

The air crackled with an eerie silence. Darx was standing in the middle of the hallway, his body surrounded by an ominous dark aura swirling around him as if hungry shadows were drawn to his body, only revealing his fearsome red eyes that seemed to have a more vibrant red color than usual piercing through all that darkness. As Darx stood there, motionless and solitary, his consciousness sank deeper and deeper into an abyss without end. Thoughts or reasoning was no longer possible for Darx. There was only one feeling left in him. Vengeance!

"D-Darx...?" Syvis stuttered, her voice trembling with genuine fear and concern.

Syvis's voice, instead of returning Darx to normal, made the dark aura intensify. It stretched out like tentacles, coiling around the walls and ceiling. Darx's presence alone sent shivers down the spines of Kase and Syvis. They stood frozen, their eyes wide with bewilderment and confusion. The air thickened with an oppressive energy, making it difficult to breathe.

Kase, however, maintained a wary distance. Despite his initial overconfidence, he found himself immobilized. Even blinking seemed impossible. Kase's background as an assassin honed his ability to swiftly pinpoint and exploit weaknesses in an adversary's defenses, facilitating deadly strikes. At that moment, Darx appeared vulnerable in Kase's eyes full of openings. The idea of killing Darx crossed his mind. Under normal circumstances, Kase wouldn't think twice about seizing the opportunity to strike. Yet, his instincts warned him against getting closer.

"W-What that fuck is going on?" Kase said while the grip on his dagger tightened, "What is he doing?"

Syvis, her worry overwhelming her, took a hesitant step forward, her hand reaching out, but before she could get any closer, Kase swiftly intercepted her.

"Stay back!" Kase warned, his voice betraying a hint of anxiety, "You must be feeling it too, right!? Whatever that idiot is doing is not a normal skill."

Syvis, torn between her concern for Darx and Kase's ominous warning, looked back at Darx, "I-I don't understand. What's happening to Darx?"

"How should I know," Kase's eyes remained fixed on Darx, "But we can't afford to stay still. I've seen this kind of energy before—it's demonic. It feels similar to the demon I faced when the monsters attacked [Merton] or the evil aura of the demon trapped in the portal inside the cave."

(It's true that it feels similar to those demons. However, there is no comparison in the enormous demonic presence I feel coming from Darx.) Kase thought as he held Syvis, (Just what is happening? Second ago, I was about to deliver the final blow to him, and now every fiber in my body is asking me to escape. Why? I was about to win! I was finally going to get rid of Darx.)

"DARX!!!" Syvis shouted, her eyes reflecting a mixture of fear and confusion, trying to get Darx's attention, but he didn't move at all.

(W-Why am I not doing anything? Am I afraid? Me? From Darx? Impossible! I am an S-Rank! I will be the next guild master of Oblivion! An elite adventurer like me would never be intimidated by a low-ranking trash like Darx! I...) Kase's heart pounded in his chest as he tried to decide what to do.

"We can't wait any longer. If we let more time pass..." Kase whispered to himself, his grip on Syvis's arm tightening, "He's not moving ...We have to kill him now!"

As Kase uttered those words, Syvis turned to look at Kase, her eyes narrowed, her gaze fixed on Kase with disgust, "You won't attack him, Kase. There has to be another way."

Kase's hold on Syvis's arm intensified, frustration and impatience evident in his eyes, "He's not human! He feels more like a demon! You have to grasp that. Darx likely fooled everyone just like Caroline did and is an undercover demon. A war against the demons is looming. I don't care about his fate. I won't let someone like that roam the streets of the capital."

Syvis, her eyes filled with defiance, pulled her arm free from Kase's grip, "I won't let you!" Syvis took out her book and placed herself between Kase and Darx, "Darx is not a demon! I'll take care of this, so back off!"

Kase's expression hardened as he stared at Syvis, a silent struggle of conflicting intentions in his eyes, "Syvis, I care about you. Your place should be by my side. Maybe you will hate me for what I'm going to do, but you will understand that it is for the best."

Syvis, seeing Kase's intentions to attack, was ready to protect Darx. Kase raised his gaze and focused it on where Darx was. However, Darx... Darx was not in the place where he was...

"W-What? Where is..." Kase said with confusion and panic in his voice.

