

Supreme M 341

Chapter 341 Life at the Academy Part 2

Months passed and soon came the end of the second trimester. Lith's teaching methods gave Marth a headache, but it was the good kind. Unlike other Professors, Lith wouldn't leave everything to self study and give only cryptic advice.

Lith always gave a full explanation of the exercises he assigned and even a short tutorial. The problem was that none of his lessons were simple. The exercises always required a deep understanding of the principles of advanced magic and the ability to put them into practice.

It resulted in half the class acing the exercises and the other half failing miserably. Oddly enough, the results seemed to be influenced more by each student's amount of practice rather than by raw talent.

The reason why Marth hadn't ordered him to use more orthodox methods was that those who thrived in Lith's lessons would also improve in most of the other subjects.

'Maybe these kinds of exercises are better suited for an elective class, or perhaps even an exam.' Marth thought. 'I'll give him until the end of the year before deciding what to do.'

Phillard the Lindwurm and the magical beasts of the Trawn woods survived the battle with the trolls. Lith returned the following weekend and brought all those who still lived back to their peak condition. He taught Phillard several healing spells, so that even in his absence someone could take care of injuries or illnesses.

Reaper introduced him to seventeen magical beasts, but Lith dismissed half of them right off the bat. Only those who already had a cyan core were suitable for his experiments. The memory of the green cored Byk turning into an Abomination was still fresh in his mind.

After the near death experience, Phillard was strongly motivated to learn. Through relentless practice he mastered Accumulation and Invigoration, becoming capable of assisting Lith in teaching the magical beasts.

By the end of the year, out of the nine magical beasts under his care only Reaper and Lifebringer managed to evolve into a Manticore and a Kirin respectively. Lifebringer's new body resembled a gigantic white horse partially covered in scales.

Emerald flames came out of his hooves and antlers.

Thunder and two more beasts died in the attempt, none of them returned as an Abomination.

The failures taught Lith many things he had missed during Phillard's Awakening process, while the surviving members learned the importance of patience.

'I can use Solus's tower form to make the process easier and safer, but I can't risk revealing her existence. I won't trust any of them until I see how they behave when they believe they have reached my level of strength.' He thought.

Thanks to Solus, Lith was able to conceal part of his powers. He trusted magical beasts more than he did humans, but that didn't mean much. Lith had prepared several safeguards in preparation to kill anyone who dared to turn against him.

Those two years as an Assistant Professor were one of the happiest times in Lith's life. His brother Aran and his niece Leria grew healthy thanks to their family's love. Lith didn't give them his special treatment. The idea of an Awakened baby was something that gave him the creeps.

'Power without wisdom is the perfect recipe for a disaster.' He thought.

After Quylla graduated, she and Friya left the academy, leaving Lith truly alone for the first time in a very long time. Tista was busy with her own friends. Lith preferred her to live her life without being constantly overshadowed by his presence.

He buried himself in magical research, trying to understand the various magical specializations while he was still at the academy and could ask for the help of his colleagues when necessary.

Lith had several flings during his last year at the White Griffon. After his break up with Phloria, dating older women made it easy for him to get back in the game.

The only real challenge he met was keeping an eye on Tista's natural Awakening process. She wasn't a magical beast, so at least he could hope she wouldn't emit a light pillar from her body.

After a year and a half at the academy, the impurities in her body were dangerously close to her bright green mana core. Incidents started to happen whenever she used first magic. Her tier zero spells would occasionally go wild, destroying her things or hurting her friends.

Lith kept his finger crossed, hoping for the weekend to come before it was too late. He couldn't drag her away from the academy without a good reason and with Manohar around faking an illness would risk drawing his attention.

As soon as Tista finished her weekly lessons, Lith brought her back to Lutia and into the Trawn woods.

"Why are we here?" Tista was confused.

Lith had refused to give her any explanation while still inside the academy and had performed several Warp Steps to make sure no one was able to follow them unnoticed. He even stored all their academy related enchanted items inside his pocket dimension to jam any kind of tracking devices.

"First, don't get scared. Second, do not scream. I don't want to draw any attention."

Lith had brought her over the mana geyser in the woods he used for Solus's tower form.

"We trained in the woods countless times, there's nothing scary here. Why should I s... GOOD G...!" Her scream was muffled by Lith's hand.

He had to admit that seeing his ring grow into a small building was quite a shocker.

"Because of that. Now can you promise me to keep your cool? Otherwise my hand will have to stay there." Tista nodded, turning from the tower to her brother over and over again.

"Is this...?"

"A mage tower? Yes. Now get in, we don't have all day." As soon as they walked in, a bright yellow wisp of light the size of a watermelon welcomed the siblings.

Tista instinctively chanted a defensive spell, but Lith stopped her.

"Tista, allow me to introduce you to Solus. Solus, this is Tista."

"It's nice to finally get to know you, Tista." Solus's silvery voice made Tista's jaw fall to the ground.

"The tower speaks?" She would have run away screaming if Lith wasn't right beside her, acting like nothing was happening.

"Yes, she does. Also, she has a name, unless you have completely forgotten your manners." Lith sighed. At this pace the sun would set before he could even mention the Awakening process.

"Does Phloria know? About your tower girlfriend?" Tista didn't know whether to be more shocked or angry at all the secrets her brother kept from everyone else.

