

Supreme M 291

Chapter 291 Scanner Part 2

"Even if it can be dangerous if let grow unchecked, a slime is not a monster. By definition, a monster is a sentient creature that naturally harbors hostility towards mankind.

"Despite having the intelligence and the means to communicate, monsters see us as we do with cattle. That's why magical beasts are not considered monsters, because they are capable of understanding human speech and cooperate with us.

"The same applies to Evolved monsters that are called as such simply because they don't resemble animals anymore and because we humans need to put tags on everything.

"The slime is not a monster because it lacks both sentience and hostility. It's a mindless natural scavenger that preys mostly on small animal carcasses. The more they eat the more they grow in size, until they split generating two individuals that are the exact copy of the original one.

"Some researchers even hypothesize that all existing slimes have spawned from a single one over the millennia, but I digress. What matters to you for this exercise, is that all the slimes on your desks are identical and we have more to spare.

"So even if you mess up, you can get a replacement."

A snap of Vastor's finger made a slime appear on the desk in front of him. He quickly cast Scanner, making the slime deflate while its fluids spread inside the tank.

Some students shuddered, imagining the same thing happening to a human patient in front of them.

"Is the Scanner spell harmful to the patient?" Lith asked.

"Ten points to Lith for his scientific curiosity and admirable work ethic."

Once again, each assigned point was a knife in the heart of those that despite having the same question didn't ask it, fearing it was a stupid one.

"No, it's not. However, some students get carried away in excitement and attempt to manipulate the life force with messy consequences."

At that point, Vastor taught them Scanner. Less than five minutes later everyone had mastered the spell and were using them to study their own test subject.

"Professor, my slime keeps moving around. Is there a way to hold it still?" Asked a boy.

"Sure, you just have to kill it." Vastor replied with a sneer.

"Do you expect a heart to stop beating or the blood to stop flowing to make your life easier? Consider the slime as an involuntary muscle."

Lith was amazed by the slime's composition. Despite being liquid looking, once seen through the Scanner spell it actually resembled a stack of gelatinous lego bricks. To move they would slide along each other, swapping their position like a treadmill.

Each brick emitted a red pulsing light that defined its contours, its individual vitality, providing a living map of the whole creature. Even if the bricks appeared to be capable of independent movement, after further examination Lith noticed a red pathway connecting all the nearby bricks.

He then used Invigoration to compare the two skills.

He hoped that just like clothes, the thin barrier between the slime and his hand wasn't enough to block his magical sense. Through Invigoration Lith could sense the creature's life force, its feeble mana flow, but no life force or any organ.

To Invigoration the slime appeared like a huge single-cell organism.

'Seems fake magic just beat us this time.' Lith was amazed and kind of frightened by the discovery that even Invigoration had limits.

'For now.' Solus eased his paranoia with her soothing voice.

'We can always master Scanner and evolve it into true magic. Also, who knows? Maybe it can teach us new ways of using Invigoration.'

Lith inwardly nodded, going back to use Scanner, but this time on himself to better comprehend what the spell was showing him. Unlike Invigoration, Scanner was unable to provide full-body imaging.

Everything appeared as a red blur until Lith focused his attention on his arm and then on his hand. Now he could see the muscles, the bones, the blood vessels as well as the nerves surrounding them.

Yet he visualized them as red lego bricks too. Some were smaller, others bigger, but all were connected by multiple glowing red strings the complexity of which made him dizzy. It was like studying a 3D railway map made with an erector set.

The intricacy of a single of Lith's fingers was way higher than that of the whole slime. Lith went back to examining the slime again, gaining a new understanding of how the creature worked.

Suddenly, Vastor clapped his hands, almost making him flinch in surprise.

"The first hour is over. Enough with the theory, it's time to put what you have learned to practice. I can tell you in advance it's a bad day for being a slime."

Griffon Kingdom, City of Xenatos, House of Duke Cailon

Eberst Cailon, twelfth Duke of Xenatos, was a big and burly man. Even though he had been born a noble, Eberst had voluntarily served in the army, quickly achieving the rank of Captain.

After the honorable discharge, he had never stopped training himself following a rigid schedule. With his 1.9 meters (6'3"), he was an imposing sight to behold. His pitch black hair and beard made him look authoritative, almost cruel.

Rumour said that he never cried during his adult life. Neither when his beloved parents died of old age or when his wife gave birth to his firstborn.

Yet now, while Lith was studying his slime, Duke Cailon was sobbing, shivering uncontrollably. There were no restraints preventing him from standing up from the chair of his own office and run for his life, yet he didn't dare to.

Not after his last attempts only resulted in a dislocated shoulder, three broken false ribs, and his index fingers more twisted than a pretzel.

Fear blocked him like the cruelest of chains. He couldn't understand how someone so small could also be so strong.

Lady Jirni Ernas was a petite woman, barely 1.52 m (5') high. She was wearing her dark blue military uniform that emphasized her blonde hair held up in a ponytail and her sapphire blue eyes. She looked like a doll.

If the doll was Chucky's blood relative, of course.

"You are really making things hard for me, Ebert." Her tone was sad, almost sympathetic.

"Everyone at the precinct, even the chief of police, was so kind to break in less than a few minutes of interrogation each. I already have everything I need to convict you of capital crimes."

Jirni pointed at the several folders she had thrown on the desk of his own office at the begin of their conversation. Each one contained hard proof of how large sums of money, after passing through the hands of several figureheads and being laundered by shell companies ended straight in his personal accounts.

Each folder was a different source of income. Human trafficking, embezzling of royal funds for the territory, bribery, and so much more. Some of those papers weren't even supposed to exist, but in such shady business, it was common practice for the involved parties to keep some records as "insurance", in case something went wrong.

Duke Cailon accomplices had sold him. Some in exchange for a reduced sentence, others just to make Jirni stop.

A burst of pain from his shoulder made him scream.

Chapter 292 Chisel Part 1

"Finally!" Jirni exclaimed. Ebert Cailon had managed to impress her. Hurting or threatening him had been useless until that moment. It was the first time he made a real sound.

"Aside from cracking their own nails, nobles are not supposed to have a notion of pain. It's what makes you so easy to interrogate. Now we have something to work on." She removed the ten centimeters (4 inches) enchanted needle imbued with her light magic.

The pain disappeared, leaving only a small trickle of blood.

"What was that?" Duke Cailon asked while gasping for air.

"A nerve bundle in your deltoid muscle."

"Do your worst, witch." He replied while gritting his teeth. "If I'm already dead, I have nothing to lose. You can make me scream, but I will not betray my comrades!"

"Comrades? This means they are your buddies from the army." She giggled.

Eberst bit his tongue in despair. Then, everything went off the rails.

"As for having nothing to lose, I beg to differ." She showed him her communication amulet while pressing a too familiar contact rune.

"That's my son's rune! How did you get it?" Duke Cailon went pale.

"Dad?" A childish voice came out of the amulet.

"Is that you? Is everything all right, daddy?"

Jirni pressed the rune a second time, ending the call.

