

Supreme M 271

Chapter 271 New Start Part 2

"That's ridiculous!" Said a fifteen year old girl with blonde hair.

"Only weaklings need a Coward's End." When she handed it to Linjos, others followed her lead.

"I'll take the Ballot and your uniform back, young lady." Linjos extended his arm grabbing the magical stone.

"Because defying a direct order from your Headmaster is more than enough to get you expelled. I'm sure that, not being a weakling, you'll have no problem finding another academy taking you in. You'll only have to wait one year."

"You can't do..." The girl's voice faded away when Linjos bent down to look her in the eye while releasing his killing intent again.

"I can and I will. Who wants to get expelled can give me the Ballot." No one stepped forward.

"Good, now imprint it." Everyone obeyed without hesitation.

"Minus five hundred points to all those who disobeyed my order."

"But..." Another girl managed to stutter despite the Headmaster's imposing presence.

"... we didn't say anything! That was her idea." The thought of losing right off the bat more points than acing an exam would provide was enough to make the unruly students try to push the blame on their previous leader.

"You have chosen your leader, hence you'll follow her in defeat as in victory. Minus two hundred more points to all of you for further questioning my judgment. The class is yours, Professor Farg."

Linjos left the class while most of the rebels realized that their magical equipment had been forcefully turned off. They wouldn't be able to access to any dimensional item until they had gained back enough points.

The girl and her followers were weeping because of the humiliation they had just endured when Farg sent them back to their seats.

"The Headmaster's speech fits perfectly in today's lesson. I am not going to teach you about fancy spells or techniques to slay monsters. Today's subject is the life outside the comfort of your homes, something that every mage sooner or later needs to face.

"Some of you come from small villages and know nothing about the outside world." Her gaze lingered for a second on Lith and Quylla, sitting in the front desks. Contrary to Lith's expectation no one had a good laugh at his expenses.

Linjos was gone, but the fear still lingered in the Lecture Hall.

"Others come from noble households and know nothing at all. All of you lack the knowledge necessary for surviving in the real world. Money can't fix all of your problems. No matter how strong you are or how much influential you consider your family to be.

"A rogue can kill any of you just for your pocket money. If you happen to mess with a wandering wizard, they will destroy you before disappearing as fast as they arrived. To thrive, society needs order. Order breeds only from the law and the respect that all of you need to show for it.

"The first topic we will talk about it's the difference between the Mage Association and the Mercenary Guild. In some other countries they are known as adventurer guilds, but we of the Griffon Kingdom like to call things with their proper name.

"An 'adventurer'..." Farg's voice was filled with disgust, her tongue clicked every time she spoke the word adventurer.

"... it's nothing more than a mercenary that names themselves in a fancy way. Mercenaries can be recruited to do almost anything. Kill monsters or magical beasts, clean dungeons, retrieve stolen property. They can even act as personal bodyguards for whoever can afford their services.

"The only tasks they can't undertake are those forbidden by law or those that are strictly prerogative of the army or the Mage Association. To accept any kind of job is necessary to join a Guild. They vouch for their employees and take full responsibility for their faults.

"That's why a Guild is entitled to receive a fair share of your income. Forget all those tales about guilds being nothing more than a board from which the brave pick up quests.

"Their rules are strict since their lives are on the line together with your reputation. A Guild that is found guilty of hosting criminals among their ranks gets disbanded, its Guildmaster charged with the same crimes their underlings committed.

"So, if you ever want to join one, expect a full background check and a lot of personal questions. Those who fail to answer properly get black listed after the first attempt, losing the chance to join any other Guilds as well.

"The Mage Association has fewer responsibilities towards its members but has even more strict rules. The Association is the link between the Kingdom and the practitioners of the mystical arts. If you want to get a title, lands, anything from the Griffon Kingdom, you need to join the Association first.

"Having attended an academy makes things easier, but getting accepted is rarely automatic, unless you have already provided a service to our Country. Just like the Guild, the Association allows you to take on assignments, but you don't get paid with money for them. Only with merits.

"The moment you accept your task, you are representing the Griffon Kingdom and the Crown alike. Failure is an option, no one will blame you if you are forced to retreat or decide you are not up to the task. Making a mess and giving mages a bad name, however is not.

"The Association is also in charge of persecuting traitorous mages and hunting down those who abuse their powers. Killing an outlaw mage is worth much more merits than saving a village or capturing bandits.

"We magic users are the Kingdom's backbone, but also its potential worst enemy. That's why rotten apples have to be taken out in a fast and efficient manner. Those who specialize in killing their fellow mages are called Spellbreakers and receive the highest honors.

"Being part of the Association is not a right, is a privilege. Its authority will shield you wherever you are, a simple call will provide you backup when in a pinch or make whole medium importance noble families disappear in a single night.

"It's possible to join a Guild and the Association both, but it's something that's frowned upon and will cripple your reputation. A mercenary can have as many masters they want to. Money can buy their services, if not even their loyalty.

"A mage in the Association only serves the Crown and themselves. Any more is considered a crowd, making them unreliable. It's through your merits that a mage can be recognized as a Great Mage, an Archmage, or even a Magus.

Those are not just empty titles. They define the depth of your loyalty to the Kingdom and how much your Country values you for it. Spending merits will never affect your status, only your actions will.

"Merits are more valuable than money for a mage, since they can be exchanged for noble titles and the annuities that come with the role, for access to the Vaults of Knowledge, that hold the most prized magical legacies of the Griffon Kingdom.

"During the Code of Practice course, you will not have to study the rules and regulations of the Kingdom or the Association. You will live them, in the roles of civil servants and probatory members of the Mage Association. Prepare to get your hands dirty.

Chapter 272 Codex Part 1

Professor Farg then explained how students would spend some time outside the academy walls, similarly to what Lith had already done during the fourth year for his Healer specialization.

The main difference was that they wouldn't be employed only according to their specialization. The students would cover all the possible aspects of a mage's daily activities, acting as guards, firemen, healers, or simply helping the Association to deal with the paperwork.

"The dirtied hand teaches the best. Remember, only monsters thrive in chaos, using their powers to satisfy their base instincts. Soldiers, nobles, mages, even the Crown itself, we are all servants of the Kingdom.

"Achieving a higher power means much more than just the ability to yell orders. It comes with an increasing burden and responsibilities. It's only by properly carrying on your duty that your lands will develop and so will the Kingdom.

"Think about it before your first assignment. Class dismissed."

While the other students discussed what they had just heard, Lith observed the impact Farg's words had on his peers. With her charisma, she had made those of humble origins, like Quylla, feel they had a calling in life.

That they had the power and the duty to protect those who couldn't defend themselves.

Watching the tense expressions of the arrogant nobles who earlier had opposed to Linjos, Lith could see how they now felt insecure. They were afraid countless eyes were watching their families.

After listening to Farg's speech, they imagined that it was only a matter of time before their crimes were exposed, threatening the lifestyle that they had always taken for granted.

