

## Supreme M 121

### Chapter 121 Interludium 3

The Griffon Kingdom was commonly referred as the Original Kingdom, since more than a millennium ago had been the first great country to emerge from the warring states period in the Garlen continent.

It wasn't the biggest, the primacy belonged to the Blood Sands tribes, but because of the much harsher life conditions of the desert coupled with its lack of fertile lands, it was without a doubt the richest.

To the north and west it bordered the Gorgon empire, and to the south and east with the Blood Sands desert. The central government was located in the capitol, Valeron, named after the Original King, Valeron Griffon.

The ruler of the Kingdom was also the commander in chief of the royal army.

It was prohibited to private citizens or even nobles to have an army. Those who could afford it, where only allowed to have a personal guard, up to one hundred soldiers.

The simple attempt to recruit or form one was high treason against the Crown, and the perpetrator's bloodline would be executed up to the third generation. Nobles were only considered as administrators of their land on behalf of the King/Queen.

They weren't allowed to make laws, only to apply them as they were enacted by the Court. In case of doubt about their interpretation, a simple call via the communication amulet to a royal scribe would clear it.

To waive the laws were needed special circumstances and the King's direct approval, otherwise it would be considered an act of rebellion.

One of the reasons the Griffon Kingdom had flourished during the centuries compared to its neighbours, was the ruler's selection process. The title wasn't hereditary, just like the competence, skill and talent the role required.

After the death of the current ruler, the spouse would hold the reins of the whole Kingdom until the next one was found. To access to the selection, there were three essential requirements.

The candidate had to share, no matter how dilute, the blood of the Original King, also had to possess outstanding magical talent and proved administrative skill. The reason for the first requirement was still a mystery to everyone except the ruler.

The second and third, instead, were quite obvious. Without magic, the ruler would be a prisoner of his own guards, since even a magico level servant could kill him without leaving any trace in barely a second.

Lastly, a good ruler was first and foremost a good administrator. Without a proper sense of justice and balance, he would be either a tyrant, or even worse a profligate strawman in the hands of whoever was able to enable his vices.

Those who satisfied these requirements would be brought in the deepest part of the royal castle, in front of a mystical gate made out of gold and silver, that would open only for those who carried royal blood.

The ones that were found worthy, would emerge from it shocked but unharmed, while the others would never return. It was the main reason why the title of King/Queen was not coveted except from those who sincerely believed to deserve it.

At any time, someone that met the requirements could challenge the current ruler and undertake the trial, but again very few came back.

In it's thousand-year history, the Court had never elected a ruler without carrying the tradition, and even that was a mystery.

Many thought that behind the gate there was a series of magical artifacts, that would put the candidate to the test and kill those who weren't fit to lead the Country.

Others that the ghost of the Original King still dwelled in the castle, passing his wisdom through the generations thanks to the bond of blood they shared.

All of them were wrong.

Behind the gold and silver gate, after a short tunnel, there was the lair of the Divine Griffon Tyris, one of the only three Divine beasts that lived on the continent, that history knew only as the Original Queen, from the time she helped Valeron build his Kingdom, which he named in her honour.

Every time it was necessary, she would examine the candidates, making sure that the legacy of her only one and true love would not be lost, using her powers to probe their minds and spirits.

If any of them pleased her, the Kingdom would have a new ruler. Otherwise she would have no need to fix something for dinner. Tyris didn't believe in direct intervention, nor did she care that much for human affairs anymore.

She just kept fulfilling King Valeron's dying wish, choosing his successors and scaring the sh\*t out the Court from time to time, when someone thought that the tradition was outdated.

It was from her lair that Arjîn Rênas departed for his new mission.

He was the youngest recruit in the Queen's Corpse, and had just finished learning the basics of royal magic from Tyris.

The existence of the Queen's corps was a known fact, something that every law-abiding citizen would remember and respect. To the contrary, the Queen's Corpse was supposed to be just a rumour, the bogeyman of the underworld.

It was a secret unit, comprised only by the most loyal member of the corps, that once had mastered royal magic, would single-handedly remove any threat to the Kingdom.

If an entire noble household died in an accident, if a criminal cartel disappeared overnight, it was the Corpse's doing.

No one had actually ever seen a member of the Corpse in action and lived to tell the tale, it was one of those "My cousin's friend knows a guy that..." kind of rumors. Yet they were very real.

When they had met, Tyris had welcomed Arjîn in her human form, making him fall head over heels for her, and wasting the following week rejecting his marriage proposals and trying to reason with him.

She had kept her Griffon form for too long, forgetting that calming down a scared guest was much easier than facing his unreasonable feelings. Tyris' human appearance had a delicate oval face, with perfect features that countless artists had spent their whole lives in vain, trying to reproduce them.

She had shining gold hair, long enough to almost touch the floor, and silver eyes that sparkled as stars at the faintest light. Her pearly-pink skin was flawless, showing no sign of being affected by living in the cold underground lair for so long.

Tyris usually wore a simple blue satin day dress, used centuries ago by grieving widows, that despite its ancient and baggy cut could not hide her soft and ravishing curves more than a flying bird could eclipse the sun.

The first time Arjîn had seen her smile, he believed to have been long dead, because that simple expression brought back to life all the feelings that long years in the Queen's black ops squad had made him forget.

"Remember to not abuse your new powers." Were her parting words.

"The impurities in your body are not your enemy, on the contrary are the only reason why you and all the talented mages are still alive, despite your bodies are unsuitable to wield the power of your cores.

It takes time for a body to adapt, and there is no way to rush the process. Any misstep, and you will turn into an Abomination, and someone else from the Corpse will have to get rid of you. Farewell, child. We shall not meet again."

With a heavy heart, he departed without looking back.

According to the Queen's orders, something was wrong with the Kingdom, even worse than usual, requiring all hands-on deck and forcing Arjîn to abandon his training early.

There seemed to be something odd about many Alchemic labs near the White Griffon academy and the materials they were buying in stock, along with too many dimensional boxes for their purpose to be anything good.

## Chapter 122 Interludium 4

After Arjîn left, Tyris could not but sigh, thinking about the irony of the core refining process. While those who started with a very weak mana core, be it red or yellow, had it easy, the stronger the core, the higher the risks.

Her beloved Valeron was the perfect example. Born with a yellow core, once learned true magic, he had the opportunity to strengthen both his core and body at the same time, removing the impurities bit by bit.

Once his core had started to be too strong, pain had been the first sign of alarm, allowing Tyris to stop him from refining the world energy until the body had fully adapted.

But for stronger beings, like magical beasts or talented mages that had already reached their full development, true magic was more often than not a death penalty. If they purified the impurities too fast, the energy inside their bodies would flood every single cell without control.

The lucky ones would die on the spot, while the less fortunate would explode among excruciating pains.

And then there were the Abominations.

Beings with a core so strong, with a will so indomitable that even death could not defeat them. They would plague the land, consuming all forms of life trying to prolong their existence.

Unlike mages and magical beasts, Abominations were like snowflakes, no two were alike. Their souls and minds would shape their new form, until the moment they were put down like rabid animals.

The only way to avoid such destiny was through hard work and patience, but the rewards were beyond imagination. Becoming a conduit for the world energy meant becoming an Awakened one, a being with an endless mana supply, whose only magical limit was his own willpower and imagination.

By removing the impurities, the body of an Awakened one would progressively become faster, stronger and more resilient. His healing so fast to almost resemble regeneration, his six senses keen like those of the animals.

Last but not least, all Awakened ones would have their life spans enhanced. They would no longer consume their own life force, replacing it with the world energy itself.

That was how monsters like Scorpicores, Griffons, Dragons and Phoenixes could have an almost eternal life. But that didn't mean immortality. Despite each of them was really hard to kill, it was far from impossible.

That was why most of the oldest Awakened ones ended up isolating themselves. The stronger you were, the more conceited you became, until the point you felt entitled to force your idea of right and wrong on others, making the whole world your enemy.

Thinking about the time she had spent with Arjîn, and how fleeting was still his existence, Tyris could not but ponder if her old friend and rival Leegaain had actually been right all along.

"Teaching humans is not impossible, just pointless." He had told her the last time they had met, centuries earlier, back when he had given up on humankind due to their innate foolishness.

Thinking of him, after all those years, still managed to make her laugh.

Leegaain was the only dragon she had ever met that flaunted his origins as a common lizard. If not for her pride, maybe Tyris could one day confess to him that she too had started as a simple finch.

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While running along the stairs, Arjîn Rênas was amazed by how both his stamina and speed had improved. Being one of the Kingdom's elite Mage Assassins, he knew his body like the back of his own hand.

