fours, “-I’m going to fight,” she clawed under the table and onto the bloodied floor, a few unconscious bodies laid waiting for death, “...”

“You’re weak for a demoness,” whispered Igna, “-leave the fighting to us. Yuio, I shall make the same offer I did to Yognl,” he stared her straightly, the vampiric allure added to the paleness and sharpened facial features, “-doth thee dare plea and offer thine, soul, to the devil?”

“If you swear to help the people and win against the attackers, I promise I’ll do anything thee wish.”

“Your request has been heard,” he rose abruptly, rubbles flung inside, \*cling,\* Orenmir slid to seamlessly slice the projectiles, “-leave the fighting to us,” the tied hair unfolded, the brownish hue displaced for white and crimson, a deathly aura of a dormant monster sprawled in waves. Fenrir, a mere child moments ago, grew to stand shoulder to shoulder, “-remember thy promise, demoness,” they stormed into the battered street; opposite buildings were crushed, ‘-a meteor shower?’ he glanced up to three prominent goldenly lit outlines.

“Such pests, we should have taken action earlier.”

“Waste not breath, brother, she’s here somewhere, we fight the heir of Rah, steal her symbol of power, and grow to join the ranks of the Golden Empire.”

“Summon another wave of meteors, we need to draw her out.”

‘Another volley’s imminent,’ he clenched, ‘-protect the people or protect me – no death elements means no barrier protection,’ whimpers and cries hailed from the broken buildings, ‘-maybe I’m weak-hearted now,’ he inhaled, ‘-I would have ignore their deaths – however, they will survive in such a harsh world has truly impressed me.’

“Fenrir, go look for Intherna, tell her to ready the portal, we’ll depart soon after I defeat them.”

“-master?” she watched, clueless on how to feel.

‘The strongest is worthy of the battlefield, I’ll repay thy kindness in full, Tariel.’

Chapter 755: ‘-we’re doomed.’

Countless magical circles were summoned, the sky wept, fireballs hovered by a single thread, or so was the illusion. Below, tiny specks of black ran left and right, ants in the grader state of things. Those at the town hall watched from afar, their sight sent on horror, smoke rose, fires burnt, a singular thought crossed the collective minds, ‘-we’re doomed.’

‘Sorry about this,’ he inhaled and ambled into the retreating crowd of fanatics, they ran, no care for women, children, or the elderly, those who fell were trampled – the yelps and cracked bones muffled under the layer of fight or flight. Shoulders bumped numerous times, rather than falter, Igna pushed through, unshaken by the oncoming horde. The conjuration of the magic, through the vision granted by Origin, told of the properties and when it was to fully materialize, \*Grant me knowledge, library of the all-knowing: Mantia.\* passages to counteract the active spell flickered in waves of pages – \*Book of Roels, verse IV, page CCLII, command over they who wish the destruction of the innocent be persecuted by the flames of Revilas, hero of old who stood against the misgiving of his god, conjure forth the emotion in the last moment upon which the god was betrayed. Forsake loyalty in favor of those sworn to the protection.\*

\*Mana Control,\* he flinched, ‘-bypass,’ he gasped, ‘-I can somewhat utilize the books to nullify their spells,’ in where he thought the recital to have worked, the page from where he read, faded into ash, ‘-it didn’t work,’ he coughed, ‘-the mana in the atmosphere isn’t stable enough to sustain the library’s knowledge,’ he arrived at a lesser crowded area, the three figures flapped, arms stretched to the sun as to call upon their powers. ‘Should I do it?’ the fingers tapped nervously, ‘-should I or should I not?’ he pondered – insanity divulged further, ‘-screw it,’ the palms clenched, ‘-if I have to cross the bridge, then so be it,’

“IGNA WAIT!”

“Intherna?”

“Don’t expand thy domain,” she panted, “-they’re after me,” Fenrir followed behind, “-it’s a ploy to test our might.”

“We should stand back and watch the people die?” turned on his heel, what awaited was utter malice.

.....

“What people, they’re already dead,” she desperately tried to maintain her breaths, “-the spell’s activated,” opposed to a slow fall, the projectiles teleported and destroyed the buildings, nothing was safe, explosions carried bodies, mutilated limbs, woeful expression, beheaded children, the face of a familiar couple landed at his feet, ‘-the two from this morning...’

“We need to run,” she motioned to conjure the teleportation crystal.

A heavy feeling brushed against his shirt, “-don’t worry about the deaths,” said Fenrir resting her forehead on his back, “-it’s not your fault; herein lays the true demented world of Draebala...” The targets switched for Intherna, a brute gust blasted past his face, a shockwave of equal density cracked the very ground, “-IGNA, RUN,” the two other angels swarmed in with elemental and physical attacks, she fought bravely, unable to call onto most of her strength due to limitations, her fire robe barely conjured. She dipped under the punches, conjured fireballs, and palmed her opponents, a transparent shield dissipated her element, ‘-what?’ \*BOOM,\* a sudden beam of extraordinary power forced her across town, through buildings till the wall.

“We’ve defeated her, brother,” said an angel, the trio gathered a rock’s throw away from Igna.

“No, we’re not done playing,” added another, “-have you taken care of the people?”

“Most of them are dead,” said a genuinely unnerving cackle, “-with her symbol of power, we’ll be accepted, at last.”

“Accepted?” echoed a deep-toned voice, “-who do you think you are?” a burst of energy tore into the stone street, “-you dare hurt one of my companions?” he vanished, grasped one of the angels and dug its head downwards, “-DON’T YOU DARE!” the ground carved.

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

wish it to be for knowledge is the true strength: Realm Expansion Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\* a massive sphere swallowed the town, time froze, broken buildings in motions of falling halted, those given motion were Igna, Fenrir, Intherna and the angels. He side-glanced to Intherna, rose an arm, \*Be healed,\* the words alone restored her physique – consciousness awoke to a dense sea of sheer power, the gaze returned to the angels, \*lose thy boon of immortality,\* the transparent shield cracked, \*-die,\* he clenched and broke an angel’s neck, the remainder jumped to no avail.

“Brother, I can’t move,” they levitated, the wings flapped in desperation.

“You,” he rose from the fissure, curled his index – thus animated the corpse, it stood lifelessly, head drooped on one side. Canines sharpened an emotionless expression tore into the fair-skin, golden-haired, angel’s neck.

“WHO ARE YOU!”

“WHAT ARE YOU!”

**novelusb.com**

“LET US GO, DEMON!”

“MONSTER, HOW DARE YOU CAPTURE US!”

“Shut it,” a dragon-shaped gust tore into the remainder, promptly sending them against the clock, a monument, “-Master,” she panted, ire lit her clothes ablaze, a clock of pure fire shielded her body, “-what are thy orders?”

He rose a finger, flicked, \*lower pain tolerance, amplify body resistance, triple life-essence, increase sensitivity to elemental and physical damage.\*

“Understood,” her fist tapped against one another, “-payback is a bitch.” In the twenty-five minutes which elapsed, what they felt was an eternity of pain. Intherna paid her due with interest, punching, kicking, smashing, nothing was out of the question. When they grew weak, she signaled and the bodies would heal. Meanwhile, he drained and took apart every fiber of the one he killed.

‘Is this the master’s newfound power?’

“I’m finished,” said a sensually charged smirk, “-that felt good,” jitters ran throughout her body. To say she was covered in blood would have been an understatement – parts where her cloak didn’t reach dripped in the essence.

“Went a little overboard, didn’t you,” returned Igna, they faced the town; his symbol of power brightly gleamed, \*Present and never changing, present and never yielding. All who wait for break and all made are subjected to thine will. I, heir of Death, the humble inheritor of thy power; call upon thee to have mine will answered: Time Control – Reversal.\* fallen pillars resettled, the town folk wound back to where they stood, the panic backpedaled, the currently free-market square filled in attendance.

\*Mantia – Book of Restoration, Honzela, fifth passage, broken art be fixed, fixed art be broken, eternal cycle; creation and destruction, levy for reality changes prospective, watcher watches, creator creates, destroyer destroys, and restorer restores, Hicht.\* the wounded healed, \*Conjured from the powers of which rules the law of nature, summoned to aid, mine quest art be left alone. Reality is as I dictate,

matters affected in Mantia ought be reflected in the outside world. Realm Retraction Shadow Realm Variant – Rantiam.\* The heaviness lifted, “-what happened?”

