

Supreme M 301

Chapter 301 Magic Creation Part 2

'This exercise is just like a math problem. I can either learn by rote all the equations or I can understand the underlying principles of the main formula and derive from it everything I need. So far the first method failed me, time to give the second one a try.'

Lith closed his eyes, ignoring the combo bar in front of him and focusing on his mana core instead. The second spell of his choosing was Jorun Bat, a useless spell that would generate coin shaped icicles.

It was similar enough to the previous one to make it possible for him to at least reuse the first hand seal. Lith drew the symbol in the air slowly, feeling a small amount of mana departing from his core.

Then, he almost stopped his hands, making one small movement at a time and observing how the mana strand reacted. He discarded all the signs that caused it to bloat or collapse, following only those which made it move outwards.

Lith had no idea how much time had passed when he heard the sound announcing the completion of the second spell. He opened his eyes just for the time necessary to pick the next two words from the Codex and transmit them to the Booth.

He kept practicing ice spells only, observing each time with more clarity the shape the mana strand assumed with each different spell. The revelation struck him like a hammer.

Most of the movements composing a single hand sign were useless. They had likely been added to make it easier to remember, to mask the important parts from prying eyes, or both.

What mattered were the movements that altered the shape of the mana strand, adding to it twists and turns until its flow resembled that of a true magic spell. Lith decided to put his theory to test.

He picked another couple of words forming a simple ice spell. Lith mentally visualized how he needed to manipulate his mana flow to obtain with true magic the same effect the fake spell would have. Next, he pronounced the magic words while using both hands to shape the mana strand like the true spell he just created.

The Booth signaled his success coincided with the gong marking the end of the lesson. Lith found himself drenched in sweat. His mana reserve was low enough to give him a splitting headache.

Yet he was pleased with his results.

'The bad news is that I can't use the same technique for higher tier magic. It takes me a minute to whip up a tier one true spell, but the same can't be said for the upper tiers. It means I must really learn how to create fake spells.' Lith thought.

'This not only will come in handy to pass this subject, but also as a way to obtain credits by sharing spells if I ever need something from the Association. The good news is that now I found a much quicker way to turn fake magic into true magic and vice versa.

'It seems my original theory was right. Fake magic's foundations are the same as true magic and the whole tier system is a ladder that leads to the discovery of the mana core.'

Lith walked out of his Booth, waiting for the hologram to project his results.

Attempted spells: Fifteen. Completed spells: All. Final Grade: B. Imprint successfully reset, ready for a new student.

'Not bad for someone who spent half the lesson to get a single spell right.' Solus tried to cheer him up. B was the lowest score they ever got, yet she was proud of him. Lith had achieved that grade all by himself, without asking her help.

'It's better to wait after dinner before asking him if he did it on purpose or he was simply so focused to forget about me.' She thought in a hidden corner of her mind.

Lith turned to watch how the others performed. Quylla's hologram reported:

Attempted spells: Twenty two. Completed spells: All. Final Grade: A.

"Amazing as always, Quylla. I suck so bad at this subject. I need to work harder." He shook her hand with a tinge of envy in his voice.

'She's more talented than me, has more experience than me in creating fake spells, and she didn't waste time panicking. I wonder how powerful will she beco...'

Lith's train of thought was interrupted by Quylla, who gave him a weak kick on the shin. The way she compulsively tilted her head made him think Quylla was having a stroke or something.

'Turn around, idiot.' Lith followed Solus's order, finally noticing the other stations too. There were a lot of holographic Ds, Es, and even some Fs.

"What the heck?" Lith blurted out. It required at least four completed spells to get an E, eight to get a D. Everyone was staring at him with pure hatred.

"I told you people, talent." Nalear patted their backs.

"As I said earlier, two completed spells are enough for a passing grade during the first lesson. The machines are calibrated for the final exam, though." She chuckled at his bewildered expression.

Later, while the students were enjoying their dinner, the traitor inside the academy could finally sigh in relief. After the streak of failures during the past year, all their meticulous planning was giving its fruits.

Based on their most recent intel, Linjos was still unaware of their plans to build military grade weapons to employ during the final act. Ever since they had joined Lukart's wild goose chase everything had gone south.

Lukart, the Archmage idiot who dreamed to be King. The traitor had joined him because they too wanted the civil war to happen, but for an entirely different reason. The traitor firmly believed that the Griffon Kingdom was beyond saving.

It was like a horrible painting drawn by an incompetent artist. More brushstrokes could only make it even messier. What the Kingdom needed was to burn the old canvas and start again with a new one.

Blinded by his own arrogance, Lukart had never expected that his ally was slowly siphoning his funds and assets. Turning Lukart's accomplices into obedient slaves. The plan was brilliant in its simplicity.

When the civil war would start, the traitor would have all the necessary means to make his side prevail, wiping off the board both Lukart and the corrupted Royals.

After the incident in Kandria, they had been forced to change approach. With the parasites discovered and a cure already available, the original plan was ruined. When Balkor had revealed his new target, the traitor assumed the heavens were giving them a sign.

By moving their pawns, they had weakened all the academies, making them easy prey for the undead. The traitor assumed that once the six great academies were lost, the other great Countries would invade the Griffon Kingdom.

Nobles and commoners would have been united in grief, forced to ally against a common enemy. The outcome of the battle wasn't important, what mattered was to destroy the status quo. Yet the damned Linjos had ruined everything by allying himself with the Lord of the forest, leading the other Headmasters by example.

The traitor had spent the last months building the strength they needed to plunge the Kingdom into chaos. If revolution was impossible to achieve, the traitor was willing to settle with revenge.

Chapter 302 The Lives of Others Part 1

White Griffon academy. Over a month later, one week before the first exam of the fifth year.

The life of Friya Solivar Ernas had always been an emotional rollercoaster. A speeding trap that kept her dozens of meters above the ground and which would never stop, no matter how much she screamed, cried or barfed.

Sometimes it would slow down, but only because another big fall was nearing. She had wasted her childhood attempting the impossible task of earning her mother's affection.

After she turned twelve, she had been thrown in a dog eats dog environment. Everyone in the academy wanted her to fail, hoping to get her place in the rankings. Everyone in the Solivar Household wanted her dead.

Her brothers and sisters were afraid of the status she would achieve by becoming the first mage in the history of the household. If Friya succeeded, being the firstborn or the line of succession would become meaningless.

She would become Duchess Solivar's right hand mage and inherit everything when mommy dearest took her leave.

Friya had spent so much time watching her back that her encounter with Yurial had been like seeing the sun after a perennial winter. Thanks to his status and power, the environment turned peaceful, giving her the opportunity to relax.

Meeting Quylla saved her soul. Despite having a much harsher life than Friya, Quylla still had a gentle heart and only strived for affection. She restored Friya's faith in mankind.

After giving her the equivalent of a sugar candy, the fourth year turned out to be the apex of her misery. First, she had lost her family. Being branded like a traitor, she had been forced to accept Lady Ernas's offer to adopt her.

Then, she had killed her first human in cold blood and lastly came Balkor. Alas, the worse had yet to come.

All those events had pushed her to the brink, yet they also helped Friya to open up with her new parents and sister. They had grown closer over time until she had stopped feeling a prisoner and became part of something bigger.

Until she felt part of the Ernas family.

Being loved unconditionally, having the freedom to decide about her future was something that in the past she could only dream about. Now that she had everything, Friya was scared to death.

Scared to lose that safe haven and return to a cruel world that didn't give a damn about her. She had no idea what to do with her life.