Kase was about to use [Predatory Eye] to be able to see in the dark, but it wasn't necessary. Seeing Syvis's shocked countenance looking behind Kase, Kase realized that Darx was behind him.

"How did he..." Kase said as he turned around; the first thing he saw was Darx's arm stretched out with his palm close to his face.

An ominous sphere of darkness begins forming in Darx's hand, growing more intense in a flash. Soon after, the sphere surged forth from Darx's palm like a long beam of dark energy. Kase caught off guard, managed to react just in time, swiftly swaying his waist backward to narrowly evade the beam's path. However, despite his quick reflexes, the periphery of the beam struck the right side of Kase's face as he staggered back, ultimately tumbling to the ground while covering the injured side of his face with a pained expression.

"KKHHHHAAAAAA!!!" Kase shouted loudly, breaking Syvis out of the state of shock she was in.

Syvis turned to watch the beam pass through several guild walls, ultimately reaching the last wall, leaving behind a large hole, revealing the buildings in front amid the swirling dust. Then, Syvis turned to look at Kase, who appeared to be in considerable pain. She noticed that the right side of Kase's face was severely injured, leaving a large area around his ear and right cheek looking like it had been burned.

"AHHH!!!! FUC...!"

However, Kase didn't even have time to comprehend what happened to him, as Darx's palm was once again pointed in his direction. Kase turned to see Darx's face covered by dark energy, only able to discern his cold crimson eyes looking at him with intensity. Kase felt terrified for a moment, yet his instincts kicked in, preventing him from staying still due to fear or the pain on his face. With the dagger still in his right hand, Kase threw it with killing intent toward Darx's face. Darx easily dodged it by moving his head to the side—enough distraction for Kase to stand up and run down the hallway away from Darx.

Darx extended his palm towards Kase, who was sprinting down the hallway, unleashing another dark beam similar to the last one. Kase narrowly evaded it by leaping into one of the adjacent rooms. Once more, the dark beam obliterated the walls, leaving behind a trail of destruction. In the eerie aftermath of Darx's attack, the destroyed hallway stood as a shattered testament to the unfolded chaos. Dust lingered in the air, caught in the soft rays of moonlight that filtered through the gaping holes in the walls.

Amid the wreckage, Darx remained perfectly still, looking in the direction of the destroyed room where Kase entered. There was silence except for some small rocks finishing falling. Then, an unexpected twist unfolded. Kase emerged as a phantom materialized behind Darx, like a silent predator ready to strike. Kase, armed with his dagger glinting with lethal intent, sought to pierce Darx's heart.

"[Assassinate]"

Kase used his most lethal skill, which allowed him to break through any defense.

However, instead of finding its mark in Darx's heart, Darx narrowly dodged the fatal blow, and the dagger sank into his shoulder.

"I'm surprised you managed to dodge that," Kase said, a smirk forming on his lips, "Still, you can't catch what hides in the shadows."

Kase attempted to retrieve his dagger from Darx's shoulder, but it proved futile. Anticipating a counterattack, Kase opted to leap backward, leaving his dagger embedded in Darx's shoulder. Mid-air, Kase invoked the seal in his hand, and the same dagger reappeared in his grasp.

Kase fell at a wide distance from Darx while Darx slowly turned to face him. The faint moonlight filtered through the shattered ceiling and walls, casting an eerie glow on Kase's partially burned face and Darx's, blood staining his shoulder as they locked eyes in a tense standoff. The air crackled with palpable tension as they stood in silence.

"I always knew we would end up like this even though I didn't expect you to give me a surprise like this," Kase spoke, "Even so, the outcome won't change. You will die at my hands!"

Darx stretched out his arm again, his demonic aura pulsating with animosity, preparing to launch another dark beam. The dark energy coiled around his outstretched hand, eager to unleash its destructive force upon Kase. However, Kase sensed the impending threat and activated his skill, [Deadly Illusion], a skill that allows Kase to create up to 10 illusions of himself that can attack with any skill Kase possesses.

In an instant, illusions of Kase, indistinguishable from the real one, materialized around Darx. The illusions moved with an uncanny synchronicity, each mirroring Kase's every movement. Darx momentarily found himself surrounded by multiple threats. They all closed in on Darx from different directions. Some threw their dagger at Darx; others attacked using different skills that Kase possessed, like [Silent Death], [Assassinate], [Death Blossom], all with the purpose of killing Darx.