From their whispers, Lith could hear from their words that for the first time in their lives they were afraid of the consequences of their actions.

Those like Yurial and Phloria, were either depressed or excited instead. They had prepared for a life of duty since they were little. The Code of Practice course meant coming another step closer to their adult life.

'I didn't misjudge Farg at our first meeting.' Lith thought.

'She is a natural born leader, capable of inspiring those around her, making them strive to become better persons. The problem is that the effect she has on people is bound to be only temporary.

'Once they have a moment to think, without the presence of a leader to guide them, they will soon fall back in their old habits and insecurities. No one becomes a better person just because of some fancy words, neither justice becomes more efficient.

'I wonder how long will it take, especially for those of humble origins, to be corrupted by their newfound powers and authority once they get out of the academy. I know very well how intoxicating is the freedom to get back at those you hate without the fear of consequences.

'It doesn't matter if they now believe to have the moral high ground. Once they realize they are giants in a world full of ants no one cares about, they'll show their true nature.

'Talk is cheap, everyone is righteous until they have the opportunity to take what their heart wants and get away with it.'

Solus was a bit worried about him. After seeing how the villagers of Lutia had impoverished their neighbors for their own gain, how petty were the people of Earth and Mogar both with all those who were one bit less fortunate than them, she knew he wasn't wrong.

Yet she considered his vision twisted by his own baggage and distrustfulness. Solus considered herself lucky for having met Lith and him for finding friends despite the academy's harsh environment.

They were the living proof that there were good people in the world.

The following lesson was also a mandatory one, so they only had to wait for the next Professor to arrive. When the gong resounded again, Professor Nalear entered the classroom.

She looked even prettier than before, all that rest had done her some good. Lith felt nothing in his heart while watching her walk to the center of the Hall. He was completely over his childish unstable core induced crush for Nalear.

"Good morning dear students. It's a pleasure to see you again. Believe me, after being bedridden for months, being able to walk again feels out of this world. In case some of you were wondering about it, your Professors from the fourth year have moved to the fifth floor as well.

"The staff follows this rotation so those that have nurtured you can keep following your progress, making the transition to the new subjects easier since we already know your strong and weak points.

"Our subject this time is Magic Creation. As you know, every real mage must be able to create their own spells. Some of you already have some customized incantations and know how hard it is to create something from scratch."

The classroom nodded in unison. Most of their personal spells were nothing more than modified versions of standard spells. At their level, creating something new implied a lot of trial and error.

One of the reasons Lith managed to score so many points every trimester was that he was the only one that seemed to be able to create new spells with ease. The truth was different, though. He only developed true magic spells.

The words and the hand signs he used were just gibberish.

"Magic Creation is another of those subjects exclusive to the six great academies. No mage that comes from minor institutions knows about it. Even speaking about it outside the walls of an academy is considered an act of treason.

"What I am going to teach you over the course of the lessons, is how to more easily create new spells for each element. There's no way we can cover everything in a single trimester, so beware. Magic Creation will last for the whole year.

"I'm going to cover only for the basics, everything else rests on your shoulder. You'll also need what we do here for your specializations. After the first exam, you'll learn how to devise more complex and specific spells directly from the Professors of the other subjects you attend.

Do not slack off. If you fail with me, you are bound to fail in every single course."

The class sweat bullets at those words, watching at Lith with envy. Everyone considered him having an unfair advantage. Too bad they were completely off the mark.

Lith was sweating even more than them.

'Oh, sh*t! Let's hope she doesn't call me as a volunteer to explain stuff, or I'll be in hot waters. The only silver lining is that I can fake my way out. She'll surely request for simple spells that I can easily counterfeit with true magic.'

"Don't worry, we'll start with something simple." Nalear said taking the words out of his mind.

"First, you need to learn how to crawl, then how to walk, and finally how to run. Second, I'll assign each of you a different spell to create. Otherwise one of you will do all the work and the others will just leech it.

"Third, to pass this course you'll need to share with me your final product, so that I can evaluate both your talent and effort. What's required from you is to not only devise working spells, but also the most effective ones possible.

Chapter 273 Codex Part 2

"Among the spells of the same tier, those that require few words and simple signs are considered much more valuable. On the other hand, long and convoluted ones will get you a C at best."

'Me and my big mind mouth.' Lith inwardly cursed at himself.

'That takes faking out spells off the table.'

'Don't be a sourpuss. Everyone else will have to work on their own, while you have me.' Solus cheered him up.

'That's true. I'm confident that the two of us can understand almost everything about magic.' Lith mind nodded.

'The only problem is that knowing is not doing. I hope this isn't as hard as dimensional magic.'

"First of all, it's better if I give you the textbook." Nalear tapped her foot, making a small booklet appear on each student's desk.

"That's a Codex. As you already know, a spell is composed of two parts: the magical words and hand signs. Magical words define the element the spell is based on, it's shape and properties. Hand signs are necessary to regulate the mana output and adjusting its effects instead.

"The book I just gave you will help you with the words part. It contains all the most common prefix and suffix to alter first magic, plus the standard words that cause specific effects.

"Let's make an example. Infiro is the magical word for fire, Menala means three, and Tach means explosion. Hence an Infiro Menala Tach is supposed to cause three fire based explosions.

"It's not actually that simple, but this is just a theoretical lesson, you only need to get the gist of it." Nalear shrugged lightly.

"Now comes the hard part, finding the correct hand signs. Unlike words, there is no recording of them. Two people can create the same spell, yet use different words and signs.

"Hand signs are strongly dependant on the imagination and willpower of the mage devising the spell. While once an incantation is complete anyone can learn it, during the creation process some signs will feel wrong to some mages, correct to others, and lacking to many.

"Everything you have learned during the fourth year, even dimensional magic, it was all propaedeutic to this moment. You needed to go past the boundaries of the first three tiers of magic to develop your mana perception.

"During all the exercises you have made, you have learned to control the mana flow with your will and to alter its properties. Without such solid foundations, creating even the simplest spell would require weeks, if not months of stumbling in the dark.

"Let's get back to our example. Infiro Menala Tach it's a fire spell, so I'll start using the hand sign for first fire magic." Nalear drew a small circle in the air with her index finger.

"Once you have a perfect pronunciation of the words, what you have to do is to focus only on your hands and your own mana flow. Say the words, draw the fire sign, then keep moving your hands. If you feel the flow continues, which will rarely happen at the first attempt, then you are on your way.

"If you feel it stuttering or being blocked, then you are doing something wrong. As soon as it happens, stop and go back to square one until you find the next sequence of movements. I know it may sound like just a random process, but it's not.

"At first, it will not seem so different from what you tried on your own in the past, but with a little practice, you will be able to understand what's the right sequence of movements by instinct.

"Creating a spell from the first three tiers will take only a few days, while tier four or five ones may require weeks if not months. Let's ask our resident expert."

'Schrödinger's cat, here we go.' Lith inwardly cursed.