"You can talk now, or I can make your son spectate to our next session. It's all up to you." She smiled softly, aware that her prey was mortally wounded

"You are a monster!" Ebert jumped from the chair trying to tackle her. He held his only arm high to protect his vitals, as the army had taught him.

Jirni executed a low kick in response. The steel toe of her boot hit the side of his left kneecap, shattering Ebert's balance and knee joint at once. Before he could fall on the ground, she headbutted Duke Cailon on the nose and back on the armchair.

Her right hand moved like a snake, striking at a nerve on the back of the neck with her index and middle finger. The pain hit like a shockwave, making Ebert forget for a second about his broken joint.

"Ebert, start telling me something I don't know. Otherwise I'll show you what a real monster is."

White Griffon Academy, in the same moment.

A second sealed fish tank appeared on each desk. At first glance there was no difference between them, nor between their inmates.

"The first slime is a 'healthy' one. The second one is your patient. We Professors have altered their life forces and created anomalies in their bodies. You'll use the first slime as a baseline to find what's wrong in the second one and understand how you are going to fix it." Vastor explained.

'It's the same method I used to cure mom.' Lith was amazed by how much tier five magic resembled true magic.

Several hands were raised at once. Vastor pointed at Friya, allowing her to talk.

"Professor, before you effortlessly killed a slime. Does this spell have any combat application?"

"No." Vastor shook his head. "I managed to do that because all slimes are identical. I don't even need to look at their life force anymore to know how to manipulate them. To use it against an opponent, I'd need them to be still long enough for me to understand their life force.

"During all that time, I could kill them hundreds of times by using more ordinary spells."

Now it was Quylla's turn to speak.

"Professor, are we really sure they are mindless creatures? This exercise seems cruel."

"Mindless, yes. I can assure you about that. They have no mind nor memory, just instincts. It has been proved by countless experiments. I won't lie to you, though. They are still living beings, so they feel pain. Remember this while you play with their lives."

Some students shuddered. They unconsciously took a step back from the tanks.

"No one forces you to be here. No one forces you to become a Healer." Vastor sighed.

"Tier five healing magic is extremely delicate. It can only be learned through a trial and error process. We start with slimes because they are easy to deal with, but also because they are the perfect starting point to steel yourself.

"They have no eyes, no mouth, no fur. Nothing that can make you empathize with them. Then we will move to small animals, bigger animals and lastly on humans. If you hesitate now, how will you be able to heal anyone?"

"Humans? We'll have patients?" Many students asked in unison.

"No. You'll have convicts, not patients. People whose actions are so terrible that even the death penalty has been deemed not to be punishment enough. People that no one cares about and would be better off dead, but still people."

Several of those present gulped a lump of saliva. They looked at each other, wondering what to do. Some even eyed the door, uncertain for the first time about their career.

"Would you prefer to practice on innocents? To kill anyone dumb enough to ask for your help until you learn how to properly perform Body Sculpting? If it can ease your conscience, those convicts would die anyway after several hours of torture.

"They volunteered for this. You are their only hope for a clean death. If you are so worried about hurting someone, you shouldn't have picked any specialization. A Healer is also a torturer.

"Battle and War Mage are fancy names for killers. Alchemists and Forgemasters are nothing more than weapon dealers. Now, for those still interested in becoming Healers, I'll explain the Chisel spell. The rest of you feel free to leave."

No one left the room, but it was clear from the mood that many had doubts.

The spell was complex and required a lot of focus. It generated a single blue tendril of mana that allowed the student to interact with the patient's life force with surgical precision.

The task was made even harder by the necessity of employing two spells at once: Scanner and Chisel. Vastor explained that a full fledged healer required at least triple casting. The ideal procedure required to use Scanner twice. One for the patient and the other for the healthy subject, usually the Healer themselves. Chisel was employed only on the patient.

A few slimes were colored, some had odd shapes, others had small tendrils. Lith's slime was one of the latter. After carefully studying both slimes, he came up with two possible solutions.

'From what I can see with Scanner, while normal bricks are all linked between themselves, those that make up the tendrils are disconnected from the main body, with the only exception of those at the base of the tendrils.

'So, I can either sever the life force connecting the bricks that serve as junction or make them be reabsorbed. I have no idea how to perform the second procedure, though.' Lith pondered about the problem, before following Occam's Razor.

The simplest explanation is usually the correct one.

The first method was similar to amputation, something that Vastor had harshly criticized during the first lesson. It was bound to be painful for the patient as well as wasteful. Hence Lith deduced it was also the wrong solution.

Chapter 293 Chisel Part 2

The second method, instead, required for Lith to create new strands of life force and use them to connect the isolated bricks inside the tendrils to the ones inside the body. Lith did like Vastor suggested, using triple casting to keep everything under control.

When the gong rang, the class was disheartened. Only a few slimes had died, but none of the students succeeded Sculpting the slime back to normal. Lith had only managed to make a single tendril a bit shorter after the whole hour.

Vastor didn't seem to mind, patting their backs and complimenting them.

"Excellent work, people. I'm amazed by how many of you successfully used triple casting. We'll continue next time."

"Continue?" Everyone was dumbfounded.

"Well, yeah." Vastor replied with a laugh. "To finish at your first attempt in just an hour you should be monsters. Before you go, a word of advice to those who killed their slime. Cutting meat it's a butcher's work, not a Healer's.

They may be mindless creatures, but if you do not anesthetize them, even slimes die out of shock from the excessive pain. Class dismissed."

Lith walked toward his companions, pondering about what he had learned.

'Now I get why Marth was so enthusiast about the diagnostic spell I shared. Scanner is able to sense life force in great detail, but it gives no information about the actual body. Also, it's overly convoluted. Even repairing a single bone by altering the life force is not an easy feat. It's much simpler to use normal light magic.' He thought.

'Not only that.' Solus chimed in. 'It's also very risky. Altering the life force means that the slightest mistake causes damage that can only be fixed by using Chisel again, which can lead to another mistake. The silver lining of this method is that on Mogar they can use it to fix genetic disorders.'

'Indeed. We must find a way to incorporate Scanner with Invigoration or at least with your life sense, otherwise...'

"Is it true?" Friya interrupted their conversation. Yurial and Quylla followed her closely.

"What is true?" Lith was still thinking about genetic disorders, but there was no such term in Mogar's tongue.

"That you fought a wyvern, you dummy!"

"I thought it was supposed to be a secret, but yes it's true." Lith nodded in slight surprise.

"It's a secret if you have no relatives in the army, the Mage Association, or in an important family." Friya scoffed at his naivety.

"That or if unlike most of us, you aren't working as a clerk for the Association." Quylla pointed out. It was the second available duty awarding the most points. It came with zero risks, aside from dying of boredom under a mountain of documents.

"What happened in Xenatos generated a mountain of paperwork. I doubt any student of any academy at this point doesn't know about it."

"Who cares about the paperwork!" Yurial wanted more juicy news.

"What does a wyvern look like? Was it strong? How the heck did you survive? The reports didn't say much. You must tell us everything!" Lith was happy and pissed off at the same time by seeing them so excited.

Happy because after Balkor's attack, the mood turned heavy. It took the whole winter break for things to slowly go back to normal. Pissed off because it was his life they were talking about like it was some kind of reality show.