“Weren’t we attacked?”

“I’m confused...” so went the common line of thought.

“Igna,” said Intherna, “-about what happened...”

“No need for concern,” he casually replied, “-what’s done is done. We had our revenge, tis all which matter,” in when the words articulated, Fenrir threw an anxious look. “-I guess there’s more than meets the eye.”

“More than meets the eye, sure, whatever you say, master,” her arms crossed, the ears defiantly lowered to stare the bystanders, ‘-what he did can’t be classified as strength, he exerted his will onto Draebala, reality buckled under his pressure. What sort of entity has he become, I thought he would have unleashed the death element; instead, he unleashed a domain far superior in stability and latent power, scary. If either the Eipea or Aapith faction learns of what I’ve witnessed, they may go to war and beg for him to join their cause, if not, they might as well join and fight a common enemy...’

“Turn the frown upside down,” said Igna poking her cheeks, “-let’s get ready to depart.”

“I beg of thee,” the priestess dropped onto her knees and clenched her palms in prayer, the crowd threw suspicious glares, “-o’ thee who owns me and mine soul, I promise to make good on our contract. Do not discard me for I shall endeavor to serve without prejudice...”

“Enough.” The teleportation crystal summoned; “-we’re heading home.”

Somewhere inside the castle, an unforeseen threat loomed in the shadows. The head-butler, old of age and strong in mind, walked, the footsteps echoed per the grandeur of the hallway, towards the balcony. The outside dampness, ignorant to the festivities, cast a melancholic dullness through the windows. Tray in hand and duty in thought, he stoutly struggled across the lushly woven carpet, which in hindsight, felt more to walking through water. Therein, his hair rose, the confident walk stopped, cackles flickered to and fro, a creek forced a gulp.

‘Three, two, one,’ murmured.

‘This sensation,’ he watched cautiously, ‘-don’t tell me.’

“CHARGE!” two figures cut towards him, “-ATTACK THE ENEMY!” Saniata’s griffin held Draconis and its master, the former held a makeshift lance – a mop. The dirty end hit his stomach directly, the butler buckled and was yet to drop the drinks, “-thank you for the refreshment,” winked Saniata who proceeded to run into the sunset, else known as the throne room.”

“Back home,” they dropped onto a green plain of grass, the side of the castle rose before them.

“Where are we?” fired Fenrir.

“The Shadow Realm,” replied Intherna, “-good job,” she leaned and offered a helping hand.

“Thank you for the assistance,” he took her offer, “-the quest isn’t accomplished yet,” an unsettling gaze rested on Yuio.

“Why the strange look?”

The wind whistled, a lovely figure arrived, “-long time no see, my heir.”

“Adete,” he smiled, “-it has been a while, where have you been?”

“Exploring the world,” she curtly added, “-hold on a moment, Fenrir?”

“Adete?”

“IT IS YOU!” they leaped into a close embrace.

“I trust you’ll explain Fenrir where we are and what happened?”

“Will do,” for the first time in ages, the first progenitor held a genuine smile.

“I ought to report our journey to the others,” wings of fire sprouted, “-see you around, Igna.”

Soon after – Igna and éclair stood behind a protective barrier. In front rested a pod.

“Took quite the effort to put her in there,” complained éclair.

“She’s very energetic. How’s her soul, suitable to be the sister-system?”

“Beyond suitable, master, I’d say, the pod was made for her. The soul is stable and her consciousness is perfect for the world she’s about to be embarked on.”

“Long as she’s of use, I don’t mind,” they faced away, the sleeping demoness soon faded into nothingness, a side panel slid to a surgical room, here, under the bright light of a lamp, laid a lifeless body, puppet to be exact. The surgeon, inhumane in appearance, worked its tentacles, “-she’ll inhabit the body?”

“Yes, tis the plan,” added éclair, “-I proud myself in being thy personal assistant, hard as I work, I’m afraid it would be a hard endeavor to overexert myself. Hence, the new soul will be fragmented, we’ll separate her into two beings, one as the emotionless soul charged to oversee the AFR, and Phantom’s infrastructure, whilst the second, the body, will be employed as thy assistant, naturally, she’s going to be useful in the various task I wish her to partake.”

“Working her to the death,” he laughed, “-how long were we gone?”

“A week? We’re on the 10th of December,” éclair replied.

“Any reports from Vesper?” the phone vibrated, to which éclair handed the device over, “-speak of the devil,” he answered, “-Hello?”

“Master, Vesper speaking. I have news, the adventuring party has made it through floor 198, it shan’t be long till they beat floor 199 and climbed to the top. Could thee kindly return to the overworld and make for the Azure Wall?”

“Can’t we teleport from here directly?”

“Sadly not, the link’s been ruptured. I’ve sent a photo – rejoin him no later than three days from now, preparation is key for our second coming.”

#### Chapter 756: Maicite

Draebala, matin after the departure, Tariel, supposed to have been attacked, rises to a shyly woeful dawn. The battle of the angels, closely monitored by a few – upon entrance inside the town, were barred from vision, the remote viewing spell nullified. The mayor, earnest and in the know to what happened, vowed to aid his people the best he could. Sadly, such an exertion of strength and forcible alteration of reality shook the world’s core. Not visible, rather, the changes were felt deeply; council leaders of the Eipea Empire and Aapith Nation were stumped to the prior activation. Caution lit the flames of belligerent leaders, no longer was it possible to stand by and watch, or so they thought, a good reason to battle. Such was the perpetual cycle of life.

“POPS!” resounded down the castle yard, the boy ran and leaped, easily landed atop his back and climbed onto the shoulders, “-Long time no see,” he smiled.

“Good to see you,” he returned patiently waiting for the remainder. Gallops mildly announced Vanesa and Saniata, the former, as sleep as could be, hovered to his leg and latched, “-no escape,” she said.

“No escape,” he chuckled, “-you look well, Vanesa,” in a gentle motion, she hovered into a piggyback ride, “-we explore the town,” she voiced.

“Greetings, pops,” said the skimpily dressed Saniata, she threw her hips and halted, the rather short skirt had Igna shake his head.

“The fashion choices are yours to make, but still, I can’t help shudder for the worse. There are animals out there.”

“There’s no need for worries,” she gave a thumbs-up, “-I look good, and even if leches ever dare to approach, a simple spell should rectify their, you know, libidos.”

.....

“If you say so,” he shrugged, “-listen, I have a few hours to spare, want to spend it at the festival?”

“Are you sure?” Vanesa’s sleeping eyes widened, “-we going to hang out?”

“Of course we are,” he genuinely smiled, “-you three are my precious children after all.”

“I bet we are,” commented Saniata, “-who wouldn’t love to have a beauty like me as their kid.”

“Just because pops is being considerate doesn’t mean you can say whatever you want with chest,” fired Draconis, “-oh I’m sorry,” he covered his mouth, “-I rudely said with chest, should have been with the ribcage.”

“No more fighting you two,” he held an index finger, “-Saniata, you have room to grow, as for Draconis, stop teasing her,” said a cheerful wink, to which, the boy grandly smiled, showing off his pearly whites, and especially sharpened teeth. A troublemaker through and through.

“The trip was good, I suppose?” echoed an inquisitive voice across the terrace.

“You could say so,” replied Intherna leaned against the balustrade, “-look at them having fun,” she observed, “-the three devils love their guardians.”

“Welcome back,” wings retracted, “-Intherna.”

“Lilith,” she pushed off the balustrade, faced the newcomers, “-where’s Gophy?”

“Here,” came from Miira’s shadow, “-I had a few things to handle up north. Tell us, Intherna, anything special happened?” they gathered around a lovely wooden table seated underneath a modest parasol.

Mug in hand, she rose the drink to her nose and sniffed, ‘-mint, delicious.’

*novelusb.com*

“Care to explain?” interjected an impatient Gophy.

