

## Death Magic 811

### Chapter 811: Ariel Council

The Royal council is well-known among the people of Hidros as the leaders of the continent. At the head of state sat her majesty the queen, and yes, for the most part, the leadership did act upon their duties. Most of which were decisions on potential infrastructural projects and a better lifestyle for the population, well, before coming to said conclusion, the matter of finance and basic commodities for living grows tedious and monotonous. Being the only continent in the world of which encapsulates the Dungeon and Monsters, the way of life is easier, albeit riskier. To afford a basic meal at a basic tavern, the cost fluctuates from the lower range of 5 Exa to the 15 Exa range. Yes, very cheap indeed. A goblin drops on average 1-2 coppers when translated grants the modest sum of 0.5-0.75 Exa each. Doing the math leads to 100 coppers for the cheapest meal and place to live thus translating into 50 goblins kill to live. When stuck in the lower threshold of monster-slaying, the coins aren't the valuables, rather, tis the item drops that come with killing such a number. Either that or quests. In comparison, an office worker earns around 7,500 to 12,500 Exa. The greatness of adventuring comes from the higher monsters and more risks, taking dire-wolves as examples, the medium-tiered variants drop on average 1-2 Silver coins, and if lucky, a fang worth 10 silvers. One wolf killed easily equates to 5000 coppers or 2,500 Exa. Once an adventurer reaches tier-8, steel, making money becomes easy, and so grows losing one's life. This alone, the prospect of slaying monsters for money, adds to the countries' seamless abundance of funds. In a war-torn land, especially Dorchester and Kreston, the scars of battle linger – schools are obligated to teach students martial arts at a young age. Common sense is if one is in dire need of money, either study or work thy heart out in the dungeon. Aria and the Azure wall have grown as result. On the Dungeon alone, an unless treasure trove, makes Hidros the place strong people wish to partake in fights. There also exists the unregulated market for deathmatches, name it, and there is a small community of people dedicated to whatever macabre craft there is to do. This, leads us onto the fabled Ariel group/organization, their name changes frequently, the members are elusive. The birth of the Arcanum sprung conspiracy theorists who surmised the world to be run by people in the Shadows, and true they were, the world is run by elites. Ariel was a misguided child spawned from the Queen's stray plots she forgot to end. The project was to gather the strongest and most influential people in the world, wherein time of need could be used as political weapons against any who dared oppose her. Gathering such a crowd was a double-edged sword, they needed adequate compensation, and for the longest of time – the purpose of personally granted adventurers who've reached Tier-2 Gold, was to recruit them into her personal fold and work the dungeon. She'd take the earnings and grant the adventurers favors – most were forced not to ask, for her ways in manipulating people were unprecedented. Money earned here was then thrown to silence the Ariel group. Most were granted political immunity, allowed to do whatever business they wished, including; trafficking, drug trade, slavery, prostitution, and murder. Obviously, they didn't act on said vices, the Dark-Guild was reason enough to scare the fellows until recent years. The climate changed, Snow – branch of Cimier, made itself known to the underground by taking Phantom's northern port. Tis been in their possession for close to a decade; a crumbling balance nears a full-out war for power, time but needs to pass till the victor emerges from the rabble.

Igna's stare froze the entourage, the lens read much on the members, the oval-shaped table, excluding him, held five individuals. First and to his right, a man in old-Victorian style clothes had his regard hidden under the shadow of a black hat. Freddie Mek, an unknown name of great power. Mek, an ancient Dynasty of traders of ties to the Empire, is mostly known for the Weklo's, a retailer most prominent in

the Empire, and of great financial backing, estimation ranged from 2-5 billion. Beside the man clad in black lain a lazily dressed younger lass, her pupils were bi-colored at the moment she took her eyes off the arms and rose to check around. Marie Jude, a well-known researcher in employment for the Cobalt Unit, some argue her to be a free agent, none comes close to her talents in weapons manufacturing. She's the reason why Phantom lost their monopoly over the market – the frizzled hair and wrinkled cheeks from laying on the table sure weren't much to amount to her genius. After her, sat one, directly opposite Igna, a well-known star, Johna Et, the same who he made acquaintance with before. Continuing around the table, arrive a very classy dressed gentleman who bore the rustic van-dyke mustache and beard. Out of the five, he was the most interesting – Jonny Dyale, a phenom in the fashion industry – a designer of which top fashion brands tare themselves open to having a shot at his council. The man, a Hidros native, had a reddish-colored tag around the neck – a ruby-ranked adventurer. Lastly, an older woman coughs as loud as gunshots. Her face dropped around her facial bones, and yet, the stare never once cared for her age. Lady Maleem Guznov, the oldest spy to ever walk the planet. Her story reads, on a mission aboard, a nightwalker took her by surprise in an artic-wasteland of white, no food to sustain her life, she defeated the walker and ate its flesh – said act alone granted her partial immortality. The assortment seemed random and was meant to be viewed as random. The leader, Freddie Mek, controls the finance and has much said about how retail is done. Marie Jude, the thinker or the strategist, her turning of the side could spell disaster for any party she worked for. Johna Et, the charismatic actor, the public's person if ever their identity was in jeopardy. Jonny Dyale, the blade readied to take opposition with either sword or needle. Finally, Lady Maleem Guznov, the information broker, her long years working in the field has culminated in a web of international connections. Queen Gallienne knew the importance of each spot and made sure to bargain for the best of the best.

A creek menacingly waned heavily in the painful silence, the doors locked shut. The freezing glare eased with Igna settling into the seat.

“Greetings, members of Ariel,” he said, “-Johna Et, never expected you here.”

“Neither did I,” he replied cordially.

“Right boy,” said lady Maleem in a raspy tone, “-why did you call us out here?” she rose an eyebrow amidst the various scattered folds on her person.

“Obviously to check on us,” yawned Marie, “-granny, use the brains once in a while.”

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“Please, do not start arguing,” interjected Jonny, “-I've seen you two go at it for ages. We're in the presence of his majesty, do pay a little respect.”

“Respect is earnt far as I'm concerned,” added Freddie, “-gathering us here is supposed to be a warning,” he side-glanced.

“Right, consider it my way of saying, hello, I know who you are. The elated group of Ariel – I see less of a reason to keep such money grubbers around.”

“-HOW!”

He rose a finger to the would-be arguments, “-let me finish, lady Maleem. Hear me well, the new government and hierarchy won’t be requiring secret groups to safeguard the continent. The creation of your group was done on her majesty’s foresight into a tumultuous future, and the time is nigh, ‘twould be wise to use the influence this table has,” he leaned forth and smirked, “-the only way to assure a weapon won’t fire on its master is to hold the trigger,” he rose and snapped, five ghoulish humanoid figures rose from the chair’s shadows, “-being hidden in the shadows has many advantages. However,” he paused, a hologram hovered above the table, the lights dimmed, it showed a seated man being beheaded by an unknown shadow at his back, “-it also means, when one dies in the shadow, one remains in the shadow, buried and forgotten.”

“Ha-ha,” Freddie chuckled, “-threats, been a while since someone’s dared point a weapon at me,” in a blink, he vaulted over the table and had a rapier millimeter from Igna’s eyeball.

“-Good attempt,” said Igna nonchalantly, “-weapons of this caliber won’t do much harm,” he caught the blade almost as quickly as the man vaulted, the grip tightened into bending the straight-line, “-kindly retake thy place.”

‘Freddie’s one of the fastest people in the world,’ wondered Jonny, ‘-I heard about the new King being an army on his own. He didn’t flinch at the attack, I hate to admit it, I would have stood no chance against Freddie if he attacked willingly. The man’s easy to predict, he struck to kill... what are the others thinking?’ he glanced at the table.

“-Right,” the scan ended with Igna’s interjection; “-the little display wasn’t much entertaining. I’m sure I don’t need to explain what my intentions are, what will it be.”

‘He’s going to kill unless we swear fealty to him, and this I mean, will require us to give our everything... We willingly walked into a trap, blinded by the title of Ariel group – I thought we were untouchable,’ the scan subconsciously reached the door, ‘-escape?’

“Don’t think of escaping,” thundered the king, “-time waits for no one, and I haven’t the patience grant to unresolve weaklings.”

“Boy...” a murderous aura rose from his left side, “-my answer is final, for the disrespect you’ve shown to me and my comrades, I swear, I will end you, and your rule,” she fiercely stood, the chair hit the ground, \*slash,\* a curve of red splattered against the left-wall.

“Pardon me,” said Igna shaking off his hand, “-I accidentally stained my hands,” blood dripped drop his fingernails, the body dropped noiselessly, \*Souls of the dead, thee who’ve sworn to serve me in life and death, come to my side. Blood-Arts: Ghouls Requiem.\* an orb of red flickered into the air, \*Once living now dead. O’ thee who’ve lost thine life to mine blade, thee who held regrets in the mortal world, I grant thee a chance at life. Be one with those who are to serve me, Blood-Arts: Ghouls Revival,\* the corpse rose anew, paler to the prior self, empty behind its glance, the orb was forced into the wrinkled forehead, “-I-I-I-let m-m-me g-g-go,” it pleaded.

“No,” he shrugged, \*snap,\* a black-portal summoned, “-éclair, I’m sending the first of five, it’s the maid, extract her soul and incorporate her knowledge into our system,” off the earpiece and into the fray, “-time moves, what will it be?” the stare settled.

“Killing her wasn’t impressive,” voiced Freddie in a shaky tone, ‘-I’m a billionaire, I’m worth more than these peasants. I have absolute power, I can get whatever I want, nothing matters. I won’t be scared, father said I’m one of the chosen bunch to lead this pitiful world, without me, it’ll all crumble. My name’s Freddie, everyone must bow down and worship me.’

“You’re not worth my time,” said Igna, “-the Mek dynasty is worthless compared to us. To prove so,” a display materialized yet again, this time, the prices of Weklo’s was in full-swing – the graph showed a pretty nice, green-colored curve, “-the brand seems to be doing well,” he tapped and the price dropped.

“What are you doing?”

“Nothing much,” he shrugged, “-I had a few of my men fly around the world to various shareholders your company is so proud of. Investors are in as long as there’s a benefit – as for Welko’s. well, let’s say I can drop the brand off the face of the earth.”

“You jest,” he laughed, “-no way a single person has so much influence.”

“Right,” he tapped the earlobe, “-éclair, sorry to bother again, kindly kill off Weklo’s prices, they’ve overstayed their welcome.”

Chapter 812: ‘-glory to the new king.’

A simple call asking for a massive company’s prices to drop. Little was known about their ways, and in fairness, none would ever know how the schemes were terrifying; lest being on the receiving end. The moment the meeting was called, Igna’s preparation to welcome guests began two if not three months prior. The importance of knowing one’s enemy, their tactics, and their fear – to win in negotiations, force, and intimidations, two of his closest companions. The moment éclair received his call, simultaneous messages were flung to various parts of the world. The coordinator, a little someone named Wendy, her organization went through major changes, first being the death of their leader and second, Phantom, more precisely, Raven’s intervention.

“He sure knows how to drive us through the mud,” she commented in jest. The message leaped onto éclair’s screen with a childish ding, “-now isn’t time for jokes,” he refuted, “-the timing needs be worked on,” he laid the phone face down, rose his chin to the grandness of his office, ‘-I pity them,’ he smirked and rolled a crystal ball about the dark-wood table.

Knives pressed on necks under the deceitful gaze of an unmanned alley. Lost in the pleasures of women, lured by the promise of greater riches, and lastly, intimidation from a greater force. The cases varied, in the first example, a certain man, a rich man, whose riches weren’t known to the world for they made sure their name to never be exposed, was ambushed in a port-town by spies from Raven’s surveillance sect. or the RSS for short, they brutally kidnapped the man, exposed his holdings within a dark-warehouse, dismissed any sliver of hope he had, and pressed forth with intent to stealing everything he owned. When all was said and done, upon being asked to willingly transfer shares of the company to some random shell company, he accepted. These types of ambush were effective and very risky, bystanders could interrupt the tête-à-tête, or worse, law enforcement of another jurisdiction. Sweat on the face and blood of their enemies on the knuckles, the spies threw waning glances at the ceiling – the pupils, never showing emotions or care. Following the physically intimate method of convincing, the means swaps for one known from the age of kingship. Since the beginning, men and women have been

used in various ways, may it be in bed or in others, to get their way. éclair's favorite, seduction, said part of the RSS' fragmentation had ties to the Prince of Lust, Asmodeus. He and his harem, the latter, bloodthirsty for the blood and bodily fluid of any gender and of any age, proved very effective. In recent weeks, a major political player in an independent kingdom was found escorting a member of Asmodeus' team, which goes to show how vast their network is.

Gentle murmurs in his ears, a younger-looking girl climbed her way onto the bedside of a visibly older gentleman. Disgusting as it seemed, the truth was there – fortunately for the girl, she bore the insignia of a succubus, and unfortunately for the lustful man, he found himself gagged by said girl and strangled. He drooled, gave satisfying moans at her rough treatment, “-old man,” she said in a polite-timid tone, “-are you finished? Pervert, if you want to play, I want more money, tell your wife to f-off, and let me be the reason for your spending.”

