

Death Magic 81

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Memories from another realm

'Left, right, up and down,' the grass felt heavy. The rain poured; the armor felt hefty. Spells blew away portions of people by the second. Up above, they flew, people veiled in a divine and demonic aura. Down below, one man; different from the others, fought with a sword that seemed familiar. The blade; demonic at times – felt correct. 'Come on men, for the safety of our realm, the invaders shall be defeated,' he yelled, behind him – the once tired and broken spirit rekindled. Everyone rushed forward, swords clashed, spells rained hell and explosions up high. As quick as a cheetah, the same man ran across the battlefield. At his feet, a shadowy mist manifested, his eyes burnt with the same passion as the void flame.

Heads fell in his wake, the losing fight now looked winnable. A pentagram, burnt on his right cheek was the last thing the enemy ever saw. "You, wielder of death magic, creation might have made you the most powerful – but you're cursed to ruin." Up above, a woman floating with weapons surrounding her back, her face was too blurry to distinguish. The wielder of death magic was exhausted, the fight had been drawn for one month now. "Don't give in, us the gods will be here to help you," a bolt of lightning blew past him and annihilated the opposing growing army of monsters.

"Don't underestimate me, Zeus, you may be the supreme god but I'm still the one who controls death." He fired back, the sword glowed – the aura around the battlefield changed. A skull fired out of his back, his body changed to complete darkness – white flame pulsed through the veins, the pentagram burnt even fiercer. [Death Element, Quietus,] 'everyone, summon your portals and get out; this planet is going to be destroyed.' One of the gods fighting above yelled – everyone listened and teleported outside. Their opponents heard everything; a high-pitched tone got followed by a dark-mist. Concentrated mana, it engulfed the whole planet.

"What is happening?" the enemy screamed out of disbelief, everything had turned pitch black. "Never underestimate the bearer of the death elements – we may be bound to failure and ruin, but we can always assist others to save something we like. Zeus, I'm sorry. I must destroy your realm to put a stop to this invasion; the god-slayer has to be stopped."

"Stop spouting nonsense, you can be the strongest entity since creation but I'm just as powerful you fool," the same lady dashed in front of him. "I've never been one to speak during a battle. Estelle, what have you turned into my friend?" He took a quick pause to stare at her face with a hint of compassion. "- all shall return to dust and none can contest me; not even you- the one who hails from another godly plain."

May the ones before I turn to dust. May they all end in ruin, may they all die without mercy. Anyone who dares go against me shall pay for I am the sole ruler of death and destruction. I command thy seal to be broken, rain down death and destroy all, Quietus.

"We shall meet one another sometime in the future, the battle between our realms hasn't begun yet – I'm but a stepping stone for the next death reaper and so are you, my friend, a stepping stone for the next god-slayer." The black aura grew heavy, pentagram manifested everywhere, a roar from dragon

shook everyone to their core. "I guess time has come?" she smirked, "Wrong," using one of her blades, it pierced right through his chest. "You'll never find an heir; I curse you to never be succeeded. Even if the death element is transferred to another being; my prodigy will immediately end its miserable life." The dark circle shrunk. "-time has come for us to die, but I've won the war, old friend – you've always been too gullible." She said in a childish tone, "always conniving and always scheming, you never change." He added. The whole globe got swallowed, quietus was complete.

Silence, the planet was destroyed without making a sound, the god's stared in awe. "Supreme God, are you doing alright?" of his servants, one flew to where he stood. "Worry not my friend, the invasion has been stopped yet again thanks to Lord Death. Today we shall feast in his honor – the battle has been won, let's head back."

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"lord death, Lord death, LORD DEATH," Footsteps scurried into the room. Taken by surprise, he woke, all the books laid on him fell. "What is it, Jessica?" he asked in a monotonous tone. "Staxius is in big trouble," she said worryingly. "No need to threat, he's doing fine." The tone remained monotonous and cavalier. "Have you no care for your heir?" Jessica's tone increased. Hearing her use said tone with him for the first time; he stood briskly. "How dare you, Jessica, how dare you?" He walked down from the floating platform. "I care for my heir more than you know." He replied with a tone of regret. "Sadly, I'm cursed... oh never mind you won't understand it." She felt his emotions for once, he regretted something, "fine, as you wish – I'll drop the subject." She wanted more answered but Lord Death's entire personality changed. "Sorry to have bothered you," She bowed her head. He tried approaching her but she ran away before he could speak again. Disappointed, he walked over to the middle of the room. A giant golden ball of a planet remained afloat. Below said planet, a blissful white and golden color – a portal.

He crouched and stared down said hole, it removed the feeling of restlessness. 'I wish I could tell you my stories but they only bring around pain and regret. Staxius, my heir, you're experiencing my memories at this very instant, aren't you? The dreams you see aren't yours but mine: they are my regrets, my fears, and my failures. Without any context; it's all gibberish but I believe in you. Thou art the only whomst can decipher mine own past. In said past will you find the answer to get out of your current situation; nothing is lost – the wielders of death magic aren't weak.' He smiled reassured.

"My queen," the door knocked, "who is it?" she replied. "It has grown rather late, you should head to your bedchambers, your maids await." The old sage, after a few hours, came back to fetch her majesty. "As you wish," she caressed his frozen cheeks, "be well, I await your return," she whispered then left.

'Daemonum Gladio, why am I wielding you now?' Staxius relived the memories; though blurry and hazy at times – he felt as if he were alive once more. It all seemed unreal: people he didn't recognize, names of ancient gods and heroes and a weird sensation of being overpowered by someone stronger. It felt nostalgic, everything went by fast and slow; all random and confusing. Trying to make head or tails about this was as if asking a drunk man where he lived, for the drunk man has a home but has forgotten the way; a labyrinth of his own doing. 'So many bits and pieces, so many clues but most importantly – so many inconsequential events that relate to none. I'm stuck in someone's memories but they are grumbled up. I can still call back anyone I've experienced but can't seem to find the correct flow.' He floated; free from everything, only his conscience traveled.

The memories felt like big pictures attached to an empty wall. Every time he touched certain images, the memories correlating to that picture would flood his mind. That didn't come without a price; it left a headache and a feeling of helplessness and the emotions of whatever that depicted. For the past week, he touched and re-lived every memory. The strain was so much that he could only re-live two memories before he blacked out. The last day had finally come, he touched the last piece of the puzzle. 'I've seen them all now. The first time I stepped into this chamber, I felt it. Mana, foreign and unforgiving, a curse. I can sort of visualize how this ever-looping prison of memories may trap an individual; however, don't underestimate me.'

Bit by bit, he picked up the paintings and rearranged them in order. At times he cried, got angry, felt despair, tried to ruin everything and lastly a glimpse of hope. With each picture, came something new and unique, something indescribable. It felt like locks being unlocked, his dormant death element reacted to each one of those locks. A well-elaborated imprisonment spell to make the mage think their magical element has been destroyed. 'The last piece of the puzzle,' the canvas got hung. *Thump, Thump,* a door slightly opened. The death element beat once more; black and white flames flowed around his body.

The pale face seemed to get back its color, 'Freedom, I see it, the time has come for I to leave this realm of memories.' He pushed the door left ajar wide open. A dazzling light blinded him, "you've passed the test." Someone mumbled right next to his ear. After checking where that sound came from, naught was found except the vast emptiness of where ever he was. The blinding white light subsided; his eyes regenerated. The injuries he previously sustained began to heal; the death element's immortality started once more. All the talk about his blessing being nullified turned out to be a plain lie; the god-slayer wanted his victim to lose all hope.

The darkness lifted, the deafness changed back to normal, he awoke. Pain jolted back and forth around his body; the limbs were healed. Broken bones fixed; his mana reserves gradually filled. The life-force he once lost came back. 'This smell, the aroma, am I in a forest?' the eyes opened, 'this place seems familiar,' he sat upright and checked the surroundings. The room was filled with plants and flowers, he chuckled. 'its nice to wake up in a place that reminds you of home for once. I'm glad I didn't wake inside a cave filled with dead bodies that's for sure.' The death element felt strange; more mature in some way. Normally a person can draw out a portion of power from their elements, a good mage can go as far as using seventy-five percent of their full potential. There were cases where mages went above that limit to only end in tragedy.

It's known to all that if a person drew out their full potential and ignored the limitations of their bodies. They could breakdown and implode or explode depending on the magic they used. The sight is horrid, death by using limit-breaker; it gave the user an enormous power boost but also drained out every single bit of mana. The said method was never advisable but people still used it when the odds were against them. Any single push that could lead to victory; a noble sacrifice.

'I don't feel powerful but I can sense something being build deep within. A foundation, something strong and rigid; I've always used brains over brawls. Is my will to fight using my strength alone evolving the element? It's changing that's for sure.' He placed his hand near his heart and sighed, 'only time will tell.' The foreign memories weighed heavily on him. It spelled out catastrophe. He got a mental picture; not accurate, but close enough to what had happened millenniums ago. 'I still don't know who that person was. But if I'm to guess, it was one of the wielders of death.'

Time was night, Staxius thought long and hard about what happened. A quick peek outside revealed the prettiest starry sky he had ever seen. The chilly breeze filled the room. The feeling of weakness and loss of strength faded. Instead, it was replaced by a feeling of uneasiness. In no way was it malicious, rather, it felt refreshing. The peace and quiet rendered him sleepy, the body wasn't fully recovered yet. 'I'll think about tomorrow when tomorrow comes; for now – let me enjoy a nice sleep.' The eyes closed and he went straight into the world of dreams, for the first time, he held a grin while resting.

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Tiny Pests

"Wake up," someone called, the sleep could not be broken. Staxius slept as deeply as a hibernating beast. The individual tried a few more times before they got physical. Time was of the essence – though Staxius was out for a week; they didn't seem to care. Two gentle slap that left a sharp feeling of pins and needles sufficed. Out of reflex, Staxius rolled out of bed; still half asleep. He fell down on the other side, the blanket had become one with his clothes. "Who dares wake me at this hour," he asked with a stern tone. Whoever woke him laughed, Staxius was half asleep. "Worry not master, it's I, your trusty sparkling and the awesome personal spirit," Avon replied joyfully, he held out his right hand over the right eye and made a V-shape with the index and middle finger. While putting up that sign, he closed the other eyes and tilted his head. "Good meowning." He added with a hint of sarcasm.

The state between sleep and reality waned, "it's just you." he said with indifference. Hearing that tone, Avon pouted. "-come on now, don't be like that. I just woke up after who knows how long." Staxius faced the window and stretched – the sun rising wasn't seen. Instead, it was dim and dark. This was the first time he stared out said windows; he always assumed that the outside was Arda but he couldn't be any more wrong. The starry sky he admired last night was but an illusion spell to make everyone aware that night had fallen. The reason for that is, the castle was located inside the trunk of an enormous tree. The brown trunk soon changed and disappeared. The dim outside changed into an idyllic landscape. A scene so beautiful it got engraved inside his thoughts deeply. The mixture of colors from plants to the shy sun who awoke with an orangish splendor. It all reminded him of home, less impressive but it felt nostalgic.

Outside the said castle, faint shouts of people screaming made its way to his room. It sounded like a fight, 'isn't the castle of Arda the most protected area in the whole kingdom?' Staxius thought. The scream had an unnatural feel to it; it wasn't one of a good omen. "Master, are you doing alright?" Avon asked out of courtesy. "-no time to talk, Avon, pass me one of those swords on the wall." He asked with a sense of urgency. "As you wish?" he obeyed the order but remained in the dark as to why he demanded a sword this early in the morning.

The weapon got thrown, Staxius caught it and leaped out the window. "What the hell are you doing?" Avon jumped right after him. They freefell, the trusty spirit crossed his arms and stared intently at his master. He wasn't happy getting ignored like that. "I'm sorry, I'm sorry, I won't go without warning you – but we should really think of a plan about the landing." The ground came too close too fast; the castle was surrounded by buildings – it looked like a city. The shouts came closer, blood splatter and people running away grew more common.? "Everybody, call the royal guards," Avon conjured a wind-based barrier to slow down their fall, "-we are getting attacked," the same voice scream from atop their lungs.

Before him, Staxius stood on a road leading straight down to the edge of the city. People rushed towards him, they all stared but didn't care – survival seemed more important. Arda truly was a haven for demi-humans, out of the crowd that ran past him, no human was spotted. They came in like waves, Staxius masterfully avoided the hoard and continued walking. His eyes were set to where the commotion was happening. "Leave my daughter alone you foul beasts." An elf held a dagger and stared down a horde of green little creatures. They held weapons and some wore armor. The horde had taken hostage three to four girls. The beasts laughed, some danced, they looked foolish. The pile of bodies surrounding them told another story, grown men were left gutted out on the street. The girls cried, said men were probably their fathers or someone related.

