

Death Magic 251

Chapter 251: Snow

The ground floor, slowly crowded by beastmen; opened. The doors to a new way of life, one filled with danger but compensated with money and fame. Individual guilds gave freedom though it came with other troubles. The four major guilds would be best suited for Arda. It still wasn't known that the people could become Adventurers. Though prior, a few did pass the test; most notably, Xula's private guards.

"Sure, looks popular to me," said Adete whilst hovering around.

"I guess," a subtle response with no particular interest. He watched on as if being the wind, rustling through leaves and trees. The dream from the nap did shake his mind into reality. For the most part, he existed in the divide between Clarity and Reality. The subconscious that is – it explained why Staxius could slip into that realm. During that stay, the conscious mind would always be floating around – as if an overseer watching every movement the body made. 'Best not let it affect any further,' a shook of the head later – a visit to the Evaluation room. There, many were given the title of Adventurer.

[Member Status: Arda]

[Tier 1 – Platinum: 0]

[Tier 2 – Gold: 0]

[Tier 3 – Silver: 4]

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[Tier 4 – Bronze: 1]

[Tier 5 – Ruby: 0]

[Tier 6 – Emerald: 0]

[Tier 7 – Sapphire: 1]

[Tier 8 – Steel: 3]

[Tier 9 – Obsidian: 14]

[Tier 10 – Porcelain : 175]

Shown on a semi-transparent screen, above the guild card, the numbers of people who were accepted into the ranks. The four silvers were Xula's guards, the Bronze, yet to be known for it but had a name. For a start, the count seemed enough to handle Goblin Slaying jobs. Through said medium, all the available quests, information given from when someone gave a quest request, locations, and much more. A tiny device with the ability to do a whole more than normal humans could.

"I'll leave the guild to you," coat on, a portal linked the Ardanian Headquarters with Kniq's headquarters. In no way was he going to face Xula after that less than inviting dream. Time was 13:00 on a Friday, Staxius, now crowned as the king of nightwalkers – returned to an empty mansion. A quick clean up of Void later, he set out to fetch Lizzie.

Meanwhile in Arda; after gaining their status as adventurers – her majesty gave the green light to escort the winged wolfing home. Leading the group, Serene, now appointed as a proxy between king and people.

The four clans shook, though, with a few manipulations here and there; any further trouble was squashed. The power shifted to one more powerful than the oldest vampire. They each served the Blood-king wholeheartedly. Going against him could result in the annihilation of what remained of the vampires. On the day Serene tried to fool Staxius – everyone witnessed the sheer resolve to kill and destroy they who stood in his path. A day marked by blood, a day that would forever change the vampiric kind. They would play an essential part in a war that had the world on edge.

“Are you really the daughter of a king?” bell rang, rumors about Lizzie and her father’s exploit during the school conference made waves. Higher than a duchess, said person would logically be he who wields the title of King. In that regard, many were correct.

“Not really, no,” she averted the question and stood in the center. Many students made rounds around her, all tried to get into her good graces, “-my dad sure is someone kind,” a smile.

“What happened to him though?” a bitter voice came from behind, “-did he abandon you, worthless commoner, don’t get a big head,” the youngest Goldberg added with a hint of annoyance. Followed by a humph and snicker, she headed off to the main gates.

“Don’t let her get to you,” said Marie, the youngest of three daughters, “-your father sure is a nice person,” a big smile followed by her tightly holding Lizzie’s hand.

“I guess so,” the latter gave a smile as big as Marie. The two girls had grown attached to one another. Despite her not so inviting family stature which suffered at the hands of a curse, Marie didn’t stand down. Her will to challenge even a prince or princess when it came down to it was unbelievable. Strong and unfaltering – her alone managed to get rid of any unwanted attention.

‘I do wonder where he’s at,’ they walked and chatted.

“Lizzie,” a few meters away, Staxius waved.

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“It’s him,” her bag dropped and dashed straight at him.

“I got you,” teenager by year, she didn’t seem the least worried about how people viewed her. A tight embrace followed by a few soft taps on his back. “Miss me?” he leaned on Void with a smile.

“Of course, I did,” she backed away and pouted, “-left without saying anything,” then realized her bag fell.

“Here,” Marie carried over the bag.

“Good afternoon, Marie,” he gave a smile.

“Good afternoon, Lord Staxius,” she bowed then turned.

“Hold it,” out of character, he reached out and grabbed her shoulder.

"I apologize if I did anything to offend," she turned with the gaze on the floor.

"Nothing of the sorts happened," he gently lifted her chin, Lizzie could but watch the scene unfold, "from what I saw, you two have grown close. It does make me very happy," he turned and patted Lizzie's head, "-she might be a ball of energy but my girl sure is someone reliable. Thanks for taking care of her," he said with a warm tone, "-on that, care to join us for a study session?"

"I- sorry?" she looked up confused by what he meant.

"A study session, I feel as if Lizzie would focus better if she had a friend to bond with as well. Exams start next week, don't they?"

"It's actually at the end of next month," said Lizzie with a grain of embarrassment. Her grades were still below average.

"Even better," Staxius voiced content with the new development, "-care to let me have a word with thy father?" he asked.

"But I didn't agree yet," a faint mumble stumped by Lizzie's broody face.

Adamant, finding out Luther's number wasn't hard. A quick call to Cake who dug around with haste.

"Come on, it will be fun," Lizzie said with glee.

"If my dad agrees, then yes," Marie gave into the two's forcefulness.

"It's settled," the phone hung, "-I'll get you home before eight," Void opened, "-let's go."

Squeezed onto the same seat, the sheer craftsmanship of Void's inside blew her mind. 'Is this what it means to be rich?' she wondered with amazement.

"I am sorry about this," the car turned on, "-I would have brought another car if I knew that I'd find more passengers," with a friendly wink, they headed into town.

"First we'll get food, then have some fun, then return home," a plan that Lizzie agreed.

"Also, Marie, don't hold back, I'm here as a friend – no need to keep up faces or act responsibly. We're but ordinary citizens who have cometh to enjoy the pleasure of Roseshire," a sentence which set her mind at ease. Normally, in no way would she accept such an offer. Staxius's charm made it difficult to refuse, a weird attraction was felt. Each time he spoke, there was a connection – a vampire's allure. Hence, for the next two hours, with Adete on the shoulder, the trio went around the capital. From food to buying books for the incoming study session and more, they had a great time. At one of the antique's shop, Marie's eyes fell onto a diamond-shaped necklace with two ruby eyes in the middle. Without much thought, she blinked and headed off as Lizzie led the way.

Time reached four in the evening, "-let's go home," he said with a smile. Finding Marie came as a boon, an excuse to take the mind off what had happened in Arda; the dream remained a sore thumb.

An hour drive later, they reached the mansion. 'The noble district,' Marie wondered, '-and close to the exit as well,' the door opened automatically. 'I've visited many nobles before,' they went up the small hill, '-but this takes wealthy to another level.' Amazed by the yard, it was as big as her whole house

combined. Then came the actual mansion, “-beautiful,” they stepped out, she couldn’t believe it, ‘Lord Staxius isn’t a mere noble, is he?’ she looked around in utter speechlessness. Even in the eyes of another noble, what he worked so hard to obtain felt as if a fortune many wouldn’t even dream.

“Go off and roam around, there’s a garden if you wish to have pleasant smells,” he said invitingly, “-I’ll park the car, see you girls in thirty minutes?”

Books in hand, Staxius headed for the library whilst the other two ran around outside.

“Hey Cake,” without much to do, he phoned the strategist again.

“Yes boss, what can I do for you?”

“Give me status on the war against the UO. Did the witch tell anything?”

“We got information that the UO was actually a pawn for an organization that went by the name Syndicate. Probably fake, since they don’t concern us – I’ve sent agents to cause some mayhem. UO isn’t UO anymore, the name they go by is Snow. Pretty uncommon, though it perfectly fits their organization. Based on the mainland, located in the Northeast, a kingdom in the alps. Not as influential as the Dark-guild but an up and coming big shot in the Angel’s Dust trade. Godfather Renaud has been going crazy, God’s Ale is nice and all, but the dust is super addictive. The risk is much more than the ale, you know what I mean don’t you?”

“Yes, a single sniff of that powder and it’s over. Safe or not, if they are selling it at a cheaper price – we’ll be at a loss. Desperation and craving, that’s what they’re targeting.”

“Yes, the real goal was to override our influence over the drug’s business.”

“A sound strategy, cut off our money and we’ll have to use up reserves. Cut off reserves and we’ll get desperate, when that happens, they’ll strike. What does Karlson have to say about this?” more opinions meant more information.

“He told me to make it seem as if we’re struggling,” her reply felt a little excited.

“What about the spy, didn’t we have a leak?”

“It’s been taken care of,”

“-except for one,” he interjected.

“Yes,” she whispered.

“I get it,” he smiled, “-how scary can one person be,” a rhetorical question for said person was her.

“I’ll take that as a compliment,” she seemed proud.

“Continue with the good work, I’ll get on examining Angel’s Dust. You are going to need it for something,” he implied to another concocted scheme.

“We’re on the same line of thinking,” she laughed and hung.

‘The strategist strikes again with another plan. Kill every single spy and let one live. It’s a risky but worthy plan. If we feed him what we want him to hear, Snow will fall in our hands. So far, I don’t think

they're that powerful else a full-on war would ensure. Fighting trade by trade, they picked on the wrong organization.'

"We're here," the door opened. Freshened up, the duo returned with smooth looking skin.

"About time," the persona changed, "-let's get started," for the next few hours, he taught them the basics yet again. Most seemed elementary but had another purpose; they showed the practical application. Using logic and wit in consortium with what has been given through the textbook.

Downstairs, Kniq returned from the daily quests. The door opened with a big clash. Work assigned, he headed down to check on the guild. "Welcome home," leaned on the stair with arms crossed, the tired adventurers walked in.

"Master," Avon yelled, "-you're home."

"You stated the obvious," Auic gave a quick tap on his head.

"Welcome home to you as well," said Undrar.

"May we ask where you disappeared to?" Achilles voiced out of curiosity.

"I had to prepare for the guild opening in Arda," he stepped off the staircase, "-took more work than anticipated."

"Emmy, Emmy," voiced Emma.

"Emma, Emma," voiced Emmy.

"Welcome home," they dashed and took each of his arms, "-Undrar, s-sure is hard on recruits," Emmy complained.

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"Yes, yes, very much hard on us," Emma added with a pout.

"Don't go spreading false accusations?" Undrar voiced with hands on her hips.

"Glad to see everyone in high spirits," he headed to the kitchen, "-no need to cook, I've ordered food. It's an apology for leaving without saying a word," the trip to the capital did more than spend time with Lizzie and Marie. Deadeyes was left alone in the RFS, he had a dense day.

Chapter 252: Angel's Dust

The night sky, moonless and covered with clouds. The breeze, harsh for it acted as a premonition for an incoming storm. The weather over the past few days had grown rather bad, many were forced to bring umbrellas in case of rain.

Deadeyes, laid to rest in the RFS while the rest had dinner, awoke with the sound of thunder. A menacing growl, monstrous in nature – he rose to his feet but ended up hitting the roof of the vehicle.

"Nice, you're awake," a voice came from outside.

"Who is it?" hand on where he got injured, the door opened lazily.

“Should I answer?” arms crossed with a deep voice, Staxius stared.

“I do apologize,” he stumbled out, fatigue had gotten the better.

“Let me help you,” arms around the broad shoulders, Staxius helped the marksman. “Dinner?” he offered as soon as they stepped foot inside.

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“No thanks, I don’t think my stomach would be able to handle a hefty meal,” not wanting to cause the man more trouble, *Ancient Magic: Teleportation.* In a blueish light, “-good night, do ask Viola if she can let you have a day off tomorrow,” the door closed and he fell asleep.

Knock, Knock, the door to the silent library came to life, “-girls, let’s go have dinner,” it opened.

“Coming,” notebooks closed, the two-headed downstairs. From silent to suddenly filled with murmurs and laughter, Marie was taken aback.

“That’s the rest of Kniq,” Lizzie grabbed her hands and led the way. There, it came as a surprise to have a visitor. At first, the uniforms and the smell of gunpowder paired with a faint scent of fire sent red-flags. She wanted to let go and run.

Auic and Undrar took charge for they knew how she felt. Getting the guest to open up wasn’t hard. Avon’s jokes paired with Auic’s rhetoric and Achilles misplaced jokes that were told using a straight face got the room lightened. The Lymsey sisters on the other hand would often doze in and out of consciousness. Being an adventurer meant a copious amount of physical effort whilst holding back the fear of dying. A big family unrelated by blood, Staxius sat back and watched – the same as Marie. At times, he would share a few words then continued his meal. Words that held weight and meaning – he did so only when the room grew into a serious topic. Monsters or the curse of demons.

At around 19:00, the trio headed upstairs to finish the study session. As for Kniq, each one either took baths and headed to bed, or headed into the study to read a book or two. Deadeyes would often go outside and stargaze from the balcony. Though he slept early today. Emma and Emmy had the habit of sneaking into Staxius room in hope of catching him off guard. They wanted to scare him, but ended up getting scared. The sight of an empty room made the twins a little disappointed.