"She's not my girlfriend!"

"I'm not his girlfriend!"

The two shouted in unison.

"Also, no. I have never told anyone before, because you know, legendary artifacts rarely remain in the hands of someone stupid enough to flaunt them to the world. I'll be honest, I probably wouldn't have even told you until you finished the academy.

I'm forced to do it now because Solus is the best chance I have of saving your life."

"I beg your pardon?" Tista had still hundreds of questions, but Lith's last words made her reconsider her priorities.

Chapter 342 Tista Part 1

Lith spent the next hour explaining Tista about fake magic, true magic, and the Awakening process. She trusted her brother with her life, yet even after meeting Solus, Tista found hard to believe such a massive info dump.

Lith then cast perfectly silent spells of all tiers, from one to five in front of her eyes. Tista gasped for air, the whole Mogar was turning upside down. She kept hyperventilating due to stress until everything turned black.

"Has she fainted?" Lith asked.

"Yes. Too bad we can't waste time being nice." Solus conjured ice cold water and splashed Tista's face with it.

"Oh, gods! I had the weirdest dream..." When Tista saw Lith and Solus again, she realized it wasn't a dream. Lith sat on the ground beside her, putting his arm around her shoulders to keep her calm.

"Is everything I learned so far a lie, then?" She asked after a while.

"No, it's just part of a much more complex truth. Think about it. We and magical beasts having two different kinds of magic doesn't make sense. We breathe the same air, we eat the same things. Why magic should be any different?" Lith replied.

"What's wrong with me? Am I going to die?" She embraced Lith in search of warmth. Tista was so shocked that she had yet to dry herself from the water.

"There is nothing wrong with you and you are going to be just fine." Lith made the water disappear and had Solus turn the heat up in the tower.

"Yet to succeed I need your help. There are some unknown factors that I had no opportunity to study, so I need you to be completely honest with me. Don't try to be a hero, if anything feels weird or painful you have to tell me."

"Weird how?" Tista blushed.

"To keep you alive and healthy I have removed impurities from your body since a tender age. I stopped as soon as I noticed your Awakening process started because I have no idea if it made things easier or harder for you. Also, you have a bright green core. So far my only successful experiments involve cyan cores." Lith sighed.

"Wait. Didn't you tell me you had a green one too? What's the difference between you and me?"

"The difference is me Awakening early. My body developed like that of a magical beast. I grew slowly in strength, so my body had all the time it needed to adapt. Yours is going straight from a dormant green core to an active cyan one. It could either kill you or turn you into an Abomination."

Lith hugged her tightly, kissing her forehead. The thought of losing her was unbearable.

'I'll never be able to live with myself if she dies because of me.' Lith thought.

'She'd be dead without you.' Solus rebuked. 'Now bring her to the basement, we have no time to lose.'

Lith helped Tista to get up and did as instructed. He explained to her how Awakening usually involved the impurities reaching the mana core, triggering some kind of reaction that made both the core and the body stronger.

"I still have no clue about the details, but I think that expelling the impurities is only part of the process. During the refinement, the body undergoes a transformation that corrects any flaw humans normally develop during their lives.

"If I'm right, the stronger the core the greater the number of flaws the body needs to fix. It's an incredibly delicate process, like using Body Sculpting on a healthy subject. Hence the body undergoes a lot of stress and if it's unable to cope, the final result is death.

"In theory, you grew with very few imperfections. It should make things easier."

"What if you are wrong?" Tista asked.

"Then by removing your impurities, I've doomed you." The sibling shivered in fear, but Tista only held Lith's hand tighter.

"What do I have to do?"

Lith brought her in the tower's basement, in the nearest point to the mana geyser. Then, he explained to her both Invigoration and Accumulation while Solus filled the air to the brim with world energy.

"If you learn Accumulation before your Awakening, we can have an idea if your body is ready. If you feel no discomfort it would be a great sign. If you learn Invigoration, instead, it can help you survive in case anything goes wrong."

Tista sat cross legged on the warm stone floor, taking deep breathes and following Lith's instructions. She was scared but at the same time excited. She had started studying magic to feel closer to her brother, but now it was an important part in her life.

She loved being a mage and the idea of becoming part of something bigger filled her with joy. The high mana density in the room tickled her skin. She could almost feel the energy moving around her, seeping into her body.

'A living tower, true magic, and secrets no one but the beasts know. Mom is right. Since Lith's birth life really turned into a fairy tale. Now I understand why all the secrecy about his abilities and how he managed to cure what even Nana was helpless against.

'Even if I die today, I have no regrets. Without him, I would have spent the few years I had left agonizing in my bed.' Tista thought, yet tears streamed down her eyes thinking back to her past life.

"Is anything wrong?" Lith asked as soon as he noticed.

"I lied to myself." Tista said. "I have lots of regrets. I'm scared and I don't want to die."

The first phrase baffled Lith, the others not so much.

"We are on the same page. Now keep breathing and tell me how do you feel."

Tista took in a couple of deep breaths from the nose before answering.

"I feel hot and ticklish. Is it normal?"

"Yes." Lith lied.

'How the heck I'm supposed to know what's normal? It's my first time Awakening a human too! As long as she doesn't feel pain it's a good sign.' He thought.