The elf stood in a weird stance; the dagger shook violently in his hands. "L-let my d-daughter g-go," he said once more, the facial expression changed from angry to petrified. Tears, screams, clothes getting ripped, everything just happened at the same time. Those little beasts began to strip their hostage's clothes, the victim screamed. "S-stop it," the elderly elf rushed to only get his hands stabbed with a rusty dagger. "Should we help?" Avon asked, Staxius intently watched. 'Interesting, these beasts are captivating. They don't seem to hold any form of intelligence but know how to move, strategize and work as a group. Is it just instinct or is there something behind it?' The screams grew louder.

"M-master you probably should do something, or do you wish to watch those girls get defiled by greenish dwarfs," Avon asked, both were indifferent to the whole situation. "F-father, p-please don't hurt yourself over this; run away, m-my fate is sealed." She cried. Time had come for her turn, the other girls were brutally assaulted but still drew breath. "R-RUN," using the remaining willpower, she yelled. The look in those monster's eyes was filled with lust. The last scream made his heart sink, a picture of Eira flew across his mind.

Sword in hand, he rushed into battle. Without drawing the blade, he picked up the young girl and took her to safety. Behind, the monsters grew more violent, [Binding Soil]. Avon locked them in place, one by one, Staxius took the girls away from their assaulters. He wasn't that quick, the man who tried to stand up to protect his child was killed by bow and arrow. The other buildings were crawling with pests as well. One by one, arrows were shot. Each one had a different target in sight, the girls. 'This will be impossible to counter if I don't use magic. My element doesn't feel familiar anymore, I don't wish to use it – I care not for the girl's life. However, I still have to do something.' Everything slowed down, the arrows came to a standstill. *Thump,* a black light pulsed through his veins. *-Thump.* without an invocation, every arrow broke. The faint sound of wood cracking interrupted the silence. It all fell to the ground, Staxius's hands shook. Excruciating pains jolted out of his muscles; it was the same as before – from the time he first met the god-slayer. It brought him to his knees, the headache forced him to let go of the sword and close his eyes.

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"Watch out," Avon yelled, 'a faint line, a mana link.' Without looking back, Staxius picked the sword and swung, the blade sliced cleanly through the monster's neck. The depth reached half-way; blood sprayed out over Staxius's face. His eyes remained closed; the headache soothed – using all his senses triggered the pains but he only realized that moments later. He could visualize everything, instead of bodies; the mind saw something else, flame, the flame that told a creature's will to live and strength.

Most of the enemies were but an amber, but the sheer number turned those ambers in a dazzling light. Still crouched, they rushed him, one by one, he followed the lines and effortlessly sliced and thrust at vital organs and body parts. More and more came out of the woodworks, defending became harder. The style he used to fight had a severe disadvantage, to stop the incapacitating pain, he had to shut his eyes. Staxius fought using detection; it was triggered when he first saw the mana-line stretching on to Totrya. Normally this ability was unlocked through severe and rigorous training, with only a person blessed with the boon of clairvoyance.

Sadly, shutting off your eyes and looking at those flames meant losing track of the weapons they used, for they were inanimate objects. One by one, the cuts grew more frequent, he didn't feel any. Staxius soon got outnumbered, the amber all charged him at once, his feet felt stuck to the ground, he knew not the reason. Avon tried to help but was also kept and forced to engage with the foes. 'Look at me, without my brains, I can't fight. This is pathetic and I had the audacity to call myself the strongest mage in the kingdom at one point. These monsters are way trickier than their appearance let on. If I use magic now, I get the feeling that something wrong will happen. I can't risk it, dark-arts isn't going to do much against things that don't feel emotions. My swordsmanship is rendered useless if I can't see my foe. I've been defeated yet again.' Dagger after dagger, the greenish devils stabbed him with everything.

Hope looked all but lost until heavy clanging of armor and weapons echoed. They charged, their black-armor reflected whatever light present. The royal Ardanian guards arrived. The flames coming from them felt like a fireball, each one burnt fiercer than the next. At times it amplified in power, the small ambers soon vanished one by one. 'Saved by others,' filled with spite, Staxius opened his eyes. The pain all but vanished, he sat in a puddle of his own blood. The injuries healed, 'am I just a walking unbreakable shield?' the monsters were killed, their bodies vanished. Randomly, one piece of copper was dropped. Most of the time they turned to nothingness.

"Master," Avon came rushing, "-are you doing alright?" he crouched next to him. "Yes, I'm doing just fine." Staxius stood, his face remained as composed as before. The girls were rescued after the fight, the remainder of the beasts fled. "You there, come with us, we've got but a few questions to ask." A human in Arda wasn't rare but unheard of. Two massively tall soldiers escorted him to the castle's dungeon. Everything remained the same, Staxius was thrown in prison to be released a few instants later. The queen got news to what had happened and brought him out for an audience. As usual, everyone was ordered to leave them alone. They scowled but knew better to not anger her majesty.

On the day she announced her courtship with him, many revolted; but she silenced them with logic and wit rather than using strength. At times, her tongue could be as sharp as a newly crafted blade. It so happened that that time was but another example of where she demonstrated those skills. "Follow me," everyone left, Shanna stood and opened the portal yet again. Obligated, Staxius entered without saying a word. They both sat in the same garden. "You should have met me the moment you awoke," she took a sip out of her cup. "I just wanted to go out and see what was happening." His arm crossed, he reflected on that fight. "To that end, you thought it was best to just rush out into the unknown without fully being recovered?" she continued using that silver tongue of hers. "I'd normally reply with 'I do what I want, leave me alone,' but this isn't possible now is it. We're courting one another so I guess my problems are yours to bear? Though adding onto a queen's burden feels degrading and shameful." He replied with a hint of regret.

“Quite the perceptive one,” she stood, “you should be ashamed, do you know how worried I was?” she placed her index finger right on his forehead. “-have you forgotten, but I did say that becoming my conduit will gravely impact how you live.” She smiled. “What do you mean impact my way of life, there was nothing of the sort said but I do remember something correlating to that.” His eyes fixed on her majesty.

“I apologize, but being my conduit isn’t that easy. You must deal with chronic pains every time you have to use mana or anything relating to that. However, worry not, that’s just the implementation phase – your body and magical elements are adapting and evolving as my power is transferred to you. Also, stop calling yourself weak and feeble, this is unlike you – have you had a change in personality?” She came closer to his face, “- I reassure you, dearest partner – you aren’t weak. You view yourself with too much expectation; the standards you set are unrealistic. Forgo those pesky emotions, become the Staxius I fell for and go out and become not a hero nor a villain, but a man who has the power to change the outcome of an entire civilization’s destiny. That’s your goal, not to defeat nor defend, but to guide, you should become the leader you were born to be. Only then, as a leader, will you find the answers you seek for.” She stepped back and smiled.

“Thank you for being patient with me, I’ve lost track of who I was ever since I re-awoke. But now I see all that went wrong,” he stood, the aura around him changed. “-I shall spend a few days in your care, my queen.” He took her hand and kissed it. “Do as you wish,” she smiled. “Seeing as we are partners, I’d like to have the opportunity to get to know you, dearest Xula.” He smiled gently, “will a visit at night suffice?” she added jokingly. “I need but an hour of your precious time,” he asked, they laughed and headed out to the throne room.

[Chapter 83](#)

Banquet

A few days went by; nothing to be worth noting around the kingdom happened. Starting with Oxshield and the royal family. The princess had a nice and gentle recovery after a certain incident. She quickly got back to her feet and things went on as usual. Her behavior – once heartless and filled with hate, subsided. It grew to be slightly more docile. It was seen through how she behaved. Theodore’s apprentice; who now assisted her on a daily basis slightly changed her. The young one’s attitude who once was afraid of her now spoke to her highness with ease. The master and servant relationship barrier was still in place, but he ignored said rules. Often, he would stand behind her while she had tea and read, just to scare her. It made her mad but she laughed.

In no way did that slight change affect how the kingdom was ruled. She remained adamant about her previous ideals; that the provinces should be ruled by the royal family only. The king had grown old over the years, his seventieth birthday approached with each passing day. A foolish king loved by his followers. None hated him for his loss of power, rather, all the animosity befallen the princess. The queen remained in the shadows and only made trips to other nations for peace treaties, trade agreements and such. Banquets didn’t diminish, her schedule filled up rapidly. Raulf Serlo arrived a few days ago – he canceled his trip to the empire to stay beside the king. He soon learned about the growing situations of unworldly beings dropping coins and such; to help with the confusion – he aided. Even as he remained at the royal castle, communication with the subordinates was maintained. The idea for a new ranking system was partly encouraged and backed by him. The Order could naught but digress.

After days of waiting for the equipment to be installed into every guildhall present throughout Oxshield. The implementation would be made public and so were the presence of monsters. It was necessary to warn the people; for if they died – who'd be the ones working for the betterment of life. Out near the border of Totrya, makeshift camps were installed. The central adventuring guild had ordered none to step closer. Looking at how many people were killed, the area was closed off. For the time being, adventurers weren't allowed to hunt nor kill – not until every preparation was ready.

A massive wall was built using magic, it required less time but more effort. For the purpose of lasting only a few days, it held up nicely. All the preliminaries were complete. Every problem and possible disturbance had been planned for. The royal family had no say nor influence. The guild, MARS, and other scholars were the ones who made all the arrangements. All the king had to do was give express permission. News of this had reached the emperor's ears, and he sent part of his forces to help with suppressing the invasions for a little. Said force mainly consisted of S-rank and higher mages. This was the main reason why Totrya was closed off.

Time had come to choose a date, a day that unveils everything. The opportune time to announce how the kingdom was to change. During a meeting between the counselors; Raulf proposed to kill two birds with one stone. The king's day of birth was to be an occasion celebrated by all. Announcing the drastic changes and then celebrating the king's birthday would silence any uprising. Anyone opposed to the guild's decision could not voice their frustrations on such a joyful day. In turn, this would help the implementation go smoothly. King Blaine McLeod Riverty, graciously accepted said idea and laughed. Nevertheless, he had one condition that was to be obeyed. "For my birthday, a day of change and new beginnings – I want every ruling noble in Hidros to come and attend this banquet. None shall be alienated on such an auspicious day. From Arda to Dorchester, everyone will be welcomed. Give the message and clearly tell them that the nobles of said provinces have my express favor to bring anyone they deemed a friend or family. Being noble or not doesn't affect this country anymore. I want said day to be the turning page to start a new life for all present." The old man coughed; he had much more to say but his body refused. Graciously knelt before him, his many attendants and counselors applauded the idea. Despite being gullible, he was someone virtuous.

Everything got set in place, envoys were sent throughout the kingdom. It took about three days for all the letters to be delivered. The banquet was to be organized in a week's time. The first province to move was Kreston. The letter read,

'all shall be welcome before the banquet itself. Traveling such distances may prove tortuous. Worry not for arrangements to ones who arrive early have been made.'

The second one to react was Plaustan with its still mysterious leaders. Then came Dorchester, on the day the envoys arrived; everyone remained baffled. The messenger entered the castle to see people working together, a camp being built. Everyone held a smile on their faces, the members of the council were spotted on scaffoldings and helping in the construction efforts. A few steps inside, merchants called out, they urged him to check the wares. Astonishingly, the weapons and armor were of a quality on par with the craftsmen in the capital. The prices weren't as high but the quality was as good.

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The stranger continued his walk to the castle. A massive tavern with a banner reading,

'come one come all, drinks and food for free.'

The place remained constantly filled with people. Even if it was free, people still paid. A tradition that slowly got embedded into how the tavern worked. An unwritten rule, that one must give anything as less of value as it may be to the bartender. Everyone did so with a smile. In a rush, Julius and Millicent ran out of the study to greet the envoy. Julius looked like a noble, his hair well combed and clothes impeccable, while Millicent had bed hair. The place felt light-hearted and accommodating

After a quick visit, the letter was handed over. The messenger stayed at the tavern before leaving.

'Anyone deemed a friend, or family, is welcomed.'

In the evening, everyone came together to decide who would go. Julius tried to remain out of the conversation but was forced to decide. Staxius was absent and Millicent went drinking. "The letter says to bring family and friends. I say that the silver guardians, Fenrir and Millicent should go." Julius said his take on it. "Absolutely not, Julius and Autumn are the ones to go," Adelana argued. "We should all go," Fenrir added her take on it. "-Undrar, me, the silver guardians, Autumn, Julius, Millicent, and Eira. It will be the perfect opportunity to visit Ayleth." She concluded. "If we all go then who is going to take care of the castle?" Julius voiced his troubles. "We have a band of responsible and intelligent people working day and night for Dorchester. We can leave this to them, I'm sure we have more than enough competent people to take charge and lead." Undrar added.

