

## Supreme M 331

### Chapter 331 Test Subject Part 2

Ever since his return home, Lith received countless invitations from noble households that wanted to get to know him or introduce their daughters to him. Most of them came from outside the County of Lustria.

Luckily it was winter, so the fireplace was usually lit. Fire was a great helper in sorting Lith's mail.

"I still can't believe we have a family name." Elina was radiant with joy. Her life seemed to have turned into a fairy tale ever since Lith's birth. Things were always getting better. If only Lith shared even one tenth of her happiness, Elina would consider her life perfect.

"One awarded by the Crown at that. I wonder if your brother will use it. He makes me worry so much." She sighed.

"Aran is too little to care about a name." Lith replied. "Also, he is perfectly fine. I checked on him a minute ago."

"I meant Trion!" Elina snorted. Her oldest son seemed to have disappeared years ago, yet Lith didn't care. It was another sour note in Elina's life.

'Don't you dare ask "Who?".' Solus reprimanded him in advance. If left unchecked, Lith was capable of ruining everyone's mood.

Rena now used both her husband's and her own family name. Her father in law had insisted she and his nephew both keep the Verhen name. Zekell was proud, not stupid. Bearing a mage's name was like having an army.

Like Lith, Tista had managed to enroll at White Griffon thanks to performing Silverwing's Hexagram. Her core was still bright green, but thanks to Lith's teaching, her skills were top notch.

Lith's house had been constantly renovated and now looked like a merchant's home. At least from the outside. On the inside it was almost as good as modern house on Earth. The only thing it lacked was internet.

With his mastery of the magic crystals, Lith had provided the house with thermal insulation, central heating, running water, and even two fully equipped bathrooms. It was so comfortable that Rena and her husband had moved back to her family home for the winter.

Running hot water and two healers was something even most nobles couldn't afford.

"Don't worry, little brother. I'm sure you'll find another girlfriend." Tista stamped a kiss on his cheek. Her attempt only made Lith snarl. Ever since Tista had started seriously practicing magic, her impurities had slowly but steadily moved towards her core.

To make things worse, she seemed to become more gorgeous by the day.

'Between her Awakening and her beauty, Tista will make me kill so many people that the Griffon Kingdom will miss Balkor dearly.' Lith thought.

He left the house, going for a stroll in the Trawn woods. As always, he passed by Selia's house first. Lith was still hoping that the huntress would return one day.

Walking was one of the few things that calmed him down. Lith always hoped some magical beast would attack him, giving him the opportunity to vent out his rage. Alas, so far even the surviving Kings of the woods had kept their distance.

So far.

Lith smelled something odd, just a split second before something hit the spot where he was standing with the strength of a freight train. Lith dodged it easily, leaving only an after image to greet the impact.

"You!" Lith was surprised. He would have never expected to meet him so near his own house.

"We meet again, fresh meat." Phillard the Kroxy (AN: crocodile type magical beast) greeted Lith with a snarl, before attacking him again in a frenzy.

The two had met during the academy's second exam. Phillard looked like a humanoid alligator. He stood on two legs reaching 2.5 metres (8'2") in height.

He wore a belt from which several trinkets hung while he wielded a double headed ax and a hammer ax in his hands.

Phillard swung his weapons in an X shape, not giving Lith the space to dodge to the sides. Lith stepped forward instead, arriving right under the Kroxy's massive torso and punched him in the stomach with enough strength to lift him from the ground.

That and the Plague Arrow Lith released at point blank inflicted upon the beast enough damage to send him into the berserk rage typical of a wounded Kroxy. Phillard attempted to bite Lith's head off, catching only air.

Lith had already moved behind his back, sending him flying with a kick and another Plague Arrow. The Kroxy crashed against a tree, coughing a mouthful of blood. Before he could get up, Lith grabbed him by the wrist and slammed him left and right against the ground, like he was just a dirty carpet.

After taking enough damage, Phillard regained his senses.

"Stop it, dammit! You are going to kill me."

"What do you want?" Lith asked while letting him go. According to Soluspedia, Kroxy had a violent, twisted sense of humor. Since Lith had perceived no killing intent from the initial attacks, he was almost sure that was Phillard's way of saying hi.

Lith was too pissed off to care and replied in kind.

"The only reason you are still alive is that you helped my companions during Balkor's attack. Bear that in mind before you answer."

"Dude, you're no fun. Can't you take a joke?" Kroxy were sturdy creatures. Phillard was only wounded in his pride, bones, and internal organs.

"Death it is, then." Lith's hand held enough energy to blast him into oblivion.

"Wait! I have a business offer for you. I didn't come this far just to get killed over a prank." Faced with imminent death, Phillard turned very talkative. He explained to Lith how after Linjos's death Scarlett the Scorpicores had decided to leave the forest.

She couldn't leave before another Lord was chosen, so Scarlett had helped all her lieutenants to Awaken. Despite all her teachings and efforts, very few succeeded. Phillard was among the failures.

"Why should I care?" Lith asked.

"I spoke a lot with Protector back then. He told me you have a different method."

"Again, this explains why you need my help, not why should I spare you."

"Protector also told me about your cubs. How you love your sweet ill, sister." Phillard almost choked when he realized his poor choice of words. All the shadows of the Trawn woods converged on them, but while Lith seemed to become stronger for it, the Kroxy felt his life slipping away.

"I mean that by helping me you can also help her. Help all of them. Wouldn't you like to Awaken them?" At those words, Lith stopped the shadows.

"Meaning?"

"I'm damn close to Awakening, just like Kalla was before me. I just don't know how and my life is about to end." Phillard's body was still battered, but now that the dark energy had pulled back, he felt reborn.

"Protector told me about your experiments. I'm offering myself as a test subject. I have nothing to lose whereas you have everything to gain. Whatever you learn from me, you can use it for your cubs."

Lith pondered that offer. Magical beasts were very similar to Awakened ones, capable of using true magic from birth. He had never experimented on them because of his bond with Protector and the other Kings. Also because magical beasts were proud creatures. They would rather die than submit.

'I wonder how much I can discover with a subject willing to let me know what works and what doesn't.' Lith thought.

'I have never spectated someone else's Awakening. If it happens to Tista during the academy, I can use the knowledge for damage control.'

"Deal." Lith said while helping Phillard get up and healing his wounds.

"Two rules. First, pull another prank on me and I'll kill you..."

"Don't worry, I've learned my lesson. You mess with the Scourge, you get buried."

"Second, joking about my sister was a bad move. It will cost you a couple of ribs."

Before the Kroxy could reply, Lith's fist hit his ribcage like a sledgehammer, forcing him to emit the first of many screams of pain.

#### Chapter 332 New Job Part 1

Lith spent his days teaching Tista and his nights teaching or experimenting on Phillard. Contrary to the Kroxy expectations, he was even further behind than Tista in the Awakening process.

"Who needs magic when you have these babies?" Phillard used to say while flexing his enormous muscles. He never liked magic much, preferring to overpower his enemies with pure brute strength.

Lith had to literally beat some common sense into him to force Phillard to practice magic, following the same training schedule he had prepared for his sister. By the end of the winter, the Kroxy's core had improved by leaps and bounds.

Maybe it was because magical beasts were naturally attuned with magic, maybe it was because of Lith's experiments on Phillard to help him sense the world's energy, or maybe it was just death being an incredible motivator.