"He was impressive." Enemy or not, Lith refused to speak about Gadorf as a thing instead of a person. He used the same respect he would have liked for himself or for Solus, if their true nature was ever exposed.

"A wyvern..."

"Thank the gods you are okay!" The moment they walked out the light magic department, Phloria hugged him tightly, lifting him a few centimeters from the ground.

"I'm going to kill you for making me hear about it from my mom instead than from you." Contrary to her words, the embrace was tender and her voice filled with warmth.

"I didn't want to bother you during your community service." He had prepared no lie, so Lith spoke the truth.

"How can you put your life and my community service on the same priority level?" Phloria was shocked.

"Did you at least call your parents?" She put him down.

"Why would I?" Her questions didn't make any sense to him.

"Are you telling me you almost got cooked, sliced, and yet you didn't feel the need to call anyone? To hear a friendly voice to share the joy of being alive? Seriously, what's wrong with you?" Now her voice and words were a match made in heaven.

Lith froze for a second. It was all true. Between the disregard for his own life he felt ever since he was on Earth and everything that had happened on Mogar, a near death experience felt just like a Monday to him.

The realization was disturbing.

"I never made a mystery of being kind of insane in the membrane." Lith tapped his temple with an index finger.

"So do you want me to list what's wrong with me in chronological, or alphabetical order?"

The group had a good laugh at Phloria's expenses. She was the only one to not find the joke funny. Not one bit.

She pinched her nose with her eyes closed, trying to calm down.

"Okay, now tell me everything about your day from the beginning. I need to know how bad it is."

While they walked toward the canteen, Lith shared with them the whole story.

House Ernas, at that moment.

Lady Ernas managed to get home just in time for lunch. Even if their duties kept them apart for most of the day, she and Orion always tried to consume their meals together. It was a way for them to relax and unload their daily burdens.

Jirni had still much to do in Xenatos. After Cailon surrendered, he had given her the names of all the players involved in that morning's events together with all the dirt he had on them.

In the underworld, there was no honor among noble criminals. The best way to get rid of a competitor had always been to collect incriminating evidence until there was enough for an anonymous tip.

At that point, if the constable assigned to the case was competent enough, it was only a matter of time before the Kingdom did the dirty work in their stead. What Duke Cailon had given her wasn't enough to indict any of them, but enough to start an investigation.

A confession to a Royal Constable didn't allow to bargain for a reduced sentence unless it was backed by proof. That was another reason why so many collected information about their competition. It was both a weapon and a shield for rainy days.

Now that she had completed a branch of the investigation, she had to open the new one from what she had. Like a domino, Jirni had to bring down the little pieces, until she had enough to make the big ones fall too.

There was only one rule in that game: follow the money.

While power plays could be concluded with an allusion or a handshake, moving huge sums always left a trail. Following such trails was Jirni Ernas's specialty. Aside from interrogation, of course.

She was surprised to discover that Orion had prepared the main dish. Cooking was a hobby he practiced when something was troubling him.

"Did something happen today to you too, dear?" Orion was a good cook. It was the timing of the events worrying her.

"As a matter of fact, yes. From today onwards, I'm relieved from all my duties as a member of the Knight's Guard."

Chapter 294 Bonding Part 1

"What? Why?" She couldn't believe her own ears.

"Do you know what happened today at Xenatos?"

Jirni nodded.

"Well, it seems that one of my swords was decisive in slaying a wyvern and now everyone wants one!"

"How is that bad news?" Jirni laughed, her fears were relieved.

"It's not bad news, it just doesn't make sense. The Gatekeeper is something I made to keep you and our little Flower happy. Since Lith is no swordsman and can't use spells with only one hand, its only ability is to channel and amplify first magic.

Phloria always says he is very good at it." What Orion didn't know, was that true and first magic worked through the same principles, making the Gatekeeper the perfect weapon for an Awakened one.

"Only ability? Do you mean you realized something that boosts the effects of the only kind of magic anyone can use and which can be cast silently, taking the opponent by surprise?"

"Yes. Even though when you put it that way, you make me feel quite dumb."

"Why didn't you make one for me too?" Jirni almost felt jealous.

"Because it's just a jack of all trades but master of none. I made you much better weapons!" Orion almost felt offended. Jirni's needles were among his masterpieces.

They amplified her light magic, allowing Jirni to stimulate the victim's pain receptors maximizing the effects of her interrogation techniques and healing most of the damage dealt at the same time. it was just one of their functions.

"Still, I could use a Gatekeeper." Jirni added. "I think you simply underestimate your talents dear. Why the suspension, though?"

"That's the odd thing. I'm assigned at Forgemastering duty until I deliver nine blades like that to the Crown."

White Griffon Academy

Lith was really happy to have managed to tell most of the story on the way to the canteen, otherwise lunch would have taken forever. After sustaining so many wounds and consuming so much mana, he ate the equivalent of a whole turkey by himself.

By sharing with him part of his life force earlier, Vastor had replenished Lith's stamina, not his nutrients reserve. Magic couldn't create life, only enhance or alter it.

"Just how badly did the wyvern hurt you?" Phloria was worried. The few times she had seen him eat like two Quylla was when he had been pushed an inch from death.

Lith shrugged. He had nothing to add to his report.

"Okay, that's it. Luckily, there is still quite some time before the next lesson." She stood up dragging him by the arm.

"Sorry, guys. Lith needs to rest and I'm going to make sure he doesn't do something stupid like training or studying."

They got out of the canteen so fast that Lith had just the time to say:

"See you later!"

Quylla and Friya giggled like crazy at the scene.

"I swear, sometimes they look identical to mom and dad." Quylla was truly happy for her sister. Over time, she had outgrown her puppy love for Lith. Her new family had quenched Quylla's desperate desire for affection, allowing her to understand better her own feelings.

"If only their heights could be swapped it would be a perfect match." Friya added, making them laugh even harder.

"Is it me or Phloria got prettier?" Yurial felt uneasy asking such a question.

"Did you notice too?" Friya nodded. "After Balkor's attack, she's lost part of her edginess. Mom says it's because when a woman falls in love, she becomes more dazzling."

"The real question is: why do you care? Do you have a crush on her?" Quylla was a bit annoyed. After a whole year using Vastor's tonic and proper feeding, she was the one that had improved the most among the three girls.

She not only had become taller, but also her body had developed enough to make her look like a young girl instead of a child. Yet no one seemed to have noticed, even after the winter break.

"No, but I'm afraid I may be developing it." He sighed.

"What?" Friya was flabbergasted by his answer, but most of all by his honesty.

"I thought she wasn't even your type."

"She doesn't even get close. It's just that I'm desperate at the idea that I never had anyone that cared so much for me and probably I never will."

Lith was forced to spend the time before the Forgemastering lesson sleeping. Phloria had managed to knock him out with a clever trick. As soon as they started cuddling, she told him about her day and all the archiving protocols she had learned about.

Lith's mind didn't last five minutes.

Despite Invigoration, he still felt fuzzy.

'Damn, she was right. I really needed to...'

The moment he stepped into the class, Lith was assaulted by enough hostility to give him the creeps. There were less than twenty people, no one seemed to pay him any attention. Yet his instincts were warning him about an impending danger.