"As you wish," Julius gave up, "-let's head out tomorrow. We'll be staying at my place in Claireville academy's noble district. Pack your stuff, it will be a long trip." He smiled. "What about Staxius?" Ancret spoke out of the blue. "Who knows," Undrar replied. "If I know him as well as I think, he will come for sure. It's an opportunity to scout out people who might help and turn against us in the future." Julius added before the conversation ended.

The voyage to Arda lasted longer than compared to the other provinces. Nevertheless, the envoy arrived without any trouble. The young butler was sent as an envoy once more. He had already made the trip here once and knew how to get in. The guards blindfolded him like always and took him to have an audience with her majesty. Unlike the previous time, he now had manners and knew how to behave in the presence of royalty. He spoke the message, gave the letter, and left. A strange figure caught his attention, a guy with a ponytail. He remained on her right side while an old-looking man stood on the other. Nothing remained the same around here; the people seemed more on edge. This didn't affect how they behaved.

Upon reading the message, the queen called in a meeting with all her counselors and nobles. Staxius tried to step away but was stopped by the old sage. The latter caught his hands and smiled. Staxius unwillingly gave a slight grin. The queen faced him and looked on the verge of breaking into tears. She and Staxius grew closer in the course of the few days that went by. Though he was once an unknown entity, Staxius grew to be loved by all. The animosity at the sight of a human quenched. The main reason for that was the fighting. Every day, at the exact same time, those beasts who now got given the name Goblins tried to invade the city.

He fought, day after day, he built up the experience and worked hard. This was the first time Staxius took it upon himself to get strong. He trained with the royal army, the generals and commanding officers hated him at first. But after witnessing the amazing swordplay he mastered, everyone took a

liking to him. To that end, Staxius used dark-arts to influence the people who seemed a threat. Despite that, he got around easily with his charisma alone. The words from Xula gave him a wake-up call. Instead of whining to himself constantly, he worked hard. Not only did he train with the army, but he also joined up with the sorcerers of Arda. They were unlike any other, mages here were on another level. They mainly consisted of elves who were born to be sorcerers. From time to time, dark elves would drop by and train him. Being an angel's conduit took a heavy toll – but he persevered and nearly killed himself on many occasions.

Gradually, Staxius relearnt how to use magic from scratch. The old sage taught him personally. Arda became a haven, their knowledge rivaled the corrupt outside world. He felt at home, his personality reverted to how it was. His emotions still fluctuated, at times he felt everything and at the time nothing – blank. That became a personal quest of his,

‘what makes my emotion turn blank, and what triggers this cold-hearted killer persona to immerge.’

As a result, from helping people daily to training with the best. Staxius's name grew common amongst the people. He would often sneak out at night to visit the lower levels of the tree. It baffled his mind how something like this existed. The demi-humans liked him and so did the noble council. Taking all that into factor, the people who were chosen to attend the banquet became obvious. The nobles didn't want to go, prejudice about their appearance would surely create an uproar. ?Thus, it all came down to a single conclusion. Arda's queen and Staxius, the man she courted were to head to the capital.

By the way she acted, everyone knew the nature of their relationship. The queen had a change of heart. She became more caring and compassionate towards her subjects and wasn't as gullible as before. The people who opposed and used her were rendered useless – the old sage and Staxius helped.

“The queen and Staxius shall be the ones who will attend the banquet on our behalf.” A man bearing white-hair, red eyes, and long teeth, spoke. He was one of the nobles from the vampire sect. “I agree with the vampire here,” a well-built man with furs covering his humanoid body, spoke. That was one of the tribesmen from the werewolf sect. In that fashion, every representative of every race agreed. “You better protect our queen with all your might, dearest Staxius.” One of the elderly elves jokingly added. She represented the commoners, a pleasant old woman who remained cheerful at all times.

Taken by surprise by all the recognition he got, Staxius replied with, “I shall do my very best to protect your queen as well as mine.” He slowed down purposefully on the last words. “Someone has grown romantic over the days haven't they,” the vampire added jokingly. Everyone teased him – the strict and relentless Arda was only but rumors. Deep down, everyone in this province lived as Staxius had hoped for Dorchester to become. “This council is done,” the queen stood sharply and left, her tone was one of a little girl. “Thank you for taking the time out of your busy schedule to attend this urgent meeting.” Staxius thanked everyone on behalf of her majesty and so did the sage.

“Worry not my friend, call on us if you're ever in trouble. We, the people of Arda though have our disagreements are one big family. You, Staxius Haggard, though a human, has become a member. Take care of the queen on our behalf, for too long has she suffered alone, loneliness can break the strongest individuals. Part of the reason everyone has accepted you is that you make her majesty smile. Never have we seen that side of her. You're keen to learn and work hard does help as well. Staxius, I'll officially say this, on behalf of everyone in Arda, welcome to the family.” They all rose and cheered, the old-sage

patted his back. A stranger turned family, he felt overwhelmed by how the people behaved. Never had he seen such bright and clean aura before.

One by one, everyone left. 'my friends out in Dorchester, I've found something extraordinary. I wish we could all meet and rejoice in this glory but I still have work to do before I can face you guys like the man you believed in. This is the day I start over, long enough have I whined, long enough have I been a fool – time has come to make myself into a better person. Not a hero, not a villain, but an example. I shall become the light that guides the people around me into a better future, that was the quest given to me by someone special. Father, is this what you tried to show me?' The footsteps faded into the distance as well as their chatter and laughter. '-was this the world you tried to make?'

[Chapter 84](#)

Preparation

The wind blows hard and cold, the sun shines but remains hidden by the clouds. It looked gloomy and dim, the silence before the storm. The capital worked tirelessly to make the king's day of birth magnificent and grandiose. The princess to everyone's surprise; helped. She took command of accommodations for the arriving guests; whom, many set off for Rosespire already.

The first one to arrive was the people from Kreston. Heavily militarized trucks with soldiers armed to the teeth escorted the guests. A flag with the holy crest waved as the guests waited at them relentlessly. In hopes of stopping any confusion, a letter of the invitation came with a small piece of paper. A small piece that gave the guests access to the city without getting searched or halted by security. Exemption from the normal procedure; something rather unbecoming for arriving nobles.

After handing the small badge; they were guided to the castle. Catching a glimpse from afar was what most people considered as a boon. Lucky were the ones who got to step inside. The architecture rivaled even the smartest builders and architects. The whole structure felt divine in some way. The castle had a rather large base that got levels, towers, walls, and other necessities added onto it. In no way was it your ordinary square wall with four towers at each corner. This one had a hexagonal shape, six towers onto which rested buildings. Yes, buildings, long and tall with guards waiting.

Before said towers, one may have looked like an ant. Though the intricacies didn't stop here for the castle itself reached mightier heights. Parts were closed off; parts were unseen and parts were hidden. Everything looked majestic; the outer walls were most that people could see from the outside. After entering the almost impregnable front gate, the sheer size became apparent. Both the duke and the pope were left breathless. In front of them stood a yard, a fountain, and other valuables. At every corner, a maid and butler waited patiently. All the vehicles were given a place to park, down, in the lower levels. A level accessed only if you went around the left side.

All and all, the nobles were gently welcomed. The accommodations for their stay were to the right side. An area as big as a small village but unused. While walking around, it became apparent that the castle wasn't all connected. It was a small town in of itself that the royal family had closed off. Massive buildings with beautiful stone and wooden walls stood close together. If this town were to ever be opened, this area would have been the area where the nobles would have resided.

The paths weren't of dirt nor grass, but stone bricks. Of which, all had a nice and unique design that shaped into the royal crest at regular intervals. These paths were far too clean to be called a part of the outside world. A quick peek upwards revealed something peculiar, a sort of barrier. Magical in nature, it seemed like a roof preventing the outer elements to enter. It all took time to seep in, the duke, his family and the pope were guided towards the first mansion. The path stretched on beyond the eyes could see and took a sharp left. On both sides, mansions, one more unique and grander as the other stood, lonely but beautiful. They were a piece of art, though this detail escaped most of the people living here.

In the span of a few days, as more guests came; the street gradually filled with nobles. None's ranks were given any significance. All were treated the same for they were all the people his majesty had invited. The day of the main event was but five days apart. Arda, Dorchester, and Totrya weren't present yet.

"Your majesty, we've received a letter from a certain man." A faint girlish voice spoke. The air felt boiling hot, the place haunted by perpetual screams of unknown beings and entities. "I hate being disturbed, but what has one of my trusty servants brought to me?" The man turned from overlooking the valley to the girl who knelt. "Thank you very much, what has happened to the man in question?" He read the letter. "He has been killed," she paused to check her master's reaction, "-the necromancers needed a living human to test out some sort of new mind and body control." She ended with sweat dripping off her forehead. "Very well, what is done cannot be undone." He walked over to her. "The royal family are having a party for a king we haven't met nor the nobles around." He stopped and stared at the gloomy sky. "-take Kanad with you Kylsha, you shall go in my stead. You will represent Totrya in that banquet, I'll give you instructions later." He spoke with a grin.

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Three days before the banquet, nobles representing Totrya arrived. None paid any heed, everything seemed in order. A lady who could rival a queen in beauty and a man whose figure made any warrior look in awe walked in nonchalantly. They had an aura around them, an aura of magnificence. The walk down the street felt short but the people could naught but stare at the duo. Their garments shone: well-tailored and filled with accessories of which diamonds, pearls, rubies, and others glistened.

The nobles from Dorchester arrived on the same day. They chose to head to Claireville academy instead. Ayleth's condition weighed heavily on their minds. For a poor and desolate province such as them, Dorchester, or rather, Julius, had called in for his company to bring six luxurious cars to escort the ladies. After a quick visit to the hospital, their heart was set at ease. Nothing happened, they just stood at their comrade while speaking to the doctors. They said she recovered at a steady pace.

On the way out, Eira came down for a quick visit. Adelana gave her a brief rundown of what was to happen. "W-what about f-father?" Eira asked; she sounded disappointed. They all sat at a local restaurant and conversed. The place looked expensive but the food was affordable and delicious. "Staxius has been missing for the past weeks, I haven't the slightest idea to where he is," Julius added. "He's probably off adventuring or looking for something unattainable," Fenrir said with a hint of sarcasm. "Forget about him, we've got bigger things to worry about," Ancret spoke trying to steer the conversation. "The banquet," Alyson said monotonously. "Yes, the banquet, we need to decide what to do," Annet replied in turn. "What is there to prepare for?" Undrar asked. "Nothing much really, just be

wary of people trying to approach you,” Autumn added with a slight bit of hate. “Now, now, time isn’t to worry but enjoy, we’ve come a long way,” Millicent added; she was partially drunk. “We’ll figure something out along the way, for now, let’s just eat and relax,” Julius concluded the conversation.

A few hours later, at Julius’s house – everyone got drunk. Millicent had forced them to partake in leisurely drinking, it all backfired. The people from Dorchester knew how to party, and when it got serious, things grew out of hand. Fighting, dancing, laughing, swearing, and plain old stupid dares challenged by another grew apparent.

All the provinces concerned answered the call. The nobles came happily, this made the king joyful. One province remained out of the picture, Arda. It was expected that they were not going to come. After all, Arda was its own nation now, but the invitation was sent as a sort of courtesy. The king really wanted to see what the new ruler or people responsible for said province looked like.

“Avon, help me clean you,” Staxius yelled. He wore only a pair of shorts, his hands wet and dripped with soap. “A bit uncalled for now isn’t it?” Avon answered. He stood on the opposite side of the car. “Not really, just help me clean you faster.” Staxius viciously scrubbed the black car. After a few hours, it shone and looked as beautiful as ever. “We should probably take a break, master,” Avon added while out of breath. “No time, I have to train with the old sage.” Semi-naked, Staxius jumped through the portal and ended in the sage’s study. “A little underdressed, aren’t we?” The sage sat before a small desk onto which a candle remained lit. “I apologize for that,” Staxius mumbled something. A weird spiral surrounded his feet and climbed up. The once wet body dried up nicely. “Excellent, you’ve mastered it, at last, haven’t you?” The sage stood up and applauded. “All thanks to you, the great sage.” Staxius smiled, he relearned magic and rediscovered the passion he once had for the subject. “My boy, you truly are a gifted sorcerer and scholar, never have I seen someone look at magic in your way.” He patted Staxius. “I’ve got more to learn from you,” Staxius had separated his ego; he wanted to learn as much as he could. “No need to threat, I shall be alive for a few centuries more. Don’t forget, us high elves may be short in numbers but we can outlive most of the beings in this realm.” He smiled. “Can we continue the lectures and training?” Staxius asked politely. The sage nodded and the training began once more.

