

## Supreme M 281

### Chapter 281 Roll Out Part two

Lith signaled to those behind him to stop, scanning the place with Life Vision.

'What the f\*ck? I can feel the lingering presence of healing magic emanating from them. I can even smell traces of soap coming from their bodies. Someone has been taking good care of them, but why?' Lith thought.

'Maybe I can answer that.' Solus felt there was something terribly wrong there.

'All these people have only two things in common. Each one of them is older than twenty years and has at least an orange core.'

'What?' Lith was bewildered by her words. So many people and no one with a red core was something impossible to achieve by chance. Not coupled with their age. Twenty years was the threshold of a mana core natural evolution for non Awakened one.

"Is there something wrong?" Yerna asked.

"Everything is clear. The grille is just a grille. Why no one is trying to escape?" The more Lith looked at them, the more the cellar reminded him of pigpen instead of a prison.

Yerna walked past him, placing her hand on the keyhole turning it into an icicle before crashing it with her fist. She only needed to smell the breath of one of the prisoners to answer his question.

"Ophaz. They keep them dosed." Ophaz was the name of a plant from which it was possible to extract the drug her team had been following for weeks. At low dosage, it induced a feeling of euphoria while at higher dosage it caused the user to be in a catatonic state.

They would still be able to move and talk if interrogated, but their mind was clouded by the drug. They had no memory of themselves or will to fight.

"It's the latest form of slavery. Once you give someone the first dose, it turns them into meat dolls."

"Do you want me to cleanse them?"

"Gods, no. This is a blessing in disguise." The Captain shook her head.

"Best case scenario, they would freak out. This way they are meeker than sheep. It will only take one of us to get them to safety. Can you..?"

Lith sighed, opening a Warp Steps back to the control room. The prisoners moved sluggishly, mindlessly obeying the Captain's orders.

"What do you make of this, Captain?"

"Aside from a few exceptions, they are too bad looking or old to have any value as slaves, even for a fighting arena. Judging from the state of this place, they have been here for a while.

"Only the cost of the drug necessary to keep them meek for so long makes the whole operation unprofitable. They have been nurtured for some reason I'm unable to comprehend." She then ordered the units outside to lock the perimeter.

While Lith and the Captain were moving the prisoners, a couple of members of the unit performed a quick search of the cellar. They discovered a few small crates containing packets of drugs ready to be sold and several big crates.

The latter contained luxury furniture ready to be shipped.

"What the heck?" Hren was flabbergasted.

"One of these things is worth more than I earn in a year!"

"Seems we arrived just in time." Khren had a brooding face.

"Those people were the last batch of whatever they are doing. The ringleader has packed their stuff and is ready to leave."

Sweeping the first and the second floor took them less than a couple of minutes. With Red telling them where and how many their targets were, it was like shooting fishes in a barrel. At each floor, Red would always detect the same inactive array.

While moving through the various rooms and corridors, they could see that unlike the ground floor, the rest of the house was still completely furnished. Everything from the paintings to the tapestry was very valuable, but they were assembled with no taste.

It seemed a patchwork made by a color-blind art connoisseur.

'Ugh! I have never seen anything so tacky in three lives.' Lith thought.

'Whoever did this would put the Mona Lisa beside a Pollock, with some piece of junk modern art in front of them both. I'm no expert, but that's enough to deserve to be hanged.'

'Bad news.' Solus chimed in. 'I don't know if it's the same array Red sensed on the other floors, but there's one active on the third floor. I don't know its purpose, but I can tell you it's something powerful enough to blind my mana sense.'

If not for Red, I couldn't tell you how many people there are up there.'

"Wait, something is wrong here." They were moving in a single column and Lith was right behind the Captain, making it easy for him to stop the unit's advance.

"I can feel the hair on my neck standing up." He lied. According to Mogar's superstition, it was a common phenomenon in presence of powerful magic. In reality, it was just a reaction in front of impending danger, completely unrelated to magic.

"I thought I was getting paranoid because it's all too easy." Yerna nervously touched her nape.

"What about you lot?" Fear spread like a disease, soon everyone shared the same feeling despite being calm until a second prior.

"Red, check the next floor."

"Gods protect me!" Red yelped after obeying the Captain's order.

"White is right, there is something very wrong here."

'Of course, I am. Right, Solus?' Lith inwardly grinned. She didn't reply, limiting herself to a retching thought.

"I don't know what kind of array we are about to face, but I can tell you this. It's very powerful, it spreads through the whole house, and it feels..."

Red extended his consciousness trying to probe deeper in order to understand the nature of their enemy.

"It feels twisted. The spell is rooted from the light element, but the magic flows backward. It's hard to explain." Red was now drenched in cold sweat, his stomach was twisted into a knot.

"Are you sure there's only one person left in the house?" Captain Yerna could feel the tension rising, her instinct was telling her to walk away.

"Besides us? Positive." Red nodded. "It's right in the middle of the last floor. Hasn't moved since I cast the spell."

"An array this powerful could make our numbers irrelevant. The hostages are safe, there is no reason to walk into a potential trap. Let's get out and wait for the reinforcements to arrive. This is above our paygrade. The Mage Association can deal with this much better than us."

They walked back along the silence corridor they had created, quickly reaching the ground floor again. A blinding light erupted from under their feet.

Red and Lith both understood what was happening. The former had studied hard to master such spell, the latter had already fallen for it once.

The teleporting array moved the whole unit in the attic on the third floor.

The entire floor was occupied by a single room, encircled by a dome made of light which pulsed with a rhythmical beat like it was alive.

"First you interrupt my meal, then you steal my food." The man speaking was the most handsome and the most repulsing that any of those present had ever seen.

"I won't let you go away without proper compensation."

## Chapter 282 Unnatural Part 1

Saying that the attic was furnished would have been an understatement. Tapestry, carpets, even the chair the man was sitting on were embedded with precious gemstones the size of a nut.

Piles of coins and jewels were laying in random spots of the room as if a creature composed of living gold had a tour of the place while having a bad case of diarrhea.

A magic eight pointed star inscribed in a circle made of pure white energy encompassed the whole room. At each extremity of the star, there was a small altar made of white marble.

The surface of the altars was covered with runes that Red and Lith both would easily recognize as the same light magic runes that were empowering the array below their feet, if only they managed to take a single glance at them.

If they did, they would have also noticed that on some of the altars there were dried up bodies, while the others had their pristine white surface tainted by an ashen powder. All the corpses were dried up like they had been dead for quite some time.

Not even the fact that the body on the altar right in front of them was rapidly collapsing on itself, like it was a closed paper cup being sucked with a straw could make any member of the unit take their eyes off their unwanted host.

The man literally sitting in the middle of that mess was on paper the embodiment of perfection. 1.9 meters (6'3") high, with black hair of such a light shade to almost seem blue. His clear blue eyes were rested on a face that seemed to have been carved out by an artist in love with their own creation.

His muscular body almost bulged out of his tacky clothes, like he could tear them up simply by taking a deep breath.

Yet no man of the unit felt the tiniest tinge of envy nor any woman thought about anything outside pointing their weapons at him and fire them at will.

He was too perfect to be natural. Each piece composing his body was flawless, but more than a person, he seemed like a patchwork of different humans assembled together. There was no harmony in his features.