'Being a Healer is a quiet job, but quite boring.' She would often mentally list all the pros and cons of her available choices.

'Also, I don't like people very much. Spending my life helping others sounds like a waste of time. The career of a Mage Knight is even worse, I would be killing people for a living. I'm sick and tired of fighting, I just want some peace.

'It's absurd to ask a sixteen years old girl to decide her future. Maybe I should take a sabbatical. Until I find my answer, I can always be the Ernas Household's private magician. Besides, the fifth year is still long. I have all the time I need.'

Quylla Ernas was having the time of her life. She had a doting father, a creepy but caring mother, two wonderful sisters, and the house of her dreams. Despite all the bad things that had happened, the fourth year had been the happiest of her life.

It had given her a place where she belonged and more importantly, a family.

She still had three more years before being considered an adult, but she had already planned her future. After graduating, Quylla had decided to work as an assistant at the White Griffon's light department until she was old enough to apply as a Professor.

She had already discussed it with her mentors. Even Manohar was enthusiastic at the idea and promised to endorse her application. The thought actually scared her. With the fickle genius' reputation, his approval could do more harm than good.

Being a Healer and a teacher was her dream job. It would give her the opportunity to improve the world around her while leaving her the time to start and nurture her own family.

After the winter break, with the start of her growth spurt, her confidence in her looks and talent skyrocketed. Quylla was looking around for a boyfriend, but with little luck so far.

Orion apprentices were kind boys, but only saw her as a child. As for her colleagues, those she liked didn't return her interest and vice versa. Like a very shy fourteen year old boy that had already asked her out a couple of times.

Quylla would have preferred someone more assertive. She was fed up enough with her own shyness to put up with that of others. Yet his last move was bold enough to convince Quylla to give him a chance.

Xodard had gifted her a small ring. I was nothing fancy, just a trinket a student of humble origins could afford. It was the note it was wrapped in that mattered.

"A charmed ring for a charming girl."

'A cheesy pick up line, but it's still cute. I'll wear the ring for our first date.' She thought. 'If things don't work out, I can always give it back.'

The fifth year's subjects were demanding, but, unlike during the fourth one, no Professor assigned homework. That left Yurial plenty of time to practice his skills as a Warden in the lab built inside his living quarter and to help Lith with his research.

'It's amazing how the so called "impossible arrays" all require at least hexacasting and fine control over all the different mana flows. Yet Lith manages to perform them at the first attempt thanks to his mastery of first magic. Maybe I was wrong always dismissing it as inferior magic.'

Their research progressed slowly. Unlike everything Yurial had learned so far, each array seemed to have a complex function. Casting them wasn't enough to obtain results. To respond to an external trigger, the energies that formed the arrays had to be properly manipulated while holding the balance of the overall structure.

Over time Yurial became fascinated with them and learned how to cast them by himself, to experiment even when Lith was otherwise occupied. Thanks to that exercises, Yurial's mastery of tier four and five arrays improved by leaps and bounds.

Sometimes, when he was focused on the mystical patterns, he could feel a burning sensation located near his solar plexus. At first, he thought it was a coincidence. After the phenomenon happened several times, he tried all of his diagnostic spells.

When none of them detected any anomalies, Yurial even asked for Manohar's second opinion. Even according to the god of healing, there was nothing wrong with him.

Distar Household

The royal constable Jirni Ernas was nervously drumming her fingers on the armrest of her chair. It was unusual for her being nervous, let alone impatient. Like every predator, she knew the importance of biding her time, of choosing the time and place of the attack to not leave the prey the slightest chance of survival.

Yet all that waiting was wearing down her nerves.

Chapter 303 The Lives of Others Part 2

"The vision changed almost a month ago. Why are we doing nothing?" Jirni's anger was barely contained. It took all of her willpower to prevent it to show on the outside.

"Because based on all we know, it's likely we are about to face the threat of slave collars, like those the Pontus Household purchased from the missing Alchemist Hatorne." Duchess Distar was disgusted by her own words.

Just like Jirni, she hated feeling helpless.

"Whoever the traitors are, they have managed to slip out of our net too many times. Linjos needs time to remove enough members of his staff to require an official turn over without arising suspicions.

"If we act rashly, we risk alerting them. They would only need to activate the collars to force us to butcher innocents while they escape under the cover of the ensuing chaos.

"We are lulling them into a false sense of confidence, so that our first strike will also be the last." Her hands were clenched so hard they were white, the blood drained from her fingers.

"Easy for you to say. It's my little girls that live in that death trap, not yours. Why can't we at least warn them?"

"To achieve what? Spook them? Spook the traitors? We may be wrong about the collars. So far all the security sweeps came out negative." Mirim Distar shook her head.

"It's not only your daughters who are in danger, but every single student in all the remaining four academies. If you can't keep your personal and professional life separated, maybe you should recuse yourself from the case."

Jirni Distar knew that Mirim was right and hated her for that.

"How long before we move?" She asked.

"Very soon."

Village of Lutia.

Lith considered the idea of becoming an elder brother and an uncle almost at the same time disturbing at best. When during the second month of winter Elina noticed she had skipped her period, Lith knew he had succeeded.

Both his mother and sister were nervous. The former considered her pregnancy like a miracle while the latter was on edge being her first time. Lith was basically on call 24/7, but luckily nothing happened in his absence that Nana or Tista couldn't handle.

Lith would go back to his village at least once a week, during the weekend to perform a complete check up on both women.

"Everything is fine. Again." Lith snorted.

"I'm so sorry, dear. I didn't mean to rush you." Elina apologized with such a merry voice it sounded fake, but she was actually sincere. She was just too happy with the good news.

"Do you want to know the gender of the babies?" Lith asked.

"Do you know it already?" Judging by their enthusiasm he had just asked a rhetorical question.

"Male. Female." He pointed at Elina first and at Rena second.

'Ugh. My family so far had bad luck with males. Orpal, Trion, and then me. Let's hope the little one grows into a better man than us. It doesn't take much, after all.' Lith thought.

'How dare you!' Solus scolded him. Not even reminding her of his body count spared him from a lecture.

Both families didn't share Lith's negative outlook on life. They celebrated together until late.

The next day, after the end of the lessons Lith went to Phloria's room to share the latest news and give her an early birthday present. In a few days, she would turn sixteen, becoming an adult according to Mogar's standards.

"Congratulations, you must be thrilled." Phloria embraced him tightly. For a moment, Lith lost himself in the delicate fragrance of her hair.

"Not really." He didn't want to spoil the mood for his family, but at least with Solus and Phloria he could be honest.

"I'm scared at the idea of having another brother. I almost have only bad memories about them." Most of all, he was scared of loving and losing his little brother. Lith was certain he couldn't take it again.

"As for my niece, I don't know. I'm afraid the baby will take a lot of her time and we will grow even further apart."

"How many times do I have to tell you?" Phloria sighed. "You can't keep your loved ones under a rock. You must learn to let them go. You are not losing a sister but gaining a niece."

Lith didn't reply. It was a matter on which they had to agree to disagree.

"I have also come to give you your birthday present." Lith took out from his pocket a small box, handing it to her.

"Why so early? Don't you know it's bad luck?" She giggled, rushing to opening the box.

It contained a lily shaped gold pendant. Rena's father in law had melted and purified the gold, while Lith had shaped it with magic. It was so lifelike that Phloria attempted to smell it.