“I never thought of it this way,” both hands holding onto a piece of paper, Marie watched in awe.

“If this continues, I’ll be able to get better grades on exams,” said Lizzie in a pleased tone.

“Yes, we’ll continue this till the basics have been mastered. After that, it will be up to you to navigate thy way around a textbook,” a warning. Letting go early would be beneficial for the students in the long run. Only the basics and not to get dependent on a teacher or anyone else. If the time came where they would have to study alone, the necessary skills were provided.

“Goodbye everyone,” a few minutes later, Void pulled up, the time had come for the guest to return. With a cheerful goodbye from the house, she left with a smile.

“Did you have fun?” as the scenery and nightlight of buildings went past, Staxius asked for he needed to know how she felt.

“Yes,” she turned with a smile; “-I got to know Lizzie better. It came as a surprise to see that Kniq lives in such luxury and doesn’t even pay heed to how much power they wield in terms of property and reach. Adventurers and a high-ranking noble living together, it was very interesting.”

“Should have expected as much,” he smiled then faced the front, “-back home, no one cares about social status or nobility. I may be noble by title, but I’m still their family in some ways. Someone they can rely on if it ever came down too.”

“How do you feel about it though?” she asked with no particular specification.

“Care to elaborate?”

“No, just in general I mean, how do you feel?” she asked yet again.

“I know not myself,” he sighed, “-Listen, I don’t have the pleasure nor time to feel. This world is far too cruel, letting thy guard down for a second and everything might crumble down in an instant,” a dense aura seeped throughout the car.

“Oi,” a sharp voice followed by teeth sinking into his neck, “-you’re emanating aura subconsciously.”

“Ouch,” he turned with one eye closed. The gaze met with Adete hovering with arms crossed. “Fine,” he turned to the road, the dense aura vanished.

“Are you alright?” Adete asked.

“y-yes,” Marie said with a trembling body, “-what was that?” she asked, her eyes seemed to have gotten blank.

“Nothing much, just Staxius subconsciously letting out a bit of mana,” she said with a friendly voice.

“Wait, are you a mage-”

“We’re here,” before she could ask, Staxius interjected for they had arrived.

“Young miss,” outside in the cold with an umbrella as light showers came down, the butler stood. “-Thanks for bringing her safely to us,” he rushed over to the car.

“It was my pleasure,” the window rolled, “-be sure to give my thanks to Luther.”

“Goodbye, Lord Staxius,” the door opened.

“Take care,” he voiced, “-and do ask if you can come around for a few more days. I should be able to wrap up the study session. Talk it over with Lord Luther.”

“Will do,” she said with a smile then was escorted inside by the butler.

“Quite an interesting character,” commented Adete on the girl’s personality.

“Tell me about it,” now in reverse, he backed off and drove home.

Today's the rise of a new day. I heard from the news that Kniq has gotten pretty famous. Between the training and resting, I haven't gotten a single ounce of time for myself. I should also probably erase the mistake I made earlier. The tournament is in February and not March. It was probably just me overhearing someone on the Television. Aunt Viola said that Julius and the others from Dorchester will come to stay for the duration of the tournament. I can't believe it's coming to reality; a chance to prove myself in front of all those eyes. With this voice inside me, I feel as if I can conquer the world. Quite addicting and blissful for when I call onto her power, the response I get is As you wish, Lady White. It makes me feel as if a princess or something... wait, I am a princess. Talk about being an idiot sometimes. Either way, the tournament is set for the 24th to the 28th. I don't participate till the 25th, the day prior will be of joy and celebration. Local and friendly matches showcasing skill and prowess by each of the participating magical academies. A concert is also planned at the end of the tournament, which will be on the night of the 27th. Three days to decide who will be known as the Prodigy. I can't wait to see everyone else again, diary shut, another entry from Eira who worked hard over the past few months.

'Angel's dust,' sat in Pandora with a batch of God's ale ready besides, the work began. Research on the Relic scroll came to an impasse around the fifty percent mark. Hence the change of pace. Lizzie and the twins remained home since it was weekend. Undrar and the rest went around doing a few kill quests here and there, nothing major. Head focused on the machine that came to life, the work began. In less than ten minutes, the focus grew so much he seeped into Clarity. All the ingredients, procedures, what made it so addictive, and why it grew to be harmful. Minutes turned to hours, at around 13:00, the dream broke. The instant he awoke, the body shut off, the heart stopped beating and all went slumped – another death.

"Wake up, my heir," a thin thread came from the top, "-death is thy friend, not enemy," he reached out and latched onto the thread. Cough followed by a massive inhale, the heart came to life, and he panted. 'That was a close one,' he thought, 'Clarity isn't that unforgiving. All those constant visits are bound to affect me somehow,' head now on the table, '-guess the ultimate price one has to pay for knowledge is his life. Thankfully, I'm immortal and my soul is linked with the current Death Reaper. I'll only truly die if he gets killed. The second most powerful entity since creation, none can escape death, for he lurks in every shadow and corner, what a scary persona.'

"I'm fine now," a quick shake of the head later, the table laid with a pile upon piles of notebooks. 'I do wonder why I suddenly woke up with the revelation on the only way I'll be able to die. Is the Death Reaper in danger or something? Last I heard was the fight against the Elder Gods; the titans. For the time being, tis not of my concern.' It took another few hours to get a handle on the notes that were written down.

'I was concerned for nothing,' he sighed, '-Angel's dust sure is complicated to make but cannot rival God's ale. Sooner or later, people will realize which is the superior drug. With the supplies I have,' he took a look around, '-I should be able to make some without much trouble,' the eyes focused at the back of the room, a shelf with many ingredients.

Taking a break after such an extensive day of alchemy, a phone call disturbed the only moment of peace he got. "Master, could you come by the guild-headquarters this instant?" Auic asked intently, behind, a girl's voice seemed to be creating havoc.

"Do I really have to?" he yawned.

"GET OVER HERE RIGHT NOW," she yelled then hung.

"Oh damn," the eyes opened wide, "-I got yelled at," he laughed, "-how amusing," for the first time, he couldn't believe it. 'Must be serious,' note placed inside a locked drawer, with a suit-jacket on, Staxius took the portal.

"I demand to meet Lord Staxius right now," a female voice came from out the hall, "-he's the only reason why my daughter wishes to join the adventuring ranks. It's inexcusable."

"Mother," another voice fought back, "-don't forget he's the one that gave me a new life. I don't care what you say, I wish to become an adventurer, it's my will and you'll never get in my way again."

"Either way, I don't care," the lady continued, "-I wish to see him right now," her anger voiced at Auic. The latter could but hide the intent to lash out.

Click, the door opened, "YOU," the lady rushed straight towards him, "-YOU'RE THE REASON FOR THIS," she raised her pitch, "-I'll have you kicked OUT,"

"Excuse me," the face turned murderous, the eyes merciless, "-I'm sure there's something we can work out," *snap,* a fireball got conjured, "-you do realize this floor is mine by right. Therefore, I could kill you and burn thy body to a crisp if I wish, Mrs. Remington. In no way am I going to stand here and take this sort of treatment from someone who hasn't the decency to calmly explain what has happened."

"Look," she turned and stared her daughter, "-that's the kind of person you want to follow, wanting to kill at every corner."

"Mr. Alchemist," the girl stood with awe, "-you are the leader of Kniq."

"Yes, and how can I be of help?" he ignored Carla and faced the girl.

"Thanks to you I can now run around and bathe in the sunlight. I was hoping that you'd let me join Kniq, I wish to go on adventures and discover new places," her face remained unfaltering, an unshakable will.

"Good," he said with a smile, "-however, that isn't my choice to make. The recruitment is handled by both Auic and Viola; the vice leader. My job is to watch over the shop and research magical items," the tone sincere.

Chapter 253: Dorothy Remington

"Had enough yet?" the mother asked with a sharp tone.

"Not yet," Dorothy didn't back down. Awkwardly, the mother and daughter had a stare-off.

"Auic," Staxius called, "-have you contacted Viola?"

"Yes," a relieved reply, "-she'll be here soon."

"In that case," he stepped closer to the visitors, "-Mrs. Remington, I'd like to have a word in private," asked in a respectful yet monotonous tone, he walked over to the office.

"As you wish," she rolled her eyes in anguish and followed.

"What about me?" Dorothy asked out of concern.

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"You're with me," Auic interjected, "-come here," she headed for her office.

Silent, filled with extravagant commodities and a desk that had nothing but a faint glow. "Please take a seat," he offered then sat in turn. With a push of a button, the curtains parted gently. "Now then," formally sat with his face turned to hers, the eyes met, "-care to tell me the meaning of this?" the image of him holding a fireball earlier lingered in the subconscious. The purpose was the calm any unnecessary revolt should emotions take over, Carla would take time to think before acting.

"I'd like to thank you first," the words seemed not to incline to part from her tongue.

"You needn't force thyself on my account, Mrs. Remington," he added since she struggled.

The little remark forced her to glare, though, her stare was met by one even colder and filled with murderous intent. Fight and flight could kick in at any time, her heart raced, her fingers felt tingly. "I do apologize," she sighed and gathered her thoughts. "It was thanks to you that Dorothy can run around in the sun. Her mind is set on becoming an adventurer, the reason why it's so hard to see her acting said way is simple. I don't want to see her bedridden ever again."

Meanwhile, in the other room, a similar situation unfolded. "Care to tell me why you want to become an adventurer?" asked Auic in a curious manner.

"I was bedridden for so long. Mother and father nearly went bankrupt trying to keep a failure like me alive. The reason I want to continue down said path; to repay the kindness they showed me. I want to go out and make the life granted to me something to be proud of. Nothing extravagant, I wish to help my parents repay the debt that has gone to my treatment."

"So, you see, Lord Staxius," Clara came to her decision, "-I'm not letting my daughter go out and fight any longer. It's unbecoming a noble lady. Her coming to age party is to come in the next few months. Turning sixteen will mean her venture into the world of upper society. Many suitors will approach, many who will make her happy with whatever she wishes for. And for her to turn to adventuring without care for our practices is borderline selfish and uncalled for."

"Can I please join; I only wish to repay what has been spent. I want to experience life outside of a caring house; my turning of age ceremony comes fast. Being a nobleman's daughter is hard, I'll be forced to marry into a family that is best suited for my family and not me. It's all I want, to live my life the fullest for the next few months till it all comes to an end. A vivid dream, a fantasy of which Kniq holds the keys."

"In no way will she join Kniq."

"I will join Kniq."

Simultaneously, both gave their opinion. 'Seriously,' he stared up, '-these two are impossible. This is supposed to be an adventuring guild, not some counseling office,' without the two knowing, Staxius and Auic knew what went on in both rooms. Earpieces, courtesy of the Dark-guild – the situation, awkward at best, was now known.

"I've heard thy worries," Staxius spoke, "-you want to keep her unharmed till her aging ceremony," with a serious glare, "-have you spoken any of this to thy daughter, or is this your supposed authority as guardian or selfishness coming to play?" words as sharp as knives, Carla could but narrow her eyes in anger, her face tensed.

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"D-DON'T-

"I'd mine my tone if I were you," the index pointed up, a full stop to the would-be screaming. Not very ladylike but part understood what it meant to be a parent. "Back to what I was saying, if you haven't discussed this with her, then there's no point. Either she'll run off and ruin thy family name or go on quests without being an adventurer. I've two daughters myself, if the time came where one wanted to join me in my job, then I'd welcome with open arms. I've seen one of them get hurt; the feeling wasn't nice, she nearly died on my watch," the face remained still, "-still, I wouldn't shelter them for my own sake. Tis their life to live, who am I to interject?" a reference to the two-versus-two when Eira got injured.

"I'd disagree," she spoke out, "-why would anyone leave their daughter to fight. Even if it's their will, they are but kids, not mature enough," her point of view didn't change one bit, rather, it was enforced.

"Listen," with a deep breath, "-I'm not here to argue what is good or wrong. The thing at hand is whether Dorothy will join my guild or not. This isn't about you, Mrs. Remington. Should I remind thy of who I am?" he stood, "-go speak this with thy daughter, the vice-leader should be in soon."

"Fine," she gritted then left.

'I do wish I could take her by the neck and watch as the life slowly drains out her nose and mouth,' he sighed as the lady left.

"Do it then," said Adete, "-kill her, I'd like to see some bloodshed too," meant to be viewed in jest.

"I knew you'd say that," he sat back down and pulled up a screen from the blueish glow. Paired with the guild card, a connection was made; information and the guild in Arda, quests, and more were displayed. More members joined; the seal of approval would be given in a week after the Mages guild would be complete with the training regiment.

A few walls apart, Undrar came as fast as she could. They now spoke to both the mother and daughter. 'If the girl was above sixteen and not noble, it would have been simpler. Take the mother out of the picture and let her experience what it's like first hand to fight on the frontlines,' he thought and waited. Mind drained from research on Angel's Dust, he could but sit back and wait.