"Quylla, Professor Vastor tells me you have a wonderful diagnostic spell. Do you mind sharing with the class what tier it is and how long did it take for you to create it?"

Quylla quickly straightened her slouched posture before answering the Professor.

"Tier three. As for the creation time, it's hard to say. The first version took me years of practice, but after joining the academy I realize it was still lacking." She threw a short look at Lith.

"I keep perfecting it every time I improve or I learn something new. It's a work in progress." Previously having so many eyes on her would have been embarrassing for Quylla, but after months of Jirni's lessons, her voice was clear and steady.

"Do you see it, guys?" Nalear gave her a small applause, followed by the rest of the classroom.

"Years for a tier three. I'm not trying to belittle her talent or efforts, just highlighting how hard it was for her. What about the spell you used during the second exam?" Nalear was referring to Quylla's ice spell that was very similar to Lith's Checkmate Spears.

"Tier three too, but it only took me a few months to make it." Quylla suddenly realized Professor Nalear's point in questioning her.

"Exactly." The Professor nodded at her. "Because I have taught you how to manipulate your mana flow, while Professor Rudd gave you the necessary practice to alter it at will."

"Professor, what about those like me who failed at dimensional magic? Can we also successfully create spells, or are we bound to be second rate magicians like Professor Rudd says?" Said a boy, clenching his fists hard under the desk.

More than half the class had flunked it, managing to graduate only because dimensional magic was considered an optional subject. Yet it had impacted their final score, causing them to be classified as B++ magicians at best.

They couldn't help but feel inferior to the upper percentile of the class. They also considered the boy very brave for having the guts to say out loud what every one of them was thinking.

"Good gods, that man is a monster." Professor Nalear was saddened by the lack of self confidence she perceived in most of the students.

"Yes, you can create spells, maybe even faster than those who succeeded in dimensional magic. Albeit they are related, they are still two different talents. Dimensional magic requires Exacasting, a very strong mana perception, and manipulation skills.

"Failing at it now doesn't make you lesser mages. You can keep practicing it on your own and learn it like anyone else. Most mages need years to master dimensional magic."

"What about you, Professor?" The boy asked.

"How long did it take you to learn dimensional magic?"

Nalear bit her lower lip, struggling before answering.

"I learned it during my academy years." She would have liked to lie about it, to reassure them about their future. However, the records were public, making the truth easy to be discovered. Nalear had graduated first of her year, ranked as an A++ mage.

So she preferred to be honest, rather than give them false hope only to lose their trust in return.

Most of the class sighed in despair. Professor Rudd's voice kept echoing in their heads, making Nalear sound just like a mother that was trying to comfort her children with white lies.

Chapter 274 Body Sculpting Part 1

During lunch, the members of Lith's group were hyped at the idea of Nalear's new subject. The only exception was Lith himself.

'I really don't care about learning how to wave new fake magic spells. It's a chore and a bore. I'm already able to cook up new spells with true magic in a matter of days, hours if it's something I'm familiar with.' He inwardly grumbled.

'So far, the fifth year is a let-down. Farg's course is useless too. I never did community service nor do I plan to work my a*s for free. This is just child labor!'

'Well this is an academy for young adults, what do you expect? Also, do I have to remind you that despite your constant pessimism each subject we attended has either given us new ideas or helped to expand our horizons?' Solus said.

Thinking back at the Necromancy class, Lith was forced to admit she was right.

Solus wanted to be supportive, yet her greatest temptation was to tell him to stop whining and enjoy the company of his friends.

The winter break had shown them how despite their bond, noble families were as busy as Lith, if not even more. They had called each other often, but aside for the Gala and Lith's birthday, the group had never managed to meet.

'They have only so much time together, yet Lith doesn't seem to realize how quickly a year pass. I'd like for him to make happy memories rather than waste time grumbling.' She thought.

"I must say, so far the fifth year seems more exciting than the fourth one." Yurial was back being his old self. There were no bags under his eyes anymore, he smiled most of the time and had regained some of the lost weight.

After the gala, Yurial had discovered that it was enough to pretend to call Lith to get rid of his fiancée for several hours. To make things even better, he had asked one of his private tutors to teach him how to emit killing intent.

Despite being a mage, it was something he had never learned to do it. On Mogar, all living being possessed mana. Emitting it was an involuntary act, just like breathing or perspiring.

Intense emotions lead to an increase in the mana emitted. That, together with an aggressive disposition inflicted a mental pressure on those who were exposed to it, causing fear, panic, or even terror.

The phenomenon was simply referred as killing intent. It wasn't necessary to be a mage to emit killing intent. As long one had mana, they could employ it. Even animals were capable of using it to scare their prey or threaten their enemies.

Being a mage made things easier, since by possessing large amounts of mana it was possible to amplify its effects. It was the way killing intent was used by calm people like Linjos.

Another method was to develop the ability to channel one's fury into the mana. It required to train the mind, allowing people like Jirni Ernas to scare even powerful mages despite her natural lack of magical talent.

Then, there were people like Lith, that had plenty of wrath and mana of their own. Ever since he and Solus had met, it had been her task to suppress Lith's mana fluctuations until he became capable of doing it on his own.

Otherwise, after he gained a green core, any animal or human in his presence would feel like a lamb in front of a slaughterhouse.

Yurial had lots of mana but little aggressiveness in him. His life had been stressful but pampered. Since he was a child, everyone had treated him with care and respect. Being gifted with a calm and collected nature, anger was something that rarely affected Yurial's judgment.

At least until he had been forced to spend so much time with Libea. His instructor was a battle veteran. He had no trouble teaching Yurial how to use his gifts to put an end to their constant squabbles.

'It may be unfair on my side to use killing intent to shut her up, but it's much better than being forced to listen to her every day.' Yurial considered it justification enough to quench his guilty conscience.

"I don't have a single spell that doesn't come from textbooks or from my mentor. Between my duties as the heir of the Deirus Household and the academy, it's already a miracle for me to keep up with all the homework they assign to us.

I can't wait to create something that I can call my own. I already have several ideas in mind.

Even Professor Farg's subject piqued my interest. Community service might sound boring, but I think it will be a great experience. I never set foot out of the high end residential areas.

It's a golden opportunity to connect with the people of the Kingdom and understand their needs."

"I can tell you what they need." Quylla was pissed off at him.

"They want tasty food, warm clothes, and some real justice. How do you expect to become a good ruler if you talk about commoners like they are some exotic animals you need to take care of? Do you have any idea how cold a winter can get? How many people starve every day?"

Quylla was usually so calm that seeing her angry was almost scary.

"She is right, Yurial." Phloria played with the food on her plate.

"I think Code of Practice is mostly aimed at us nobles as an eye-opener. Farg is right when she says we know nothing. I believe its purpose is to make us realize there is no easy solution to the Kingdom's problems." Visiting Lith's house had been almost a shock to her.

Even after all the renovations and improvements thanks to Lith's hard work, it was still worse than the servants' quarters at house Ernas.