'That guy looks like the handsome brother of Frankenstein's monster.' Lith thought.

After a split second of stupor due to the teleportation array, Captain Yerna pointed her wand at the man, quickly followed by all the members of the unit. They didn't give orders or made demands, they simply shoot a barrage of fire, ice, and lightning bolts until the man was turned into an half charred half frozen corpse and the chair into a bunch of golden splinters.

'I have bad news and I have worse news.' Now that they were inside the array, its mystical energies didn't impede Solus's senses anymore. With everyone busy and Red scared out of his wits, Lith was free to use his skills to get a grasp of the current situation.

'I think I know what this array does.' Solus explained while Lith used Invigoration on the array and Life Vision on the man.

'It's filled to the brim with powerful energies, yet none of them belong to the unnatural man. My mana and life sense perceive at least nine different signatures currently coursing through the array. I think they belonged to the people on the altars.'

The unnatural man was lying on the floor, but no one managed to relax. Despite its owner death, the light dome was still on.

Seargent Khran tried to open the door, but the array also worked as a barrier, pushing him back with a jolt of light. Khran yelped in pain, the contact had badly burned his hands.

"Who the heck was that guy? How do we get out of here?" He cursed.

"Is, not was." Lith pointed at the body on the floor. "He is still alive and well." He could see how even after so many attacks, the body's life force was as strong as before.

'Exactly.' Solus continued. 'The array keeps slowly injecting those energies inside him. I don't know why, though. The transfer's not fast enough to be some sort of healing device.'

"Are you kidding me?" Khran scoffed while Hren helped him to drink a healing potion for his injured hands. "That guy is as dead as a doornail."

"Am I?" Said a silvery voice coming from the corpse as it tried to get up. A second barrage of spells stuck it before the sentence was completed, sending it sprawling on the floor.

'Let me guess, that was just the bad news. What about the worse news?' Lith was putting together all the pieces of the puzzle. The picture taking shape in front of his eyes wasn't good.

'The worse news is that the unnatural man seems to be a human Abomination hybrid.'

Her words left Lith speechless.

'Is he... like me?'

'Not at all. I can see two cores inside of him, a bright cyan one and a smaller black one. I believe that just like Kalla's, his second core is artificial.'

The corpse got on its back for a second time, getting blasted once again. This time no one stopped shooting until there was no charge left in their wands.

"We need to get out of here!" Captain Yerna wasn't scared. She and her people had gone through worse situations in the past, keeping her cool had always turned out to be the winning move.

"White, Warp us away from this sh\*thole."

Lith didn't make her repeat herself, but the dimensional door shattered as soon as it was formed. A second attempt bore the same result.

"What's happening? Why it doesn't work?" Khran was starting to freak out, his voice rose of an octave.

"I have no clue." Instead of despairing, Lith placed both of his hands on the array. He was certain it was the root of all their problems.

"It's actually quite simple." The corpse of the unnatural man stood up from a pile of half molten jewels. Wands were once again aimed at him, but no spell was fired.

"Dimensional magic requires a perfect balance between all the six elements." The unnatural man explained while his skin and hair regrew at an astounding speed.

"This room is so filled with light magic that it makes impossible for a lowly human mage to find the balance necessary to tear up space. Don't blame the kid for his incompetence." He said with an amused look.

"Even if he managed to do it, it would take me a simple wave of the hand to disrupt his focus. As I said earlier, no one is leaving until I get compensation for all the losses you have inflicted me. Kneel!"

The unnatural man apparent kindness turned into a mask of fury. At his command, a new array overlaid with the already existing one. It increased the gravity of all those present by several folds, forcing them to fall on their knees.

Only two people weren't affected by the new array. Lith, who was already hands on the ground studying the room, and the unnatural man, who kept standing as if nothing happened.

Chapter 283 Unnatural Part 2

"Do you have any idea how hard it was to find humans smart enough to help me manage my business? How difficult it was to round up among the dregs of society the right ingredients for my path towards godhood? You..."

The ramblings stopped. Suddenly the extra gravity had disappeared and the unnatural man could feel a stinging pain in his abdomen, along with a sensation he had never experience before in his life. Nausea.

"You!" He screamed at Lith. While the others had jumped up on their feet assuming a defensive formation, Lith was still crouched. Several tendrils made of light and darkness came out of his body, tampering with the energy coursing below him.

The array's magic circle was distorted, turning the clockwork formation into a shoddy mess.

"Don't mind me." Lith replied with an innocent smile. "Keep talking, I was really caught up by your narration."

'It seems you are right.' Solus kept observing the alterations in the man's cores.

'The array is linked to his black core, feeding it of the accumulated energies inside the array. The black core absorbs and refines the energy before transferring it to the cyan one.

'It's an artificial version of Accumulation. By my maker, I can't imagine how many lives it took for him to reach a bright cyan core.'

'It was the only possible explanation for keeping those people prisoners.' Lith shrugged. 'He needs quality cores. That's why he fed and healed them. Probably he wanted them well ripened before squeezing them. So kind of him giving me a path straight to his mana core.'

"How dare you touch a dragon's treasure?" The unnatural man turned into a blur, charging at Lith while ripping to shreds all those standing on his path. Three members of the unit died without even managing to slow him down.

'A dragon?' That word along with the man's speed sent a cold shiver down Lith's back.

'I thought it was just some psycho, but to be so quick he must be able to use fusion magic. Why the heck an Awakened need this contraption? Could a dragon really have just a cyan core? It doesn't make sense.'

He didn't fear to fight another Awakened one, hybrid or not. Nor did he care about the rest of the unit, since they were dead the moment they would see his real skills. Lith was experiencing what all of his past opponents felt facing him.

The confusion deriving from not having a clue about what he was against.

The unnatural man jumped, extending towards Lith his hands that had turned into razor sharp claws.

'What an idiot.' Lith sneered while getting back up. By leaving the ground, the opponent had actually slowed down. Once in the air, fusion magic was useless and the trajectory was easily predictable.

Instead of freezing up in fear like his opponent expected, Lith took a side step. He then grabbed the arm while pivoting on his right foot, executing an overhead throw. Lith added his strength to the opponent's momentum, slamming him against the light dome.

'This guy has no technique, just brute strength. Revealing his abilities just to scare me is stupid beyond reason.'

'Why the throw?' Solus was confused by the turn of events.

'Because normally one can't be harmed by their own magic. Yet I think he is trapped as well as we are.'

The impact was strong enough to make the unnatural man penetrate into the light wall for a second. His flesh turned black while the energies trapped into the array reacted to the foreign body with a violent assault.

The unnatural man screamed in agony like he never did when the unit had showered him with tier three spells from their wands. The light dome pushed him away, making his body bounce on the floor writhing into spasms.

Lith didn't wait for him to recover, using wind, gravity, and spirit magic to toss him again against the wall.

'Bingo! The array is so filled with different energies that it's unable to recognize its master. I can kill him and not blow my cover. Two birds with one stone.'

Alas, the unnatural man had no intention to cooperate.

He roared with fury while his body covered with golden scales. Two membranous wings formed under his armpits, connecting his little fingers to the hips. The neck got longer while his face deformed into a long snout.