“Fine,” she sipped, “-Draebala was one hell of a trip. We were teleported to a mountain, I managed to get this map, and we were around here. He used up the remainder of the death elements mana to unleash the Nevermore gate for one last time – our fears were true, the time inside lord Hades has truly shaken his core and very soul. We fought a legendary beast, Fenrir, who turned out to be Igna’s long-lost companion. We’ve brought her to the Shadow Realm, should be on a trip with Adete, the two have a lot to catch up on. After that, we journeyed and fought, witnessed the ruthlessness of their world, and somewhat got entangled in a family feud. At the climax of the dispute, we sought refugees at a tavern, there, I confess I might have snuck outside of town and unleashed part of my powers to draw in demons for our quest. They took me by surprise and the town suffered, I couldn’t fight to my fullest ability; shameful for one of the generals. One of ‘em drew my blood, the fruit of Zem,” mention of said item enthralled Miira and Lilith’s pressed lips, “-he lost it,” she laughed, “-Igna lost it and unleashed hell, the symbol of power reacted, believe me when I say this, no matter ranks or status, if he decided to reactivate the domain – and the one which is directly linked to the Shadow Realm, not the partial expansion, I doubt any to resist his will. I drowned and choked at the sheer intensity. The trip was worth the time, he trained and is ready to battle without magic, let’s say he went back to his routes.”

“Sound like you had a lot of fun,” Lilith added coyly, “-I’m jealous.”

“The fruit of Zem,” said Miira, the table whelmed, “-we know the story, a foolish human who sought power and landed on the idea of tormenting living beings, extracting their soul, and combining it into the cursed fruit of torment. Tis said whoever takes a bite will be shackled by the emotions the sacrifices felt, regret and anger, a combination for disaster.”

“If they’ve stumbled onto the ritual, what will happen to the people?” wondered Gophy, “-we should forget what happened and focus on the Shadow Realm. Continents and worlds are being born as we speak, their land inhabited by humanoids variants of the residents – the population grows, a monetary system must be applied.”

“I’ve got it covered,” said Miira, “-new policies and laws have been crafted to safeguard peace and promote self-growth. Let’s turn the realm into the second Elysium.”

Half-a-day elapsed, the manor on the outskirts of the noble district rose, gates opened to an otherwise silent yard. ‘-Draconis fell asleep, Saniata’s barely standing, and Vanesa, conserving energy,’ he clambered against the hill, reaching the peak where éclair stood in company of another.



“Welcome back, master,” he waved.

“éclair, have thee waited long?”

“Not too long,” he added, “-here I present, Yuio, the new sister-system, her other self has been implemented and is in process of assimilating the data around the world.”

“She seems shy to me,” remarked Igna. The tan complexion remained, her horns vanished, the ears sharpened similarly to an elf, her canines followed suit. Freckles spanned from one cheek across the nose and to the other, her lips, tight and in a perpetual frown, watched. Her height, compared to éclair, who stood the same height as Igna, was but shy a few inches.

“Not shy,” remarked the same tone, “-confused is all,” her left arm rose as if checking the time, a swipe across the watch summoned a holographic display, “-the technology is new and still, I know how to use it.”

“Welcome to the new world,” commented Igna, “-Yuio.”

She dropped on her knees and bowed, “-master Igna, I thank you for saving the town and its people. You healed and revived the deceased. I regret not being able to bid the master and young master farewell.”

“I doubt tis the last with seen of them. Draebala has more than meets the eye, we may yet to finish our journey.”

\*CRASH,\* the lushly green grass yard boomed, smoke rose, a silhouette exited the cloud and leaped to their stead, “-don’t forget me.”

“Fenrir?”

“Yes,” she winked, “-I won’t make the mistake of leaving thy side ever again,” her expression rang true.

“MY YARD!” exclaimed éclair, “-MY BEAUTIFULLY CARED FOR YARD.”

“Hold it together,” he turned, pointed and snapped, the explosion disappeared – the fumes flourished into a vibrantly colored meadow, “-there, a makeshift garden.”

“Master,” éclair dug his face into his elbow, “-the flowers are beautiful...”

“But you don’t like them,” he exhaled, “-fine,” \*snap,\* the colors left for a vivid green, “-there, does it work?”

“Yes, uncared lawns are one of my weaknesses.”

“More of an obsession,” he added, “-as we were saying, Yuio is to serve as my secretary, correct?”

“Yes, master. I’ll have her lead a branch of Raven’s company, Kul’s gotten into toys and gadgets lately. She’ll work from Rotherham and oversee operations until I see her fit to serve us, acceptable?”

“Shouldn’t be a problem.”

The children were sent to bed, “-Master,” said éclair, “-once thee return, please visit lady Courtney, she has a few things to discuss.”

“Understood,” the teleportation circle activated – a beam shot upwards, floated for a few seconds, and grounded before the three skyscrapers.

“Where are we?” fired a confused Fenrir, “-so many lights,” she scanned profusely, “-is it night, wait, nighttime is this active... why are children out in the streets?”

“Calm yourself,” he tapped her back, “-here’s a summary of what has happened ever since the incident in Dorchester,” a pocket reader, thin as humanly possible, shrunk to the size of a ring, “-touch the jewel and it should turn into a book.”

“Alright,” without time wasted, the book opened in her palms, her blueish pupils reflected the words. ‘-a chronicle of transpired events; good thing scholars have habits of writing and obsessing over the past.’

“Fenrir, shall we go?” Thus, they climbed one of the most influential parties’ buildings in Hidros, the Federation’s emblem blazed against the secondary skyscraper, there, the office was dubbed ‘-financial trade center of Hidros,’ countless renowned brands made their headquarters onto the many floors – stocks, prices, gold, and a new currency, trade of Maicite. The new element slumped researches of other countries – a catalyst for mana harvest and convergence has always been a statewide secret, the more efficient a nation’s technology is, the cheaper is the cost to supply the buildings, machines, and daily lives with power. Throw in an ore that already handles 75% of the classified process and the world’s power could shift. In theory, the discovery had potential to shake the market – as is with novelty, apprehension from rudimentary tests didn’t make the element reliable for a kingdom to spend funds in an already broken economy.

‘The arm’s trade won’t last long if the Cobalt Unit keeps on rivaling our technology,’ they climbed the lift, ‘-Maicite,’ he smirked, ‘-problems must be squandered before they arise – I have strong reason to believe energy will become the next bottleneck. The more advantage they get, the more power will be required...’

“Young master Igna, please follow us,” said a guard immediately out the elevator.

“Lead the way,” he said, Fenrir kept close, “-the ladies wait inside.”

“Fenrir, could you wait out here?”

“Sure, do what is needed,” she never once rose from the book.

‘She’s absorbed,’ the handle clicked.

“Hello, nephew,” said lady Elvira in the company of lady Courtney.

“Glad to see you’re in good shape,” the door clicked, ‘-the atmosphere’s dense, what’s this about?’

“How was the trip, Igna?”

“Very good, actually.”

“I’m glad,” a timid smile kept on lady Courtney’s face, “-your aunt has a few things to say, care to hear her out?”

‘Okay?’ he shuffled to the large desk, took a seat, and waited.

"Igna, it pains me to say, Phantom's not doing so great. The Federation requires us to spend more money than we currently make, the arms dealing market's plummeted since the Cobalt Unit's intervention. It looks dire, luckily, few of my investments and stakes in other companies have kept us afloat. I need your council," her fingers interlocked, "-the Elon Dynasty has been very helpful throughout our struggle, an investor of their proportion is an achievement on its own... per Elendor's actions, our relations rather strained. Our foundation may break if we're not careful. The reason why I ask for thy help is simple; your company, the Raven's, has built itself off nothing and grown into a behemoth in the world of gambling, not to mention, the narcotic trade is presided upon by thee. Phantom can't, as our agreement said, take over the company, it's yours, and honestly, we wanted to test thy might in a strenuously difficult region. You have control of the mayor, the investors, and the chief of police, the towns under Raven's complete authority, and I even hear the families have bowed to thy rulership, thus, I ask, help us climb the wall, another year and we're doomed, we can't keep up the reckless spending. War is expensive – without an advantage, tis lost."

Chapter 757: "Nothing ventured, nothing gained."

"After all the effort we put in, I'm told the company won't be swallowed?"

"Correct, I have no interest in leading your team and your project," she strained on yours, giving Igna a feeling of solitude and disappointment. By all means, the work done had been for sake of a bigger cause, for the chance to do good for those who had treated him so well. Unwilling to refute her claim, the elbows weighted heavily onto the chair, he pushed and exhaled, the posture lowered minutely.

"Aunt Elvira," he waved, toggling an interface in his phone, "-give me a few moments to go over Phantom's reports."

"Sure, take your time," said she ordering a drink over the intercom, a muffled voice, barely audible, courteously answered her request.