"I researched the etymology of your name. This flower symbolizes the goddess you are named after. It's also enchanted to be durable and as a dimensional amulet with a capacity of fifty square meters." It was the highest grade dimensional item Lith could create without making a fuss.

"Thanks! It's a wonderful gift!" She attempted to kiss him, but Lith stopped her.

"That's just my cover story gift. Otherwise people would think I'm even more of a cheapskate than I already am."

"What's the real gift, then?" Phloria was puzzled.

"I know I can't Forgemaster anything your father couldn't do better, not I can afford something you couldn't buy on your own. The only thing I can offer you is my trust. Please, close your eyes and give me your hands."

Phloria did as instructed, while Lith activated Invigoration on her.

'What the heck?' What he saw left him flabbergasted. Compared to the last time he had visited her, most of the impurities in her body were converging towards the mana core. They hadn't moved much, but the movement was as clear as the day.

'It's just as I feared.' Solus sighed. 'The prolonged exposure to you, combined with the repeated use of Invigoration and the practice of high level magic seems to stimulate other people's cores.'

'Exposure to me? Invigoration?' Lith was still stunned.

'Do you remember Balkor's attack? To save her and Yurial, you had to use Invigoration a lot. Also, since she asked you out, the two of you spend a lot of time together. Protector told us that the key to Awakening is a high mana density.

'Compared to a normal mage whose core is dormant, yours is a small mana geyser.'

'Doesn't this mean that Tista is likely to Awaken? Compared to them, she has been much closer to me.'

'If she enters the White Griffon, I think it's a reasonable assumption.' Solus replied.

'It also depends on her talent and luck. Tista hasn't Awakened in years and Phloria's impurities have barely moved. Don't overthink it.'

Lith took a deep breath to calm himself before proceeding. He used Invigoration to remove the most external impurities from her hair and skin, destroying them as soon as they emerged.

"What's this smell?" Phloria had no idea why she was feeling so hot and fuzzy, but the stench was out of this world.

"This is my gift. I'd like for it to remain a secret between the two of us." He said bringing her in front of the mirror.

"I don't feel any different." Phloria looked her reflection without noticing anything.

"Take a bath and let me know in the morning. Doctor's order." Lith kissed her deeply, tasting her fragrance before leaving her room.

He took off, flying along the corridor towards his living quarters.

'I'm proud of you, taking such a leap of f... Watch out!' Solus yelled.

Lith reacted swift as the wind dodging a barrage of icicles, only to feel an invisible grip blocking his limbs. He immediately activated fusion magic to neutralize the effects of the spirit magic holding him.

The person using it was an expert. They slammed him against the walls and the ceiling before he could react.

"I bet you didn't expect to meet another Awakened one, did you?" A too familiar voice said while the world around him faded to black.

Chapter 304 Broken Part 1

The attack had been ruthless, quick, and carefully planned. The barrage of attacks had thrown Lith out of balance, while the spirit magic throw exploited the momentum of his own dodge to slam him against the nearest wall.

The impact sucked the air out of Lith's lungs, making him lose focus at the same time. Solus had been helpless against the ambush. The attacks had come out from the occupants of the rooms they always passed by on their way back.

She had no reason to be vigilant of them. Solus would rather focus on those hiding behind corners or pillars, but the coast was clear. Or so she believed until the attack came.

Lith was about to lose consciousness, but thanks to the prompt use of fusion magic and the Skinwalker armor, he managed to heal himself at the last moment. Lith stood his ground, assessing his predicament.

Mana sense and Life Vision both told him the situation was desperate. He was surrounded by all sides with no way out. The students weren't a problem, but the person in front of him was.

Professor Valesa Nalear had already weaved several spells while he was still trying to get up.

"Dodging was dumb of you." A cruel smile distorted her usually kind features.

"Buying that armor was dumb of you. Thanks for making everything easier for me." Her voice was carefree like they were playing a game.

Several fireballs appeared around him, exploding at the same time.

"I really like this spell of yours. I hope you don't mind I copied it."

Lith took out the Gatekeeper sword from his pocket dimension, imbuing it with enough water magic to instantly conjure an ice coffin around himself while using air magic to protect his ears from the explosions.

'What the heck is she saying? I'm making her job easier? At least she's dumb enough to use one of my spells. I know exactly how to counter it.' He thought.

Alas, Nalear wasn't stupid. As soon as the coffin formed, she unleashed a river of lightning that used Lith's own barrier to bypass the armor's protection.

"Another dumb move. Should I think you still have a crush on me?" Her laughter was cruel, oozing mockery.

Lith inwardly cursed at himself. He could only endure the spells by using earth fusion. He was taking damage after damage. Up to that point, he was stuck on the receiving end of the battle.

'Damn, she has silenced the whole area. No matter how much noise she does, no one will hear a thing.' Solus thought, racking her brain for a solution.

'I think I know why she said you are making her job easier. She can't kill you because of the academy's arrays. If she attempts to, they will protect you and send a distress signal!'

Lith had almost forgotten about the academy's protection, he never needed them. Wind blades shattered the ice coffin. He was tempted to offer them no resistance to activate the protective arrays, but he felt something was wrong.

Nalear was taunting him, she was likely to have taken precautions. Lith parried them with the blade, discovering he was right. They were too weak to inflict him a serious injury, she was aiming to make him faint.

"You know, I can't believe it took me so long to realize we are cut out of the same mold. Two Awakened ones." Lith ignored her words, distraction tactics were one of his specialties too.

"How you survived the Talons, helped find a cure for the parasites, or saving the life of that Deirus idiot. Everyone believes you are the next Manohar, but I knew it couldn't be the case. You are too normal, too sane to be a genius."

Lith moved his hand behind his back, taking the Ballot out of the pocket dimension, only for it to be ripped away from his fingers by Nalear's spirit magic.

"That was rude. Time to finish this." He ignored her words again, pretending just for a second to be willing to fight for the Ballot in a spirit magic tug of war before jumping towards the nearest student.

'The arrays work for everyone. It means if I strike one of them down it will activate anyway!' Lith thought.

The student was startled. Lith moved too fast for her eyes. Yet before his sword could reach the girl, he felt an agonizing pain from his back. Several knives stabbed him. Their enchantment was strong enough to piece his armor while their blades were too short to do serious damage.

Nalear pulled out the blades with her spirit magic, activating their second spell. Healing magic from the knives closed all of Lith's wound, completely restoring his body. At the same time, the healing weakened him even more, sapping his strength.

"I call them the 'anti-academy' weapons. Strong enough to knock you out, but not enough to trigger the arrays. You have no idea how much trial and error I had my little lambs go through before Wanemyre perfected them.

So many of them got reprimanded or expelled for hurting their own friends." She chuckled.

"Sacrifices must be made sometimes. Right, little lambs?" The students' faces were like stone, yet their eyes were crying in fear.

She struck Lith's temple with an enchanted leather club, making him lose consciousness.

'He fell for my trap, just like I expected. The students weren't here to trap him, they only served as bait. Now that he's out of the picture, I'm not going to let him ruin my plan. An Awakened one is an unpredictable wild card. I have no intention to discover if a slave collar works on us or not.

'If not for these damned arrays I would kill him right now.' Nalear sighed.

She brought Lith in her apartments, bringing along a few students. During the winter break, she had everything prepared in advance. It was impossible to have a secret compartment made without the power core of the academy detecting it.

Yet she could easily turn one of her closets into an excellent prison. Short chains were hanging from the wall, blocking Lith's neck, waist, legs, and arms. Then, Nalear proceeded removing all of his enchanted items.