Phillard hadn't lied to him. Lith could see with Death Vision that his test subject had about a year left to live and Lith never missed an opportunity to remind him.

When the first day of spring arrived, Tista and Lith left together for White Griffon academy.

"What's the academy's only rule?" Lith asked Tista for the umpteenth time in the last three months.

"There are only three kinds of students in there. Those who will suck up on me to get into my pants, those who will do it to get into yours and then there is me." At first Tista thought Lith was just being a killjoy, but after speaking with Friya, she wasn't so sure.

"Good girl. See you in the classroom." Lith ruffled her hair before going to the Headmaster's office to receive his ring and assignments for the day. He found a pleasant surprise when he walked through the door.

"Friya, Quylla. Nice to see you again. What are you two doing here?" Lith asked.

"Lady Quylla has decided to attend fifth year again." Marth explained.

"Mage Friya has offered to serve as an Assistant Professor, just like you."

Quylla had grown quite a lot. She was now 1.6 meters (5'3") high with shoulder length brown hair. Despite Vastor's tonic and the growth spurt, she still looked incredibly frail.

Her body was almost as scrawny as when they first met, her complexion was sickly. Lith knew she had spent the last year as a recluse, rarely coming out of her room. For someone that until a few months ago had problems keeping her food down returning to the academy was a huge leap.

"You would have known if you had visited us even once during winter." Friya clacked her tongue. She seemed to be quite angry.

"I was busy." Lith snarled back before turning to Quylla.

"Are you sure little one?" He asked while caressing her head. Lith still had problems seeing her like this. It reminded of his limits. Even when he had given his all, Lith was still unable to help her. He was just a Healer, not a miracle worker.

"I'm sure, thanks." At that familiar touch Quylla finally smiled. It was a small, forced smile but it was still better than nothing.

"If anyone bothers you, just give me a call and I'll kill them."

Marth cleared his throat loudly. He could appreciate the sentiment, but not the way it was expressed.

"Not literally." Lith clarified, making Marth nod in relief. "I will take away so many points from them they'll wish they were dead."

Marth went pale while Quylla chuckled.

The three left the Headmaster's office and were finally able to speak freely.

"I lied in there. I can really kill them, if you want."

Quylla knew he wasn't joking, yet she couldn't stop laughing when she thought about Marth's face.

"Don't worry about me. Friya only accepted the role of Assistant to be able to act as my lady in waiting inside the academy."

"What?" Lith blurted out in surprise.

"Isn't it the same thing you are doing for your sister?" Friya asked.

"I mean, if it was possible to bring along a relative, all those stuck up b\*stards would. Being an Assistant I can Warp from floor to floor and spend time with her."

"My reasons are entirely different from yours." Lith shook his head.

"This was my best and only real option. Until I turn sixteen I have too many restrictions. Back home I could only waste my days hunting animals or small time criminals. I need the money, the merits, and the resources of the academy.

For me and my family."

"Couldn't you help your parents with the farm? I'm sure they would like to spend more time in your company." Quylla asked.

"I've already done that in the past and it never ends well. My father is happy at first, but then he feels useless. His workers have nothing to do and fear losing their jobs. The same happens to mom.

"It's nice having someone around that can do in a second what takes you hours, but after a few days, you find yourself having too much free time. Aran doesn't keep them that busy, their job is still their life."

Friya and Quylla remained stunned for a second. Being magicians, there were too many things they could do and so little time. They had never thought how even a simple job could be important enough to define someone's existence.

The trio separated, Lith was in charge of Principles of Advanced Magic for the fourth year, while Friya and Quylla would be busy with Magic Creation on the fifth floor.

Lith Warped in front of the classroom. Memories of his own first day at the academy flooded his mind. He walked through the double doors to find exactly what he had expected. The classroom was noisy since Marth had yet to hand over the Ballots.

Small cliques had already formed. Some were just talking while others were hazing commoners and less powerful nobles. Tista was sadly between a rock and a hard place.

From what Lith could hear with his enhanced hearing, a group of girls was trying to sl\*t shame her, while a group of boys was offering her protection in exchange for "entertainment".

"What a show-off little b\*tch you are!" The leader of the pack was a blond girl, flat as a board and much shorter than Tista. What she lacked in physique, she made up in attitude.

"Why don't you wear your robe? You're a disgrace to all the students of the White Griffon. The uniform is supposed to make us feel empowered, not look like wh\*res!"

She said while pointing at Tista's generous chest. The other girls either laughed or joined her, piling cruel words on their victim. The boys were enjoying the show, discussing Tista's body like she wasn't even there.

"I wonder how many Professors already got a taste of that pretty body and face of yours to stoop so low as to admit an old hag like you." With her sixteen years, Tista was indeed old for the fourth year.

She had been accepted because of her talent and because between Balkor and Nalear the White Griffon had already lost too many mages.

Tista attempted to reply, outraged by those words, but the blond girl slapped her hard as soon as Tista attempted to stand up.

#### Chapter 333 New Job Part 2

"If I say sit, you sit. You are a b\*tch, so act like one. Otherwise I'll be forced to teach you how to play dead." Thunderous laughter followed. Most of the class was truly enjoying the moment.

Tista was on the verge of tears, but instead of falling apart she stood up again. Then, she slapped her tormentor hard enough to make the blond girl spin 180° before falling on a desk.

"How dare you!" The blond girl was about to retaliate when something stopped her. Her body froze like time had stopped.

'All according to plan.' Lith inwardly grinned. He had given Tista a Ballot beforehand and told her to not introduce herself with her family name but as a simple commoner instead.

He wanted her to experience the true academy, without the shield his presence would grant her.

'Tista needs to grow up, I can't protect her forever. That slap was a really good one. I'm proud of her.' He thought.

"Good morning, my dear students." He said with his best Nalear impression.

"I'm Assistant Professor Lith Verhen and I'll teach you Principles of Advanced Magic."

At his appearance all the girls ran back to their desks, each trying to emphasize her own charms and draw his attention. From what they knew, Lith was the same age as them and, more importantly, single.

Many of them had planned in advance how to approach him to reap the most benefits both during and after the academy.

The boys could only hate Lith's guts. Compared to him they seemed like scrawny dwarves.

"Before starting the class, I'd like to share with you some bad news and some even worse news." He said with an angelic smile while memorizing every face in the class.

"The bad news is that this girl's full name is actually Tista Verhen. She is my sister."

Lith's smile disappeared and his eyes flared with mana. A single wave of his hand was enough to use gravity magic on every student but Tista. It made their heads slam against the hardwood desks with enough strength to make them bleed.

"The even worse news is that she had a Ballot all along. I'm sure Headmaster Marth will have many things to discuss with both you and your parents." The lights in the classroom flickered. Lith's killing intent brought nightmares to life for each student every time the lights went off.

Some could have sworn they saw their own shadow stare back at them with glowing eyes and a smile entirely made of fangs.

"For those of you who will not be expelled, I can promise you this. We have a long, long year ahead of us. It will be full of blood, tears, and sweat. I'll make sure of it. In the meantime, minus 200 points to everyone but Tista."

Even from their prone position, some managed to object at the insane punishment.

"I didn't do anything! Why I'm getting punished too?" Some asked.

"You just answered your own question. You did nothing, hence you deserve nothing. Minus 100 more points to everyone for questioning my judgment." Lith cruelly smiled.