His nostrils dilated doubling their size, his open mouth now bigger than a manhole revealed the rage burning within. The following breath of fire turned everyone on its path into cinders, making even the gold piles boil.

When the jet of flames ended, the creature was over four meters (13 feet) tall, forced to bend over to avoid his head to graze the ceiling. His long tail whipped the air furiously, generating sparks whenever it briefly touched the array.

Lith was taken by surprise, managing to dodge at the last second only thanks to air fusion. Yet his right leg was grazed by the flames, not even the Skinwalker armor could resist such intensity.

Even using water fusion wasn't enough. The fire burned through the protective enchantment, covering the whole limb below the knee.

Lith's skin was no more, his burned flesh left exposed the burned muscles still throbbing in pain. Four more members of the tactical unit were dead. Only the mystical energies of the array had protected the room, leaving the wall and the floor pristine.

'That's not a man, that's a wyvern!' Solus clearly recalled Kalla's words during their last meeting. Magical beasts once Awakened would evolve into monsters. They could still have offspring, giving life to a new bloodline of creatures that wouldn't be Awakened ones.

He hid behind one of the altars, using light magic to heal his wounds.

The wyvern roared in outrage. By slamming into the energy wall first and by recklessly using his fire breath, a good chunk of the energy stored in the formation had been lost.

"I was so close! Curse you, human!"

Gadorf the wyvern was aware of being really close to a breakthrough. Even though he was no Awakened one, the black core he possessed gifted him with several powers.

The ability to absorb the life force of living beings, to detect the magical talent of those close to him, enhanced regeneration, and partial resistance to most elements. At that moment, the only person that Gadorf hated more than Lith was his own father.

It was because of his father's refusal of Awakening Gadorf that he had spent the last two centuries experimenting all kinds of forbidden magic. None of his experiments bore any fruit. Not until he met that arrogant, insufferable human.

It was only by becoming their test subject that Gadorf had acquired the black core and the Life Draining array. That human was obsessed with the idea of achieving eternal life through the Abominations.

After obtaining what he wanted, Gadorf would have gladly awarded them for their services with a swift death, but the Abominations serving the Master were too strong.

#### Chapter 284 Operating Room Part 1

Gadorf had met the Master only a few years prior. Unable to assume a human form, the only way he had to acquire new techniques and materials was stealing them.

Even if descending from the bloodline of an Evolved monster granted him the use of true magic on all six elements, the wyvern was still too weak to attack a major noble family or important merchants.

Gadorf had already nearly got killed multiple times after raiding small cities. The Association responded quickly to threats, sending several mages at once to deal with him. Gadorf managed to survive only thanks to his mastery of light magic and arrays.

In over two hundred years of practice, he had reached a level in those fields that very few mages could even start to comprehend. It was exactly because of his stubbornness that the Master had taken interest in him.

Fighting the Master had been a humbling experience for Gadorf. Despite their experience gap, despite them being a fake mage, Gadorf's defeat took less than a minute.

"You're lucky the Association put you on priority C until now." The Master wheezed. The fight had been brief, but exhausting for someone not used to fight like they were. Especially because they wanted to take Gadorf alive.

"Me? A proud dragon, just a C-lister?" Gadorf's rage made the ground tremble, but the array keeping him prisoner didn't even budge.

"A dragon? You?" The Master guffawed.

"Good gods, your ego is bigger than Lady Tyris's a\*s! Don't tell me that's the reason this dump you call home is full of gold and pieces of art?"

Gadorf's reply was breathing fire with all the strength he had. The act almost resulted in suicide. The breath of a wyvern, just like those of a dragon, was neither normal fire nor a magical one.



It was a unique effect caused by the mix of their life force with the world energy, no mana was involved. It was a similar effect Balkor had developed for his Valors, allowing them to emit rays of darkness from their eyes, without them being affected by slowness that affected all kinds of darkness magic.

The downside of such powers was that just like a body can damage itself, so that kind of attack based on life force, no matter how little was employed, would harm the user as well as anyone else.

Gadorf's screams of agony only made the Master guffaw until small tears of hilarity streamed from his eyes.

"Conceited and stupid. It's a miracle you managed to survive this far. That's a good piece of news, Lizzie." The Master simply replaced the most consumed magic crystals with new ones. The array was back to full force in a split second, adding despair to the wyvern agony.

"I'm not a lizard!" He roared. "I'm Gadorf, son of Xedros the first wyvern! One day I will evolve into a dragon and feast on all those that belittled me. Be it you or my father, you'll end up the same way! Burned to death by my hand!"

"The good news, Lizzie..." The Master continued after silencing their noisy prisoner.

"...is that I believe that just like me, the gods don't play dice. We were destined to meet. My research can't go any further without a willing subject who allows me to study true magic, just like your pathetic daddy issues fueled quest can only get you killed if you keep acting on your own.

Our interests are aligned. If you stop with your temper tantrums, we can make a deal."

After summoning by their side an Eldritch Abomination to keep in check Gadorf's mood swings, the Master brought him to one of their labs. Gadorf was able to learn about Arthan's Madness and study its blueprints. The insane contraption turned out to be an endless source of inspiration for him.

Together, they developed the Life Draining array for Gadorf and some of the technology the Master needed to fuse together Abominations in a stable form.

"I don't get it." While sealed up in one of the Master's gene-tanks, Gadorf could still talk while daydreaming about how inflict to his partner in crime the slowest and most painful death possible.

"If you are already able to create artificial cores, why didn't you make one for yourself?" Gadorf was a prideful creature, to the point of considering even an equal partnership as a dishonor. He believed to have been born a ruler.

As such, stomping arrogant ants was his birthright and the Master was no exception. By defeating him, by subjecting him to all those humiliating tests, the Master had earned themselves a thousand deaths.

Alas, just like Xedros, the Master was too strong for him, yet. Gadorf could only suck it up and bide his time.

"Because I don't like the middle way. The method we have developed for you may turn you into an Awakened one, but then what? You'll get a little more powerful, live a little bit longer. I find your idea of turning into a dragon is nothing more than wishful thinking.

"You are already a wyvern, the very thought of someone as conceited as you becoming a Guardian is disturbing, to use a euphemism. Instead, if I succeed, I'll become an immortal being with no limit to my strength and none of the weaknesses that plague Abominations.

"Humans have stopped evolving for a long time. Awakening is just a palliative care. I'll bring the dawn of a new golden age for mankind. Imagine a world where a selected few, the truly brilliant and enlightened, can lead the masses without the threat of death, aging, or illness."

Gadorf had listened to that speech countless times. The Master's eyes always shone with a childlike enthusiasm that bordered madness.

"Sure, there will be collateral damages. Some people will be sacrificed for the greater good, but Mogar is full of idiots that do not deserve to live. Small minded cretins incapable of seeing further than their nose."

The rage transpiring from their words made Gadorf suspect that the Master was lonely, unappreciated, or both.

"You don't want to conquer the world?" Gadorf was flabbergasted. The Master was as powerful as short sighted.

'Power is the only requirement to rule over the weak.' He thought.

The Master laughed heartily at those words.

"You really are insane, Lizzie. I'm just tired of seeing good people die while the mediocre thrive. To see true genius go unnoticed or buried under useless paperwork that could be handled by lesser men.