'There is no hidden threat.' Solus kept scanning their surroundings to no avail.

'I can get some of these spoiled brats are angry at me, but this much? It's not a single individual, more like a collective will. A shared emotion.' Lith thought.

"Why are you blocking the door?" Lith turned around, discovering that Professor Wanemyre was right behind him. He was so tense to not even notice her arrival.

"Sorry." He walked to the nearest desk. The hostility had disappeared, but he still felt nervous.

"Welcome back, future Forgemasters." Wanemyre was back in her prime. The effects of the toxin had completely disappeared.

"Today I'll explain to you the true value of magic crystals and how to employ them in your creations." Lith carefully observed her and all of those present. No one seemed to be aware of what had just happened.

"What you are going to learn today, requires you to have mastered everything we practiced during the fourth year. We are going to expand and revise your foundations of Forgemastering. From here, the sky and your talent are the only limits.

"First of all, why are magic crystals so important for us? Because as I previously explained, unanimated matter resists to our attempts to imbue it with external magical power.

"That's why without a crystal you can't put more than one spell per item, why the time window for the enchantments is so short. Forgemastering requires the strength and the skill to permanently force your magic onto something.

"Let's make an example with made up numbers. An iron sword has an innate magic of ten, while a tier three spell requires one hundred. This means that creating an iron sword capable of shooting lightning requires infusing it with a magical force ten times its natural capacity.

"It makes the process difficult and limited. Difficult because the sword will attempt to reject nine tenths of the spell, limited because if I try to infuse a magical force above the tenfold threshold the item will break."

'I wish I knew all this earlier.' Lith inwardly sighed. He remembered how many materials he wasted before discovering that silver was the best suited element for hosting great magical forces without the support of a crystal.

Chapter 295 Bonding Part 2

"Magic crystals allow us to overcome this issue. Forgemasters and Alchemists both consider a crystal as a beating magical heart in search of a body. The more powerful the gemstone, the greater the number and quality of enchantments it can sustain.

"That is also the reason why Alchemical tools mostly use up to yellow gemstones, because it would be a waste otherwise. Alchemical tools are meant to be cheap and mass produced.

"Using green crystals or above for a single spell would defy everything Alchemy stands for. The cost of the gemstone alone would be enough to buy a better Forgemastered item.

"Embedding a crystal is a delicate and irreversible process in Forgemastering. Once the heart has a body, they become one. If the iron sword of my previous example were embedded with a green crystal, its innate magic would raise to one thousand.

This means that we can now infuse into it a magical force up to ten thousand. It makes it possible to imbue the sword with multiple spells."

"How does a crystal fix the problem of the limited time window for enchanting an item?" Asked a chestnut haired boy.

"Once one or more crystals are embedded, the Forgemaster no longer channels their magic directly through the object, but through the gemstones instead. They are also amazing magical conductors that widen the time window from a few seconds up to a few days, depending on their strength.

"Otherwise it would be impossible for a single Forgemaster to have enough mana to imbue so many spells at once. Another reason for using mana crystals is because they are a power source.

"If you remember, the elemental weapons you crafted during the past third trimester, can be only used two, three times a day tops. Gemstones allow using multiple spells in a short time frame with no mana expenditure from the user.

"Good magical items, like your communication amulets, require one blue gemstone minimum. Blue and violet gemstones are expensive, but they absorb mana very quickly from the environment, making it possible to keep an enchanted item active almost indefinitely.

"Green and cyan crystals are employed only for making toys or ceremonial weapons. Any more questions before we move to a practical demonstration?"

Lith raised his hand while Solus left his finger to take a closer look at the students. Her mana sense perceived a familiar sensation, but it was too faint to recognize it from a distance.

"Does it mean that crystal embedded Forgemastered items can last forever?" Lith's question was linked to Solus's nature.

'What Wanemyre explained doesn't make sense. Thanks to true magic I know that without the imprinting from the mage, the mana pathways fade away with time and the pseudo core dissipates. If crystals are also power sources, why Solus almost died?' He thought.

"I would have talked about this before we studied constructs, like golems or gargoyles. No harm in moving a little ahead of time, though. The answer is no, they don't. Most stories about heroes finding legendary equipment laying on the floor are just stories.

"Without a user, an artifact will degrade over time, magical gemstone or not. It happens because all items have passive properties that are always kept active, like weight reduction, self repair, or enhanced resistance.

"Usually, the more powerful the artifact, the more passive abilities it has. It means that magical gemstones alone cannot keep up with the mana expenditure. That's why golems require arrays that serve as recharge pods.

"Unlike artifacts, arrays have a single function making them easier to preserve. Ancient noble households are protected by several arrays, but each one has its own magical stones and requires maintenance. Anything else?"

Lith shook his head.

'The tower from her memories was so big and powerful that probably it would have required a whole crystal mine to keep it active. Especially since Solus cannot go in stand by mode. It would mean her death.'

By the end of Wanemyre explanation, Solus had returned.

"Yes." Asked a black haired girl. "Why not just enable passive abilities to be turned off whenever the object is not imprinted?"

"Because most of those spells are needed to preserve the magical item. Even if you do not notice it, imbuing an object with a great magical force causes a constant erosion. If an artifact sustains too much damage, it loses all its magical properties.

"The only way to preserve it from the passage of time is either to pass it to a new owner or use an array. Both solutions require for the original user to die in a manner convenient enough to allow for the artifact to be preserved. Useless to say, it doesn't happen often."

Then, Professor Wanemyre proceeded to teach them the Bonding spell before giving a practical demonstration. She placed an amulet and a green gemstone inside a magic circle entirely made of runes of power. They were so tightly packed to almost resemble a straight line.

"I hope you learned to use water magic well, or drawing this kind of circles will take you days." Wanemyre grinned seeing many quivering at her words.

She didn't need to charge the magic circle with mana. Wanemyre directly chanted instead.

The amulet and the gemstone started to float in mid air, orbiting around each other like twin stars while the runes turned into threads of blue light. The threads pierced both items, passing through them over and over again.

After each passage, the amulet and the crystal neared each other until they came into contact. Then, Wanemyre chanted a different spell. The threads entered inside the gemstone, painting it blue before spreading to the whole surface of the amulet.

Lith could see the lines of power even without Life Vision, finally understanding why crafters considered magic crystals like living hearts. The threads had formed the equivalent of a mana circulatory system, allowing the gemstone to fill the amulet/body with its power.

The lines turned from blue to green before disappearing, while the amulet returned on the flat surface of the black Forgemastering table.

'It's just as she said.' Solus was amazed. 'I can see with my mana sense that the amulet has now a powerful magical aura. In a way, it reminds me of ourselves.'

"Now the amulet is ready to be enchanted. The use of the Bonding spell does not imply the need to imbue spells right off the bat. Bonding and Forgemastering can be considered two separate processes.

"Now it's your turn to try. This is tier five magic, so remember that the spell requires from you to generate as many threads you can control. The greater the number, the better the Bonding. A Forgemaster like me can generate one thread per each rune.