The mouth-gag undid, saliva dropped, “-anything you wish,” he turned and leaped onto the feeble figure, “-I'll do anything you want, just let me,” the eyes filled with lust, “-let me.”

“Old man,” she placed a finger on his lips, “-give me what I want, and I'll return the gift tenfold,” another shareholder lost himself at the hands of Asmodeus's wickedness. A few blocks down the street, within the same city, rises a skyscraper of class and prestige. On its side were brand names of multiple hotshots. An unknown director found himself in a lift accompanied by two guards, they showed the way to the top floor where a man, clad in jewelry and riches, flaunted his wealth at the unsuspecting man. The greed of more fortune had the director begging to sign a contract, “-I'll do anything, just give me money!” Before long, a clap had a few million transferred into the man's account – he stood stumped at the numbers of zeros, “-here,” the shares slid across the table, “-till we do business again.” Working vices and pulling the strings in their favor hence arrived at the conference table.

Igna sat calmly, the splattered blood grew to harbor an ominous iron smell, “-you jest,” said Freddie, “-the chart has to be a fake.”

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“Oh, by all means, have a look on thy phone.”

‘We've been bought out... the shareholders up and left, I don't get it,’ he rose a belligerent glare at Igna, “-was this you!”

“Yes.”

“HOW DARE YOU.”

“Shut up, the whole ego of being the leader has overstayed its welcome. You're not of any use, this table didn't need an old maid, and it sure doesn't need the spoiled brat of some age-old dynasty.”

“Karma will strik-”

“I don't care,” a casual flick thrust the man down and onto the wall, “-may thee have a painless death,” the shock from the impact imploded internal organs, the skull cracked as did the back, \*Blood-Arts: Bloody-Mary,\* the gore-filled remains earnestly followed a path of scarlet crimson. It formed as if an apple being unpeeled; the shiny fruit hovered above his palm.

“Pardon my asking, majesty, will you be killing everyone?”

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“Good question, Jonny. I’m sure the answer is self-explanatory.”

“We either side or are killed,” commented Marie, “-am I to assume I’m going to die?” she stretched onto her seat, pulling up her arms as far as she could, “-sucks to die here, well, either this or I’d have died in an explosion or something.”

“Marie Jude, regardless of the outcome, you will not be dying. Instead, I want thy talents in working for Phantom.”

“Make weapons?” her expression slumped, ‘-another guy interested in weapons, and not what I want to make. This is pointless, I thought he’d understand, so much for being a researcher... best agree to his terms and get this done with.’

“No,” he returned, “-forget that. You are to research whatever thee wishes,” he smiled, “-consider it my way of caging your talents.”

A shimmer crossed her vacant stare, “-I don’t have to design weapons?”

“No,” he laughed, “-I have a policy of living and let live. Yes, I’m selfish when applying the saying, what can I say, those I deem worthy to be left alive, will not die needlessly. Take Jonny for example,” the remaining duo turned their faces towards him, “-the man has but one thought, and tis the sight of me killing Freddie and lady Guznov. You think me a heartless murderer?”

“N-no...”

“No use. I won’t say I dislike it, however, dying for the sake of dying is pointless. My words are very one-sided, I most enjoy killing for the sake of serving my end objective. In a way, it’s nothing more than a farmer spreading pesticide to safeguard his crops.”

“Hate to say it, I don’t know what to think anymore. His majesty has shown many faces, to the public is a warm and gentle soul, relatable to the people, and behind doors a cruel man far scarier than Queen Gallienne at her prime. I’d hate to lose my life. I never understood the appeal of begging for one’s life, which is why, I’ve decided to place my fate and existence in thy hand, majesty. Kill me, save me, I care not, what occurs will be under the judgment of lady Tharis,” he motioned a gesture related to the goddess’s scale of law.

Igna turned his focus onto Johna, “-slept your way here?”

“No,” he shook his head, “-I was chosen by the prior representative. Made it here somehow.”

“Johna Et, you think me a fool, don’t you?”

“Whatever do you mean?”

“Sleeping your way to the top. If life was that easy, don’t you think everyone would be standing tall and mighty? I knew something was off the moment we exchanged greetings, the way you spoke and

changed according to my responses. The act of getting nonchalantly inside a person's intimate barrier, tell me, why is a spy of the Empire working hard for the sake of another kingdom?"

"You knew," the fa?ade dropped, "-I underestimated his majesty's information network. I'm a native of Iqavea, my parents were killed under the pretense of worshiping another god. Tis there, I found myself in the good graces of the resistance. By some lucky outcome, I grew close to two individuals, Lord Avon and Lady Auic. We lost contact a decade or so ago, the last mission assigned was to go and live a full life in Hidros. They always spoke highly of the one who gave them their freedom. They had a child, don't know where she's at or what happened. In my life there, I was enlisted in a noble house and worked as a spymaster. I resembled more as a girl when I was younger, it made sneaking into houses and killing my targets simpler. My story's very boring, I managed to get out of said life under the pretense of serving the noble house. I suppose seducing the daughter and his wife helped in my favor."

"Prince charming, how lovely to meet you," commented Jonny.

"Cracking jokes..." narrowed Marie, "-majesty, I want more information on the nature of what I ought to do."

"Wait a moment, what about me, I'm a spy, will I be killed or what?" Questions on top of questions, it reached a point where the cacophony grew silent. Thoughts of the future and how to best act on the new pawns showed themselves, "-be quiet."

"Here's what will happen going forward. Ariel will be dismissed; the duties will be taken over by me and my companions. Johna Et, focus on thy life as a star, the performance in the previous movie was very nice. Look after Aceline, we haven't spoken much after the whole marriage debacle. I'll be happy as long as she finds happiness. Keep her away from the life of drug and lust, I know tis a tall order, consider it a request from a friend?"

"A friend?" he exhaled, "-I'm glad," the face brightened, "-thank you."

A glance at Jonny Dyale, "-I'm afraid I can't let thee run free. You have too much influence over the noble houses. Starting from today, thou art be the mediator for the King's faction to the Noble faction."

"Way to add on the pressure," he shrugged, "-consider it done, my lord."

"Also, I've prepared a chamber at the hospital for your little sister. She was afflicted by her majesty's illness, right?"

"-How did?"

"Never underestimate the king's network," he winked.

"Thank you," he bowed and slammed his head onto the table.

Igna moved onto a very erratic and excited Marie, '-me, me, me,' said her visage.

"Marie Jude will be transferred to Phantom's independent research sector. The team's led by a very rude old man, he can be a pain to work with. If you get along with him, consider thy life set."

"..."

'She's still confused,' he fixed his glasses, "-you'll be working freelance at one of the laboratories. Doing research of your choosing, understand?"

"OH YEAH?"

"Yes," he nodded, "-with that settled, I decree the Ariel organization to be defunct," the doors opened with a line of energetic maids. Each took to wiping the blood.

"Johna," called Igna.

"Majesty?" he stopped shy of the entrance, Jonny and Marie were too preoccupied in their conversation to pay attention, the chatter soon faded into the corridor.

"Here's an address," he handed a small handwritten note, "-Auic and Avon's daughter is well, she's an adventurer. Go pay her a visit," on that, the king veered away from the crowd and disappeared. 'he knows what I wanted,' the knees weakened, '-glory to the new king.'

### Chapter 813: The Sadian People

Far north, over the mountain peaks of the Dorchestrian landscape, after the lands runs into the sea, and where the sea continues till another continent, reaches a place where sailors pray to the lady of the sea for good fortune and safe passage. The sea was bountiful, and how much gave was naught compared to how much she took, the graveyard of the Arie Bay, the cursed sea of the southern sea-port of Meltia.

"They're over the border," cried soldiers wearing Alphian uniform. Night conquered the faded evening hue, street lanterns lit. The sandy stone paths, muddled by the wet footwear of the various traders and visitors, headed within the town-wall. The stone barrier perimeter around Meltia, tall and ominous, bore the crest of the church shy off the main entrance. Guards atop said barrier ran to and fro – as it happened, Meltia, located inside Ease was one of five provinces consisting the country of Waiwia.

"What's the matter?" inquired a gray-haired lady.

"Highness," they bowed, "-the enemy has launched an attack," reported the man, "-a force of a few thousand made their way around the Akine Mountain range. Orders have been given to fortify the forward outpost."

"Very brave of them, the number of men who die traversing the Akine mountain reaches into the hundreds. I wonder if the Emperor has gone insane," she spun and glanced at the array of roofs and winding paths of which ended at the sea, on the port.

"Attack!" rang bells throughout the town, "-WE'RE UNDER ATTACK!" Movement at said port ran inward. A green-hue enveloped the lady, her grey hair soon swayed indifferent to the flowing wind.

'An attack?' she dove straight for the town-center, houses were lit ablaze. A band of leathery-armored bearded men slaughtered their way inside, blood-washed their faces, the innocent dropped at their feet. Amidst the smokey cacophony, she scanned and locked on a sword readying its blade at a child's neck, "-STOP!" palm to the attack, the sword crumbled into nothing.

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"If it's not the princess of Alphaia," said a tall beast ruffling through the army of giants. Light but gave a glimpse in form of an outline. A wave of the hand sent the attacker, who in all respect was muscular and intimidating, against an adjacent wall. The petrified little kid stared the man of which had reached the size of a house, "-scurry along, kid," he said, "-when we kill, we kill without discrimination. Tis the way of the Sadian people."

"HIGHNESS!" soldiers from Alphaia swarmed the empty space between her and him, "-please take cover!" they said, "-we'll take care of them, worry not."

"Worry they say," thundered the beast, "-take it from a man who's lived on the edge of insanity. Once blood flows, we stop at nothing to take everything," he rose, straightened the slouched position into looking above few walls, "-HEAR ME ALL!" the voice resounded, "-SHOW THEM WHAT THE SADIAN PEOPLE CAN DO!" a blow of a horn rattled the pensive silence, "-eat to thy heart's content!"

"YAAHHHH!" walks leaped into sprints, the mass of warriors increased, they seemed to multiply in the shadows. Skills and spells were conjured on the Alphian side, guns were fired, the echoes flashed down alleys and silent roads, alas, greater trouble brewed over the wall. The hired army, after losing many men on their march, successfully captured the Mountain pass outpost. From there, vehicles loaded with blood-thirsty men drove into town – what followed was a scene unlike any she had seen. People were cut down, women were taken, children put onto curbs and stomped, there was no hiding.

The princess' attempts at fighting was returned with a brazen chuckle, "-superhuman powers aren't effective on us," said the beast, "-listen to me," he grabbed her throat and squeezed, "-we evolved to harbor the blood of Exnia, the dragon-kin of the Northwest."

"Enough," said a band of silhouettes dressed in white and gold, "-Erak, your duty was to capture the town without casualties," a light-haired man leaped and floated down to the beast's shoulder.

"Lord Kure," the grip eased, "-I thought this princess was supposed to be strong. I'm disappointed."

'Strong,' she barely breathed, '-my powers are being nullified,' desperate attempts at checking her surrounding ended in vain.

"You want to look around?" he grinned, "-then, LOOK!" Red, red, red, nothing but red, ambers of fire in the distance, broken houses, naked women, they pillaged, raped and took everything.

"Barbarians," said the man in white, "-let the princess live. She's worth her weight in gold."

"She's attractive, I'd like to have a taste of royalty."

"No, no," said the light-haired man, "-would be wise to listen," a heaviness rose the hair on his back, a pair of scarlet-colored pupils went up and down.

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"Bringing that thing here?" the grip eased, "-I've seen barbarians in my day, she's worse than us, and it's saying something." The band of white drifted at the pace to surround the immobile princess.

"War is a funny thing," said the man, "-they're allowed to kill and pillage. The gods have granted us full authority in choosing who is to live," the seemingly innocent gaze wrapped into a sadistic dance, "-princess Lofta..."

“Enough, you’re scaring the prisoner,” cuffed tightly gripped her wrists.

Face in his palm, “-forgive me, I got lost in the moment. We report to the bishop. Kill the remaining survivors – the cleansing of Meltia will be completed under the cleansing full-moon.”

“Are you going to lock me up?” she coughed, the location swapped for a lonesome roof-top. The light-haired man had his shoulder against a chimney, the view gave onto a fierce town square. Survivors were rounded – many were burnt on stakes, and some beheaded. The process wasn’t easy, a blunt ax meant a few swings – the screams grew to be a melody quite common to his ears.

The clean-shaven jaw casually veered in her direction, where she knelt with hands and feet tied to the very same chimney, “-alive are we?”

A crude annoyed glare returned, this, broke the man’s composed frown, “-scowling won’t do much. Well, my sister did do a number on that pretty little visage of yours. She hates pretty things, especially those who are loved. I imagine, a torn face without a nose is something of a fetish to some?” he shuffled and knelt, “-yes, to the desperate sinners who live under the capital, working their day and night powering the furnace with their mana. You’ll make a great distraction,” he grabbed her chin, “-a very great distraction. Imagine the line of men waiting to have a shot at making love to someone else than their fellow comrades.”

“Do what you wish,” she lunged forth in attempts to bite his finger, “-I’ll never yield, never!”