The hours passed. Lith could only check on Tista and Solus from time to time. Neither of them could afford losing focus or to get tired. Until Tista's Awakening started, Lith preferred to have them rest, if needed.

"I think I learned Invigoration!" Tista suddenly said. "I can feel a warm flow of mana entering my body. It's this the world energy? It's so different from casting a spell with fake mag..."

"Don't lose the breathing rhythm!" Lith scolded her. "When the process starts, it will be painful. If you lose the rhythm, Invigoration stops working!"

Tista wanted to rebuke, but realizing Lith was just worried about her, she moved to Accumulation instead. Now she could visualize the impurities nearing her core, giving her a pricking sensation whenever they touched.

Tista was about to report it to Lith when a big impurity struck her core merging with it. Pain invaded her body, almost breaking her concentration. Tista had never felt such agony since she was a kid when even breathing was a miracle to her.

Pain was an old friend, so she welcomed it back gritting her teeth and without losing her breathing rhythm.

"It has begun." Solus said.

Chapter 343 Tista Part 2

One after the other, the impurities reached Tista's green core, forcing their way in. The mana reacted strongly to the invasion, giving its all to wipe out the foreign objects.

Lith could watch via Invigoration a small scale war of matter versus energy taking place inside Tista's body. The green core slowly turned black as more and more impurities amassed inside.

The pain grew as Tista's core darkened, until Tista couldn't bear it any more and screamed at the top of her lungs. Lith knew the pain was normal, so he kept watching. It had happened to him multiple times.

Tista's mana core started to pulse, contracting and expanding like it was going to blow. Then it released a powerful wave of cyan mana that purged the impurities inside and outside itself.

Lith could see the mana coursing through her body like it was searching for impurities to vent its wrath upon. Whenever it encountered them, they would be flushed out, no matter the cost. Flesh and muscles were torn, bones cracked.

It was like Tista's body was suddenly disgusted by itself and had decided to start over from scratch.

Tista's pain was nearing its peak. Lith kept watching and waiting, the refining process seemed identical to his own. The only thing he could do was to ease her pain with light magic and give her a bit of his life force whenever her body experienced a major breakdown.

Not knowing what was actually helpful and what wasn't, he couldn't directly interfere. The self-inflicted wounds brought Tista to the verge of death, yet he couldn't heal her without risking doing more harm than good.

Lith and Solus did their best to keep her stable, moving alongside the mana flow to not obstruct its movements.

The process lasted barely a few minutes, but to both siblings it might as well have been hours. Black goo came out from Tista's pores, making her puke, cry, and bleed impurities all at the same time.

Only when the last drop was shed was Tista's body fully repaired. Lith destroyed the tar-like substance with darkness magic while assessing the damage.

'She expelled way fewer impurities than I usually do, yet the pain was much worse.' He thought.

'I think it's because at first you expelled only impurities and your body got progressively stronger and more resistant to pain. She had to endure broken bones right off the bat. The pain must have been unbearable.' Solus replied.

Lith checked Tista with Invigoration again. Aside from being unconscious, she was perfectly fine. Her core was now deep cyan and was constantly absorbing the world energy Solus had conjured inside the basement.

'Solus, can you make a room for her too? She needs to sleep and so do I.' Lith was exhausted too. Tiptoeing across a minefield and getting out alive would have been easier than what he had done to not get in Tista's mana's way while keeping her alive.

'Sure I can. My mana core may still be deep green but that is more than enough.' During the past two years, Solus's mana core had been further enhanced, allowing her to complete the first floor of the tower.

Unfortunately, she had yet to acquire any semblance of a body.

'I'll also pump world energy into her room non stop. It should help her to recover faster.'

Lith brought Tista to a brand new room that was a perfect replica of her own at the academy before going to sleep.

Tista woke up several hours later, feeling like someone had kicked her all the way back home. The first thing she noticed was that her body felt different. She was faster, stronger, but most of all smellier.

"Did I fall into an open sewer or what?" She took off her dress, throwing it into a corner, yet the stench didn't subside.

"Or what." Solus replied making Tista flinch. She wasn't expecting company.

"The impurities can have that effect. Follow me, I prepared you a bath."

Solus was relieved seeing Tista was all right. She was also incredibly embarrassed. After the Awakening Tista's physical appearance hadn't changed much, but it was Solus's first time seeing her naked.

She was now a gorgeous woman who stood 1.76 (5'9") meters tall with waist length auburn hair containing several shades of red. What made Solus feel really awkward wasn't just the fact that Tista's three sizes were 92D-58-88 centimeters (37D-23-35 inches), but also the perfect proportions of her body.

'I bet countless artists would be glad to spend their lives trying to reproduce her symmetry.' Solus thought while staring at Tista's oval face and her delicate features.

'By my maker, if it keeps up this way either my self-esteem will crumble or I'll develop a crush on her.'

"How long have you known my brother?" Tista asked snapping Solus out of her reverie.

"A long time. Since he was four years old." Now that she was submerged in water and foam Solus had a much easier time thinking straight.

"Do you want me to show you?" Solus had already asked Lith's opinion via their mind link.

'She already knows a lot, there's no harm in sharing the rest. Just keep my first two lives out of the picture and enjoy your first human friend.' Was his answer.

Tista and Solus talked a lot about themselves, true magic, and their plans for the future. Solus would often show her images from their easiest battles or of the Evolved Beasts they befriended.