"In your case, since it's your first attempt, one out of four runes can be considered a passing grade, but only if the Bonding is successful. All the threads must always go through both targets. If even one misses, the spell will fail. Who wants to go first?"

Chapter 296 Growing Hostility Part 1

Lith stood up, eager to put his talent as Forgemaster to the test. The pattern of the spell was simple, but the execution was complex. It allowed the mage to choose if to power up the runes one by one like Wanemyre just did, or to group them up as she suggested.

Making a single strand out of four runes meant a lesser strain on the mage during the first chant, since it required an average level of multi casting, but it made things more complicated during the second spell.

It would generate a thread four times thicker and likely four times harder to control. The second spell was just a crutch for the mage's willpower, making it easier to control the conjured energies.

After learning the spells, Lith went all out. His multi casting ability allowed him to control ten spells at once, one for each finger. He created one thread out of two runes, twice the number Wanemyre required.

Lith could have conjured more, but it would have meant risking to fail. Since it wasn't a life or death situation, there was no need to bite more than he was certain to be able to chew.

When Wanemyre performed the spell, the resulting energy strands were as thick as hairs and moved in unison, like they shared a hive mind. Lith's performance turned out much different.

Each strand was as thick as a finger and moved like a snake slithering for its life while having a seizure.

'Damn! I thought that my experience with true magic would make things easier. It's the first time I meet such wild energies. Let's hope the second spell helps.'

Lith started the next chant. He had a hard time just to prevent the blue threads from crashing against the walls of the classroom, marking the failure of his attempt.

"This is a classic rookie mistake." Wanemyre explained to the rest of the students.

"Always remember to commence the second spell as soon as you finish the first, otherwise the Bonding spell goes rampant." Contrary to the expectations of most, she didn't deduct any points from Lith.

The second chant was a revelation for him. He could feel small tendrils of pure mana emanating from his body. They latched themselves on the wild energy threads, taming them like trained dogs on a leash.

'I never thought it was possible to use spirit magic to control remotely another spell!' Lith was overjoyed. 'I have to master this Leash spell as soon as I can. It has countless applications!'

From that point onwards, the rest was easy. Lith successfully completed the Bonding spell, but the difference between his product and Wanemyre's was like heaven and earth.

Lith's amulet had a much weaker magical aura, not even half as strong as the one the Professor made. The mana vessels he created were fewer, smaller, and formed a less complex pattern compared to hers.

'Seems the results of the Bonding spell aren't linearly proportional to the number of threads generated, as much as exponentially.' He thought.

"Outstanding job!" Wanemyre clapped her hands with a big smile on her face.

"Thirty points for handling so many threads at the first attempt, thirty for succeeding at the first try, and another forty for achieving all the above despite my mistake."

"Your mistake?" Lith raised an eyebrow in confusion, while the rest of the class heard nothing after realizing the total sum was one hundred points.

"Yes." She nodded.

"I forgot to point out the importance of the timing for a successful Bonding. Unlike everything you have attempted before, the two spells are interlinked. My blunder affected negatively your odds of success. Hence the forty points.

"Now let's see how those that were so smug while you were about to fail perform. I expect great things from them." She threw a cold look to a few students that went immediately pale.

Lith turned around to go back at his desk, when suddenly the hostility returned. The threat was as close as pressing, forcing him to perform a quick 180° turn by pivoting on his front leg.

Wanemyre looked at his arms raised in a guard position with a puzzled look. The feeling of danger coming from behind had disappeared.

"Is it something wrong?" She tilted her head in confusion.

Lith shook briefly his head before returning to his station.

'Okay, something is f*cking wrong here. First the brats, now the Professor. Solus?'

'I was going to wait until the end of the lesson to tell you, but at this point we cannot take any more risks.' Lith could feel Solus using all of her senses to keep the whole classroom under surveillance.

'Do you remember I told you there was something familiar? Well, I was right. When I went checking your colleagues, I noticed that at least five of them wear trinkets bearing the same pseudo core of those we found in the boxes. I have no idea what they do, but this can't be a coincidence.

'Until we figure it out, I want you to wear your paranoia cap and never take it off.'

Lith inwardly cursed. He hated being forced on the defense, but there was nothing he could do. Lith had no reason to report them, nor he could explain in any way the significance of the trinkets they wore.

'Even worse, we recognize them only because we can see their pseudo cores. I have no plausible way to justify how I know that completely different items all do the same thing. Do you think Wanemyre is involved in this too?'

'I can't be sure.' Solus replied. 'I didn't take a close look at that betrothal gift of hers back then, but I remember its vibe. It's definitely possible.'

Those words were enough to make Lith shiver. It was only the second day he had returned at the academy, yet another storm was already brewing at the horizon.

Meanwhile, in the Headmaster's office, Linjos was even more worried than Lith. Despite taking all the necessary precautions, he could feel the control of the academy slipping through his fingers.

He had spent the winter break personally crafting the new Ballots, giving them to students and Professors alike to make it possible for them to record any suspicious activity they may encounter, but to no avail.

An academy's power core was a priceless treasure for the Griffon Kingdom. To avoid enemies or spies from tampering it, in times of crisis only the Headmaster could access it. It was the reason why one of the qualifications for becoming a Headmaster was to also be a Forgemaster.

"Today's attempt on Lith's life it's undeniable proof that traitors are still operating within these walls." He said to Marchioness Distar. Linjos was one of the few people aware of her real nature of mage and of her role as Lord Commander of the Queen's corps.

"Constable Ernas's investigation proves that the real target was Captain Yerna, but to assign Lith to a slaughterhouse, those nobles needed help from inside the academy."

"Agreed." The Marchioness nodded. "Even sending Professors to do a clerk's job didn't help. Let's admit it, our opponent beat us at our own game. Information keeps leaking and now you tell me materials have started to disappear?"

"Yes." Linjos sighed deeply. "Small quantities at a time, but what worries me the most is that they are all ingredients necessary for making weapons. Military weapons at that."

Chapter 297 Growing Hostility Part 2

Mirim Distar slammed her fist on the armrest of her chair.

"Fine. If they want war, then war it is. Enough with finesse and schemes. I'm going to make all the necessary preparations to detain and quarantine all the academy staff until the traitors have been found."

"This... this will have terrible consequences for the academy's reputation and the students!" Linjos stuttered in bewilderment. "Classes will be suspended, exams delayed. Not to mention we have yet to prepare for Balkor's incoming attack!"

"Not as terrible as more dead students would, Linjos." The Marchioness understood his concerns, but she could see the bigger picture.

"A reputation can be rebuilt, the same applies to an academy. The dead though, have no such luxury. I don't want any more students endangered by political plays, nor the White Griffon to suffer from sabotage like last year.

"Get rid of some of the most useless members of your staff. I'm going to replace them with constables, some undercover, some not. We have an advantage our opponent lacks: we are the ones making the rules of this game."

Linjos opened the Warp Gate of his office, allowing the Marchioness to get straight to her mansion. 'Gods, I hate how right she is.' Linjos held his head between his hands in despair. All his hopes, his ideals were shattering one after the other against the harshness of reality.