The tower is where you'll find the answer. Two demons have taken reign over this world. Direct subordinates to the new god of time, they are out to do but one thing, revive the Elder Gods and destroy the many realms in an attempt to unify all into a single rule, the rule of Kronos, a voice whispered, flashes of a fight were on display, "-wake up," another voice came from between the dream, "-Wake up," it grew, "-WAKE UP." The dream shattered, "-is it that time again?"

"Time for what?" stood with a smile, Auic. A glance at the clock revealed that three hours had gone by.

"You're going to relish this new turn of events," the smile she held wasn't that pure, it felt like a smirk.

"Care to elaborate?" the half-asleep mind came too.

"We've agreed," sat before him, Mrs. Remington and Dorothy, each had a subtle smile.

"We came to realize that all this has been thy fault from the start," Auic went into greater detail, "-having brought over Marie earlier cause this mess. Dorothy had been tamed before her sister told about how Kniq lived as a family and the numerous adventures Avon recounted fondly. It brought her out of her shell, thus," she stared over at the people in question.

"What's the compromise then?" a bad feeling hovered in the air.

"Dorothy here will be working at Pandora for the upcoming months. Her mother remained adamant about not letting her go out into the wild to fight. Viola also agrees the girl isn't physically suitable to fight for she's weak and prone to fatigue. A side-effect caused by the curse," from trying to figure out what had happened, the eyes opened instantly.

"Seriously?" he stared at Undrar and mumbled, the party stood behind close and seemed to laugh. 'I swear,' he looked down in amusement, '-I can't, as revenge, they decided to place her responsibility on my head. This is going to be a pain,' since the adventuring guild would settle in the next week, there wasn't much to do else work at the shop. Any major tasks had been handled.

"What's the verdict?" asked Carla.

"It's no trouble, I'll take in Dorothy as my assistant. She'll be at the shop, safe from danger and paid pretty well. Does that suit thy criteria?" nothing could be done; the decision had been made. What was left was to take in the assistant and work her to the bone.

"Awesome," said the girl, "-I'll be sure to make it worth thy time."

"I'll be sure to pick you up tomorrow, it will be a sort of orientation of where you'll work," on those parting words, a supposed peaceful Sunday had been planned with instruction a newbie.

"Now then," once the duo left, a dark aura seeped out, "-care to tell me who came up with the plan of sticking babysitting duty onto me?"

"Tis not that big-a-deal," Avon dashed for a hug, "-she just wants to live life a bit before getting married off to some other family. I thought you enjoyed the company of small girls," he referred to Lizzie, the twins, and Eira.

"That's quite malicious," he patted Avon's head, "-but I also enjoy the company of boys like you," the arms wrapped around the spirit's body and squeezed.

"OK, OK, I GET IT," Avon screamed in pain.

"Jokes apart, that was probably the best choice of actions. Good job to you and Viola. Tomorrow's a day off, go enjoy thyself. I'll go and deposit the Qaisar you've brought from all those monster-slaying quests."

"As you wish," on that, the party left.

“Auic, can I have the report on quests and the amount of Qaisar they managed to collect?” still sat in the office, the fox-eared lady, ran back out.

[Report for January]

[Quests completed: 30]

[Qaisar amassed: Gold-10, Silver-500, Copper-102000]

‘Talk about working hard,’ it was a quest every single day and a lot of monster slaying.

“Any monster drops?” he asked.

“I’m afraid not, they are unexpectedly rare,” Auic replied.

“Guess I’ll take the coins to the guild. I’ll meet you back at home,” stood in the storage room, three massive chests onto which had Gold, Silver, and Copper labeled. ‘Why do they have to be this big,’ a quick shake of the head followed by a teleport to the central guild.

“What are you doing here so late?” Diane was in the process of cleaning up coffee Melisa spilled.

“I came for a favor,” the tone remained monotonous.

“Go on,” she said without much thought and cleaned.

“You know the big chests where guilds are supposed to deposit Qaisar at the end of each month then bring here?”

“Yes, what about them?” her mop stopped moving.

“Can’t I just link the boxes with the deposit box here?”

“What do you mean by link?” intrigued, she asked wanting to know more.

“It’s simple. Each month, guilds bring in those boxes and deposit it at their guilds account where it’s processed and handed back out after a cut has been taken. Therefore, I’d like to create a shortcut, instead of me walking, I’d like to just raise a portal between the chest at headquarters and the chest here.”

“Teleportation,” she sighed, “-fine, guild master of Arda,” the tone felt a little woeful. “Ask Melisa about the depo chest for Kniq,” she had lost the usual flair and uninviting personality. Not wanting to pry though he noticed, a chat with Melisa later; without much trouble – the link was established.

“See you later,” a rather hard slap on Diane’s back, “-don’t look down. The guild assistant who always causes me trouble isn’t a person who looks down. She stares up and confronts whatever pisses her off. Wipe that woeful expression and replace it with one filled with disgust. It suits you best,” with a wink, he left.

“Screw you.”

Chapter 254: New Venture

“One, two, three, four,” yells broke the rather light sleep. It came from the outside; confused, a glance revealed Kniq. They made laps around the yard with Undrar at the helms shouting numbers. Leading the pack from the back, Achilles, she’d chew out any who slow down in pace. It seemed more like torture than improving stamina.

“Always something new around here,” voiced Adete, she also had her dream broken by the ruckus.

“Got to hand it to them,” he gave a gentle smile then headed off to the baths. Last night, the meet with Melisa and the linking of the chests was a success. The process had been made simpler. The average time was around a few hours to process the cut and how much the guild and adventurers would receive.

After the central guild took it’s cut; the copper converted into Silver and was distributed equally. Each party member received a gold piece and 100 silver. Kniq, as the guild, got 2 Gold and the central guild took 1 Gold. Opposed to quest rewards, tis was but bonus added for killing monsters. The other account got handled by Undrar. Staxius had but one thing to think of, and that was Pandora. As an alchemist working for the DG, away from anyone’s knowing; the money made could but take the breath out of any normal person. An hour went by, breakfast stood ready on the table. Outside, the party continued to make rounds and train. Most seem to smile in cold weather.

‘Let’s check the balance,’ from the pocket, a wallet in which resided many bank cards. The first one, owned by the DG and where all the not so legitimate money was made from, 62,936 gold and 350 silver. The same card used to make purchases around town. Next came the money made from being an adventurer; 184950 gold. Most came from the two months out on the border. The best someone with average skill could make was around 100 gold per month. Better than the average pay for their lives were on the line. Staxius led many parties into battle. Not a single man was lost and paired with the enormous number of monsters killed; it added up. A fortune from killing stuff, the perfect job. Money wasn’t an issue any longer. The thought to leave it all behind and head to Arda; did cross the mind. Sadly, Kniq and the shop here needed the attention.

“Undrar,” a few minutes later, Void pulled out the garage.

“Yes?” she shouted back.

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“I’m going off for today. The money from Qaisar should have been transferred over. Take the day off and don’t overwork, I’ll probably be back late,” on that note, the car drove off to the Remington’s residence. Doing the math’s internally, the shop made around 11 Gold for the first two months. It didn’t come as a shock; he was away most of the time. Rather than selling other commodities such as arrows and more, the focus changed to Magical potions and Scrolls paired with a few high-value items.

Beep, Beep, “-young miss, Lord Staxius awaits thy presence,” said the butler as Dorothy had breakfast.

“Be careful,” Carla remained strict.

“I will, goodbye, mother,” the door opened with the girl rushing out.

“Good morning, you seem to be in a good mood,” Staxius commented in a comforting tone.

“Good morning to you as well, Lord Staxius,” out of breath, she managed to calm down. Thus, a would have been quiet Sunday, filled with teaching the ropes to a new employee.

“Is this it?” she asked, the car stopped shy of the door.

“Pandora, Kniq’s magical shop that is also my laboratory,” the door unlocked.

“What do you mean by Laboratory?” she asked and followed. The inside filled with dust and smelled of iron.

“I’m an alchemist, remember?” he turned around, “-this shop is basically a means for me to sell my research,” a short pause, he stared the entourage. “Since you’re not that able of body, why not go around and check the stocks. There be a notebook on the counter at the back,” without warning, a piece of cloth got wrapped around her nose and mouth, “the shop hasn’t been opened in weeks, we best get to cleaning soon.”

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“On it,” the voice muffled, she scurried off into the dimly lit room, taking stock wasn’t that hard. All that was needed to be done, count how many items the shop had. No trouble since he was meticulous.

‘Who knew that this lock would come in handy,’ not wanting her to ever enter the room upstairs. A lock, installed by the dwarves prior, had a code: X3u0 instated. In addition to that, the frame got embedded with the same properties as the portals in Arda. Only he who was allowed could gain entry, anyone else, would be shocked. Doors shut, a notepad with results on Angel’s Dust, got placed beside the information about the original God’s Ale recipe.

“Let’s get to cleaning,” he said whilst checking the inventory with Dorothy. Time reached ten, the sun had yet to show. The grey clouds felt imposing. The temperature dropped; an unwelcomed sensation. The ingredients for a mild cold were at nature’s disposal.

Cleaned without dust, Dorothy sat behind the counter. Staxius gave a few notes on how the shop should be run. First, a basic lecture on potions and scrolls. Everything a novice would require to understand how the items worked. The more one knew, the better judgment could be made. On the right, behind the counter, a phone that linked directly to Auic’s phone at headquarters.

“Since today is a first, I brought you with me. Starting tomorrow, you’ll have to come and go using thy own means. Working here means that I’m only responsible for thy safety on the morning shifts, coming and going is your responsibility. I won’t tolerate tardiness,” the voice strict, she could but nod in agreement. “Pandora isn’t opened all week-long. Monday, Wednesday, and Friday are the days where adventures return from extensive quests. It’s from 07:00 to 12:00.”

“Understood,” her face remained stern.

“Good,” with a smile, “-guess we’ll shut down shop for today,” on that, Dorothy joined Pandora. At first, making Pandora a famous shop seemed the idle way to make money using knowledge on scrolls. Sadly, with the involvement in the DG, it turned pointless.

‘What to do,’ now inside without Dorothy, he thought. The girl was taken back home thanks to Achilles and Lizzie who came strolling downtown. ‘I can’t possibly hope to maintain this shop. The only way I see

this working,' he stood, '-becoming a wholesaler. Since Mana potions are being made, healing potions will be required. Isorin won't bat an eye at the chance of selling scrolls.'

Sooner or later, he'll have to leave the capital for good. If people grew to be dependent on Pandora's potions, then, later on, the adventurers would suffer. The reason why he didn't do that move previously was that an alchemist in the guild could reverse engineer the potion. If that happened, a source of income would vanish. Nothing mattered, figuring out his work couldn't be any more of a waste.

"Mathew," a step inside, the assistant jumped.

"Lord Staxius, how may I be of help?" he asked in a feeble tone.

"Could I meet with Isorin?" cold gaze fell upon his back.

"Yes, you'll find him inside his bed chambers."

"Clarise," he turned, "-glaring at me with such annoyance won't help in hiding your presence."

"Always the charmer," the girl approached with a fatigued look, "-what brings you here?" she asked with a bit of resentment. Refusal to join the Cobalt unit had placed both on bad terms. In Staxius' case, he could care less. Clarise was the one who seemed to hold the grudge.

"I come with an offer," he held out a hand, "-let me carry half of those books," an offer that she accepted. "Come to think of it, I think the alchemist guild might also benefit from this deal," a glance at her facial expression revealed nothing but a tired girl and flushed cheeks. "Interested?" he asked.

"Honestly, try speaking with grandfather about this. I'm too tired to think," they walked up the stairs and made way to the Alchemist Sect.

"Too tired are you?" forcefully, he pulled on her shoulders and held her cheeks. Too slow to realize what happened, she swallowed a flask of magical potion. The slumped eyelids came too, "-what are you doing," she pulled back and glared.

"It worked," he laughed then walked.

'I feel energized again, what's this,' her eyes narrowed, "-what did you give me?" she asked.

"A healing potion," the voice nonchalant, "-common in quality."

"Don't be stupid," she stopped, "-healing potions of common quality aren't that potent."

"Yes," he turned, "-the ones made by the Alchemist Sect aren't as potent as mine," a smirk later, "-this is what I'm offering," the journey down the hall continued.

"A common quality potion, made by you, is as potent as one that is Uncommon, and even Rare as the one we made?" more than anger, curiosity came forth.

"Let's discuss this in a more appropriate setting. Where's the master alchemist?" now hooked, the girl could but follow him to the meeting room.

Pleasantries exchanged; a deal was laid out on the table. "I'd like to take over the manufacturing of healing potions from the Alchemist Sect," up till now, it was the sect that was responsible for providing the potions to the Magical guild.

"Another bold proposal," Flein shook his head, "-care to elaborate why?"

"Not to be disrespectful," he slid across a few common quality potions, "-these are the lower grade potions I've blended. The procedure is secret and so are the ingredients. What I'm offering is to take-over production. Of course, I'll be the sole Alchemist in charge of making the item," the master alchemist felt pressured. "Moneywise, the cost won't be any higher than what the guild is charging. More than anything, it will lower."

"Still, the question about why you wish to become the sole manufacturer."