"Once I graduate from the academy, I want to see the world. When I was younger Lutia was my everything but now it feels like a cage, just like my house was back when I was still ill.

"I want to see the capitol, the big cities I visited during my house calls for the White Griffon. I know people will be the same ass*oles wherever I go but the scenery of some cities just stole my heart. What about you, Solus?"

"There's not much I can plan." She sighed. "Soon we will join the army, that's all I know."

"I never got why Lith wants to enlist. Can you explain it to me?" Tista asked.

"It's not for me to say."

"How deep is your bond?"

"Pretty deep."

"Do the two of you ever separate? I mean, where were you while lil brother was with Phloria? Did you watch or something?" Tista's question made the wisp turn beet red.

"No, I didn't. I always gave them their privacy. I can isolate myself from the outside world when it's necessary. Oh, Lith just woke up. He will be glad to know you are alright." Solus quickly changed the topic, materializing a replica of the uniform's academy out of thin air.

"I can give you any dress you want, but you can't take them outside. My creations disappear beyond the tower's walls." She explained.

Tista dried herself with a wave of her hand before wearing her new clothes. She entered Lith's room without knocking. He was focused on practicing Silverwing's Hexagram and another impossible array at the same time.

"What's that?" Tista was referring to the six pointed star inscribed inside a silver circle originating from Lith's right hand.

"Yurial's Hexagram." Lith's replied. "Something he theorized and I'm working to turn it into reality. I still have a long way to go. Also, I could have been naked."

"Yeah, right. Even when we were kids you always swam in the river with your clothes on and your door was always closed whenever you changed. You always hated feeling vulnerable, lil brother. Isn't that the reason why you bought the Skinwalker armor?" She pointed out.

"Point taken, but still." Lith dropped the matter. He preferred to explain to her the basics of true magic since it was almost time to go home before Elina started to worry.

Chapter 344 Final Wish Part 1

"There are two things that you must never forget about being an Awakened." Lith explained.

"The first is that our secret cannot be shared with anyone. The history of Garlen continent is full of mages and researchers that go missing in 'accidents' when they tried to share their theories about it.

I have no idea how many Awakened ones are out there, so far I met only Nalear and Farg. I only discovered their nature when they decided so. Sadly, there is no way to tell a fake from a true mage."

"Two of our Professors are Awakened?" The news shocked Tista.

"Yes." Lith nodded. "What I am trying to say is that not only you can't tell anyone about your new powers, but also that if you ever get found out you have to kill them."

Lith's eyes and voice were stone cold.

"Kill them? Why?"

"Think about it." Lith sneered. "A mage is a weapon and as such is strictly regulated. An Awakened one is both a weapon and the key to longevity. What do you think nobles and Royals would do to us, to our family to get their hands on such power?"

Lith paused, letting Tista ponder on his words. She wasn't a naïve little girl anymore. The academy had been her wake up call. Tista now knew what to expect from others.

"Do you mean that not even your group..."

"No one knows but you." Lith shook his head.

"Not even Phloria?"

"No. She noticed something was amiss with me, but Phloria never pushed me to reveal her the truth. It's one of the reasons why she was so precious to me." Lith sighed.

"The second thing is that every time you use Accumulation or Invigoration your life gets longer. By drawing in the world energy you'll consume less and less of your own, allowing you to live for centuries.

It means you'll see our family, your husband and children wither and die while you'll still look twenty. I'm giving you a choice I didn't have. You can either just practice true magic and live a normal life or also use those techniques to become stronger but be progressively set apart from humans."

"I'm sorry, but I need some air." Tista stood up and ran away from Lith's room. Her head was spinning because of all those sudden revelations. She felt suffocating. Despite the tower was actually spacious, Tista had the impression the walls were collapsing on her.

Only when she walked out of the door and into the familiar Trawn woods the world seemed to regain a semblance of normality.

"Would you like some company or do you prefer to stay alone?" Solus's voice made her flinch, but just for a second.

"Oh Solus, thank the gods you are here." Tista turned around and hugged the wisp. Much to Solus's surprise, her arms didn't pass through. She could actually feel Tista's embrace as if it was Lith's.

"Can we take a walk? All that talking about killing in cold blood and immortality seriously freaked me out." Being touched by another human being freaked out Solus too. Also, she had no idea what to say to Tista without scaring her.

Solus knew Tista like she was her own sister, while Tista knew nothing about her.

"Sure, but I can't get very far from the tower. The further I get, the smaller the wisp becomes until I'm forced back inside." Solus did her best to not let her voice quiver.

'By my maker, our first meeting couldn't go any worse. First, she took me for a peeping tom, now she'll pity me. I must find something smart or funny to say to salvage the situation.'

Tista walked around and away from the tower until Solus's wisp became the size of a tennis ball. For several minutes they remained silent, the only audible sounds were the rustling of the leaves and the woods' bird calls.

That situation was a nightmare for Solus. Her consciousness was far enough from Lith to not feel his presence in her mind anymore and at the same time, she realized how awkward that quiet was.

'Oh gods! Why does she say nothing? I'm not used to silence, Lith's mind is always a noisy mess. Am I supposed to break the ice or is it better to wait for her to open up?'

Solus's first human interaction wasn't as she had always pictured it. She had been linked to Lith's mind and emotions for so long that she was not used not to know what the other person was thinking.