'Innovation, there must be an unfulfilled gap in the market. Phantom's doing badly, appearances don't reflect the truth. To think, she's handled such a tedious affair without so much as breaking a sweat or showing weakness. I'm impressed, very impressed,' lines upon lines flowed, he read, catching specific details – secret military projects, advancement in the underground facility, '-the biggest source of income is guns trade. The open market freely allows the exchange, add the Cobalt Unit, and we're in a battle of 70-30 in our favor. Since the technology we used is classified, many kingdoms wish not to do business – well, since we were a mighty military force, it didn't matter, we could be secretive and force our will upon the nations. The table's turned, the Cobalt Unit's more open to sharing their information, selling their ships, and leasing their researchers to aid other countries. Looks like the drug trade was able to sustain us for a few months, the cartel's making a fair share – most of which is laundered and granted to the Dark-Guild, led by lord Elon. Phantom's turn-down offers for a bigger share in exchange for the Elon Dynasty's backing, a double-edge idea. Relations between us are strained, the root of the problem, let's see,' he scanned, carefully going over the lines, '-Elendor.'

"Igna," called from the side, "-why not take a break for today?" suggested lady Courtney, "-maul the idea over in thy own time. Lady Elvira and I have a few meetings to attend too," she kindly caressed his cheeks, "-Phantom isn't the only one who is trouble – check-in with Alta, Arda's not doing so great either," the words timidly fell on his ears, a sense of shame washed upon her figure, the proud and

strong mother he'd once idolized and respected was but a shell of her former self. A few minutes elapsed, his mother and aunt left down the elevator.

"Igna?" called Fenrir, "-are you fine?" she entered the now vacant office.

.....

"I don't know what to think," he swapped seat to Courtney's couch, "-my selfishness to not get involved might have done worse than good. Everything hangs in the balance, one wrong move, and tis finished."

"I went over the history – Lizzie died and was reincarnated. She was a brat, a lovely brat, I remember her reserved smile when we brought food, gave her outfits, and told her to live her best life. Her past had to ruin the peaceful life she was to live," she dropped onto a seat – a buzz said, "-drinks?"

"Come in."

Warmly brewed tea was served, the retainer, smart in outfit and polite in his tone, nodded at the duo then left. "-This world truly is amazing," she ambled out the office, made way across the corridor, slid the side panel into a brightly lit nightfall. "Pretty," her hair swayed in the breeze, "-where are we?"

"Rotherham," he explained, "-looks awesome, doesn't it."

"Tell me, Igna, what's the problem, want to talk about it?" she kindly tilted her head and sipped, "-I'm here to listen if you want to."

"I don't know really," he sipped, "-the fact is, we're in a tight situation. Normally, we'd have found a way to strongarm the heart of the problem – matters are so intensely woven tis impossible to unwind the yarn without it crumbling."

"I don't know much about business, nor do I care to learn," her longing gaze firmed into the town, "-I was gone for who knows how long. People, buildings, I realized, with or without my intervention, the world ambled steadily onto a prosperous future. I mean, look at this place; from what I remember, it used to be a shithole for thugs, a forsaken land where even the shrewdest of noble dared not veer their heads. The foundation is strong," added she with conviction, "-Igna, Staxius, whatever the name is, I know from my memories, the one I served, the one I adore, would have never built an empire on a weak foundation, he knows better than anyone else that to reach the top, the basics must be firmly be ingrained. Why worry about the alliances, why worry about things which are out of thy grasp," she sipped, "-stop and look around, what stands before us is truly a feat deem of the utmost praise."

Distant sirens clambered onto were they stood, the starlight sky couldn't have been clearer, in a way, her words, a weird assortment of how she felt, sent shivers, '-she's right,' he leaned onto the railing, steam rose from the mug to be swept by the brusque wind, "-THAT'S IT!" an idea sparked, "-Fenrir, I need to visit the university. I'll have éclair take thee home, is that fine?"

"S-sure?" she frowned, "-what sort of idea..."

**novelusb.com**

"A secret," he laughed, "-thank you for the pep-talk, it helped put things into perspective."

'Why was I drawn to follow what others set,' he glided down the stairs, '-I thought of the problem from the wrong angle. If technology advances, the foundation, power, without it, no matter how strong a gun is, without bullet, the weapon shan't fire. Maicite, the answer stared me blatantly. Who knew watching the wind blowing steam would spark inspiration,' the ground floor jumped into the frame. \*Calling éclair.\*

"How may I serve, master?"

"Where are you?" he hurried out of the building, the suit jacket fluttered upon reaching outside, a strong gust slapped, nearly blowing the phone out of his hand.

"Supervising a few things, why, is something the matter?"

"Have someone escort Fenrir home, and get me in contact with Clarise from the Alchemist Sect. She's in charge of the convergence engine, is she not?"

"Yes, her and Gate-Six. Master, what are you planning?"

"Something big," he smirked.

"Clarise should be at the university, she's a professor in Magiology. Should I send transportation?"

"I'll take the bus, it's yet to be curfew."

"Understood, I shall call her and inform of the arrival, should I forward the call afterward?"

"Why not."

Under the starry night, Igna joined into the local commute of students, teachers, and workers, patiently waiting for the bus. The topic of discussions, hard as he tried to not eavesdrop, transcribed onto his interface, '-efficient and scary,' he wondered. '-There have been murders in the capital, politicians have gone missing mysteriously – those of the faction who opposed the crown,' sat onto a silver-colored bench, cupped inside a shelter adjacent the bus turnout. Men differing outfits fit into differing clicks, a blatant sense of superiority rose from those in shirt and tie, whilst the casually dressed, fashionable to some extent, were viewed under the judgmental magnifying glass. Some lit cigarettes at the back, polite towards the commuters. A slow-moving bus, most fitting to be described as a rectangle on wheels, pulled into turnout – the panels crumbled.

"Excuse me, is this the bus for the University?" inquired a young man.

"Yeah," replied the tired driver, "-come on in, kid."

Window seat towards the back-portion of the moving rectangle, '-do I have change?' the thought suddenly crossed. A scanner to the side, linked to a small interface, neatly showed a wireless payment, a touch of the phone cleared the bill. After many twists and turns, under the suddenly gloomy clouds – arrived a terminal.

Blue backdrop and golden colored letters told the prestige of the University. '-A more stuck up feeling,' he walked into the campus, students and workers hurried out, whereby, he headed inward, '-the outfits clearly demonstrate the level of education, the better an establishment is, the more famous and prideful people get.'

\*Incoming call, éclair.\*

"Hello?"

"Hello, Clarise Reinhart speaking," spoke on the other end, "-am I talking to Igna Haggard?"

"Correct, I do apologize for my selfish request."

"I don't mind it," said a jovial mien, "-are you on campus?"

"Yes."

"Head for the auditorium, it should be to the left of the main building, I'll wait there."

"Understood," lamps lit the path, flies flew here and there; keeping to themselves most of the time, 'I wonder how it looks during the daytime,' the distance closed, 'the clear sky turned cloudy, the Hidrosian weather, unpredictable as always. I'm sure if lightning cackled, the place would look like a demon lord's lair.' He wrapped around the building to where she directed, the walkway hurried into a darker area. The auditorium stood grandly with a domed roof, "-Young master Haggard?"

"Lady Clarise, a pleasure to make thy acquaintance again," he smiled.

"You look younger than what I imagined," she scanned through her rounded glasses, years took its toll onto her visage; memories were of a young girl, said lass stood before him as a woman, tall, mature, and prominent, "-follow me."

"Do you not have questions?" he wondered.

"In due time, Igna, in due time." The promenade went on a few minutes in complete silence, the main building soon lost into a small line of marked trees. Beyond laid white blocks, the laboratory on which, 'Research Facility of Rotherham,' wrote in bold black paint, "-éclair told me a few things," she stopped shy of a gate, "-what's the goal. Not to sound rude, I'd rather not have people who know not of the sacred quest for knowledge to trample over our sanctum."

"I understand completely. I don't have qualifications and the only reason we've talked is because of my butler. Tell me, Alchemist, if you doubt my intellect, why not ask a few questions."

"Pretty bold," she smirked, "-firstly, remove the lenses, only then are we to conduct a fair assessment."

"As is wished," the transparent tint dematerialized, "-as for the subject, let's talk Magiology." Questions fired in rapid succession; she made hypothetical problems on the fly. No amount of remembrance of notes would have passed her test; the faster the questions arrived, the sharper he replied until the last breath, "-Magiology was founded by my uncle, I ought to know a few things about the subject, don't you think?"