Hours went on deep into the night. Staxius trained with the sage, then with the army, and then back to the mages. This was his whole day summed up, relentless study and training. The goblins now attacked at night, everyone knew when and where they would pop up. Staxius stood as the front guard, behind him, trainee soldiers and mages. This had become a training exercise thanks to the suggestion given by him. ‘Alright, today is the day I try to fight with this technique.’ Hands ready to unsheathe his sword, Staxius closed his eyes. The growls grew closer, “attack,” one of the supervisors yelled. ‘I can see with my normal sight. My head doesn’t hurt as much, being a conduit takes a lot out of me daily.’

The trainees ran forward, everyone screamed, spells were cast. Staxius stood in place, his eyes closed. ‘I see better with my eyes closed,’ the mana links, the flames, he had been working on this for a long time now. Something he invented, something he discovered after the first fight. A technique of his own making, *Whoosh,* before the students could hit their targets, all the goblins were slain in one motion. Staxius’s sword sheathed, ‘I did it,’ he smiled. “I DID IT,” he screamed. “Staxius, stop taking all the prey, how are the kids going to train?” the supervisors yelled jokingly. “Sorry,” Staxius tilted his head and smiled.

'I finally have something, an ability I created from scratch.' He walked away from the training grounds. 'I won't give it a name yet; I feel like this can improve even better.' He headed towards the castle. The portal took him straight to his bedroom. 'God I'm beat,' he opened the door. The room looked dark, with no sign of lights – nothing. "Xula is that you?" when he blinked, Staxius saw something, a white-flame. "How did you know I was here?" she stood up, the lights all turned on. "I don't know really, I just... let's not speak about it." He took off his shirt and threw it purposefully at her. "Queen or not, you still have to deal with me and my sweaty clothes, aren't you, my partner after all?" he pulled out his tongue.

"A bit degrading but I care not for such trifling matters." She picked up the shirt. "Aren't you going to take a bath?" Xula asked while placing said shirt inside a basket. "Not really," Staxius snapped his fingers. The same spiral covered his entire body. "you really didn't have to pick that up, I was but playing around." The spiral vanished, he looked clean. "I know, you needn't worry," for a queen, she was dressed lightly in only a shirt and pants. "What's the nature of your visit then?" Staxius sat down opposite her. "-never mind, you don't need to answer," he turned around and touched her shoulders gently. "If you have something in your mind, do speak to me about it, I'm all ears." He smiled. She turned around, smiled, then spoke with him for hours on end. He remained attentive until the very end; the queen fell asleep while speaking. 'Being someone who people look up to must be hard now, isn't it, Xula.' He covered her and left the room. It would have been disrespectful to sleep in the same room as her, especially when nothing had been made public yet.

[Chapter 85](#)

The day before the banquet

"Staxius, Staxius, STAXIUS," Loud screams echoed throughout the empty throne room. Xula awoke after a good night of sleep. The sight of her in skimpy clothes; she unconsciously undressed at night, forced her into an alarming gale of embarrassment. Each step she took, Xula thought that Staxius was the culprit. Her footsteps resounded, one by one, the guards on shift grew agitated. None had a clue as to why her majesty's current mental state. Her rampage continued outside the throne hall and into the portal room.

The sight of their queen entering shocked everyone. "Good morning your majesty," a unanimous greeting broke her wave of fury. "Greetings to all," she smiled and calmed her head. "How may we be of service?" the same lady behind the counter asked politely. "Could you please tell me the location of Staxius Haggard?" She asked. An innocent grin blossomed on top of her rage. Xula became a rose, a face as beautiful as the flower and emotions heavily charged with anger – the thorns. "Give me an instant, I shall check when he last crossed the portal." Xula waited, her anger slowly gave way for calmness and reflection. "Staxius Haggard last took the portal to the royal army's training grounds. Not the one situated on the bottom floor of the tree but the one you ordered to be made for the next Protector of Arda." She pointed to the purple portal. "Thank you very much for your help," without waiting to hear her response; Xula walked straight in. "The queen sure is in a foul mood today," one of the guards uttered when she left. "shut up and go back to work you imbecile." The always strict receptionist fired back.

'Left, right, up and down,' the sound of sword clashing made a symphony. Every strike had a rhythm. Curious about the nature of that rhythmic sound, Xula slipped into the shadows and cautiously

approached. A small hall led into the training ground. There, a massive field with obstacles, training dummies, spell casting bots, S-rank and above training bots. Not to forget the countless number of exercise machines to train a warrior's body. This was only available in Arda, the talented warriors asked for a more rigorous training regimen. This was the scholar's idea, numerous machines that trained different parts of the body.

Baffled by why one would put their body in such peril, Xula walked closer. Staxius came into view and so did the countless numbers of bots inside the closed-off arena. A quick peek on their helmet revealed SS-ranked bots. He had put the training level to SS for that was the max at this instant. The machines moved so swiftly, it took a good thirty seconds for her eyes to adjust. They darted around from one end to the other in a matter of seconds. Staxius remained in the middle, his face partly covered by a shadow and sword sheathed. He dodged, the bots adapted quickly and went through the process of using their best attacks. A volley of charged up fireballs, arrows, swords, you name it, everything was aimed at his face.

Xula tried to jump in but heard a strange mumble. 'One, two, three, two, one, three, FOUR,' a flash of light, he unsheathed his sword: the spells all nullified, the weapons all broke and their heads on the floor. It looked like he didn't move, the falling of the clunk of metals told another story. The queen stood in awe; a faint glimpse of light revealed her partner's face – closed. The eyes were closed and he bore a smile. "Good morning my queen, it's a bit weird not having someone announce your arrival," a loud buzzer signaled the end of the training session. The cage got swallowed back under the ground. He walked off as if nothing major had happened.

"Good morning to you too Staxius," she replied, her anger still wasn't that subtle yet. "Why do you have such animosity towards me," he paused and stared at her with a warm and innocent face of an infant. "tis not I who is responsible for your skimpy clothes, that was your own fault for sleeping recklessly." He grabbed a water bottle from one of the many dispensers. "how did you know I was mad about that?" she asked skeptically. "There's nothing much to it." He took a sip. "-the grand sage once told me to leave the room if ever you accidentally fell asleep. Apparently, you walk around at night and can get very hectic if you spot someone else beside you. I also didn't want to sully your reputation for we haven't made the nature of our relationship public yet, dearest Xula." He winked and drank everything. Hearing his response, her cheeks flushed. "Fine, I agree, that was a bit uncalled for on my part, but still; it was embarrassing waking up semi-naked and the thought of you seeing me in that state made my blood both boil with anger and passion." She whispered the passion bit for she didn't want to cause any more trouble.

"Worry not my queen, I haven't the desire to fulfill my carnal desires at this moment in time. All I want is to know you, not the queen, but the real Xula; the fairy who could turn into an angel at any given time." He lightly touched the freezing bottle of water's tip on her forehead. That got her out of her daydream, "f-fine." Her eyes looked like a puppy while her face pouted. "Can't believe that you're the queen," Staxius headbutted her gently. "We need to head for Oxshield soon, the day of the banquet approaches fast." He waited for her, "yes, that completely crossed my mind." She scurried to the portal.

The sun's gentle warmth turned into an inferno. The outside soon felt like the entrance to the underworld, it grew so hot that the forest could naught but cower before his splendor. The various elves and guards around had to take breaks more occasionally, the heat made some weak, and some grew sick. Sudden changes in weather were common, try as hard as they might to fight against it, the sheer

randomness of this even left scholars speechless. It had now reached the peak of its journey, time was midday.

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“Staxius, have you gotten everything you need?” one of the counselors asked. A short man with a bald head, a mustache paired with vampiric teeth. Ruslan Kromer, one of the many nobles from the various vampire clans. A man who tried to oppose her once upon a time but was shown the vulgarity in his actions. He repented, needless to say, the queen read his mind and it stood true. The man had changed for the better. “Yes, thank you Ruslan,” he loaded up the car with luggage and other valuables.

A portal got called forth; the car who normally was parked on the lowest floor of the tree had been brought up to the castle’s level. A splendid piece of machinery, something worthy of royalty, a car so costly it’d make the people turn their heads. This was the first time the people in her council saw the beast known as Shadow. If it wasn’t for Staxius, they would have had to travelled by a carriage, something archaic but still sought after. Not to forget that said carriage was embedded with gold and diamonds, a sign of their prosperity.

“Staxius, STAXIUS,” a voice called out from inside, “yes?” he answered. “here, here,” a girl waved at him. “Ruslan, I’ll be here in a minute. Avon, please check if the car is ready to go,” he walked forward. A figure lingered behind him, it looked like Staxius had left his shadow, “as you wish,” Avon materialized and winked. As nonchalant as Staxius tried to appear, Ruslan was thoroughly impressed. “We’ve made a great choice leaving her majesty in his hands.” The other curious advisors came out to see how their queen would travel to another province. “I agree, he’s both powerful, strong, diligent and most importantly, he cares for her as much as we do. I know not why someone like him; a person who seems too quiet and distant to be so affectionate to our queen. It may seem like he’s trying to fool her, but bare in mind, that our ruler has the ability to read minds – this situation is too complex to put into words.” The general of the royal army spoke, he was making his normal rounds around the castle until Void caught his attention. “If it isn’t Niroz Knakthix,” Ruslan added casually. Niroz waved and continued his rounds.

“Aurora, what is the matter now?” Staxius stood near the entrance. Inside, maids, butlers, and servants ran around aimlessly, the queen got ready to leave. This was a first for her as well as her province, it felt weird leaving everything to a stranger’s hands but they all knew that Staxius was the better choice. “Nothing much, I just wanted to give you this.” She handed him a candle that was the size of his pinky finger. “There’s a faint trace of mana, what’s this?” Staxius asked curious about the nature of the said object. “This is a poison detecting candle, you needn’t light it. The latter will sense the air around you and warm up if there is even the faintest trace of poison or anything harmful. We can’t be too careful; you are going with her majesty as her partner.” She took a quick pause. “-rumors have already spread around the kingdom that their ruler is courting someone.” She continued. “nice attempt at trying to be subtle, the populous has gone crazy. Not with anger nor hate, they are curious about who has the guts to make their ruler fall in love with him. They’re more astonished than anything. Given its just rumors at this point, I’m expecting you and her majesty to make it public. But for that to happen, you need to make sure no harm comes to her.” She ended.

Concurrently, the castle grew silent. “My boy, you need to get ready as well, the queen is on her way.” The old sage teleported behind him. “As you wish, master.” He didn’t seem fazed at all, that trick had

been used far too many times. Staxius ran inside, changed, and came out looking stunning. The queen still hadn't made it out yet. The attire given to him was a black suit, formal and well-tailored. The quality reflected in the fabric itself, the left side of his chest had a place especially for any noble crest. As a sign of respect and proof of how close they were, the royal Ardanian crest was placed right next to his. They both shone as brightly as the golden sun outside. His hair still long and tied in a ponytail – Staxius looked like he was the king. A few minutes later, the queen walked out. She was resplendent in the black and gold embroidered dress. She wore a necklace that covered part of her neck, it matched her dress and screamed of nobility. Her greenish hair was tied, the amount of detail in how she looked was worth it.

This was the first time Staxius ever admired how she truly looked. Her face was perfect, with no flaws, pointy ears, not as obvious as elven ones but still point and slightly inhuman. Her cheeks, always slightly red, a pointy nose and luscious lips. Her greenish almond shaped-eyes, the ones that changed color throughout the day matched her hair perfectly. She was as beautiful as Venus herself. Staxius unwillingly stopped breathing, he could not take his eyes off her. "Stop gawking and let's go," she gently elbowed his stomach.

"Staxius Haggard, you whom the queen has chosen, are to protect her at all times. We from her council shall make sure everything stays in order, have a safe voyage – Queen Shanna Islegust is in your hands, be safe." Ruslan's voice deepened as he spoke the last words. Staxius opened the door for her and then left. A portal got conjured, and the drive to Oxshield began. Their time had been scheduled so that they would reach Dundee exactly six hours before the banquet; enough time to rest and get ready to set off.