"As pleasantly as I can say this, the ones in charge of making Healing potions are incompetent as far as I'm concerned. I'm sure you've read the papers on how to heal a demon's curse. The potions being made currently shan't suffice. I'd like to monopolize on the superiority of my blend. Sadly, there are other duties I must tend to. Things that are far more important than waiting for customers in a shop. What I hope to gain is a fixed amount of coins each week. Nothing more nothing less, I'll sell Rare Quality blend that can be filtered into Uncommon and Common quality. The pricing is up to you."

"Master," called Clarise, "-what he offers is a blend unlike any we've seen."

"Alright," he sighed, "-I'll decide after an estimate on how much it will cost."

"Seems fair," tap on the guild card later, a screen came up. Information about anything private was hidden. What he used was a notepad, "-let's say 4 Golds per liter."

"Too expensive, take it down to 3.5 Gold," Flein fired back.

"Considering its Rare potions, are you sure to let this opportunity go: 3.25 Gold."

"Fine, since it's Rare potions, I'd settle on 3 Gold per liter," final offer from the master alchemist.

"Deal," he said with a smile.

"I won't be handing the production of healing potions just yet. Show me how efficiently the potions can be made, I'll make my decision after a week or so."

"Let's say a hundred liter for the first batch?" Staxius offered.

"Isn't that a bit much?" argued Clarise.

"First impressions are the best impressions. Payment will be forwarded on the day of the delivery. Let's say, next Sunday?"

"As you wish," thus, a new venture began. Wholesaling; one that could be transferred over to Arda should the time demand. Shallow as it might have seemed, this deal was more planned out than what was let on. Once people took notice of how much better his potions were, demand would increase. The Alchemist sect would need more. Even if they were able to get the ingredients, the procedure was far more complicated than they had the means to accomplish. When the demand hit a certain peak,

production will be sent to Arda. Thus, the Ardanian would have another way of income; a monopolization of the healing potion's market. A risky gamble, for if it failed; the blend and credibility as an alchemist would crumble as well.

Chapter 255: Ocher Time

'Now that's settled, time to negotiate the scrolls with Isorin.' Destination set to the wizard's room, after a nod of acknowledgment – he left with the master Alchemist and his granddaughter speechless. The man who refused to join the Cobalt unit had another purpose, another scheme brewing. Deep down, Flein knew something was up. Sadly, emotions and baseless accusations would but harm a perfectly good situation. Quiet as he might have seemed, Staxius slowly made waves across the capital. From the underground to the royal family, the reach had expanded over many people. Not only in Hidros either; the Main continent as well. Well acquainted with Prince Ernis and a friend to Renaud; the amount of power hidden between those blank stares and monotonous speech patterns was consequential.

"I see," said Isorin with a smile, "-you'd like to sell some of thy research to me?"

"No," the head shook, "-I'd like to give you some of my scrolls as a gift. Do with it as you wish, sell them to collectors or wealthy adventurers. There is plenty to come soon, all I wish from thy is goodwill. The time might come soon where scroll could turn into something essential," he paused and stared up, "- imagine a dragon befalls town. Arrows and guns won't do much. Then, in the shadows, an adventurer pulls out a scroll within which has an SSS-ranked spell infused. One that could destroy a town, the possibilities are endless."

"In the wrong hands, it could also be used against us," the wizard argued.

"I'm sure the good outweighs the bad. I can't help but think about the uses it might give us if war is to erupt suddenly. Who knows, maybe the main continent gets attacked and the Imperial family is exiled to Hidros. Queen Gallienne would have to rightfully step-down as queen. The well-balanced situation we have will crumble. Adventurers forced to fight soldiers, invade other places, lay waste to settlements," the reaction from the wizard didn't seem normal.

"Even though what you say is but a product of fantasy, the possibility does exist. I can't fathom another war – Scrolls, the Alliance with Arda, beings that are more than natural. Hidros is a hotbed of fuses waiting to blow."

"Whatever the case, my loyalty lies with Arda. They are the people who took me in and gave a place to stay," he stood, "-if Hidros does ask for help, I'll gladly join the front. This is what an alliance is for, to help one another."

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"I guess," he sighed, "-I'll take these scrolls and spread its name and fame. That's what you're counting on isn't it, free publicity."

"Whatever do you mean?" followed by the signature wave, Staxius left the mages guild and headed back to Pandora. Without noticing, the grey clouds turned to dusk. Already somber and dark, not many saw from whence the sun returned.

“Are you sure not returning to the mansion and Arda is wise?” asked Adete when they entered the shop. “You did sort of leave without telling thy precious queen,” she pulled out her tongue.

“It’s nothing new, I always leave without saying anything. Goodbyes aren’t my forte,” the locked door opened with a beep. The light toggled into an amber color. Not harm on the eyes, the same as lighting a candle, warm and soft – a relish for the mind.

“Guess you do have a soft spot, vampire,” she laughed.

“You bet I do,” he smirked, “-a soft spot for the people I care about,” the gaze soon changed to emotionless, “-sadly, don’t ever think that the weak spot can be exploited. I’d not stop even if my companions are to die before me,” he had noticed it too. ‘Since I met Xula, Eira, Lizzie, and the others, I’ve been feeling much more at ease than before. I dread the day we’ll part ways. Have to sort out these feelings. The dream about me and Xula showed the truth. Turning soft won’t accomplish anything. I’m a vampire and the heir to Lord Death. There’s no need to be merciful; the new Staxius may be strong by strength and body, but the old Staxius was far stronger by mind and soul. Calm and compose, feel Darkarts, feel the state of nothingness I once thrived in,’ the eyes focused on theorizing a way to make Angel’s Dust. All the knowledge was here, it became a game of crossing; different procedures with different ingredients in some disorderly fashion. Rain poured, outside, the cold wind blew across the empty streets and made howls upon hitting buildings. The first floor dimly lit, Staxius worked the night till daybreak.

A new day without much change. The weather remained angry and gloomy. Umbrellas broke by the sheer force of gusts, the rain felt like pebbles hitting; it took a change for the worst. Town square, usually filled with newspaper sellers, stood empty. Many took refuge under shops and buildings to wait for the downpour to halt. Some braved the storm and headed to work. Tardiness and excuse were a thing of shame – none wanted to be a burden. The start of a new week, lucky were those students who had vehicles.

“Lizzie,” Auic called, “-I don’t think that master will be home today,” now stood with Kniq ready to leave, the girl waited.

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“Come with us,” offered Undrar, “-the weather is too bad to be taking public transport,” her face held a smile.

“You too, Auic,” voiced Achilles, “-we’ll drop everyone off and head out. Mondays are a bit slow. Not to mention the guild had to pay out many quests as it’s the start of a new month. It should be fine.”

“That’s kind of you to offer,” Auic interjected, “-I’ll just take the portal to work. It does link to Pandora, from there, I’ll head to the headquarters.”

“Then it’s settled,” Undrar said with a smile, “-Deadeyes will stay home with the twins today. You three are in bad shape and need rest. Don’t cause too much trouble,” the vehicle headed out.

“Food has already been made. Heat it when you eat,” with a pat on the twin’s head, Auic climbed to the attic.

“Let me in, come on,” a voice came from outside. “-I know you’re in there,” it shouted.

“Who the hell is making all that noise?” inside Pandora, Auic headed for the door to find a drenched Dorothy.

“Finally, someone answered,” she stared up with a pale face, “-I was getting worried,” her speech slowed.

“Let’s get you warmed up first,” she offered and returned to Pandora.

The weather didn’t let up, late in the afternoon, the rain continuously ailed the citizens. Void stood outside the shop, Auic assumed Staxius was up in the lab, sadly, when she came to the door – a shock pushed her away. None knew where he had gone, Dorothy was sent back home. The secretary and vice-leader decided to take a day off, no work could be done. Hence, the duty to take Lizzie back home fell onto Undrar. Time was 15:00, no sign of Staxius anywhere.

“Good afternoooooon Hidros,” in a jingle, a voice came through the radio, “-the weather here has been atrocious. I can’t even get out without three or four umbrellas. Nonetheless, armed with a coffee, I’ve returned,” the voice was that of Aceline. “Let’s begin Ocher Time with me,” a relaxing show ran by the idol herself. One that any could tune too, no real schedule and no real plan, it was as she wanted – free from everything else. “Before we begin answering calls, there’s an announcement. A few hours ago, the Order and Claireville Academy gave the dates of the Inter-magical tournament. It’s from the 24th to the 28th. A few colleagues of mine will perform live for the opening and ending ceremony. Many of you fangirls out there will be pleased; Sugar, the singer, and guitarist who’s been making the land tremble in Iqavea will be joining the festivities. Not only him, but some other stars and superstars answered the call. Most notably, the duo from Autumn’s Blossom, will be here on stage with us all. I don’t know about you guys, but Autumn’s Blossom has taken my heart and soul. Each episode is one filled with...egh... I can’t,” the air cut to music, “-sorry about that,” it returned after a few minutes, “-I sort of had a mishap.” The show continued without worry. People joined in, requested songs and such, mainly calm and peaceful.

‘How long have I been asleep,’ with a few sniffles, ‘-look at the rain outside,’ he commented as the noise made was as if bullets hitting the window and roof, ‘15:10’ indicated the clock. In the background, a radio played. Adete’ slept across the buttons and accidentally tuned it to Ocher Time. ‘Guess the pride of Hidros is back from the vacation,’ he thought and leaned back. In front laid packets of white powder, around three of them.

“First progenitor,” he called and stood, “-wake up,” pinched by her tail, she awoke the instant he lifted.

“Don’t do that ever again,” face flushed and erratic, Adete awoke with a lot of emotions.

“Awe,” he mocked, “-did I touch a sweeth spowt.”

“Ha-ha, very funny,” she charged straight to his neck.

“Cut it out,” and again, pulled by the tail, her reaction remained the same.

“I’m going to kill you,” held with the index on her forehead, the girl lashed out indiscriminately.

‘Guess the tournament is in a few weeks,’ the face returned to emotionless, “-we need to go meet with Jason.”

“Angel’s dust?” her assault stopped. Not inclined to respond, he took the packets and teleported inside the bar.

“Not meeting with the other bartender today?” Adete asked yet again.

“No time, I need to get this out as soon as possible,” from the cave to the bar, Jason stood and cleaned as normal.

“Shadow,” he said.

“Long time no see,” a snap conjured a mask, one made of blood as opposed to store-bought.

“What’s the occasion?” the bartender asked.

“I’ve got a gift for Renaud,” he whispered and laid out the packets, “-from his favorite alchemist. I made a new blend of white gold. It should be more potent than the others are selling. More addicting without the fatal side effects, the major ones anyway.”

“Ask and you deliver,” Jason couldn’t hide the excitement, “-this is great,” he smiled, “-here,” another few cigars, “-a gift from yours truly as thanks for the fast service.”

“I’ll take it,” kept inside the suit jacket, “-about the game of chess we spoke of, I heard that three out of the four pawns were taken over. I never thought that he’d be able to let one of them get close to the Bishop.”

“Give one? It’s more like he let that pawn get to the Bishop. The next plan did take a while to formulate but the player sure was smart. Patience is key was what he said,” Jason fired back.

“I just hope that the Bishop doesn’t get overrun by a mere pawn. That would be embarrassing even if it was a trap,” added Staxius.

“What the opponent didn’t realize was that when the attention turned to the Bishops and Knights trying to stop the four pawns, the Queen made her move into checkmate. Even if the pawn is to take Bishop with help from Knights; a castle stands ready to avenge the Bishop.”

“I see,” he sighed, “-a game within a game. Reckless as he might have been, I hope the Queen realizes that the opponent could have had another piece ready to move. Another piece that slowly moved into checkmating the reckless King.”

“The game will end in whoever outplays the other, for now, let’s keep the talk for another time,” a weird chess talk, ended.

“See you,” a handshake later, Shadow vanished.

“What was that chess talk all about, it made no sense whatsoever,” Adete complained after they returned.

“It’s more like a code, a discussion about a game of chess. Fictional of course, but who’d judge. None’s going to eavesdrop onto something so boring. What we discussed was the spies; the pawns. All and all, I’ll skip the details, I asked about the status of the war. What was told was that Cake is ready to make her move. It’s going to be reckless; I wonder who’s the Castle – guess she has a plan B. In the end, I gave

a word of warning, one that said to not get tunnel vision by trying to capture the King. Look at the broader side of the game.”

Chapter 256: Emptiness

“The weather hasn’t been this bad for a long time,” late, Staxius returned to the mansion. Greeted by a not too pleased Auic; she told what had happened with Dorothy.

“She’ll be fine,” he said without much inclination to justify the actions. On top of that, questions about why the laboratory had been shut by a portal were asked. “Do I have to write a report of what I do with my property?” emphasis was put on the “my” part. To that, Auic could but back down and stop pestering the man. Not wanting to cause any trouble, “-I closed the lab for a good reason. I’ll be more focused on alchemy in the coming days. The details will be forwarded at a later date, just don’t make this any harder than it needs to be.” Dark-arts came in handy, sensing how the lady felt, helped. A problem handled before it blew out of proportion.