“Never?” he stood and kicked, the foot cleanly took her head and threw her towards the end, “-look there,” he jumped and stood on her bleeding head, “-they’re being cleansed under the moon. Perhaps the same is to happen to you, worshipper of the heathen gods. The church always has and always will have the power to rival the world. We’re the righteous one, our god is the epitome of power and strength, nothing like the pagan gods you worship.”

Her blurry sight barely made sense of the devastation, “-someone will come,” she coughed, “-and when that someone comes... you’ll all pay. I believe in him,” she pushed to voice her resolve, “-my death will serve a single purpose,” she pushed herself off the edge, “-and tis to piss off the slumbering devil,” the body hit the cold floor with a few cracks.

“What happened to the prisoner?” inquired a returning figure in white.

“She committed suicide,” he said, “-her resolve to die was admirable. Sinners they are – all living things have a say in how they die. Whether we decide or not, tis for the gods to oversee. What did the bishop say?”

“He asks for Lord Paladin to gather the Guardian Saints of the four cardinal sects. His imperial majesty has decreed for us to take action against Easel Run Gard.”

“It’s about time,” he laughed, “-I will make sure they listen to us. What of the summoned heroes?”

“They’re serving a great purpose in giving their love and compassion to our servants. Many of the devotees have been blessed with their seed.”

“Good, the stronger the hero, the more potent his offspring to be. The new archbishop sure is a man without limits. I admire him,” they leaped, “-our job is complete.”

'I survived, I can't feel my legs, the restraints are off,' a greenish hue covered her body, 'I have to make it to the settlement, even if it kills me, I have to make it home.'

11th January X111 – a few weeks elapsed since the breaking of Ariel. Much deliberation went into the people's council, and after much effort, the Gaien Council grew to their own meeting. They rose many issues by the current regime – Alta and her overwhelmingly combative spirit shot down various selfish claims. To have a say, one needed a good argument, and good arguments are often met by the strongest of rebuttal. In a way, the bait of the people's council was but a distraction method to veer the public's attention to the change of power. In the end, a new hierarchy took precedence over the rulership. Igna sat at the top – it was decided only matters needing his assistance would be brought to the table, in addition to the ease in workload, as king, he had full authority to introduce new policies without consulting anyone. A royal decree was and still remains the strongest shot a king can use.

The council of nobles and people, even though the name Gaien was objectively made in favor of the people, two factions accepted the shared name. Nobles represented the royal faction as for the people faction, they were represented by traders and competent leaders chosen by the people. They had a voice in how the kingdom moved forward.

"The meeting ended without incidents," said éclair.

"Yes, the debates were grounded and realist. We've appeased the masses, right?"

"Not really, we have the matter pertaining to the revolting faction led by the Goldberg dynasty. Many Counts and Barons have sided with them."

"I see," they made echoes around the castle, "-have Jonny make his way to their estate."

"Will do, majesty," the corridor ended into an open-space of statues and paintings, "-majesty!" hailed a voice to the side.

"Alta," the fast-pace walk halted, "-it's about Glenda," she said, "-the town's under strain from overpopulation."

"The food?"

"We're importing most of it, I asked the villages for help..."

"But they refused, it's the changing of the seasons. Have the dwarves extent the town, we'll go into Noctis's hallow. I'm sure the Blood-King faction will accept long as we give them access."

"Won't the nightwalkers be a problem?"

"No, the only problem they have is boredom, have lady Elvira handle the negotiations. I'm sure Serene might be able to pull strings, speaking of which, what's Julius up to?"

"He's taken for Easel Run Gard earlier this week.'

"So much happening. I'll fly Starix from Alphaia, he'll help us manage till we're able to steady our breathing."

“Understood, majesty,” and thus, the very energetic Alta skipped her way outside the hall. There was a change, Igna granted her the Nox’s clan curse – she became a nightwalker, one very strong and of Marchioness rank.

“I’ll excuse myself,” bowed éclair, “-later, my lord.”

“Take care,” he smiled, “-prime minister.”

“Ha-ha.”

The hectic day-to-day life finally allowed a moment’s break. He took off the suit jacket and made way for the Queen’s study, a stacked library of olden books and oval-shaped terrace gave onto the Rosespire’s cityscape.

“It’s you,” said an audibly irritated voice.

“Right,” he stepped inside, “-it’s the promiscuous queen.”

“What?”

“You heard me,” he climbed the stairs.

“And I wish I didn’t,” she lounged in skimpily on a beanbag, the face always mused in a book, “-I’m not fooling around with anyone. I made the vow, a lady never makes wrong on her word.”

“Good,” he flung his jacket onto a nearby couch.

“Would it be hard to keep a conversation?”

“Depends, but I have the feeling you’d rather read than talk.”

“Good assessment.”

Chapter 814: Eia Riverty-Haggard

‘Eia Riverty-Haggard, the queen of Hidros, in name only. What did I do to deserve this, I wanted to live a peaceful life far away in a village. Living from day to day, going to work in the morning, returning home in the afternoon, being greeted by the man I loved and admired. My life now isn’t the same,’ the queen often spent her long afternoons in the study, ‘-this place brings me peace and joy. Mother’s collection of books, and her journey. I admit, looking inside them was a little awkward, many names came up, many names with whomst she had joined in explicit relations. It’s been more than a few months since my marriage with my mother’s affectionate half-son or whatever. She treated him with more respect than she did me and my father. Life at the palace’s not the same. Everyone’s running frantically looking for a task to accomplish. Many guests stay the night, and at night – at the back of the castle, there’s often the echoes of distant gunshots. Not uncommon for the ill-advised guests to go missing.’ \*Ding,\* she glanced at her phone, ‘-a message?’ she pinched the device curiously, ‘-let’s see,’ it closed to her face, ‘-ah, I see,’ the title read, \*Urgent,\* and from Goldberg.

“Greetings, honored Queen of Hidros. My name’s Katherine Goldberg, the heir to the Goldberg dynasty. Congratulations on thy marriage, or so I’d like to say. We currently reside in Dorchester and shelter a man by the name of Nicola Vonhen Hart. He is positively sure that her majesty has been brainwashed into

the marriage. This may be old news, however, many of the nobles aren't exactly happy with the new king's way of bringing change. He doesn't care for the Riverty name, nor does he care about the cultures that set's us apart. A resisting army is being rallied secretly – my mother's doing her best to recruit PMC's from Iqavea. To make our conquest legitimate, I need thy help, please, become the reason for us to rescue the crown from the king's clutches. He needs to be taught that with great power comes great risk. 'Twould be unwise to attack him head-on, instead, we're following an already proven method. Thank you for reading the message," the big slab's of wood suddenly clicked into a low 'douf', there, in the entry, stood the man in question. A moment's worry washed her visage, the phone slip through her grip and fell onto the bag, her other hand immediately brought the romance novel to her glabella.

'Why now,' she wondered, the heart eased, '-why did he have to come now?' she snuck a glance above the hardcover, they exchanged a few words and he found himself outside. The refreshing whiff broke the mundane inside. Dressed in tight shorts, an oversized sleeve shirt, of which her shoulders were exposed, jet-black hair tied in a high-bun. She pushed big-round glasses up her nose, moved her slender legs onto the wooden floor, slipped her feet into slippers, and stood. Crumbs from previous adventures in the world of pastries snowed at her feet. She cared none for the mess, stretched loudly, threw both phone and book on said beanbag, and shuffled outside. 'Look at him,' her eyes narrowed, '-always cool and composed. Is there nothing to shake his demeanor? By all means, casually lit a cigar and watch the view... I don't get him.' The tame whiff screamed at her oily visage, "-cold," she commented.

"Rare for the queen to make herself open for conversation," he puffed, "-what brings you out here, should you not be trying new pastries?"

"I certainly don't sit around all day eating snakes. I also workout," she said proudly, "-what's with you," they stood a meter apart, "-the elated king never makes his way into the study."

"Being focused on one task makes one blind the greater picture. This place is great to stand back and look at what is being accomplished. I'd have opted to take a trip to the manor... sadly, a few messages have my attention."

"And?"

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"And what?" he puffed, "-does it matter to you?"

"Igna Haggard."

"Yes, Eia Riverty-Haggard, or should I call thee by thy lover's family name?"

"You're such a pain," she breathed an exasperated sigh.

"I know," he smiled, "-hence the reason why I do my best to be as standoffish as I possibly can," he turned side-ways and leaned, "-is something on your mind?"

"You have a heart?"

"No, I tore it out, remember?"

"Oh..." her visage dulled, "-I forgot, you immortal f-freak."

“The mask is slipping,” he chuckled, “-can’t hide from the fact that we are married. I’m not opposed to us being friends, anything more than that, well, your feelings for Nicola are tangible. I see and smell it even now, the scent of thy yearning for a chance to hear his voice, a chance to see and meet-”

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Quick to avert his gaze, “-stop,” she turned to the view, “-I have to forget about him. It’s part of being a noble, we don’t have the right to pick our lovers. Well, in a way, I thought I could get away from said life, I really wanted to run... never mind, enough about me, what about you?”

“Not much going on, just cleaning the trash from Hidros’s face. The population seems to have accepted my claim as legit. I became the people’s king, it’s great. We have a new way of coming to terms with decisions – it moves smoothly. To protect us from the outside, the inside must grow united,” he puffed and crushed the stick against the marble balustrade, “-onto the real reason I’m here. Eia, the message you received, what will you do?”

“What do you mean?”

“You said eloping earlier, you should have done so. I mean, if my wife runs away, not my fault – she got what she wanted, and lives a life of her own choosing. It would have meant giving up the Riverty name, as for me, I’d have figured a way to make my claim legit. Besides, my older sister, Eira, is the first child of her majesty, I’m sure said link alone would have sufficed. The rules changes according to who needs to be in power and who ought to be forgotten.”

“What?” she took a step, grabbed the balustrade, and stared at him coldly, “-are you saying I could have run away with my lover?”

“Yes,” he said, “-the only thing you needed was a sacrifice, which is me. I’d take the burden, which I already am doing. Baffles me to think the daughter of Gallienne, a woman whose shrewdness knew no bounds, to have an illiterate child in the ways of intrigue, what a waste of excellent genes.”

“Sorry I’m not like my mother,” she shrugged, “-maybe talking to you about my issues could have been resolved...”

“Yes, if only a certain someone swallowed her pride and anger...”

“I understand, don’t rub it in.”

“Eia,” he said coldly, “-will you join the resistance or not?”

“Huh?”

“The message,” he said, “-not to sound overly stalkish, my butler has a firm hold on every message which goes through the castle’s servers. What will it be?”

“I don’t know,” she said, “-if I join the Goldberg’s revolt, I could become one with Nicola,” upon saying his name, her eyelashes fluttered, “-but no,” the fading spark washed in a cold-blue, “-my selfishness will only bring turmoil to the continent. I’m not daft, I know what happens in and outside the castle. I heard you went out of your way to open an orphanage, a hospital, and a residential complex to help alleviate poverty, most of all, you paid from pocket. To sacrifice so much for the sake of strangers, I could never...”

“Listen,” he said, “-what I did was for publicity’s sake. To become a king for the people, I ought to grant them their wishes at first. After that, I’ll ask for them to slowly return into society as functioning residents, all and all, the more workers, the more tax they pay, and eventually, the money will make its way into the castle’s coffers. A win for my kingdom is a win for me, I will spare no expense in making this place self-sufficient, a place where everyone with a dream, conviction, and the will to work hard, has an opportunity at finding fame and fortune. In a way, I want Rosespire to become like Ogdawoan, the city of dreams.”

“...” she but watched, her ears closed to what he said.

“Listen Eia, I don’t want the bond of marriage to shackle thee to the palace. You’re my wife, and I have a responsibility as thy husband. I’ve killed who I was before, I’m a new man, a strange man. I won’t promise happiness nor will I promise superficial matters. Eia, freedom is a great responsibility, do with it what thee wish. Help me save the people, help me make the kingdom better, or serve yourself. The right choice is always the one with less regret, long as you don’t feel worse in the end, I say it’s the correct option.”

“Even if it means I willingly give myself, in body and soul, to another man for the sake of not having regret, what then?”

“If it’s what you truly want, I couldn’t argue. The saying applies to anyone. Part of me would feel betrayed since the bonds of marriage are rules to tighten the scope of the allocated freedom,” a sudden urge rose, he slapped himself, “-forget what I said, do what you want.”

“A thinker,” she said, “-I don’t think I can ever love someone as much as I’ve loved Nicola. Relationship ends, people move on, time changes, I don’t have time to stay in the past,” she stepped closer, “-let’s be friends?”

“Be friends?” he tilts his head in a friendly chuckle, “-what would you do if I killed Nicola?”

“Killed?”

“Depending on how the revolt goes – people will die, and I certainly don’t want to make claims of saving an enemy.”

“... I don’t know. Survival of the fittest?”

“There, I knew you had Gallienne’s blood running through thy veins,”

Hard knocks barged the door opened, “-MAJESTY, WE HAVE TROUBLE!”