As a beginner Awakened one, Tyris had allowed him only to partly purify his blood from impurities, yet the changes were remarkable. His happiness was short lived, though. Arjîn could not stop worrying about the report he had just received.

Not for its content, but for its length. A single page.

That could only mean that all the Crown's resources were stretched so thin that they could barely function properly. And considering that it included both the Queen's corps and Corpse, the idea was beyond unsettling.

"I have entered seclusion just a few months ago, how could the situation change so much in so little time?"

As soon as he reached one of the mirrors, he pricked his left index finger with a small knife, using his blood to draw a magic rune on it while injecting his mana.

The mirror's surface quivered, while the secret Warp Gate network was activated, allowing him to instantly reach his destination, the city of Kandria.

While on paper it was just a medium sized city, thriving thanks to its position along one of the main trading routes, reality was a bit different. Under all the sweat and noise produced by its industrious and honest citizens, Kandria was home of one of the biggest black markets in the Marquisate.

For the right price, there were very few things you couldn't acquire, even slave collars, and that said a lot. Slavery was forbidden in all the free Countries, and it was a crime punished with death, preceded by torture and the expropriation of all the family's assets.

It was because of the ever flourishing criminal underworld that a famous Alchemist like Coirn Hatorne had chosen Kandria to build her state of the art laboratory. It gave her access to all kinds of clients and ingredients, allowing her to take the best from both worlds and became filthy rich very quickly.

When Arjîn emerged in the local branch of the Mage Association, the clerk barely glanced at him. The secret network also had access to all the official waypoints across the Kingdom, allowing the agents to avoid being questioned or searched.

Customs and controls would take place before departing, so those who arrived were considered to be properly cleared travellers. Before leaving the building, Arjîn took a quick stop at the restroom, to prepare his cover.

A fancy silk dress was inconspicuous in the royal castle, but it would make him stick out like a sore thumb in any other place. He wore brown cotton leggings, a white shirt and a vest. His new shoes had a soft sole, allowing him to move without making noise.

The final touch was applying make up with water magic, simulating a long scar going from under his left eye to his chin. Even if someone would stop looking at him, the scar would be the only thing they would see.

Their gazes would be drawn by it, ignoring his eyes and his nose. Whenever they would try to recall his appearance, the only thing they would remember was a man with a three days old scruff and a scar on the cheek.

According to his seniors, it was the best mask one could ever wear.

Once outside the building, Arjîn remembered why he hated Kandria. When the city had been founded, no one had expected that one day it would be so busy, hence the roads weren't very large.

Between the merchants' stalls, the carriages stopping to load and unload their goods and all the pedestrians going to and fro their homes, walking had become a form of art for the residents and a labour for everyone else.

The bustling activity forced people to bump into each other, making those cramped streets a paradise for thieves. When Arjîn finally reached his destination, he had been robbed four times of the leather pouch he carried at his neck, holding a few copper and silver coins to hide the fact that he had a dimensional ring.

Each time, he had been forced to replace it with whatever he could find in the pockets of those who were robbing him, whom he robbed back with a sleight of hand. In the process Arjîn actually earned three silver coins, which he donated to a nameless homeless on the road.

He circled around Hatorne's shop, pretending to check the nearby stalls while looking for a way in. Being in the high-end part of the city, the traffic was limited, and that allowed him to spice things up with magic.

At every step he took, Arjîn would release earth magic waves that would seep into the shop's walls before coming back, like a sonar, allowing him to check for secret passages. A smart's rabbit hole had two exits, but a clever one would have many.

Yet despite all his efforts, he found nothing.

- "Either I have overestimated that traitorous witch and there is no secret passage, or I have underestimated her, and she has magically shielded her lab." –

On the back of his orders, there was a recently drawn map of the Alchemic lab, but the only entrances noted were the front door, were aside from window shopping he could do very little outside drawing unwanted attention, and the service entrance for the suppliers.

According to the map, both were guarded by skilled mercenaries. Killing them wasn't a problem, but getting in without causing a ruckus was. The mission required discretion, otherwise instead of the Corpse they would have sent a simple constable with a proper warrant.

Arjîn didn't like complex plans. In his experience, the bigger the setup, the higher was the number of things that could go wrong. He had only one shot at the mission, so after scouting the surroundings, he bought a few trinkets before disappearing in a back alley.

He chose to wait on the top of the tallest building in the zone, a three stories house, to keep an eye on the Alchemic lab without being noticed.

## Chapter 123 Terminus

Arjîn's options were limited. Being against a fellow magician, he doubted that Hatorne employed common locks.

The illegal market was her biggest source of income, she was bound to have set alarms and safety measures to get rid of intruders or destroy all the incriminating evidence, in case something went wrong.

Arjîn wasn't hot-headed, neither the mission had a deadline, so he bid his time, waiting two days to get his opportunity.

It arrived in the form of a shipment of crates, that two young men delivered after parking their carriage in the alley of the service entrance. Finally, the door was opened from the inside, allowing the goods to be brought inside by both the guards and the couriers.

Using Life Vision, Arjîn checked the surroundings for witnesses and then the building to make sure the intelligence he had was correct. There were no guards hidden inside, and that was good news.

If Arjîn wanted, he could have jumped down and killed them all in barely two seconds.

The corpses weren't a problem, he could store them in his dimensional amulet, and so was the blood. A simple pulse of dark energy would delete every trace of the massacre.

But that would mean killing two potential innocents, not to mention that the carriage and the crates were bound to draw attention, since they were perfectly visible from the main road.

Arjîn waited for the guards to get back in, and at the last second, when the door was about to be closed, he Blinked inside.

Arjîn's stiletto severed the man's spine from the skull, killing him on the spot. Before the second guard, a bulky middle-aged man, could even react, Arjîn Blinked again, appearing behind him and putting his right hand on the guard's mouth before slitting his throat from ear to ear.

Not even a drop of blood reached the ground, Arjîn managed to capture all of it with water magic and store it in his dimensional amulet. Then, he proceeded to search the corpses, finding a set of keys and personal effects.

Judging by his looks, the middle-aged guard wasn't married, nor had any family. Under the breastplate, his clothes were dirty with days old food stains, missing some buttons that he never cared to replace.

His belongings amounted to a set of gambling dices and a wineskin already half empty, despite was still morning. All signs that the man was letting himself go, without a care in the world.

The other guard was younger, cleaner with an oval shaped locket around his neck, inside there were four initials inscribed in a heart.

Arjîn used air magic to shave off his scruff and water magic to remove the fake scar, applying at the same time some make up to resemble as much as possible his victim before donning his clothes.

- "As long someone doesn't come close enough, it would be hard to recognize me as an intruder. Even if that happens, surprise should give me a second or two, plenty enough to get rid of the meddling b\*stard." –

After sealing the bodies in his dimensional amulet, Arjîn used earth magic again, this time scanning the building from the inside.

As he had suspected earlier, it had been shielded against external probing, but from there he was able to perceive an uncharted grid of tunnels and rooms right below the shop.

Arjîn left the warehouse, heading towards the nearest entrance. He regretted not having the opportunity to search the crates behind him, but now he was on the clock. His goal was to get all the evidence he needed, before either blowing up the place or running away after writing an apology note.

Thanks to Life Vision, he could see that the door in front of him had no magical properties. Nonetheless, when he found the right key, he used spirit magic to unlock it, just to be safe.

According to the blueprint, the shop occupied the first floor of the building, being composed by the exhibit space of medium-low value merchandise for the public to see, the warehouse, to stock the unsorted raw materials and an ample corridor, connecting the two with the employee facilities.

Below the street level, were supposed to be just the alchemic lab and the vault, containing the high-end products and rare ingredients.

Thanks to earth magic, Arjîn had no problems finding the hidden lever to open the path to the tunnels. The road was disseminated with alarms and traps, but between royal magic and Life Vision, he was able to get past them, barely slowing down.

Building a magical lab underground was unusual, but not unprecedented. Handling powerful spells and volatile components, it was of paramount importance that the facility was perfectly insulated from external forces.

If mystical wild energies were to enter, whatever the reason, during a crucial step, the best-case scenario was losing hours, if not days of work and all the resources employed. Worst case scenario, the whole lab would go boom.

A good insulation by magical means was very, very expensive. That was why stingy or needy magicians would choose the underground option to ease the burden on their wallets.

Arjîn thanked his good luck for Hatorne not having realized that her ruse was a double-edged sword. On one hand, it had allowed her to build a lab under the lab, away from prying eyes, without raising any suspicion.

On the other, though, he could see via Life Vision that she had been really stingy. The real lab was poorly insulated, and that meant that Hatorne could not have placed any kind of powerful magical device in its vicinity without risking her own life.