[Chapter 86](#)

A Shoulder to cry on

Atop a certain building on which rested a certain crest; a car – fully black, jumped out. A portal, whose color now was of a greenish-white, closed. Time felt like a flicker, but a fading sensation of belonging. Ancient magic truly was something astounding to witness in person. Ancient knowledge from civilization most knew not of its existence. Nobles weren't that lucky either, though holding the power over politics, only scholars of high enough rank had the right to study ancient manuscripts. A breakthrough was made when a young child accidentally wrote something on one of those scrolls. It duplicated; the scroll was reborn anew – though partly responsible was the father who had built a machine to write scrolls. The child's foolishness triggered something deep within the scholar's mind, he felt inspired. Long had those manuscripts been unusable but a child's mistake proved to be the biggest discovery in that century.

He whom the thought of rewriting the scrolls and using them never crossed his mind. The child gave him the confidence he needed; thus, a new sect formed. A sect devoted to the rewriters of ancient scrolls – copies were made. For ages to come, the field of magical science grew exponentially. It reached a point where ancient magic became widespread, the Xerxes series car being one of the said endeavors. Using the same baseline of knowledge, the new equipment to measure a person's strength was built from scratch. No longer had one need to pass a test, the equipment measured their mana capacity, skills, abilities and most importantly, their untapped potential. Little did that child who played and made a mistake know that; his action would greatly affect how the world was to become. It hadn't been voiced yet, but the announcement on the king's day of birth also hid another meaning. A meaning only mages would get, the message that combat-heavy sorcerers had outgrown their stay. Weak eaten by the strong, the fundamental law of survival; the new age began.

Veiled in black and as fast as lightning; the car dashed through Dorchester. “S-Staxius p-please slow down,” on occasions the queen would speak out. He didn’t care for reaching Dundee as fast as possible was a necessity. He knew how good-hearted Xula was. If she were to see the state in which people and demi-humans lived out of Arda, her anger would take reigns. That was to be avoided at all costs, hence why he drove so fast. Though hiding the truth might have seemed bad, he had planned on showing her the reality, but on a later date. Today was a day of celebrations and bliss for she had stepped out of her province for the first time. Irregularly, Staxius would gaze and admire her, this was a first. Shyly, she would catch his stare and look away. Deep within both, a feeling of belonging grew. They felt as if they were made for one another. The courtship they entered also affected how they thought.

Staxius wanted only one thing, to keep her safe. Sadly, it wasn’t necessary, Xula was a fairy who turned into an angel. Her power rivaled most of the people Staxius knew. What would happen if one-day danger arose, would Xula have to protect him, would she have to risk her life for someone like him? Definitely not, his pride would not take it. Training to get stronger, an endeavor he placed upon himself; strong enough to stand as her equal one day. The drive continued for hours on end, Staxius reflected while her majesty fell asleep. Before he knew it, Dundee came into view. They passed Savaview bridge without him realizing. The subconscious took over, it all grew blurry.

Since the day he nearly lost all his power, the nature of his body and mind changed. One may have called it evolution, he had to grow to overcome his weakness. During the many battles with other mages, soldiers, goblins, and sellswords. He found something, the ability to go even faster than before. Given his speed and reaction had reached their limits, Staxius discovered a new way, a new method to surpass that limit. Instead of trying to be physically strong, he chose another route. In a duel between two expert swordsmen, the faster and more accurate one always won. It was decided in the first move, however strong the opponent might have been if he could not connect, victory was assured. Adalana’s lightning stance move worked off that principle.

Sadly, overcoming the limits given to you by birth was a feat close to impossible. Train as hard as one may, the given speed at which one’s brain could process images had been decided. Training could overcome that barrier but only slightly. This often didn’t mean anything. Thus, why swordsmen trained their muscle memories instead. To subconsciously parry attacks and moves without thinking about it. The swordsmanship taught to him by his late father did make Staxius a true master, but it had its limitations. The technique, mainly built for Tempest Haggard, could not be fully mastered. It was too hard and complex to fully assimilate. It was based on a principle Staxius had forgotten over the ages, though he vaguely remembered,

‘the one who strikes fear in the hearts of many has an unprecedented advantage before going into battle.’

Said quote was but a glimpse at his teachings.

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‘I know not what he meant, maybe making the opponent cower before me. Sadly, that’s not what my father would have usually thought,’ the car came to a full stop. Before them stood the town square. On the left side, a luxurious hotel that reached the heavens in height. The light coming off it gave the feeling

of daytime though dusk set in. "Hey Xula," he whispered, "wake up, we've arrived." He gently shook her shoulder. "Five more minutes," she mumbled.

Phoo,

he blew into her ears. A ranging volley of pins and needles went throughout her body. "What's the matter with you," she awoke, her hands and feet shook thanks to him. "Nothing much just wanted to see you suffer," he replied while holding back his laughter.

The banquet was set for tomorrow, they had made it to Dundee with time to spare. Like a gentleman, Staxius opened her door and escorted her majesty inside. Their arms locked; the walk inside felt slow. Everyone watched in bafflement, never had they seen such a pretty looking lady. The man beside her wasn't that bad either – he looked like a prince from another country. The gazes all befell them, Staxius partially sensed the emotions. It ranged from amazement to envy and jealousy. The place crawled with wealthy looking citizens, one out of five felt like a noble. The majority were rich traders and successful businessmen. Of which most had their concubines with them, the place crawled with said individuals. Girls trying to survive off selling themselves. Xula didn't know that fact for it was unheard of back in Arda. Staxius knew better, a single glance at one of the ladies told everything. They shyly looked away as if embarrassed by their actions. He could not judge them, Hidros was a tough place to survive.

"Good evening, sir," a young-looking receptionist welcomed them. The ground floor was filled with people walking around. Time was for dinner which came free of charge for anyone who stayed there. The meals prepared by the best of the best, delicacies, and aged wine. Before replying, Staxius took a good long look at the surrounding. In front of him stood a desk situated on the right side from when you entered the establishment. Opposite said desk, countless sofas accompanied with tables. The color matched the interiors of which it was brown and black. A bit old fashion but the place felt like home. The servant waited, they stood like statues, their only job – assist new coming guests. A massive chandelier stood in the middle. A few steps forward, a staircase spiraled around the central lift. At the farthest right corner, a door that led into the dining area. As far as the entrance was concerned nothing else could be said about it. "Good evening, I'd like to rent your most expensive room for a night," Staxius asked politely with a tone befitting someone respectable.

"A-as you wish," the novice stuttered a bit. Staxius and Xula looked imposing. It felt like they held the whole world at their fingertips. The noble crests on his suit didn't help either; the boy's anxiety grew. "That w-would be ten gold pieces," he replied with fear in his voice. 'Ten gold pieces is a bit too much, but Xula is with me, I can't have a queen stay in someplace mediocre.' He touched his pockets looking for his guild card, 'I left it in the car,' his facial expression changed. "Staxius," Xula whispered in his ears. "Yes," he answered back. "Ten gold pieces is a bit too much," she replied, even as a queen she knew the importance of money. "Don't worry about it dear," he smiled reassuringly. "Do you take guild cards as means of payment?" his stare returned to the novice. "W-we s-sure do." He gave a feeble and weak smile. 'Avon, I need you to get that guild card for me,' Staxius contacted his spirit.

Before he even thought of it, Avon walked into the hotel. He wore a suit and not his normal attire. "Master, you've forgotten your belongings." He bowed and held out the object. "Thank you very much," Staxius smiled and proceeded to complete the paperwork.

“Y-your room is o-on the t-top floor. P-please t-take the lift,” the boy, still anxious let out a sigh of relief. Avon followed them to their room. “Someone is acting out of character, now isn’t he?” Staxius spoke while riding the lift. “That’s a given, master. I don’t really like to act all courteous and polite,” he pulled out his tongue, the usual sparkle returned in his eyes. “Thank you for helping,” Avon nodded and hid back in Staxius’s shadow. “Why art thou angry?” the lift stopped. Xula pouted. “Nothing, I’m not angry,” she averted his gaze. “Something is definitely wrong,” they walked down the hallway. “I told you, nothing is wrong,” she remained adamant. *Click,* the door opened. “don’t make me force it out of you,” Staxius held her shoulder. “If something is wrong, you need to tell me, Xula, how can I help if I don’t know how you feel,” he turned her body around. “I-I t-told you i-its nothing,” she stuttered, she held something back. “Let me guess, it’s about the whole payment thing,” he remained as stubborn as she was. “No, that’s not it, I saw a demi-human,” her tone changed to someone on the verge of crying “-or r-rather I felt one.” Her face changed; it looked desperate. “T-they c-cried, and are s-still s-sobbing till this hour,” she stuttered, it felt hopeless. “-I c-can’t help it. I feel their s-sorrow w-whenver I get c-closer to t-them. All I sense is p-pain and s-suffering, this is different f-from A-Arda,” a single tear ran down her cheeks, she cracked.

It wasn’t unheard of that demi-humans were used as playthings. They actually came as a gift from the owners; a toy for the guest to enjoy. Xula felt it, their pain, the restlessness, their fear and the loss of hope. Her eyes changed from green to black, her smile turned upside. A strong surge of helplessness took Staxius by surprise; the emotions were too strong he felt it. “Don’t worry,” he hugged her with all his might. “The world outside Arda is much different.” He tightened his grip around her back. “- I didn’t want you to see these things nor experience them. Demi-humans aren’t treated as rightfully as you thought they were.” Not knowing how to deal with such overwhelming feelings, Xula embraced him tighter. They stood like this for god knows how long. Staxius calmed her down, he spoke gently and stroked her back, “it’s all ok,” he said from time to time. Xula cried her eyes out, her sobs grew louder in intensity. He held her head close to his chest and patted her back. Her hand grew tired, she tried letting go but Staxius held her back. He wasn’t satisfied until she smiled again, even if that would be difficult.

For the first time, someone had held him so closely. Someone needed him, someone depended on him, Staxius felt a surge of flame burn from within. He couldn’t stand the sight of her in tears, it triggered his protective side. The only person who had that impact on him was Eira, but then again, the flame he felt now burnt with an even hotter passion. “No longer will you have tears in your eyes; incompetent as I may be, I’ll strive to never let a single tear reach you. Xula, you’re an angel, and angels aren’t beings who spread woe, they flutter their wings and spread bliss. You pulled me back from my confusion – and I promise to make it back to you one day. For now, I can be the shoulder you need to cry on, for I’m Staxius, the man whom you placed your hopes and dreams onto. A man who will always persevere and make you happy.” He smiled, her tears stopped, hearing him say those words put her woeful heart at ease.

[Chapter 87](#)

Arrival at the royal castle

It came at last, after days of preparations and hard work – the day had come. The banquet was to happen later in the evening. The princess since the guest arrived, took care of them. She helped, answered to their requests, and most importantly; kept their animosity in check. Plaustan remained as mysterious as always. Only three out of seven attended the event. The remainder of the nobles were

calm and compliant of which most visited the famed capital. Gallienne had trouble dealing with Kreston. The Pope immediately caused a mess when they arrived. He demanded to hold a holy prayer for his majesty the king. After hours of convincing, the pope remained adamant. The king's health didn't permit such luxury, everyone in the court tried to tell him that to no avail. In the end, the princess got fed up and ordered him to stand down. He obeyed; duke Hawkins wasn't happy by her actions. Their animosity grew over the days to come. The princess would order them around like dogs – she had the right to do so. Kreston felt insulted; she knew they were brewing some sort of conspiracy for the fated day but chose to ignore it.

Alongside the castle, the capital also got ready to celebrate. A festival got put together by the guilds and various companies. This festival was in honor of his majesty. Disparities ran rampant around the town, but for that festival, none chose to pay heed. The main reason being that the nobles weren't going to attend the festivities. The event in the capital turned out to be made for commoners. Traders from around the kingdom traveled all the way. Bards, wandering musicians, and other artists joined. The streets were filled with banners, flyers and pamphlets recounting the majesty's ascension to glory. The idea to organize such an event for the commoners was given by her royal highness. None knew the reason nor why she acted out of character. The guilds were happy to hear her announcement. The commoners felt included, they all rejoiced, drank late till night, the taverns were filled. The town square was where most of the celebration happened. All the wandering artists performed for day and night there, people loved it.