“See you later, Eia. I hope we grow to understand one another,” she watched, ‘-a strange man. The vampiric allure is there, talking with him made me forget about Nicola. Is it his charisma or is there something more to his personality? Doesn’t concern me,’ the heart pulsed, ‘-Nicola...’ she bit her inner-lips, ‘-we have to... SHI’ the inner thoughts turned grit, “-DAMN IT!”

“What is it?” the corridors blurred in the sudden rush, “-Kion, tell me?”

“Igna,” they increased their sprint into superhuman speed, “-I went to investigate the spot said to have been disturbed by a teleportation spell. I scoured the entire Frozit Mountain range. Spent the past week

camping,” a portal materialized immediately after the castle gates, “-take a look for yourself,” he said. The momentum sent the duo off the peak of a mountain.

“KION!” he exclaimed, “-should have said something about being high in the AIR?”

“Sorry?”

Wings sprawled, he reached and caught the hero, “-where is it?”

“There,” he pointed to the northwest, further into the unforgiving land of trees and deadly pits and sharp valleys, “-look for a smoke signal.”

The dirt ground was damp, the trees old, and the fledging underbelly made of smaller plants fought hard for a sliver of sunlight. Growls and sneers were commonplace, a disturbance in the untouched land caught their eyes, “-there,” said Kion, “-I found her locked in a cell made of ice.”

‘A cage of ice?’ the reflection made observations hard, ‘-who in the hell?’ he straddled the oval-shaped object, “-why did it make you so afraid?”

“Look inside.”

‘Blood, the leg’s practically hanging,’ he examined, ‘-that hair color, the face’s scarred beyond recognition,’ finally, he locked onto the necklace, ‘-I remember that tag, Loftha...’

“Majesty?”

“Kion,” he unmounted the cell, “-speak of this to no one. Head on back to Alphaia, I’m sure Odgar will need manpower soon.”

Chapter 815: United Nations of Alrosia

So, it would seem, carnage ensued over Alphaia’s Melmark. One of the many buildings the royal family-owned, at the foot, similar to ants gathering around a fallen sugar cube – was replaced by armored cars and various individuals dressed in boots and ties. The elevator worked double. A stream of similarly dressed figures made for the reception – the lady, barely in her late-twenties, sweated buckets by the number of requests and appointments. Break at 10:23, a white car swam through the crowd, made its way under the shade of an ebony tree, had guards gathered around a door to which clicked. Inside, pale legs turned, white hair shimmered, Empress Eira made her appearance, light-blue makeup in the shade of ice, froze the outside with a glance. The stuffed lift emptied, she took a firm stance and rose.

At the entrance of the top floor, the handle clicked, “-majesty, if nothing is done, we’ll lose the war. I don’t see anything we can do, the princess has gone missing, I’m sure you know the implication of such a loss. IF NOTHING IS DONE, WE’RE DOOMED, PLEASE!” the one-way assault halted, the emperor had his head behind a holographic screen, the heavy-toned man at the counter kept a stern gaze – the interruption forced a side-glance, he looked, saw ice, froze still.

“Pardon my tone,” he bowed, “-good day, empress,” he smiled in her direction and made for the door.

“What was that about?” she inquired calmly.



“Sorry,” the stressed frown which invited wrinkles, glanced up at Eira, “-I’m sorry I didn’t return home. Things here are worsening... I’m fearful of what is going to happen,” he stood, “-you shouldn’t be here,” he glanced at her protruding belly, “-what of our little babe?”

“I’m taking care of myself,” she refuted, “-the babe’s fine. Tell me,” she took a seat and settled, “-I overheard something about Loftha, how is she?”

“I don’t know. We received reports yesterday – the hold we had over the Empire was raided and seized. Everyone’s dead, the few survivors gave short, incomprehensible reports, I’m at a loss for words.”

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“Loftha, what about her?”

“I don’t know, the battle happened a few weeks prior, tis only now we got the news. Communication’s gone dark... I mean,” the hands, rogue to him, as he leaned at the front of his desk, made nervous scratching gestures against a rubber paper-weight.

“Don’t hold out on me,” she voiced, “-the bad habit’s showing again.”

“Here goes nothing,” he inhaled, “-Loftha was spotted being killed by the hand of the Paladin, the witness said it was too dark and flames too bright to take notice, despite that, I know you want to say he might have been mistaken – the witness’s a sniper, he has a sharp vision. If he says she was assaulted, I have no reason to doubt the man... makes me sad, honestly, to imagine her being killed.”

“Hey, hey,” she glazed across, “-aren’t you taking the news a bit too calmly?”

“Eira, I’m sorry, I can’t act out on my emotions. Even if I wanted to lash out, there’s no way I’ll be able to. I want to hide, live out our lives as a couple expecting a child. What am I left with, a war which signifies if ever the world has a chance to strike at the Church and the Wracia Empire? I had hoped the Federation to be around, they went and disbanded, Elendor... it’s hard, always being wary of those in my entourage. I can’t even eat before doing an appraisal of the meal, tis how bad the anxiety has gotten.”

“Loftha’s not dead,” she said, “-I wish I could join the front-line...”

\*Ding,\* a message rang loudly, “-the northern border’s being pushed back. A fleet of a few dozen, including motherships, has been spotted at 3 days from Whuotan’s northern sea.”

“What?” he leaped behind the monitor; the radar flashed the movements.”

The heavy Eira pushed herself against the armrest, “-where are you headed?” fired a troubled emperor.

“To stop the enemy,” she said, “-We both know I’m the strongest in the whole of Alpha. I’ll freeze the sea and rain an onslaught of spikes. Forget not, I have within me the shard of Gergusser, the lady of ice, an ancient dragon.” Their eyes crossed, the husband rose softly, gently took steps towards the door, locked his arm around the handle, rose his clean-shaven chin at Eira, “-no.”

“Pardon?”

“No,” he smiled, “-no is no, do you understand?”

“What about the continent?”

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“We’ll figure another way out,” he said, “-we’ve lost Loftha already, I’m not going to lose my precious wife and daughter. Hell no, weak as I am, I’ll take to the battlefield instead. There’s no way I’m giving up, NO WAY IN HELL.”

“Adamant?” she exhaled and resettled, “-what then, allow the church to take over the northern province. Our forces are exhausted, they want to rest. This battle, might I remind you, will determine if Alpha wins to create an atmosphere for each nation to a few months and rest. Tis not uncommon for nations to agree on a truce for the sake of the troops, then again, if the Empire wins, they’ll take the momentum to use it to crash on our shores. It’ll be the greatest tsunami to ever hit our shores, do you know the implications?”

\*Ding, ding,\* her phone buzzed, “-who is calling at such an hour?” said her frown, the caller had, ‘-little devil,’ plastered in bold red, “-greetings, King of Hidros, I apologize for turning down the coronation.”

“Drop the formal talk, sis, there wasn’t a ceremony, rather use the money for a better cause. By the way,” a notification riddled her screen, “-toggle on video.”

“Ok?” she set the device on a glass table, it sparked a view of rainbows to project a corn within which a clear image of what Igna showed displayed, “-here’s what we found.” White and numerous laboratory instruments lined in a suspended shelf at the backdrop of the main piece, an oval-shaped ice-cage placed atop an operating table, “-princess Loftha used a teleportation scroll I gave her a few years ago. It must have been a bad situation; there’s a pulse and her mana is recovering. The ice’s prevented her mutilated limbs from going necrotic.”

“Is Loftha there?” the emperor leaped into the shot.

“Good to see you, brother-in-law. Seems my sister’s not taking too much stress. She’s at a crucial stage, expecting an heir must be a great responsibility.”

“I know...”

“Igna,” she took command, “-what are you going to do?”

“I’ll ask a friend to take care of her injuries. He’s a great healer, the man known for reviving the dead. I can’t say much about her brain injuries, looks to me she’s barely alive, the moment the ice is undone, the applied pressure may explode the rupture. Nothing’s a guarantee, we’ll try our best to bring her to a calm recovery.”

“Igna...”

“Yes?”

“Why are you hiding her face?” narrowed Eira.

“I was hoping you wouldn’t notice,” he casually scratched the back of his head, “-take it from me, you don’t want to see her right now.”

“Igna...”

“Yes, emperor?”

“I have a favor to ask...”

“Is the immense army making way to Alpha?”

“How did-”

“I have my connections,” the video-stream died into only voice, “-I also had reports of a possible attack on Easel Run Gard. We’ve become the hub for energy production, don’t want to brag... however, at least 90% of the world want’s a piece of the technology Phantom’s developed. It wouldn’t be long until we’re able to create a town-sized airship to fly and conquer the sky. A floating city sounds like a fantasy, one I’d like to make real.”

“You can’t help?”

“Now, now,” he exhaled, “-I owe Alpha a great deal. As the little brother to sister Eira, I have an obligation to work for her help in bringing peace to the Ardanian people. The situation’s changed, I represent Hidros – the politics won’t allow me to move so freely.”

“Igna,” interjected Eira, “-what of the Federation, I heard it was disbanded.”

“Yes, true it was.”

“And Ariel, that too was disbanded.”

“Very true.”

“Not to mention, the Gaien Council. Little brother, I might be imagining this, doesn’t it look more of a clearing of the path for a new alliance to be formed?”

“Right,” he chuckled, “-my wise older sister, I’d hope someone picked up on my intent. I had to settle the kingdom first before moving into a new alliance. Since our families are already tied by the bonds of marriage – won’t be hard for Alpha and Hidros to form a new pact in the war against Iqavea.”

“Wait, wait, wait,” interjected the emperor, “-if we were to make a new alliance; my hands are pretty tied...”

“Don’t matter,” he shrugged, “-forget the conglomerates, what’s important, the safety of the people or a few one-percenters?”

“Put that way... fine. What do you propose?”

“The foundation of new power, the United Nations of Alrosia, and yes, it will include Arda and Easel Run Gard – we’ll add more members as time progresses. My vision for us is to become a haven for the weaker kingdoms, a place for refugees and immigrants to find peace.”

“United Nations of Alrosia. The name has a nice ring – Igna, an astute of thy caliber must know of the rough path which lain itself before us if we are to take said route.”

“What’s life without conflict?” he smirked, “-Hidros and Alpha, Haggard and Sultria. Let’s make it happen, our people already share a bond from Eira and Aceline’s effort, we’re tight as a community of non-humans. They understand us, and we understand them, we’re xenophobic to other nations. I say – the cultural sharing over the Arcanum set to ferment for decades has made it the obvious choice going forward, being alone won’t do much good. Loners tend to stick in a groups, yes, sounds very paradoxical, yet, tis true.”

‘It’s a good offer,’ he thought, ‘Igna’s making good points. I was scared of relying on other people to save myself. Even when he demands favors, the latter is very considerate and only serves to better him without making us seem worse. He has a history of great decisions, the collapse of the great name Haggard’s only served to fling his name over the barriers of normalcy. Take the dive, I have to take the dive!’

“We agree,” interjected Eira, “-I’ll use my powers as Empress and Archbishop of the Church of Qhildir to make the union legitimate.”

“There we have it,” said Igna, “-tis the founding of a new union of nations. Tis on a bigger scale to what the Federation was thought to be.”

“How long till you make it to Alpha?”

“Shortest, a few hours,” he laughed, “-I’ll fly over the fleet. Do make way for the sea-side estate, the places far suited for a war council,” the call ended.

“Majesty!” a troubled man blasted into the sterile laboratory, “-pardon my intrusion. We have a report from a fishing boat, a smaller fleet is headed for Easel Run Gard. They spotted the Church’s insignia...”

“Perfect, thank you for the information, I’ll take it from here,” it fell silent, ‘-Brother-in-law swallowed his pride and cultural norm to accept help. It’s my time to rely on my heirs,’ he motioned a few symbols in the air, four portals opened.

“Hello,” he said.

“POPS!” cried Draconis running into a tight embrace, “-long time no see.”

“We hung out a few days ago.”

“Draconis, it’s a bad time,” observed Raphael, the duo of Vanesa and Saniata held frowns, the tense atmosphere spoke of trouble.

“He’s right,” echoed Igna, “-we’re going to war,” he said, “-Been a while since I’ve asked for help. How about it, would you help your old man out in battle?”

“Pops?” they all tilted their head, “-we aren’t kids more,” winked Draconis, “-if its blood, we’ll take blood.”

“We’ll make our instructors proud,” each of them bore the blessing of the gods on their neck, they grew over the years, Igna could but stand and genuinely smile, ‘-they’re the best.’

Chapter 816: Heroes of War

13th January X111, offshore to Yeun bay of the northwest of Whuotan – the arrays of multiple ships laid in weight. The insignia upon the vessels were of the Imperial allied army, in the current entourage were two-motherships, known to the world as Kel and Del, the fortresses of the sea. Part of the reason why the empire stood as a sea-fighting monster was the very dedicated researchers.

Compared to Phantom's ability of airstrikes, the oppositions focused on long-distance projectiles to be fired from anywhere in the world. Since the ships were at sea, there need not be the worry of fueling in mid-air. The pros and cons of each variant balance themselves.

Inland, if one were to walk from the shore of Yeun's beach to the inclined hills, the rocky valleys, dense forest, and virgin from human intervention, a third of the province laid in green and gray.