"I only want to show humans their true potential, to cure the ultimate disease: death. I'm sure that despite their name, Abominations are as natural as you and I. They are the next evolutionary step, they just need to be perfected."

After acquiring his black core and practicing his new skills, Gadorf was eager to leave the Master's side. The next time they met, it would have been when he ripped the Master's still beating heart from their chest.

Or so Gadorf thought.

"Where do you think you are going, Lizzie?" The Master refused to call him by his name until the wyvern gave up his pretentious dream of becoming a dragon. Both had proven to be stubborn.

Chapter 285 Operating Room Part 2

"Away. I need food to evolve." Gadorf snarled.

"You really are an idiot." The Master sighed.

"Attack magical beasts and Evolved Monsters will kill you. Attack humans and mages will do the same. They are many while you are one. Not a particularly brilliant one at that."

Gadorf growled, but didn't reply. He had always picked on humans because he was scared of meeting Evolved Monsters. The wyvern had always considered the humans as the weakest link, yet their fake mages had almost killed him several times.

The Master was a human and a fake mage, yet had single handedly defeated him. Those words deeply wounded Gadorf's pride, yet their truth was undeniable.

"This lab costs money. Giving you power cost me a lot of money. This isn't a bard's tale where you get riches simply thanks to the writer's pen. If you want your 'food' and get away with it, if you want your gold, you've got to earn it."

The Master taught him how to feed only on the weak and the poor, those whose disappearance would cause no alarm, if not call for celebration. The Master also showed Gadorf how to alter his life force to assume a human form.

It was something called "Body Sculpting". Last, but not least, the Master introduced him to the criminal underworld. Someone like Gadorf, capable of opening illegal Warp Gates crossing hundreds of kilometers at once thanks to his arrays, of transporting people and contraband alike, was a money-making machine.

Drugs, fugitives, stolen goods, there was nothing Gadorf couldn't slip over the Griffon Kingdom's borders unnoticed. Even some of the most powerful noble families used his services to get to safety their endangered members, like the ex-Headmistress of the Lightning Griffon Linnea or Archmage Lukart did.

Thanks to their support and protection, his criminal empire had grown over time. The reports about his activities were constantly covered up or downplayed if hiding them was impossible.

Sometimes, leading figures of human society would use him to get rid of overzealous officers, like Captain Yerna, or to settle their grudges away from the Crown's eyes, like in Lith's case. Yerna's execution was already scheduled, Lith's was just the icing on the cake. An opportunity to kill two pests with one stone.

Gadorf needed food, they needed a killer, it was a win-win situation.

The wyvern gladly indulged in such favours. He would get powerful mages to feed on, together with huge sums. The only sour note was that half his profits ended in the Master's pockets, to fund their research.

'I would have already acquired a treasure worthy of a dragon, if not for that leech!' Gadorf hated sharing, but the Master kept him on a tight leash. A single Eldritch was enough to chase him to the darkest corner of Mogar and put him down like a rabid dog.

While Gadorf was assessing his losses, watching his treasures boil and his priceless furniture turn to ashes, Lith was back at his peak condition.

'Where the heck are the reinforcements?' He had no idea that those sent to their aid were of no threat to the wyvern, nor that they had been sent to the wrong address. One hand washed the other, and both hands washed the face.

'Who's left?' Among the smoke and flames, it was hard for Lith to see. Thanks to air magic, breathing was not a problem instead.

'You, Red, the Captain, the Sergeant, and the only two orange cored members of the unit. I suspect the wyvern did it on purpose.' Solus replied.

'No sh\*t, Sherlock. We must be his full course. Time to go all out.' Lith actually had several attack plans, but none of his liking. The wyvern was bigger and stronger than him.

Between the fire breath and the tail ending with a talon-like extremity, Lith was tempted to curse at the unfairness of the match.

'Could as well got a broom up his a\*s, so he can sweep the floor and kick my butt at the same time.' Lith focused on Solus's ring, making it grow until it covered his whole right hand.

Now it looked like a stone gauntlet with a yellow gemstone shining at the center of the back of the hand. Then, he used darkness magic to cancel his presence and fire magic to spread the smoke while making it thicker.

Thanks to Life, Vision Lith could easily see Gadorf through to smoke and circle around him waiting for the moment to strike. The wyvern kept turning his head, sniffing the air in search of his prey.

The array hindered his mana perception. Gadorf was sure to have left alive the right ones, but couldn't pinpoint their exact location. He tried multiple times to extinguish the fires and clear up the smoke, but someone was opposing him.

'I could force my way through, but this could be some kind of trap.' The resistance he felt made keeping control over the burning environment a tug of war of willpower. To prevail, Gadorf needed to focus. Such a focus would diminish his awareness of the surroundings.

'Bah, I'm overthinking. I have nothing to fear from some weak humans and unharmed kids.'

Lith felt his grasp over the smoke weakening and smiled for it.

'He is no Awakened, otherwise the smoke wouldn't hinder his senses. Finally a piece of good news.'

The moment the air cleared, Lith struck. He charged towards the wyvern's exposed back, his hands pulsing with electricity. Gadorf had centuries of battle experience, as soon as he smelled traces of ozone in the air, he reacted boosting his reflexes with air fusion.

His tail lashed toward Lith with the bone stinger aimed at his shoulder. The ritual required a living prey, not a healthy one after all. Lith took out the Gatekeeper bastard sword at the last second, boosting himself with fire, air, and water fusion.

The sword's appearing took Gadorf by surprise, while Lith's movements brought complete shock to him. They were too fast, leaving him no space to dodge. Too strong, cutting through his scales, flesh, and bones like a hot knife does with butter.

Too fluid, allowing his arms to move up and down like a slithering snake, amputating one chunk of flesh after the other. When Gadorf managed to pull the tail back, half of it was already painting the floor red.

"My tail! How? Why?" Had Lith cut it once, reattaching the two severed parts would have been a piece of cake. Now the wyvern's only options were to collect and reattach the pieces one by one or regrow the tail.

The latter solution would leave Gadorf drained. He didn't dare to leave himself more exposed to such a cruel sword.

"Why?" Usually Lith wouldn't talk. This time he knew his opponent was getting weaker by the second because of the blood spurting from the amputated extremity, while as long he was allowed to use Invigoration his energy was endless.

"Because this isn't a fight. This is just another operating room..." He infused the Gatekeeper with darkness magic, slashing the chunks of tail again.

"...and I'm the healer." Lith taunted the wyvern with his sword, while the flesh rotted at a speed visible at the naked eye.

"Curse you!" Gadorf charged in outrage, his blood boiling from fury, his hatred taking physical form, engulfing him with an armor of living fire.

Red and the surviving members of the team couldn't believe their own eyes. None of what was happening made any sense. Yet Lith's next move surpassed it all.

## Chapter 286 Light and Darkness Part 1

From his first and only serious fight with Protector, back when he was still a child, Lith had learned an important lesson.

Be it while facing one of the Kings of the Trawn woods, an Abomination, an Evolved Monster, or a Valor, he had always stuck to it, never allowing his pride to blind him.