He sent the Ballot to the Headmaster before starting the actual lesson. One by one, those responsible for the hazing incident were summoned to Marth's office. Many never returned.

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Months passed and it was finally time for the mock exam. Lith and Friya were watching the events unfold from the Surveillance Mirrors, ready to save the students in case something went wrong.

"How is Tista doing?" Friya asked. It was frustrating how despite living so close it was so hard for her to get in touch with Lith. He was always busy with either his magical research, helping Tista study, or chasing Manohar to force him doing his job.

Being the newbie, he had been entrusted with the worst job possible in the light magic department: being Manohar's assistant, warden, or nanny according to the circumstances.

"So far so good." He replied while his eyes moved from one mirror to another.



"Her grades are good and she has no friends. All according to plan."

"Plan? That's sick! How can you do that to your own sister?" Friya was outraged.

"I did nothing. Her classmates simply acted as I predicted and Tista makes her own decisions." Lith explained. "Or did you expect her to forgive and forget just because of some lame a\*s apologies?"

"Actually, no." Friya suddenly felt stupid. She had watched the recording from Tista's Ballot. Every time she was teaching to the fourth year students, Friya treated them like the trash she believed they were.

"Me neither." Lith replied. "That's why I made sure her group was picked at random and placed in one of the worst spots of the forest, just like what happened to me. It's only under situations of real stress that people reevaluate themselves and show their true colors."

"It's how Phloria found me. I hope Tista gets lucky as I did." Friya could still hear a tinge of nostalgia in his voice when he said her name.

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House Ernas, during the academy break after the first exam.

The family was reunited to celebrate Quylla's success. Despite having spent so long without practicing light magic, a few failures and a lot of effort was all it took for her to regain the ground she had lost.

During the fifth year, the nature of the first exam depended on the student's specialization.

In Quylla's case, she had to deal with the simulation of the outbreak of an unknown disease. The simulation involved the use of lab rats instead of humans. Each one was at a different stage of the infection and their death also meant the failure of the exam.

After everything she had gone through, the death of a few rats would leave her unfazed. While the others went into panic, she took control of the situation becoming the leader of her team.

She assigned a role to each member based on their strong points. The less talented healers were tasked with keeping the zone quarantined, preventing the infection from spreading to the healthy specimens.

Those with mediocre talent were to use their abilities to slow the progression of the disease while Quylla and the others studied the pathogen in search of a cure. Her team achieved the best score and Quylla had received many compliments for her presence of mind.

Aside from Phloria, the whole family was reunited for the event, even Guniyn and Tulion, Phloria's blood brothers. It was the first time in years that Orion had managed to bring his sons back home.

Not only had Quylla aced her exam, but she was also slowly regaining her health. She had friends again and even a boy she liked. Despite all that, Orion Ernas was so down that he spent most of the evening staring out of the window.

"What's wrong with you, dear?" Jirni was seriously worried about him. When Quylla had told them about the boy, Orion didn't grunt or object. He didn't even order a priority one background check on the little pest.

"I just miss my little Flower." He sighed.

#### Chapter 334 Trawn Part 1

"I always wanted her to be strong and independent, but now that she's gone, I don't give a damn about all that cr\*p. Why didn't Lith stop her? He was still a bit young, but he could still marry if his parents gave their approval."

"That's rich coming from you!" Jirni scoffed. "Maybe if instead of messing with my plans you had helped me, things would be different. Or maybe, Lith knew her well enough to understand he couldn't stop her."

"Nothing is lost, yet. She is in the army and he will join the army in the future. Now, enough sulking. Quylla needs us more than ever."

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Lith's house, same moment.

After over six months, Lith and Phillard had reached a critical moment in their endeavour. The impurities in the Kroxy's body were so close to his bright cyan core that they could almost touch.

"Okay, I've done all that I can." Lith said.

"I've brought you over a mana geyser for your training, I have used Invigoration to help you feel the world energy, and pushed the impurities closer to your core whenever it wasn't painful for you. The last step it's on you."

"Don't worry, I can feel resistance but no discomfort." Phillard replied.

Even after all that time, he still had to learn Invigoration. The Kroxy's mana perception was even worse than Lith's when he had just started the academy.

It was only thanks to Lith's training schedule and his natural attunement to magic that Phillard was able to crudely stimulate his own core.

"I swear, this thing feels like I'm taking the biggest sh\*t of my life!" Phillard couldn't stop laughing from excitement. He was filled to the brim with an unknown energy that made him euphoric.

Suddenly, the night sky cleared. Phillard's body emitted a blinding radiance, but unlike normal light it didn't spread in all directions, only upwards. Even using darkness magic and his hands as a shield, Lith could barely stand the intensity the light pillar emitted.

It slowly grew in height and width, until a second light pillar descended from the sky. It connected itself with the smaller one coming out from Phillard. The phenomenon gave Lith an oddly familiar sensation.

'This feeling it's too similar to what I experience during my transformations to be a coincidence. What the f\*ck is happening?' He thought.

'Beats me.' Solus replied. 'The only thing I know is that Phillard's core is evolving.'

The Kroxy's body started to expand in all directions until his arms became as big as small trees. After that, it only grew in length. When everything was over, Lith was staring at a ten meters (33') long serpentine body covered by emerald scales as big as a small shield.

The head resembled that of a dragon from Earth's fairy tales, with several small horns surrounding the neck area like a mane. Phillard's legs had been replaced by a long tail, while his clawed arms seemed able to rip even a stone house to shreds.

"Yes! I knew it! I always knew I was destined to become..."

The light faded and so did the Evolved Monster's awareness.

"What am I?" He asked to Lith while scratching his gigantic head.

Lith accessed the bestiaries he had copied from the academy and stored inside Soluspedia before answering.

"You are a Lindwurm." He said while clicking his tongue.

"All this work and you're not even a new species. Protector at last isn't derivative."

"I'm not derivative!" Phillard roared. He had no idea what the word meant but he was sure it had to be some kind of insult.

"I'm a..." He stuttered a few times.

"What am I again?"

"A Lindwurm." Lith snarled. "A lesser dragon. Like a wyvern but wingless and with a very long a\*s. According to my books, you should possess some kind of toxic breath."

"Really? Cool!" Phillard took a deep breath from the nose, emitting a gurgling sound before spitting an enormous mass of phlegm against the nearest tree.

"Why it's not melting?" The Lindwurm looked at the birch tree like it had betrayed him.

"I said toxic breath, not sputum." Lith replied.

"How do I do that?"

"How should I know? You are the Lindwurm. You'll figure it out." Lith shrugged.

"Ugh! It sounds like a lot of work. Let's spar already!" Phillard towered over Lith standing 5 meters tall while his tail whipped the air in excitement.

"It would be a waste of time. You have just evolved. You have no control over your body, not to mention you suck at magic. Maybe you are physically stronger than me now, but I've killed bigger and more powerful beings than you."

"We'll see!" Phillard darted towards Lith like a train. His new body was much nimbler and faster than the old one. He clapped his huge hands trying to squash the opponent, but once again he only hit the air.

Lith had long learned true dimensional magic, which allowed him to Blink above Phillard's head.

"Bad Lindwurm. Sit!" Lith stamped his left foot using a combination of air, fire, and earth fusion while using air magic to drop down like a meteor. The foot exerted the same impact an elevator in free fall from the sixth floor would.