The dimensional amulet, the magic storing rings (AN: rings that store spells), and lastly his Skinwalker armor, leaving Lith naked while his possessions were stored inside her dimensional amulet.

"It makes you wonder how pretty would I have become if I Awakened earlier." She sighed, looking at his broad shoulders and chiseled body.

Nalear attempted to remove Solus's ring with spirit magic but to no avail.

"Want to play hard to get? Fine by me. Cutting a finger or two makes no difference." A jagged blade appeared in her hand, making Solus desperate.

She had been fuming with rage from the beginning of the fight, hoping Nalear would come close enough for a sneak attack. Yet the Professor had Lith always moved by the students or with spirit magic, she never came close enough.

Wishing she could use Lith's mana when he was unconscious or at least move his body, Solus's only real option was to perform an all out attack.

As soon as the blade cut the skin, Solus shapeshifted from ring to a stone scorpion attacking Nalear physically and magically at the same time.

Chapter 305 Broken Part 2

Nalear had been on guard the whole time. Life Vision had allowed her to notice how the ring was full of energies since day one.

She used her blade to pin Solus to the wall and the students as human shields against her spells. They were badly hurt, but thanks to their uniforms there wasn't much tier two spells could do.

Solus's yellow core limited her greatly.

"What a marvelous object." Nalear blocked Solus with spirit magic.

"It's not only capable to store the user's mana but also to move on its own? It will be an excellent addition to my collection." Solus could only curse her bad luck. If only Lith's and her energies weren't as one, she could have hurt him enough to activate the array and save him.

When Nalear tried to store Solus inside her dimensional amulet, she was in for another surprise. The amulet didn't respond and Solus kept floating in mid air.

"It's impossible! Is this thing really alive? Good thing I'm always prepared." She took out a mystical wooden box out of her dimensional amulet. It was engraved with silver runes of power. A blue mana crystal the size of a tennis ball was embedded on its lid.

When Nalear opened it, it generated strings of blue energy that trapped Solus, dragging her inside the box before it closed on itself. She attempted to shapeshift multiple times, but the strings relentlessly followed her, adapting to her every change.

The blue gemstone powered up the runes, sealing its content from the outside world.

The bond between Lith and Solus was broken. The backlash gave Solus a seizure while Lith suddenly woke up, roaring like a wounded beast.

The killing intent he released made two of the students faint. The spirit magic blast he generated made everyone but Nalear fly against a wall and lose consciousness. She sneered at his swan's song, hitting him on the head with the leather club again and again.

The club was another enchanted item she had prepared. It was made so that it would inflict a lot of pain but no harm, draining the victim of their vitality.

What she didn't expect was for Lith's mouth to suddenly open like a maw, filled with fangs instead of teeth. The moment her hand was close enough, he bit her deeply. The fangs dug into her flesh until they reached the bones while seven eyes stared at her with hatred.

Nalear ignored the pain, passing the club to the free hand, resuming the beating. The eyes burned bright in defiance, refusing to let go. The maw was almost closed when the head fell limp again. Even fury had its limits.

"What the f*ck are you?" Nalear cursed while using Invigoration to close her wounds and restore her strength. It took her less than a minute to heal the injured students and replenish their life forces with Invigoration.

They had spent no mana, so they were still in their peak condition.

"Here are your orders, my little lambs. These chains are strong enough to hold an angry Byk, but what's even more important it's their color." She pointed at the mystical aura surrounding the shackles and the chains both.

"When it's red it means Lith is unconscious. When it turns green, it means he is awake. As soon as it happens, you have to stab him with these knives."

She handed them the anti-academy knives.

"Don't stop until it turns red again. Wait for my signal. Only then you can kill him. Cut his head and pierce his heart. Just to be safe." The five students nodded in unison.

"After you are done with him, return to your rooms and wait further instructions. Tomorrow is the big day."

The next morning, Phloria hummed all the time while she was walking to pick Lith up for their morning stroll before breakfast. She wore the golden lily pendant over her uniform. It didn't matter to her that wearing an early present was bad luck, Phloria was too happy to care about silly superstitions.

'I don't know what Lith did, but my skin had never been so smooth nor my hair so silky and easy to comb. My sisters are going to be so jealous.' She inwardly giggled. What made her so happy wasn't the beauty treatment itself.

The changes were so slight it was unlikely for anyone to notice them and she knew it. The reason behind her happiness was Phloria felt something had changed between them after the date in Vinea.

Lith was a riddle, wrapped in a mystery, inside an enigma; but he was finally starting to unravel himself. When she knocked at his door and no response came from inside, it didn't spoil her good mood.

After ten minutes of knocking, she started to worry.

'Maybe he is just too tired. It's no big deal, we'll see each other for breakfast.' Phloria didn't believe her own thoughts. Lith had never stood her up before.

When he missed breakfast too, she was close to panic. The others tried to reassure her everything was fine and called Lith's on his communication amulet. Yet he never answered.

Fear started to spread, like fire through dried grass. The second gong signalling the start of the Code of Practice without him attending was the final straw.

"Where do you think you are going, Lady Ernas?" Professor Farg yelled at Phloria who was walking away.

"Enter the Warp Gate now or I'll make sure you lose more than a lesson's worth in points!"

"Feel free to report me to Linjos." Phloria retorted. "It will save me the time to explain to him what's happening! Maybe if two students disappear at once he'll move his lazy a*s."

Farg attempted to localize Lith with the artifact Lady Tyris had given her, but to no avail.

'It's impossible!' She thought. 'For his hybrid aura to disappear like this, he should be dead. No one can die inside an academy. I have to warn Lady Tyris immediately.'

Phloria had no Guardian to summon by her side, but she had the next best thing.

Jirni Ernas walked through the Warp Gate leading to Linjos's office less than five minutes later, wearing her royal constable badge on her chest, right above the heart.

"What's the meaning of this?" Linjos jumped from his chair. The Gate had opened without his consent.

"Royal override code." Jirni replied with a stone cold voice.

"I'm constable Ernas, investigating on a missing student case. Hope you remember my husband."

Linjos turned pale seeing Orion standing right behind her. The memory of him beating the Headmaster an inch from death was still vivid.

"What are you talking about? What case? Do you realize what you coming here could cause? You may have ruined a month of hard work!"

"Not at all. I have here a missing person report and the authorization to investigate." She slammed on his desk Phloria's statement and Elina's request for intervention. The two women had always kept in contact and after hearing about her son's disappearance, Elina would have even signed a deal with the devil to have him back.

"I have all the necessary paperwork. Find me Lith and I'll walk away before the Gate even closes."

Linjos had no choice but to comply. He attempted to activate the tracker in Lith's uniform and when it didn't work, he checked all the records about who had got in and out since his last sighting.

"This makes no sense. The tracker can't find him and no one has left the academy unsupervised yet."

"Well, the good news is that he is still alive and somewhere inside the academy. The even better news is that I finally have a reason to turn this place upside down. Tell Distar that I'm done waiting. Now we are going to play by my rules."

Chapter 306 Rising Tide Part 1

Attack him where he is unprepared, appear where you are not expected.

That was how Nalear had defeated Lith, but also the way Jirni Ernas planned to smoke out the traitor.

The arrival of constable Ernas was a big enough monkey wrench in Nalear's plot to put both her master and contingency plan at risk. It was impossible to use dimensional magic inside the academy because of the array blocking it.