'At this point, I can trust no one. Not even my inner circle. I'm completely alone, surrounded by enemies!' He banged his head against the desk, realizing how devious was the human heart.

'At this point, we can trust no one. Not even the Professors. We are surrounded by enemies.' Solus thought with a sigh.

'Yeah. Same old same old.' Lith shrugged. 'The trick is to keep our eyes wide open and our buttocks tightly closed, so no one scr*ws us from behind.'

Lith took off, flying at break neck speed towards the Mage Knight training hall. Since Wanemyre gave the students a single attempt at Bonding, the Forgemastering class ended before the gong resounded.

While she explained to those who had failed their mistakes, the others were free to leave. Thanks to the map in Soluspedia, Lith always knew the shortest path to his destination while his senses allowed him to avoid collisions in mid air with other students.

When Friya and Phloria came out of the hall, they were in the middle of a lively conversation about some technique they had recently practiced. Their faces were drenched with sweat which they dabbed with a towel around their necks.

All the students had an exhausted look. Most had bruises visible on their exposed skin, especially on the arms. Combat specializations were demanding both physically and mentally, often involving getting hit at the slightest mistake.

"Hi, girls." Lith drew on himself hateful looks. Most of the boys hated his guts from the fourth year. Despite being three years younger than them, with his 1.66 meters (5'5") was already taller and with a better physique than them.

On Mogar, youths developed mostly during their thirteenth year. After that, there could be small adjustments until the sixteenth one. It was the limit after which the body stopped growing.

All of them hoped to become elite troops and while being tall wasn't necessary, it sure helped. They could only envy the kind of monster Lith would grow into.

"Hi, Lith!" Phloria was pleasantly surprised. Usually in their relationship it was up to her to take the initiative.

"If you give me an hour to catch my breath, we can train together with the sword before dinner." She knew Lith was a workaholic. Phloria assumed that after his fight with the wyvern, he was eager to accept her offer to train him.

"Who do you take me for? Some battle maniac? Thanks, but no thanks. I had enough for today. I was more thinking about taking advantage of the lack of homework to take you out for dinner."

Invigoration or not, Lith felt the need to rest. Phloria was the only person beside Solus with whom he was able to lower his guard. He wanted to go outside the academy to relax and talk freely.

Lith also used the assembly to have Solus scan the students for the mysterious items. He suspected there were more involved in the poisoning who Linjos hadn't managed to smoke out.

He was right. Solus spotted four more.

"Really? I mean, sure." She replied with a dazzling smile from ear to ear.

"I still need an hour to make myself presentable." Phloria drew on herself hateful looks. Most of the girls of the fifth year hated her guts. How such a plain looking girl managed to date a pin wearer was a mystery to them.

From Lith's dating experience on Earth, one hour was an optimistic estimate for an improvised date.

"Sure. I'll go visit Yurial in the meantime. Call me when you are ready. There is no rush." He wiped a drop of sweat that was streaming along her cheek with his thumb. All the bruises on her body healed, her muscles and joints stopped aching.

Instead of getting tired because of the light spell, Phloria felt her fatigue disappear.

"How did you do it?" She was amazed. Lith hadn't used any sign or magical words.

"We are inside one of the great academies, so I'll go with magic." He shrugged.

"What about me?" Friya hadn't missed how Phloria's breathing was back to normal or that she had stopped sweating.

"Sorry, three is a crowd. Find yourself a boyfriend." He said taking off before she could give him the finger.

"I meant the healing, jacka*s!" She yelled even though Lith was already too far.

Yurial was pleasantly surprised to see Lith too. It was rare of him to seek Yurial's advice or help, which made him happy to oblige.

After the fight with Gadorf, Lith understood he needed a better grasp of the power of arrays. Since he was still stuck with Silverwing's Hexagram, Lith decided it was time to ask the opinion of an expert.

"Can you check if this is an array?" Lith asked after materializing a small golden hexagram between his hands.

"Sure thing. It's unlikely though." Yurial's array detecting spell begged to differ.

"I stand corrected. This is an array and an impossible one at that."

"What's an impossible array?" Lith asked.

"Arrays are spells that require a long cast time and that can be placed in a specific spot for a time. This one defies all the above. It disappears as soon as you stop spending mana and appears relatively quickly." Yurial explained.

"There are several recordings of impossible arrays like this one, all left by past Magi. They are only used as training material for multi casting, though. They have no practical use and are considered nothing more than magic tricks."

"How so?"

"Because they come with no explanation, no hand signs, nor magical words. Even if they had a decent effect, they can only be used with first magic. Turning them into real arrays would require to study their properties and then find signs and words to match.

"It's much easier creating a new one from scratch. Also, what use could possibly have an array that requires constant chanting and mana expenditure? The mage couldn't even move, being forced to become an easy target."

"Maybe. Maybe not." Lith pondered.

Chapter 298 Discoveries Part 1

"Can you help me discover what Silverwing's Hexagram does?" Lith asked.

"Sure, no problem." Yurial was happy to be finally able to repay his friend of all the help he received in the past, even if it was for a fool's errand.

"I'd also like to see those impossible arrays you mentioned earlier." Lith was sure to have struck a gold mine. Having true arrays in his arsenal was an opportunity he couldn't miss.

Lith kept the Hexagram active, making it possible for Yurial to perform a series of experiments and spells to determine the newfound array's properties. While Yurial studied it from the outside, Lith could perceive from the inside the changes in the mana flow each test produced.

After a while, they compared notes about their initial findings.

They were still discussing the details when Lith received Phloria's call.

'Ugh, I wish I knew how much time has passed. I have to make myself a damn clock or something.' Thirteen years after his third birth, Lith was still unable to tell the time without looking at the sun.

It frustrated him beyond reason.

When he went to pick her up, Phloria was wearing her uniform, just like him. She wore her waist long black hair down. Her wavy hair reflected the academy's light, giving them a silky look.

Phloria emanated a delicate flowery scent that Lith found surprisingly relaxing. Even before he obtained an enhanced sense of smell, Lith had always found perfumes to be too strong. Their sweet scent was nauseating for him, just like a man using too much cologne.

She wore little make up. Just enough to make her features appear more delicate and her eyes bigger. Her lips shined under the effect of lip gloss.

"How do I look?" She asked with an expectant look.

"You look gorgeous." Lith honestly replied.

Lith took her to the lagoon city of Vinea that he had visited during the fourth year's house calls. With its many small canals and boats, it was the most romantic place he knew.

It reminded him of the Italian city of Venice he had seen in many movies back on Earth.

Also, it was located quite far from the academy, so the odds of meeting someone they knew were very low. Lith wanted some peace and quiet. They chose a restaurant with outside tables to enjoy the scenery. Being still early spring, the air was a bit chilly.

It took Phloria just a wave of the hand to warm the air around them and make so that the heat wasn't dispersed. Lith took care of the lights, summoning small silvery moons around them.

The poor waiter assigned to them was so flabbergasted by their uniforms and display of power that it took a while to manage to order some food.

"Not to complain, but this is not like you. Taking me outside the academy, in a romantic city instead of ordering food from the canteen and eating it in one of our rooms. What's wrong?" She asked extending her hand across the table to take his.