The dragon like head crashed on the ground with a rumbling sound, creating a small crater on impact.

"I yield." Phillard hated Lith, especially when he was right. The problem was it happened most of the time. Neither of them had used his true strength, but the quick exchange had been more than enough to prove the difference in skill between the two.

"How did you..."

"Magic. Until now you could only use water and earth. I already taught you everything you need to know about first magic and all the other elements. Practice on your own. Our deal is over." Lith said while walking towards his home.

"Wait! I need new axes and something to carry them."

"Why is that my problem?" Lith replied.

"You have nothing I want and I don't work for free." Lith said. "Don't even think about plundering this area. There's nothing valuable and if someone pays me, I'll be more than happy to get rid of you."

"Dude, that's cruel. I never needed money. I don't even know how to get back home. Boss Scarlett Warped me here with one of those fancy portals. Can't you do the same? If earlier going unnoticed was hard, now it's impossible!" Phillard whined.

"Again, not my problem." Lith was tired of dealing with the Lindwurm. He always managed to give him a headache.

"Scourge, was that your doing?" Even though they hadn't met in years, Lith immediately recognized that voice.

"Of course it was me. Nice to finally see you again, Reaper. I was starting to think you were avoiding me."

Reaper the Shyf, one of the two remaining Kings of the woods, didn't reply immediately.

"Actually, I was. Since Protector's disappearance, there is something wrong about you. It scares us greatly."

"What changed your mind?" Lith asked.

"We are desperate for help." Reaper admitted. "You never took interest in your role of King, leaving your turn in our hands. Now that Protector is gone, we lack the strength to defend our land from humans and monsters both."

"Those who replaced the two of you are too weak. Can you help us evolve too? Otherwise it's only a matter of time before something bad happens."

#### Chapter 335 Trawn Part 2

"How can two weaklings have become Kings?" Lith was confused. Protector had always been the strongest among the four, but not by much.

"We are not like humans. A King is simply the most powerful beast in the area. The new Kings are simply too young. Those of my generations have all died, either of old age or by challenging my authority." Reaper explained.

"Replacing a single King is not an easy feat. Two is impossible."

'Solus?' Lith asked.

'I am not sure we can help them. Reaper is not as strong as Phillard was when he got here. There are still too many things we don't understand.'

"I'm sorry Reaper. I could do it, but it would take time and a considerable amount of risk. I spent over six months to Awaken him through painstaking efforts..."

"Mostly mine." Phillard snarled. "Especially the pain part."

"If you wanted a walk in the park, you were free to go anytime." Lith replied. "Without my teachings and experiments, you would still be waiting for death. Bottom line, Reaper, what you are asking from me is impossible."

"I don't have the time to teach you and Lifebringer, let alone focus on even weaker beasts. Even if I did, there are no guarantees of success. You could die, or worse. You could turn into an Abomination and I'd be forced to put you down. Unless..." Lith looked at Phillard with renewed interest.

"Seems you guys are lucky. He needs a place to live until he learns dimensional magic." Lith pointed at the Lindwurm.

"While the Kings need someone capable to give them a hand and teach them the basics. You are a match made in heaven."

"You are asking quite a lot from me and offering nothing in return." Phillard snorted.

"I can survive on my own, why should I waste my time with him?"

"Do you still want your new axes?" Lith asked with a wolfish smile. "Time to make a new deal. I'll give you what you want in exchange for your help."

"Make them enchanted, then." The Lindwurm raised the stakes. Teaching was like thinking, something he hated doing.

"Deal." Lith instantly replied catching both the creatures by surprise.

'What a sucker!' Phillard inwardly gloated. 'He didn't even try to bargain.'

'We have gravely misjudged him.' Reaper was deeply moved by Lith's altruism.

'He truly deserves the trust and the title of "crownless King" Protector gave him.'

Lith had always refused to rule over the west area of the Trawn woods. He would help the Kings to deal with threats like Abominations or crazed beasts, only to disappear whenever a crisis was resolved. Hence Protector's moniker.

'What a moron.' Lith inwardly grinned while shaking the Lindwurm's hand and sealing the deal. 'He asked for enchanted weapons, not for good ones. He is in for a nasty surprise.'

"As for you guys, I need something in return." Lith turned toward Reaper.

"Name it and it will be done. I swear it on my pack." Reaper's reply stunned Lith for a second. According to Protector, it was the most sacred oath a magical beast could take.

"Soon I'll go away. My cubs will be left unprotected and I don't trust humans. I want from those of you who will survive the treatment to guard my pack, no matter how long will it take. Protect all those who carry my blood."

"If they truly carried your blood, they wouldn't need any protection." Reaper grinned, crouching on his front paws giving Lith a small bow.

"I'll make sure everyone understands it's a gamble. I'll introduce to you only those who are willing to take my same oath. When are you going to leave?"

"Soon." Lith replied.

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Trawn Woods, after Lith's left for the academy

Reaper and Phillard were visiting one tribe after the other, searching for volunteers.

Power and longevity were a powerful siren, especially for those aware of their life span coming to an end. They were among the smartest beasts of the woods, but also those Reaper trusted very little.

Wisdom and mastery of magic weren't the only thing a magical beast could develop over time. Despite their affinity with Mogar, they could become greedy for life. They would despise the humans, so weak and magically inept, yet blessed with a long life.

"I don't get it." Phillard said.

"How can a weakling like you be the King of anything? Boss Scarlett can pummel you with just a swing of her tail. Heck, maybe even I can."

"How many times do I have to tell you?" Reaper sighed.

"The woods have a density of magical energy much lower than your forest. It has no will of its own. Kings have no special relationship with the woods nor share part of its power. Our duty is to protect the balance of the woods, hoping that one day it will awaken."

"Wow, sounds really boring. No wonder Protector left this place. Maybe if we manage to Awaken a lot of you guys, things may even become interesting." Phillard scoffed.

"Are you even listening to yourself? Your idea is simply terrible. Either a lot of us will die, further weakening the woods, or if too many Awaken at once it could result in a war for the territory."

"We can't pick candidates at random, but only those strong enough to survive the process and trustworthy enough to be entrusted with such power."

The more time they spent together, the more Reaper felt ashamed at the idea that a blockhead like Phillard had managed to Awaken while he and Lifebringer were still stuck as magical beasts.

"Whatever. I know that your house, your rules, but I think you are being very rude."

"What are you talking about?" Reaper was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"I've always been polite to you, even when you didn't deserve it!"

"Woah! First, chill. Second, I wasn't talking about me. It's just that I can't understand why after wasting our time with all those small fries you are purposely ignoring a big tribe of trolls." Phillard pointed one of his huge fingers towards the north.

"They are very strong. Boss Scarlett usually has to wipe them out fast before they swarm the forest. I'm really impressed by your ability to tame such fierce creatures."

"What trolls?"

If it wasn't for his brown fur, Reaper would have turned pale.

#### Chapter 336 Trolls Part 1

"Do you mean they aren't your friends? That sure would explain a lot." Phillard said while moving away from the menace as fast as he could.

"Of course they are no friends of mine! There have never been trolls in the Trawn woods. More importantly, what the heck are trolls?" Reaper asked.

Phillard pondered for a second, trying to remember Scarlett's words correctly.