"A few things?" she panted, "-you're annoyingly entertaining. Good to have an able mind in our midst. So, care to explain the reason for the visit?"

"Before that, I have a question."

"Go on?"

“About the samples of the monster curse plague, the vaccine, how’s it coming along. I’m sure I had the process written to perfection; does it not work?”

“We tested the samples and created the formula – it worked on animals, however, the refined mana needed for one dose is too expensive and time-consuming. The only viable way of production is direct extraction from a human, an act that goes against the global law of Manaion (Countless deaths have resulted from the research of Magiology, and the death of a young orphaned named Manaion created outrage, the penalty was riots. Humanitarian organizations around the world forced the leaders to act, hence, forbidding human testing). You’re the one behind the cure, I never realized.”

“I like to keep my identity hidden,” he laughed, “-about my visit, Maicite. I need to know if the ore can truly be deemed the future of the power industry. As the Alchemist Sect is bound to the organization, it would behoove thee to not have the information leaked.”

“A difficult task,” she said, “-we thought the same until the practical usage. The element grows unstable when exposed to an artificial source of mana, it comes around to one thing, living beings.”

“Nothing ventured, nothing gained.”

Chapter 758: ‘-what did he just say?’

Maicite, first found at The Depths of Arlm, in Easel Run Gard. A not so fruitful mine turned training zone for potential adventurers. In the many elapsed years, whereby a time during which village fledglings would embark to the big city to change their future; the banner under which the Eastern and Western Dragons lived, the Federation, brought many career opportunities. The establishment of an overseas adventuring academy brought forward greater options for the youngsters.

The light shines the brightest in the darkness. Economy, morale, a failing leadership, a malediction raveled the fledgling country into despair. They forced Hidros’s hands and were offered help – days were long and nights short. Extraneous work for minimal pay, many fled the country to which they suffered the ‘brain drain,’ phenomenon. Famished and impoverished countries are very often tied in a never-breaking loop. Competent people, able to change their nation for the better, opt to immigrate, leaving the falling country for a better life, better reward, and recognition. Many children choose not to have an education and embark into the dangerous world of adventuring. If a guild hires, no matter the prestige, whether, low, mid, or high, guild; they accept and train, often having to prove themselves before being shipped. Therein, the culmination of the country’s pain, the prayer of the people didn’t go unanswered, fate shone upon them during a lucky accident. What trainee adventurers thought to be rock, when a spell misfired, was absorbed brazenly by rocks and nullified its effects. Idea was to make shields, the ore was mined and exported to a local appraiser, he thought naught, and tis where it flew to Hidros, more specifically, the University of Pleon, build in the dead center of Rosespire’s academy district. They appraised the ore, sending it across the globe to parent research facilities – no price was placed on the ore. A gram was easily obtained, the starting price went for 2 Exa per unit, unrefined and uncleaned. The properties went under close examination, results were favorable, alas, the cost price too much for the scholars to invest. The price spiked to 10 Exa per gram since researchers wanted more for further testing. Tis then, a trade ban was decreed by Queen Gallienne to halt the ore’s exportation to anywhere aside from Hidros. Supply and demand, no other mines were ever found which held Maicite, the current value peaked at 100 Exa per gram, now lingering between 70 – 80 Exa. By all means, a novel

ore circulated throughout the months until the hype died and the general public moved on with their lives.

Time read 22:35 on a square-clock, the white, sanitized laboratory, deep in the underbelly of the 'Research Facility of Rotherham,' breathed.

"I'll head out for the night," said Clarise, "-call the guard if there's anything you need. Take your time, I'll be off, good night." Shutters lowered halfway onto the doorway, '-pretty industrial for a place of low-key knowledge. I have a kilogram, ' he leaned, studying the scrambles from afar, '-the pieces mildly gravitated to one another. They form their own field and act on the mana around,' hence the testing commenced. For the next few hours, he'd carefully comb the properties, understanding the matter on an atomic level, the pupils bleached, Origin's boon of true sight foretold of the endless possibilities and how it reacted, the mana lines, the very particles, were visible. 05:05 on the clock, '-looks like I was right. The ore is actually the fragmented parts of perished gods, angels, demons, monsters, those who live in a clearer, purer dimension. These must be the remains of Lord Death's massacre, in other words, tis the physical representation of a being's magical element. Father's research into artificial elements briefly touched on the possible idea about physical extraction, the course of time did its due. Who knows how long the Maicite will last,' he leaned closer, '-it's possible to synthesize it to 80% of efficiency – triple the value current technology holds. No wonder people couldn't see the potential, tis beyond their comprehension. Knowledge strikes again,' he dropped into a cushioned chair at the lobby, plants and warm-colored walls gave a sense of relief.

\*Calling éclair.\*

"Good morning, Master."

"éclair, good morning," he replied, a shield-shaped majestic blue gem hovered within his palm, "-how much money have we made so far?"

.....

"Vague question, are you speaking of Raven's earnings?"

"Yes, I need both clean and dirty money."

"Through gambling, we've made close to 520 million Exa, whilst the drug trades brought in 800 million. The latter's very profitable, combined, we have 1.3 billion."

"How much did Phantom make in comparison?"

"254 billion last year."

"And Elon's dynasty?"

"560 billion."

He winched, "-how about the Gaso Group and Patek?"

"Gaso group, 215.5 billion, Patek, 430 billion, the figure are drawn from what's publicly available. I suspect more funds have been circulated stealthily."



“Wait, are those how much the companies are worth, not the profits, right?”

“Yes, sorry, I forgot to specify. Early morning fatigue, forgive me, master.”

“No worries, I was just brushing up on the bigger player. I need a favor,” said a stern voice.

“Go on ahead.”

***novelusb.com***

“Who owns the Maicite mine in Easel Run Gard?”

“The mine’s in the Eastern Dragon’s province, and own by a local lord.”

“Make arrangements to purchase the mine and the land, better yet, have Starix flown and make negotiations. Controlling the Maicite market will directly affect who controls the world. Buy them using our funds, make it seem as if the ore is worthless, use the guise of training prospective adventurer, I’m sure my cousin wouldn’t mind giving a hand.”

“Understood, I shall make preparations right away. Also, I received a message from lady Vesper, she wishes for thee to depart for the Azure wall. I shall ready a jet.”

“Right, thank you,” the call ended, ‘-takes care of that. I refined the ore using mana manipulation, I doubt any other country has the know-how. With this little blue gem, we’ll take over the whole world.’

The following days elapsed till dawn of the 12th, lightning rode throughout the facility, the air charged with static current. The converter blew, a blackout inspired terror, “-what happened?” an army of white-coats barged into Igna’s lair, he’d forced researchers out, garnering hate – nothing money couldn’t fix. A rainbow of hues stapled against the ceiling, floor, walls, he stood, palms over a shoe-box sized container, ‘-Creation magic,’ he puffed, ‘-box of Alche and the reality alteration, and the concrete support of Mantia. I’ve made it,’ he panted, ‘-the first catalyst to utilize Maicite in its fullest potential, the gem’s removable – higher grade means greater output,’ sweat poured, gleaming against the ceiling lights. Heavy steps stopped at his back, two sharp taps, “-what happened?”

“Lady Clarise,” he spun, “-the time I spent in the laboratory was worth the effort,” said a smug smirk.

“We’ve had it with the forceful requests,” fired an angry professor.

“Being locked out of the laboratory has hampered the students’ growth; you should be ashamed.”

“Be quiet, is that any way to speak to the son of the Duchess?” he frowned, the statement sank their hearts.

“We didn’t mean our words maliciously...”

“We only wanted to care for our students, their future relies on the thesis they present.”

“Magiology,” he paused, “-a very complex subject requiring years of preparation to skim the uppermost layer. Tell me,” he nodded to the first plump figured man, “-explain in thy words why Magiology is hard?”

“For the simple reason of it implementing various fields into one, the overarching purpose being to find similarities of magic and the ‘proven’ fields.”

“Not completely inaccurate. Simply put, Magiology was founded for one reason, Mana research. The quest to learn about what we call the human soul, the very essence of our being. Magical elements are real, still, the existence can’t be proven. Where does mana come from, where does it go, is it the life-essence of the universe or additional force. So, you see, the complexness doesn’t arise till one has a ground grasp on an everchanging form. A competent pursuer of the subject, not to lower thy qualification, must be able to hold water within their palms and not lose a single drop. Once one falls, the water must be released and filled anew.”