'Am I really such a cheapskate?' Lith thought. Solus's silence spoke volumes about the matter.

"I hate to be the bringer of bad news, but there's something you need to know." Lith told her about the hostility he had perceived from Wanemyre and the other students.

"It's no coincidence, all of them wear accessories that give me a bad vibe."

"They wear matching items? How did no one notice them before?" She was surprised, it was quite the dumb move on their side. It made them recognizable.

"Not matching, but I'm positive they have the same properties. I want you to be wary of all of them." Lith gave her the names and a physical description of those he had identified.

"Then how do you know they are linked?" She asked.

"I just know."

"Is this another of your secrets, like your physical abilities and your mysterious brother?"

Lith just nodded.

"Okay, I believe you." She replied with a radiant smile.

"This is actually a piece of good news."

"How so?" Lith was stunned by her positive reaction. He had expected her to doubt his words. Phloria was aware of how paranoid Lith was and he had offered her no proof aside from a nondescript bad feeling.

Even if she believed him, he was afraid the new impending threat would ruin the mood.

"Because at least now we know whose asses we have to kick. It was no mystery there are traitors at the academy nor that some of the students were involved in the poisoning. It's the first lead we got. Thanks for trusting me enough to share it with me."

Her response almost made him feel guilty for hiding so many things from her. Aside from Solus, she was the person that trusted him the most, no matter how many shadows Lith left lingering between them.

She was the first girl on Mogar that had gifted him with a gentle touch and a warm embrace. Even when he had almost lost it after Protector's fake death, Phloria had never left his side.

Lith sighed, finally ready to admit with himself that he cared for her. Over time, Phloria had become his home away from home. Someone to return to, without worrying about how to act or what to say. He could just be himself.

Phloria giggled, closing with her hand Lith's mouth that had remained agape since her reply.

"No, thank you for believing me. Now that I said out loud, I realize how insane this story sounds." Lith felt a sting in his heart, but it was a pleasant one.

"I would believe you even if you told me some monster kidnapped you overnight. Otherwise, what are girlfriends for?" She held his hand tightly.

"I was thinking we could use this knowledge to unleash my mom against them."

"I doubt she would act just because I have a bad feeling." Lith sighed.

"True, but my mother is even more paranoid than you are. If I tell her that the bad feeling is mine and that those people acted in a suspicious manner, she'll come running. She's overprotective since your vision..." Phloria suddenly stopped, dropping the fork on the ground.

"That's it! Your vision just got updated!"

"I beg your pardon?" Lith had just reached the same conclusion, yet he was curious to see how far she was willing to push that lie.

"We can say that your vision showed you something about those items. It will be more than enough to give mom everything she needs."

"What if I'm wrong and they are actually innocent? Wouldn't you feel guilty for throwing them in Jirni's maw?" Lith's care for their well being was on par with what he felt toward the game he was eating. He only wanted to make sure Phloria realized the implications of her idea.

"No." She shrugged. "They can do like me and blame those damn dryads for not giving us much to work on."

"Someone is getting crafty and manipulative." Lith said, laughing.

"What can I say? Between you and mom, bad habits rub off."

They spent the rest of the dinner talking about their respective specializations and families

Chapter 299 Discoveries Part 2

After Lith paid the bill, they took a stroll along the promenade. Despite the late hour, the city was still bustling with carriages and small taxi boats.

Everything moved slowly. Unlike Earth's metropolis, nor the coachmen or the ferrymen seemed to be in a hurry and so were their passengers. To Lith, it almost appeared as the city of Vinea was lazily falling asleep.

Suddenly the silence between the two was broken by a sigh, shortly followed by another.

"What's wrong? Having second thoughts about the plan?" Lith asked.

"No." Phloria shook her head. "It's so odd. I feel so happy yet so scared at the same time." She sat on a wooden bench, inviting him to do the same.

"I'm happy because despite last year has been a nightmare, it made me realize how lucky I am. I have a loving family, wealth, status, and talent. All things that I took for granted before meeting you guys." She leaned against Lith, putting her head on his shoulder.

"I even managed to get this old without being forced to kill another human being." Lith had still a hard time hearing a sixteen year girl calling herself 'old', but after Rena's marriage, he was starting to wrap his head around it.

Especially after his sister got pregnant.

"The reason I'm afraid, it's because I know the fairy tale that has been my life is going to end soon." She sighed again.

"I finally understand why my mom is so pushy and my dad is so lenient. They are both trying to protect me their own way from life as they know it. Since I'm almost an adult, I must start acting like one. I can't keep relying on others for protection.

"Once I graduate, the army will send me away from home for the gods know how long. It will not be like with the academy, I will not be able to come back for months. For the first time in my life, I will be really alone.

"No matter my family name, my path is my own. Every decision I make will have consequences and I must be strong enough to live with them."

She paused for a moment, looking at the stars shining over their heads, while the crescent moon was partially covered by a passing cloud.

"It's so quiet tonight, while my future is so scary. I would like for this moment to last forever, but I know it's impossible."

Lith said nothing, his mind was blank. Even though he wanted nothing more than for the fifth year to end, to get over the accursed vision, the idea they had less than nine months together before breaking up made him feel empty.

The next morning, Lith served as a clerk for the Mage Association. It was the hardest thing he had ever done in all his three lives. He would receive new documents every few seconds, give his magical stamp as proof of receipt, and then catalog them according to protocol.

After that, he had to read them and forward the paperwork based on their priority. Despite the senior clerks provided him with an amulet that allowed him to easily find the correct rules and regulations for each document, the job was mind numbing.

Seconds seemed to last hours, while the two hours of duty could as well been years. He returned to the academy, feeling as his soul had been sucked dry.

'I'd rather fight another wyvern than do this sh*t again.' Lith thought. 'At least once you slay the beast it stays dead, those papers kept coming like a flood. It's much better a swift death by claw rather than slowly drowning in an ocean of boredom.'

'Cheer up! You had me and Soluspedia to help you remember what goes where. Imagine how does it feel for the others.' Solus chuckled.

During the healer specialization, they kept treating their slimes. The more Lith became accustomed to the procedure, the more often he was able to switch from Scanner to Invigoration.

He and Solus had discussed at length about Body Sculpting during their morning torture. They both thought the subject held one of the missing pieces of the puzzle that true magic was.

'The way Protector changed his form and the wyvern did are completely different. Protector shapeshifted at once, like water going from one vessel to another. The wyvern changed in small bursts instead, like a werewolf in a horror B movie.

'I think both manipulated their life forces, but employed different techniques. Protector is an Awakened one and Scarlett taught him how to change form, while the wyvern wasn't Awakened and had no access to his mana core.

'Probably the reason why Protector wasn't able to teach me how to shapeshift wasn't related to the refining stage of my core, but rather to my inability to control my life force. I must learn how to perceive it as a whole, not just a single limb at a time.

'Also, I need to find a way to create a backup of my human body's life force pattern or I risk losing myself forever.'

Lith used the Chisel spell as a sewing kit, joining the red bricks composing the tendrils of the slime with those of its main body by creating threads of cyan mana between them. As soon as the connection was properly established, the life force flowed like blood in the new vessels, turning them red.