The only way out was using the Warp Gate, but even with the help of her little lambs, it was impossible for her to drag away Lith unnoticed. Her teacher ring was useless too. It not only would leave a record of her position, but also could move her inside the fifth floor only.

'Each floor of the castle is huge, but with enough time they can search every nook and cranny of it. I can't hide Lith forever nor can I kill him and store his body in a dimensional item. I can't believe months of careful planning are about to be crushed because of a stupid girl!'

Nalear had underestimated the depth of the bond between Lith and Phloria, dismissing it as a simple crush. She was also unaware of Marchioness Distar's plan of putting the academy in lockdown to search for the traitor.

The information blackout had worked like a charm. The problem was the Marchioness had no way to know what the enemy intentions were. It almost resulted in a perfect set up to douse the fire yet to have it ready after the house was completely burned down.

Almost.

Lady Ernas was a decisive woman. The moment Phloria contacted her, she put her first contingency plan in motion, pulling a lot of strings and calling in as many favors. She knew Lith well enough to know that he wouldn't leave the academy without letting her little Flower or at least his mother know.

His disappearance could only mean something big was about to happen. Taking out someone of his caliber in such a clear manner, inside an academy at that, meant the enemy was as strong as well prepared.

Lady Ernas was certain she had not a second to spare. Alas, she was right.

Professor Amyla Farg contacted Tyris as soon as Phloria left, reporting to her everything she knew.

"What are your orders, my liege?" Farg asked.

"I'll be there in a while." Tyris sighed. From her throne, she could feel the air in the Kingdom turning heavier by the second.

"I mean to spectate, not to intervene. I feel that what's happening at the White Griffon is similar to Balkor's attacks. A reckoning. Humans are bound to make mistakes and it's only by suffering the consequences of their choices that they have the opportunity to grow.

"I don't plan of doing like Salaark and treat them like a bunch of kids that need to be held by hand. As for you, Amyla, do whatever you think it's right. You have my permission to use the full scope of your abilities."

After closing the call with Farg, Tyris called her only two friends. The fall of one of the Great Countries might be something all Guardians would like to bear witness.

Inside the enchanted box, Solus had long recovered her senses. Without her bond with Lith, she couldn't feed nor she could grow stronger. Only weaker.

That didn't mean she was powerless, though. She had still all the abilities of a yellow cored Awakened one. Invigoration didn't allow her to recover her strength but was a crucial instrument for her survival nonetheless.

She had spent months studying the boxes together with Lith, attended the same lessons, and followed all of his steps towards becoming a Forgemaster. Invigoration made it possible for her to study the lock keeping her sealed.

Solus wasted no time crying or despairing. She had spent the last few hours planning her escape.

'"Always prepared" my... whatever my a*s looks like, you witch!' Solus had never been so angry in her whole life. It could be said that even though she had developed the whole spectrum of human emotions, she was incapable of hate.

At least until that moment.

Hatred was something usually Lith generated enough to supply a small army, something she was used to contain, being careful not being infected with. Now it burned through the very core of her being like molten lava.

She would have loved for life to be like those comics Lith liked so much as a kid. Where trivial things like love, friendship, or rage could produce miracles giving the hero endless strength.

If love could do any good, Nalear wouldn't ever managed to take them apart. If rage was worth something, Solus would have already turned the box into cinders to be reunited with her other half.

'Feelings have no power per se. They are only what drives you towards your goals. I have to do like Lith always does. Not let myself be controlled by them but harness them to keep my mind focused.' She thought.

'Luckily for me, this box has been built to be difficult to open from the outside, not from the inside. I also doubt Nalear ever suspected that the dimensional amulet she stole from us is actually empty.

'I still have access to a dimensional pocket full with everything a compulsive hoarder with full blown paranoia prepared "just in case".

'Wait for me, Lith. I'm coming for you.'

Tendrils of darkness magic emanated from her body, relentlessly eroding the internal safeguards of the box. Solus only had to make sure to survive the conflagration. To her it didn't matter who or what was outside the box.

The whole Mogar could burn for all she cared.

City of Valeron. Capitol of the Griffon Kingdom. Inside the King's quarters.

"Are you sure giving constable Ernas the royal override code was the right thing to do?" Queen Sylpha asked.

"Absolutely." King Meron nodded. He was engrossed in testing his Gatekeeper longsword potential.

"The more I read the reports about this Lith, the more I'm inclined to believe he is a natural Awakened one. Traitors come and go, we fight them on a daily basis. Awakened ones are too precious to be lost.

"If I'm right, he would be the first one we know about inside the whole Kingdom. We could even pitch him against the Magic Empress, if we play our cards right." The Magic Empress was the only known natural Awakened on the Garlen continent.

"How could he be an Awakened one if some kids are strong enough to take him down?" Sylpha found the idea simply absurd.

"Maybe he is not an Awakened. Or maybe the traitors have developed a weapon capable of defeating one." Meron replied.

"Whatever it is, we can't afford to stay idle. We are already left with only four of the six great academies. Losing the White Griffon and the most promising student in one fell swoop may be a blow that we could not be able to bear. Not now.

"We are already stripping the ancient noble households of their privileges bit by bit, redistributing them according to merits and loyalty. The Kingdom is still too unstable. If the traitor threatens one of our assets, we must react swiftly."

Chapter 307 Rising Tide Part2

"If there really is a weapon capable of defeating an Awakened, we must get to it first. That's why I've given her the royal override and control over a division of the royal army. We cannot afford any more failures."

Queen Sylpha pondered on those words, before agreeing with her husband. The Royals needed all the power they could muster to survive the impending crisis.

"Mom, dad! Thank the gods you are here!" Phloria quickly embraced them both. Their presence was enough to mitigate her fears.

"I'm glad to see you too, my little Flower." Jirni returned her embrace, feeling something was different about Phloria.

"There isn't a moment to lose. Mom, this is the list of all those Lith had marked as suspicious." She handed Jirni a list of names followed by their addresses in the academy. Phloria hadn't been idle either, collecting all the intel she could while waiting.

"This one is the closest one to my room." She pointed a name in the middle.

"Dad, whatever happened, it must have taken place between my room and his. I can guide you there."

"There is no need." Orion replied. "My amulet already contains all the blueprints of the fifth floor and the list of its residents. I'll go check on my own, you go with your mother. You are the only one that knows these kids. Maybe you can notice if anything is out of the ordinary."

'And maybe keep your mother in check.' He inwardly added.

Orion took off, quickly reaching Lith's room and moving from there towards Phloria's after taking out his equipment. Open spaces were a nightmare to investigate, too many things could go wrong.

Animals, bad weather, worst case scenario the culprit could burn everything. A closed space, an academy at that, was another matter entirely. Orion didn't take much to find the place of the ambush.

"What a smart son of a dragon." Orion smirked while finding a cut alongside the stones on the floor. Before falling, Lith had employed his failed slash against the girl to leave a mark behind. Darkness magic could delete many things, but couldn't hasten the academy self repair mechanism.

Starting from there, Orion found traces of water marking the use of ice magic and small burnt marks in the crevices between the rocks. That coupled with the lingering traces of ozone indicated a powerful lightning had been employed.

'Whoever attempted to clean the scene is an amateur. Either they know nothing about our investigation methods or they didn't expect an investigation at all.' Orion's guesses were actually both right.

Nalear had cleaned the crime scene to the best of her abilities, but not being a Forgemaster, she had a limited idea of what they could achieve, aside from what Wanemyre knew.

Professor Wanemyre was many things, but not a member of the Knight's Guard.