“‘Twould be impossible.”

“There’s the answer, magiology isn’t a matter to be tied by rules – laws naught but a lie.”

“And?”

“It must be interpreted, not comprehended, apply your rules, and your mindset. Similar to magic, when casting a spell, tis the manifestation of what is seen in the consciousness, mana is water in many ways.”

“Igna,” interjected Clarise, “-is it necessary to go into more details?”

“Oh, I apologize for rambling. I thought I’d share what I’ve learned to know. No matter, my days in the hogging the laboratory wasn’t done in malice – I was researching,” he sternly gazed Clarise, ‘-privacy,’ said his gaze.

“Leave the matter to me,” powers returned; equipment rumbled. Worries thrown out the window – the few discussed words touched their hearts, a new perspective to pounder. She watched them leave, pushed a stray blond lock behind her ears, and firmed onto his visage, “-there, they’re gone.”

“Good,” he sidestepped, “-I present thee, the first convertor abled to use Maicite of any grade.”

“...” her fingers tapped, ‘-what did he just say?’

“Should I repeat what I say?” he smirked.

“Igna,” said a deepened exhale, “-are you pulling my leg?”

“No, why?”

“Countless elite scholars have gone over the problem without an answer. How did you solve the ever quandary of Equal Exchange?”

“By ignoring it,” he laughed, “-I said it before, tying Magiology to your rules limits what it’s able to do. I merely had to discharge the very thought.”

“Okay, sure. What about the purity, how did you refine the ore in such a short amount of time. I never saw any of the equipment being utilized?”

“Manually – I use the Mana-Control arts, a unique ability to control mana in the atmosphere.”

She went on her knees, gawked the blue gem, enchanted by its beauty, “-does it work?”

“Channel mana as you would in when driving.”

“Understood,” her index touched, her eyes closed, \*BANG,\* the energy released in sound form, shaking the floor, “-What the?” she fell backward, knocking her head against the adjacent table, “-hurts... I added just a bit, nothing my body can’t regenerate in a few seconds, HOW!” she leaped, “-IGNA, THIS IS AMAZING!”

“I know, please keep your mind clear. This is the prototype; I bind thy tongue under Phantom’s authority. Reveal this to no one,” he pressed a button, the device shrunk, “-the current output is triple the added amount. Use it to manufacture the cure for the monster curse, purity and energy are solved, right?”

“Yes...”

“I’m very serious about the condition, keep the device hidden. Never mind,” he grasped the invention, evoked a dark-portal, then threw, “-if you want a job done right, do it yourself. I’ll have éclair deliver it to the secret base, acceptable?”

“I don’t care, long as I get to study the procedure, please, might I have the papers?”

“It’ll be uploaded soon enough. I trust you to oversee the manufacturing process?”

“Understood,” she nodded, “-Phantom can once again look proudly forward, we broke through an unclimbable wall. Reminds me of the time I met Staxius, your uncle’s intellect and way of thinking differed so much I couldn’t make sense of anything.”

In two days, Igna nonchalantly fixed a problem that had scholars scratching their heads. The technological advancement from the prototype alone skyrocketed their country to the top – such was the opinion upon taking accounts of the rival countries.

‘-And, done,’ he exited, breathing in fresh for the first time, ‘-very crowded during the day. Looks like the Academies jointly participated in seminars,’ he made for the entrance.

“Wait!”

“Pardon me?” he turned, ‘-why’s she out of breath?’

“Are you Staxius Haggard?”

“No, and who might you be?”

“Mille Stalin, I was a friend of Eira Haggard, we studied together,” ogled from over-shaped glasses.

‘I remember her.’

#### Chapter 759: Casefile 89 -The Royal Conspiracy

‘Mille Stalin; big eyes and small nose and ears closer to elven than human. Not much was known of her past for it was never brought in conversations. Clumsy and always zoning out – aged 13, a girl with superior brainpower.’ So was her description of many years ago. In a way, her facial features retained a sense of familiarity all the while exuding the years which had passed. Her big eyes, protector of her hazel-colored pupils sparsely had chestnut-colored sprinkles, each flutter of her eyelashes gleamed the

gaze anew. Her hair, longer and untidy, didn't add much to her overall tall and slim figure. Her lab coat held to her shoulders in much distress, she pushed aside her bangs and stared, firming her prior statement. "I'm sorry, are you not Staxius Haggard?"

"No, I'm afraid not," he replied, '-why are the students giving the side-eye?'

"My bad," she exhaled, "-it's just I had hoped to see him again."

"Why?"

"It's about Eira," she gasped, "-well, not matter, she's not likely to talk to her old classmates now is she. Empress of Alphaia must have much on her plate," said a vacant smile, "-I apologize for bothering," she turned, her arms relaxed and back hunched slightly.

"Hold on a moment."

"..." a distant gaze matched his, in a way, her face told she had moved on to another matter.

.....

"If you wish to speak to the empress, then by all mean," éclair understood the intent, her number dialed automatically. "Hello?" said the other end.

novelusb.com

"Hello big sister," he cheered, "-Igna here, long time no see."

"IGNA!" yelled across, he distanced himself from the phone, "-WHERE HAVE YOU BEEN!" cried through and through.

'What's this about?' read across Mille's face. He nodded in reassurance, waiting for the onslaught of words to end, "-are you done?" returned when the volume lowered.

"Yes," she audibly exhaled, "-why did you call?"

"I'd like for you to speak to someone," without further ado, he handed over the phone. The duo exchanged words till Mille's lack of focus and interest heightened, her pitch rose in with greater energy. She immediately headed into the campus, he followed, not too close nor too far, at the right distance to not arise suspicion. Meanwhile, the ladies reminisced, he dug up the profiles of the princess's classmate. The unexpected trail ended on a timidly reserved garden, Mille went back and forth between crates of cut flowers.

'Mille Stalin, a prodigy, the first lady who cracked the Esoplam Rule of Attenuation. The latter is, let's see, I get it, the process in which the converted energy is lost during transference. She found a way to lower the resistance, very impressive. No wonder the University scouted her, she's an eccentric researcher, not that I've seen any of her peculiar sides. The others are gone, no records on the boys, some of them, dead or missing. Ysmay Mallkin, where's her...' he searched till a hit, '-Ysmay Mallkin, Anastasia Whitstar, Kim Lone Franquet, Timothy Clark, Fletcher Vega, Harold Cumber, Simone Styles, and Tony Parker – students of the 50th graduating class at Claireville Academy were reported dead, the only survivors being Eira Haggard and Mille Stalin. The report says on the morning of the 25th of March, during a good faith visit to the Azure Wall, a meteor from unknown origin, crash-landed; killing hundreds

of adventurers in what was described as, Kiel's Fall. Search parties have swept the area to no avail, the 27th arrived, monsters attacked in full, any hope of survivors was abandoned. Princess Eira ordered for the search to be halted personally, in spite of her friend's death, she strode forth, concerned by the safety of the populous.'

A black rectangle loomed into the closed field of vision, "-here," said Stalin, "-thank you for that," she smiled, "-I can finally put my worries behind. It wasn't her fault, the projectile came suddenly, I-I, never mind. She told me to relay this message, '-fly to Alpha when you're able, I need to give thee a stern talking too'."

An unlikely personage stumbled into his life, such was the journey and point of the many ventures made. Hands in the pocket, he ambled to the nearest bus stop, took the transit for the airport, and arrived shortly at the airfield. The walkways followed the road where which lain a long line of halted cars. Each waited patiently for a chance to cut into the parking lot. The current location, the Rotherham airport, is one of the bigger facilities where trading and commons flights were sent and received.

Leading in, one must either talk the expansive road or make for a flyover shy of the gated restricted entrance to the runway.

'-Seeing her talk with big sisters made me remember the friends... no, not friends, perhaps, acquaintances? yes, them, they who I met at the adventuring academy. I wonder what's happened to them, hold on a moment, wasn't there... Prophecy, she ran away from Queen Shanna and started life anew. I did sort of depart from their lives, I wonder,' a blue-haired lady dressed in a black suit came from the town, fighting against the wind. She pressed her sunglasses to her glabella and smirked. The buildings in the vague distance added to her figure, each movement held power and authority – meanwhile, Igna stood shy of the flyover, the stairs led up and over. Awaiting cars, upon the signal turned green, split either left or right, drove under the overpass, and were lost in the complex layout of the terminal.