As he expected, from that point onward, the traps and alarms were only of mechanical nature, making his job much easier. While he delved further, Arjîn suddenly realized why the security was so lax.

The corridors were large enough for two adults to be barely able to walk side by side, and magically lit so that there was no hiding place. Going in was relatively simple, but if he were to be discovered, getting out would be nigh impossible.

The low ceiling made flying useless; the tight space prevented to use agility to run away. Strength and numbers would be much more important in a fight compared to speed and magic.

The first room he encountered was a luxurious lounge, with an expensive carpet covering all the floor, and velvet red couches and armchairs arranged around a long cherry-wood table.

- "It must be where she discusses business with her 'special' clients."-

Arjîn noticed several wooden boxes lying on the tables, each of them had a very complex magical lock already activated, except for one. He recognized the rune pattern. It was a variation of a lock very popular among smugglers and spies.



It allowed itself to be opened by whoever knew the right combination, not only by the one that had imprinted its magic, yet a single mistake and the vessel would implode, destroying its contents.

This version seemed to be more complicated and dangerous, it would explode instead of imploding. Arjîn stored all of them in his dimensional amulet, hoping to be able to find a way to break into them later.

He also took the unlocked box, and after moving some of the furniture to get as much space as possible, he placed it on the ground, pushing the opening button.

The box grew to the size of a big closet, containing beakers, glass rods, vials and several burners.

It was also full of gears connected to mechanical arms that seemed to have been designed to hold and handle the laboratory glassware that had yet to be arranged.

It was a marvel of magic and science like Arjîn had never even dreamt about.

- "Whatever this is, it must be the unassembled version of what lies in the other boxes. If only the glassware was already at least filled with the ingredients, my mission would be as good as done. As it is, the question remains. What the heck is this for?"

He compressed it again, storing it away too.

The lounge lead to another small corridor, identical to the previous one. After checking with earth magic and Life Vision for traps or hidden guards, Arjîn moved forward, determined to find the last piece of the puzzle.

His steps didn't produce any sound, allowing him to keep an ear out for incoming enemies, yet he encountered no one.

At his left, he found another door, unlike any other in the building. It was thick and padded, made to prevent something from coming out, yet it had no lock whatsoever. This piqued his curiosity, so after changing back to his enchanted suit and preparing for the worst, he slowly opened the door.

What he saw was so creepy that even a hardened veteran like him could not help but feel cold shivers running down his spine.

The room inside was small, five meters (16') large and ten meters (33') long, with chains coming out from the walls and floor. At first glance it could look like a prison, but everything was wrong.

There were no prisoners hanging, just corpses. One seemed to have exploded from the inside, its chest cut open in two by a single huge wound, that no known weapon or beast should have been able to inflict.

Another was burnt to death, while its neighbour was frozen solid, and despite the room was far from cold, it didn't show any sign of thawing. After checking them both, Arjîn understood that their death made no sense.

It wasn't the result of any spell or natural event, fire and ice respectively had devoured them from the inside. The last corpse was even stranger than the others.

What he supposed had once been an old man had now his face disfigured by agony. The eyes rolled back showing only the white.

The corpse had its veins turned of a bright blue, and they were bulging out, like they were going to burst open at any second.

When Arjîn touched the body to better examine it, the old man regained his senses, whimpering an almost silent prayer.

"Please... kill... me."

Arjîn jumped back from the surprise, instinctively activating Life Vision. Not only the old man was alive, but all the chained bodies, even in death, kept emitting a mana signature. Whatever had killed them was still active.

- "What in the gods' names has that madwoman done?" -

Arjîn stored the bodies, the royal mages would have a lot of explaining to do.

Then, he checked the old man again. He was clearly in a lot of pain, in no condition to be moved and Arjîn was no healer. He had only recently become an Awakened one, developing with true magic only the spells he was already apt to.

"I'm sorry, old man, but your body or those of your companions may hold the key to prevent a great disaster. The Kingdom honours your sacrifice."

Arjîn snapped his neck, giving him a painless death, but as soon as he did, the chains started blinking with magical energies.

Even without understanding how, he knew to have triggered some kind of alarm. Arjîn assessed that between the bodies and the boxes, he had gained enough. It was time to get out of there.

Unbeknownst to him, it wasn't an alarm, just like the room wasn't a prison. It was just another lab, with a different kind of guinea pigs. The chains had simply alerted the assistants that was time to collect the data.

Arjîn rushed all the way back using air fusion, slowing down only to avoid the traps. Suddenly, a man with a wizard attire and a couple of guards popped out of a corner, managing to sound the alarm the moment they spotted the intruder.

Cursing his bad luck, Arjîn darted forward, his stilettos made short work of the guards and the mage, that died before having the time to cast a single spell. More and more guards flooded the corridors, dying like ants under Arjîn's stilettos, their corpses piled up as fast as they arrived.

The alarm kept resounding in the building, forcing an assistant to alert his mistress.

"Mistress Hatorne, there is an intruder in the Kandria's lab." Her voice was full of panic.

"How far has he gone? What has he taken?" The old, hoarse voice was more annoyed than worried. They had disturbed her during a crucial point in her latest experiment.

"We don't know. He's about to come out from the underground lab. I don't know how long we will be able to stop him. Please, help us!"

"Help you? A bunch of incompetent, ungrateful idiots? You are all fired!"

Coirn Hatorne took out a glass pearl from her dimensional amulet, crushing it under her heel. A second later, a powerful but controlled explosion erupted from the underground lab, turning everything and everyone in a radius of five meters (16') from the shop into ashes.

Then she took her communicator amulet, informing her client.

"Lukart, old fart, I have good news and I have bad news. The bad news is that an intruder screwed up your little master plan. I had to destroy everything to prevent him from escaping."

"What's the good news?"

"I'm still not finished, you idiot. My old student, Professor Reflaar, had come to collect his order, and he is probably dead too. If I'm right, and I usually am, the intruder was sent here from the Queen.

The death of the Professor is ill timed, they will probably think he was one of your lapdogs. Also, I don't know if there was more than one intruder or what they have found out.

The last batch is either lost or in the enemy's hand, if I were you, I would make haste. If they find out their content, you'll fail even before you start."

Archmage Lukart's voice was full of anger and impatience, he would have buried alive that old hag years ago, if only he had the chance. But Hatorne was too smart and knew too much.

"I am still waiting for the good news." He roared.

"The lab was insured."

## Chapter 124 Exordium

Lith waited for his companions to fully understand the seriousness of his situation. Without their aid, he feared to be forced to expose himself and his family to countless dangers. Each one of them was forced to a really difficult choice.

Either to back up his story, lying to the Headmaster and put their academic careers and family name in danger, or refuse, leaving him to shoulder alone the consequences of his attempt to prevent the ruin of the academy.

"I'm aware I'm asking much from you, but please know that I'm not doing this lightly. If any of you doesn't want to get involved, I would understand and bear no grudge."

An awkward silence ensued, most of them didn't know how to answer. On one hand, they felt proud of our friend, not only willing to risk so much to protect the Country from the civil war, but also having enough trust in them to reveal his secret.

On the other, though, they felt scared by the consequences both choices would bear. But most importantly, they realized that he was asking from them a leap of faith. If his revelation had proved something, was that they actually knew nothing about him.

Lith was already eerie back when he glared all the time, breezing through the classes and single-handedly disposing of magical beasts in the mock exam. But now, didn't he has just admitted not being a normal human?

For all they knew, his unnatural speed and strength could be just the tip of the iceberg.

That wasn't a situation any of them had ever taken into account when joining the White Griffon academy. For Yurial the plan had always been to study hard, have as many flings as possible before his arranged marriage, and inherit the family assets.

Phloria's only aim was to graduate with grades high enough to allow her to avoid any arranged marriage, and live her life as she wanted.

After finding out that her mother didn't care for her as a daughter, but only as a tool for her plots, Friya had become determined to become as successful as possible to give her the middle finger before leaving the household for good.

Quylla, instead, just wanted to never suffer from loneliness and starvation again.

Things had just turned so much complicated.

Contrary to everyone's expectation, it was Yurial the first to answer.

"You can count on me." He gave him a thumbs up.

- "Quylla would probably follow him even if he revealed to be an undead or a shape-shifting monster." Yurial thought. "Friya will simply come along. Those two are so glued together that I wouldn't be surprised even if she accepted to take part in a threesome.

That leaves out only Phloria, but she seems too much bounded to honour and loyalty to abandon a teammate in dire straits. Hence instead of looking like a coward, is better to move first. Besides, no pain no gain.