Hung on the wall, Lith had already undergone several cycles of regaining consciousness just to be knocked out by the anti-academy weapons again. Nalear's little lambs weren't allowed much freedom of thought or movement.

They were trapped in a nightmare of their own creation. When they accepted to follow Archmage Lukart's plan to trigger the civil war, only a few raised objections about the use of slave collars.

Even then, it was only because slave collars were one of the most universally despised versions of forbidden magic. Simply owning one carried the death penalty, if not for the whole families to be stripped of their titles and wealth before being executed.

Most of the little lambs considered slave collars the most natural course of action. Each one of them would receive a Master ring, allowing them absolute control over their victims. Just considering all the possible uses an obedient slave could have made their mouths watery.

Little did they know that even their Master rings had been replaced with normal slave items. Nalear made sure no little idiot could endanger her plan out of lust or cruelty. She hated nobles the most, so she had always intended to use them as cannon fodder, in case something went wrong.

Once the little lambs discovered the truth about their rings it was already too late. They had been trapped in their own bodies from months, drowning themselves in self-pity, which made them more than happy to vent out their frustration on Lith.

Between their rage and the boredom of the task, they didn't notice that every time it took them a little longer to make him faint again.

Unlike Nalear, who had Awakened at fifteen years of age with an already cyan core, Lith was Awakened from birth, starting with a measly red core. It meant that his body had all the time to adapt to the changes, expelling impurities little by little.

So far, Nalear's core had progressed only once because of the long time it took for her body to adjust from a dormant cyan core to an active one. It also meant that she had expelled impurities only a few times.

She was magically superior to Lith, thanks to her blue core, but her body was weaker. When she planned how to keep him prisoner, Nalear used herself as a standard. According to her calculations, the pain would keep him from casting spells before losing consciousness.

Lith's pain tolerance, however, was higher than hers, especially since the bond with Solus had been broken. The emotional pain he was experiencing, together with the endless void her absence left behind, allowed him to clench his teeth and emit small bursts of darkness magic inside his body.

With every cycle, Lith was able to shut down more and more pain receptors. At first, he would last barely a few seconds, too weak to project magic on the outside.

Soon, the pain wouldn't break his focus anymore.

Soon.

As soon as constable Ernas arrived, Nalear knew she had to move ahead of schedule, even if it meant endangering her master plan. Her lambs on the outside had warned her about an incoming division of royal guards. They would reach the White Griffon any minute.

Too many external witnesses would ruin everything. All of her planning was based on each floor of the academy being strictly isolated from the others and the outside world alike. The only silver lining in all that situation was that the Code of Practice had been suspended.

All the students were still present, making her plot still feasible.

She walked right behind Wanemyre, who knocked out Balfas, Linjos's secretary on their way in.

"Headmaster, we heard the news. Is there anything we can do to help?" Wanemyre voice was genuinely worried, yet her hands kept trembling, one of her eyes twitching.

"I wish." Linjos sighed, not missing any of the odd details of that meeting.

The two Professors had never been close. Quite the contrary, he was pretty sure that being Wanemyre from an ancient noble family didn't make her pleasant company for a self made woman like Nalear.

"Please, return to your apartments. You'll be contacted when your turn to be interrogated comes. I can't believe this is happening. Never before a student has disappeared like this inside an academy."

Those words triggered Nalear's rage.

"Yeah, if it happened outside, it would have made things a lot easier for you." Her voice was full of contempt.

"Nalear, I know what happened to you and it was terrible. Now things are different..."

A shower of lightning and ice rained down on the Headmaster while he was still talking. All he needed was to activate his Headmaster ring to trigger the defensive arrays and make the attacks vanish into thin air.

"How did you silently cast such a powerful spell?" Another wave of Linjos's hand and both Professors were trapped inside a circle of light. He hadn't missed how Wanemyre just stood there while he was being attacked.

Whatever was going on, he wasn't willing to take any chances.

Chapter 308 Awakened Part 1

"So it's true." Nalear laughed maniacally, giving Linjos the creeps.

"A Headmaster is like a god inside their own academy. Sorry to break it for you, dear Linjos." Nalear took out from her pocket a magic crystal so finely chiseled it resembled a diamond. Each facet had a rune of power engraved on it.

"That's a power core unit. Where did you take it from?" Linjos was horrified by the implications the gem had.

"There are no gods in this world!" She ignored him, breaking the gem and causing the power core to temporarily shut down, bringing all the arrays offline at the same time.

Ever since the sabotage of the dimensional magic training hall, Linjos knew that something was wrong with the power core of the academy. That was why even when there was a desperate demand of Ballots, he couldn't allow having more produced.

Usually, the academy's Forgemasters would be granted access to the power core for several reasons. To create items linked to the power core, like the staff rings or the Ballots, for the maintenance of the array departing from it, or of the power core itself.

After the sabotage, Linjos had blocked the access to the academy's heart, adding such duty to everything he already did as Headmaster. The effort drained his mind and body, causing his premature aging.

Yet he did it anyway, for the students and for the future of the Kingdom he believed in.

'As soon as the crisis is resolved, I'll have the time to rest.' Linjos repeated to himself over the months.

All that pain, all those sacrifices, were for naught.

Nalear had already made Wanemyre tamper with the power core enough to create a power core unit. Despite its insane complexity, it was a pale imitation of the Headmaster ring, but with only one function.

Nalear unleashed a new wave of spells against the Headmaster. She had to be quick and kill him before the power core activated again.

Cursing his bad luck, Linjos could only Blink away to safety. The whole situation was a nightmare. He couldn't understand how Nalear managed to silently cast one spell after the other, without giving him any time to fight back.

Nalear too was cursing her bad luck. Her original plan was to lure Linjos away from his office and backstab him. Nalear would have framed Wanemyre for the murder thanks to the Ballot she carried with herself.

With the Headmaster dead, her little lambs would have the opportunity to butcher all the students of commoner origins or those from new magical bloodlines. It would make it appear as even after Balkor there was still a radical faction among the ancient noble households not willing to back down.

Her hope was that the massacre would reopen the divide between social classes and trigger the civil war. After all, Wanemyre and the lambs all came from influential families. The surviving students would be found in possession of slave items they brought themselves inside the academy.

All the evidence would lead to Archmage Lukart and his allies, there was nothing left indicating Nalear's involvement. Especially after she would have made sure Wanemyre and the few little lambs that worked with her died in the ensuing fight to save the academy.

A head on fight was something she wanted to avoid. The Headmaster robe was a masterpiece. It not only offered great protection from physical and magical damage, but also constantly boosted Linjos like potions would, making him immune to spirit magic.

Not to mention Linjos was one of the best young mages of the Kingdom.

The Headmaster didn't mindlessly Blink. The spell was too expensive to use it recklessly. He used it to keep his distance and reach hidden stashes in his office.

'Whatever she is doing, it's a game two can play.' Linjos unleashed a barrage of ice, fire, and lightning generated by alchemical tools. Just like true magic, they had no cast time. Nalear cursed, she was forced on the defense after barely three exchanges.

Each one of them was at the peak of tier three spells in terms of power and there were so many that not even an Awakened one wearing a Professor robe could tank them without risking their life.

Thanks to the defensive spells she had ready at hand, Nalear avoided the brunt of the damage, but Wanemyre wasn't so lucky. Even with the protection from her magical items, she was slammed against the wall and on the verge of unconsciousness.

To make things even worse, the smoke the spells generated engulfed the whole room, making them all blind. Or so Linjos thought.