For once, Rosespire felt united. Sadly, that didn't include the demi-humans and beast-men. The demis were locked in a cage and devoid to take any part in the celebrations above. The beast-men were put to fight in underground deathmatches. On occasions, a few drunkards would ask to have a lovely night in the company of a certain lady. All knew what they meant, the caged demis were put onto a display. The clients walked around the basement and picked the one that tickled their fancy. Most notably a certain girl grew to be more popular amidst all who remained imprisoned. Her ears weren't of dog nor cat, it was one of a fox, and her once fluffy-tailed told it all. The rarest of the rare, and considered divinity by some belief – she was up for sale for anyone. Her price, five gold pieces. With such a high price tag, most ran but a few remained, the truly rich people. After a certain incident with a noble whom she bit – the girl was put to chains and left to die, alone, and suffering. Her price now fetched forty gold pieces, they put her up for sale as a slave. However, how she looked visually remained appalling and most walked by her. The days where she stood popular amidst her comrades were long gone. Now she sits, alone, with a shriveled-up tail, shrunken face, and injured ears.

Stories like that were common. No one cared, dogs and cats were treated equally as demi-humans. A human supremacist society could only bring ruin to them, the non-humans. Despite being far stronger, faster, and more talented than humans, these beings were left helpless. Trained like animals to obey every order given to them. They had to be put on a leash if one grew rebellious, they were put to the sword. Years had gone by, but nothing changed regarding how the non-humans were treated.

The time now was five hours before the big event. The party from Dorchester set out after a long dispute. Julius, being himself had ordered his company to bring in dresses for each of the ladies. The dresses matched their hair perfectly. Eira wore a white dress, that had diamonds scattered around – expensive but a gift. Julius didn't care for cost; he was one of the richest men in the entire kingdom. Autumn wore a yellowish colored dress. Fenrir chose to have a suit instead; she didn't like the whole

girly thing. Adelana wore red, Ancret, blue and white, Alyson, brownish blue and Annet, grey. The dress made for them had a similar design, they were twins. Viola wore something unexpected; she took out her gothic dress, her appeal looked like a vampire. Millicent wore a red and black long dress. Julius had a normal suit, the ladies though in their thirties looked stunning. The drive from his home to the castle took longer than expected, the streets were filled with people celebrating. After an hour or so, they made it to the castle.

Butlers stood ready and waiting. They opened each individual door, the ladies got out and entered the gigantic castle. The cars Julius had brought did leave an impact on the few people outside breathing in the fresh evening air. The silver guardians caught the eye of every man standing. One by one, they entered, Julius walked behind them, he was acquainted with the majority of the people. A few nods here and there, he entered.

"This way please," a young maid escorted them to the throne room. Faint music was heard, moments later, they entered the room. An orchestra of countless musicians played the king's favorite tunes. The man in question wasn't here yet, instead, the princess was the one who greeted everyone personally. The dining hall stood next to them.

"Duke Julius Garnet," the princess walked over. "I'm glad to see you've made the journey to our humble castle." She spoke courteously. "Greetings your highness," he bowed his head. The rest of his party bowed slightly but didn't speak a word. "I assume you've come on behalf of Dorchester?" she asked, her eyes met Eira's. Eira felt something boil inside her heart, the lady before her seemed familiar. An uncanny resemblance, Eira's white hair matched Gallienne's as well as the queen. "Young lady, have we met before?" the princess changed the topic. "I'm afraid not, your highness. This is the first time I've seen you in person. I must say that our hair does resemble each other." She replied jokingly. "Indeed, they do, tis something very peculiar." Her eyes filled with doubt. "I thank you all on behalf of my father for making it here today. Do enjoy the banquet as much as you want." She left.

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"There's something really off about her," Autumn spoke. "I agree, I feel like I've met her before," Eira added. "Don't worry about it," Undrar placed her hands on her shoulders. "I haven't seen Staxius yet, where is he?" Julius asked. "Now that you bring that up, I'm certain that he would come out of the woodworks and surprise us all," Adelana added jokingly. "Time will tell, let's go eat," Fenrir proposed. The banquet was set to happen in three hours though the guest came in early.

"xula, Xula, XULA," Staxius shook her body. "What is it?" she mumbled. "We're late for the banquet," he awoke with a bad feeling. "the BANQUET," she sat upright, her hair still combed. "How did your hair not get messy while sleeping," Staxius dashed to the mirror after waking her. "Magic, my dear, tis magic," she boasted. "Magic or not, you better get dressed," he tied his hair. "Will do, give me a second," the memories from what happened earlier rushed her mind. She blushed; her cheeks flushed. Almost instantly, Staxius got ready. "I'm headed downstairs to check on the car, you better get yourself ready," he closed the door and ran. 'Does he not remember what happened last night?' she slowly removed her laced sleeping gown. 'He probably does but doesn't want to embarrass me by bringing up that subject again; what a man,' she got dressed as fast as she could.

As expected, she got ready in an hour. Staxius furiously banged his head against the steering wheel. "Avon, I might have to put the car into overdrive, are you ready?" Xula came into view, she got off the lift. "Yes, master, unleash all your mana into me; I'll take care of the rest," Avon replied from within the car. "Thank you," he smiled. She got inside, "sorry I took so long." Staxius stared at her intently, "so long is an understatement but whatever, you look stunning as always." His facial expression turned emotionless. "Please grab onto something and wear a seat belt. Whatever you do, do not disturb me from now on. I'm not being rude, I need to focus, we have only two hours." His tone followed; it was monotonous. "As you wish," she sat comfortably.

"Avon, here I come," Staxius injected half of his mana reserves into the car. The engine roared so loud it echoed throughout Dundee. It sounded like a lightning bolt hitting the ground. "Shadow has entered overdrive mode, do you wish to continue?"

"Yes," he accelerated; the car shot out of the town. It traveled so fast that it nearly took off, something popped up on the back of the car. Neither did Staxius nor Xula notice it, the scenery went by so fast it felt like a blur. 'How can someone even drive at such velocity, I can't even distinguish what's before me much less drive.' Xula admired him even more, Staxius's eyes were fixed on the road. Xula caught glimpse of the castle.

"We've arrived," the car blew past security and stopped at the castle entrance. The sound it made got everyone on edge. The beast stopped, everyone inside the castle heard it – a thunderous boom. They made it with time to spare. "Did you hear that?" Eira asked, said sound felt familiar. "That's definitely one of the Xerxes series," Julius added. "You don't think it's him now do you?" Adelana asked. They all stood in awe, waiting for someone they had not seen in weeks.

"Xula, are you alright?" Staxius asked he was worried. Her face told another story. "Don't worry about it," she cast a self-healing spell onto her stomach. "Isn't that cheating now," Staxius got out of the car. Xula closed her eyes, the journey took a lot out of her mentally. "Not really," she spoke, the door opened. "Well, we've arrived," Staxius took her hand and escorted her out of the car. "Excuse me, sir, to whom do we have the pleasure to meet?" one of the butlers asked, the princess had ordered them to ask the names and where the guests came from and who they represented. Staxius looked at Xula, she signaled him that she was going to reply instead.

"I'm Shanna Islegust, queen of Arda. And this gentleman right here is my fiancé, Staxius Haggard." She introduced both in a serious tone, the power in her voice made everyone around her look away. Though calling Staxius her fiancé made her a little shy, it didn't show at all on how she acted. "Greetings your majesty," the butler immediately bowed. "No need for formalities," Staxius jumped in, the poor man's leg shook in fear. "Could you kindly tell us where to go?" he asked politely. "W-with pleasure, t-that l-lady will e-escort you," his eyes remained on the ground while he pointed to another maid. "Thank you very much," they crossed arms and walked inside. "If you would, please follow me," the girl seemed more confident than the previous guy. Staxius purposefully slowed down his step, "Xula, I haven't even given you an engagement ring yet, how can you say that I'm your fiancé?" he asked in a friendly and compassionate way. "Don't ask me, it felt like the correct thing to say. Don't worry about the ring, once we get back, our courtship will be made public," she elbowed him gently. "As you wish, my queen," he smiled, he felt blissful.

[Chapter 88](#)

The Banquet begins

Custom it might have been, the queen and her fiancé entered with the sound of trumpets. The orchestra changed their usual performance to one befitting the entrance of someone important. Long ago, set in stones by ancestors who hadn't got the necessary will to grace everyone's presence with their own. The reigning sovereign would employ bards to shout the names of the nobles entering his court. If one didn't seem familiar, he was either put to the sword or taken to the dungeon. The kings of old were cynical and distrusted all, even their wives and children. Frequent were betrayal through poisoning and assassination by power-hungry fools. As time went on, this threat of poisoning a ruler had become the easiest way to get rid of him. The ones closest had blood on their hands after such deeds. Patricide in the name of power made a young prince and princesses the devil. Some cursed by their own mother through the power of magic who back then was known as sorcery.

The trumpet arrangement had been passed down the royal court's musicians for ages. The king had told them to no longer play said tune as it brought chaos and bad luck. It was associated with a curse, though an exception to that rule had been made. The emperor once visited Oxshield in the olden days. Not hearing the fame tunes insulted him greatly, he had the king play the song by force. From that day forth, the emperor ordered that the song be played only when someone of a rank higher than duke and duchess entered. This didn't shock the king, rather he accepted the judgment easily. No other king lived on Hidros; he was the sole ruler – thus allowing said decision.

"His majesty, King Blaine Mcleod Riverty, Queen Sely Riverty and Princess Gallienne Riverty accompanied by her husband Piers Clyfford Riverty have graced our presence." A man, dressed in white with a mustache and a loud voice yelled. He announced the royal family's entrance inside the throne room. The trumpets played the same forbidden song he despised, but those were the emperor's order.

The entire room fell silent, everyone watched in awe as his majesty took his seat. Now old and feeble, the body remained well-built. The queen who sat beside him looked as divine as ever, the men were thunderstruck. Her white hair tied so masterfully it seemed like a flower bud atop which rested her golden crown. The princess, on the other hand, took her husband and welcomed guests on behalf of her parents. The king's health, however he might have looked, grew worse with each passing day. A few minutes went by until the unexpected happened, a roar shook the castle. The king grew on edge, his mind intrigued by whom made such a powerful noise.

It came as a shock, the musician heard that a queen entered the premises. The thunderous arrival of her transport told it all. Powerful and relentless, the mysterious queen of Arda heard only in rumors had graced their presence. The room remained silent from the king's arrival. Everyone mumbled to one another but the sound of heels turned their heads.

"Who's making all that noise,"

some asked confused. *Klock, Klock, Klock,* it grew closer with each step. The trumpets grew louder. The king heard the tune once more, his eyes filled with displeasure. A presence came from the door, or rather, two – powerful individuals. The guards grew on edge as well as a few attending mages from the main continent. "Julius, look." Millicent pointed to the entrance. "Isn't that Staxius?" she asked, everyone stared. "Yes, that's father," Eira replied joyously, she tried to wave and signal her father but he didn't notice her. Rather, his mind was focused on a particular person, his gaze met the princesses.

“Queen of Arda, Shanna Islegust and her fiancé Staxius Haggard have graced our presence.” The trumpets played the song of arrival – the notes danced with one another as if fairies flying through a starry night sky. It felt calm, “i-impossible,” murmurs filled the hall. “did he just say, fiancé?” Adelana asked, rather shocked but bore a smile – she nearly died of laughter. Staxius walked, arms crossed with her majesty, they walked graciously and headed directly to meet the king. “Greetings King Blaine Mcleod Riverty of Oxshield.” They reached the bottom of the small podium, the king sat atop. Everyone watched as both sovereigns had first met. Mostly eyes were changed from queen Sely to queen Shanna. “Greetings Queen Shanna Islegust of Arda,” he stood and walked down his throne. They formally introduced themselves, Staxius waited by her side as she engaged in a little back and forth with his majesty. The white-haired queen stood as beautiful as a flower before Staxius. She eyed him down intently, that was the boy she saw years ago in that vision. A vision that sent his life into turmoil. From the first instant he walked inside, he felt the emotions of everyone around. ?Dark-arts got activated; he watched gravely for anything that could be possibly harmful.

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Sely didn’t try and hide her fear of the young man. She might have stood firmly, but her eyes told another story. The whole court fell silent, the small back and forth ended after a minute or so. They shook hands and got back to their places. Xula faced away and held the sternest face ever for just a fraction of a second. “Are you alright?” she locked her arms with Staxius and walked over to the open balcony. One by one, the initial impact they had on the guests faded. They all got back to their usual conversations and gallantry.

The wind blew cold and crisp, the curtains blocked unwanted eyes. “Staxius, is this kingdom really that good a place?” She asked, her eyes turned to the stars. “Not really, nothing is good in this place – some may argue otherwise but I don’t.” she placed her hands on the balustrade. Her eyes screamed of anger and hate; it had turned red. “Well I agree with you on that one, this place stinks of so many things my heart can’t be quelled.” Her tone grew sharp, the small conversation with the king had put her in a foul mood. “Don’t worry about it,” Staxius placed his hands atop hers. “-there are things that take time to fix, let time do its job – we’ll be the catalyst. I know not what you discussed with his majesty, but he isn’t the ruler. The one pulling the strings is that princess, the one who locked me away for sixteen years.” Staxius and Xula spoke and calmed each other down, they truly supported each other.