Once it gets out we 'managed' to kill a monster, my reputation will go through the roof, and if somehow 'our discover' prevents the civil war, I'll take credit for that too." –

Although cynical, Yurial's reasoning was in the ballpark. He had anticipated Quylla of a split second, and as soon she spoke, Friya agreed too, leaving the flabbergasted Phloria looking like an egotistical jerk.

"What the f\*ck... I mean, I'm in!" She blushed so hard to almost look cute.

After thanking them Lith proceeded to describe again the fight versus the Abomination, concocting with their help a believable team victory.

They were still discussing when a voice resounded in the air, just like the gong for the lessons, summoning them in the Headmaster's office. They walked as slowly as possible, trying to fix the last details.

When they entered the office, Linjos was waiting for them, standing up in front of the glass window.

"We are ready to report, sir." Phloria stepped forward, straight as an arrow in a military-looking pose.

"No need." He replied without even turning back, prompting them to get close with a wave of his hand.

While they obeyed, each one more nervous than the other, Linjos spun his index finger in the air, and the whole tower where the office was located started to turn around, until it faced a particular region of the forest that was completely bald.

The whole group was shocked, if not for the change in the landscape they would have never guessed the tower was able to move. It all had happened without the slightest vibration.

"That's where the fight took place, correct?" Linjos asked.

"Yes." Phloria replied swallowing down a lump of saliva.

- "Good gods, how big was that thing? How strong Lith really is?" – They thought as one.

"Normally I wouldn't believe a word of your story. Too many things do not add up. But even if that horrible withered scar wasn't proof enough, I have already contacted the Lord of the forest, which confirmed everything.

So, either you are telling a truth worthy of being sung by bards, or I'm the victim of an incredibly elaborate joke."

When Scarlett had received Linjos' call about the Abomination, it had immediately understood what was happening.

Knowing what humans would do to an Awakened one, and being still interested in Lith's development, the Scorpicoe nodded to everything, even introducing to Linjos the rescued dryad before hanging up the call.

"Animals can talk?" Yurial couldn't avoid asking out in surprise.

"Animals, can't. Monsters, instead, speak fluently just like you and I."

Linjos turned around, looking Lith in the eyes.

"That leaves me with only a couple of questions. How come Lith was the one to decide what to do with what you found?"

"Because the dryad sensed that was his soul being in danger." Phloria promptly improvised.

"Everything we found seemed to be linked to his destiny. We simply thought we had no say in the matter."

"And that leads to the second question.

Why you contacted Marchioness Distar instead of coming to me first? I could have expected that from Lord Deirus or Lady Ernas here, giving such important news and evidence to their families to gain the Court's favour. But you?

You are just a commoner, why you decided to overrule me?" His voice didn't sound angry, as much as dejected.

"With all due respect, sir, I'm not overruling you." Lith replied.

"Marchioness Distar is not only the ruler of this region, is also one of those that taught me magic." He clung to the lie that got him admitted in the academy months ago.

"Also, I think she is better suited to handle the matter, since she is more detached from the problem that albeit just in part, you contributed to create."

"Explain." Linjos' eyes steeled, a tinge of anger appeared into them.

"In my opinion, your reform of the academy system is a true paradise for those who work hard and commoners, and that's the problem. Have you ever heard the fable of the boiling frog?

If you put one in hot waters, it will jump away to safety, but if you rise the temperature slowly, it will die without even noticing it. The problem was already there, you had the right solution, but implemented it too fast.

I believe that a man of your knowledge should have been able to predict it and proceed with more caution."

Linjos was already hurt by their lack of trust, the last remark hit a nerve, tinging his cheeks red with anger and shame.

## Chapter 125 Bombshell

After Linjos delivered both the magically sealed dimensional box and the coded letter, Lith felt like a burden had been lifted from his chest. It was the biggest, yet just one among many.

Now he had to prepare for the next dimensional magic exercise, research the runes sealing the boxes hidden inside his pocket dimension with the library's help, study their pseudo core with Invigoration, and find the time to use Accumulation to keep refining his core.

Now that he had finally overcome the bottleneck, he could use his first breathing technique again, to amass the world energy and strive for the blue mana core.

Worst case scenario, it would make him as powerful as the Headmaster or a Professor. Lith had not missed how the more he refined his core, the more dramatic changes he experienced.

At the beginning, Lith had thought that by absorbing the world energy, he was simply overcoming his natural lack of magical force. But over time, by expelling the impurities accumulated in his blood, organs and now in his bones, things had become unsettling even for him.

So many things didn't add up. At the White Griffon academy, there were plenty of students with a mana core stronger than his own, even his teammates. Yet none of them exhibited a physical prowess like the one Lith now possessed.

Hence, it wasn't just a matter of the mana core. As for the impurities, it couldn't be as simple as that. In the past he had removed them with Invigoration from his parents and sisters, but again, no such thing had happened.

Science could not help him; it was clearly related to the different biology of the new world. And then there was how Kalla had reacted to his last metamorphosis, saying that his smell had become less human.

Lith had so many things to do or think about, that his headache started getting worse again, reminding him that first of all he had to sleep. His vision blurred, while his knees became so weak that he had to lean against a wall to keep standing.

"Are you alright?" Yurial asked.

"Not really. I think the fatigue from the fight in the forest is about to kick in. I don't know how long I can hold on."

A sudden pang made him fall on his knees, holding his temples between the hands, trying to withstand the blinding pain.

He had yet to express his gratitude for their help, but the only thing Lith could do was getting back to his room with the help of his friends, falling asleep as soon his head touched the pillow.

The next morning, not even the breakfast gong managed to wake him up. In the end, Yurial had to bang on his door for several minutes before Lith managed to crawl out of the bed.

"Is that a wand in your pants, or are you just happy to see me?" He said with a cheerful smile.

"What the heck is happening? Has the civil war already started?" As soon he managed to regain his senses, Lith realized it was already morning.

"I was about to call for help and have the door kicked down. Yesterday you almost fainted. How do you feel now?"

"Tired." Despite the full night of sleep, he was still very weak. Invigoration still had no effect.

- "Solus, why you didn't wake me up?"

"I tried multiple times, but your consciousness was beyond my reach. Besides, I think you still need plenty of rest." She sounded really worried.

"Why do you say so?" Lith asked.

"Because while you were sleeping, your body kept syphoning the world energy non-stop. Your mana core is still half empty.

It seems that overcoming the bottleneck caused such radical changes to almost deplete your system. Whatever happened this time, you still need time to adapt. –

Despite his weakness, Lith decided to continue his day as normal. At every meal he ate more than Quylla, feeling like his stomach had turned into a bottomless pit.

During dimensional magic practice, he discovered that his mana sensitivity was still crude, but his mana efficiency had gone up a notch. Magic flowed freely through him, encountering no resistance.

Casting any spell now required less mana, reducing the burden that such powerful energies exerted on his body. Sadly, that was still not enough.

Even training under Quylla's guidance, making any progress was a real struggle. Usually Lith would compensate his lack of talent with all-nighters and endless energy from Invigoration, but this time he lacked both.

When he was too tired to continue, he went straight to bed, asking his friends to wake him up at all costs, in case he couldn't manage on his own.

The following day, Lith woke up full of energy, his body was light like a feather and his head was finally clear. Both Invigoration and Accumulation seemed to work as normal.

- "Luckily, I contacted the Marchioness before going to sleep, otherwise I would have lost a lot of time. Seems that the refining process now needs a lot of preparation. If I stepped in a new stage during an exam, or worse, after a fight, I would be as good as dead." –

During breakfast, the whole canteen was shocked by the latest news. Everyone was discussing the mysterious explosion happened in Kandria that had killed Professor Reflaar, the Master Alchemy teacher.

At those words, Lith almost choked on his food.

"Isn't Kandria the city from which the mercenary team received both the hunting and the delivery mission?" Lith pointed out to the others with a whisper.

"Yeah, it's too odd to just be a coincidence." Friya said.

"Do you think that Professor Reflaar died trying to protect the academy, or because he was part of the conspiracy too?" Phloria's question was on point. Based on what they knew, even professors were untrustworthy.

- "He was a good man. I can't believe he would have brought any harm on his students." Solus refused even to consider the idea of Reflaar being a traitor. "He was an alchemist, and that was an alchemy shop. Maybe he was just in the wrong place at the wrong time."

"I believe you. I'm really sorry for your loss." Lith replied. –

Losing one own's first crush so abruptly was never easy, so instead of expressing his usual doubts and paranoia, Lith decided to let her grieve in peace. Even if they had never directly talked, Lith knew how much Solus had valued his company and enthusiasm.