By the end of the lesson, Lith's proficiency with the slime had greatly improved, yet he hadn't got halfway through the task. Oddly, the class' ranking was reversed. Those less skilled had almost finished, while Lith, Quylla, and the others had still much to do.

Even more oddly, Vastor didn't seem surprised nor worried by the turn of the events.

"Excellent, excellent!" He patted Quylla's back enthusiastically.

"I don't get it, Professor. I'm behind most of the class, why are you complimenting me?"

"Because you and the good ones are focusing on the how and why, rather than on the what." He explained placing his hand over her fish tank.

"As I expected. Your slime suffered minimal shock. You are not slow, Quylla, you are meticulous. There's a big difference between the two. Don't doubt yourself and stand tall." Vastor pushed up her chin, stopping Quylla from staring at the ground.

The Professor then checked all the slimes, complimenting most of the slow students and scolding all the fast ones.

"Your slimes aren't healed, more like patched up. If this was a more delicate procedure or a less durable creature, it would be long dead." Vastor shook his head, proceeding to ease the pain of the slimes by fixing the major mistakes.

Lith's group left the Healing lab in high spirits. The others because of Vastor's words, Lith because despite making no progress with Invigoration, he felt he was on the right path toward the discovery of how to shapeshift.

The next subject was the first practical lesson about how to create their own personal spells. Lith was eager to discover if he could learn something about true magic from it. Up to that point, all the academy courses had helped him to broaden his horizons.

They went to the Lecture Hall, where Professor Nalear was waiting for them. Once all the students arrived, Nalear opened a Warp Steps moving them to the most absurd training hall any of them had ever seen.

Chapter 300 Magic Creation Part 1

The Training Hall the students walked into reminded them of the one they used for practicing dimensional magic.

The room was 30 meters (98 feet) long and 20 meters (66 feet) wide. It was big enough to easily accommodate double their numbers. However, while the dimensional magic Training Hall was completely empty, the Magic Creation one was filled with what looked like an old telephone box made of transparent crystal.

Right in front of each telephone box, there was a holographic horizontal bar that reminded Lith the combo counter of games like "Dance Dancer Uprising". All in all, the place looked more like an arcade rather than an academy's facility.

"First things first, you should take out your own Codex." Professor Nalear showed them the book she had distributed during the first lesson.

"As a warm up exercise, each one of you will pick two magical words of their own choice from their Codex and input them in the Sensor Booth." She pointed at the crystal phone box.

"All the possible combinations are known. They generate a mana flow that has been thoroughly researched and the Booths are capable of sensing. Let me give you an example." She walked inside an empty Booth, leaving the door open.

Nalear placed her hand on the crystal wall in front of the holographic counter.

"First, you need to imprint your station with your mana. Then say out loud the spell you have decided to create. In my case is Infiro Gata." According to the Codex, it was supposed to create a ring of fire. The Booth emitted a red glow while powering up and so did the holographic counter.

"Now the device knows what kind of energies are going to be employed and how to protect me from them. I suppose you all remember the dangers of casting a spell incorrectly."

The class nodded in unison. Lith too had almost died multiple times while learning his first tier one fake magic spell when he was still six years old. A mistake in the magic words' pronunciation or in the hand seals could have unpredictable consequences.

"Well, creating a new spell is even more dangerous, that's why it's a subject explored only during the fifth year. A complete spell is safe for the caster. Even if you mess up with it the worst it can happen is for its effect to go haywire.

"The magic signs for low tier spells determine the amount of mana which will be employed and how it interacts with the elemental energies. Using the wrong signs can directly harm your bodies. The bigger the mistake, the bigger the damage you may sustain. This is especially troublesome for attack spells.

"That's why we'll start with spells that are barely tier one to give you solid foundations. I'd like to tell you that the Sensor Booths can block anything, but it would be a lie. They can only shield you up to tier two spells and some of the weaker tier three ones.

"The purpose of this exercise is to let you safely experience the flow of your mana while you are creating low tier spells. Only then we will move to more powerful spells against which there is no protection but skill and experience.

"It's important you become familiar with identifying the correct signs and finding the right words. The Codex only contains the most common and safe magical words. Truly powerful spells require you to make adjustments."

"I have always thought that spells made from our own mana couldn't harm us." Quylla asked. "Why is this different?"

"Because a correctly performed spell is part of you, like your hair or your skin. A messed up spell is composed of discordant energies which make no distinction between friend and foe."

"Did I risk my life while creating my personal spells back at my village?" Quylla shivered at the thought of how dangerous ignorance was.

"Not really." Nalear patted her shoulder, trying to reassure Quylla.

"Light magic is the magic of life, it's mostly harmless. It requires a monster failure to inflict damages with a low tier light spell, otherwise a failed chant simply has no effect. You and Lith are lucky.

"Being healers, you followed the safest path. It made it possible for you to later create even offensive spells with ease thanks to your prior experience." Quylla thought back when she created her first offensive ice spell.

She had suffered from pain and discomfort from time to time, but she had always managed to stop before things got out of hand. She never reported injuries during her experiments, only minor frostbites.

"Creating personal spells before even enrolling in an academy it's what means being talented." Nalear said to the rest of the class.

"Let me finish my demonstration please." Her hands drew an S in the air, filling the holographic combo bar by a third. "This means the signs are correct."

She then repeated the magical words while drawing and S followed by a circle. The combo bar flashed red and emptied.

"This happens when the signs are wrong."

The third time she drew a doodle after the S. Everything flashed red a few times, a warning sign filled the counter.

"Guess what? That was a major blunder. Without the Booth I would have got injured. If there aren't any more questions, get in the booths and start practicing. Choosing two words that form a universally known spell will not count as a success.

To get a passing grade you need to complete at least two new spells. Begin!"

The moment Nalear walked out of the Booth, it glowed with white light. The following text appeared inside the holographic display:

Attempted spells: Infiro Gata. Completed spells: None. Final Grade: F. Imprint successfully reset, ready for a new student.

Several students swallowed a lump of saliva, Lith included. Cheating wasn't an option, the system registered everything.

Lith inwardly cursed at his bad luck.

'I'm not Quylla, I never created fake spells besides those I taught Tista. Let's hope it's enough.'

He took a deep breath to calm himself down, then Lith imprinted the terminal with his mana.

"Jorun Ka." According to the Codex, the spell would create an ice cube the size of a table. Lith started to form all the signs he knew, discovering that such a brute force method was impractical.

Every failed attempt consumed part of his mana. Taken individually, a failure was nothing to him. Hundreds of failures in a row were quite tiring though. After an hour Lith had wasted a quarter of his mana reserve and completed a single spell.

'Calm down, you idiot.' Lith scolded himself. 'Don't panic like a drowning man. This is just the first lesson. Worst case scenario you'll get a failing grade, but there's always next time. Focus on the task at hand.'

Lith recalled Vastor's words about the difference between being slow and being meticulous. Then about the purpose of the exercise. They weren't practicing for a guessing game. They were there to learn to perceive the mana flow inside their own bodies.

The fourth year classes required to sense the mana once they projected it outside, Magic Creation was the opposite.