“Lizzie and Marie await thy presence in the library,” Deadeyes said whilst headed down the stairs.

“Quite formal,” Staxius added with a smile, “-nonetheless, have a pleasant evening,” they shook heads and parted ways. Their lecture continued where it left off, focused and composed, the girl couldn’t wait.

Meanwhile, preparations for the tournament began. Both arenas were cleared and renovated. The entire vicinity, with the dorms, was repainted. Trees, flowers, and the greenery around were handled with care by elite gardeners.

Director Josiah and Sophie remained true to their word. Training Eira became priority. Day after day, physical to magical, they worked hard. After many months, in the coming days, the list of who’d participate would be made public. Fourteen individuals would take part; since adventurers were allowed, many of the would-be mages – lost.

In the end, four participants from The Order in the capital. One from the Main central Claireville Academy, two from the Eastern branch, and two from the Western Branch. The latter being inside Arda. Four from Sepmora, School of Witchcraft, a girl only institution where witchery is taught. An art that differs from normal mages; as opposed to using one’s mana, they used a spirit’s mana. Acting as a conduit to channel the powers of the elements. No restriction to what spell could be used and not requiring mages to train their mana capacity. Founded a few decades ago; tis was pretty new. The Director of said establishment hated the prospect of using their education to fight. Nonetheless, going against Claireville Academy, a place renowned for mass making would-be killers. The only time their students were given combat training were a few years leading up to any major tournament that included Claireville. Alienated by the norm a few years back, witches were seen in a bad light. After countless quarreling with the King, a place was given to set up residence. Far to the East, inside Kreston. The Pope didn’t mind for the Director was bestowed with the title of Bishop. The ladies, pure and brought up to enter the service of their god – weren’t that normal. Witchcraft, once the magic of heathen, accepted by the Pope was now dated news, but it happened. Last but not least, a single adventurer managed to make it.

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Requirements set by this year was, *only people above 14 and below 20 are eligible to participate.* The sole necessity as far as the populous were concerned.

“Time to call it a day,” voiced a lady over the intercoms.

A thumb up, followed by heavy panting. The arena, normally clean and dry, turned to ice. Breathing grew heavy, icicles diagonally pierced into the barrier. In the middle, a single girl with her hair as white as snow, eyes as red as a ruby with what appeared to be a dragon in form of a mist above her head.

“Good,” an elderly voice complimented, each time they spoke, breath vapor would form what seemed to be clouds. A frail comparison to the reality that stood in the sky. Few steps away from the icicles, straps of metal and components. Pierced right in the center; a training dummy with S on the helmet. “That’s enough,” from complimentary to harsh, “-how many times do I have to repeat this. Don’t rely on that power,” he stared vividly into her half-frozen face. Eyelashes ending with snow, she stared back. Tiny as it might have been, the ruby-colored right eye seemed lessened; decolorized to one somewhat blueish. The iris already changed into one blueish-white. What remained was the outer layer of the cornea.

“Sorry,” it took a second to snap out of said state, “-I couldn’t resist it, came like a force of habit,” the tone semi-monotonous with gradual intonation at the start and end. “Anything to help in winning the fight?” she wiped her face with a towel, one thrown by Josiah.

“Winning is what counts, yes, that is true,” he shook his head, “-lose a fight and you’re dead,” a bottle of water was thrown, “-that doesn’t mean to sell thy soul to the devil for the chance at victory. I know not what power has been bestowed upon thee, I shudder to think what you’ll turn out to be,” at that moment, a flashback to the day everything began – the entrance exam of a boy who didn’t possess any special qualities. A boy who would have toppled over the academy if not for the plots by the royal family and everyone around. Next to her face, a semi-transparent apparition, one of Staxius; more than ever, they looked related. Red eyes and white hair, though for different reasons, Eira and her father sure were connected.

“Don’t be so harsh on her,” a female voice came forth, “-as strong as she might be, being perfect isn’t that big a deal,” she gave a wink.

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“Thanks for all the help, Instructor Sophie,” she bowed, “-you too as well, Director,” she turned to Josiah and followed suit.

“You’re my apprentice; drop the Director title,” he sighed.

“I apologize, Master,” after which, the trainee headed into the showers.

“What’s the verdict?” Sophie asked as the girl faded into the distance.

“She’s strong, I’m confident in her abilities. That girl is like a sponge; outright absorbs everything I teach her without fail,” he could but smile.

“What about her Dark element?”

"It's best to focus on her strongest element first. Ice, rare and powerful in terms of offensive power, not to mention that secondary presence I feel when she goes all out. She's got everything to become the next prodigy."

"Let's just hope that the power you talk of doesn't overwhelm her mind," Sophie gave a gentle smile in turn. "Also, concerning the request by the Guild Master, any thoughts on the matter?"

"Are you referring to the exchange program?" he asked sarcastically.

"Yes, what else," she stared, "-uncle, are you growing old?"

"How dare you," he shouted, "-I'm still young," the glance defiantly stared away. "It seems a bit out of character for our Academy to take part in such a program."

"A breath of fresh air, I think the students will appreciate it. Joining a guild as a trial member for a period of a few months; to fight and experience what it's like on the battlefield," Sophie argued.

"I see the benefits," he turned away, "-I doubt many will find that prospect enjoyable. Several of our students are nobles by birth; as opposed to adventurers. I don't mind the idea – sadly, the upper echelon would get a little anxious if that were to pass."

"There's a simple solution," Sophie added, "-why not make it optional. Make a list of the most suitable and prominent guilds, then see if the parents and students would like to take part in said program."

"I guess I'm growing old," he walked, "-a select few guilds with a few spots. Considering how it is at the moment, I doubt many will try to join. Even if a few do accept, it'll be in their best interest. Mages need to evolve to be able to keep with the changing times. Becoming obsolete is the concern that should be addressed. Magical weapons, and more, I care not, we need new ways to fight."

"That's the spirit," she followed behind, "-since they'll be up against monsters; I doubt that it will weight on their mind."

"Another point well made," they entered the administrative building, "-time to speak with an old friend," the door to his office shut.

"A few weeks more," hidden behind steam, Eira rested her head against the wall. "I've trained so far," her head turned to the showerhead, "-will I be good enough to go against them?" water fell and went down her long white hair, a gentle journey.

'Why do you worry,' a voice spoke from within, '-as long as I'm here, you'll be fine, Lady White, I shall always be by thy side. Everyone else is but a mere insect on thy path to glory, everyone, without exception.'

"Yes," the gaze felt emotionless, "-everyone shall be crushed beneath my foot," ice formed right below, from hot, it turned cold, "-all will fall before me," the mumbling grew louder.

"Eira," a sharp voice called, "-are you done?"

"Yes, coming," the hypnotic feeling broke, '-guess I took too long in the showers.'

Back home, the study session ended with a big yawn. Lizzie dozed in and out, Marie tried hard to stay awake. To that end, a bite mark could be seen on her thumb. As usual, despite the rain, Marie headed home in Void.

'100 liters by the end of the week,' he thought, '-3 gold per liter. Considering I sold Rare potions which is a quarter of a liter at 500 silvers; very profitable indeed.' Stop shy of the mansion, he stared blankly at the surroundings. 'Opening the Guild in Arda is complete. After Eira's tournament, I wonder what I'll do. This emptiness; is it what awaits for the coming centuries. How will the world look like then? Maybe it would have already been destroyed. Do I head back to Arda and live out till something big comes up,' the thoughts kept on adding. 'I can't, I decided to raise Lizzie as my own. Even the Lymsey sisters, adventurers as they might be, they're under my care. Still, Undrar is sure to protect them. I've got good companions,' he stared at his hands, '-what is it that I wish for?'

"Why not go on a killing rampage?" said Adete with a serious tone, "-I'm craving for blood. Sitting idly by isn't going to change much. Should I remind you of what title you possess, Blood King Staxius of Arda?"

"Even if I'm on guard, everything will be taken care of by the people I've called companions. Serene will sort out any issues, trivial, and major. Xula is independent and one of the strongest people in Arda. Here, we have Undrar, Achilles, and Auic. They're like three mothers keeping the house safe and welcoming. Eira can stand on her own, Lizzie is getting there at her own pace. Where does that leave me?"

"At the top, obviously," she sighed, "-didn't thy wife give thee a purpose to live for? What happened to that."

"Lead by example, I know, it's embedded deep inside. There's no clear path to strive for. Money, that's covered. Connections, I've plenty. Power, not to be arrogant but I'm strong. What is there for me to conquer?"

"The Death Reapers curse," she said in a monotonous tone.

"Are you saying that the vampiric power isn't sufficient to quell its growth?"

"Not necessarily; if everything is that boring – why not take a trip outside the capital. As you said, everything will be handled; why not leave to explore Arda or Totrya. Maybe go on a mission to slay every monster at Azure's wall."

"That's not such a bad idea," the face lit, "-exploring the deeper forest of Arda sounds challenging. A good opportunity to train my powers further," a deep inhale, "-getting strong is the only thing I need to live for. Thanks for conversing with me, First Progenitor."

"Stop calling me that," she pouted, "-besides, I'm the only one you can fully trust. A manifestation of thy power with its conscience; how I wished I knew what my past was like."

"Probably filled with blood," he laughed, "-we're setting off soon. A chance to go all out, using everything I've got inside – an opportunity to run myself ragged. Waiting around for a good fight is foolish, I understand that now." On that night, with Adete's fear of the egg breaking and Staxius's emptiness, both came to one conclusion. Sitting around and waiting for things to be resolve won't do much.

“We’ll leave in two or three days – need to brew God’s ale and Healing Potions for the Alchemist Sect. Lizzie’s lessons are nearing completion. After that, we’re free to go,” he turned, “-what do you say?” he held out an open palm.

“I’m ready,” she gave a high-five, “-partner.”

Chapter 257: All or nothing.

‘Let’s get working,’ Tuesday came after a restless night. The weather didn’t diminish in the least. Lizzie, as opposed to running semi-nude around the house when the shower ended – had a change of mind. As cold as it was, going out in the hall would be a mistake she’d regret. Auic breathed a sigh of relief and tended to the girl’s hair.

Breakfast began with the smell of burnt food oozing off the pan. A look revealed the Lymsey sisters trying to learn. Towered over them, Undrar, she held a smile; a mother teaching her daughters how to cook. Harmony around the house fit as if a puzzle. None felt left out, Deadeyes and Avon ran around extra. Achilles stood in the middle as a guardian, body wrapped in a rain-poncho colored brightly yellow, she waited.

“Master,” called Auic, “-are you alright?” she asked as he felt a little off.

“Yes,” he replied with a smile and comforting eyes, “-I’m just relishing the sights. Everyone has found a place to belong too. It truly helps to see smiling faces every day.”

“It might not look it,” Undrar entered with platters filled with food, “-everyone here is grateful to be able to live together.”

“Considering most of us don’t have a place to call home,” added Emma, “-you taking us in is like a big family,” Emmy completed the sentence.

“It’s as they say,” Lizzie interjected, “-who’d knew that someone like me would have the chance to study at a prestigious school. Not to mention all the lovely people who I can confidently say are my family,” she glanced at everyone.

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“No need to get sentimental,” Avon returned and panted, “-this mansion is now a home.”

“You better not slack off,” yelled Achilles from the porch, “-a few more laps,” she said with sternness.

“Better leave or she’ll have thy head,” voiced Auic.

“Let’s head out then,” head wearing a helmet, the bike was taken out. Void remained in the garage for it would not be convenient.

“We’re off,” Lizzie bid her goodbyes.

Near the school gates, “-could you hand this to Dorothy?” a request to Marie who arrived at the same time.

“With pleasure,” she gave a bow, kept the letter inside her bag, then walked in.

“That settles it,” he wore the helmet.

“Are you going to sort out everything?” Adete came forth.

“Yeah, I think we’ll stay for more than a few days. I’m thinking of returning two days before the tournament,” explained, the bike teleported near Pandora.

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“Well, let’s hope it comes to that. What we discussed isn’t to be taken lightly,” she added with a mumble.

“Undrar,” telepathy was utilized, “-I’ll be working nonstop for three days. Care to watch over Lizzie?”

“Shouldn’t be a problem,” a nonchalant reply, “-she’ll be fine,” on that the short conversation ended.

First came the Magical potions; preparations were made, ingredients, and a rather large barrel lent by the Alchemist Sect. At 10:00 sharp, the process began. Head deep into the procedure, the machine and man worked tirelessly. Mana, raw ingredients, ground into fine powders, blended with other substances again and again. The process couldn’t be automated like God’s ale. Manual for the most part – the barrel filled slowly. Not an ounce of sleep, night came.

“Where’s master?” asked Auic when they returned.

“No clue,” replied Lizzie as she focused on studying.

“He’ll be here soon, don’t worry,” replied Undrar as she made dinner.

“Lizzie,” called a deep voice, “-let’s get to studying,” with a woeful expression, Staxius neared completion of the basics.

“That should be all you need,” he exhaled, ‘-22:00, didn’t expect to take that long,’ without another word said, he teleported out. Half-way done, it would take another day and night to be able to make the 100 liters. An all-nighter, the work resumed; Lizzie’s lessons were taught without fail. What remained before the expedition was, God’s ale and Healing Potions.