Tista's expression was unfathomable to her. She seemed to be worried, disgusted and annoyed all at the same time. Solus started panicking, thinking that Tista's silence was due to her regretting the choice of bringing Solus along.

"I'm so confused. What do you think I should do, Solus?" Tista asked.

"I'm sorry, I have no idea what you are talking about." Solus's voice was cracking due to the strain she was under.

"I'd like you to get closer to the tower, though."

"Do you think Lith is right about killing?" She continued walking at a fast pace.

"Please, Tista, get back. One more step and you'll be stark naked. My clothes, remember?" Solus yelped, her wisp was on the verge of disappearing.

Tista cursed at her stupidity, walking towards the tower as fast as she could. She noticed how her body had never felt so light.

"As for the killing, yes. I think he is right." Solus sighed. The wisp was back at half of its original size.

"I was just like you at the beginning, but all the things Lith and I experienced together changed my mind. Even if the person that discovers your secret is a good one, would you really risk your whole family's lives just to save a stranger?"

"Would you risk them becoming hostages to keep you on a leash? There's nothing that people with power wouldn't do to not lose their power, even using slave items. Do you want to be a slave?"

Solus projected in front of Tista some of the images from Nalear's attack. The chaos and bloodshed forced her to avert her eyes.

"Please stop. I got what you mean." Solus stopped the projection, giving Tista some time to think.

"What do you think is better between longevity and power? I mean, the stronger I get the longer I'll live, but I'm scared of ending up all alone. You have already lived for so long, do you have any advice for me?"

Solus felt flattered by so much trust in her judgment despite they had just shortly met.

"Honestly, no. I have no choice on the matter. I'm glad I lost all my previous memories, otherwise I would have gone insane a long time ago. There's one thing I can tell you, though. Your brother and I are as scared as you are of being alone.

Lith always worries about the day he will grieve your deaths, while I worry about him. I'm so scared of losing Lith that I can't sleep for days after he fights a strong enemy. I'm scared at the thought that he will grow old and die while I'll be forced to look for a new host."

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"Why do you the idea so terrible?" Seeing her issues through Solus's eyes made her worries seem so small that Tista was almost ashamed of herself.

"I'm not a thing, okay?" Solus lashed out in frustration, it was the first time she had ever laid her worst fears bare in front of someone that wasn't Lith.

"I have feelings, memories. I learn new things every day. What would you do if you lost the person you have spent your whole life with? Someone who shared every one of your feelings, dreams, even thoughts. You can't simply replace such a person with a random stranger and move on."

"I'm sorry. I didn't mean to offend you." Tista had never considered Solus like an object, she simply didn't expect her to be so fond of her brother.

"What kind of relationship do the two of you have?"

"I don't know either." Solus's voice sounded depressed.

Solus shared with Tista how her lack of a body made her feel incomplete. How she hated being just a voice in his head. To be always powerless whenever someone needed her help.

After hearing about all the things they had gone through together, Tista believed to have a proper answer to her own question.

"If after sharing so much for so many years you two don't hate each other's guts you must be soulmates!"

"Thanks, your words mean the world to me, but you are too kind and naïve. It's only because of our bond that we share so many things. I forced it on him years ago, otherwise I doubt Lith would have opened to me. I think he likes me, but more like a friend. Phloria instead..."

"What about Phloria?" Tista hoped for some juicy gossip. Neither the Verhen or the Ernas had any idea how close the two actually got during the academy.

"Sorry, but it's not up to me to tell. Let's go back to the tower."

During the weekend, Lith taught Tista about fusion and spirit magic. Whenever she had free time, he would pass on her all of his knowledge about true magic, all the tips and tricks he had learned over the years to disguise it as fake magic or make use of it during the exams.

He also introduced her to Phillard, Reaper, and Lifebringer. Tista had never spoken with a magical beast, let alone with an Evolved Monster. In her eyes, they were all big and scary. Phillard with his serpentine body and two clawed arms was apparently the most menacing of the three.

At least until she noticed they were as scared of her brother as she was of them. Reaper the Manticore had the body and the head of a lion with quills like those of a porcupine protruding from most of his body. He was big enough to look Tista in the eyes.

He also had black feathered wings on his back, horns like an ibex on his head, and the tip of his tail was a mass of quills. Each one was infused with a different element and ready to be thrown.

Lifebringer the Kirin had grown even bigger, developing a new horn in the center of his head and what looked like a long beard made out of emerald flames covered his chin. The four of them would practice and spar together to get used to their new abilities.

"Why are you still here?" Lith asked Phillard.

"I'm not going anywhere until you deliver me my axes." The Lindwurm snorted. "Also, I still suck at magic. I'm even worse than the pipsqueak here." He pointed at Tista.

"How's her smell?"

"Delicious... I mean, she is definitely human." Phillard's ribs still ached at the memory of how Lith appreciated his jokes.

Lith made for each one of them a dimensional and a communication amulet so that they could ask for help if necessary. He also realized for Phillard a couple of twin axes on the cheap.

The Lindwurm couldn't provide him materials or magic crystals, so Lith infused the weapons with what by Forgemastering standards was considered to be the bare minimum, making them sharper, lighter, sturdier, and capable of self repairing if infused with mana.