"Trolls are one of the Fallen races. They were once humanoid creatures of great wisdom and longevity. Like us magical beasts they were in tune with two elements, but they were the same for everyone, light and darkness.

At the same time, like humans, they could freely learn all kinds of magic.

"Their major weak point was their low reproductive ability, you know, for balance and stuff. They were superior to us, but too few in numbers to expand their dominion. At some point, they decided to solve their problem with magic.

"They used light magic to force their evolution, becoming able to spawn faster and also increasing their physical abilities. A first, it was a great success. By altering their life force with light magic, they became the perfect race.



"At least until the unforeseen side effects started to appear. In a couple of generations, their children were raving mad from birth and plagued with an insatiable hunger. Their millennia old society was destroyed in a matter of weeks."

"Wait a minute. How could children destroy a civilization in weeks? Why their parents didn't kill them?" The idea that the same thing could happen to the Trawn woods terrified Reaper.

"Are you deaf or what?" Phillard scoffed. "I told you, they spawn fast. The little b\*stards can reach maturity in a few hours with enough nourishment. They are damn strong and hard to kill. Light magic runs rampant in their bodies."

"They recover from any wound in a matter of seconds. Cut off an arm and in a few minutes, you get double trouble. The troll regrows the limb while the limb regrows the troll."

"To make things even worse, their whole body is a frigging mouth. Attacking them without a weapon means literally throwing yourself in their maw. I almost got killed by them, twice. That's why I want my frigging axes!"

Reaper stopped in his tracks, putting together everything Phillard told him.

"How long do we have before they swarm the woods?"

"A week, maybe two if we are lucky." Phillard pondered.

"Depends on how much food they find and how hard they have to fight for it. The b\*stards can eat anything. Meat, fruits, grass, even trees if they are really hungry. Right now they are barely a dozen, but tomorrow they could be 24 and 48 the day after that."

"By the Great Mother, then we need to act now! What are their weak points?" Reaper had a bad feeling. If even after turning into an Evolved Monster Phillard was eager to run away from them, he had to have a really good reason.

"Not many. Perfect race, remember? They are incredibly stupid, but with their abilities, they can afford it. Magic is mostly useless against them, only fire and light can kill them for good. They burn like dry grass, but boss Scarlett always used light magic to get rid of them."

Reaper was flabbergasted. He never heard about light magic being able to kill, making it impossible for him to understand Scarlett's tactic. It was actually pretty simple, but Reaper's panic was blinding him.

Fire was dangerous to use inside the woods because, until the end of the combat, it would be free to spread everywhere. Also, the explosions usually associated with it could blast away a piece of troll, bringing it to safety.

If it happened, it was only a matter of time before that single missing piece spawned a new tribe. It was exactly what had brought trolls in the woods. A team of adventurers had been tasked to get rid of a small tribe and did a poor job cleaning up their remains.

"You can use all elements now, right? It should be easy for you wiping them out."

"Dude, I've Awakened from days and magic has never been my thing. I can use water and earth, but they can barely stall for time. If you don't have a way of dealing with them, we're as good as dead. It's better to run to fight another day."

Phillard's words almost crushed Reaper's hopes. The Lindwurm was right. During his last days in the woods, Lith had only explained them Invigoration and how to practice first magic. He had refused to teach Phillard any spell to force the Lindwurm to understand the importance of magical research.

"Run away? If what you said it's true, then in a week those creatures will turn the woods in a barren land. At that point they'll attack Lutia. I'm sure that Lith will appreciate you breaking your oath and letting his family getting killed." Reaper retorted, making Phillard freeze in fear.

"We need to kill them now. I'll get all the help I can find. You keep an eye on them and prevent them from spreading. I've a plan."

The Lindwurm spent the following hour watching the horror the trolls were from a safe distance. He also weaved as many spells as he could, just to be safe. For the first time in his life, Phillard regretted not listening to Scarlett the Scorpicores when she tried to teach him more advanced magic.

'Thank the Great Mother I've no legs anymore. My new body allows me to be silent, without stomping or tripping like my old one.' Phillard's size wasn't an issue. The trolls' eyes were white, without pupils or irises.

In his experience, they were blind and relied on their hearing and sense of smell to track their prey. Phillard wasn't soft hearted by nature. He often enjoyed playing with his meals before killing them, yet he couldn't help but pity the trolls' miserable existence.

They were over two meters (6'7") tall and their skin was of a sickly white color. They had no eyelids nor nose, breathing from two holes right in the middle of their faces. They had no lips either, revealing their huge maw filled with fangs going from ear to ear.

They were skeletal with a swollen belly, as if they hadn't eaten from days. Their hands had long fingers ending in razor sharp claws and their bodies were covered by odd looking scars that gave Phillard the creeps.

The trolls had already eaten everything in a 100 meters (328 feet) radius, so they were lazily grazing the grass while waiting for the next prey to draw their attention.

When Reaper returned with the reinforcements, Phillard could finally sigh in relief. There were Byks (bear type magical beasts), Shyfs (puma type), Gylads (stag type), Rys (wolf type), and Crons (hawk type).

Each tribe had sent their four most powerful members. Every one of them was a King or a potential King candidate. The Byks were eager to fight and prove their worth. After Lith had defeated Irtu, their previous leader, and the most talented member of their tribe had turned into an Abomination, the Crons' alpha had become the King in the West, usurping their title.

#### Chapter 337 Trolls Part 2

"That's it?" Phillard whispered despite his frustration. He couldn't risk alerting the trolls.

"What are we going to do with just twenty stooges?"

"Twenty one." Reaper said, pointing at the Lindwurm. "I brought only champions. Weaklings would only be dead weight or food for the trolls. Besides, why so gloomy? We almost outnumber them two to one."

"Dream on." Phillard sighed. "There are sixteen now."

Trolls reproduced asexually. Whenever one of them was full enough, it would give birth to a new creature.

"Dammit!" Reaper cursed. "We have to move fast. Here's my plan."

Everyone nodded in agreement, except the Byks.

"We don't trust birds. They'll fly away like the cowards they are." Said Cormr, their leader.

"Shut up, Cormr." Reaper commanded him. "I know you can't stand Crons. I only asked for your help because Byks are the only ones beside the Rys that can use fire magic."

"One more thing, before I forget. Whatever happens, do not use darkness magic." Phillard chimed in, enraging both Byks and Crons.

"Why is that? It's the most destructive element!" They said in unison, leaving Reaper flabbergasted. It was the first time they had agreed on anything.

"I don't remember." Phillard shrugged. "Sentar told me so. She is a Cron too, so she can use air and darkness magic. I trust her and so does Boss Scarlett. She's the next in line to become Lord of the forest."

Despite being an Evolved Monster, Phillard lacked the imposing aura of a King, so both tribes refused to listen to his advice. Only Lifebringer and Reaper managed to stop their bickering.

"He may not seem very bright, but he fought them twice and lived to tell the tale." Said Lifebringer, the King in the south.

"I'd have liked to meet you in more happy circumstances, Phillard. These two are Guardian and Thunder, the two new Kings." He pointed at the biggest among the Rys and the Crons respectively.

"Everyone, get into position. If we fail, the woods will belong either to the trolls or the humans. We have to pick the lesser evil and cooperate."

The idea of losing their ancestral home was enough for all the clans to agree to a truce.