When he had shown her the nearby village, Phloria had found it to be so small and dirty to make her heart tighten. After hearing Lith's stories about the farmers' harsh life, learning how even getting medical care was a luxury for them, she had felt guilty for days for having such a blessed life.

Friya shared Yurial's enthusiasm, but nodded at Phloria's words. She had never visited Quylla's village, yet all the stories about her previous life before she was adopted by the Ernas were enough to give Friya nightmares.

After lunch, they headed towards the Light magic department for their first lesson of the Healer specialization. Lith was really eager to discover what kind of subject they would practice during the final year.

They were already capable of healing all injuries and amputations. That left very little outside their reach.

"Welcome back, my dear students." Professor Vastor hadn't changed one bit. He still looked like someone had attempted to fuse together an egg and a man.

The top of his head was completely bald, the hair he had left on the sides was snow-white and so were his waxed handlebar mustaches. Vastor's belly was so big that it made hard to guess if he was larger than tall.

"It seems I was a bit too pessimistic last year, saying that only a third of you would make it to graduation." He said while twirling his mustaches.

"Anyway, the lesser the merrier. Now that we got rid of the dead weight our lessons will surely go smoother." Of the thirty-four students that had joined the healer specialization on the fourth year, only sixteen remained.

Chapter 275 Body Sculpting Part 2

"Just like the previous year, we are going to spend the first two trimesters on a single but wide subject, while during the third one you'll get real practice in the field. This time as lead healers in the most important hospitals of the Kingdom.

"What I am about to introduce to you today, is the last branch of healing magic you need to master before achieving the privilege and the honor of being considered full fledged healers.

"Tier one to three have taught you to mend broken bones and to heal injuries. Tier four how to replace lost limbs and organs. Yet there is still a case we haven't explored.

"What if our patient never had a limb to start with? What if they were born with a deformity or a defective organ?" He asked while walking around the class.

"Are we helpless in front of such eventuality? The answer is no. There is nothing that a true healer cannot fix. Only death is beyond our reach, at least for now." Vastor declared with a proud look in his eyes.

"The first four tiers of magic are completely useless against natural deformities simply because there is nothing wrong in the first place. You can't heal a man born blind because it's his natural status.

"Even if his eyes were to be gouged and regrown, they would still be blind. Tier four magic simply gives the body the means to revert to its original status. Nothing more, nothing less.

"Tier five Light magic brings in something that we have often mentioned but never worked on. The study of the life force. During the first trimester I'll teach you how to sense your own life force and how to use it to manipulate other people's life force to give them a normal life."

The class murmured, for all of them life force was a vague concept. They had learned how to share it with the patients, allowing them to survive critical wounds and major procedures, but nothing more.

"That's only the first step, though. Once you learn how to control the life force comes the real deal. Let's suppose our patient is born with a deformed arm. It's the easiest case you'll ever face.

"Two-bit healers will approach the problem by amputating the arm, to regenerate it in the correct shape. It works, yes. The arm will be perfectly functional, but that's a butcher execution that will teach you nothing and endangers the patient's life.

"A real Healer uses a complex mix of light and darkness magic to perform what is called 'Body Sculpting'. Mastering the life force means you can find the dissonances in its flow and correct them accordingly.

"Darkness magic is used to remove the excess parts or to clear the way, so that light magic can start the healing process while the mage teaches the body its new form, permanently altering its natural state.

"That way, if the arm gets damaged or maimed, healing magic will restore it without the need of using Body Sculpting. I want you to understand the deep implications of altering someone forever.

"Our physical appearance is something that defines us, or at least affects how others perceive us. Body sculpting is still a highly controversial ethical matter. Some worry it can be used to turn a human being into something else.

"That through human experimentation it could breed all sorts of hybrids. Such concerns I can understand, but it's something for the Crown to regulate not for us mages to care about.

"Some radical fools say that it breaches the boundaries the gods have set for humans. I say that's bogus.

"When the Crown passed a bill that forces those who oppose to Body Sculpting because it's 'unnatural' to give up all magical tools and commodities since they are unnatural too, no one dared to say a word anymore.

They are just a bunch of hypocrites." Vastor snarled.

"Another thing that you must know, before learning Body Sculpting, is that like all magic it's not omnipotent. Along with the hypocrites that would like to outlaw Body Sculpting, there are also the quacks that try to abuse it exploiting the insecurities of the rich.

"In theory, it can be used to change the shape of a nose, to make someone taller, slimmer, or to increase bust size. Quacks demand insane sums, but the results are underwhelming, if not fatal."

'Seems plastic surgery still has a long way to go here.' Lith was fascinated by Vastor's explanation. Body Sculpting sounded a lot like the procedure he had performed on Tista years before.

"Why fatal?" He asked. "A nose is external and relatively small. Compared to reshaping a whole arm, it should be much easier."

Lith unconsciously touched his own nose, while the rest of the class wondered what they would change about their bodies if given the chance.

"Excellent question." Vastor scratched his short button nose, wishing he could make it more manly.

"Once you learn to perceive the life force, you'll notice that everything has a purpose. Our bodies have something I call a voice, for a lack of a better term, and you must learn to listen to it before applying the smallest modification.

"A hand wants to grab, to touch." He said while flexing the fingers of his left hand.

"A leg wants to walk, a nose wants to breathe, a heart to beat. What about a perfectly functional nose, albeit not easy on the eyes, like mine? If you could listen to my life force, you'd find out that aside from the problems related to age there's nothing wrong with me.

"It means that altering my life force, even just on the nose, would have unpredictable consequences. Make it longer could cause me problems breathing, affecting my ability to cast spells. Becoming taller is alluring, sure, but what about the ramifications?

"Even a few centimeters more imply that all my bones, my organs, everything must be reshaped. There is a reason why powerful mages aren't all muscular studs or world class beauties. It's because the benefits are not worth the risks.

Healthy organs have a healthy life force, their voice can't help you. Changing them means you are acting blindly, relying more on luck and wishful thinking than on scientific basis." Vastor took a brief pause, to make sure that his students had a clear understanding of his words.

"Internal organs are even more tricky. Like all magic above tier three, the procedure requires a full medical team. Unlike regenerating an organ or a limb, the process can't be performed in one go. Cutting and reshaping take a huge toll on both the healer and the patient, especially if we are working on a vital organ.

It's never wise to subject them to too much stress, because if complications arise, the body may not have the strength to make it through. Even if that's not the case, it may be necessary to switch the lead healer to allow them to rest.

Body Sculpting is probably the hardest thing you'll ever do and also the way you'll lose most of your patients." Vastor looked down on the ground, his mind couldn't forget all those he had failed.

Each death had changed him, making him more cynical and detached. They also had made him a better healer and a better man.

Chapter 276 White Part 1

"There are countless things that can go wrong during a Body Sculpting procedure." Professor Vastor continued.

"I'm not going to lie to you. Despite our best efforts, I expect you to see a few people die before you graduate. Some may die under your hands. It's going to put you under a lot of pressure, testing your will.