Darx, without moving or even blinking, created spheres of water around him. However, these were different from the standard water spheres that Darx uses. These water spheres were made of very dark water that emitted the same darkness as him.

The first clash erupted in chaotic and destructive blasts. Kase's illusions darted forward with lethal intent while Darx retaliated by propelling the dark water spheres against the illusory assailants. As Darx focused on the illusions attacking him, Kase activated another layer of his skill. More illusions materialized, doubling their numbers. The guild hall became a dizzying array of Kase's duplicates, each indistinguishable from the real one. Darx, in response, summoned even more dark water spheres. The air crackled with tension as the spheres surged forward, colliding with the illusions in a cacophony of explosive clashes. Yet, Kase's illusions were relentless. With each illusory strike, they vanished into thin air, only to be replaced by new duplicates.

The water spheres passed through those illusions, continuing their path through the walls and ceilings, destroying the guild even more. However, none of them found the real Kase. On the other hand, Kase's illusion attacks were using [Assassinate] and [Death Blossom]. A skill that can pierce any defense and another that increases the severity of wounds. Although Darx had no severe damage, minor cuts began appearing on various parts of his body. Darx summoned an even greater number of dark water spheres. The orbs swirled around him like a malevolent dance, ready to strike down any illusion that dared to approach. However, Kase's illusions, fueled by the relentless pace of their attacks, dodged and weaved with uncanny precision.

The cycle repeated, creating a maddening cycle of illusions and water spheres that tore through the guild like a storm of destruction. The walls and ceilings, already weakened by the previous clashes, began to succumb under the strain of the destructive force of the dark water spheres, destroying everything. Then, amidst the chaos, a single water sphere went through a wall, and shortly afterward, an agonizing moan was heard. The water sphere seemed to reach the real Kase, who had been hiding using [Silent Death] to become invisible and undetectable, waiting for the opportune moment to strike. Kase, momentarily revealed, staggered backward, his left side marked by the forceful blow. Darx, detecting the real Kase, seized the opportunity, and with a flick of his hand, Darx summoned his demonic power, creating a long, dark water spear. Similar to the water spheres, the spear pulsed with an ominous demonic energy.

Kase, sensing the impending danger, blood dripping from his mouth and clutching his side in pain, watched with shock as Darx conjured the devastating water spear. In the blink of an eye, the spear hurtled toward Kase with destructive force.

"SHIT!"

The building, already a maze of destruction, offered limited refuge. In a desperate move, Kase attempted to leap toward the ceiling, utilizing one of the holes created by Darx's prior attacks. Yet the pain from the blow to his side slowed him down, and it seemed the spear would reach him before he could evade the attack. However, halfway there, a stone summon in the shape of a woman materialized, intercepting the spear attack instead of Kase being destroyed instantly. Thanks to the stone summon, Kase narrowly evaded the lethal projectile as he ascended to the roof.

Darx was about to take a step to follow Kase when Syvis appeared with her book in her hand. Syvis had been protecting himself with his summons and magic from Darx and Kase's attacks until she chose to step in, realizing that Darx was on the verge of delivering a potentially fatal blow to Kase. Syvis walked slowly toward Darx, who was motionless, watching her without blinking, while surrounded by a darkness that felt more suffocating with each passing second.

"Darx..." Syvis said as she looked at Darx with sadness and remorse.

Numerous questions raced through her mind. Syvis knew many things that Darx had only confided in her, including his encounter with the goddess and his strange powers. However, she didn't understand what was happening to Darx or where those strange demonic powers that Darx was showing came from. Yet, those concerns paled in comparison to the overwhelming frustration and anger she felt at herself, knowing she was the one who caused this. Knowing that she finished destroying Darx and turning him into what he was now was what tormented her mind.

Syvis, her voice full of remorse, took a tentative step forward. She couldn't bear to see Darx in such a state of torment, "D-Darx, you don't have to do this..." She called out, her voice soft, "Everything is my fault! It's all... my fault. You're not like this... Please, snap out of it."

Darx heard those words without reacting. Syvis stared at him, almost pleading with her eyes for him to answer anything or even react a little to her words, but nothing. The only sound that could be heard was in the background. The sound of fire that was beginning to spread through various parts of the destroyed area, perhaps caused by a lamp that fell on a bed.