Reaper's plan was simple. A few gutted rabbits were enough to lure the trolls to a large clearing. The smell of blood was for them like a flame to a moth. They moved so fast that the magical beasts only saw a blur until the trolls stopped to consumed their meal.

At that point, the Gylads, Shyfs, and Phillard used earth magic to turn the clearing into a crater ten meters (33 feet) deep while the Rys and the Byks unleashed fire on the trolls.

The mad creatures ignored everything around them. They kept fighting among themselves until the last shred of flesh and bones was consumed. Only the four newborns died. The adults were too strong, most of their injuries healed so fast that even the magical flames couldn't keep up.

Only then did the trolls notice the magical beasts and rushed towards their new prey. The Crons attempted to hit them with lightning while the earth magic users turned the ground into quicksand and erected stone walls to protect their allies.

The trolls were too fast for the quicksand to be effective. They even managed to dodge most lightning bolts. The trolls reached the stone walls, tearing through them like they were made of paper.

One of the Byks was caught off guard, the troll's arm had pierced the wall and grabbed her by the neck. She didn't have the time to call for help, her throat had already been replaced by a gaping hole.

The maw on the troll's palm opened and closed repeatedly, eating its way to the spine. The other magical beasts didn't understand what was happening until the troll smashed through the wall, embracing the Byk.

The odd looking scars turned out to be more maws, consuming the poor creature in the blink of an eye. Cursing their bad luck, Guardian used a blast of air magic to send the troll back to the center of the crater, exploiting its feeding frenzy.

Then, she unleashed a pillar of fire that filled the whole crater and engulfed all the trolls, buying her allies the time they needed to adjust their formation.

"Dammit, I don't think we can make it. We have to call Lith before it's too late!" Reaper knew that only by swallowing his pride as a King did they have a chance of success.

"Phillard, what are you waiting for?"

Phillard sighed. Reaper had clearly gone mad, yet he obeyed nonetheless.

"LITH! WE NEED HELP!" He screamed at the top of his lungs, almost deafening his own allies.

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Meanwhile hundreds of miles away, at White Griffon academy.

'I wonder why my ears are burning.' Lith thought while explaining advanced Body sculpting to Quylla's class.

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"Are you insane?" Reaper was on the verge of a nervous breakdown. Again.

"What was that for?"

"How the heck I'm supposed to call Lith? With our friendship power?" Phillard snarled, sending the trolls back in the crater with well timed swings of his tail. Despite being strengthened by earth fusion, the Lindwurm's body was covered with bite marks. Small chunks of meat were missing.

Reaper realized that Phillard had no communication amulet. It was likely that he didn't even know they existed. The only option left was fighting to the bitter end.

Even with their combined efforts and the higher ground, were the magical beasts barely able to keep up. It was only thanks to their perseverance and the trolls' lack of spells that they slowly managed to turn the tides.

The fire kept burning the trolls like candles, forcing the light magic coursing through their bodies to deplete their nutrients to keep them alive. One by one the monsters ran out of juice and died of starvation until only those who had eaten one or more magical beasts were still alive.

Only four trolls remained against fifteen magical beasts. The Crons were the only tribe with no casualties since they never touched the ground.

"Cursed birds! Come down instead of flying like cowards!" Cormr, the Byk alpha, got distracted in his outrage. The troll that had already tasted Byk's meat didn't miss the opportunity, grabbing him by the throat.

Cormr went into a panic, unleashing darkness magic against the monster to get rid of it. Contrary to his expectations, the creature emitted a moan of pleasure. The troll's body was now bulging with muscles, its eyes white no more.

Cormr could perceive the mouth closing on his throat, yet it didn't bite. Fear made him ignore the sudden burst of intelligence from the previously mindless creature. The Byk sent more and more darkness magic into his captor's body.

"You idiot!" Phillard reacted as quick as he could, piercing both the Byk and the troll with countless ice spears.

'Now I remember! Trolls are also known as the unliving. It's the lack of darkness energy in their bodies that makes them a Fallen race. That stupid Byk gave the troll enough darkness to regain its senses.' Phillard thought.

The troll roared in outrage. With Cormr's death, it could already feel its mind slipping away again.

The troll ate the Byk's corpse with its hand, before freeing himself from the ice spears by flexing his muscles. The hideous troll was quickly regaining its humanoid features, taking the appearance of a man with grey skin and four arms.

The creature now had gold colored eyes that glowed with mana, reminding Phillard of Lith's Life Vision. The troll charged at the Lindwurm, releasing small bolts of light when they were almost at close quarters.

Unlike darkness magic, light magic was fast, but its range was even worse. Phillard managed to dodge most of the bolts, but some struck him, making his body go limp.

'That's a watered down version of Boss Scarlett's offensive light spell.' Phillard thought while watching the troll's maws ripping through his flesh.

#### Chapter 338 Boot Camp Part 1

Phillard had no memory of ever being an animal. His first recollection was standing up on his legs, feeling the need to fill his belly. As a magical beast, he had always been on the top of the food chain.

Fear was a rare emotion for him. Something he experienced only when facing Evolved Monsters or, more recently, Lith. Being eaten alive made Phillard discover the emotion of terror.

The awareness that, even if he somehow managed to get rid of the troll, he could still die from his wounds, was almost enough to make him panic.

Almost.

His body was weak but his mind was strong. Tendrils of earth emerged from the ground, shoving themselves down the troll's many maws. Mud and rocks tasted terrible. A disgusted expression appeared on the Fallen's face while it tried to get rid of the fetters restricting its movements.

Reaper exploited the moment the two were finally separated to unleash his most powerful lightning on the still struggling troll. Hammer Fall was the equivalent of a tier four air spell.

The lightning bolt was as big as a small house and instead of striking once before disappearing into the ground, it coiled around its prey, hitting it multiple times.

The troll's skin was blackened and the smell of grilled meat accompanied his charred body. It made the Lindwurm hungry, reminding him he was an apex predator. All those who opposed him were bound to become food first and manure later.

The troll started to heal the instant the lightning stopped, its hands glowing with light magic. Guardian the Ry struck it with several fire bolts, but in its humanoid form, the troll wasn't vulnerable to fire anymore.

"I'm useless here!" She said. "I'll go back and help the others. Try to hold on until we get rid of the other three trolls."

"Easier said than done!" Reaper cursed. Letting a single troll go would mean that all of their fallen companions would have died for nothing. Running away wasn't an option.

Phillard roared his challenge and stood up on his tail despite the agony from his multiple wounds and the blood spurting everywhere. The troll charged at the Lindwurm, releasing another barrage of daggers made of light.

This time Phillard was ready. He clenched his right hand, raising a stone wall that blocked the light spell. The troll smashed through the wall, falling into Phillard's trap. Right behind the stone barrier, he had mixed water and earth to create a thick mud layer that thoroughly coated the troll.

Suddenly the creature was deaf, blind, and slowed enough for the Lindwurm to conjure a giant hammer made of stone. He used it to send the troll flying in the sky with a single powerful upward blow.

"Strike it with everything you got!" Phillard ordered both the Crons and Reaper while removing the earth and leaving the monster drenched in water.

Lightning bolts struck from every direction with enough force to almost prevent the troll from falling down. Phillard made sure the creature never regained its footing. He swung the stone hammer sending the troll flying every time it was about to reach the ground.