On no sleep nor food, Wednesday arrived. Third of the way done, the work continued. His focus didn’t diminish. All in the mansion didn’t pay heed to where he was. All worked without noticing he’d vanished. A sign of a perfectly harmonious environment. Auic gladly took time off her work to care for Lizzie and the twins. Being the youngest in the house, they were doted upon very often.

“I’m done,” the head slipped and hit the desk. Besides, a barrel filled with Rare quality potions. It had been more than twenty-four hours, no sleep nor food.

“Can we take a break?” asked Adete.

“No, we’re going to repeat this process for two more barrels,” emotionless, the work resumed after two more barrels were brought in. ‘I’ll do the work for a whole month in three days,’ he thought and returned. Fatigue tried to disrupt the focus, sadly, it could but crash and burn. Determined to see it through, the man remained steadfast.

Thursday came without notice; three barrels stood next to one another. 'That takes care of the potions, now for God's ale.' First, physically exhausting, now a process that required mana level control. At 07:00 the switch to God's ale happened. Contrary to the Alchemist Sect, God's ale production was simple and easy on some level. A higher concentration was made this time, one that could give five bottles from one.

At around 18:00 that day, Staxius laid slumped on the floor.

"He did it," said Adete, 'let's hope that all this effort isn't for naught. I'm sure he felt it as well, that curse is starting to manifest. Getting away from everyone is the smartest choice. Unknowingly, the suggestion I gave a few nights back was for said purpose. I'm glad he took the offer,' she sat atop his face. "How will it turn out I wonder."

Sun beamed through the windows, Friday came, the greyish clouds that had plagued the streets for days; gave some leeway. The sun managed to peer through.

"That was hard," he woke up still doozy.

"Let's go already," voice Adete loudly.

"First we deliver the stuff then we leave," in total three-hundred liters was blended. Shocked, Flein could but stare blankly at the produce. "I've got plans coming for the entire months, here's to cover it all," nonchalant with a dirtied grey shirt and brown shorts, he stood not as a king, but an Alchemist.

"Four days and you made that much," the head shook, "-good job," with a light tap to his, 900 Gold was transferred. The same was done with Jason, the delivery was made without payment. "I'll ask god-father to hold the cash until you return," he said with a smile, "-also, Angel's dust was a hit. He's very pleased with the blend – you might get more work sent thy way."

All and all, Friday was spent finishing any uncomplete business. From the guild to the shop and the employment with Dorothy – all understood. What was left, to depart. At dusk, dressed in a grey battle-uniform, the one made in Arda – backpacked filled with potions and scrolls. The belt held Orenmir, and inside the jacket held Tharis. A spare dagger and sword were also brought. Food would be found in the forest itself. Hair tied in a bun, he walked out of the room and into the dining hall.

"Are you going off somewhere?" asked Auic.

"Yes, I've things to do in Arda," he said whilst sipping on whiskey.

"How long will it be?" asked Lizzie with a little woeful tone.

"No idea," a short and cold reply.

"We'll be waiting I guess," said Undrar, "-don't forget that Julius and the others will be here on the 20th."

"Yes, yes," he averted her gaze and watched the moon through the window, a clear sky after what seemed an eternity.

Not wanting to say goodbye, after the meal was complete, he walked out the front door and teleported. The excuse given, "I need a breath of fresh air."

‘Everything seems in order,’ at the Ardanian guild, he sat before a screen. Not much had happened, nothing that required his attention. The training regiment from Ryul rested on the table. ‘Should give the necessary training,’ focus on basic protection, healing, and attack spells. Spells that anyone could use, not to mention the option to buy staff and wand to reduce the strain. Ryul did a very good job. For the fighter’s guild, the leader also left a regiment – one that focused on attacks, defending, and body training. As opposed to mages, fighters had to stay for two or more weeks; until the instructors gave the seal. Bodies had to be trained into wearing armor, wielding heavy weapons. Traders and Crafting guild had nothing to report, business was slow.

‘I believe wholeheartedly that Arda will become a strong force in the coming months. This amount of care and patients with each adventurer will prove necessary. A slow start as they climb up a hill, from there, getting experience and more powerful will be a breeze so to speak. I’m proud of what they’ve done, what I had envisioned brought to reality, what a joy.’

Inhale, “-the air sure is fresh for being inside a tree.”

“Who would have thought,” stood inside the front pocket, Adete swayed her head.

“Yes, guess it’s time to leave,” bag now in his hand, wings sprouted. A few flaps later, he blazed through the entrance gate and dove deep inside the forest. Direction, the western region, a place so dense and devoid of any living interaction; the perfect place for monsters to set up shop. The eyes closed; auras of differing power lit as if lamps in pitch darkness. ‘We’re here,’ they landed atop a tree, kilometers upon kilometers away from civilization, at the heart of the Forgotten Forest, one feared by guards and inhabitants.

Under the full-moon; the flickers kept increasing in numbers. From auras as big as boss-leveled foes to one’s as small as goblins, they plagued the insides.

“Get ready, Adete,” *Blood-Arts: Bloody Mary,* the moon shone and carnage followed. Unleashed without an ounce of restraint, his full-power; both mana and blood utilized without fail. Spanned over a few kilometers, a blackened hemisphere.

May the ones before I turn to dust. May they all end in ruin, may they all die without mercy. Anyone who dares go against me shall pay for I am the sole ruler of death and destruction. I command thy seal to be broken, rain down death and destroy all, Quietus, a surge of dark energy burst upwards into the sphere. The same spell, the memories from Lord Death, a turned down version of a spell that once destroyed a whole planet. It wasn’t even a ten-percent of its full capabilities, despite that limitation, the sheer amount of destruction was godly. In the middle, with a reddened halo above the head; paired with the All-seeing eye, said sphere became a killing ground. Anything inside the vicinity was killed by flames, struck by Scarlet Thunder. None inside could survive, the potential unleashed. Each kill meant more blood, more blood meant more power. The vessel transformed; all the ancient writings seemed to levitate in a spiral around the host. It grew to be a shield that lashed out to anything close. “More,” he yelled, “MORE!” the eyes opened wide, white flame burst forth into beams, the whole inside lit with strength. Limit break onto every single curse and boons given. The symbol of power underneath the left eye moved. Wings, sickle, and a scythe, three symbols of various meanings, they disentangled, the mind possessed by alter egos emanated from the symbols.

Sickle, the weapon of Kronos, it who separated Uranus and Gaea, thee who disunited Heaven and Earth. Scythe, thou who art the blade whomst severs the thread of life. Wings, the symbol of Nike, goddess of speed and victory – I, Staxius Haggard, call upon thine names for I’ve inherited thy powers, he spoke with four voices. Two weapons manifested. Radiating in divine light and held in each hand, the wing flew and latched onto the forehead with a golden color. Three symbols of power manifested into a moral realm of which a single had the strength to destroy a dimension. The outburst grew out of control. The hemisphere changed from black to blinding gold.

“MY BODY,” he screamed, “-IT’S GETTING TORN,” the light continued to bestow power – not only did the wings do so, but the weapons also channeled their power inside his arms.

“IMMORTAL AS I MIGHT BE,” he regained control for a few seconds, “-THIS IS THE ONLY WAY I CAN DIE,” he screamed, “-LORD DEATH, LOOK AT ME,” face now lit, “I’LL KILL MYSELF TO BREAK THE CURSE OF THE DEATH REAPER. THE SYMBOLS OF POWER WERE GIVEN FOR A REASON AND ONE ALONE. TO BE THE SCYTHE AROUND MY NECK. I’LL BREAK THAT EGG NO MATTER WHAT,” gritted, several bones broke under the pressure. *SLASH,* in the end, he pulled and stabbed himself. From that, a large deafening sound resounded, the golden orb expanded then *BOOM,* explosion – dust and silence. Followed by a rumble, nausea hit all who lived on Hidros.

Chapter 258: Creation

“Don’t regret this now,” with a loud yell, Adete flew inside the dematerializing Staxius. Death had come at last; the fear of the curse, dreams concerning the people he loved, all made its mark slowly. The emotionless heart cracked little by little, tis was the way to stop it all from whelming the mind.

Vanished into the midnight with the land around turned into a dessert. Destruction, the way of Lord Death. The boon of immortality; broken by two divine weapons – fueled by their symbol of power. Only a god had the right to kill another god, even then, tis was as if breaking a mountain with nothing but hay as thy pickaxe.

“Wake up,” a voice called.

‘Who’s there,’ the eyes opened, ‘-I’m in ethereal form,’ he stared towards the arms and legs; semi-transparent with a greenish hue.

“I’m all and all is me,” it added with an echo, the voice changed from male to female and differing in accent each word it spoke. Abyss below and Heaven atop, in the middle was where he levitated with no control.

‘Who are you?’ he tried to articulate to no avail. The silence reigned supreme.

“Worry not child,” the figure; an orb of various colors and forms. It took on many appearances whilst speaking.

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‘Can you read my mind?’ Staxius wondered amazed by it who faced him.

“Yes,” he replied, “-we’re conversing through our minds,” it hovered over. “I see,” in a circle, the entity examined every inch of him.

'I do apologize for the sudden rudeness,' he stared, '-care to tell me who you are and if I've died or not.'

"My foolish child," he went back to the original spot, "-I've said it before. I am all and all is me. You from the mortal realm must know of Creation, yes?"

'The strongest entity that keeps the peace between all who live in the universe.'

"Correct," it said sarcastically, "-before you ask, I didn't call upon thee. Only gods are allowed an audience; a one-time agreement. All who've to awaken a symbol of power must pass through my test to be worthy, else," he stared down, "-the abyss awaits new souls."

'I understand,' he looked up with confidence, '-the evaluation to becoming a god or demon; a test under thy rule.'

"Pretty sharp for a human," he stared which felt more like a glare, "-Lord Death sure has gone senile. Choosing a human soul as his heir, what utter foolishness. Nevertheless, as Creation, my job isn't to destroy, but tis to create. I can only grant whilst my partner, Death, takes. I give life and he takes lives. Hence the division, I rule over the path to heaven, he rules over the path to the Abyss."

'Basically, Creation and Destruction are different faces of the same coin,' a glance as cold as Niflheim. 'Are you truly number one?'

"Yes," it turned, "I've been number one since the day of awakening. Many tales speak of me, many worlds worship me, and many realms depend on me."

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'Wouldn't it all be compact if a destroyer didn't exist? What would happen if Death disappeared, what would become of the all-mighty Creation,' an inconsistency, he had figured a hidden truth through the man's words.

"I admire thy intellect,' he approached again, '-It's as you say, child, Death, and Birth are bound by one another. If one is to suddenly disappear, the scales would tip and bring about calamity,' hands on his shoulders, Creation stared into the distance. "The first God of Death, she who was my partner for millenniums upon millenniums; grew tired of the monotonous life. Her boredom took charge and she went on a destruction spree. Many would-be civilizations died by her hand. In that instant, I placed a Curse onto her, since I can't destroy, I created a curse meant for destruction. That is to say, she died; leaving the scales unbalanced. To stop Calamity, the Death Element grew to be inherited by many, many entities till the current Lord Death came. A pleasurable fellow with a sense of humor. Not blinded by greed and lust for power, the perfect candidate. Down the line, I altered the curse to only kick in when the Death Reaper grows too powerful. This affected the following Gods; the pain to start over again and again. Many succumbed to the pressure and asked to be killed – Daemonum Gladio, the weapon many killed themselves with. I thought that the current Death would give; imagine my surprise when he found a way to stay under the limit of the curse. Constantly keeping an eye out, any more growth and he'd start over from scratch," the attention changed to Staxius.

"Then you came along," the gaze felt warm, "-someone foolish enough to try and break something I created," *snap,* the egg inside had been shattered, "-the curse I created was destroyed," a face

appeared, mixed with many features from male and female, it showed a smile, “-could you please recount to this old being how you managed it?”

‘To be honest, all I wanted at the time was to train. Then, a dream, I heard the voice of Lord Death. In turn, it triggered a reaction inside my mind, I suddenly felt many, many voices speak. Voices of previous wielders of death I presume. Each had researched how the curse worked; Clarity, starting over, the symbol of power – he had planned it all when I became the heir. He’d knew all along that I’d one day be able to break through the barriers he had built. Quietus was the first step, then came the Symbols of power, three of them which hold unquantifiable strength and knowledge. Time and Death, Sickle and Scythe, one that split heaven and earth and one that splits life from death – they alone had the potential to break thy egg. The third power, Wings of Nike, was assurance for it came from the Goddess of Victory. So, you see,’ he stared up, ‘-all I could do was to act upon the changes. I felt it all, since day one, slowly ailing my insides, a quest to resolve the Curse of the Death reaper, one that was accomplished by a Vampire.’

“I see,” he nodded, “-a vampire you say,” the gaze grew stern, “-nevertheless, you are to pass my test first. Bear in mind, since you’re blessed with three symbols, it shall be harder than ever before. You’ll fight against thyself, not once, but thrice. The duration is all of eternity, I care not if it takes a few seconds or centuries, thy soul is bound to me, a potential ally, go and destroy, tis what thy art for; prove thy worth,” hands pressed together, a sphere engulfed they who hovered.