"FIGHT TILL WE DIE!" echoed along with an abandoned mine of which borrowed from one side of the mountain and exited at the opposite extremity. Consider it to be the main path of invasion into Yeun beach, there was merit in holding the passage, supplies, and easy evacuation for once. The risk of toppling the structure remained nil as mages from both sides focused much of their energy on reinforcing the pillars. For a shaft, the height rose to be three time's the size of an average man and wide enough to harbor a road. Barricades of sand, broken vehicles, exploded tanks, blocked any direct passage as well as give cover. An advance team from both sides fought arduously, the constant chant of bullets, the deathly scream of the injured, their prayer, and the regret of not seeing their families.

"Major Oyzel, we've lost platoon two and three. The squad leaders are asking permission to retreat."

"No way," voiced a boisterous man, the shoulder-pads held a golden symbol of his rank, "-we won't be retreating," the white hair pressed under a hat, "-no way," he argued, frowns and coughs were commonplace, "-have the survivors from platoon two and three merge into a new platoon," he glanced back to a yard of military personnel, "-send the medics in," he said.

"Major," refuted the second in command, "-I refuse to allow them to die needlessly. We're hauling out soldiers as we speak..."

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"Second Lieutenant Alio," the arms crossed at his back, "-look at the situation before us," he said, "-graduating the military academy of warfare doesn't justify such a senseless request. Did they not teach when going against the military hierarchy, one needs to be ready to present their case and face reprehension?"

"Sorry sir," he shook his head, "-what I meant to say was to split the healing unit..."

"Take a look through the binoculars," he said.

The young officer did so, the entrance grew close, at the foot were mortally wounded fighters. Some lost arms, others had rashes over the visage, many were pale and showed sign of poison gas infection, "-you see what the frontline fighters have to endure. The empire is a hard beast to win against. I control the Yuen's shaft, I'll sacrifice people if it means the survival of my country," he rose a gesture at another officer, "-split the medics, have them aid the mages, have the following message broadcasted, 'those able to fight, those able to push through the imperial forces knowing it's a suicide, are to do so without question. Know this, from the many battles I've led in the past, I know one thing, the death of a soldier is

a thing of glory. We will climb over our fallen comrades; we will rise a mountain of corpses, if need be, to have a glance at the waning light. Go, my dearest comrades, onwards till death,' we wait and see," no matter the morale boost, the imperial forces proved vicious and famished, "-MAJOR!" screamed a reporting officer, "-message from the frontlines, it's the imperial special forces, the more we fire, the stronger they get, we've lost 75% of our forces. The remainder is grievously wounded."

"Major?" inquired a troubled Alio.

The major's high-held head fell onto the ground, "-there's nothing we can do," he murmured, "-the special forces have arrived, we've lost the battle," he exhaled, "-the ships must have deployed their forces, an army of tens of thousands is on their way. Have the survivors evacuated, ask them to place mines – have ten of our best cover the retreat. We'll conjure a barrier to stop their advancement."

'He's going to block the entrance and trap them inside. I don't see how that'll work,' wondered the young man, "-major," he rose his head, "-allow me command over the remaining survivors."

"Pardon?"

"I want field command of the survivors," he said, "-sir, I'm ready to lay down my life for the safety of our people. Please, sir..."

"Don't beg, the second lieutenant, I'm not so old a fool who won't change his ways. Time is of the essence; you have the eyes of a resolute man. I won't make promises of leaving the entrance open, if there is a remote inkling of the lines being pushed, the walls will crumble, have I made myself clear?"

"Yes sir," he saluted, '-I will make you proud, father,' he vaulted, grabbed weapons, and leaped onto a transport headed to carry the wounded.

"Lord Oyzel, was it wise to allow for thy heir to head to death?"

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"Who is to say. Age has caught up to my better judgment. When odds are down, there's a saying in where I grew, champions are forced to act on their impulses, once an innocent man has had a taste of blood... two paths present themselves, the path of the bloodthirsty or the righteous. Look at me spouting nonsensical shi-" thunder crackled over the mountain, '-it starts,' the grip tightened.

A lovely blue sky of scattered white clouds washed the sandy beach vibrantly, "-Iгна..." the living room had curtains sway under the passing sea-breeze, "-calling a war-council here?"

"Big sister," he stood hunched over her filled belly, "-tis for the simple reason of relaxation. The babe ought to be away from the war and blood, I'm sure we don't want the innocent to be stain scarlet, do we?"

"Tell us the real reason," inquired Markus tapping away at raw vegetables.

"To shield the imperial family from the ambers of war. I've reached the general – éclair and him speak as we lounge. This war has had many heroes – tis time to bring an end to the years-long battle."

"What do you mean by shield?"

"The conglomerates, I'm fearful they've turncoat and made much effort in buttering the emperor's hands. I don't understand how Iqavea got that stage."

\*Knock, knock,\* "-my lord," entered éclair, "-I've spoken to General Rozemal, seems to be the Empire's landed."

"Right," he ominously made for the view, the light rendered his back pitch black, "-I suppose it's time for me to take to the battlefield."

"Igna," the pregnant Eira clambered to a stand, she made her way across and placed a hand on his shoulder, "-tell me, little brother, what about Easel Run Gard, are they not under attack?"

"Yes, they are," he placed his hand upon hers, "-the empire's force in quality and quantity is headed here, to Alpha, whilst the church is headed for Easel Run Gard, a kingdom without any military. They'll use smaller ships and have at least a few hundreds to take what they need. The sea is a great o' beast herself, when she grows angry, there's no way a man-made twig will survive," he side-glanced to Markus, "-Loftha's healing, she's out of danger and recovering in Rotherham. I've made sure the best tend to her needs. I should get my winning streak going again," wings sprouted, "-they face King Igna Haggard of the United Nations of Alrosia, may this be a message to the onlookers."

Meanwhile at the seas closing headed for Easel Run Gard, a black-shadow makes rounds over passing ships, an imminent vessel of chaos, "-Draconis," said Saniata, "-you sure you want to drop onto their ships?"

"Yeah," he smiled broadly, the sharpened canine eerily shimmered, "-using your powers of the sea is cheating. I want to fight them head-on," the arms pointed east to a ship.

"That's them," she said, "-I sense their auras. If pops spoke true, they're the scout unit. The quicker they're defeated, the harder it will appear to invade. I hate being your taxi... pops asked us for help, I'm not going to ruin it," she turned, "-Draconis?" her lashes fluttered, "-I guess he dropped?"

Below, an anvil sent waves across the deck, the figurehead upfront of which was the head of a beast, allured the illusion of nodding.

"WHO ARE YOU!" screamed men in religious outfits,

"Me?" he laughed and brushed his nose, "-the name's Draconis. I need a word with your captain."

"Look at this," more gathered, "-a young fool's gotten on board."

"I'm not a fool," he clapped, "-I'm like seven years old."

"Yeah kid," thundered a greater voice, "-we're known as Malta, the pirate band from Swabia. What do you need?"

"Are there members of the church on board?"

"Come on kid," a beast of a man hunched with arms akimbo, "-we have none here," the entourage laughed, "-now then, where did you come from?"

“So you guys don’t have priests?” he tilted his head, ‘-I got the wrong ship?’ self-muttering increased in pace, the bystanders threw confused glances.

“Boy...” thundered the captain, “-don’t ignore me,” he kept on to his own devices, speaking in a low and inaudible tone.

An impatient crewman reached for a scabbard, pulled a scimitar, and swerved at the unsuspecting guest’s shoulder, \*crack,\* the blade shattered. The self-murmuring halted, a dark sentient shadow rose to cloak the body, “-did you attack?” inquired a terrifyingly monotonous tone.

“WHERE ARE THE SERVANTS!” a man in robe suddenly barged onto the deck, “-oh...” the flushed visage burped a hiccup, “-wrong timing?”

“You have priests onboard...”

“Boy, you spotted one earlier,” said the captain, “-who the hell are you?”

“Yeah, I did,” the visage gave a sigh of relief, “-I thought I done goof.”

“Done goof?” they exchanged glances and laughed, “-goof, BAHAAAAHA.” Two orbs swallowed his fists, Draconis latched at a nearby bystander, the man fell instantly, “-have to kill you now,” he said and jumped, he broke swords with flicks and snapped necks without prejudice. A barrage of combos flung the majority of the crewmen overboard, the captain remained still.

“Boy,” he said in a low-menacing voice, “-DON’T HURT ME.”

\*ROAR,\* the ship rocked, “-Don’t listen to them,” exclaimed Saniata, “-just destroy everything already.”

“Fine,” he shook his head, pressed the palms in prayer, “-rest in peace,” the core of the vessel exploded, everything in close vicinity disintegrated.

“Damn,” she whistled, “-the powers of Gophy sure are scary. Talk about a loud boom.”

“I know,” he grinned proudly, “-I love to destroy stuff.”

“Still the advance party, they hired pirates to do their transport. The church doesn’t want to play their hands. Call it a day?”

“Yeah, I want to sleep. Vanesa said she found something delicious to eat.”

“Understood,” the griffin vanished into the clouds.

Hidden yonder, secretive onlookers examine the scene, “-powerful fighters,” they said.

“I know, we should take our time and wait for the empire to lose. Victory smiles on the patient.”

“We know, lord paladin.”

The mood altered heavily, “-on me,” cried Alio, “-aim for the gas canisters. We’ll use their gases against them,” a wide-area spell of protection kept the survivors alive.

“We’re running out of ammo,” said a badly injured fighter, “-we lack supplies.”



“We’ve held out for three hours,” they neared complete exhaustion, “-out the remaining fifty, we only have five left.”

“I didn’t realize,” he ducked undercover, they stumped the enemy’s advancement using guerrilla tactics, hits and run, using smoke grenades interspersed with poison gas, ‘-they don’t have the powers of unlimited stamina, once again, I stand alone.’

“Report,” said an injured technical fighter, “-the major’s ordered for a full retreat. Orders have come to barricade the tunnel.”

#### Chapter 817: Onward onto Death

‘Fading lights at the end of the tunnel. It’s said following them leads to the afterlife,’ from the ground to the very pillars, pebbles shook, the unsteadiness gave birth to stray bullets, two of which made connections to comrades. The bodies fell, no life spark in their eyes, instant death from the moment the projectile made contact, ‘-I chose to ignore it, the fallen at my feet. I should have done more,’ the fist, unable to clench, grew to harbor a numbing tingle, ‘-I did my best,’ the light, bright as it was, and scarce as it seemed in-between cover of vehicles and sandbags, “-we’re left for dead,” said a hallowed man, the latter bore a heavy frown, “-fighting for the sake of the greater good,” he dropped on his bottom and held his elbow, the latter was blasted into a fracture. Not far to the left of the man, laid two bodies. Images of how they died, heroes who dove onto grenades to shield their comrades, nameless fighters recognized only by their tags and memories of those they worked beside.

“Run, Alio,” he said, “-you possess unlimited stamina – go now, we can’t hold much longer. They’ll close the tunnel after the mages have left,” he pointed at the outlines of robes being torn against the wind, “-go,” he gritted, “-NOW.”

“Not going to happen,” he leaned to grab a fallen man’s gun, “-we’ll defend to the death,” he said, ‘-I’ll ignore the light at the tunnel,’ he faced away, ‘-I don’t deserve to be granted Elysium, nor do I want it. This is the unsung ballad of nameless heroes, for the sake of my family and the people, I promise,’ he clambered into cover, took aim, and fired into a smoke-cloud, ‘-war will always be a part of our lives,’ he pulled, it echoed into a moan and scream, ‘-the longer I hold, the easier it’ll be to save them.’

Following the robed spell-casters, a specialist unit in the army, “-where is Second lieutenant?”

“Major,” they gasped, “-Alio’s still on the front lines. The men in his platoon have been killed, there remains five with him included.”

“Fool,” the head shook, “-begin the demolition,” he spun, ‘-I’m proud.’

\*Bang, bang, bang,\* explosion rattled the entrance, a controlled environment made it simpler to not cause excessive damage. Upon the last boulder falling into its slot, a puzzle’s last piece is placed, a pull of the curtains settled the rule of abyssal darkness. Sound amplified, footsteps, shuffles, hampered breathing of allies, and an innate howling of the cave – the sound, close to a gritted out-breath, seemed to be the murmurs of the mountain.

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Alio finally gave, ammunition emptied, he fell onto his knees, took notice of a burning sensation on his forearm, ‘-I had to be shot...’ he complained, ‘-no one’s left alive. The few who breathe will rejoin the

cycle of life and death,' the back of his head pressed against the cover, the eyes, acquainted to the darkness, widened to another head glaring down at him, darker than the darkness, oval-shaped, no hair, big-reddened eyes, and viciously sharpened teeth, the resting mien was one of utter horror, 'a demon,' went across his mind, 'the end has come,' the monster enlarged its mouth to be twice the size of his head, 'end it quickly.'

\*Crack,\* the warm sensation of liquid rained onto the forehead and against the uniform. Another silhouette ambled in his direction, "-still alive," it said.

"Who are you?" he coughed, "-what of the monster?"