Even with an enhanced body, even despite all the changes he had experienced after the recent breakthroughs, Lith never allowed himself to forget that he was just human.

There were enemies whose fury and savagery he couldn't match, no matter how badly he wanted it. Instead of charging blindly like his rage demanded, like his opponent was doing, Lith kept his mind cold while his mana core burned with power.

He had to play it smart, eroding his opponent's strength until the tables were turned.

Gadorf had never been so furious in all his life. He had allowed a simple human hatchling to mutilate him. With his flesh now rotten, reattaching the pieces was impossible, the only choice he had left was regrowing it.

That was the exact reason why Lith had done it.

'He is faster and stronger than me, but without the tail his balance is all over the place. No matter if he prefers to keep his energies and wobble like a duck or to heal himself and exhaust his reserves. Either way he is dead.'

The stump had stopped bleeding, but Gadorf wasn't used moving, let alone flying without his tail and in such a confined space at that. To keep his balance, he ended up twisting his body multiple times, touching the edges of the array with catastrophic consequences.

Every time the array and the destructive spell engulfing him clashed, both would lose part of their power while waves of pain invaded the wyvern's body. Lith easily dodged the charge with a few side steps. When the left wing passed a few centimeters from him, he slashed down with both hands.

The blade cut through the light bone of the arm, lacerating the wing almost all the way to the wyvern's hip. The short flight turned into a tumble, slamming against the altars before crashing into the barrier again.

A new barrage of spells struck the wyvern's body, making him bounce back and forth against the dome of light like a pinball. Lith and the surviving members of the unit, even Red, were throwing everything they had, to pin Gadorf as long as possible.

Gadorf was almost in agony. The phantom pain from the tail was blinding, his left wing was being consumed by the darkness magic Lith had infused into the blade, and his back was sizzling like a steak forgotten on the barbeque.

Worst of all was his pride, shattered like it didn't happen from years. Yet the physical pain made him snap out of his fury. The wyvern was thinking clearly again. His survival instinct combined with centuries of battle experience allowed him to see how foolish he had been. freewebnøvel.com

'I really am an idiot.' The Master's words echoed into his mind and for the first time the wyvern actually listened to them. Seeing that the kid with the sword was waiting for him to do something stupid again, Gadorf took a deep breath instead.

Lith rolled behind the closest altar, expecting another breath of fire and so did the others. Gadorf channeled light magic into his wing instead, wiping off the dark energies and healing the limb.

"I'm done underestimating you, human."

Despite his arrogant tone, Gadorf didn't like his odds. His body was too huge to move nimbly inside the array's closed space. Yet he didn't dare return to his human husk. Tier three and below spells could barely break his skin, let alone harm his scales.

The sword, though, was another matter entirely. His human form wouldn't be able to stand more than a couple of slashes from such a powerful weapon.

'That kid is too fast for a human. Could he be like me? In disguise?' Another sting struck his abdomen while Gadorf was lost in thought.

Lith was tampering again with the array, poisoning its energies and the wyvern along with them. Gadorf inwardly cursed at him, quickly weaving a barrage of ice spears while taking back control over the array at the same time.

Lith channeled fire fusion into the Gatekeeper, engulfing himself in a shroud of flames that turned the ice into steam. Gadorf looked at the sword with greed, before Blinking behind Lith and releasing a new stream of flames from his mouth.

'Oh sh\*t!' Lith inwardly cursed, realizing that the opponent not only could use dimensional magic, but also true dimensional magic. His instincts screamed at him to put the sword away and Blink to safety, an action that would lead to his death.

Warp Steps had already failed him before, there was no reason to believe Blink would work any different. Also, without the sword, the difference in physical prowess would be crippling at such a close range.

Lith clenched his teeth while suppressing his muscle reflexes. His only option was to dodge.

Yet it failed. His legs were stuck to the ground, Lith found himself incapable of lifting a single foot. While the flames roared towards him, he needed only a glance to understand what had happened.

The energy of the array was wrapped around him like a leash, blocking his movements.

"Fool me once, shame on you. Fool me twice, shame on me. The array is mine! You are not the only one that can twist it to your whims!"

Lith didn't lose time wondering how the heck the wyvern could talk while hurling the stream of fire. He channeled water and air fusion into the sword, splitting the river of flames in two while generating a cold aura to protect himself from the scorching heat.

Yet he was too close to their source and the wyvern's breath too deep. The creature's flames had an intensity on par with the tier five Raging Sun that had almost killed him in the past. They broke through the aura first and the armor later, prickling at his skin like thousands of white-hot needles.

Lith's hair took fire, his skin was covered in blisters and burns despite the multiple layers of magical protections.

Captain Yerna didn't stand idle. She had attempted to contact the HQ multiple times, but the signal was jammed. Yerna had already used all the weapons she had with little to no effect. She only had one card left to play.

While the two monsters fought, she reached Red's side.

"Why are you staring at them like an idiot? Do something, now!"

"Me?" Red was almost frozen in fear, his mind replaying Balkor's attack in a loop.

"You are the soldier! You do something."

"Kid, I only know tier three spells that the army bestowed to me. The Sargent is just a magico stuck at tier two. Do you really think we can help? You are a Warden and we are stuck inside an array. Do your thing!"

Red cursed at himself. He had picked a potentially dangerous job to get rid of the fear and helplessness Balkor had etched into his heart. Yet just like during those days, he was cowering in fear behind others.

"It's going to take time."

"Then you'd better start now!"

## Chapter 287 Light and Darkness Part 2

Before the jet of fire ended, Gadorf charged head first at Lith like a ram. Even with the flames still raging around him, fighting off the blinding pain with light fusion, Lith saw the wyvern coming at him and acted accordingly.

The heat had not only injured Lith, but also weakened his constraints. He could now let himself fall to the ground, holding the sword with both hands close to his chest. As he expected, Gadorf Blinked at the last second, keeping his momentum to strike at him from a dead angle.

It was what Lith would have done in his shoes.

With the back on the ground, however, he had no blind spots. The area was still shrouded in flames, Gadorf had no way to know Lith's exact position. His head only hit empty air, Lith rolled away as soon as the Blink happened.

Darkness energy coursed through the blade, grazing one of the wyvern's legs as he passed. It was just a scratch, but it affected Gadorf's already precarious balance, chipping again his life force at the same time.

The wyvern tripped on his own feet, crashing against one of the altars. The array protected and empowered it, giving Gadorf the impression of having hit a mountain. Lith was too weak, his battered body didn't allow him for fast movements anymore.

Charging at Gadorf was like asking him to Blink and put him out of his misery.

Lith lifted his sword again, using all the strength he had left to stab the ground, unleashing all the accumulated darkness magic into the array. The wyvern felt like his body was being torn into shreds.

The array was like an IV of life force dripping straight into his core. If Lith's previous tampering felt like someone messing with the needle, now it was like venom had been injected into it.

"What the f\*ck are you?" Gadorf yelled, writhing in pain.

His words made no sense to the survivors. Their knowledge of magic was so limited they thought Lith's performance was thanks to his training and equipment. They had no way to understand the number of layers the fight was taking place on, nor the amount of energies which had been expended with every strike.