Lith's group kept discussing all the possible implications the explosion could have, and who were the professors more likely to be a traitor. It goes without saying that Professor Rudd was on everyone's top of the list.

Once in the Dimensional Magic training hall, everyone took his place. This time, knowing that Professor Rudd would not give any pointers, Lith positioned himself right beside Quylla, to be able to both learn by imitation and asking her for help.

Only twelve students had to execute the second exercise, Pilfer. All the others were still stuck at the Loop spell.

Pilfer consisted in creating a dimensional door big enough to let the hand slip in and emerge above a table full of quills. Unlike the Loop spell, the students had now not only to open a bigger passage, but also to regulate the distance on their own.

"Begin!" Professor Rudd's voice roared even before the last gong signalled the start of the lesson.

Lith struggled with Pilfer from the first seconds, that soon turned into minutes and then in a whole hour. In all that time, he had made no progress. The only Gates he had managed to generate were all too narrow for his hand to pass, not to mention their exit was still too far from the table.

Quylla was faring way better, her Gates were almost of the right size and distance, but still unstable, disappearing within seconds with a loud bang. She tried to explain what Lith was doing wrong, but what was simple for her was a mystery to him.

Soon the air filled with the bangs from the students' unstable Gates and their curse words, tired of failing while Professor Rudd would only laugh in the face of any plea for help.

Suddenly, a bang resounded louder than ever, soon followed by another and then still another, until Lith started to think that the training hall had suddenly turned into a firing range.

"What in the gods' names is happening!" Professor Rudd's voice had no trace of hilarity anymore.

The space around the students was filled with cracks, small black holes formed and dissolved, causing the bangs that they had just heard. A student curious enough, tried to touch the cracked space, resulting in it exploding with the strength of a grenade.

Professor Rudd managed to save him, Blinking both of them out of the danger zone.

"Everyone, stop casting if you want to live!" He yelled on the top of his lungs. "Somehow the Hall's protections have been turned off."



## Chapter 126 Bombshell 2

Lith's mind immediately went to Soluspedia, accessing the contents of Professor Rudd's book to assess how serious was their predicament.

"What the heck is going on?" Friya was never far away from Quylla.

"All the failed dimensional spells have made the space in the class unstable." Quylla beat Lith on time, explaining the root of the matter.

"Normally it would never happen, since space reconfigures itself after a while. But because in a short time frame, hundreds, if not thousands of spells have been cast, order turned into chaos, making it possible.

The badly folded space wants to revert to normal, but it's too crumpled. Different spells are still lingering in the air, interacting together. If it keeps up like this, the whole training hall will turn into a huge fireball."

"What? Can't you dumb it down for me?" Like anyone without Soluspedia, Friya was still at the basics, completely oblivious that over bending space was like lighting a match in a coal mine.

"Don't cross the streams!" Lith blurted out.

"What streams?" Quylla looked at him with a puzzled expression.

"I mean... Friya, opening a Warp Steps is like folding a piece of paper. Two extremities separated in space can temporarily overlap, before going back to normal, like a spring.

What's happening is that multiple pieces of paper are colliding between them, but since it's not paper but energy, it will explode!"

"That's why dimensional magic is taught only in academies." Quylla chimed in.

"All the training halls have specific protective arrays, to prevents things like this from occurring. Students are bound to mess up, especially on difficult subjects. But according to Professor Rudd, they must have been turned off!"

Right after saving the dumb student from his own idiocy, Rudd took out his communication amulet to call for help. Only then he realised that using a dimensional spell hadn't been his brightest moment.

New cracks started to appear in the points he had Blinkd through, spreading to the nearest ones until they formed a rough circle.

Inwardly cursing, Rudd threw the amulet to the closest student. Then he focused all his attention attempting to fix his mistake, that was about to generate a black hole big enough to destroy the training hall if not the whole academy.

"Rudd, unless this is important, I'd like to postpone." Linjos' image appeared from the amulet. He seemed to be swamped in paperwork, his usually tidy desk had turned into a battlefield.

"I'm not Professor Rudd, Headmaster." The student managed to say despite quite some stuttering.

"Who are you and how you managed to fake his call? Impersonating a Professor is a criminal offense, young man." Hearing a squeaky voice, Linjos finally raised his head, realizing something was off.

"I'm not impersonating anyone!" He squealed.

"The Professor gave it to me because..."

"Because?" The student had no idea what was happening or how to describe it.

"Because we need help! Cracks in the air, explosions and something about not wearing protections!"

"What?!" Linjos could not make head or tails of it.

"Give me that, you dimwit!" Lith used a mix of air and spirit magic to rip the amulet off his sweaty hands, explaining everything properly to the Headmaster.

Linjós turned pale, but reacted promptly.

"I can reactivate the protections from my office, but that will not help with your situation. Has any of you already learned Restoration?"

It was an advanced dimensional magic spell, developed exactly for situations like that. It was capable of restoring the natural order of things, dispersing the accumulated energy safely.

Linjós' eyes were actually fixated on Lith. He had proved to be excellent in everything, and that gave Linjós the hope he could pull another of his miracles.

"No." Lith replied. He knew the spell only because the book was in Soluspedia, but he had never tried it before. There was no chance Lith could manage to do it at the first try. With his luck, it would have made everything worse.

"Yes." Quylla's voice took everyone by surprise.

"Good! Then use it to assist Rudd. Help is already on its way, but because of the situation, we cannot risk using Warp Steps. It will take some time to arrive there, even by flying."

As soon the conversation ended, they regrouped with the others, deciding what to do. The students close to the exit had already run away, but the ever-expanding cracks and their explosions had now trapped all the others inside.

Only about half the class was still present, along with Professor Rudd, and things were getting worse by the second. Despite all his talent, he was only a man. There were too many sections of space about to collapse, he hadn't the time to properly stabilize them.

The best he could do alone, was temporarily fix the most dangerous one before moving to the next, but after a while the patch would collapse, forcing him to cycle between cracks.

Quylla proceeded to close the smaller ones, preventing them to grow and relieving Rudd, albeit a little. She had learned Restoration because the group would always use her room for training in dimensional magic.

Already having so little of her own, she was scared of losing them, so she had practiced it after everyone left for the night, further developing her mana sensibility by feeling the small damage their practice had caused over time.

Lith felt helpless. For the first time in his life, he could only watch and do nothing.

"Let me guess, our friend Lukart has already escaped."

"Indeed." Yurial nodded. "He and his goons were the first to get out. Either they have great reflexes..."

"Or they knew." Lith completed for him. He then used Life Vision to check his surroundings, discovering that visible and invisibles cracks had almost filled the training hall.

Swallowing a lump of saliva, he racked his brain trying to find a way to make himself useful.

Suddenly, Life Vision showed him that the spatial crack that Quylla was fixing had turned white hot, albeit the change was unnoticeable at the naked eye.

Reacting as fast as he could, Lith managed to shield her with his body before the explosion, conjuring at the same time a series of concentric barriers made of darkness, air and water.

From his fight with the Wither, he had learned that dark magic barriers, despite not blocking all the damage, would wear away everything. As expected, the dark layer reduced the strength of the impact, the air one blocked part of the shockwave, while the water layer smothered some of the flames.

The remaining damage was enough to riddle the back of Lith's uniform with holes, burning his skin and hair.

"Oh gods! I'm so sorry, it's all my fault!" Quylla's eyes filled with tears, but Lith stopped her, putting his index finger on her lips.

"No time for that! As long as I'm alive, we can regenerate everything. What's just happened?" He tried to act though, but he was now quite pale, his skin stretched from the waves of pain.

Luckily, both Friya and Yurial moved forward, one healing Lith, the other supplying him with energy to withstand the process without fainting.

"I've never used Restoration on distortions that big. I used the smaller ones to practice, but it seems I'm not good enough. There's only so much energy I manage to dissipate with my spell, the rest becomes unstable and explodes."

Despite the fear and all that was happening, Quylla immediately stopped sobbing. She had just realized that it was the first time they actually touched not through the uniform.

Lith's skin had a pleasant smell of soap, still bronze coloured from the years spent hunting in the wild under the sun.

"Would you manage to close them if they contained less energy?"

Quylla nodded, while Lith turned around, facing the nearest crack and flooding it with darkness magic.

- "I have no clue about light magic, but after much thinking I'm quite sure that darkness is pure entropy. No matter what kind of energies a dimensional fissure is composed off, if I'm right the darkness will eat them, until they become weak enough for Quylla to fix them."

"And if you are wrong?" Solus voice was worried like when they had faced the Scorpicores.

"In that case I suck at science as much as I do at magic. Here goes everything!"

Chapter 127 Bombshell 3

At first, everything went according to plan. Lith could see via Life Vision that the highly compressed forces stored inside the spatial crack were progressively weakening.