Inside, after hearing the name Staxius Haggard, the princess ran out of the room. She jolted out; her husband didn’t care any less. He spent his night drinking away at the bar. Joining him, an old comrade – Millicent. They both drank, the ruler of Dorchester acted differently. None knew this but her head got assaulted regularly by strange messages. Her only remedy was locking away her consciousness using alcohol. She didn’t drink because she hated the people around her, no, rather she wanted to save them from whatever ailed her.

Not many people noticed it, but all the attention got focused on Shanna. She obviously came with someone just as powerful who was her fiancé. Before entering, people felt two powerful auras, but when they arrived, only one was felt. ?Staxius purposefully hid his, the goal was to scout out the surroundings.

“Julius, I’m going to meet my father,” Eira said impatiently. “Didn’t you hear what the guy just said? Staxius is engaged to the queen of Arda – someone who I’ve only heard in legends.” His face changed for

the worst. "I agree, Staxius might not be the one we know," Adelana added. "You guys worry too much," Ancret tried to break the growing tension. "Don't worry, I'll try asking him," Undrar spoke, she tried using their telepathic link. The joyful faced sunk into the pits of despair – she only noticed that their bond had been severed. "I-it's broken, t-the bond," she uttered. "What do you mean broken," Julius asked, "-isn't it impossible for that bond to be broken unless he d-died..." The realization hit, Staxius must have gotten defeated by someone. "Well, I don't care either way, I'm going to meet him and that's final." She dashed to the balcony.

"Father," the curtains opened, Staxius stood. He waited with open arms, "hey Eira," he smiled. She ran and embraced him tightly. "How did you know I was coming?" Eira asked. It felt suspicious how he held his arm out for a hug before she arrived. "You're my daughter after all. If I don't sense when you arrive, then, who will?" His tone, friendly and compassionate. Xula watched intently, she examined Eira's face and figure – she truly was a beauty waiting to fully bloom. Living in Claireville academy, Eira had become more acquainted with the things happening around the kingdom. The main rumor she heard was of an unforgiving queen living out in Arda. It made her shudder a little, but Staxius's presence recomforted her. "Is this Eira Haggard?" she asked politely. "Yes, this is my lovely daughter, one who I've neglected for god knows how long." He knew he was a bad dad but loved her with all his heart. "Don't worry about it, it's all fine." She smiled, her white cheeks flushed.

"Xula, I guess it's time for you to meet my companion and friends," he took her by the hand and walked closer to the curtain. He held Eira's on the other. Julius came outside, everyone followed behind – even a drunken Millicent. "Hello everyone, I'm sorry I abandoned you all in a moment of peril." He bowed, and let go of both Eira and Xula. "Worry not friend," Julius raised his head and hugged. "-I've missed you," he backed away slightly from the tight hug. "I've missed you too, my old friend." Staxius placed his hands on his shoulder. "S-Staxius... a-are y-you ok?" A worried Undrar stepped forward, she checked his neck, the symbol was gone. "Now isn't time to reminisce," Adelana jumped in, "Staxius haven't you forgotten to announce something important to us?" her arms crossed, she asked using a stern voice.

Footsteps felt like it rushed outside, a strong gust of wind took everyone by surprise. "MASTER," Staxius got pushed back to the balustrade. "Hey there Fenrir," he patted her head. In any given situation Xula might have gotten mad, but the weeks of staying with Staxius – he told her about his friends and how they acted. To her surprise, they were all as he described, she smiled and laughed. After a few seconds in a hug so tight it nearly strangled him, Staxius walked back to where they all stood. Xula stared at him, he knew what she meant. They stepped back, Staxius stood beside her, everyone watched curiously. The moon shone directly behind, "greetings friends, I'm Shanna Islegust – queen of Arda as well as Staxius's fiancée. I hope we can get along," they both bowed, for a queen, it wasn't necessary but she did it out of respect for the friends he treasured.

"No need to bow," the girls rushed in to raise her head. "We are glad to make your acquaintance." They laughed and cheered, none cared if she was a queen. They treated her as a friend. Julius took Staxius in a separate corner to speak in private. The queen bonded with the others, especially Eira – she became attached. The aura coming out of everyone Staxius knew felt pure and innocent with a slight bit of bloodlust. The people she interacted with were powerful. She read their minds unwillingly, none felt a threat, or rather, they all questioned how a guy like Staxius could get engaged to someone like her. She chuckled – they all had diverse opinions about him. The silver guardians bonded with her as well, the balcony became livelier than the banquet inside.

Princess Gallienne was nowhere to be found, she had run off to her room. None knew the reason and none cared. The king sat with a smile on his face – everyone had come for his day of birth. Queen Sely's eyes screamed of fear. The other nobles didn't pay much heed, they were too busy discussing trading and boasting about how much money they had. The dining hall grew more popular; their stomachs screamed. With everyone present, the banquet began.

[Chapter 89](#)

The Announcement

'Impossible, how is that man alive?' Gallienne stood alone in a dimly lit room. 'Where did I keep that bloody thing,' she searched drawers to drawers, her goal – an item her uncle left behind years ago. A piece of forbidden knowledge that should have not been hers from the beginning. Behind, lurking in the shadows, Theodore stepped in. "Are you in trouble, master?" he asked, the aura around him remained as mysterious as ever. "Not really Theodore, do me a favor and keep an eye on that queen and fiancé of hers – I've got a bad feeling about them." Her eyes remained to the floor, she searched up and down, the room was turned upside down.

"Kanad," inside the throne room, a lady with an arousing voice spoke. She took her time pronouncing each syllable of his name. "K a n a d," she let out a little moan and bit her lower lip. "Cut it out, Kylsha," he paid no heed to her jests. Instead, the focus turned solely on the people present in said banquet. "Don't you remember what our Lord told us to do?" he turned around. They both stood near the farthest edge of the hall. Better view and people would not pay attention to them, though their attire was on par with the noble's present. "Yes, I do, but that mission is boring. Only observing and not having fun," her speech remained slow and mysterious – her eyes red and filled with a feeling of dread. "I want to devour someone," her face changed into a pout. "No, no devouring till the banquet is over, understand?" he placed his index finger on her lips. "You better act civil," he leaned closer, "-or I'll eat you instead," he licked her ears and went back to the mission given to him. She panted; her heart raced – demons were scary entities not yet fought by humans. Hesitantly, she stopped and joined him in his adventure.

"Staxius," outside, the wind grew cold, noise in the background filtered out. Julius's eyes felt serious. "-do you have any idea of what is happening around us?" He asked, his hands rested on Staxius's shoulder. "Is it the arrival of monsters?" he replied with a tone of regret. "Yes, but how did you k-know that?" Julius looked perplexed but quickly followed up with, "-did they enter Arda too?" With a big sigh, Staxius replied, "-yes they did. Those things are monsters that evolve constantly." Julius took a step back, "I haven't actually fought one myself. Rumors ran rampant that on the edge of Totrya and Oxshield, otherworldly beings attacked anyone. At first, I thought it was but lies and rumors – however, when I heard the guild intervene, it made my fears turn to reality." Staxius stepped forward and gave him a quick hug, "worry not friend, I've been working to find the most efficient way to exterminate those pesky creatures." He handed him a small notebook of which the name read,

Monsters and Weapons,

in that, Julius saw something amazing. Diagrams that perfectly recreated how the monsters looked, a short description of how they fought and what worked best against them. First on the list was goblins. Though the method for beating them remained a mystery for him, the diagram was perfect. "They don't

look that strong but strength in numbers I'm guessing?" a quick look revealed much-needed information. "Yes Julius, that's correct," that was deduction coming in, Julius was as wise as he was strong. They continued to speak with one another, Staxius bore a smile as well as his friend.

Xula stood with countless people around her cheering but kept her eyes on her fiancé. He looked stunning that night. Try as hard as she might, she could not take her eyes off him. "Someone is awfully observant," Ancret added, her usual flirty side came out. "Whatever do you mean?" Xula smirked and avoided her teasing masterfully. "You've bested me, I yield," Ancret spoke dramatically, she acted as if she had gotten slain. Xula chuckled, and everyone laughed. The party truly was a bundle of joy, Millicent's smile remained but was an image from the past. Her true joy faded long ago – none knew why. A few minutes later, Eira spotted her friend, Ysmay. The latter scurried outside to a balcony filled with beautiful and strong looking people. Most notably Xula, she stood out like white on black. The moon shining behind served to only enhance how she looked.

Ding, Ding, Ding, a man spoke, demanding the attention of everyone present. "Attention please, we've got an announcement to make on this auspicious day." The voice reverberated. Raulf Serlo spoke, flying bee shaped machines stood by. It broadcasted live whatever he was about to say. "We should probably go in," Julius took charge and led everyone inside. "Xula?" Staxius approached, her mind was in the clouds. "-we should probably get going," he blew in her eyes then took her hand and escorted her inside. "You definitely should stop with the blowing in my ear, it gets me jolty and I don't like it." She pouted. "Fine, fine," he wasn't going to stop.

"Greetings ladies and gentlemen, I am, Raulf Serlo, the current holder of the divine-blade title." He took a pause and stared at the papers in his hands. "On behalf of the guilds and royal family, I've got something rather important to announce. This doesn't correlate to the majesty's day of birth – rather it's one that could change how the people in Hidros live. As you all know, reports have been coming in that people go missing around the edge of Totrya. That much is true, however, the real reason is that Hidros is being invaded or has sadly already been invaded by monsters." He snapped, a video played on a floating screen, the same one used on the airships circling around the capital. "As you see, these monsters are vile and merciless." The video showed how strong they were – it got filmed earlier, a few clueless adventures jumped the wall to go look for adventure, sadly they died. "Hope isn't lost," another image played, this time, it showed the army defeating one of those beasts. "As you see, they vanish into dust the moment they are killed. To add to that, it drops coins and items. Nevertheless, defeating one of those beasts isn't a job any ordinary human can partake in." He walked over to a strange figure covered with a blanket, it had been brought in moments earlier. "To prevent any casualties, this device has been built to accurately distinguish a human's capabilities and if he's worthy to become an adventurer." He pulled the piece of cloth.

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The apparatus didn't look that impressive, it was a mirror with a small place to put your finger in.? "After weeks of countless research and work, this piece of technology is the pinnacle of our knowledge." He stepped away. "With this, comes another thing, a new ranking system has been put in place. We aren't the one who decides your ranks, its that machine. We only rely on the information it gives us about the potential of any new adventurers."

A chart came up on the screen, "The ranking systems will be divided into ten tiers. Tier one being the strongest and Tier-ten being the worst. To stop confusion, names will be given to each rank. Starting from Tier one: Platinum, Gold, Silver, Bronze, Ruby, Emerald, Sapphire, Steel, Obsidian and Porcelain. If you're wondering how the old S-ranking system compares with this one, then Gold-rank or Tier-two is equivalent to SSS-rank. More information on the matter will be given at each respectable guild. The fighters and mages guild will now stop taking in applicants. If one chooses to become an adventurer, one must register with one of the individual guilds or go solo, the choice is yours. The main change is from the currency, each monster drops a coin that is precious and pure. A trade ban has been imposed on said items, one can only exchange them at the central guilds who also controls the bank. It's a precaution for the kingdom's financial status to remain the same. With this my speech ends, I hope you all have a lovely night." The mic turned off; the message spread around the island like wildfire.

As predicted, most didn't take said message lightly, rather they were angry. The king's day of birth helped to quell the hearts of many – the festival organized in the capital aided massively. The hall remained silent, all that had to be processed. Staxius and Julius watched with sparkles in their eyes. A new ranking system, everything overhauled – it became obvious that mages had outgrown their stay. They knew it to be true, but that prospect of a machine telling how powerful a person could be; made it more than enough. Adventurers, heroes to be born, history to be made, the start of a new world. "D-did you h-hear that," Julius slowly stared at Staxius. "Y-yes I did," despite standing near royalty, Staxius's facial impression changed to one of a child who found a new toy. "They smiled at each other like idiots," Autumn quickly corrected her brother's stance with a quick elbow to the ribs. Xula did the same but less violent, she instead caressed his cheeks and smile menacingly. To that, Staxius winked and continued to watch in awe. Xula shook her head in disappointment but chuckled.