"Too many times in this job I've seen old men live long enough to not even remember who they were, their bodies refusing to give up, while young people not even old enough to marry would die under my care for no apparent reason.

"Many healers refuse to practice Body Sculpting, either to not affect their reputation with repeated failures or because they cannot take it. Up to tier three, you can still blame bad luck. At tier four anything seems possible.

"Once you reach tier five, you can only blame yourself. People will die because you aren't good enough, aren't prepared enough, or simply because you have let your pride get the best of you. Never be afraid to tell a patient that it's better a long but limited life than gambling everything on a maybe.

"Never hide them the risks of any procedure or make them any promise. The final choice is theirs, but the final burden is yours." Vastor sighed deeply, before resuming his usual confident attitude.

"One last thing. Don't think that once you graduate you are set for life. What we are teaching you are the basics of the basics. The difference between a quack and a real healer is the number of personal spells they develop, how much of yourselves you put into your work.

That's why we'll also cover how to alter, improve, or create from scratch spells.

The fifth year will make the fourth one look like a walk in the park. Class dismissed."

After listening to Professor Vastor's introduction to the subjects of the Healer specialization for the fifth year, the students were gloomy rather than excited. Up to that point, they had always worked in teams comprised of Professors and medical staff.

They were a safety net, boosting the students' confidence that no matter what happened, things could still be salvaged. Now the rules of the game had changed. Only a few, like Lith and Quylla had lost a patient in the past, but no one had ever been responsible for a death.

The thought was scary and not because most of the students had such a good heart. The reason was that the majority of the patients admitted in the White Griffon hospital were powerful mages or influential figures in the political world.

Killing a commoner was one thing, explaining a powerful and well connected family why their loved one wasn't among them anymore could easily destroy lives. The Healer's life, to be precise.

Lith was insensible to such worries. Partly because killing was second nature to him, mostly because lots of people had already died indirectly by his hand. Back at Lutia or during the plague, he could have saved dozens of lives if he had given up his secret and used true magic.

'Seems I actually performed tier five light magic twice already. The first time with Tista, the second on mom.' Lith thought.

'Yeah, but you only succeeded because of true magic. Tista's treatment took months since we lacked tier four magic, while Elina's would have gone badly if you acted alone.

'I'm really curious to see how much our abilities will improve once we learn how to listen to the life force.' Solus considered all the fifth year subjects amazing. They had managed to mimic tier five spells despite missing so many pieces of the puzzle. She was eager to see how far they could get after mastering so much knowledge.

Being the first day, they received no homework. It allowed Lith to go straight to the library and borrow books about the other specializations to copy them. During the fourth year, he and Solus had stockpiled an impressive number of tomes.

Every time Lith had spent the night practicing a specific spell, Solus would use that time to make copies. The information amassed in Soluspedia gave Lith an edge while studying most of the magic related problems.

Even if his understanding of the basics of each specialization was shallow, he could analyze each situation from different angles to find the best possible approach.

Lith decided to keep up the pace, using the time before dinner to work together with Solus and complete the first batch of copies. They could only borrow three books at a time and needed to return them before getting new ones.

Since they used water magic to control the ink, each page took barely a few seconds to be reproduced. The problem was that each book was composed of hundreds of pages. They worked on a different book each to make things faster.

'Don't you think it would be better to spend this time with your friends? Or at least with Phloria? You two only saw each other twice in the last three months.' Solus liked to be alone with Lith, yet since having a full free afternoon was a rare event, she would have preferred for him to socialize.

During winter, at night or whenever his family was away and he wasn't busy with clients, Lith had already spent countless hours studying and researching magic inside the tower. After his speech in Phloria's room, she had hoped Lith would be more considerate, instead of having her making the first move as usual.

'No.' Lith replied. 'This is a perfect opportunity to get some job done. If we manage to finish the three books early, we can visit them before dinner or spend the evening together. If we don't, we'll have to pull an all nighter, even if I'd prefer to sleep.'

'I want to be at my peak condition for the first practical lesson of the Healer specialization. Besides, we still have to receive this trimester's books. The clerk should be here any minute.'

He could feel Solus's disappointment, so he rushed to add.

'It's not like we are hiding. If they have nothing better to do, they'll come visit us.'

Lith had barely completed the thought when they heard someone knocking on their door.

'See? This must be the clerk. Good thing we are here, otherwise we would have missed them and be forced to go fetch our package from the secretariat.'

'I bet this is Phloria. I hope she gives you a good scolding before dragging you somewhere nice for a date.' Solus cheated, using her mana sense through the door. Their guest had a bright cyan core and was very tall.

It was unlikely for a clerk to be so powerful, while Phloria fitted the bill.

They were both wrong. When Lith opened the door, he found Wil Ironhelm, the Professor in charge of the Battle Mage specialization, staring at him with an impatient look.

"Good evening, Lith. Mind if I come in?"

Lith was quite surprised. It was the first time a Professor came to his room and Ironhelm was the last one he would have ever expected paying him a visit. After Lith let him in, Ironhelm handed him a piece of paper containing a list of jobs.

Chapter 277 White Part 2

"Those are your available choices for the Code of Practice course." Ironhelm explained.

You start tomorrow and we need to know where do you want to be assigned. The rules are simple. Each day you have to pick a different duty.

"No repetitions allowed until the start of the following week. The Headmaster wants the students to acquire experience in as many fields as possible before graduating. I'm here to answer any question you may have and to offer you guidance."

Lith read quickly the list, noticing that each job was listed along with the maximum number of points the student could be awarded according to their performance. The jobs ranged from clerk for the Mage Association to patrolman.

"Why working as a Healer is not an option?" Lith found odd not being given the opportunity.

"Because it would be overkill. Like all students with a practical specialization, you are already scheduled to spend a good part of the third trimester working in the field. Code of Practice gives you the possibility to try out things that you normally wouldn't do." Ironhelm explained.

Lith nodded, simply selecting for the rest of the week the jobs granting the highest number of points in descending order. Ironhelm furrowed his brows, most of Lith's choices were identical to those of his colleagues.

Being the last year, everyone was eager to score the maximum number of points, no matter what. Yet very few had selected the first job on the list.

"Are you sure about this?" Ironhelm asked.

"Yes, I am. Is there any problem?"

"Kid, I understand you are in the top three and want to keep it that way, but maybe you should rethink your choice. This is the real deal. I know that Linjos kept you safe until now, be it in the forest or during the house calls.

"However, the Headmaster is only a man, he cannot guarantee your safety at all times. What good would points do you if you die?"

"If it's so dangerous why is it available?" Lith didn't budge, merely raising an eyebrow in annoyance.

"Because we didn't make this list, the Crown did. Academies are simply tasked with providing assistance, the final choice belongs to the student." Ironhelm scoffed.

"Thanks for your concern, but I have made up my mind."

Ironhelm shook his head. There were several things he would have liked to say, yet he remained silent. After inputting Lith's choices in his communication amulet, the Professor left the room.