Their only special property was they were able to shrink enough so that if Phillard ever learned how to assume human form he could still use them. The Lindwurm had never owned an enchanted weapon, so he considered them masterpieces and gloated for days thinking of having scammed Lith for good.

Lith and Tista's last year of the academy was uneventful. Lith's only worry was to dodge all the noble dames and mages of marrying age that pestered him on a regular basis. Most of his female students couldn't wait for the third exam to come since their hot teacher was of their same age and still single.

Lith disappointed them all by disappearing the very next day after the exam. He and Tista could finally rush back at Lutia. Attending the academy after the third exam was a mere formality.

Both of them wanted to pay their respect to their old mentor before it was too late. Without Tista helping her, Nana's health deteriorated over time, no matter how much effort Lith put into treating her condition.

Death and old age were two enemies that even he couldn't defeat. Many people were assembled outside her house to pay her a last visit. Nana hadn't become nicer just because of her impending death.

She refused any visitor aside from Count Lark and the Verhen Household.

"Damn hypocrites." Nana's voice was weak but still full of anger.

"Even on my deathbed they still try to suck up on me. Never trust shameless people, kids." She said to both her apprentices.

"Isn't there something we can do?" Tista asked Lith for the umpteenth time in the last months.

"No. We aren't gods." Lith shook his head. He had already tried every spell in his book.

"Master, you never told me who betrayed you. I could take care of them for you if you wish."

"Bah! Hear me well, King of the spirits. What kind of mentor would I be if I added my grudge to your already enormous baggage? Do you think I'm stupid? I always knew there is a darkness inside of you and I'm proud you never became its slave."

Nana wheezed for several seconds to catch her breath. She had little time left and still a few things to say.

"Thank you, Lark. Despite my stigma, you never stopped being my friend. A good, honest friend I never deserve. If there are gods on the other side I'll make sure they compensate you properly, or they'll taste my wrath.

Don't search for my enemies, Lith. It's only thanks to them that I had the opportunity to meet you and your sister. I rejoiced for your achievements like they were mine.

I know it's hypocritical to say from someone that never wanted a family, but I'm glad a part of me will always live inside your magic. Thanks to me a new magical bloodline was born. My enemies will probably follow me in death out of desperation."

She half laughed half coughed the last sentence.

"My only regret is that I failed you both. I never managed to teach you what you truly lack. Lith, the King of the spirits must be strong, wise, but also loving. Otherwise he is just a monster.

"Tista, my fairy Queen, if you don't learn how to close your heart to others, they will rip it out your chest. Whenever someone bothers you, don't give them a second chance. Do like I would and fry them their a*s."

After making sure her disciples understood her last wish, Nana fell asleep. Everyone remained to her side until her heart stopped.

Chapter 346 Enlist Part 1

Nana's death had a deep impact on both Lith and Tista, although for entirely different reasons. For Lith, it was one mourning too much. In the past four years, he had lost more people he loved than in his whole first life.

He left the academy for good after saying goodbye to all his colleagues.

"It's a pity Lith didn't change his mind." Marth said while drinking vintage wine with his friends from the light department.

"He could have been a good Professor, after some proper training. I have decided to turn his version of Principles of Advanced Magic into an elective course. Many find it difficult, but those who succeed reap too many benefits to discard it as a failed experiment."

"I'm glad he's leaving." Vastor took a big sip from his cup. "He's still young. The academy is better suited for old coots like us or madmen. Our duty is not only to teach magic, but also to guide people in life.

Lith can't guide anyone, the kid is still lost in whatever the gods threw at him."

"Indeed." Manohar emptied his cup in one gulp. He liked drinking with company. Alcohol made people easier to bear for him and vice versa.

"Although I resent being called an old coot. I'm the youngest one in the room, after all. Also, although he may be an odd fella, I can guarantee you that Marth is not a madman. You should apologize to him Vastor."

It was hard to understand when Manohar was serious and when he wasn't. Especially after the second bottle. The three men laughed merrily at the joke. They were eager for winter to come. It was the only time of the year they could properly rest.

For Tista, Nana's death was the moment she became truly aware of her own mortality. She had lost several patients over the years, but never someone she cared about. Tista realized she had to decide if power was worth so much suffering.

She found solace in spending time together with her family, but at the same time, she felt isolated. They knew nothing about magic and even less about Awakened ones, so she spent more and more time with Solus.

Lith was happy his companion had finally found a friend. Sometimes he would leave Solus in her tower form, allowing the two girls to be alone while he was elsewhere.

"Have you decided what you want to do?" Solus asked.

"Yeah. I'm done with the academy for now. I'll spend the winter together with my family and friends. I'll leave the first day of spring in a random direction." Tista replied.

"For a while, I'll stop being a Healer. I'm sick of always having to worry so much for others. I want some me time for once. Money will not be an issue for a long time. I never spent a dime of what I earned working with Nana.

Lith always paid for everything. What about you?"

"Meaning?" Solus was confused.

"Are you still unclear about your feelings for my brother?"

"I'm still as clueless as I was the first day I met you." She sighed.

"Well, you can't just live your life like a damn sidekick. You are a great girl, Solus. Maybe you two should work on getting you a body. Maybe the reason why you are so confused is because you spend too much time together.

You need to make your own friends, experience a life that's only your own."