Gadorf himself only understood that Lith was capable of using true magic, but Life Vision and Invigoration were beyond his comprehension. At that moment Lith was using his breathing technique not to heal his wounds, but to keep a steady flow of darkness magic through the blade, shaking the array to its foundations.

The wyvern roared, realizing his chances to breakthrough to the next level were nigh zero. Best case scenario the array was damaged, worst case scenario it was poisoned.

Gritting his teeth Gadorf conjured his strongest attack, the tier five light spell Purge. His eyes were fixated on Lith while the whole room was filled with streams of light of different colors, resembling an aurora borealis.

Then, everything went black. Agony blinded his mind while a small icicle physically blinded him.

"Forgot about me?" Captain Yerna's voice sounded from his right side. Between the pain from the array and his attention focused on his opponent, Gadorf had really forgotten about the insignificant ants.

Yerna had managed to circle around him, waiting for the moment to strike. Her spell was too weak to change the course of the fight unless it hit a critical spot. Compared to the scales, the wyvern's eyes were soft.

With his concentration lost, Purge was dispelled. Another ice dart was aimed at the remaining left eye. Gadorf only needed to slightly tilt his head to make it harmlessly strike the scales instead. The wyvern was enraged once more, on the brink of losing its mind again.

The wyvern roared, Blinking behind the officer that had just shot from his wand, decapitating him in a single bite. He disappeared again, materializing in front of Sargent Khran, his mouth already opened.



Gadorf hated wasting so much energy, but without the tail and an eye, moving normally would mean becoming a sitting duck. Knowing what was about to happen, Khran inwardly cursed while raising his arms over his head.

His last act wasn't a futile attempt of protecting his life. Khran was aware he wouldn't see ever again his wife or children. Gadorf's fangs effortlessly bit off his upper torso, swallowing it in one gulp.

What the wyvern didn't know was that inside the Sargent's hands there were the broken extremities of his wand. The damaged alchemical tool went haywire, the wild energies it sealed quickly reached the magical stone, releasing all of its power in a small conflagration.

Lith ignored the screams around him, focusing only on two things. Following the wyvern movements with Life Vision and corrupting the array as fast as he could. The energies seeping into the black core were corroding it instead of nurturing it.

Once the black core filtering them was destroyed, the life forces contained into the array would directly reach the wyvern's true core, destroying it.

The explosion caught both Lith and the wyvern by surprise. Gadorf's innards were strong enough to withstand the blow, but not without taking damage. The wyvern coughed smoke and blood, trying to breathe.

It was the first real opening since the fight had started, yet Lith stood still.

'Without dimensional magic, to get there I'd have to fly. Rather than making myself an easy target, it's better to keep weakening him. If he is able to cut off his pain receptors like I'm doing, he could ignore his wounds and crush me the second I'm within his reach.'

Like they were sharing a mind link, Gadorf used darkness magic to stop feeling pain. He Blinked right above Lith, to squash him with his weight. The talons on his feet were longer than twenty centimeters (8 inches) and harder than steel.

The wyvern slashed downwards with his legs, their longer reach prevented Lith from raising his sword and impale him. He had no time to adjust his position, standing there meant having his arms torn or worse.

Lith rolled away, but the talons still managed to open deep wounds on his back, from the clavicle to under his rib cage. Blood spurted all over the wyvern's body, filling him with renewed confidence.

Gadorf pushed forward to not lose the advantage, following the prey closely. Lith couldn't expose his back anymore, so he turned around, slashing randomly with the Gatekeeper to keep the monster at bay.

Lith's swordsmanship was already bad to start with. Now that his arms were weakened by the wounds, Gadorf had an easy time grabbing it in mid air and ripping it from Lith's hands in one fluid movement.

Contrary to his expectations, the brief contact welcomed him into a world of hurt. The sword had been infused with light magic, granting it healing properties. The spell Lith had imbued it with wasn't meant to treat any injury, only to reconnect the severed pain receptors.

Gadorf lost his grip, throwing the sword as far as he could. His throat was back to burning so bad that every breath was agony. Every time the ice shard piercing his eye moved, the pain would make his vision go blank.

Suddenly Gadorf couldn't breathe nor see. He fell on his knees trying to control the spasms and shut down the receptors again. The wyvern regained his sight just in time to see Red completing his spell, turning the world around them into shards of light.

#### Chapter 288 Call Part 1

After Captain Yerna's wake up call, Red was forced to bet everything on a desperate gamble. The members of the unit were dying like flies and despite his outstanding equipment, there was only so much White could do against a wyvern.

The Captain had asked him to do his thing, but there was actually a single option in his arsenal. Countering an unknown array was almost impossible, the only thing he could do was to identify its key points and use them to bring it down.

Destroying an array was always risky, even more if you were blocked inside it. It meant twisting the energies coursing through the formation into chaos, turning the mana flow against itself until its structure collapsed.

The stronger the array, the greater the risk for the consequences to be literally explosive. The only perk of the Disarray spell was to be relatively quick compared to most Warden incantations.

'If it works I may die, but if it doesn't I'll die for sure. Here goes everything!' Red thought.

The only silver lining was that, based on his previous analysis, the array seemed to be based on light magic, hence probably harmless.

Probably.

The word echoed in his mind while the Life Draining array shattered, freeing the prisoners from their cage. The life force released formed wisps of light, the intensity of which made it almost impossible to see.

The surviving member of the unit jumped off the nearest window without hesitation, quickly followed by Red. While their uniforms could easily protect them from the fall, the same could not be said against an angry wyvern.

Their escape almost had a tragic ending, since their colleagues surrounding the house had been spooked by the explosion of lights. Not receiving any response from the Captain for several minutes, they had requested for back up and were expecting the worse.

The sudden explosion made them trigger happy. A few of them shot at their falling comrades before seeing the black of their uniforms.

Meanwhile, Gadorf was panicking. The array had been dispelled before the link between the magic formation and his mana core could be severed. What was meant to be his instrument toward godhood was now a gaping hole in his cores.

He had the means and the knowledge to mend the damage, the Master had foreseen for such an eventuality to happen. The black core served both as a filter for the foreign energies and as a plug.

The problem was the contingency plan had been devised for the case something went wrong during the casting of the array or the assimilation process, not to be used in dire circumstances.

Gadorf was heavily injured, most of his mana spent. Not to mention he had no doubt that the monstrous kid wouldn't let him cast a new array and perform several healing spells while standing idle.

"Come on, White. Let's go!" Captain Yerna was still there. White was just an unknown temporary member of her unit, but she had seen too many good people die in a single day to leave someone, especially a kid, behind.

Lith's body was battered, covered with so many first degree burns his skin was nigh red rather than pink. Life fusion had partially healed the haemorrhage on his back, but it was still bleeding.

Now he could Blink again, the problem was he had enough strength just for one last trick and movement spells inflicted no damage.

'Leave no loose ends.' His mind kept looping. The wyvern knew.

The wyvern had to die.

Invigoration was off the table. The moment he focused on the breathing technique, Gadorf could still Blink. Even if Lith knew exactly where he would appear, the wyvern had proved to be too fast even for his enhanced reflexes.

That when his body had yet to become a bloody mess.

Hearing Yerna's voice triggered Gadorf. His blind eye was a constant reminder of what underestimating her could cause. Following his mana perception, the wyvern cast a stream of lightning with his left hand while charging up a breath to intercept Lith the moment he came to the rescue.