‘This fight is rigged from the start,’ he thought, ‘-three versus me with the same amount of strength,’ a smirk could be seen, ‘-the only one who can kill me is me.’

“BEGIN,”

Meanwhile, down in the mortal realm, a new day had come too. The date, 8th of February. Preparations for the tournament began. “Send the invitations to all Royalty and nobles around the continent. Queen Gallienne has expressly said to send one unique to Queen Shanna of Arda,” Josiah ordered. Backed financially by the royal family, it had to be grand for both commoners and nobles.

“On it, uncle,” Sophie ran out with letters. Workers helped in keeping the school ready. Both as a festival and grandiose event, the yard towards the left was fitted for stalls and more. The town of Claireville boomed with activities, traders came from all over to make a living.

Since Josiah didn’t care about the disparities between Nobles and not; no particular care was given. Only a VIP seating arrangement since the Royal families of two kingdoms would arrive. On top of that, stars across the continent were also invited. On the 10th, a reply came from the mainland. Prince Ernis would come to stay as well. As per rumors, he remained adamant about personally attending the event. Many influential figures were coming to Hidros.

In preparation, Queen Gallienne and Raulf sent out a quest request. One that asked adventurers to be in charge of guarding the academy and its people from monsters and humans alike. Blade’s End jumped on the opportunity without much trouble. It would be from the 24th till the 28th. All the major guilds joined the fray since the Prince was visiting.

“Are we participating?” asked Achilles.

"I'd prefer to take a break and enjoy the event. After all, my niece is participating. Too bad that the two-versus-two was canceled. In any case, I'll be taking the days off," her voice seemed relaxed.

"What about you guys?" she turned and asked.

"I'll be taking a break. I heard that Queen Shanna might also be one of the guests," Avon voiced, "I'd prefer to be as close to her. She is my Master's wife, I'll be on guard."

"On guard, you say," Achilles narrowed her eyes, "-aren't you just wanting to go out and visit all the food stalls?"

"No," he averted her gaze.

"In any case," Undrar jumped in, "-let's just enjoy the festivities," the television played Autumn's Blossom in the background.

"The lady sure looks a lot like father," mumbled Lizzie.

"What do you mean look like?" asked Emma.

"She has black hair," added Emmy.

"I mean her eyes," she pointed.

"I see," they noticed it as well.

Similarly, Julius, Fenrir, Millicent, Autumn, and the Silver Guardians got ready. Castle Garsley became the capital city of Dorchester. More and more people came over to enjoy the moment of peace it gave. People living harmoniously without prejudice.

"I'll finally get to meet Master," in the wind, Fenrir wagged her tail and ears.

"I don't think so," argued Adelana, "-isn't he royalty now? I doubt the man will have time to meet with old acquaintances."

"Still on the same old stuff, aren't you, sister," argued Ayleth.

"Could you girls just cut it out," added Millicent, "-the man abdicated his position and left because we couldn't make heads or tails about what person he was. We're going there to support Eira, that's final."

"You ladies do what you want," Julius interjected, "-I'm going to meet my friend. I care not what you have to say; Staxius and I will have a drink and reminisce. I did take over Dorchester for his sake; I'd say he more than owes me that favor."

"I'm in with Julius, I'll cover his majesty with my saliva," after which Fenrir howled.

"Same here," voiced Autumn.

"We too want to see him again," everyone else agreed except Adelana. She always had a few misgivings towards Staxius. Ones that forced him to leave them behind and not turn back once.

Wednesday the 12th came around, "Scott, where's Staxius?" Aceline asked before Ocher time.

"I tried to contact the guild master and Kniq. They all had one thing to say, Staxius disappeared from Hidros on the 7th. For all we know, he might have died, is what Raulf said with a chuckle."

"Finding a bodyguard is going to be hard. At least try to get someone from Kniq, they might be of help."

"I asked, all said the same thing; we want to enjoy the festivities. "

"What about Achilles, the rumored hero of justice?"

"I'll ask her once more," on that, the idol headed into the booth and began her show. The days flew by one after the other; so many things to prepare for. Eira trained hard, students who fought bravely were on their way. Stars and more cleared out schedules to view the long-awaited Inter-magical tournament.

"Majesty," on the 15th, an audience was called, "-are you sure it wise to stay for around a week in Oxshield?" asked Ruslan, the representatives were anxious too.

"We did enter an alliance, not showing up would be bad form," her mind didn't change.

"As you wish majesty," the old sage interjected, "-King Staxius will be there as well. Why not take time to enjoy and support thy daughter, Princess Eira," on that, the matter was settled.

'How long do I have to keep fighting,' stood with mortal injuries and lightheadedness, it had been eight days since Staxius fought. The trio remained untouched and ready to lash out, '-if I don't win this, then I'll miss Eira's tournament,' the face turned blank, the eyes closed. '-That can't happen,' he charged, *Oh sword, severer of life and death, heed my call, I, Staxius Haggard, call on thy help: Daemonum Gladio.* A flash of purple light later, the weapon of the Death Reaper came forth. Swing after swing, he fought for the chance to return home. Never did he know that this day would have come. A test for becoming a god before accomplishing anything of value in the Mortal Realm. Still, it didn't matter, what was to be done; had to be done.

Chapter 259: Misfortune

"Yo wake up," a roughed-up voice call, "-DG has been on our asses for weeks now," complained the same man.

"Just when it was getting cold enough for a good sleep," another voice reached out from under a bunk bed, "-this place is too hot for us to sleep." On the ceiling; a fan that turned monotonously without purpose, each round was followed by screech. Dust hovered above the tiny openings used as windows.

"I'm on you with that one," a large mass dropped from the top bunk.

"What's the plan now?" the one below rose.

"We've been outplayed, that's what happened. Snow is retreating off Hidros. Desmond died and the Syndicate isn't willing to cooperate," the door, left ajar, was pushed.

"Guess we're left to die," the other replied without much thought, "-what you're saying is that our journey ends here."

"Basically," he who stood at the door, turned, "-not all is lost. Money is running dry, why not try and kidnap some nobleman's daughter," he said with a smirk.

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"Kidnapping one now isn't going to do much," the same tone and reply.

"I mean," the door swung opened, "-we did kind of go overboard with the whole masked murderer disguise," next door, two swords, and the same outfit worn by the murderer that terrorized the capital a few months back.

"I don't mind the idea," the other stood, "-there's the thing about the tournament too. Man, with DG on our asses, the fun we've had is about to end. I get what you're saying, the last hoo-ray before we die," he smirked as well.

"That's about it," the other took charge, "-I've already set my eyes on a particular school. One crawling with nobles, some who are influential, and some who aren't. Any will suffice," he glared into another room further to the right. An iron gate with a dismembered human hand.

"Fill me up on the details," the other wore a jacket, "-a face and a location. Give me those two and we'll have our last bottle of fun before we disappear, what you say?"

"I love the idea," on a wall, not far from the bed, a calendar with fingerprints had February the 12th crossed off. At the start of a new day, some people had the habit of crossing the cages; a method to keep track.

Breaking News: The Return of the Masked Murderer, sat around the television, Kniq watched as Autumn's Blossom was interrupted. "Young boys and girls have been going missing. The Royal Guards with the help of Adventurers and the Public Order have concluded that the Mask Murderer is on the prowl. The same methodology, the same way of killing and the same sword." [We implore the public to remain alert and on guard. Going out at night will not be beneficial to us nor you. We from the Public Order will do what is necessary to bring an end to this monster] After which the show began.

"He's back again," voiced Achilles with a hint of disgust.

"Yeah, we'll have to be on guard. I wonder why they're targeting children. In any case, we've got a few days till we move to the town of Claireville," not bothered, Undrar resumed the show. Tuesday the 17th was displayed across the headline from when the news came on.

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'This is tough,' knelt on the floor with a sword as support, two out of the three opponents remained. 'I've no idea how long I've been fighting,' the mind reached its breaking point, '-two more to go. I wonder how the rest are doing,' he breathed and stood. 'In any case, I've got a job to do,' *Symbol bestowed upon me by Goddess Nike, I call upon thee. Give me thine wings, give me thy strength for he who stands in mine way shall perish a death worse than the Abyss itself,* a high-pitched scream deafened all who stood. The wings departed from the left cheek to imbed itself onto the forehead. A mass of energy trickled down from the tips, it formed vertical golden lines that went around the face. Contoured perfectly around the skin, it reached the foot. Drained, the power didn't overwhelm its host as before; thus, the fight continued.

Days went by as if a gust of wind, none realized it. The routine of waking, going to work, and returning home was as if a prison.

"Lizzie," Undrar spoke, "-we're going to the guild. Afterward, I'm going to meet some of my friends that arrived yesterday," she leaned and gave a kiss, "-make sure you return home safely. If you don't see anyone at the gates, take the bus home," thus, on Friday the 21st, Kniq left to greet the old companions.

'Father's old companions,' Lizzie watched as they left. 'I better get on the move too,' stood before the school, she headed inside as Marie approached with a smile.

"Did your father return yet?" she asked as Dorothy grew anxious back home.

"No idea," a cold reply, "-I'm sure he's fine. He did promise to raise me as his own," her face kept a smile.

"I guess," they arrived near the classes, "-best stay on the lookout. Father said that the murderer has been targeting young nobles. I do not know why but you watch yourself," a quick pat on the back, Marie scurried off into the distance.

'Guess the students are scared,' she walked in, the class had lost its usual vigor.

"Heed my call, heir of Lord Death," Creation returned, "-the curse of starting over has been vanquished from thine soul. Though I must warn that the real curse, the curse of misfortune, will never be broken. Destroyers must rest in the abyss and never seek the light, for if one gets too close to the light, thine wings might be burnt."

'Are you referring to Icarus?' steadfast on his feet, Staxius dodged with ease; Symbol of power was truly a boon.

"Maybe and maybe not, who knows," he left the men to fight.

'What did he mean by misfortune. I doubt the entity would come all the way here to just say that. There must be something more to this,' he gritted and fought.

Sat in a restaurant not far from Town Square, Undrar had tea with the visitors from Dorchester. "VIOLA," a voice screamed across the room.

"What is it?" she stood, the one responsible was Achilles.

"It's Lizzie," she held a phone, "-she's gone," at that moment, the world came to a halt. Broken with the screen in blood, Undrar rushed over.

"Is this a joke?" she asked with stern eyes.

"Do you think I'm that tasteless?" Achilles said with her face filled with complex emotions.

"C-Call the others," without wasting time, Viola sprouted wings and burst out the restaurant. Achilles toggled her super-speed and ran out into the streets. The whole of Kniq came as one, "-Lizzie has gone missing," panting, the Lymsey sisters ran to the central guild.

"No..." Melisa nearly fainted, the adventurers overheard what the twins said.

"Go out and find her then," screamed Diane, "-we'll worry about the paperwork tomorrow," her head faced the others, "-URGENT QUEST, Lizzie Haggard, daughter of Staxius Haggard, leader of Kniq, has gone missing."

“Kniq...” the air felt cold, “-LET’S GO,” they each ran out into the streets to find the missing girl.

‘This can’t be happening,’ heart tightened, the throat on the verge of giving up, Undrar, Achilles, Avon, Deadeyes, Emma, Emmy, and Auic.

“S-she c-can’t b-be d-dead...” Auic hurt the most, the girl felt more like a daughter than a companion.

“Let’s not give,” the RFS moved out, “-THIS IS NO TIME TO GIVE UP,” screamed Undrar, tears flowed, “-WE’LL FIND HER NO MATTER WHAT.” Off into the night, Kniq ran around the streets, phone to all in favors of all who they had helped. Many were obliged to answer the calls, Achilles ran, ran, and ran till the slums. She scoured all over the streets, broken down houses and such to find Lizzie. On the news that same night, a missing report of Lizzie Haggard, a noble, went around town.

Filled with tears and cries, forced to remain at home, the twins and Auic shared a bed. Each tried hard to comfort one another, though that never came to pass. “Please return to us safely,” cried Emma, memories about how they would often team up to pester Viola came forth. “W-w-we’re w-waiting,” the grief of losing someone close, ‘my chest, it hurts so much,’ she could but give out and cough, “ P- PLEASE,” Emmy jumped out and ran off into the yard. The cries turned to sobs; her tears flowed into the moonlit sky.

“Emmy,” Emma ran after her, Auic couldn’t deal with the pain. She forced her head into the pillows and wailed. “STAXIUS WHERE ARE YOU!”

Sniffles echoed down a dim room, “f-father, w-where a-are you,” clothes torn in half, with her right breast exposed. Hands tied to a bed frame, the eyes swollen from endless cries, a voice came forth, “-it’s been three days, don’t you go dying on us yet.”

“We only took your virtue, there’s more to come, young lady. Begging for someone to come rescue you will but arouse my freaky friend over there,” tied to a chair with the eyes of a predator, a man who salivated through a cloth used as a gag. ‘Father... you will c-come w-won’t y-you?’ she asked as the man eyed her. ‘I n-never g-got to s-say I l-love you,’ memories from the first time they met flooded her psyche.