"Hello again, Igna," said she easing to a stop.

"Hello, Fenrir, I see you prefer pants and shirt as opposed to the more feminine choice of attire?" bystanders watched curiously at the elegantly dressed lady.

"Men's clothes are much better," she held a leather case, "-should we head out?"

"Over here, master," hailed a voice towards the left, they turned the corner to a group of suited men standing under a supporting pillar.

"éclair," they gathered at the same place, concrete ground, full crowds, and jammed roads, "-this place sure is popular."

"If I remember right, this is the first time visiting, right?"

"Yes," he replied, "-we normally take cars and make for the private airfield further north. Why did we have to meet here?"

"We've run into a few problems. Our private jets were commandeered by Midas, the director of security wanted to include the new AFR and upgrade the weapons, maintenance, and whatnot."

"I get it," he smiled, "-where's Julius, I haven't seen him?"

"The prince is on a business trip to Drejai, seaport Danzai to be precise. Master, Alta wished to discuss Glenda's future."

"I'll handle the matter of statecraft when I return from the expedition. I expect my hard work to be implemented, understood?"

"Yes, master, I shall get right on it."

Fenrir's leather case held plane tickets for Oriakon – the trading hub of Oxshield South. Before much longer, they were onboard a lesser crowded plane, the takeoff followed without hassle. The window seat provided a nice view, a glance to the right, where Fenrir waited, showed her in deep slumber. Therein, a notification from an acquaintance read, "-dear Igna Haggard, Count Stark speaking. I wish for thee to read this article," it linked to a differing page, "Casefile 89 -The Royal Conspiracy, written by Count Stark."

"I begin my summation of the story on a particular message I received a few weeks ago. The letter the following, '-dear Lord Stark, tis come to our attention a few of our associates have gone missing. Those who spoke ill of her majesty, view under close prejudice, have chosen to keep their mouths shut on the matter. Alas, tis not within my morale to keep such a malicious ploy to remain undiscovered. Please, whatever the price may be, my associates and I are willing to pay full recompensating for the following endeavor. We implore to thy intellect and world-renowned skill,' although I keep a strict policy of accepting jobs which are under law whereby, I know the crimes and criminals are sentenced accordingly, the seal, noble in nature and from the continent of Hidros, drew my curiosity. I accepted the job and made for the continent, there, upon meeting with the employer, I learned of a greater, possibly deathly, code-of-conduct people in the know must abide by and follow. Various lunches I held, whereby, lady Katherine Goldberg, vividly remains, particularly, her way of disclosing information without so much flinching an eye. The letter I received and when I ask for her written consent to use her testimony, led to a blatantly obvious truth, she was the secretive employer. A noble daughter of the Goldberg dynasty. Her obsession with the facts and how the murders were reported greatly benefited the investigation. For ones, the statements were true and we grew to spend much time in each other's company. I began on the streets of Rosepire, inside the outlier districts where one of the only three bodies were recovered. Public safety didn't like the idea of a private investigator hanging around their territory. Regardless, I spoke to locals and learned of a secretive organization, the D.G. They but had one thing to say, '-if people are dead, it's them.' The statement wouldn't ring true till a strange interview with a man named, Azal, most probably a nickname. In our parle, when I confronted him of having played a part in the murder of Baron Ogusta, he casually placed his revolver upon the table and relaxed. The glare he gave remains with me to this day; I was surrounded, and without my usual planning, I had to admit defeat. 'A man of your intellect should know better. Take my advice, forget Baron Ogusta, focus on the third disappearance; after all, we'd like to clear our name as well.' I asked for a lead, he remained silent. The second name, Uie Gaham, a reporter working for the Starrie Gazette went viral, damning proof of his affection to the younger demography blasted his name over the Arcanum, rendering his investigations into big names such as; Piers Riverty, the king, Empress of Alpha, and Aceline, the pride of Hidros, who'd recently made a return, useless. He was found dead, hanged, and pronounced a suicide. The body was cremated and the case file was conveniently lost. Every step I made; the world seem to counter. I must confess, in the decades I've worked this line, I have never come across such a complex

maze of dead ends and leads, the more logical and attention to details I took, the tighter grew the roads till I was inevitably left stranded, unable to think nor act. I spend the long months working for an acquaintance I made, I solved their cases and they gave me access to the restricted cases. The winds of change blew on a cold evening, I took the train to Riverwood upon receiving news about a newly discovered body, the victim, aged 17 and working in the court of Viscount Jenao, was found mutilated in clinical fashion inside a sugar cane field. I drew the conclusion of the body not being related at first, then, revelation hit, and I have to admit, was a lucky guess, the nobles and victims were affiliated in some way or another to the D.G. Also, the victims had spoken badly about the leadership at one point in time. Where there is distrust, there is revolt – I returned the very same day on the train and met a curious individual, Casefile 88 – Murder on the Riverwood Train, has more information on the matter. The story went a particular road, therefore, I observed a pattern, not purely blasphemous to the crown; but also, tied to adversaries of the Goldbergs. Without proof, there isn't much to say save my last confrontation with lady Goldberg, my employer who knew who did the murders and who was responsible. She wanted someone of caliber to investigate the trail and verify the astuteness of the fa?ade. My suspicions were confirmed, which I sadly cannot reveal under oath. Sad to say, I could only link the murders to the D.G, tis all I can say. The mystery is yet to be solved, I was bested, Hidros is a very interesting continent. I know of the real people, and for my own safety, will remain silent.'

Chapter 760: 'Have you ever had regrets?'

'Have you ever had regrets?'

"Send the lift, the adventurers are back," said the intercoms.

"Right on it," answered a short-haired lady, a flick brought an elevator. The view from where she stood was one to not forget. Tired men and women stumbled, some barely grazed the ledge and dove into a prone.

"Safety at last," they said, team members healed and comforted one another – Wall Guardians helped in first aid. A medical tent of greenish color rested beside a private lift headed into the 'safe' part.

"Wall guardian, here's my report," said a boy with half of the visage covered in blood, "-our party leader was mauled by a dire wolf," no expression, the shock had overwhelmed the innocent mind.

'Another one,' she took a notepad and wrote, '-death counts have been low.'

"I'll inform the guild, take care of yourself now," she politely smiled, the defeated figure returned to a click of equally wounded members.

.....

'Regrets,' she exhaled and stared at her right arm, '-I have plenty of them.'

"We'll handle the retrieval today. You're off the clock," spoke a commanding officer. Platforms private to guardians lowered, bow around her shoulder and arrows strapped to her waist, she hopped, made for a tram headed for Meke. '-Regrets,' dressed in army uniform, '-such a painful word to say,' evening drew curtains on a sunny day, a somber-blueish hue rose upon the continent, stars made their entrance, the nightlife of Meke, prominently from the adventurers, roared into action. A cold shiver pierced fabric and glazed her hairs, an apartment complex of somewhat moderate comfort rose in-between the

residential districts. Stairs rose into an outdoor alley of many doors. Occasionally, screams of arguing couples snuck outside, she paid no heed – thoughts were on the phone, ‘-he’s released a new casefile.’ The lock clicked, she pushed into the tight dark entryway, the stuffy air choked her breath. Her fingers lazily took off the tightly fitted heels, which soon were thrown haphazardly to the side. Her leggings made contact against the wooden floor – each step left an imprint.

‘Dinner,’ she stumbled into the kitchen, fixed dinner for two, jumped into the shower, ate said meal, and made for her room, the sliding window pushed upward. Night fully settled as for her, she sat with one foot pulled onto the office chair and the other on the floor, a warm cup of milk steamed, a page had, \*The Royal Conspiracy\* written in bold, ‘-the Goldbergs are involved,’ her eyes widened. ‘Right, Leonard’s busy dealing with his mother,’ she sipped, faced the open sky, ‘-Regrets,’ her chair rolled so as to look upon the street below. Friends walked, laughed, and teased one another, ‘-the days at the academy were fun, very fun. I enjoyed it so much I’d wish to relive the event again. Our groups fallen apart, I was responsible for pushing him away,’ she stared her arm, ‘-regardless, he did his best to help, meanwhile, I refuted his involvement, why would...’