Seeing the air crackle, Yerna cursed at the monster before taking cover behind an altar, still refusing to leave. Even without the array, the marble was unaffected by the spell. [freewebnovel.com](http://freewebnovel.com)

Contrary to the wyvern's expectations, Lith didn't move an inch. His eyes kept staring at his opponent while his hands weaved and amplified a spell he was too weak to cast with his mind alone.

"Damn you!" Gadorf cursed again. The woman clearly had no value as a hostage. The realization shattered his hopes to use her to stall for time and save his cores.

His time was running out, he could hear the escaped officer yelling about the need of sending reinforcements. Gadorf was left with one choice. The energy from the Life Draining array was still lingering in the room and there was still more than enough to overload his core.

Remembering the Master's words, rather than death Gadorf preferred to join the ranks of his Abominations. That was the black core's last trump card.

Just like Kalla's blood core made it easier for her turning into an undead, the artificial black core was supposed to greatly increase the wyvern's chances of successfully turning into an Abomination.

Gadorf used the last of his magical strength to collect all the energies and forcefully inject them into his body. Suddenly he was full of vigor, the missing tail and the pierced eye didn't bother him more than a scratch would.

His rage and pride were replaced by a quiet hunger while his physical body started to crack under the massive pressure coming from inside. For the first time in his life, Gadorf felt at peace with the world.

His path was now clear in front of him, neither Lith or his father meant anything. The only sour note was that until he learned how to control his new body, magic would be out of his reach.

"I'll need a lot of life force to complete the transformation. It's a good thing Xenatos is such a populous city." Gadorf's tone was relaxed, but he was actually focused. With his new senses, he could perceive that Lith's spell was a darkness one.

"Since the two of you pushed me this far, it's only fair for you to become the foundations of my new life." The wyvern smiled softly while his flesh crumbled.

Such a spell was useless against him now that he was back at his prime. Darkness magic was the bane of undead and Abominations alike, but even the most powerful sword was useless if it was unable to hit its target.

Gadorf bolted toward Lith, lured by the light of his cyan core like a thirsty man by a gushing fountain. He moved in a zig-zag pattern, making impossible to predict his trajectory.

The wyvern was so fast that he had barely the time to notice that the young mage was uncaring for the evasive maneuver. Lith just focused all of his strength on his right hand.

His right bare hand.

'Didn't he wear a magic gauntlet? Where has it...' Even if he had realized it earlier, it would have been useless. Back when he had ripped the Gatekeeper from Lith's hand, Solus had followed suit, suppressing her energies behind the sword's waiting for an opening.

## Chapter 289 Call Part 2

While the wyvern wasted his movements, the sword flew in a straight line held and empowered by Solus, whose senses allowed her to pinpoint her target with surgical precision.

Infused with air magic, the Gatekeeper struck a split second after leaving the ground where it lied in ambush. The blade went through and through, adding its own momentum to the wyvern's to drag him to his demise.

Lith unleashed the darkness spell while Solus acted like a lightning rod, guiding it to destination. Their lives were linked and so were their energies. Manipulating Lith's spells, even from a distance, came natural to Solus like thinking.

"There's two of you?" There was no rage in Gadorf's last whisper, only surprise.

His cores were already weakened from the continuous poisoning Lith had inflicted them and the stress the metamorphosis caused. The first wave of darkness was enough to wipe them both away, turning the wyvern into a bad memory.

The sword disappeared into the glove and the glove shapeshifted back into a ring before returning to Lith's finger. When Yerna came out of her hiding spot, it was already over. Everything had happened in just a few seconds after the lightning struck.

"A little help here." Lith was sitting on the ground in a small pool of his own blood.

The Captain had no idea what had happened, yet it didn't stop her from applying first aid at the best of her capabilities. The wounds were too extensive, they required tier four healing magic. Stopping the bleed was within her reach instead.

"The monster?" She looked around nervously, expecting it to jump out from the shadows.

"Dead. That lightning was his swan's song." Lith lied, pointing his finger to the few scales still in the process of turning into light.

"Seems his life and the array were connected. Red saved our lives."

"Saved our lives my a\*s!" The Captain cursed. She knew it was unbecoming of an official and didn't care one bit at the moment.

"Even if what you say is true, it means that if instead of chickening out he had acted earlier, half of my team would still be alive. Khran would still be alive!" Yerna had yet to come to terms with the massacre of her unit.

"You are crazy, instead. Tampering right off the bat with an unknown array and holding your ground like a madman." She wanted to scold him, but found herself unable to.

"The good kind of crazy. Red or not, I'm going to write in my report that if it wasn't for you, we would be lying on those altars, waiting for that crazed monster to turn us into dried meat. That and the fact we've been set up."

"Set up?" Lith raised his eyebrow in interest.

"Yes, even if I have no proof, I'm certain of it. Too much of our intel was wrong. The support was supposed to be on stand by, yet never arrived. Too many things do not add up. It's likely to be all my fault. I stepped on too many entitled toes during the last years.

"I'm ready to bet my next two months' pay that everything will be covered up. Some minor bureaucrat will be fired, all thoughts and prayers to the victims, but in the end, nobody will be held accountable.

"Those rich b\*stards always get away with everything." Rage and sorrow cracked her voice.

"Gods, so many people have died today. Good people. What I'm going to say to their families?"

Lith didn't know and didn't care.

"I'm not much for justice..." He took out his communication amulet.

"but revenge, is something I respect. It's time to see if my pin is worth its troubles." Lith called what he thought being his most powerful ally. He had no idea if the real target was him or the Captain. Either way, Yerna's reasoning was sound.

Someone had to pay.

The royal constable Jirni Ernas was surprised seeing Lith's identification rune, he never called her before.

"This better be imp... What happened to you?" Lith looked like a burning building had just collapsed on his head, yet Jirni knew he could shrug off such a trivial event without a scratch.

"Murder attempt. I've been set up during academy duty." Lith used the same tone anyone would use to talk about the weather.

Jirni liked him more every time they spoke.

'Calm and collected, like a professional.'

"Tell me everything."

"One moment." Lith gave the amulet to the captain, who didn't know how to react.

"Ma'am, your son is safe and sound. I can't tell you more and neither should he." Yerna threw a mean look at Lith.

"Today's events are likely to be classified, I'm really sorry."

Jirni found the situation hilarious, yet she just smiled warmly. Unlike Lith's standard issue communication amulet, her own was capable of forwarding and registering conversations, among many things.

She shared the call with Linjos and the Queen, before making the proper introductions.

"Don't worry, Captain Yerna." Her amulet's facial recognition program had already uploaded the Captain's personal file along with all the relevant information about her career.

"I'm not his mother. I'm the royal constable Jirni Ernas. Give me a detailed report of what happened. Start from the beginning.'

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"A wyvern?" Linjos was shocked, the Queen merely amused.

"What are your orders, your Majesty?" Jirni asked.

"Go to the precinct, interrogate everyone thoroughly. Find who is behind this attack and why it happened." Queen Sylpha was wondering how valuable could it be a mage who faced a Valor first and an Evolved monster later and lived to tell the tale.