With no spells and its mobility sealed, soon the troll reverted back to its hideous form and died shortly thereafter. Phillard was exhausted. He was doing everything he could to treat his wounds, but his knowledge of light magic was limited to chore magic.

He could only dress the wounds with earth magic to stop the bleeding. When he saw that the three other trolls were still alive, rage blinded him.

"Why don't you just die?" He roared. The air in his lungs mixed with the unique mana running through his body. A spark of his life force ignited the mana, turning the roar into a green cloud that enveloped the trolls and filled the crater.

The rocks melted, and the earth decaying emitting the disgusting smell of rotten eggs. Everything touched by the toxic breath died and the trolls were no exception. Their bodies turned into pools of white liquid. Not even bones were left behind.

"F\*ck my life!" Phillard cursed. "Couldn't I have learned that five minutes ago?"

Of the twenty one magical beasts, only fourteen remained and many others wouldn't survive their wounds.

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Phloria's boot camp was a nightmare. She knew what to expect, Orion had told her everything in advance, yet no words could describe the harsh reality she had faced during the last six months.

First, her long hair had been shaved to a buzz cut and then all of her magical items had been confiscated. Everything that reminded her of her past life, every link with her family had been severed.

They strictly forbid the use of magic outside of chore magic during the training course. The cadets could only use their first name and the service number assigned to them. It was for their own protection.

The military was the polar opposite of an academy. The male to female ratio was seven to three and nobles would suffer from hazing if discovered. Most of the applicants were poor people trying to build a better future for themselves.

More often than not, they had been forced to run away from an unfair ruler, either to spare their families from more taxes or to avoid a grudge. Nobles were despised by both officers and grunts, forcing them to hide in plain sight.

With her muscular build and her callous hands from all her training, Phloria had no problems passing for a commoner. Whenever someone asked her about her family or past, she simply talked about Lith's.

They had spent so much time together that she knew his life like the back of her hand. It helped Phloria to make friends and to keep her identity a secret. She had never experienced most of their daily worries except through Lith's words.

The first months were brutal. The instructors only cared about strength, stamina, and speed. Only those who excelled would get a shot at becoming part of the elite forces. Average cadets could only become normal soldiers, while those lacking in one or more skill could only hope that their brain would get them a desk job.



The rest would be deemed unfit for service and discharged.

In every test during the first three months, Phloria outperformed every other cadet in her platoon. It earned her a lot of admiration from her barrack mates and just as much hostility from the other cadets.

However, the Ernas family had stolen too much spotlight lately, their enemies were itching for an opportunity to embarrass them.

Archduke Teben had never forgotten the humiliation his daughter suffered during the White Griffon tournament. He couldn't stand Phloria overshadowing Clea in the military too, so he made sure the right rumors reached the right ears.

When her identity was "casually" discovered, all Phloria's hard work was for naught. Even her barrack mates abandoned her. They could stand being outclassed by a hard working commoner, while the success of a silver spooned noble was unacceptable.

Soon Phloria was cut off from the other cadets. The only thing worse than the daily hazing and humiliation was the isolation. Things hit rock bottom when her platoon met their sergeant instructor: Trion Proudstar.

It was Archduke Teben's final gift. He knew Trion hated his brother so much that he had refused Lith's family name and bought one with his own merits instead of using them to further his career.

#### Chapter 339 Boot Camp Part 2

Trion was powerless to do anything to Lith. No Commanding Officer in his right mind would put two brothers in the same platoon. Phloria, though, was a whole different story.

Trion did his worst to ruin her military file. He charged her with insubordination whenever she objected to the impossible tasks he assigned to her and gave her demerits when she inevitably failed to accomplish them.

Phloria wasn't a stunner, but everything about her drove Trion crazy with envy. She was now 1.78 meters (5'10") tall, while he barely reached the average height of 1.65 meters (5'5").

The idea that a noble dame belonging to one of the most important households in the Kingdom, who also was a very powerful mage, had been his brother's girlfriend was something he couldn't stand.

'According to the rumors, this wh\*re slept with him for over a year. I heard they got this close to becoming engaged. Yet none of the noble b\*tches I met did so much as to look at me because of my origins.' Trion thought.

He knew that messing with an Ernas was a bad idea, yet he did it nonetheless. Trion knew it was likely to be his only opportunity to get back at his brother, so he couldn't miss it. Teben was aware of Trion's grudge, it was the reason he had chosen him for the job.

Only an idiot would put everything on the line for a petty reason and Trion was exactly that kind of man. Phloria endured the constant latrine duty, the insults, and the protection he offered to anyone who hazed her.

The only silver lining in that situation was that the Ernas name was both a blessing and a curse. It gave everyone a reason to hate her, but at the same time, it set boundaries not even the most reckless soldier dared to cross.

Jirni's reputation was only second to Orion's when it came to avenging his daughters for any kind of offense, be it real or simply perceived as such. Even with Teben's protection, Trion had to walk a thin line to avoid turning from perpetrator to victim.

Months passed. That morning Phloria found her mail in the mud, as it always was after a rainy night. Normally it would take her first magic and quite an effort to salvage its contents, but this time the letter was written with special ink which made it easy to read.

She grinned and had the courtesy to slam the barracks' door behind her and waking everyone up. A lot of swear words filled the morning silence, but she didn't care. For once she deserved them.

Phloria walked double time toward the officers' quarters, humming the whole time.

"What are you doing here, private Ernas?" Trion's voice was full of contempt, putting emphasis on her rank being at the bottom of the barrel.

"I'm going to receive my new assignment, sergeant Proudstar, sir." She gave him the salute. Her voice was unusually happy.

"You have no assignment until I say so!" He yelled. Trion might have been a simple sergeant instructor, but to a private in boot camp, he was a king.

"Haven't you learned that I hate sass? Drop down and give me twenty!"

"I'm not in the mood, thanks. Do it yourself, I have better things to do."

Trion turned bright red in outrage. Never before had someone dared to defy his orders.

"This is the army, not your precious household, little missy! Your insubordination will cost you dearly!"

Phloria's reply was but a simple word.

"Kneel."

Suddenly Trion felt his body weight increase until he wasn't able to stand up anymore. His hands hit the muddy ground with a thud, requiring all of his strength to not end up face first in the dirt.

"That does it! Using magic on your commanding officer will get you court martialled. Not even your family can save you this time." He said with a grunt while his face inched closer and closer to the ground.

"I don't think so. I'm just using magic on a measly sergeant to punish his bad manners which border on insubordination." Phloria placed the letter where he could read its contents. She had just been promoted to Second Lieutenant.

The only reason why Phloria endured Trion for the past three months was that she knew that there was little he could do if she didn't fall for his provocations. The only results that mattered were those assigned to the whole platoon.

If Trion set them too high to make her fail, everyone would fail. Whenever he underrated her performances, all she had to do was to ask for a second evaluation.

"For your information, Sergeant, gravity magic is another thing I learned from your brother. After meeting you, I'm not surprised your family has completely forgotten about you." Her voice was stone cold. She pressed down on his head with her boot until Trion's nose dipped into the mud.

"I don't believe you!" Despite the anger behind his words, his voice lacked conviction.

"Do you know that you have another little brother? That Rena now has a daughter? Except for Elina, no one cares if you are dead or alive. Both babies have been named after Lith, you know? Instead of running away as you did, he made their life better."

Phloria used the truth to hide her lies, making them as painful as possible.