\*Click,\* “-I’m home,” echoed from the entrance.

“Welcome back,” she returned, “-how was your day?” she shuffled into the living room.

“Tiring,” returned an exhausted visage, “-are you still thinking about them?” he snuck inside with shoes in hand.

“Leave them behind,” she glared, “-don’t bring your smelly shoes in our room.”

“Force of habit,” he scratched his head and chuckled, “-how was your day, Jen?”

“Pretty normal, the death count’s been lower. I heard the Goldberg Guild’s been gathering members – you sent a kid to his death today, come on.”

“It was beyond my abilities,” he exhaled, unbuttoned his shirt, and turned the television, “-the shareholders want our members to gain strength. The academy gave us the green light, figured I’d use ‘em.”

“Use them,” she brought a cup of water, “-that’s all you think about, don’t you.”

novelusb.com

“Don’t be like that,” he winked, they sat and watched the evening news, “-we know my job’s a nasty one. Long as our home is cozy and amorous, I’ll do what is needed. Tis the vow we exchanged, didn’t we?” they kissed, fingers interlocked; silvery wedding bangs gleamed against the show.

\*Message from Lieutenant Mello,\* rang in the early morning hours, “-what is up, Jen, it’s your favorite lieutenant. You’ve begged for time off, I managed to find a sucker to handle your guardian duties, tis the holiday season, monster activities lowered. I can afford maybe a week of leave on the condition you are to rush to work if ever things are dire. I said, maybe, in any case, today you’re free to stay home. Tell Leonard we’ll invoice him the payments for the monster drops later, happy sleeping.”

“Who was that?” asked a grumpy voice.



“Mello,” she muffled into her pillow, “-I’ve got the week off. By the way, it’s 05:00, don’t you have to work?”

“OH GOD!” he jumped and left, “-I’ll prepare breakfast, sleep in.”

“Yeah, yeah... have a good day.”

‘Jen’s the strongest woman I’ve ever met,’ quick to shave the stuffy chin, ‘-it’s my responsibility to give her the best life I possibly can,’ memories of their unrecognized marriage came to mind, the harsh words from his mother – a forceful abdication from the family, ‘-leaves a bitter taste till this day,’ he hurried into the kitchen, cooked then hurried to work, ‘-another grueling day,’ date showed the 10th of December, a few hours before Igna made for Oriaon.

‘Guess we’re here,’ he thought, the laptop closed, ‘-Trading hub is an understatement, the amount of presence I feel within the town sends a haunting sense of doom. Count Stark isn’t one to be trifled with lightly, he attached a personal message to the public case file, “-Lord Igna Haggard, I base my assumptions on speculation and deduction. The Haggard’s are involved in the killings, the trail’s very much clean, even if I were to accuse thee, there’s no point, the law can’t catch a Phantom, can they? Tis a lovely game of cat and mouse we are playing, thee have the home-field advantage, therefore, I digress for now. Then again, my deductions are prone to be wrong at times.”

‘Law can’t catch a Phantom,’ hung in his mind, line after line exited the plane, ‘-he’s a threat, I knew it. Such a shrewd personage, he knows how to play the cards dealt. Send an assassin and tis blatantly announcing the affiliation and confirmation of the D.G’s existence. ‘I know of the real people, and for my own safety, will remain silent’ a scheming sentence, I applaud thee, lord Stark.’

“Master?”

“Fenrir?”

“Are you well?” she held and lifted his chin, “-Igna, we’re in Oriaon.” Consciousness returned to a massive terminal of high ceiling in which were various floors, trains, cars, name it, and the means of transit was available. Most wore workers’ uniforms, those who worked in import and export. Outlines shuffled to and fro, Fenrir’s blue hair firmed his attention, “-I dozed off,” he said, “-We should head for Meke. Apparently, my contact waits there, it would have been easier to fly...”

“Seriously?” she hung on his words; “-the journey’s nice, very relaxing. I get to take in the world from a new perspective,” she spun towards the crowd, “-look at them,” she said, “-the architecture, the people, and the hustle, it’s awesome,” she spoke true, the bronze color, emphasis on metal structures, gave an industrial feel. In comparison to Rotherham’s terminal, the difference was night and day, where one side had dignity and finesse, the other had brute strength and tenacity, not to implicate either to be better

“Right,” he grabbed her arms and pulled.

“Why are you pushing?”

“Look around,” he muffled, “-you screamed the last word... people are looking,” thus, he faded into the crowd till the station for Meke.

‘Dwarves,’ he observed under a tall clock, ‘-rare of them to take interest in affairs outside Arda.’

"I've brought food," said Fenrir, "-after lunch hour makes me peckish."

He took no heed to her comment and waited, the train arrived and off they went. '-Murder in the Riverwood train,' washed over his self, '-I must admit, murder was very fun to resolve,' first-class wrote in the décor and attention to detail. The scenery unfolded into a various array of trees, farmlands, and occasional stops at villages.

"Who are we meeting?"

"Don't talk with your mouth full," he remarked.

"Whatever," she fought through the bites, "-where are we going anyway?"

"To take care of a request from my stewardess, Vesper."

"Who's she?"

Elbows rested against the ledge, "-the one who handles the monster kingdom on my behalf," voiced across nonchalantly, the train went past closely arranged poles, in turn, projecting shadows on the monotonous reply.

"The Monster Kingdom?" her ears perked, "-explain..."

"Was it not in the report?" they entered a tunnel, "-I, Igna Haggard, I'm the Watcher of the Shadow Realm, the dimension we visited earlier. It currently holds the domain of Scifer, the Godslayer. Long story short, I have control over, Time, Death, and Origin's knowledge, the former, time, is one I haven't yet mastered. I remember using the ability when Intherna was injured, 'twould be best if I never use it again.'

"Never change, do you," she smiled, "-the grandness of what was spoken doesn't one bother thee, does it."

"And, should I change it?"

"No, I never implicated it to be bad," she gazed outward, the train reemerged, "-the responsibility must be great. It doesn't sit right with me, how can a simple human, cursed and barred from ever becoming a god, hold such power?"

"No idea," he shrugged, "-and honestly, until I have to face off against gods, which I doubt will ever happen, the issue's best left unanswered."

"You're bored, aren't you," her eyes narrowed, the voice sharp and canines sharper, "-be pushed to the wind's whim, tread along a path of no end nor definite goal. Are you sure about this path, heading down said road will be painful, not for you, but the people around?"

"If it's about me moving according to my whim."

"-Don't make excuses," she moved closer, "-Igna, you're running away, aren't you?"

"Running away?" he glared back, "-how dare you!"

“Don’t shout at me,” she smirked, “-I know Staxius and I know you, there’s a key difference, though the two are the same, he was someone who’d charge headfirst into a problem, never caring to prepare, making plans on the spot. You are a lesser version of him, easily influenced by emotions, taking the easy roads, avoiding the face the fact of thy weakness. You’re scared to call on the powers, scared they’ll be misrepresented, and call upon the gods to strike thee down. The lost must have wane...”

“-Enough!” he thundered, “-I get it,” returned a slightly tamer tone, “-I’m scared, are you satisfied? Yes, maybe I am running away, maybe I am looking at the Shadow Realm as an excuse to not fight, maybe I don’t want to get my hands bloody. I know firsthand how much I suffered, how painful it was to take in the curses, fight with a body that bordered the line of death. Do you think I enjoyed that life?” a red tint shimmered through his pupils, “-when the day comes, and when it will come, I’ll find my answers then. For now, the gods,” he gulped, “-the demons, Eipea and Aapith are entities I can’t afford to antagonize. I’m weak, and even if I were to unleash the Shadow Realm, the residents will be exposed, tis a line I won’t cross, a line I can’t cross.”

“Was the change for the better or worse?” she shrugged and resettled, “-who can tell really, I-”

“I’m sorry,” he exhaled, “-and you’re right, I’m not him, not the man who built an empire on his own. I’m just a pretender.”

Silence infused the remainder of the voyage; a deep voice shortly announced the arrival at Meke. The momentum halted, he stood, the doors parted, Fenrir followed, ‘-why did I have to say all those things?’ he waited outside the transit, facing a horde of impatient travelers.

“Don’t dwell on the past,” said the curt voice, “-guess I got carried away, sorry about that,” her ears and tail lowered.

“I’m fine,” he fist-bumped her shoulder, “-don’t worry about it.”