"It won't take long." Jirni was on her way since the Captain had finished her report.

"Once I find them?" It wasn't a matter of 'if' in her mind, only of 'when'.

"Search their homes, interrogate them very thoroughly and once you are finished with them, kill them all." The only answer that came to Queen's mind was 'priceless.'

"Something slow and flashy. I want to send the message that the Crown is not to be trifled with. Just to be sure to hit where it really hurts, strip their families of all their wealth. Half for the Crown, the other half to split between the academies involved. Make sure the families of the victims get properly compensated."

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'Well, not bad for just an hour of work.' Lith thought once he was back at the White Griffon academy. There was still one hour and something before the beginning of the next lesson.

Arriving at Xenatos, listening to the debrief, and scouting the place had taken them half an hour. The assault at the building lasted less than ten minutes, the rest of the time had been lost receiving first aid.

'I could have healed everything by myself, but since normal people need hours to regenerate mana or life force, it's better not to show off.'

'The plan worked like a charm.' Solus thought merrily. 'My new powers grant me much more versatility. I'm still a yellow core, but I can pull my weight now.'

It was her first time killing someone, yet she couldn't care less.

## Chapter 290 Scanner Part 1

The Skinwalker armor had more holes than swiss cheese, but it was perfectly functional. The problem was repairing it required time or mana. Alas, Lith had a shortage of both.

Luckily, the Warp Gate (\*) brought him straight from Xenatos to Linjos's office, where Manohar, Vastor, and Marth were waiting for him.

Marth was there to heal his wounds while Vastor replenished his life force. Manohar was attending out of curiosity. He seemed to find the story of the wyvern and his mysterious array quite fascinating.

Lith reported to them the events, replying to all their questions about the nature of the Life Draining spell being careful to not blow his cover.

"Fascinating!" Manohar listened to every detail like they were sweet words from his beloved one.

"Wyverns are also known as pseudo dragons or lesser dragons. Never use those terms in front of them. They consider it a racial slur, just like the word 'lizard'."

"Bah!" Vastor scoffed at Manohar's childish enthusiasm. "I have yet to meet a single dragon and even if they exist, they would still be lizards. A wyvern is even worse, it's just a lizzie."

"A what?" Lith asked.

"It means a lizard with an inferiority complex." Marth explained.

"It's how we members of the Queen's corps refer to wyverns when they are not within earshot."

"Wait, you are members of the Queen's corps?" Lith was flabbergasted. Vastor looked more like a chef than a fighter. Marth closely resembled one of his high school teachers. As for Manohar, he was Manohar.

It was an inhuman task just to imagine someone willing to fight beside him without being given the opportunity to strangle him on a regular basis.

"We are. Don't underestimate me because of my well-fed exterior." Vastor patted his large belly to emphasize the point.

"Every element is deadly. It all depends on the user. Also, there is no one mad enough to walk into a fight without a true healer. After you experience enough battles, even if you start as a total rookie, you are bound to pick up a few tricks along the way."

"Indeed. Until wars and illnesses exist, healers are like breathing. Something annoying that you can't live without." Manohar nodded in agreement with Vastor.

"Back to the lizzie's topic, I wonder what the array did for him. Beasts use a kind of magic completely different from ours. Maybe we could have learned something by comparing a human and a beast array."

"Unlikely." Vastor scoffed again while checking Lith's vitals.

"Surely it was something idiotic. It cost him his life."

"Today I find myself agreeing with you often, my mildly esteemed colleague." Manohar nodded again.

Vastor took the unintended insult gracefully, barely dilating his nostrils in annoyance.

"How do you feel?" Marth had just finished regrowing his hair.

"Tired." Lith replied.

"You don't say, Lith." Vastor gave him a hospital gown to wear over his tattered clothes.

"The first lesson of Body Sculpting will be a simple one, but you still need mana. Let's go to the hospital and find you a bed. You can rest until your companions get back from their chores."

A Warp Steps brought them to destination.

"I'm really proud of you. It's amazing how much you have grown as a mage in a single year." Vastor said while Lith was tucking himself inside one of the beds in the VIP wing.

"Yet I feel forced giving you an unsolicited piece of advice. Being under the spotlight feels good, I know it very well. Sometimes it's better to keep a low profile, though. Otherwise the wrong kind of people will take interest in you."

"At that point, being a healer will become a hobby, a cover story at best. Small or big, there is no country that isn't constantly looking out for a Highmaster." Vastor sighed deeply.

His eyes went out of focus, Lith's enhanced instinct could sense that the Professor was being overwhelmed by bad memories.

"That's how the Griffon Kingdom calls them." Vastor mistook Lith's curiosity about his past for confusion about the unknown term.

"The Gorgon Empire prefers the term Ravager while the Blood Desert calls them Starkiller. No matter the name, they are all the same. Mass murderers with a badge."

"I thought War Mages and Wardens are the real backbones of an army."

"They are." Vastor nodded. "Highmasters rarely take part in a war. It's too risky. They either start or end it."

A long silence befell between the two men, while Lith mulled over the Professor's words.

"This time you had no choice, but the next time you attend a party, do not show off that much. Otherwise when you get to my age, you'll have a lot of regrets." Vastor closed the curtains around the bed, giving Lith shade and privacy.



'He's a man full of surprises.' Solus said.

'Indeed. The real question is: is he worried about my future or rather that someone recruits me before he does? There is no such thing as a free meal.'

'Your paranoia it's disheartening.' Solus pouted. 'Can't you just accept someone's kindness at face value for once?'

'My paranoia is one of the reasons I'm still alive.' After all that had happened that day, Solus had no argument to refute his logic.

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When the first gong woke Lith up, most of the damage sustained by the Skinwalker armor was repaired. It took him a bit of mana for the finishing touch while using Invigoration to recover his strength.

His body was in perfect condition, but his mind was still sluggish.

'The Skinwalker armor's self repair speed is much greater than the uniform's, yet it's still not enough. I better recover at least half of my mana. No matter how simple the lesson can be, I don't want to suffer a headache the whole time.'

Professor Vastor was waiting at the hospital's entrance for the students to arrive. He led them inside a small laboratory that had been rearranged to be used as a classroom. It contained sixteen desks, each one with a sealed fish tank on it.

After the students took their places, Vastor snapped his fingers. Inside the tanks now there was what appeared to be a cake shaped gelatine. They were all identical, each one was a translucent, colorless mass with no distinguishing feature.

Only when the 'cakes' started to move around, looking for a way out of the fish tanks, some of the youths realized what was in front of them.

"Is this a slime?" Yurial asked pointing at the thing that was slowly climbing the glass, until it was hanging upside down from the top of the tank.

"Yes. Ten points to Yurial for his expertise." Those that had recognized the creature too but hesitated to express their mind, silently cursed at Yurial.

"The first part of today's exercise is to learn the Scanner spell which detects the subject's life force, and then use it on the slime in front of you. These creatures have the simplest life force pattern known to man, so I expect it shouldn't take much for talented students like you to get accustomed to it."

"What's a slime?" Lith asked. He had never found a trace of them in any bestiary he had purchased, nor met any during his hunts.

"Excellent question." Vastor nodded while throwing a mean look at those that were sniggering behind Lith's back.