"You are nothing but a little man, inside and out. I could ruin your career with a call, but you are not worthy of my time. Two years and you are still a sergeant? Pathetic."

Her words and her boot crushed his resistance, making Trion fall flat into the mud.

Phloria left him sobbing. She wanted to wear her new uniform and settle all the scores she had left before leaving the camp.

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White Griffon academy

After the end of lessons, all Lith had left to do was to make sure Manohar was properly entertained. Ever since Marth became Headmaster, the eccentric genius had stopped going missing.

Marth made sure he would receive new components and ingredients from time to time instead of getting them all at once. This way Manohar would explore the possibilities that each branch of his research offered before moving on to the next project.

Lith's duty was to check if Manohar's boredom levels were reaching the danger zone. In such cases, Lith was allowed to provide him with new toys that would keep him busy in his lab.

Judging from the "Do not disturb" sign hung to Manohar's door and the amount of neglected paperwork on his desk, Lith could sigh in relief.

'It's when he starts doing his job without being forced to that I have to worry.' Lith reminded himself.

Then, he used his ring to open a Warp Steps to the fifth floor, right in front of Quylla's door.

"Thanks for coming. I'm sorry to bother you so often." Quylla hugged him as soon as he stepped inside and away from prying eyes.

"Stop saying that every time we meet, little one." He replied while patting her head.

Ever since her return to the academy, Lith had done his best to stay close to her and help Quylla overcome her sense of guilt for killing Yurial while under Nalear's influence. Quylla needed all the support she could get.

Lith was the only one in the group that had no role in the accident. Quylla was the main culprit, but Phloria was the one that gave the order to save Jirni first, while Friya mindlessly obeyed.

Quylla considered him to be the only one that could judge the events without his own guilt clouding his mind.

#### Chapter 340 Life at the Academy Part 1

"Stop calling me 'little one'!" Quylla hated that moniker, it made her feel like a child.

"We're the same age and I'm even quite tall for my age." With her 1.6 meters (5'3") she was indeed tall by Mogar's standards. Because of her thin build, she seemed even taller.

"You are short compared to me." Lith shrugged. He never expected these Murderers Anonymous meetings to become a habit for the surviving members of the group.

Yet after noticing how much talking with him helped Phloria to relieve her burden, Lith became the sponsor for the three girls until they felt ready to share their demons with each other.

Friya and Phloria had recovered quickly. Maybe because the academy kept their minds busy, or maybe because after so many tears and so much grieving they had come to terms with the truth that saving both Jirni and Yurial was just a pipe dream.

The anniversary of Nalear's attack had recently passed, so Lith wasn't surprised when Quylla called him and asked for his help. He was glad to see she had been eating again. Her cheeks were rosy and she was even starting to gain weight in the right places.

"How is it going with Kalan?" Before confronting the elephant in the room, Lith wanted to make Quylla relax with small talk about her boyfriend.

"We broke up yesterday." She replied with a sigh.

'Nice move, Freud.' Lith inwardly cursed at his bad luck.

'It's not your fault, you had no way of knowing.' Solus consoled him.

"I don't need to know who dumped who to tell you that he is a d\*ck. It's his loss."

"What makes you so sure it's his fault we broke up?" Quylla chuckled. Lith's unconditional support meant a lot to her.

"Well, you started dating less than two months ago. The only reasons I can think of for such an abrupt ending is either you found out he was cheating on you, or he rushed for the fifth year and he wouldn't take a no for an answer. Either way, he is a d\*ck."

Fifth year was the Mogar's slang equivalent for the home run in a relationship.

Quylla blushing instead of getting angry at her ex made Lith understand it was the latter.

"How is Tista doing?" Quylla changed the topic. There were things she didn't like to talk about with Lith.

"Good. After the mock exam she got a group of her own. Two girls and two boys, just like ours. Tista's jury is still out on whether or not they are sincere."

"How come you're so relaxed? Aren't you worried about the boys?" Quylla would have expected Lith to have run background checks or at least have intimidated them.

"Tista knows that if she needs my help she just has to ask." Lith shrugged.

"She must learn to fend for herself and become a good judge of character. My role isn't to prevent her from stumbling and falling, only to help her in standing back up."

Those words shocked Quylla. Lith was so calm and mature instead of his usual overprotective self.

"If someone tries something funny or hurts her, they may find themselves accident prone. Maybe even going missing for good, but that's another story." He winked.

Lith meant to make her laugh with his joke, yet Quylla became sad.

"Do you still think about Yurial?" She asked while staring at the ground.

"Yes. Almost every day." Lith sighed.

"I still regret never making that trip with you guys at the end of the fourth year. I also regret not being a better friend. Before meeting you guys, I was completely alone. Don't get me wrong, I love my family, but they know nothing about magic.

"My mother still thinks that with a book and a bit of effort everything is possible. She doesn't realize how much work there is behind every single spell. Nor does she realize the things I had to do to get where I am and earn all the money I bring home.

I know it's my fault for always keeping them in the dark, but I felt lonely nonetheless."

'I don't know what would have become of me without you, Solus. You are the best thing that ever happened to me.' He inwardly added, making Solus incredibly happy.

"Even if I didn't realize it earlier, you guys are my magical family. After the second exam, Yurial realized his faults and did his best to become a good friend. A brother. Yet I was too conceited to notice."

Lith handed Quylla one of Yurial's notebooks. It was opened to a page where, after discussing one of the impossible arrays, Yurial had let his mind wander about his feelings towards the group and Quylla in particular.

He expressed his regrets for having treated her as an asset rather than a person at first, thinking only of how he could exploit her help to improve his grades. Yurial also wrote about how he had protected her from the shadows, getting rid of those who approached her with a hidden agenda.

"I think Quylla is too kind for her own good." Yurial wrote. "Don't let her know that I told you, but I believe she's the most dazzling girl I've ever met. Despite Quylla's harsh life, she retained her sweet and loving personality.

"I wish I didn't always act like an idiot in front of her. I hope one day I'll be able to repay all the kindness she has showered me with, even when I did nothing to deserve it. I hope she'll think fondly of me like I do of her."

Quylla started sobbing. She dropped the notebook, incapable of reading those words for one second longer. She felt undeserving of such affection.

"How can you forgive me for what I did?" She said through the tears. "I'm sure Yurial spent his last moments of life hating me. Thinking I had betrayed his trust."

Lith embraced her. He caressed her hair and back while she vented her pain.

"You have nothing to be forgiven for." He said.

"I didn't show you that notebook to torture you, but only to let you know what his feelings for you were. Yurial could never hate you. He loved us too much to have such thoughts. I'm sure he was worried more about you than about himself."

Lith paused for a second before continuing.

"Quylla, no one blames you for what happened but yourself. Life is for the living, not for the dead. You can't let Nalear's madness ruin your life. Don't turn him into a vengeful ghost haunting you. That's the only thing Yurial could never forgive you for."

Lith knew he was being a hypocrite, yet he didn't care. Carl's death was always lingering in the back of his mind, affecting every decision he made. Getting over the untimely death of a loved one wasn't something he should preach about to others.

'My body count has already reached three digits, while Quylla has still a chance to be normal. She needs hope more than anything else.' He thought.

Feeling that little, frail body quivering through tears, Lith deeply regretted having given Nalear a swift death instead of one filled with excruciating agony.