"How would I survive? Without a mana geyser or your brother, I won't last long. Lith would be forced to stick around and delay all of his plans until I'm done. It wouldn't be fair."

"I don't think so." Tista shook her head. "Maybe having your roles reversed for once might help both of you. I believe Lith would be happy to give you a chance at life."

Meanwhile, Lith was at the Ernas Household.

Most of his recent losses were related to his life at the academy, so he felt the need to share his burden with someone that had lived those events with him. Quylla was not an option since she had too much on her plate already.

That had led Friya and Lith to become closer, even if it wasn't in the way she would have liked. With her family's history, Friya was the one who could best relate to his mental state.

Lith was lying on a sofa, with his head on Friya's lap while she caressed his soft hair.

"Good gods, when will you stop growing?" She lamented. Lith was now an adult by Mogar's standards and also a giant at 1.83 meters tall (6').

"Soon, I hope. Otherwise I'll be forced to spend a fortune on clothing. The Skinwalker armor is nearing its limits and I'd like to avoid getting a new one." He sighed.

"I'm glad to see that you and Quylla are alright. After losing Protector, Selia, Yurial, Phloria, and now Nana I don't know if I can take another blow."

"Protector, Selia, and Phloria are not dead!" She rebuked. "They are simply..."

"Gone? Lost to me? Disappeared from my life?" Lith cut her short.

"What's the difference? Until Protector stops playing dead, I will not be able to find him. As for Phloria, I haven't heard from her in two years. She might have become a completely different person."

"I'm sure she still cares for you."

"Yeah? Then why did she never call? Not even for my birthday?" Lith rebuked.

"I don't know, maybe for the same reason you never called her?" Friya clicked her tongue in disapproval.

"Wherever she is, she has the right to be happy. I prefer to be a happy memory rather than a chain preventing her from enjoying what she now has. That's why I don't call her."

"That's funny. She said almost the same thing the last time we talked."

"She what?" Lith tried to jump up on his feet, but Friya pushed his chest forcing him back down.

"Did you really expect Phloria not to call her family for two years? If you want to know where she is, you just have to ask."

"What are you going to do with your life?" Lith asked.

"First, I'll pretend to not notice you just dodged the question." Friya sneered. "Second, since Quylla is going back to the academy in spring, I think I'll take a few missions from the Association.

I'll see the world, meet new people, and rack up merits. Three birds with one stone. Hopefully, I'll also find a decent man. Both the academy and the Court have been an utter disappointment." Friya's love life was similar to Lith's. It was filled with short, meaningless relationships that frustrated her to no end.

When spring arrived, the heirs of the Ernas and Verhen Households moved on the next step of their lives. Lith reached the recruitment center fully prepared.

Everything valuable he had was safely stored in his pocket dimension while Solus was concealed in his mouth, wrapped around one of his teeth. Orion had explained the whole procedure to him, allowing Lith to make preparation for when things would go south.

'Always the optimist.' Solus sighed.

'Always the nagger.' Lith replied. 'Besides, I resent that.'

Chapter 347 Enlist Part 2

'The optimism?'

'No. The fact that I proposed countless bodies to you and you always refused. Now that Tista said the very same thing you are considering the idea?'

'Only idiots never change their minds. Yours was the right idea at the wrong moment.' Solus replied. 'We'll think about it after the military. I can't have you defect. Also, thanks for delaying your departure until spring.'

'You're welcome. Tista is your first human friend, you two deserved some time together. I love you both and I'm happy you found a good friend in each other.'

"Name?" The army clerk's harsh voice interrupted their conversation. The woman loved her job, but repeating the same lines over and over ruined her mood.

"Lith Verhen."

"Oh, gods!" When she inserted a name into her amulet, the clerk was used either having to fill out a form or finding a short resume if the candidate was a noble. In Lith's case, so much information popped out of her screen that she thought he had a rap sheet as long as her arm.

She was about to call security when she noticed they were actually meritorious deeds.

"Son, are you sure you want to join?" She stood up giving him the salute.

"Why do you ask?" Lith lifted an eyebrow in confusion.

"Only spoiled rich kids enlist in spring. Your timing is terrible, not to mention that with your build there is no chance in the netherworld other cadets will see you as anything but a noble."

"I'm fully prepared for that. I'm not enlisting to make friends, but thanks for your concern anyway. Much appreciated." Lith returned the salute and offered her his hand, which she promptly shook.

"No, thank you. You are one of us that made it. A commoner that graduated from one of the six academies and even received his last name from the Royals. You are a beacon of hope for my children."

Xonta, that was the clerk's name, filled out Lith's form while giving him the same advice Orion did and warning him about all the dangers he was likely to face.

Lith nodded from time to time, giving her the empty dimensional amulet that he had prepared when asked.

"From now on, you're only allowed to introduce yourself as Lith, cadet 1416. The use of any kind of magic outside of chore magic is forbidden except for protecting your life or that of others. I also need your communication amulet."

"Why?" Lith asked while doing as instructed.

"Contacting anyone outside training is forbidden for the next six months, but we are not monsters. This way if something bad happens, we can relay the information to you."

Lith was unpleasantly surprised the army was able to operate someone else's amulet without their permission.

'Note to self, Forgemaster another amulet with safeguards.' He thought.

'Done. Do you want sugar or milk with your coffee, mister CEO?' Solus giggled after performing her best secretary impression.