But then, he noticed its edges turning white hot, just like had happened to the previous one before exploding.

- "Dammit, I was too naïve. In this situation darkness magic is a double-edged sword. It allows me to erode the energy just as I predicted. What I didn't take into account, is that at the same time it accelerates the destabilization of the crack, making it even more volatile." –

"Quylla, I did all that I could. Time for you to step in!"

Lith let the darkness fade away, hoping she had still enough time to complete her spell. At the same time, his hands moved rapidly, forming random signs, pretending to cast one spell after another, creating strong and thick multi layered barriers in case something went wrong.

Lith could only count the seconds, watching the fissure becoming more and more unstable, inwardly wishing for Quylla to hurry up and finish. Just when the crack was about to collapse, the Restoration spell took effect, making it disappear with a small bang.

"One down, one million to go." Lith didn't find any joy in succeeding. There were still too many spatial distortions, and only a handful of seconds had passed since he closed the conversation with Linjos.

Time wasn't on their side.

He immediately attacked the next crack, using all his focus and skill to speed the energy degeneration process while trying not to affect the fissure's stability. If before he had just made chaos clash with chaos, now there was a method behind it.

Lith could see the hot spots where different cracks overlapped, and gently used darkness magic to weaken the interactions between them before attacking their cores, avoiding chain reactions.

Rudd had no such thing as Life Vision, but thanks to his talent and abundant experience, he could appreciate the finesse Lith was demonstrating by using darkness magic in such an unorthodox way.

- "Brilliant, simply brilliant." He thought. "It's such a shame that his space sensibility is so much greater than his dimensional magic aptitude. And to add insult to injury, the only one capable of using Restoration is a flimsy commoner.

The world has really turned upside down. Here I am, fighting side by side with some 'inferior' commoners that yet stand at the top of the class, showing unparallel talent and improvisation, while the 'nobles' do nothing but run like rabbits.

Maybe I have grown too old for this job." - Rudd inwardly sighed, closing one fissure after the other, trying to create a safe zone for the students.

Meanwhile, Lith realized that the strategy was doomed to fail. They had only two mages able to use Restoration, while the space distortions were too many and too strong to keep attacking them one at the time.

"Quylla, focus only on the cracks that I point out for you! Phloria, Friya, you protect her at all costs with your Mage Knight's shields! I'm going all out!"

Without waiting for a reply, he enveloped several spatial distortions at once with darkness magic, marking each time the most dangerous one with a wisp of light.

His hands and mouth moved like crazy, mixing random seals and words, giving Lith the alibi he needed to create small but densely packed barriers around the remaining cracks, this time trying to prevent the resulting explosion to get out, rather than get in.

- "What in the gods' name is that?" Professor Rudd was flabbergasted by his performance. "He is controlling so many spells at once, adapting the shape, size and intensity of each one according to the situation.

No matter how simple each incantation is by itself, the combined effect is on par with a tier five spell." –

The number of fissures started to decrease rapidly, but it came at a cost. Only those treated properly with Restoration would just disappear, the rest would suffer the corruption of darkness magic until they blew up.

Thanks to Lith's efforts and planning, they were controlled explosions, but explosions nonetheless. He couldn't get too far from them, the hot spots were small to begin with, and he had to keep track of all at the same time with Life Vision.

Each time, the flames were strong enough to overcome the uniform's magical protections, burning through the fabric and the flesh alike. The others were barely able to defend themselves with their combined efforts, leaving Lith alone.

The burns kept piling up, until the pain became unbearable. Lith was forced to use light fusion to regenerate the parts of his body that were too damaged, while cutting off the pain receptors with dark magic to avoid impairing his focus and movements.

"Where the heck is Linjos?" He tried to yell, but the hot air had injured even his throat. His voice came out as a raspy hiss, before he started to cough uncontrollably, falling on his knees while gasping for air.

Yurial immediately came to Lith's side, attempting to treat the most severe injuries without draining too much of his life force.

"You can't keep up like this, it's a suicidal move." Yurial was horrified.

Most of Lith's upper body was now exposed, burned beyond recognition. His arms and back, which he had used to cover his vitals, had flakes of skin falling down at his every movement, revealing the bloody muscle tissue underneath.

"I don't know how can you handle so much pain without going crazy, but you need to rest, or you will die!"

"Thanks, man." Lith appreciated him being so concerned about him to be blind to the truth.

"But if I stop, we'll all die. Or do you have a god in the family that we can call upon for actual help?" Lith smiled, patting Yurial's shoulder before attacking the next group of cracks.

In the new world, religions were a relic of the past, whose only remnants were the old gods' names, used either as exclamations or swear words. Since humans had discovered magic, they had stopped believing in superstitions and devoted their passion and faith in the mystical arts.

Even the so called "six gods of magic", one for each element, weren't considered real deities. They referred to the first mages that not only mastered the power of the elements, but also left behind their legacy, allowing their knowledge to spread and be shared instead of getting lost after their demise.

Lith's words were meant to remember Yurial that it was useless to stay idle and hope for help. He was no hero; his actions weren't a selfless sacrifice for a bunch of strangers and an old coot.

He was simply doing the only thing he could in a time of crisis, creating a path for himself and his friends to survive an unjust fate.

For the second time in less than a week, Yurial felt stupid for choosing the Warden specialization. Even if he had started casting a fire protection array from the moment Rudd had warned them of the danger, he would have never finished it in time.

Yet he swallowed down his self-pity. Lith constantly needed healing and energy, hence Yurial focused on keeping close to him, assisting whenever he could, to at least lessen his burden.

Finally, help arrived. Linjos and several Professors entered the class, using an artifact to completely clear the door's surroundings from spatial fissures. Lith's group moved towards them, to escape the death trap.

Yet the ray of hope quickly turned into despair. The students closer to the exit went into a frenzy, trying to force their way out even at the cost of trampling others. During the struggle that ensued, a girl pushed all those around her away conjuring a powerful gust of wind.

One of her victims ended up colliding with a spatial crack, triggering a chain reaction that quickly spread to the whole training hall. Cursing mankind stupidity, Lith dashed forward, dodging people and explosions alike.

Then, something hard crashed against his chest with the strength of a cannonball. The combined pain from the impact and the burns almost made him lose consciousness, and because of that, Lith didn't manage to change his trajectory.

The hit sent him against one of the still open fissures, that seemed to swallow him whole before tinging his world red.

## Chapter 128 Severance

The moment Lith collided with the spatial crack, he knew that something horrible would happen. Twisting and turning his body despite the blinding agony, Lith managed to use air magic to avoid crashing head first against it.

But with the little margin he had, and the feeble energy he managed to muster, avoiding the fissure entirely was impossible. His left arm penetrated it up to the head of the humerus, giving him the feeling that someone had thrown a massive boulder from a cliff, but not before gluing his left hand to it.

It was like every single cell in his arm had been put into a blender filled with gasoline and a flint. It stretched endlessly in the deformed space, appearing and disappearing multiple times from different spatial cracks, before they finally closed down under the effect of Linjos' artifact.

The result was that both Lith and his left arm were finally free from the dimensional vise. But while he was still where he had fallen, the arm was about twenty meters (66') away, cleanly cut from the shoulder with inhuman precision.

Lith's world turned red when his mind went beyond the pain and the blood gushing out of the stump, realizing what had happened. No matter how many times he had mentally simulated the event in the past, the shock of the amputation almost overwhelmed him.

Almost.

Emitting an outraged roar rather than a scream of pain, Lith used what energy he had left to stop the bleeding, before his body collapsed due to the accumulated damage.

The group had stopped in its tracks since their friend had been knocked down by a tower shield, ripped off the hands of his owner by the same explosion that turned it into a deadly bullet.

While the others ran to his side, Phloria turned back, sprinting to the severed arm and storing it in her dimensional amulet as fast as she could.

- "According to my father, reattaching a limb is much easier than regrow it. The important thing is to preserve it in the best conditions possible. A dimensional item is the ideal solution, since it will not rot or degrade as long it's in there." –

When Quylla reached him, she thought it was already too late. Despite being only partially healed, the stump bleed too little, and she was unable to feel a pulse.

If Lith was really dead, she would have been forced to attempt a resuscitation manoeuvre even at the risk of further compromising his body's integrity. But if there was even just a spark of life, she knew, or better she firmly believed he would have made it.

- "Damn diagnostic magic! It's too slow!" – She inwardly cursed, taking out a small mirror from her dimensional amulet, and putting it in front of his mouth and nose. The glass fogged up, giving her hope.