Nalear activated Life Vision, making the figure of the Headmaster appear as clear as the day. She could see him casting an unknown spell.

"Just like Lith, you are making my life easy with your stupid moves." Nalear's voice was stone cold.

Her hands emitted a pillar of fire. It was her personal spell, tier five Searing Gale. It was a mix of air and fire magic, generating a small sized tornado of a temperature capable of melting stone.

Its tip rotated at high speed, making it capable of drilling through every defense she had ever met in battle. Even if the victim somehow survived, the lightning bolts hidden inside the vortex would fry or at least temporarily incapacitate the victim.

The spell struck Linjos's chest with surgical precision, yet the Headmaster didn't flinch. Searing Gale was being sucked in by a Warp Steps in front of him and unleashed on Wanemyre's right arm, turning it into cinder.

The shock from the pain of the amputation almost killed her. Only her Professor robe and the items she had Forgemastered for herself saved her life.

Linjos didn't mean to slay Wanemyre, only to incapacitate her. Alas, he had no idea what spell Nalear would cast next. The only thing he could do was to make sure that Wanemyre wouldn't be struck anywhere vital. He chose the right arm because a mage without their hands or voice was usually helpless.

Nalear cursed again, dispersing the smoke with air magic since it clearly was of no advantage to her. The room cleared, revealing Linjos wearing some kind of odd looking glasses while holding what seemed to be a steel tube.

"Hello there, young miss." Linjos's words were followed by a series of sonic blasts coming from the tube. Nalear found herself kneeling while holding her ears. The sonic booms were making her bleed from the eyes, nostrils, and ears.

They also shattered her eardrums and balance alike.

'Damn Forgemasters! Damn them and their creations!' Nalear knew how dangerous a Forgemaster with a dimensional amulet was. It was the reason she brought Wanemyre along. They were walking armouries and Wanemyre was supposed to be as good as the Headmaster.

Linjos was even younger than her, yet he had left his fellow Forgemaster no time to act. Linjos fired his weapon over and over again, until he was sure Nalear was in no condition to fight back.

He took out from his dimensional amulet a rope that bound Wanemyre by itself and another for Nalear.

"You have much to explain. I'm sure Lady Ernas will be able to learn from you everything we need to save the country."

Alas, Linjos didn't know that the only thing that Nalear needed to recover was to breathe. He had stopped his attack thinking that even if she had the means to heal such extensive wounds, exhaustion would have been the death of her.

Yet thanks to Invigoration, with every breath her body healed. With every breath, her strength returned.

Chapter 308 Awakened Part 1

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Chapter 309 Awakened Part 2

Linjos took out his communication amulet to call for reinforcements when Nalear's sword moved by spirit magic impaled him from the back. The Headmaster fell on his knees, coughing blood. The surprise almost made him ignore the pain.

"How? Why?" Were his final words.

Nalear freed herself and Wanemyre from the ropes, moving the unconscious Professor like a puppet thanks to spirit magic. Wanemyre remaining arm easily lifted the sword, decapitating Linjos with a single swing.

Blood spurted like a fountain, painting the room red.

"It is done!" Nalear laughed maniacally.

"Linjos died by your hand! By your sword! Oh Lyca, if only you could see. I'd kill you right now, but you need to make a statement to not leave any doubts about what happened here." Nalear took out her communication amulet.

"Rise, my little lambs! The time has come. Your final order is the following: do whatever your heart wants! R*pe, kill, steal! Have no fear for tomorrow because you don't have one. Show the whole world what kind of monsters you really are!"

And so, the final part of her plan began.

Outside the White Griffon academy, Lady Tyris wept warm tears for Linjos's death.

"Nice order! If it wasn't for her being raving mad and using slave items, I could almost admire her cleverness." Salaark said with a disgusted expression on her face.

"Watch and learn, girl. This is why I lead my country with an iron fist and why Leegaain abandoned the Gorgon Empire." She said to Milea Genys, the Magic Empress and also the only human among the spectators.

"Humans are cruel beings that inflict pain on their kin not out of necessity, but simply because they can. They can't feel good with themselves unless they stand atop others."

"Indeed." Leegaain nodded. "Violence only begets more violence. Abuses breed monsters in an endless cycle of blood and chaos."

White Griffon academy, right after Orion left and before Nalear entered Linjos's office.

Jirni compared Phloria's list with the one on her amulet.

"Good thinking, my little Flower. I'm proud of you."

"Thanks, mom. I think we should start with this girl because not only she's close to the scene, but she also belongs to a very powerful family. It means that if she is involved, she has a lot to lose. You can use it as leverage." Phloria pointed out.

'By the gods, she is really getting crafty.' Jirni didn't miss her daughter becoming mature, nor the lily pendant at her neck.

'Let's just hope her bull-headed father doesn't make a fuss when he notices it too.' She inwardly sighed.

The two women quickly reached the room of Leflia Quaroon, daughter of Duchess Quaroon, an influential figure among the ancient noble households. While Phloria made way, Jirni studied Leflia's family file without finding anything unusual.

According to her personal file, Leflia was a tall sixteen year old girl with black hair and chestnut eyes. In a way, she reminded Jirni of her own daughter. She had flunked her Battle Mage class, hence she could only graduate as an unspecialized mage.

It made it impossible for her to achieve a high ranking.

The moment the door opened, Leflia's lineaments contracted for a split second. Behind the girl's meek appearance, Jirni recognized hatred and envy.

"Is there something wrong, Ernas?" Her voice was low and sweet.

"Royal constable Jirni Ernas. We need to talk about what happened last night." Jirni stood in front of Phloria, tapping her index on her badge.

"I'm sorry, I know nothing about it." Leflia opened the door, inviting them to come in. Jirni didn't miss her eye twitching for a second.

"The rooms are soundproof, inside and out." She was still denying when Nalear voice came out of her communication amulet, giving the final order.

The change was like a switch had been pressed. Leflia's features turned into a mask of wrath. She took out a short sword from her dimensional amulet, attacking Phloria in a frenzy.

Phloria didn't even flinch. She grabbed and twisted the opponent's wrist with the left hand, making her drop the blade. At the same time, she grabbed Leflia's neck with the right one, raising her from the ground with a single arm.

"You better start talking or I'll start squeezing." Phloria's voice was stone cold. She was barely letting Leflia breathe.

"I'll never talk, you wh*re! You don't deserve what you've got. You sucked up to two filthy commoners to improve your grades." Another twitch happened.

"Keep her hanging, darling. Do not let her go, no matter the reason." Jirni took her badge and passed it over Leflia's neck before moving to her hands.

"We are lucky." The badge had just emitted a ping while Jirni waved it over the left hand.

"It's only a slave ring."

"What?" Phloria was shocked. She had only read about them in history books.

"Why lucky?"

Jirni didn't reply. She stabbed the girl's arm with one of her needles, which acted as a nerve blocker. It immediately became limp.

"Because otherwise, I couldn't do this." She cut off the ring finger with a single movement. Only then the slave item could be removed.

"Why do you think they used collars in the past?"

After the amputation, Leflia changed again, sobbing desperately.

"It's Nalear! She made me do it. Lith is kept prisoner inside her apartments!"

Phloria was shocked by the turn of events, yet she retained the presence of spirit to stop the bleeding and reattach the finger with light magic. The cut was so clean the extremities took little effort to heal.

The moment Jirni stepped away, Leflia turned hysterical again.