"A wandering traveler," he returned, "-suppose that excuse won't work. My name's Igna Haggard. Why's a second lieutenant on the front lines?" he dropped on one knee and unbuckled a sac and handed potions.

"I selfishly asked the major to let me lead the battle of attrition. The passage was supposed to fall four hours ago, the empires stopped their advances at the risk of it caving. After guiding them to the afterlife, seemed fitting the leader to die the last after ensuring the dead are properly sent off." The faint glow of a healing spell, 'a white-haired man,' he thought, "-why are you here?"

"To put an end to the war. If what you say is true, the passage has been buried from both sides?"

"Yes."

'The stench of death, I've missed it,' he rose, "-Alio, you able to walk?"

"Yes," he nodded.

"Take heed," an orb of gentle yellow hovered onto weapons and unused ammunition, "-gather and take inventory. We'll move forward."

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An hour elapsed; the darkness grew welcoming. Alio did much of his work, loaded weapons, separated supplies, and armed himself. Distant gunfire would frequently thunder in his direction.

"I've checked the other end," said Igna, "-how are they?"

"Everyone's dead," he said, "-I've gathered them in a pile."

"Good," he snapped and conjured a heatless white inferno, the latter burn without using the air, latching onto the bodies as if parasites, it devoured till ashes, "-may death carry them to a greater plane," he nodded and turned to the survivor, "-two choices present themselves. Either accompany me to the frontlines or return and relay the information. What will it be?"

"My life's not worth much," he said, "-allow me to follow."

"Right," the shoulders slumped, "-we'll make straight for the outlook in the hills." There was the reason why forces couldn't advance, the northern entrance's path splits onto three, one headed to the coast, the middle path heads into thick-woods whereby a few settlements were built by adventurers, and lastly, up the mountain to an observatory turned fortress. The latter held many views over the

surrounding land, from there, snipers were able to set their sights onto the cave and fire at incoming threats. The multiple unsuccessful ventures culminated into a brief overlook of the enemy forces. The biggest threat was a lady in black, wielder of a scythe – not much else was known.

A few minutes' walks brought the blocked archway into sight, “-breaking through will surely notify the enemy of our presence.”

“Tell me, Alio, do you know why they opted to bury the remains?”

“Perhaps they were scared of us launching a desperate attack?”

“Wrong,” meanwhile he spoke, the hands wrote spells onto thin-air, “-the arrival of an army their size is a double-edged sword. The more time passes, the stronger they become, their size means a change in leadership – the militia at present are from the church. The cave had to be shut to give time, they most likely want to focus their attention on unloading supplies and changing leadership instead of worrying about an attack which may or may not arrive,” by the end, a purple portal opened to the right, “-let’s go, I’ve linked the cave with the outside,” he fixed his glasses and the duo stepped. Darkness from the night seemed akin to daylight, a surveying truck rode across the dirt path, Alio and Igna subconsciously dove into the bushes. The distant headlights flashed in their direction, the path rumbled, a gunner looked to and fro, continuing their survey, backlights of red soon made down the slope, “-fortunate,” escaped a sigh.

“Perfect timing,” said Igna, “-here,” he threw a binocular, “-climb the tree and look towards the observatory.” The thick-outlying foliage provided cover, “-you’re right,” he said, “-there’re snipers under the antenna, I see a lot of movement.”

“They’re looking towards the beach, aren’t they.”

“Yes,” he said with a rise in tone, “-can you see them too?”

“No, I only assumed. The truck probably delivered supplies. Let’s take the observatory.”

“Pardon?” he blinked, “-even if we make it up there, they’ll spot us from a mile away.”

“Who said we’re sneaking?” he leaped onto the path, “-you need but follow, Alio, for I represent an army on my lonesome.”

“Conceited muc...?” the brows rose in astonishment, \*Heed my voice, comrades in war, heed my will, comrades in death, I, Igna Haggard, Watcher of the Shadow Realm, call upon the immortal army, the guardians of the Shadow Realm, the strongest entities known to our worlds, make thy presence known, migrate thyself, possess the vessels of which I grant. Pity is for the weak, salvation is for the worthy, we represent none, god or demon, may they all perish in the sluthering darkness of Chisn. Summoning – Puppet Army,\* miasma filled fractures in reality’s fabric brought on dozen of men clad in black-uniform, from helmets to armored boots, the attire was in many ways the description of futuristic soldiers, great emphasis was on the weapons, rifles with long barrels, assault-rifles known to be restricted, borderline being banned from importation and distribution.

“Majesty,” they bowed, “-how may we be of service.”

“Tis a war,” he said, “-fellow comrades, we are to fight a war. My orders are simple, kill anyone who’s remotely a threat, I care not if they are civilians or the enemy – I want complete extermination. Infiltration of the settlements is the priority. I want three squads, one under my command, the remainder will work jointly. The rest will be reported after the battle. There is the risk of death by curse and soul imprisonment. Long as thou art careful, I guarantee safe passage home. If reinforcement is needed, please inform me right away, have I made myself clear?”

“Yes Majesty,” they saluted.

“I will take command of Alpha unit,” said a helmed man, recognized only by a number on his vest, “-call me 01.”

“And I will take command of Beta unit,” said another similarly dressed man, “-call name, 02.”

“I shall be in charge of the Gamma unit. Call name, 03.” All and all, fifteen men split three ways in five. No time was wasted, the fighters took the road and headed for the would-be battlefield. In order to capture the observatory, Alpha and Beta unit will make noise at the coast, striking at the heart of the operation, an explosion, of which, Igna casually handed a bomb – crafted on the principle of Maicite’s amplification, to 01.

“Where are we headed?” inquired Alio, “-I’m confused.”

“Alio,” said Igna, “-are you skilled with a sniper rifle?”

“Yes?”

“Good, you’ll join the Gamma unit,” the nonchalant proposal begot a glare from the unit leader, 03 – well, between the pitch-black helmet, the stare was very much imagined and subjective. It took a few hours, time read midnight, the sky cleared into a canvas of purple and blue sprinkled with spots of white, “-a lovely sky,” said 03, gazing upon the stars. They rested atop a rivaling hill-top, on it were remains of a campfire and used containers. Igna kept watch onto the beach, smoke puffed under the starry night.

“Sorry to bother.”

“Alio?”

“Yes, I have to ask, where did these men come from?”

“My soul,” he said, “-they’re part of me, and I’m part of them. Please refrain from prying into my personal life.”

“Sorry, I mean no disrespect.”

“I know, curiosity is an untamed beast. What did you want to ask?”

“How are ten men going to win against the imperial army?”

“Don’t get me wrong, we’re not here to wipe the opposition, the goal is to reach an armistice, there are many ways I can think of reaching the desired outcome. Easiest would be to strike at the mothership, destroy the fortress of the sea and limit the Empire’s movement. Harder said than done, conjuring such

firepower would need the help of my guardian deities. I know one who'd love to bring chaos. No matter," he exhaled, "-there are many advantages in cleanly disposing of a threat."

\*Incoming transmission,\* "-report."

"The bomb has been planted, majesty."

"I presume the supply truck's headed to the beach?"

"Yes, the sister system estimates thirty minutes until they reach the desired location."

"Right, I should make the necessary preparations myself," he moved to 03's makeshift hammock, "-01 and 02 are readied for the attack. I'll give the signal," he slid down the side of the cliff, "-03."

"Yes Majesty," returned via the coms, "-Gamma unit's ready to fire at any time."

A murderous gaze washed his visage, the tall observatory approached with each step, '-onward onto death.'

#### Chapter 818: General Valentino

Nestled, a wall of foliage kept at a few meters' distance from the compound wall deterred the usual culprits of monsters and unghostly beings. Hand in pocket, Igna made way up the gravel path till a slight hump, he took a heavy step on said hump, it caved, exposed wires, \*snap,\* the unblemished white-abysal flame used the wires as a guide to the inner-sanctum.

'They never thought of hiding the wires, cutting costs has its disadvantages,' yonder, immediate at his back, sharp gleams off the scopes fired in his direction. The Gamma unit was ready to shoot.

'The communication should be cut,' he thought and continued, farther he got, the harder it grew to spot his outline, and soon enough, the overhanging forestry made an impeccable ceiling.

The nestled compound, at a few yards' distance, stood covered by a few guards. He closed his eyes, the outlines displayed in weak ambers, '-should be time,' he glanced at his watch, a tracker displayed the bomb's location over the lens' interface. Alpha and Beta unit currently moved to surround the settlement where supplies and ammunition were guarded. In a twist of the Alphan weather, clouds of dark disposition moved to shield the moon and stars, another layer of darkness hovered onto the surroundings.

Cargo and people unloaded a small vessel since motherships were massive where only a few designated ports could serve as their hook. Ramps thrown onto the concrete harbor, crates were slid across – in addition to items, a lower ramp extended from the ship's belly, a dejected crowd of silhouettes made their long climb, scrawny and tall, the lack of food crudely displayed on their necks, cheeks, and limbs, "-move along," whipped a robed-man, "-damned slaves," he spat.

Meanwhile, to the left of the ship, various headlights rumbled from stone trails and onto a solid surface, the engines seemed to sigh, the noise faded into a jovial walk.

"Over here," signaled a man with tablet in hand. The trucks lined one after the other, their backs gave onto an elevated platform, there, the crates were simply pushed into their respective vessel. Amidst the

loading and unloading, a surveillance truck, the same Igna and Alio spotted previously, finally made onto the firm ground.

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"Here," said another man in uniform, it pulled to a stop away from the cargo and slaves. Men in imperial uniform stood akin to statues, tall and menacingly waiting for the next order. The higher-ups, despite their better judgment, opted to stay the night aboard the mothership. Few lanterns worked restlessly to illuminate a vague circle around at their feet.

"Reinforcement's come," commented the driver, he had his head on the steering wheel. The rearview mirror gave onto the line of sternly dressed men, he casually rolled his eyes onto the ship, Calums, was painted white over the dark-coat, '-why was I sent here,' he painfully reached inside his shirt, pulled onto a necklace, smiled, '-memories,' he exhaled.

"02 reporting," thundered across the intercoms, "-we go live in thirty seconds," all on the general channel received the message. Stress heightened as did focus, Igna kept to his wit, a tap on the concealed sheath brought Orenmir forth. She looked rusty and old for it has been years since he rose to wield her tenacious will. By force of habit, he maintained his fighting form, death and him were comrades, one day or the next, he'd be pushed onto the battlefield. Time slowed, a tick of the second hand resonated in a deep thud.

"Three," said Claire, "-two," guns were loaded, the snipers altered targets onto the overwatch, "-one," reality sunk, \*BOOM\* a devastating orb of orange, red, yellow, and blue, mixed into a shell of carnage, from trucks to the ground, it took everything – the range amplified to even swallow the ships and cargo hold – the port was swallowed as well as the surrounding roads and guard posts, the excruciating force blew and flashed the bystanders silently – it took a few seconds for the shockwave to destroy faraway construction.

"Go, go, go," said both teams.

"Five targets' down," reported 03, each party assembled into their private channels, the bodies fell.

"WHAT HAPPENED!" exclaimed the surveillance center.

"No idea, sir, we've lost communication with the port," said a baffled officer, "-our cameras are malfunctioning..."

Outside, the guards cared not for what had happened, rather, they couldn't care. The tree line blocked the view onto the port. Thuds and screams were commonplace, the snipers had habits of playing jokes. In when the focus should have been their main responsibility, the hectic use of the intercoms proved a curse, "-what are you saying?" one screamed into his earpiece, "-I can't hear anything..."

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Steps shuffled from grass to rocky and finally, gravelly, a bespectacled white-haired man wandered through the gated-cage, gleamed a blade in their direction, "-you don't have the right to be here," said another casually trying to make heads or tails of their predicament.

“Wish death my warm welcome,” he swung, never mind the blade making contact, the force alone sufficed to take their heads as well as the concrete wall, ‘-too potent,’ it sheathed. The leather boots clopped along the tiled floor, the inside, a place of research turned a den of prayer and strong belief, robed priest pushed themselves before a statue of their great god, Lucifer, “-take our blood,” murmured many, “-we deserve salvation.”

“Who are you?”

“...” the sight of Lucifer’s visage, ‘-him,’ a bubbling inferno warmed his heart, the very inside of his being lit ablaze, ‘-it was you,’ he gritted, “-LUCIFER!” memories from the days of being Alfred the Curse King intermingled the composed sense of being, “-die.”

There was much to see on the hillside, “-no enemies reported,” said a marksman.

“The bomb sure did a number on the harbor,” said another, “-there’s barely anything left.”

“Don’t matter to us,” said 03, “-any reports on his majesty?” he inquired over the general chat.

“Nothing yet,” reported 02 and 01, “-the settlement’s been claimed. We’re holding northeastern and northwestern paths.”

“Nothing from the mountainside,” added 03. A calm demeanor in wake of the dead left behind, the enemy’s perspective was a sudden blast at the port. Communication to the observatory was interrupted, the lifeline was cut. Fighters fell without ever knowing the location of the shooters, it took a few minutes to claim the stronghold. For a place to store supplies, there wasn’t much reinforcement save on the roads in and out – a reluctance to expand, the subtle fear of an unseen force. Ultimately, it didn’t matter, “-we’ll execute those who’ve surrendered after his majesty gives his orders,” they said. At least fifty men of different age groups were lined in shackles before a brick wall, there were women, though lesser common.