An hour went by, the banquet reached its end. Dinner got served, everyone sat according to their rank and prestige surrounded by families and friends. The king sat, atop a small podium and looked down upon everyone with a glass of wine. Royalty had to sit near royalty, hence, Xula sat atop the same podium on a different table. She sat with Staxius, there was room for only them. Everyone raised their glass and toasted to the king's long life. The dinner carried on quietly. It felt somewhat too calm, Staxius's guard got up unintentionally. He felt the presence of two otherworldly beings faintly.

The candle inside his pocket burnt up as a servant closed in with another glass of wine. He placed it on their table then left, the princess looked as nonchalant as ever. "Xula," Staxius reached in and grabbed her drink. "Why don't we exchange," he winked. Her glass got poisoned, the candle heated so much it hurt him. 'I knew it, assassinations at royal banquets. Whoever did this have some guts.' He looked around to see if anyone suspicious could be seen. In the farthest corner, he noticed something. Two individuals who were clearly not there before stood up. "Kanad, I want to kill," sat idly while sipping wine, she uttered. "Kylsha, I said no to killing," a faint sensation shook him. It felt like he was being watched by someone or something.

Kill as many as you want,

it whispered. "No need to tell me twice," Kylsha jumped out of her chair and threw what seemed to be darts at everyone near her table. Below her, Kanad dashed behind and launched a spell at the king. It took the form of an arrow with a skull on its tail.

It took all by shock, a surprise attack. Luck would have it that the silver guardians were the one who sat at that table, the darts were neutralized. *Ice Element; Frozen-Barrier,* Eira reacted quickly. A wall of ice protected Millicent and Ysmay who came to chat. "You're not the only monsters here," Undrar moved so fast none saw it, she grabbed the demon's foot and slammed her on the ground. Sadly, the arrow the other one shot moved so fast even Raulf could not reach it in time. Staxius's hand shook, everyone looked like they stopped moving except for the arrow. Xula remained stuck in place, Staxius watched. 'Close your eyes, relax, maintain your breathing.' He saw everything became clear, the arrow had a faint red aura surrounding it. 'Two, three, five, one, two, zero,' gone. He vanished, *Dark-arts; mana-cancellation,* he channel the spell into his palm and caught the arrow. "YOUR MAJESTY," Raulf screamed, he thought the king got killed. He looked back to see Staxius sitting with his legs crossed and the spell in his hands. The black mist faded, he laughed, the eyes remained closed.

[Chapter 90](#)

The Truth

"Impressive," Kanad spoke. Kylsha after her body fell to the floor, retreated. They both stood side by side, everyone had their hands on their weapons. The guards rushed the dining hall, the mages conjured spells and waited. It had only been a few seconds, the response time was to be praised. The princess looked on edge, underneath the table, she held something, an object. Neither did she care that her father nearly got killed nor was she worried about her life. The only thing her mind focused on was Staxius Haggard. The foe remained still; their eyes felt unbothered – it was as if these people were child's play.

'Well then,' he opened his eyes. Everyone forgot he stopped the spell. Raulf's attention shifted from him to the intruders. The atmosphere filled with animosity and killing intent. The king, he who saw his life flash before his eyes, remained flabbergasted. The queen, on the other hand, had her guards appear out of nowhere and made a defensive line. 'Who are these guys,' Staxius asked, he jumped off the table. "Staxius..." Xula called out, "leave this one to me," he fired back. If she were to join the fight, this place would surely become another battlefield – her power had the potential to ruin this castle. "Who goes there, you who've dishonored his majesty's day of birth, who are you to ruin this auspicious occasion." The royal guards arrived fully. A whole platoon of fifteen soldiers, armed to the teeth. Their guns aimed and ready to fire, all waited.

"What do we do," Kylsha ignored the guards threatening them. "We had our orders to kill. Sadly, we only managed to raise their suspicion. I mean, just look before us. They're ready to fight seriously, but if we go full out, we may end up causing a genocide." Kanad thought hard, he didn't want to misinterpret the master's orders for that would cause unnecessary problems of which the result would be death. "Kill them all, spare none," Another whisper came through in his moment of despair. The non-combatants were evacuated, only mages and people who could fight remained in the dining hall. Autumn and Eira helped with the evacuation, they all left – Kanad and Kylsha stood idly and waited. 'This presence, I can't move,' Kanad looked to Kylsha, she as well remained fix to the ground. A powerful aura held them down, they could not move an inch. Sluggishly, he managed to catch a glimpse of the one responsible. *Death Element: Unleash Aura,* he held a grin.

"Move an inch and we'll shoot, state your name intruders," the guards continued asking questions. The general didn't order for them to shoot – intimidation remained their only option. "Impressive yet again,"

Kanad chuckled, Staxius watched intently from afar. A semi-circle of soldiers followed by mages and the other combatants stood in-between them. 'Staxius Haggard,' her face changed, '-I swear I'm going to end your life,' Gallienne raised her hands, she held a book – more of a grimoire. "Not so fast, your highness," Xula teleported. She grasped the princess's shoulder, "now isn't the time for betrayal, or do you wish for I to end this whole ordeal in a single move?" she spoke with a subtle tone of anger. "Don't underestimate me, fake queen," Gallienne pushed her shoulder away, "I swear to god, you were never supposed to be here," she bit her lips in frustration. "Now, now, I've said this before, tis not the time," her index finger touched the princess's neck; it felt ice-cold. Soon after, she fell onto her seat and remained silent.

Theodore rushed from the shadows, blade in hand, he headed for Xula's neck. *Clang,* Prophecy; her weapon and spirit stopped his assault. She did naught but glare at him, Theodore nodded and went back. "This farse has gone on for too long," He clapped. A shock-wave pushed the defensive line back. The king fled with the queen and an unconscious princess. The dining hall remained lonely, the soldiers got pushed aside effortlessly. It seemed like blowing a dandelion. "Open fire," one screamed, bullets rained. "Spare none," Kanad whispered. In a blink of an eye, both vanished. The dead bodies of the royal guards fell, their neck sliced and blood gushed out. "Now then, who is up for a real fight," they broke through Staxius's Unleash Aura, this was unprecedented. A vampire could naught but cower, but these guys were superior.

Soon after, a battle began, swords clashed, spells fired. It went on for what seemed to be forever. The silver guardians did most of the job repelling, healing, and attacking. Staxius provided support and didn't lead the attack, that fell under Julius's responsibility. The mages send by the emperor fought without holding back. Despite this, Kanad and Kylsha looked unshaken. They only but gave out comments on how bad their foe was. Attack after attack, they dodged and countered with one more powerful. The once's magnificent dresses were torn and ripped, not to mention, that they grew shorter to allow mobility. Xula sat on the podium, Staxius remained a few feet in front. She didn't care, her facial expression felt neutral – Staxius hesitated. ?The fight wasn't lost yet or rather it felt as if they were winning.

After a few minutes more, that idea was changed – that false prospect of having the advantage got blown away. One of the mages went beyond his normal capacity. For a second, he became as strong as Kanad to only end in tragedy. It was all to save a very tired Adelana, the cursed-blade hadn't the strength to use her full power. Neither did she have her weapon nor could she fight accordingly. This whole time, she used a sword found on one of the dead bodies. The mage who sacrificed himself had activated limit-breaker; the true limit-breaker. The body imploded, blood sprayed everywhere, the internal organs were crushed into a little dot. The sight sent ripples down everyone's stomach. One after the other, the mages began to use Limit-breaker. "GET AWAY," one screamed, "We cannot hold them any longer," another yelled. The silver guardians fell back, Julius managed to injure Kanad. "Payback," he replied, Julius ran – he had a long way to go. People around him blew up, the clothes all smothered in blood. "We can't fight against them," Adelana crouched down, the fight didn't last that long. Only about thirty-minutes had gone by. They made way to where Staxius stood, near the small podium.

The foolish mages who used limit-breaker grew exponentially powerful. This gave them time for Staxius to force his companions out of the room. "Run," he ordered. Undrar's mana felt weak – she wasn't at her full capacity. The news about their bond-breaking took a toll on her mental health. "GO AWAY,"

Staxius screamed. The mages fought, Kanad desperately tried to launch an attack. "FOUND YOU," he screamed, a small opening that led to Julius's back got found. *Demon Art: Hades wrath.* A spear-shaped mist got fired. 'Why am I holding back, this isn't how I fight.' Staxius, in the middle of helping Adelana outside, glanced back. He felt an enormous aura, one that far exceeded anything he felt before. At that moment, everything changed. The spell Kanad launched turned invisible, he caught a glimpse of it.

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"Fight now or let your friend die, the choice is yours, my dearest heir."

His face changed, it turned blank, the eyes went back to emotionless. The change got felt by all his party members, "... their faces looked gloomy and feared the worst. *Woosh,* he vanished and caught the spear. "W-what..." Julius stumbled, something pushed him forward. It was Staxius, he guarded his friend using his body. He caught the spell head-on but it didn't suffice to stop it, the tip managed to pierce right through him. *Cough,* blood came out, the face remained unbothered. "W-why..." Julius stopped. "I didn't do this to save you my friend, this is my way of fighting; get back." He replied; the voice remained monotonous. It all made sense, this ability to always laugh in the face of death. It wasn't Staxius's, that ability was given to him by Lord Death – the one who resides inside his soul. The boon of immortality, all the times the god of death came to speak with him. It wasn't out of courtesy, but, a necessity. Part of his conscience – the memories he saw, it was all thanks to the god of death's soul getting merged with his.

'You've always remained by my side haven't you, Lord Death.' Staxius pulled out the spear. Julius made it to the door, they all stood in the entrance watching. The last of the mages died. All that remained was Staxius. 'All the times you made me kill, all the times you changed my emotions. I did wonder why I hated emotions but all those are superficial. Lord Death, I know your inside my conscience this very moment. You've never left me. The first time you ended my life was also the time you infused with me. I don't despise you for it,' he smiled, the wound got healed, 'I thank you for making me your apprentice.' Staxius though he didn't train before going to Arda grew powerful with each passing day. This was the same thing he did for Eira. Train the magical element from within, secretly, the god of death had been making Staxius stronger. The reason why he can change personality so effortlessly was thanks to dark-arts. However, the cold-hearted killer who rejoiced in other's pain, that was the god of death. The time he tortured Aurora, that got partly influenced by him as well. ?Slowly, Staxius pieced together all the pieces. Everything leading up to this moment had a purpose, some were left out but it didn't matter. He got the bigger picture and it was enough to quell all the questions he asked.

"Why do you stand there, aren't you going to attack?" having had enough thinking; Staxius spoke. His voice resounded across the hall, Kanad and Kylsha waited. "You have changed," Kanad replied. "Changed for the better I shall say," Kylsha added. "Change is good in the face of uncertainty," Staxius added in turn. They all looked at each other, it didn't feel like a normal battle. "Change isn't always fruitful," Kanad spoke. "Change in the face of the enemy is adaptability." Staxius fired back. "Adaptability means thou art weak to fight using thy own strength," Kylsha said in a gloomy tone. "Unshakeable as a rock but flexible as a leaf, tis the way to fight," they locked eyes. *Clang, clang, clang* the battle continued. Staxius returned blow for blow, his eyes remained open. Kanad fought him using a sword while she fired magic as support. *Dark Arts: Mana cancellation,* an opportunity arose – Staxius halted her supportive magic. "You're far better than those unworthy adversaries," Kanad replied, he

spoke while parrying each attack, “-sadly, time isn’t in our favor,” His speed increased, in a blink, Staxius’s foe vanished. No longer could his eyes track the enemy before him. ‘The faster and more precise swordsman wins.’ The eyes closed, two red flames moved about the room. “Why do you close your eyes, have you given up?” A faint voice whispered, “no, tis my way of fighting,” Staxius vanished in turn. His speed grew, only faint flashes of swords were seen.

“Come back this instant,

” Kylsha jumped out the palace. “You may be fast, but you aren’t that powerful yet,” the sword, invisible to Staxius, sliced the right arm, the red flame vanished. ‘It’s still not ready,’ he fell to the floor, the battle ended. It was hard, Staxius gave everything he had in that fight.

The new foes were powerful, but something inside him increased in intensity too. It made him happy, strong foe had stepped foot onto the island. Since that meteor hit Totrya, the number of strong enemies Staxius had to fight grew. To that end, he had to change everything about him. Given he could kill anyone with a single snap of the finger, it didn’t feel right. The only time he used that spell was when he got bored out of his mind. At this given moment, something else drove him – he wanted to go out and fight. Most importantly, he wanted to stand beside Xula – as an equal.

“Are you ok?” a faint voice lifted his head. “Never been better,” he fell asleep.