"Don't leave me! She'll be back! They'll kill you. They'll kill us! Don't leave me!" She threw herself at Jirni's legs, hugging them desperately.

Lady Ernas took the needle out of her arm and into her neck. Leflia's pupil suddenly dilated while her body relaxed.

"Who is going to kill us?" She asked placing the girl on her bed.

"Everyone."

Nalear's apartments, in the same moment.

Lith's eyes opened, staring at the tireless efforts of his captors to make him unconscious again. They could stab all they wanted; he felt no pain. With his focus finally restored, all he needed to do was breathe.

With every breath, his body healed. With every breath, his strength returned. As soon as he had enough strength, he grabbed one of his captors with spirit magic, pinning her against the wall.

One by one, they all found themselves hung on the walls or the ceiling, just like him.

When Lith returned to his full strength, he started studying the locks. His mind was cold and rational, while his heart was scorching hot with rage.

Yet the void inside him devoured everything. The hunger consumed all other feelings.

Black tendrils came out of his body, eroding the pseudo cores on his wrists, legs, and waist until they exploded. Between his body being fully empowered by earth fusion and the use of Invigoration, he didn't care for the damage sustained.

The first lock almost cut off his left foot, the second one only gave him a third burn degree and some metal shards stuck in his flesh. With each lock he learned more, taking less damage opening the next one.

His fury didn't make him stupid; he kept the neck for last. The left wrist was barely scratched, the right one remained unscathed.

Lith grabbed the shackles at his throat turning them into dust before speaking.

His voice was coarse and guttural, his words growled more than spoken.

"Where... is... my... ring?"

Chapter 310 Escape Part 1

"My... stone ring. Where is it?" Speaking was a mammoth task for Lith. He had to focus and spit the words one by one while suppressing the urge to tear those present apart, limb from limb.

The fury running through his veins only steeled his willpower to find Solus first and butcher Nalear later. First things first.

The students were shivering in fear, but because of the set of orders they had received, they were unable to speak. At least until Nalear's final order came out of their communication amulets.

"Do whatever your heart wants."

"Set me free, you f*cking monster! Or my mother will have you and your family beg for death!" Some said.

"I beg of you, have mercy. Nalear made me do it." The others sobbed.

Two girls out of five students were cold blooded enough to release the spells stored inside their magic rings, uncaring for what would happen to their comrades. The shroud of darkness enveloping Lith engulfed their magic attacks, eating away most of their destructive power before they struck.

Yet because of the short range, they were more than enough to make him bleed, to rip his flesh apart, and expose his muscles. Lith reacted sending the darkness towards his attackers.

The tendrils pierced the two students, robbing them of their vitality while transferring it to Lith and healing his wounds. The girls withered like dried up mummies in a matter of seconds, before turning to ashes together with their uniforms.

Feeding off someone's life force not only allowed Lith to recover without becoming more fatigued, but also restored his body's stamina as if he had a short rest.

'I have already used Invigoration too much. I need more energy. I still hunger.' Lith thought.

The remaining three became hysterical, screaming and crying for help. Lith had the darkness engulf them without inflicting any harm. The coldness it emitted amplified their fear, but at the same time made them snap out of panic.

"I'll ask it only once more. Where is my ring?"

"I don't know. I swear." Sobbed a red haired boy.

"Then you are useless."

The boy only managed to emit a short yelp before disappearing in the shadows. Lith's complexion was getting better with every meal.

Soon, it was clear they had no knowledge about Nalear's plan or Solus's whereabouts.

'Leave no loose ends.' Lith thought before killing them. He took a blanket to cover himself, before looking for food.

'Invigoration can give me back my strength and mana, Vampiric Touch can restore my fatigue, but none of them can replenish my nutrients. I need all the advantages I can get before confronting Nalear again.

'Judging by her order, Linjos is dead and the academy is about to fall. I won't let that witch get away with this, nor the vision to come true. Solus, Phloria, wait for me. I'm coming for you.'

After eating everything edible he managed to find inside Nalear's apartment, Lith stepped into the chaos the White Griffon academy had become.

Solus's patience had run out from hours, yet she endured. She could feel her strength dripping away, but so was the spell keeping her prisoner. Unlike Lith, she couldn't heal or recover her mana indefinitely, so she had to take a surgical approach.

First, she had to probe the mana crystal and the pseudo core's pathways, looking for weak spots. Only then Solus could open countless small holes, making the energies that empowered the box dwindle.

Each hole was too small to make the structure unstable enough to explode, but together they drained the magical prison at a faster rate than Solus's energy consumption.

The moment Solus broke the lock, the mystical box exploded outwards in a shower of flaming splinters. She found herself in the room of one of Nalear's little lambs. She had decided it was best to keep Lith and the artifact as far as possible from each other.

Giving the box to a lamb was her insurance that even if something went wrong, it would be impossible for Lith to find it.

Her jailer was a chestnut haired fifteen year old boy that was currently busy taking off the pants from an unconscious girl that was lying on his bed. She was also bleeding profusely from a head injury.

The moment the boy saw Solus, Nalear's highest priority order took effect. He took out his communication amulet to alert his master when Solus drove one of Lith's elemental blades through his throat with spirit magic.

The fire enchanted dagger made short work of the uniform's defenses, killing the boy in one blow. Solus was shocked. She knew Nalear's lambs were mind controlled and likely not to be entirely responsible for their actions.

She had expected the arrays to activate, saving Lith, the girl on the bed, and the lamb in one fell swoop.

'The only possible explanation is that Linjos is dead.' Solus inwardly cried. She really liked the Headmaster.

Having no time or mana to spare, she quickly poured a healing potion down the girl's throat before leaving the room. Solus discovered that closing the door was useless. The locks were offline, like everything else in the academy.

'Sorry, kid. I have no time to babysit you.'

She turned into her spider form and activated her mana sense. She could fly, but had no idea where to go. Walking on the ceiling would allow her to avoid being spotted while looking around for Lith. She wanted to find him as soon as possible.

"Fascinating, isn't he?" Tyris said pointing at Lith, who was walking double time through the corridor, slaughtering all those who attempted to attack him.

"Indeed." Leegaain used Life Vision, watching Lith's second form bulge from his aura, clawing to escape.

"He really is like a magical beast. I'd say his natural elements are fire and darkness." Unlike humans who were equally attuned with all elements, after evolving from their animal form, magical beasts would be limited to two.

At least until their further evolution into Evolved Monsters. Even the Guardians were no different. Salaark elements had always been light and darkness. They made her a literal embodiment of the cycle of death and rebirth, even before she became a phoenix.

Leegaain was a creature of fire and air, while Tyris's foundations were air and light magic.

"Isn't that the living artifact you told me about?" The dragon pointed his finger at Solus who had just escaped the room.

"You know what it is?" Tyris raised an eyebrow in disbelief.

"Sure I do. It's Menadion's Desperation. Her story is long but interesting..."

"Then, save it for another moment." Salaark cut him short.

"I'll call your father and Friya. You alert Quylla of the danger. If Nalear's pawns get to her first she is as good as dead." After hearing from Leflia what the traitorous Professor had made her do, Jirni had a grasp on her intentions.

After her sister, Phloria warned Yurial too. She hadn't forgotten about Lith's vision. As far as she knew, any of them could die at any moment.

"How did you know she was controlled?" Phloria asked after arranging a meeting point with the rest of her family.

"The twitch in her eye. Not even a strong willed person can resist a slave item, but they can signal their distress through small movements of the hands or the eyes. I know it from experience."