'Are you sure about this?' Solus asked. 'What about our plan of being low key?'

'Too late for that. This is the final year, holding back is useless. I need to stand out as much as possible to acquire what I need and guarantee the safety of my family even during my absence. Besides, the Crown already knows about me.'

'During the last year, I've spoken with the Royals more often than most nobles do during their whole lives. I have allies in the army, in the Queen's corps as well as in the White Griffon. Before I was a nobody. I had to build up things slowly while now I'm a rising star.'

Even if I sit back and do nothing, a lot of people will try to get back at me for my success. As I see it, this is our only way out.'

The following day, the city of Xenatos.

Thanks to the Academy's Warp Gate, Lith crossed hundreds of kilometers in an instant. Arriving at the location of his first day of community service required help from a mage of the local branch of the Association.

Lith had never been there and time was of the essence.

'I still can't believe we are going to do this.' Solus sighed.

'What do you mean?' Lith laughed in response. 'It's our first opportunity to face normal human opponents instead of the wackjobs we keep meeting since we entered the White Griffon. Who knows? Maybe working as a member of a tactical team may be interesting.'

Walking through the Warp Steps, Lith found himself inside an abandoned warehouse. It was a run-down place, dust and cobwebs covered most of the surfaces. The only clean spot had been arranged as a debriefing room, with wooden chairs and a white board.

Lith could see the rough sketch of the layout of a building that was drawn on it. He counted three floors and what seemed like a basement.

Several men and women wearing military looking uniforms were assembled in a circle around the boards, their faces were tense. No one had weapons, but only because each one had a dimensional ring.

Their clothes were black in color, with the insignia of the local Lord's Household on their backs, shoulders, and heart.

They also wore metal protectors on the forearms, shoulders, and chest. Solus completed the analysis for him.

'Everything they wear is enchanted, but the quality is poor. The clothes are inferior to your old uniform. Only the zones also covered by protectors offer a decent defense.'

Being used to the Queen's corps, the Talons, and all the marvels of the academy, Solus had high standards.

'What do you expect? This isn't an elite squad, just a local police force. It must be the standard equipment. I could never afford my Skinwalker armor without the academy's points. How many mages?' Lith replied.

'Good question. All those present have red cores, except the woman on the second chair from the right, who has a green one, and the man on the first chair on the left. He has just a yellow core. She's probably a mage. Him, I'm not so sure. It depends on the power standards they use.'

Solus pointed at Lith a woman with chestnut hair in her forties and a black-haired man around the same age. Everyone in the squad had an expression difficult to decipher.

More than nervous, they looked like they were there because they had lost a bet.

"The first saddle has arrived, captain." A rough voice scoffed. Lith saw it belonged to the man with the yellow core, who spat on the ground with a disgusted expression. The woman with the green core glared at him for a second but said nothing.

'Saddle?' Solus was baffled.

'Probably an insult. I guess they consider students like me dead weight, or worse.' Lith didn't like being offended, but he could understand the man's feelings. Whatever they were about to do was a dangerous job and the police officers would be forced to keep an eye on the students too.

It would make their work harder and get back in one piece even harder.

"Nice to meet you, son." The captain offered Lith her hand, which he promptly shook.

"I'm captain Yerna of the Xenatos police force."

"I'm..."

"No names, son. We must judge only the performance, not the household." She said with a stern look.

"Since you are from the White Griffon, we'll just call you White. That's sergeant Khran, my second in command. Sorry for the cold reception. Today's task would be a run of the mill, if not for the fact that we are waiting for another student."

"Two rookies to the same unit?" Lith asked.

"Yeah, the other one belongs to the Fire griffon." Yerna nodded.

"Why did they send both of us here? It makes no sense."

"Thanks for your understanding, White. The problem is there aren't many missions that students can take part in without endangering themselves or the host team." She sighed.

"Which is exactly you are doing by being here." Khran stood up, walking toward Lith with a menacing expression.

Chapter 278 Red Part 1

"I know that for you nobles your points are much more precious than commoners' lives, but I'd like for your Lordship to realize that some of us may not come back to their families because of you brats.

"Captain, instead of wasting our time with niceties, let's see how much a waste of space he is. What's your status, Saddle?"

"I have a girlfriend. Don't know if she's the right one, though." Lith pretended to have misunderstood the question. Being obnoxious was a game two could play.

Seeing Lith's smug expression, Khran became red from anger. Some of the officers laughed at the joke.

"I don't give a damn about your love life. I want to know what can you do!"

Lith took a mental note that no one was defending him. Even the captain did nothing, aside from the occasional eye roll.

"His specializations are Forgemastering..." When Captain Yerna read out loud Lith's file, multiple groans and the sound of hands slapping a forehead or a leg in a fit of rage echoed through the warehouse.

"That's great, another one as useful as a third nostril..."

Yerna ignored Khran, raising her voice to cover the sergeant's whining.

"...and Healing. Back in his village, White was a hunter and a bounty hunter. Last year he survived Balkor's attack, went toe to toe with a Valor and lived to tell the tale."

Instead of wasting her time arguing, the Captain had decided to check her trainee's personal files from her data amulet. It contained an image of his visage to recognize him and all the relevant information for the mission at hand.

Many heads turned when they heard about the healer part, a few nods followed Lith's past as a manhunter, and clear disbelief accompanied the last sentence.

"His village?" Many echoed.

"Yeah, I'm a commoner, not a noble. I've worked very hard to get where I am." Since they showed him no respect, Lith was ready to pay them back in kind. His voice was cold while Death Vision showed him a series of gruesome deaths he had no intention of preventing.

"A healer from the White Griffon sounds nice." Said a brown haired man in his mid-twenties. For Mogar's standards he was tall and lean, with his 1.74 meters. Like all the men in the unit, he was perfectly shaven.

"I'm Huren Nacth, nice to meet you. Can you get rid of this scar? The ladies don't like it." He took Lith's hand in his own, making the request without a hint of shame.

"I could, for a price. It will leave you exhausted." Lith was amused by the change of attitude. The scar was long and deep, going from the lower half of the left cheek down along the neck.

"A healer is damn fine as long as they are trustworthy." Khran spat again. freewebnovel.com

"Every kid still attending an academy is a survivor, so there's no point in bragging about it. As for fighting a Valor, what kind of sick joke is that, Captain?"

"It's no joke." The Captain replied.

Yerna's words caused a small commotion. All the unit's members rushed behind her to read from the hologram projected by the amulet, but it was soon interrupted by the arrival of the second student.

He was a fifteen year old boy, 1.7 meters (5'7") high with blond hair and deep green eyes. The newcomer had the build of a soldier, rather than a student. Something in his confident attitude told Lith he had to be a lady-killer at his academy.

The Captain moved to his file, hoping for another pleasant surprise.

Alas, the student from the Fire Griffon was a Warden and an Alchemist. His only perk was having received some nondescript military training. Yerna clicked her tongue, turning off the amulet before moving in front of the board.