Blood fell from his glasses, an exhaled sense of satisfaction ran across veins and limbs, the hands and legs shook in excitement, ‘-I feel great,’ he stood empty and faced the ceiling, the flock of television screens was stained in red and innards. Heads were slumped over the control panel, the light flickered, handprints on the walls and doors, many clawed for the door, some backed into the walls. A tale of mercilessness and pure bloodlust could be told in how they had died.

“éclair, what’s the status on the battle?”

“We’ve won,” he said, “-the settlement’s been taken over. Tis hard to get a reading on the devastation, an onsite visit should prove beneficial.”

‘We tested a new weapon today,’ the blood and innards gathered in a halo, ‘-Lucifer,’ he glared the statue, ‘-if not for you, the realm I built would have been safe. The past is the past,’ the shoulders drifted between slumped and puffed.

A day or so before the battle, Igna and the general held a meeting inside a certain fast-food restaurant in the middle of the cacophonous metropolis of Melmark. Technological advancement here was at an all-time high, the true ideal cityscape Igna wanted to paint onto Rosespire. Dressed in nonchalant clothes, the duo made no change in the scenery – passersby were glued to their phones.

“Is there a reason why you called me here?” they sat at the window seat on the first floor, the view led to a zebra-crossing, the sheer number astonishingly made Igna wonder about the population size.

“Sir Valentino,” he sipped the accompanying soft drink, “-I appreciate the visit.”

“Say that to my daughter,” he grudgingly glared, took time to study the surroundings, couples, students, and unknowingly innocent lives living their day-to-day peacefully, “-I don’t understand the reason for our current location. Tis a liability, what if we’re under attack?”

“The heroes will rescue us,” returned Igna, “-besides, I was craving a burger. Isn’t it lovely to see smiles on people’s faces? Look around, the atmosphere’s energetic and happy, it brings me joy. If not for the Emperor, I doubt their expressions... never mind, I’m here to discuss the war and United Nations of Alrosia.”

“Straight to the point,” he took a bite, the brows flashed in astonishment, “-this is delicious,” he commented.

“I know,” returned Igna, “-to the point. Alpha’s split into three factions, the nobles, the military, and the independent parties, the conglomerates. Each is allowed to act for the benefit of the country; however, the influence of the imperial family isn’t much to speak of. Since the marriage, the Empress’ made waves in establishing the crown as a pillar – the result was further splitting of the factions. Doesn’t matter, for now, what I’m interested in is the Military faction. You, General Valentino, hold more power than is let on, public safety to the control of noble families, the military is quite scary – if I’m so inclined to say, the surveillance faction is to be wary.”

“No idea,” he ate, “-what then, what is it you wish?”

“A favor for a favor,” he smiled, “-I promise the complete defeat of the forces currently camped in Whuotan. In return, I only ask for the Military to accept Alrosia as the new leadership. Here are the details on when I’ll launch my attack,” he slid a piece of paper, “-‘twould be wise to send reinforcement – haste is the utmost priority when capturing land.”

“Let’s say I accept, what is there for me?”

“The credit for taking over Whuotan and an undeniable advantage on the war. Each side’s sick of fighting, besides, the battle was instigated by the church. If they retreat, I’m sure the empire will take the cue and follow. I believe in the emperor’s intellect, he’s wise.”

“Unacceptable. If retaking the northern province was such a simple task, I fail to see how the military couldn’t handle the matter alone. We could use thy plan...”

“Bad idea, the plan won’t work,” he smirked, “-because I’m the one who’s heading into battle. Balls in your court, general.”

“I owe you favors,” he exhaled, “-my eccentric daughter grew to be a police chief, I was scared for her future, I’m relieved, she’s formed a family and expects a child. Odgar told me about what you did. Don’t want to be ungrateful,” a shade of intrigue lowered his focus onto the meal, “-naturally, you’d want me to handle the conglomerates?”

“Right on,” he cheered, “-I expected no less from a wise man.”



“You have a deal. I will send my forces to the north on conditions that the land’s been captured.”

“I’ll make good on my promise,” thus ended their exchange – time showed 03:00 on the watch, Igna and Alio waited in front of a caved-in pathway.

‘The observatory was cleaned of bodies, who exactly is this man?’ glanced to the beach, ‘-the lingering smoke makes it hard to gauge the destruction. What is he thinking?’

“03 reporting,” said the coms, “-the area’s clear.”

“All is well, no enemies in sight.”

“All is well here,” said 03, “-the prisoners are unusually quiet. We wait for thy orders.”

“Understood,” off the earpiece and before the stone-edifice, “-step back, it’s going to go boom.”

“Go boom?”

Opposite them, the general’s forces arrived in full: tanks, armored vehicles, the major was left in complete shock, “General Valentino,” he gawked with open mouth.

“Alrighty, people, ready up – we’ll move in on my orders.”

“Yes sir.”

Chapter 819: “-inhumane,”

“General Valentino, why is a man of thy stature here?”

“Major, excellent job in holding the frontlines, I’m sure your men are exhausted.”

“They would be if there were any alive,” he said, “-I fail to understand why.”

“Which is the reason why observation is crucial. Cause and effect, the reason for the caving was to stop traffic in and out. You’ve had an arduous battle,” he said condescendingly, the authority behind his gestures and way of speech was grounded on a solid foundation. The major, shook by the previous day of worry, excused himself to the outpost.

Trembles towards the mountain, the blockage disappeared. Out of said rubble, a duo exited, the major who’d grabbed a binocular from a fighter, ran from his office and onto the walls, “-he’s alive.”

Reinforcement took no time, the engines made for the inside without care.

“Second Lieutenant,” said Igna, “-it’s been a pleasure. You’re a hero of the war, the fighters who’ve died will never be forgotten. The deaths have been crucial in leading our victory,” a side-smile, hands warmly kept inside his pockets, “-we ought to exchange goodbyes,” he said, glancing towards the General, of which had a pleasant expression.

‘People of his kind always take the credit,’ went across Alio’s mind, ‘-I didn’t do anything, it was him, he handled everything. He captured an impenetrable fortress, destroyed a town, still are no repercussions... Igna Haggard, I will remember the name.’

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People come and go, quick as he was to acknowledge the man's presence, Igna hastily forgot the man's inability to bring good. Warm words are often the worse thing a person can receive.

"Master?" rang through his earpiece, "-should I do it?"

"Correct," he turned, '-kill him, I don't need unnecessary attention.'

"Son!" exclaimed the Major onboard a bike, "-you've survived."

"Father," he held a hand, '-my chest,' \*thud,\* he stopped and looked at his hands, '-blackspots, am I going to die?' the back straightened, he fell face-first onto a misplaced rock.

A son died before his father, "-what happened there?" inquired the General.

"Nothing of importance," the door shut, they sat aboard armored transport, "-tell me, Igna, have your side of the deal been fulfilled?"

"Yes, else why would anyone go through so much effort. The observatory is under my way as is the settlement. We'll head directly for the latter; I have bad news as well."

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"Tell me."

"The harbor is most likely devastated."

"Pardon?"

"You heard me," a holographic map displayed, "-see here, these are the last captured images. The present I sent might have been a little too potent. Aside from the destruction, I say the conquest's been relatively clean."

The old man sank into his seat and breathed, radio coms would often interject in the silence, "-fine," he said, "-I'll overlook the matter."

Igna matched the man's authority, "-no, no," he smiled, "-don't pass it off as my problem. What happens will remain true, tis the reason why the church is going to retreat. In their fashion, we'll send a lovely personalized message. No harbor equals no additional threats from the sea. The geographical nature of the bay makes it easy to defend – having tall cliffs overlooking the sea is a boon. How about Phantom installs anti-air and anti-sea cannons," he lit a cigar, "-one thing's for sure, Alphaia will protect themselves."

"Making a deal with the devil," he muttered.

"Correct," puffed Igna, "-till we reach an armistice, I'll continue to fight."

Later in the night, the clock struck 04:30, the imperial forces rounded remaining survivors into a cramped house – surveillance was established, the good news of Alphaia's victory in the north was shortly reported to the Imperial family.

Two undone buttons, a crinkled shirt, and flowing hair, the guards before the house were scared, they held their guns akin to children holding fingers to their lips in silence. "I'm here on orders from the

General,” he said, the guards accepted his plea without care. It opened to a stuffed interior, moans of pain and complaints were commonplace – before arrival, a triage separated the crowd. No corners cut, he beelined for the robed priests, barging the door into a metallic echo, “-good day, people of the church,” he said with arms crossed.

“Who are you?” they gathered in a single spot, knelt and hands in prayer to their god, “-our God will save us all, the threat will not accomplish much, our faith is strong!”

“Your faith?” he smirked with a tilt in his expression, “-this is going to be fun,” he pulled a seat, toggled a camera, “-éclair if you’d please.” A transmission reached forces eyeing the shores of Easel Run Gard, a griffin and rough seas made the journey inland arduous. The attackers had set shop on an abandoned island a kilometers away from the continent, “-Lord Paladin,” said a man in pious wear, “-I have a live message addressed to us.”

“Let me see,” he rose his stare, a solemnly burning candle jittered the cast shadow into frighteningly disfigured outlets. The fingers interlocked, he peered into the screen. On the other side, Igna. Dressed in a rough shirt, he sat on a stool with one leg perched higher than the other.

“Transmission established, my lord,” said the intercoms.

“Lord Paladin,” he stared the lens, “-good day, is it not? You’re wondering who I am, and how am I able to reach thy location. Simple, did it ever occur the abandoned island is done so on purpose, never mind, the church has a habit of being extremely shortsighted. I’d not trust thee to see beyond thy own nose let alone the greater picture,” the tone lowered, “-I’d highly advise caution this time, for you see, Paladin, the games are over. Alpha’s retaken the northern province. I’ve asked for Phantom to deliver a few presents,” the images of the prior explosion displayed, “-opposed to this small boom, the ones they have are much bigger. The best part, only I know how the weapon is manufactured. We could cut a deal,” he leaned, “-wouldn’t be in my interest. The events in Meltia, do you think me a fool to ignore the atrocities. I’m a firm believer in an eye for an eye, who cares if the world goes blind, in the end, my amusement is what matters. Holy knight of the god of Lucifer, does it hurt?” the screen displayed the captured priest, “-it doesn’t, I’ve met countless men with thy same personality. Embarrassing the name of God to satisfy a lust for blood, we’re one of the same, or so I’d say if I wanted to lower myself to the level of shit-smelling dogs. The difference between us is I back my words and take responsibility if my actions lead to greater problems – you, people of the church, only serve thyself and leave after spreading the seed of malice. Like it or not, you’re in my palm, Paladin, call on the four-cardinal sect of the church if you wish, I defeated Oat once, and I’m not bothered to take the remainder on my lonesome,” he lit a cigar, “-in other news, how’s the conquest of Easel Run Gard going, I heard the sea’s pretty rough. Don’t take my word for it, look at where you are, it’ll only require me to give the orders for the island to be wiped. The great paladin won’t be heard of ever again. I should get to culling the crowd,” he stood, “-paladin, don’t mistake me for another fool, I’m vindictive, you laid hand on the princess of Alpha, someone close to me, I promise the next time we speak, it’ll be face to face with my knee up to your nose. A holy knight has no business dealing with me,” he took off his glasses and slammed his hand onto the cold ground, “-I would get to a higher place if I were you,” the glasses returned to whence they came. A large quake sent fear among those on the island.

“Who’s this tool bag?”

“Don’t waste breath on the posturing. Slamming his hand on the floor, what does that even mean.” The ground shook, they escape onto the sandy beach, a shadow, tall as a mountain moved in an embrace.

“Surprised, are we?” the transmission continued, “-what I did was simply visualize the sea and slam, what happens next? A tsunami. Consider it a wedding present for our new relation,” the camera turned to the priest, “-here is the faithful who stayed the night. They’ll rejoin their god soon,” he swiped, two out of a dozen fell, “-to us,” he cheered, the transmission ended. The tall shadow dove onto the island.

“The tsunami reached the target,” reported éclair.

“Good, I doubt the strongest fighters in the church to yield. Push comes to shove, they have a teleportation scroll, if not, they die, simpler for me. Now, the matter of pushing the leadership. Has the video been sent to the Empire, you made sure the transmission was easily cracked into, yes?”

“Master,” he breathed an exasperated sigh, “-since when do you drive me to such lengths.”

“Forgive me, I trust you,” the transmission ended, nameless faces of priest knelt at his feet,”-you all are worthless,” he snapped, a tiny speck of crimson exploded, carrying spikes and tremendous force, the same principle of shrapnel on a grenade.

After finishing his rounds, general Valentino opted to visit Igna- a bike rode to a stop at the same time the white door opened, “-General,” he said with an apple in hand, “-how goes the rounds?”

“I’m headed to your artwork,” a nod toward the beach, “-shall we walk together?”