"...D-Darx, you have to stop this, please! More members of the guild will come soon, and if they see you in that state, they will not hesitate to attack you," Syvis pleaded to Darx with desperation and fear in her voice, "If you want to take my life for what I did to you, I won't resist. I won't let you be blamed for my mistakes. I promise I won't let them touch you, so please sto-"

Darx, however, stared at the face of the woman he came to love even more than his own life with cold indifference, leaving Syvis perplexed. It was as if Darx lacked emotions. He shifted his gaze back to the hole in the roof through which Kase had escaped and started walking in that direction, dismissing Syvis entirely. The shock and bewilderment on Syvis's face was evident. Syvis turned her head to watch Darx slowly walking away, with tears welling in her eyes, coming to terms with the painful realization that her relationship with Darx had come to an abrupt and heart-wrenching end. In Darx's eyes, she had ceased to exist.

As Darx walked away, Syvis summoned two stone women to block his path. The summoned beings materialized in front of Darx, blocking his path.

"Darx, please!" Syvis's voice quivered with heartbreak and desperation, reaching out to a man who seemed lost to her, "Even if you hate me now, I won't let you be killed. You need to escape. Once the others arrive to rescue Kase, they'll ambush you. Please, Darx! I beg you!"

Darx, his gaze fixed on the hole in the roof, showed no sign of acknowledgment. Syvis's eyes blurred with tears, and frustration and heartache mingled in her voice as she implored. Without looking back, Darx summoned two dark water spheres with a flick of his hand. The malevolent orbs, swirling with ominous energy, surged forward with a destructive force, shattering the stone summons blocking his path. Ignoring Syvis's pleas, Darx approached the hole in the ceiling. The moonlight, filtering through the shattered roof, cast an ethereal glow on his figure. As Darx leaped through the opening, disappearing into the night, Syvis's voice echoed through the ruins, a desperate cry in the silence of heartbreak.

Darx, having leaped to the roof, found himself face to face with Kase, who stood at a safe distance, an enigmatic smirk playing on his partially burned face. In the distance, a few people had started gathering in the streets, drawn by the commotion and destruction that echoed from the guild hall. Silhouettes of curious onlookers began appearing at a safe distance from the building, trying to see what was going on. Meanwhile, Darx and Kase, standing on opposite

ends of the long roof, locked eyes in a tense standoff with the moonlight, filtering through the scattered clouds, casting an ethereal glow on their figures.

"I have to give you praise," Kase taunted, his words intended to evoke a reaction from Darx, "I don't know how you did it or if you're a demon or not, but a low-ranking loser like you really put me on the spot for a few moments. But your luck ran out," Kase said, raising his arm and pointing his dagger at Darx, "You will not live to see the light of a new day. Something I should have done a long time ago."

Despite Kase's attempts to incite Darx's wrath, there was no visible reaction. Darx's eyes remained cold and unreadable, as if he had severed every emotion in his body. With a swift motion, Kase activated his [Deadly Illusion] skill once again, creating copies of himself. That made Darx finally react. His crimson eyes shifted from one illusion to another. He extended his hand, preparing to unleash the dark beam that had proven devastating. But before Darx could release the evil energy, he was struck by an unexpected attack.

A blue bolt of electricity, swift and precise, emerged from behind him, catching Darx off guard. The beam struck Darx violently, knocking him from the roof to the street below. The impact reverberated through the night, illuminating the ceiling. Darx, though relatively unharmed from the surprise attack or the fall, didn't have time to see who had attacked him on the roof since a warrior wielding a greatsword charged at him, aiming for a powerful strike. Darx, with uncanny agility, evaded the attack, narrowly escaping the blade's deadly arc. However, the respite was short-lived. A silent figure approached from behind— a woman wielding a katana. Darx perceived this other unexpected attack, created his commonly used water barrier around him, which began to expand rapidly, making the warrior and the girl with the katana jump back. However, the dark water barrier didn't materialize quickly enough to prevent the katana attack from piercing Darx's side.

"It looks like you're having a tough time," Kase said from the rooftop with a mocking smile.

Gin appearing seconds later by his side. Kase then jumped off the roof and landed next to Diva and Arthur. Soon after, Celeste and Valeria appeared behind Darx's. At that moment, Darx found himself in the middle of the street, surrounded by some of Oblivion's best adventurers.

"What do you say we finish what we started?" Kase spoke, sounding confident.