"Now that Red is here, let's wrap this up. Today's mission is very simple. We have to raid the drug depot of a local gang. It's a three stories building right in front of this warehouse.

"Thanks to an informant, we know the disposition of doors and corridors. We'll split into four teams of five. Two teams will break in respectively from the front and the back door while the other two will secure the perimeter to prevent anyone from escaping."

She pointed with her finger on the two entry points and then on the position of the windows on the first two floors.

"According to our intel, each floor should be lightly guarded. Expect a minimum of five guards but no mages. The organization we are against is notorious for being ruthless. Its men carry Fire Seeds with them and have no hesitation to blow themselves when captured.

Hence kill first and questions later. We are not taking prisoners."

Captain Yerna took a deep breath before addressing their guests.

"Remember that despite our targets do not have magical powers, they are likely to be well armed. Enchanted blades need one hit to rip to shreds a light armor and the one wearing it. They could also have Alchemical weapons, so never underestimate them.

Any questions?"

Lith raised his hand. Yerna nodded, giving him permission to speak.

"Do you plan on breaking in or for a stealth approach?"

"Stealth it's not an option. The doors could have magical traps or alarms and we don't know exactly how many people are inside. If we take it slow we would risk getting surrounded and outnumbered."

"I can detect and disarm magical contraptions. I'm a Forgemaster." Lith lied. Wanemyre had yet to teach him about those subjects, yet he was confident about succeeding thanks to true magic.

"And I can tell you how many people there are in the building and where they are positioned." Red said with a confident smile. "I'm a Warden and my family specializes in Life Detecting arrays. Speaking about my family, My name is not Red, I'm..."

"Happy to have you with us, kid." Captain Yerna used one hand to shook Red's right one and the other to shut his mouth.

"Today you are Red and you are going to be evaluated based on what you do, not on who your relatives are. Got it?"

Red nodded with a slightly annoyed look. Only then Yerna took the hand off his mouth.

"Good. I'm Captain Yerna, your commanding officer for today. He is Sergeant Khran, my second in command and he is White."

Lith and Red were still deciding what to think about each other when Khran handed them a black uniform and a communicator earpiece each.

"Welcome to the team, kids. There are no Griffons here, only members of this unit. Put on your uniform, so we can separate the good from the bad guys and you avoid getting shot in the back by friendly fire. You can change behind those crates."

"Thanks, but it's not necessary." Lith put the uniform inside the blue gemstone at his neck, allowing his clothes to shapeshift into a new form.

Red took step back from the surprise, while Khran took a wand out of his dimensional ring, pointing it against Lith's still morphing clothes. Its tip shined with a yellow light, allowing Lith to perceive the fire magic it contained.

'Must be the equivalent of Earth's service weapons.' Lith thought noticing a small red mana crystal set into the alchemical tool.

'Yup.' Solus confirmed. 'The crystals work as a cartridge. These guys must be good because a wand like that costs a pretty penny.'

Chapter 279 Red Part 2

"A Skinwalker armor?" Red was amazed.

"Your family must be loaded!" He ran behind the crates to change. Red didn't want to be the one slowing down the team.

"With the two of you, we can give the stealth approach a try. Change into something less conspicuous, so you can scout the building without drawing the attention."

A few minutes later, Lith was wearing his hunter clothes and studying the front door while pretending to be interested in the merchandise of a food vendor.

"Don't try to be a hero. If you are not certain of your findings or don't feel up to the task just say it." Captain Yerna's voice sounded in his ear.

'Solus?' Lith couldn't use Life Vision without scaring the cr*p out of the vendor. He still had to find a way to activate it without his eye glowing like small suns. Solus's mana sense was much more discreet.

'The front door is clean. No magic at all, if there is anything it's mechanical in nature. There are no arrays active, but I can sense something magical and powerful on the third floor.'

Lith bought some of the food, going into an alley to circle around the building. It was his first time in a slum of a big city. The alley was full of trash, forcing him to dodge rats eating rotten food while he walked.

Now that he could use Life Vision, Lith detected that aside from the animals the alley was empty. He could see the people inside the building through the wall, and no one seemed to be alert.

Lith used darkness magic to extend the shadows of the alley. It provided him a cover while he studied the back door from a safe distance. It also masked his glowing eyes, preventing onlookers to notice him.

"The front entrance is just a regular door." He reported via the communication earpiece.

"The back door, not so much. It's reinforced by some kind of earth spell, making it as hard as stone. The lock is booby trapped to turn into a skewer of ice whoever tries to pick it."

"Damn!" The Captain sounded really worried. "Not as easy as our intel told us. The front door is probably barred, if not even walled. Can you do something about those protections or do we need to abort the mission and request for reinforcements?"

"Didn't you read my file, Captain? I'm the reinforcements." Lith grinned.

After months spent studying the boxes and the countless attempts in breaking their locks without meeting a fiery death, the enchantments in front of him were barely more difficult than beating a monkey at a tic tac toe game.

"I already finished disarming them while I was talking with you. I counted not less than three people from the windows on the ground floor." With the channel open, Lith could speak but not listen, missing all the gasps and swearing that filled the control room at those words.

Lith could see several life forces down in the basement. They were too many and too weak to be guards, making him wonder what kind of mess he was walking into.

'Either there is a Warp Gate in the basement and they are moving a small army or these guys do not smuggle just drugs.'

On his way back he kept looking for windows, grates, anything that could give him an excuse to share the knowledge acquired with Life Vision. Lady Luck didn't smile at him.

When he made it back to the warehouse, Red had done his part. He was filling the blueprint on the board with red dots according to his readings.

"Your intel was completely off the mark." After listening to Lith's report he had given his best to impress his teammates as well.

"The first three floors are almost empty. There are only three people on the first floor, five on the second, and four on the third..." Red stopped abruptly, wiping off a red dot from the board.

"Three on the third floor. Someone just died. There are also at least twenty people on the underground floor. Are you sure this is really a drug depot?"

At that point, the Captain was the first to question her superiors' judgment.

"Not anymore. I need to call the Headquarters. No matter if the mission gets aborted or not. You both did great and I'll make sure to write it down in my report."

'I can't believe they flunked this so bad. We could have all died in there.' Yerna thought while conjuring a silence spell to prevent the following conversation to be heard.

After a quick call with her commanding officer, she was pinching her nose with her eyes closed, trying to contain her anger.

"I have good news and bad news. The good news is that the HQ agrees with us. This could be too big for a small squad, so they are sending reinforcements from the Association in case something goes wrong. They'll be here in a few minutes.

"The bad news is that since the hostiles are so few and there is such a high number of potential hostages, prisoners, slaves, whatever those people in the basement are, we have been ordered to continue the mission.

"They say our new objective is to prevent the hostiles from running away or get rid of the prisoners once they found out to be surrounded. The even worst news is that since the two of you have been so useful, you have to come with us."

'Still, not a big deal.' He inwardly sighed. 'The ones on the ground floor were just humans, right Solus?'