“Cut the dude loose,” ordered he who sat.

“Don’t,” she begged, “D-DON’T” nothing but screams, sharp nails dug into her waist and pierced her skin. Violent without mercy, her woeful screams pained as the man penetrated her already deflowered body. The last thread of hope broke, ‘-he’s not coming back,’ her eyes closed shut, she tried to move and get away. A fruitless endeavor, nothing but fake hope, nothing but desperation. Flash images of them being together gave a faint glimmer. *Skill: Body Enhancement,* her eyes lit with a golden color, with a single swing, the hand ties broke.

“WATCH OUT,” a second later, the mattress grew moist. Slowly, it trickled down onto the floor. ‘So, this is t-the end,’ her eyes watched on into the night, through a small opening; the starry night. Images of what was experienced flew across. The meeting with a man who was angry about noble and rogue fighting. Angry because his sleep was broken. Being taken in, treated as a human, given a place to live. People to love, and people who loved. ‘Forgive me,’ her eyes lost its glimmer, the smile that she one gave now turned into a frown, the laughter she gave; a ball of joy – came crashing down. Lizzie Haggard, on the 24th, died just as the tournament began.

Scythe, weapon of the Death Reaper. Sickle, weapon of Kronos, come to me, one more to go, the last strike, ‘-I’m coming back home,’ he said with a face covered in blood.

“Congratulation, future heir, your evaluation has been completed. You fought three god-class opponents with the power given to you by birth. I’ll see you in the far away future. Remember that the curse of Misfortune will remain. There’s but one thing to do if you wish for it to stop,” *Snap,* “-distance thyself,* a mumble, for the soul returned to Rosespire.

“We did it,” said Adete, she flew out her body.

“Yes, the curse of starting over is broken,” a glance at the phone revealed the 25th of February. “I’m late,” he stood and nearly hit his head against the roof, “-Eira’s tournament begins. I better head to the mansion and check on the others.”

“W-what is this,” teleported shy of the entrance, familiar faces were spotted. One of them being Xula, and Julius, they all wore black clothes. ‘-t-this m-must b-be a joke,’ he stumbled inside with bloodied clothes, ‘-Emma, Emmy,’ the girls cried in a corner, ‘-Diane... Melisa,’ everything seemed to be in slow motion. ‘Cake... Karlson, J-Jason,’ everyone he had a connection too was present. The portrait of Lizzie stood behind a coffin, Marie, Auic, and Undrar cried their hearts.

‘What happened here,’ the hands shook, the heart rate increased, tears flowed.

“Can anyone explain to me what happened?” a dark aura oozed.

“She’s d-dead,” Auic turned and mumbled, “-raped and killed,” she stood, “-IS THAT WANT YOU WANT TO HEAR.” *SLAP!*

Chapter 260: Lizzie Haggard

“I’ll see you later, father,” a voice echoed, “-thanks for the lessons,” the memories flooded the psyche. “I’ll get good grades this term, I promise,” the always joyful face, reduced to nothing but a lifeless corpse.

“She’s dead,” wailing and cries snapped the confused mind, Auic held his collar, she cried wholeheartedly. Kniq, with faces of which showed complete despair, gathered around him. The surroundings faded in color, it turned grey, the people moved but he stood still and watched.

‘Lizzie’s dead,’ the news settled in, ‘-the relic scroll isn’t ready... I don’t have enough power to cast a resurrection spell. Necromancy isn’t going to do much,’ the hands trembled, the mind and body could barely stay. ‘W-why...’ he stood powerless once again, “The curse of misfortune will never leave thy side. The only way to stop others from hurting, distance thyself,” words that came from Creation.

“My heir,” a voice spoke inside the mind.

“Blood-king,” another called.

“What was it that you said?” the manly voice questioned, “-how would thee react upon the death of a precious one.”

“I’d celebrate it,” he mumbled with eyes closed, everything around was void.

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“Blood-King, what is thy choice. Crumble over the death of someone precious or wake?” a female voice told what was needed to be heard. “Tis thy fate,” she said without remorse, “-bound to eternal life, more and more death will come. Faltering over this will but ruin the bigger picture.”

“She’s at the hall-of-rebirth; being cared by Jessica. Her soul shall leave for heaven soon, the girl had a tough life. The few months spent on thy company told her what it is to be alive. Don’t be ashamed of her death, be proud for she died without regrets.”

‘Here I am again,’ the eyes opened, ‘-faced with woe and grief. First my father, then my friends, the people I met along the way, my best friend, and now, Lizzie, a girl who I swore to protect. She died because I was bored; it’s as Creation said,’ a deep inhale later, “-I don’t have the right to protect anything,” those who had gathered around him heard it, all stared baffled. “I had one job, protect and raise Lizzie as my own. After her exams, I had planned to take her to Arda, then officially adopt her. That regret will always haunt me, the fear of starting over blinded what I already possessed. It’s as Creation, Lord Death, and the First progenitor said, I’m a destroyer, one who dwells in the pits of darkness. I exist to spread chaos and carnage, not to love and be loved. It’s all clear now,” the emotionless expression, one that many grew accustomed to, changed. The peaceful expression, one that grew to settle over time, disappeared. Instead, a face unreadable, stoic, and blank, surfaced. The eyes, ruby-colored which had grown to glee, turned dull.

“Master?” asked Auic.

“Brother?” called Undrar.

“Are you alright?” asked Emma and Emmy in tandem.

Not a word said, he brushed aside those who tried to comfort and find a sliver of peace. ‘Lizzie, my daughter,’ stood next to the coffin with her head stitched onto her neck, he touched her face for one last time. “You’re not the only one who died today,” the voice, deep and powerful, echoed around the room, “-I’ve failed thee as a father and guardian. An apology isn’t going to do much,” he faced Knig, “-it was a pleasure knowing you all,” a smile with warm eyes, Tharis unholstered, *Bang.*

“MASTER,” the twins dashed for he shot himself. Healed within a few seconds, the first stare he gave sent shivers down the girl’s spine, “-a-are you?” Emma tried to speak, though what befell was a gaze. One that felt unforgiving, merciless, ready to kill given the chance.

“I’ll see you someday, Lizzie Haggard, I loved you dearly,” from the collar, he ripped out a tag. The adventuring tag of Silver, Gold, and Platinum, engraved on the backside was his name, “-may you find peace and eternal happiness,” placed atop her chest, what he said prior, held true. Staxius shot himself, he died, the Staxius who’d been warm to the people around, the one who grew weak by the mind – that persona died that day. The heart, one that grew to be warmer, froze over ten-fold.

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Everyone who had a remote connection to Haggard saw the rebirth. It sent chills, the aura grew cold and ominous. Carried away to be cremated, Staxius helped in supporting the coffin. Nothing felt heavier than carrying one’s child atop a parent’s shoulder to be burnt.

Set ablaze near the cemetery under blossoming flowers, prayers were given; her body turned to ash. Ones safeguarded into an Urn.

"Hey, are you ok?" from the hall, Undrar came to the garden.

Stood in the middle, a place where the girl enjoyed sitting and reading, Staxius said naught but nod. "Are you sure?" she followed the path to the chair.

"Yes," he stared up; "-Lizzie is dead. There's nothing I can do about it. I'm responsible for leaving, I should have been more careful," the hand held a note, "-I'm sorry Undrar," he stood, "-Staxius Haggard, the man who sought out to find an inkling of bliss, has died. He died on the day his daughter was cremated. It's my way of atoning for what I've done; Lizzie Haggard will always be in my heart; her place will never change."

"Where are you going?" she turned and asked.

"To watch Eira's tournament," a cold response as he walked off with hands in pockets.

"Staxius," a familiar voice called, "-I-I'm sorry," green hair flowed.

"Majesty," he bowed, "-I do apologize for having to witness such atrocities earlier. Shooting one's self must have caused harm," to which, he knelt.

"W-what are you doing?" she asked and held his shoulders, "-why are you calling me majesty. Aren't I thy wife?" tears fell at his feet.

"Yes, my lady," he looked up, "-I'm thy husband and thou art mine wife. Nevertheless, thou art the ruler of a kingdom, a lady who deserves the utmost respect. I'm bound to serve thy both as husband and King," the mouth monotonously moved as the words rolled off the tongue without any particular feeling.

"Staxius," she knelt and gave a warm embrace, "-it must hurt. Losing a child, a daughter I hadn't met," she cried, "-still, I'll be there, waiting for your return."

"Waiting for my return," he spoke with no inclination to embrace her back, "-could you wait an eternity?" he stood, "-I'm Staxius Haggard, once a father, once someone who loved, but now, I've awakened again. I'm the heir to the god of death, a being that stays in the shadows without expecting much. There isn't a need to care for me. Thanks for everything, lady Islegust, I think I should leave. I carry the curse of misfortune, all closest to me shall suffer and die without prejudice. The place I hail from isn't for the likes of an angel, thou art to spread light and joy. I'm but a shell of what I was, nothing will change said fact. The man you loved, died on the same day his daughter was burnt."

Knelt on the ground, she reached out to no avail, "-I'll wait for eternity," she yelled.

'I'm sorry Xula, this is the path I've chosen. To protect those I love, tis time to let go. I live for one purpose now,' the note had Cake's writing. It detailed the people responsible, the organization, and the country that backed them. 'Even if the people who killed Lizzie are now dead, their families, loved ones, are very much alive. I'll turn that kingdom to shred,' the note burst into ash, "-Adete, we're going to annihilate a whole nation, what do you say?"

"That's it," she licked her lips, "-let's turn that kingdom upside down. The place where Snow hails from, the place where the ruler backed the organization to terrorize Iqavea and Hidros."

"Majesty," Undrar and Achilles ran to hold her hands.

"What happened to him?" she asked unable to read his mind.

"I'm afraid," the voice lesser confident, "-that his true self has awakened."

"What do you mean by the true self?" Xula asked, her tone felt desperate.

"You might not have noticed it, but each time he saw blood, the face would often turn blank."

"Yes, but isn't that because he's more focused?" Achilles argued.

"It could be farther from the truth," she shook her head, "-that's who he is deep down. A boy brought up to kill, awakened to kill, and lives to kill. Lizzie, Eira, Emma, Emmy Queen Shanna, and the rest of Kniq, played a big part in his life. We broke through the hard-shell bit by bit. The process began 17 years ago, on the day we met Eira as a small babe. Sadly," she watched as Void turned on, "-this is who he truly is," the car sped off.

"I've got bad news," Avon rushed over.

"What is it?"

"It's master," his voice trembled, "-I've o-overheard what he's p-planning," the face remained in shock.

"Go on then," they urged.

"He plans on annihilating the country from where the murderers came from." Stuck without much to say, what he overheard was true; after the tournament – he planned on heading to the main-continent.

"He's joking right?" voiced Xula, all she got was their unresponsive gazes, "-someone stop him, HE'S GOING TO TURN INTO A DEMON."

"He's already a demon," a semi-transparent spirit materialized. "-Get back, majesty," Prophecy shot out with a long-sword. *CLANG,* a single parry by a sword on which had a Sickle ended in Prophecy getting stabbed. Rendered unable to move, Xula watched, "-I'd strongly advice to not get in the way, any of you," it spoke without much regard to life.

"Who are you?" asked Avon who stood on guard.

"Daemonum Gladio, a weapon, protector and loyal servant of Staxius Haggard. Master has awakened, I won't let any insects get in the way. If he wishes for the world to end, I'll make it so," an image of a planet hovered above her hand, "-we're destroyers. He has had plenty of living with family and being loved, "-it clenched, breaking the planet. On the other hand, a book appeared, "Tis a story of the Wielders of Death Magic. Have a thorough read, you'll understand more about our kin; we care not for lowly beings. The balance must always stand. As long as creatures with lives are born, death will follow close behind. Heed my warning, Queen of Arda, thy King hath died. Try to get in his way and I swear I'll kill thy, Angel, without remorse," it took a few steps back, "What would you protect, the life of a single man or the life of a nation?"

"The lives of a nation," she stood.

"Good answer," it smirked, "-now be a good girl and support Eira. The lady will grow to be powerful," on that, the spirit turned to mist.

"Undrar," Emma reached out, "-I'm scared."

"Will master be ok?" Emmy asked.

"Time will tell, I've no idea. I can't stand to imagine the pain he lives with daily. The Death Magic-user will always be bound to misfortune. It's something I know personally; I'm his sister after all. The awakening of Daemonum Gladio means that the symbol of power accepted his being. The man died a vampire and returned a god," she stared the clouds, "-that confirms it," she sighed.

"Confirms what?" asked Xula.

"He had an encounter with Creation. The latter must have given a test; it explains why he vanished suddenly. The return mean one thing, he has returned a God."

The death of Lizzie marked a day that many wouldn't forget. The awakening of the Heir, bestowed with the right to be worshiped and called a God, Staxius took a massive stride into the future. Life as a human ended on the day he turned into a nightwalker. The life of a nightwalker ended when his daughter died. Ascended into a higher plain, a new star came to life, the heir had taken his place.