"Yurial, you heal him. You have already given him too much energy, we cannot afford anyone passing away. Friya, enhance his life force, I'll keep him stable."

Quylla's task was the hardest. She had to use diagnostic spells to find the most damaged organs, and then alternate healing and energy infusion without compromising the others' work.

Too fast healing would kill him, he was too weak to endure more strain. Too much energy would kill him too. If the heart suddenly started pumping fast, Lith would either bleed out the countless open wounds or die due to organ failure.

But if they acted with too much caution, his body would simply collapse. It was like a game of Jenga with cracked crystal pieces. One wrong move would mean the end, with no chance for a do over.

First, she finished mending the severed shoulder, then she harmonized with her friends' spells, fixing whatever mistake they made in the heat of the moment. Unlike her, they had no real experience as healers.

And to make things worse, their first patient without any Professor's supervision was a close friend. Inwardly, all the three of them just wanted to run away crying from that hellhole.

They were already tired from the dimensional magic lesson and the nightmare born from it. They had been on the edge all the time, believing that every second would be their last. And when finally everything seemed to be over, they had been forced to stare death in the face.

It was still morning, but it felt like a week had passed. The only things that kept them together were rage and stubbornness. Rage coming from the frustration of being constantly swept around by forces beyond their control, and the stubbornness that made them unwilling to yield at any cost.

Alongside them, a silent but invaluable fourth player was fighting with everything she had. Solus had been constantly expending her own energies to keep light fusion active, after Lith had lost consciousness.

When the kids had started their treatment, it had been her using Invigoration to redirect their healing spells where they were needed the most, that had allowed everything to go smoothly.

Three young mages at their wits' end wouldn't be able to handle alone such situation.

Especially since Quylla was tired and short on mana after having closed so many cracks fighting alongside Lith, and Yurial had already passed Lith so much of his life force that it was already a miracle for him to keep standing without help.

When they finished, he didn't smell like barbeque anymore. Most of the burnt skin was replaced by a new one, but the overall impression was still those of an over stewed lobster.

"Excellent job, but he is still in critical conditions. We need to bring him to the academy's hospital as soon as possible." After evacuating the training hall, Linjos had returned to offer his help.

When he bended over Lith, attempting to grab him, Quylla welcomed him with a perfectly aimed punch on the nose, resulting in a clear breaking sound and a nosebleed.

"Are you insane?" She yelled at him with no respect for his seniority nor status.

"We can't move him. He could go into shock from the amputation at any moment. Light magic needs time to take full effect. Have you really studied before becoming a Headmaster or did you just win the title at a raffle?"

Linhos wanted to reprimand her harshly, but after noticing that her fist was still held high, in the optimal position for hitting him in the groin, he took a step back instead.

"Young miss, I can see you are very upset, so I'll overlook your lack of discipline, just this once." His voice was now nasal, until a simple healing spell stopped the bleeding and straightened his nose.

"But for your information, now that all the protections are activated again, we can move him safely with Warp Steps. Besides being an excellent healer myself, I have already alerted the light department. Where in the gods' name is Manohar?"

"Right here." Said the god of healing punching him in the nose too.

"Why did you do that?" Linjos was flabbergasted.



"Because she is right, you are wrong and didn't tell me the patient is one of my own!" Manohar formulated a quick spell that made Lith look human again, even regrowing his hair to a medium length.

"Now it's safe to move him, you two bits healer." He said throwing a mean look at the Headmaster.

"Did someone fetch his arm or is it lost?"

"I did, sir." Phloria showed him her dimensional amulet.

"Great! Thirty points to the flat beanpole for the quick thinking." Phloria didn't know if to laugh or cry at the rude remark.

"Fifty points to each of you for saving a colleague, and another fifty to the scrawny shorty for the well executed punch."

"First, this is not your lesson. Second, awarding points for assaulting a Headmaster is unheard of!" Linjos was fuming with anger.

"Well, you always knew I am an innovator." Manohar shrugged, opening a Warp Steps to the Intensive Care Unit and disappearing through it with Lith's group.

Linhos remained there, with his mouth agape, with a snarky remark still stuck in his throat while the rest of the staff was snickering at his expenses.

## Chapter 129 Chaos

Derek woke up in what was unmistakably an hospital room. Even with a fuzzy head and a blurry vision, he knew there was only one place where so much white would belong.

The sheets, the blind, even the walls and ceiling were white. He tried to rub his eyes, but discovered his right arm was cuffed to the bedside, while the left one felt so heavy, he couldn't muster the strength to lift it.

- "Must be the morphine. That or they tied me up." He thought. The last reasonable memory he had was about him killing the b\*stard who had murdered his little brother.

"F\*cking cops, couldn't just let me die? I don't know if it's because of the brain damage or because they have heavily drugged me, but that was one heck of a dream."

He shook his head, trying to clear up his vision.

"A little too absurd, even for a dream, though. Magic powers, a mystical sentient girl tower, talking animals and a Kingdom in danger. It only lacked a pink dressed princess kidnapped by a fire spitting turtle to be more ridicule.

That, or me finding my happy ending with the girl in the tower. Heck, even if it was all inside my head it has been the most meaningful relationship I ever had." – He scoffed.

- "Really? I would have never assumed you would think of me that way." - Solus' mind blush was so strong to overcome the boundary they usually kept to separate their innermost thoughts.

Lith managed to avoid screaming in surprise and embarrassment only because the blind was pulled away by Professor Manohar, that had come to check his conditions.

"How is my patient?" He asked. "Remember, the only acceptable answer is 'well and getting better'. If you die on me, you'll ruin my statistics."

"Professor Manohar?" Lith was still recovering from the shock.

"So, it was all real?"

"I know how this seems, such an incident, if we want to call it that way, happening in the White Griffon academy is simply unbelievable, yet it happened. Odd, I perfectly regenerated your skin, yet you are all red up to your ears.

Are you experiencing any discomfort, or did you just have a wet dream?"

Lith's brows furrowed, while his memory was finally returning.

"I..."

"Just a yes or no. I'm not interested in your fantasies."

Lith blushed even harder, but this time out of anger, for the complete lack of tact of his healer.

"No discomfort and no wet dreams. Thanks for your concern. Why am I cuffed? I don't remember doing anything to deserve such treatment."

"Do you mean the chain? That's no punishment, is just to prevent you from rolling on the wrong side. The wound is just barely closed, we still need to reattach your arm, after all. I would expect an accomplished healer like you to understand something so simple."

Lith turned his head abruptly, trying to touch the little stump where once was his arm, but the chain stopped him again.

At that point, Solus had regained enough of her cool to share her memories of the most recent events, bringing him up to speed.

"How long was I unconscious?"

"A few hours, is barely lunchtime." Manohar replied, right before casting a series of diagnostic spells that made Lith glow like a lightbulb.

"Everything seems fine. Your body heals magnificently, young man. Keep up like this, and you'll get discharged in one piece before dinner." Manohar took out his communicator amulet, informing Linjos that the patient could receive visitors.

- "Remember to properly thank your friends. They gave it everything to save your life before Manohar arrived." Usually Lith would have objected at the abuse of the word 'friends', but after looking at Solus' memories he didn't feel so sure about it anymore.

"Wow, Quylla really punched Linjos. Was it really so dangerous to move me at the time?"

"No, it wasn't. But I can't blame her for being protective. I would have done the same."

"Okay, then why Manohar punched him too? He doesn't seem the protective type."

"According to his rants while he was finishing to heal you, Manohar has always dreamt about hitting a Headmaster and get away with it. Quylla simply gave him the inspiration he needed. He told her himself before awarding another thirty points.

You know, I really like that girl. I would have nothing against her being your mistress until we find a proper body for myself." –

Another powerful mind blush made him understand that she wasn't joking at all, but luckily Linjos entered his room, saving him from such an awkward topic. Lith had never been so happy to see the Headmaster's long and brooding face.

Contrary to his expectations, behind him there was no trace of his classmates. He was followed by professor Marth, instead, and thanks to his enhanced hearing, Lith could hear them repeatedly apologizing to someone.

"We are terribly sorry for what had happened to your son, but as you'll see, he has received the best cures available in the whole Kingdom. The reason we called you here, is to help him overcome the shock of losing an arm.

Albeit is only a temporary condition, it could severely affect his mind and future decisions. We don't want him to quit the academy, it would be too great of a loss. Please, be strong."

Lith heard a snarl from his father, Raaz, stopped by his mother, Elina, hurrying Linjos to let them in. They rushed to Lith's bedside, doing their best to not cry or stare at his stump.

"Professor, please, tell me he is going to be all right." Despite all their efforts, Elina's eyes were watery and her voice cracked. Raaz held her hand tightly, searching for the strength to appear calm and confident to reassure his injured son.