'Positive. Red cored humans with slightly above average life force. Easy to catch, easy to kill.' After spending so many years with Lith, Solus had little regard for human life. The only exceptions were those who she believed to be innocent or those she grew fond of.

"I have two more questions, Captain." Lith raised his hand again.

"Granted."

"Red, can you detect arrays? I don't mean to sound paranoid, but I'd prefer to avoid any more surprises." Lith was cautious of the content of the third floor, from which Solus perceived a powerful force.

It wasn't a problem for him since he was already on guard and his partner could warn him on time. What worried Lith was being the sole survivor of whatever threat they could find. It would raise too many questions.

"Yes. It's one of the easiest and fastest spells of a Warden." Red nodded.

"It's unlikely we'll find any. A temporary one would imply the presence of a Warden and I can't imagine a mage wasting their talent with these dregs. A permanent one would cost far more the whole building is worth."

"The same could be said for the back door." Lith pointed out. "I think..."

"Wait!" Red cut him short.

"Another person on the third floor just died and one of the two remaining life forces is fading quickly. What in the gods' name are they doing there?"

"Weapons at hand, everyone." Captain Yerna took out a sword and a wand from her dimensional ring.

"We are about to find out."

Chapter 280 Roll Out Part one

"I still have a question, Captain." Orders or not, Lith had no intention of charging blindly. Whatever was happening inside the building was of no relevance to him and so were the people in the basement.

He was there for the Code of Practice course, the only things that mattered to him were his own safety and the points.

"Just be quick, White." Captain Yerna snorted. "Red, keep me posted if anything else happens."

"Since the mission has changed, what are the new conditions to consider it a success?"

"Kid, do you think this is some kind of game? People are dying in there!" Lith could understand Khran's righteous outrage, yet he found it annoying anyway. The Sergeant was a commoner, probably of humble origins just like him.

Unlike Lith, he had dedicated his life to protect the weak.

'What an irritating guy, always preaching his own ideas. I had hoped for having left this kind of zealots on Earth.' Lith thought.

"So what?" Lith replied. "I took no oath, I'm no policeman nor hero. I'm interested in the mission, not in some nondescript ideal."

Captain Yerna grabbed Khran by the shoulder to prevent another outburst.

"We only need to get in and check the condition of those in the basement. If they are hostages releasing them takes priority. If they are soldiers, we can just blow them into oblivion before moving on the rest of the guards. Is it clear, everybody?"

The unit nodded in unison.

"Okay, then let's move. We need to be fast. There is no way to get to the back door unnoticed, so prepare for a warm welcome."

"Actually, there is." Lith waved his hands in the only fake magic he really used. He opened a Warp Steps leading straight into the alley, in the last covered spot before their destination.

Many people flinched in amazement. For non mages, dimensional magic was something straight out of a fairy tale.

"Today's our lucky day, people." Captain Yerna was grinning from ear to ear.

"Change of plans. My team and Khran's will take point and assault from the back. The rest of you will remain on standby until we check on the prisoners. On my command, surround the building. Red, with me."

The others followed her through the Steps. Each unit was comprised of five people, leaving ten officers in the warehouse to close the perimeter or act as backup in case of need.

"You really are a d*ck." Khran stopped for a second before stepping through the dimensional corridor.

"Yet the gods know how much I'd like to have one like you on every mission."

Once on the other side, the Sergeant conjured a shroud of silence around them before asking Red for an update.

"Another life force disappeared. Now there's only one person on the third floor."

"Damn!" Captain Yerna cursed. She had hoped it was some kind of internal strife, but three deaths in such a short time frame didn't fit the scenario.

"What about the guards on the ground floor?"

Red focused for a second, checking twice just to be sure.

"There are none right now, but someone is coming down from the second floor. One person."

"Arrays?" Lith asked.

Red handed to the nearest officer a red mana crystal he was using as a focus. Without it, casting another spell would cause him to lose control of the Life Detecting array.

"I can sense something on the ground floor. It's inactive at the moment." The unit inwardly cursed as one while Lith pondered on Red's words.

'This means that neither Life Vision nor Solus can detect latent arrays. I need to learn the array detecting spell as soon as possible.'

"What does it do?" The Captain asked.

"No clue." Red shrugged. "Never seen anything like this."

"Great. Let's finish this before we have to find out."

Yerna took out from her dimensional ring what looked like a clump of clay, sticking it to the wall near the door. It created a thin air dome, silencing the area within a ten meters radius.

The team entered the building, activating a new clump each time they neared the end of the air dome, generating a corridor of silence. It allowed them to speak and move while remaining undetected by the inhabitants of the building.

"At least the layout of this place is as we know it." Khran cursed. Maybe it was because he knew they were potentially stepping on a minefield, but since they had entered the house the Sergeant had an eerie feeling in his gut.

"The door to the basement should be on our right after the next corner. What about the person you mentioned earlier?"

"It's closing in slowly. It should come from there." Red was pointing to the left branch of the t-shaped corridor.

The Sergeant put a clump of silence clay on his hand while three members of the units aimed their wands in the direction from which they were expecting the enemy.

"Shoot only after I do!" Khran instructed.

The figure of a woman popped out of the corner. She was dressed in a brown sweater and cargo pants. Lith noticed she was young, couldn't be more than twenty years old. She was walking while spinning some odd handcuffs on her index finger.

Sergeant Khran generated a powerful gust of wind from his hand, propelling the clay towards the girl's face. Despite the surprise attack, she managed to dodge it by rolling on the ground, taking out a wand from the back of her pants.

She screamed for help, but the clay was never meant to do damage. Lith could see her lips moving without emitting any sound, like watching an old silent movie. The same happened when streams of lightning made her slam against the wall in a seizure.

Khan objective was a silent kill all along.

"Hren, take care of the body and clean the scene. Red, stay with him and warn Hren if anyone else moves." Captain Yerna tapped on her ear to remind him of the communication earpiece in case he needed to contact her.

The unit moved forward until the door to the basement.

"White?"

"Locked and enchanted." Lith replied using Invigoration to study it. It was a very crude pseudo core with only two mana pathways. Not strong enough to block someone determined to open it, but enough to slow them down.

"Seriously, what do you usually do when you don't have a forgemaster?"

"We mourn." Khran's reply didn't sound like a joke.

"Klaatu Barada Nikto." Lith's fake magic word generated several tendrils of darkness that made short work of the pathways. Without something to contain its energies, the pseudo core faded away with a crackling sound.

Lith took point to search for more traps, but there were none. The wooden stairway led them to a cellar six meters wide and ten meters long. Contrary to the run down look of the rest of the building, the room was clean.

Behind a simple steel grille there were over twenty people of different gender and age, laying either on the ground or against the walls. They were all shabbily dressed, their appearance suggested they had spent most of their lives on the streets.

Yet they appeared to be well fed and in good health. There was no trace of dirt in their clothes. The weirdness of the scene didn't end there.