“It’s a few miles out, I doubt walking will do good.”

“Correct,” he laughed obnoxiously, “-come, I’ll give you a ride.” They spoke business on the way to the destination, upon arrival, there was much less to say and more to intake. The weapon Igna unleashed on the world was to be fear in the coming centuries, the devastation, “-inhumane,” or so described the general. There remained nothing, and by nothing, he truly meant nothing, the beach was gone – a vortex swirled, the sea took liberty in rushing into a gaping wound – no ships remained nor were their life, “-this is unbelievable,” he coughed, “-I feel lightheaded,” the general fell, “-Igna?”

“Mana sickness,” \*snap,\* a protective bubble wrapped the general’s head, “-not lethal, depends on the person and situation. The effects of Maicite are far scarier to what I imagined, I love it,” he cackled, “-general Valentino, I’ve assured the armistice. Take a look around, will they dare to attack when we have this threat looking over their heads?”

“They’ll develop their weapons to match ours, what are you thinking, Igna?”

“It won’t matter, the power balance will ensure either side remains in check. Politics, especially warfare, has always been which nation has the bigger balls or breasts, in our olden society, it was the presence of mages, before them, the number of soldiers, now, tis technology and weapons. We’ve evolved to keep the same standard of guarding strength. Well, General Valentino, I’m sure there’s much to be done, cleaning this mess won’t take months, I expect years. Therefore, I leave the matter in thy hands.”

“Washing your blame?”

“No, I call it outsourcing. Whuotan’s always been the training area for heroes and adventurers. Can’t change the world in one day. If you’ll excuse me, I have more headaches to handle. Best wishes to Julia,

may she have a healthy babe, and may you live to see the birth of thy grandson. Please, for her sake, don't die needlessly, the battle's won."

15th January, the beachside of the Imperial estate nonchalantly bestowed beauty for the spectators viewing pleasures, "-Iгна," said a warm voice clambering into the guest room, "-I need you."

"Phrasing, sister," he laughed with elbows onto a balustrade, "-how can this bloodthirsty murderer help?"

"You took the general's word to heart?" she pouted, "-don't be so picky."

"I'm not," he smiled, "-I was only kidding. How are you, I heard you fainted yesterday."

"Yeah, I felt lightheaded," her smile froze, "-what about you?"

Chapter 820: Medusa

"What about me, I don't know. I did what I was told to do, the northern province will be safe at the moment. There's greater fish in the world, and I'm in the mood to go fishing. Part of me has been tied by reservations, not anymore, I'm free. Funny, isn't it?" he chuckled, "-my sense of self is different from what it used to be. As I speak, there's three superior voice that whispers and guide my actions. Coming clean is relieving, especially since the guardian of the library is a goddess, confiding, never tried it before, all has a first."

"I'm happy," she said and sat, "-I feel like a big sister."

"You always were and will be my big sister."

"Iгна, I can't tell you how much this means to us. I'm not exactly in a position to help, look at me, heavy and holder of a little fellow's life. I hope it to be a girl," her frozen cheeks flushed, "-sorry again, I wasn't able to help in your time of need."

"Don't worry, my heart is not of concern," he moved to her side and kindly exchanged glances at her belly and stare, "-I killed the person I was to become king. Sacrifices ought to be made, and I'll happily do it again to save my people."

"There," she flicked his nose, "-hard as you try, you're a hero deep down."

"No," he shook his head, "-don't smudge the title of hero with my name. The only title I care for is Devil."

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"There's a deeper look on the face," she commented, "-it's like the gods I've met and spoken to... you've reached enlightenment, haven't you?"

"Does it look so?" he crossed her examination, within the darkest depth of bicolored pupils, after a hublot into his mind, a golden spark swirled timidly, "-regardless, it doesn't matter. The little fellow will carry the Sultrian name."

A vacant gloominess filled her lips, "-yeah..."

“Sorry?”

“The Haggard name, it’s a curse,” she said, “-a curse of excellence. I don’t want that kind of pressure on my child. I’ll make sure they grow to become a good person, nothing extraordinary, being related to living legends is a reality check no one wants.”

“Living to our name is second,” he said, “-mother’s the head of the house, her orders were to never run after success, rather, let success run after you. I’m sure she heard so on some movie,” they laughed.

“I picture it,” her breathing eased, “-what now, Igna, what’s next?”

“The birth of Alrosia. I have my suspicion – the empire wouldn’t have made a move without insurance, I know there’s more to it, more intrigue and data, perfect for me.”

The conversation ended prematurely, “-I ought to leave,” he said peering over the balustrade. Monstrously expensive-looking cars laid in wait, the guard gave much hassle till a faint interference granted access – two white-slabs folded automatically, the sand scattered road led into a stone bricked driveway.

“Igna,” came from downstairs, “-you got visitors,” yelled across.

“Right,” on his feet, “-see you later, sister. Take care of the babe,” he reached in and kissed her forehead, “-tell me if there’s ever a problem. I’ll be there for you.”

“Take care, little brother.”

Solid colors, warm and unassuming interior, more of the likes to be sharp and clean – great emphasis on natural beauty, gave onto very modern set-of stairs. A black rod upon which laid white rectangular tiles, a safety hazard at first glance, on foot and the grip prove ten-fold of the security. The manor’s ground floor, open and with barely any walls, had retainers running to and fro, at the center, the emperor in pajamas and a bowl of cereal.

“You’re here,” he said with attention on the news, “-people from Odgawoan are here. They say they’re from Raven.”

“And you allowed them inside the property?”

“Don’t look so baffled,” the spoon dropped into the pool of white, he side-glanced and gave a childish smile, “-my brother-in-law is the devil of Glenda, I pity those opposing him.”

“Markus,” he shook his head and exchanged fist-bumps, “-bananas would go better than strawberries, trust me.”

“No,” he refuted, “-eating such a throbbing long member seems...”

“Just break it,” the head shook in jest, “-go check on big sister, she felt lightheaded earlier.”

“On it, and you take care.” After the battle, Igna found himself in Melmark, therein, a very heated message drove into his phone, the sender, Eira. Unable to argue, he packed himself and flew to the manor, where they’d lived for one day and two nights. The aura was very friendly – take away the title and responsibilities, the couple was but lovebirds expecting their fruit.

"Master Igna," said a flush-cheeked maid, "-h-here," her arms trembled at the opening the door.

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"Please don't," he said, "-I can take care of it."

"Y-yes sir," she scurried into the eternal open-maze.

A push opened the gateway to heaven, the brightly colored sun blasted into the already vivid interior, "-greetings, master," said a stunningly beautiful lady, long hair allowed to rest free on her shoulders and back, thin brows, a small flushed nose, and perkily shaped lips, a look reminiscent of Vesper's sharp gaze, ending in a sharp chin. Her outfit was warm compared to the actual weather, leather jacket and tightly fitted jeans, "-pleasure to make thy acquaintance," her temples, albeit hidden by her locks, grew to show signs of sweat, the glaring heat stabbed her back, "-I'm here on Asmodeus's orders," she said.

"..."

"Master?" it took a few minutes before he spoke.

"Master?" she kept on waving to get his attention, "-are you there?"

The five-minute mark crossed, "-yes, I'm here. Pardon the wait, it was amusing to see you fight against the heat."

"A sadist," murmured under her breath.

"Pardon?"

"Nothing, the thoughts of my master being a gentleman seemed far from what I've seen."

"Why are you here, Medusa?"

Her smile dropped, the curves straightened into a straight line, "-how did you know?"

"I'm your master," he shrugged, "-I'd know," he spun, "-let's have a drink."

"It's 09:45..."

"Better," the duo settled face-to-face separated by a counter. Retainers brought juice, "-this what you meant by drinks?"

"Obviously, what did you expect?"

"Nothing, perhaps something more strong?" she reached for an orange-colored glass.

"No," her arms froze.

"Pardon?"

"You think I wouldn't notice, drink water. You're hungover."

"Yeah," she dropped her head, "-I'm sorry. Lord Asmodeus told me to gather information at a bar... I-I, I love alcohol, I activated my powers and froze the damn client. It's a pain," she facepalmed, "-I screwed up and thought to drown in my sorrow. Is it so bad a thing?"

“Quit the fake crying,” he pressed an ice-cold bottle against her ears, “-you’ve made a good impression. I enjoy the company of eccentric people.”

“Master,” her face rose till her chin rested on her curled elbow, a slight tilt and flushness, “-I waited years to meet you,” added she very coyly.

“And I’ve avoided you for years.”

“Stop playing hard to get,” she smiled.

“Right,” he sipped, “-enough drinks, why are you here?”

“We have a problem; I was sent to fetch thee.”

“A problem?”

“Yes, a massive problem, concerns the casinos.”

“Right,” he stood, “-sadly, I only have beach shorts and a white T-shirt.”

“Who cares,” she followed, “-wear slippers, the owner of Raven should have the liberty to wear what he wishes.”

“Beachwear,” he looked about whilst walking to the door, “-excuse me,” he stopped and called onto a maid, “-can you take a message to Markus?” she gave her full attention, “-thank you for the warm accommodation, I’ll see you around.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes, my warmest thanks to the retainers, you made our lives so much easier. Take care,” thus, the stay at the manor ended on a high note.

During the travel, any question about the problem was averted and skillfully dodged. Medusa made a point to stare at Igna and boldly refute his worry – cars led into a helicopter, the latter turned into a jet and in a matter of hours, they crossed Fuda Mountains, flew over the expanded city of dreams, passed Carter Lake, and landed at the airport. The infrastructure reinforced in a full-fledged terminal.

“Tell me more on the problem.”

“No. Master, when a lady says no, a gentleman ought to accept her decision.”

“And I don’t care. The gentleman can go screw himself with a walking stick,” they exited the jet, “-it’s cold,” he said, “-beachwear isn’t much of help at our altitude.” The afternoon sun, or in Odgawoan’s case, the afternoon clouds, reflected on the transport. The driver made sure to take the route for the De Costle stripe. Traffic wasn’t much on an issue, ‘-been a while since I’ve come here,’ he wondered, the outskirts casinos and buildings impressively guarded the sanctuary.

“Question.”

“No,” she refuted, “-master, I’m driving...” the convertible roared to greatly impress the bystanders.

“I wouldn’t consider speeding along the strip to be driving...’



“Stop complaining,” she laughed, “-no speed limit. Drive like a maniac and die like one,” she stepped, the engine blasted through the loosely packed cars.

“Look at them,” commented a pair of young adults inside their own supercar, Medusa’s scary image closed on their rear-view mirror, “-press on the gas, we’re racing.”

“Understood,” said the driver, he pulled out and slammed, the battle rattled the spectators, she passed without breaking a sweat, a would-be race turned humiliation.

“Medusa...”

“Yes, master?”

“Were they not driving a supercar?”

“They were,” she said, “-a cheap supercar,” she laughed, “-this baby is mine, I’ve tuned it to perfection. Besides, the brand Raven, since the championship has grown very popular. This model is not regulated, nor will it ever be regulated, not legal to drive...”

“Then?”

“Screw the law, we’re Raven’s. Alpha is a capitalist society, no matter the pretty words they add to it, those in power have deep pockets. Evidently, our pockets are stockings.”

“Freak.” A side-road escaped onto the upper plane, there, she surprisingly slowed to match the others, “-where’s the flamboyant lass-”

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“I know what you’ll say, and I don’t care. I’m not endangering innocent lives for my entertainment. We have better ways to do so,” the shops screamed of class and wealth, from roads to the roadside trees and plants, everything felt expensive, as told by vehicles in the hundreds of thousand parked nonchalantly.

“Let’s buy you a suit,” she pulled to a rustic brick-building, a glance inside sufficed to give an idea on the price, “-head-on inside, I’ll park the car,” to which, the black beast wiped into a side-alley. ‘-let’s buy a suit she says,’ he pushed the door.

“Look what the wind dragged in,” said a sharp-gentleman dressed in a very expensive-looking suit, “-pardon me, sir, our establishment serves only the best of the best, I’m afraid,” he looked at his slippers, “-an imbecile who doesn’t care about his appearance has no business here.”

‘Right...’ he looked at his toned muscles, ‘-I look like a surfer...’ he breathed a smile, “-long as I have the money, it’s no issue, is it?”

“Money isn’t the problem,” said the tailor, “-I pour my heart and soul into my craft, I won’t allow my masterpieces to be worn by...”

“Stop being a snob,” the door opened.

“Lady Medusa,” he gawked, “-I apologize, a rat seems to have snuck into the shop,” a snap called onto a lovely assistant, “-please escort the tan man outside. I’ve readied the suits,” he turned, “-I presume tis

for lord Asmodeus and Lord Mammon. I've used the best fabric to paint the perfect picture. The best piece to be worn on special occasions, I admit, the size isn't for either..."

"Charlie, those suits aren't for Asmodeus or Mammon," she leaned against the counter, "-it's for that man," she pointed, "-the founding owner of Raven."

"S-sorry?" he blinked, "-Raven, as in the mafia?"

"Right on," she smiled, "-don't be nervous."

"N-not nervous, a little shaken is all," said the few coughs.