"Don't worry, ma'am. We were just about to reattach his arm." Manohar said, throwing a flirtatious look at her.

"I must say it, there must be something special in your bloodline."

Lith started inwardly cursing non-stop. Maybe after looking at him and his parents, the genius healer Krishna Manohar had noticed some abnormality caused by him using Invigoration on all his family to remove impurities from their bodies.

"Otherwise I can't explain why your son is so talented, you are so gorgeous, and even Lith's dear grandfather is so well preserved despite his age."

At those Marth, Raaz and Linjos became pale as ghost, while fury tinged Lith's cheeks of red while his eyes were reduced to fiery slits. He couldn't believe his esteemed Professor was actually hitting on his mother right in front of him.

Despite the situation, Elina and Solus couldn't stop giggling.

"He is actually my father." Lith's voice was stone cold, causing Manohar to gasp in surprise.

"You are very lucky, good sir." He said shaking Raaz's hand, limp from the surprise.

"Your son is a brave kid, and your wife could have got much, much better."

If Lith's arm didn't had yet to be reattached, Raaz would have probably strangled him for the repeated insults.

"See, old man?" Manohar said patting Linjos on the shoulder.

"That's why I tell you to never lose hope. In this world there are still women that don't care much about looks."

Before the situation became even more humiliating, Professor Marth dragged Manohar away.

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In the city of Kandria, all the hospitals and the healers' home offices were full to the brim, while the city guard was arresting lots of citizens for gruesome crimes. The two things had only one thing in common: all those involved would tell unbelievable stories to justify what had happened.

A man claimed that his wife had caught fire while cooking lunch, a woman told them how his brother had turned into a piece of ice while conjuring some water to wash the dishes.

An otherwise beyond suspicion healer was trying to explain how he never meant to amputate his patient's leg, it just had turned into a lump of meat after he attempted to heal a fracture.

But the real cause was ensuing inside the local branch of the Mage Association, where many magicians were reporting how they had inexplicably lost their powers.

## Chapter 130 Chaos 2

Despite Professor Marth intervention, the situation degenerated as soon Raaz and Linjos managed to recover from the vicious verbal beating they just endured.

"Who is that raving lunatic and why is he allowed to have any contact with the students? He has no shame nor regard for the feelings of others!" Normally Raaz would have been humble and submissive.

For someone that had never left the small village of Lutia in over thirty years, the White Griffon academy was intimidating. Raaz was well aware that even a single brick of the castle was worth more money than he could earn in his whole life.

Raaz still couldn't believe one of his children had managed to get admitted in a place like that. He suspected that behind all his brave talk, Lith was actually having a hard life, surrounded by rich, spoiled kids.

In any other circumstance, he would have never stepped inside, fearing that his presence alone was enough to put Lith in embarrassment.

But now after his son had been severely hurt because of the incompetence of the so called 'Professors', not only he had been forced to listen to Linjos' rants about the academy's prestige, but also had to suffer a young, handsome dandy trying to seduce his wife in front of his eyes.

That was the proverbial straw that broke the camel's back. He didn't care anymore if the man in front of him was the Headmaster or the King himself, Raaz was determined to give him a piece of his mind.

On the other hand, Linjos wanted nothing more than join him and tear Manohar apart limb from limb. That man had always been a nightmare for the public relationships, either avoiding social events or making a mess the rare times he deigned to attend them.

And now, in less than a day Linjos had been assaulted and humiliated by him twice, both times in front of students and staff alike, destroying whatever pride and dignity his role was supposed to have.

- "I wish I could tell him that if the previous Headmistress that recruited Manohar wasn't already dead, I would kill her myself. Right after throwing Manohar from the academy's highest tower. But when I accepted this job, I knew there was an elephant in the room." –

"Despite his many, many flaws, I can assure you that Professor Manohar is that kind of genius that appears only once in one hundred years. He is an invaluable asset for the academy and the Kingdom, whom has already saved countless lives, probably even your son's."

Raaz wasn't satisfied by the answer, but Elina squeezed his hand tight, stopping him in his tracks.

"Are you in much pain, dear?" She asked Lith, ruffling his hair.

"No, mom. On the contrary, I feel groggy but relaxed." He replied, quite surprised to have hair again. He had yet to have an occasion to look at himself in a mirror.

"That's because we injected you with several potions to help you sleep and recover." Linjos explained.

Marth returned, bringing along five members of the medical staff and Lith's missing arm. Usually for such a simple case a single Professor was enough, but they wanted to show to both Lith and his parents how much they cared.

The arm was completely wrapped in pure white linen gauze, not leaving even the fingertips exposed. Being detached from a living body, it couldn't be healed, so it was bound to be bloody and burned.

Lith imagined that covering it was another form of courtesy towards his parents, since no healer would have blinked at the sight of it.

The moment the arm was within five meters (16 feet) from him, Lith felt that something odd was happening. His mana core started stirring inside of him, trying to release mana.

Lith was too tired to put up a fight without a good reason, so he stopped resisting.

- "Solus, can you describe to me what's happening? I can't activate Life Vision without flooding my eyes with mana."

"Tendrils of energy are going out of your body and connecting to the arm. It is... alive?" –

When Lith felt the itchy pain from the burns, he was so surprised to unintentionally wriggle his left hand's fingers. Luckily Marth was still walking, so the sudden movement went unnoticed.

- "Now the mana is replacing the blood, reactivating the lingering light fusion from before it was severed. By my maker, it's healing on its own!" –

Solus was free to express her shock, but Lith had to keep his calm demeanour, acting like everything was normal instead of panicking. Just to be certain it wasn't all a crazy dream, Lith attempted to bend the left little finger.

It moved at will.

Lith extended his remaining hand to Elina.

"Mom, I'm a little scared now." Lith tried to convey his real feelings without arising suspicions, at the same time drawing all the attention on himself. While focusing on his mother's warmth, he tried to call back the energies from the arm, but to no avail.

The closer it got, the stronger the connection.

The reattaching process went without a hitch, immediately followed by the healing one. Lith had to carefully remain still the whole time, a single spasm would betray his new and untimely secret.

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The night before the sabotage in the dimensional magic's training hall, a few hundred kilometres south from the border of the Griffon Kingdom, the High Council of the desert tribes had gathered, trying to plea their case to the Benefactor.

The Blood Desert was the biggest out of the three Great Countries in the Garlen continent, the other two being the Griffon Kingdom and the Gorgon Empire. According to many, it was also the strongest and the most dangerous.

The reason was that despite its harsh climate, the Blood Desert was the richest one in terms of mystic treasures and natural resources. While in other places to find magic crystals, one had to dig through mountains or explore vast forests, in the Blood Desert it was enough to find an oasis.

The geysers of world energy that everywhere else were hidden, and could be found only by sheer luck or resorting to powerful artifacts like Solus or the Scorpicores' pince-nez, there would manifest themselves in the form of water, vegetation and life.

Among its dunes, it was possible to find rock formations rich in a rare metal, the Davross, that after being smelt and forged it would change its colour from silver to black, according to how it was exposed to light, but most importantly was capable of cutting through iron like it was just wood.

Davross was the strongest material known to man.

Despite its name, the Blood Desert's sands weren't red, but yellow gold. It derived from the countless lives lost during the past wars, when the different desert tribes would fight among themselves or against the foreigners trying to rob them of their land.

War had been a constant in the desert, because no amount of mana crystals or Davross could turn the weather humid, quench the thirst of humans and cattle or make the land fertile.

Despite all the riches it held, food and water had always been the only currency that held any real value in the desert. In the past, the tribes would fight for the control of the oasis, either by their own will or manipulated by the people of the plains, wishing to exploit their needs to pursue the monopoly of resources.

But not anymore. After the Benefactor's arrival, the desert had been unified and the word competition had been replaced by the stranger sounding "cooperation."

Oasis were now shared, and each tribe would periodically rotate from one zone of the desert to another, allowing everyone to cyclically enjoy everything their Country had to offer.

Each of the tribe leaders, now simply called Feathers, would receive wisdom and power, becoming strong in the ways of magic regardless of the talent they were born with. But what now could seem a divine country, came with a price.

The Benefactor's laws were the only laws, and the lightest punishment for breaking them was death. The Feathers would rule above their people, but any change, small or big had to receive the Benefactor's approval.

Even the High Council had been reduced to a mere formality, only one will really mattered. That was the reason it was now held only after the sunset, when the Benefactor had a less fiery temperament.

That night, the convened Feathers, were trying to persuade the Benefactor about the many advantages the desert tribes would reap from invading a weakened Griffon Kingdom.