Xonta led Lith to a changing room before giving him his uniform and boots. It consisted of a deep green shirt and pants. They were made of a thin but robust fabric Lith had never seen before.

The service number was embroidered over his heart and was the only thing bearing an enchantment. As soon as he finished wearing them, a soldier accompanied him to a Warp Gate.

"The destination is random." He explained. "It will lead you to one of the farthest available boot camps from here. Don't wander around and wait for someone to pick you up."

Lith stepped through the portal, finding himself in a place where the climate was much colder than Derios's. A cold wind blew over his face carrying the smells typical of winter. Spring had yet to reach that region. Luckily, the uniform turned out to be pretty warm.

'Either that or my tolerance to cold has further improved.' During the last two years, Lith had used Accumulation almost non stop. His mana core was now bright cyan, it was only a matter of time before it was refined to blue.

After each breakthrough, his body had become stronger, to the point that most of the things that would threaten a normal man's life were merely a bother to him. Normal weapons couldn't cut his skin, just like normal fire and cold left him unfazed.

The camp was the size of a small city and was filled with barracks, depots, and outside training facilities. The spot Lith appeared was close to a stone building, but no one came to him.

Lith stood there for more than half an hour, using Accumulation to kill time.

Two men with uniforms similar to Lith's but heavier and with the rank of corporal came out of the building. They were both in their mid twenties and looked at him with a mix of surprise and worry.

"Good gods, this one is huge!" The corporals were above average height, making them 15 centimeters (6") shorter than Lith.

"Kid, why didn't you come inside? The standard uniform is too light for Grimatros's climate. Aren't you freezing out here?"

Lith gave them the salute before answering.

"I'm as green as a grassland. They told me to wait and so I did. The cold doesn't bother me, sir."

The man on the left laughed at his words, while the one on the right facepalmed himself.

"Just because you joined the army doesn't mean you must relinquish common sense. You could have at least knocked and asked for directions. Despite what you might have heard, playing pranks on the cadets it's not part of our job."

They led Lith inside and gave him a change of clothes before accompanying him to the cadets' quarters. Along the road, Lith noticed that the housings were split into two. A block for the male soldiers and another for the female.

The house assigned to him was quite spacious, but consisted of a single room. Aside from beds and lockers, it was empty.

"This is where you'll live for the next six months unless you find someone willing to house you." One of the corporals explained.

"Pick an empty bed and a locker as your own. You can imprint them like this." He moved his hand over the service number, releasing a bit of mana. It generated a small golden cloud that followed the corporal's hand.

"You have to imprint every tool and personal item you'll receive. It will be your responsibility to take good care of them. Someone will be here shortly to give you and the other new recruits a tour of the camp and explain the basic rules.

"I suggest that you use this time to get acquainted with the rest of the cadets."

They pointed at a small group of youths. They were all about Lith's age, but shorter and lighter. They looked at him emitting grunting noises and whispering mean words.

'Seems Xonta was right. They really believe I'm a noble.' Lith smiled in amusement.

"Look what the spring fairy brought in, a goddamn noble." Said a cadet of average height with a mean voice. He walked towards Lith like he owned the place. The others were about to follow suit, but something blocked them.

Lith had learned to control his killing intent, which was paralyzing everyone but the leader of the pack.

"Listen well, sh*thead I'm Liwell..." The words died in his mouth when Lith lifted him up by his throat with one hand, bringing his face close to his own.

"Thanks, Liwell. When were you born? It's the only other thing I need to know for your gravestone.

Chapter 348 Overwhelming Part 1

Liwell turned pale and not just because Lith's words didn't sound like a joke. His lungs were burning, yearning for air, yet Lith's grip didn't let him take a single breath. He was enjoying the sight of his opponent turning red first and cyanotic later.

'No arrays nor recording devices, right Solus?' Lith asked, just to be safe.

'None. After all, there are only six great academies and countless boot camps. If they had the resources to allocate a power core in each one of them, the Griffon Kingdom would have long conquered Mogar.

'I don't think that committing murder on your first day is a good idea, though.'

Lith snarled, abruptly releasing Liwell and making him fall butt first onto the ground.

"Since we are going to live together under the same roof for the next six months, this time I'll let you go with a warning." Lith said while Liwell coughed and wheezed, gasping for air.

"I don't know who you are or why you hate nobles. Honestly, I don't care. I'm not a noble either, but the next time you or one of your friends mess with me again, I'll make sure it will also be the last."

Lith knew it was likely that no matter what he said things would get ugly. Yet Solus was right, he couldn't kill them all and hope to get away with it. The silver lining was that there was almost nothing a normal human could do to him whereas he had countless ways to make their lives a living hell.

Lith ignored their hateful gazes and chose a corner bed for himself. The imprinting process was simple. Once his mana activated the spell contained in the service number stitched on his chest, a small golden cloud followed his hand.

Lith's service number was now engraved on the bed frame and stitched to the blankets. He had no reason to pick a locker, since they were all empty.

"What the heck is going on here?" Asked a rough voice that made everyone turn around from Lith to the door. Standing there was a tough looking 1.75 (5'9") tall man in his mid thirties. Unlike the cadets, his uniform was light blue with Staff Sergeant stripes on his sleeves.

As soon as he entered the house, the Sergeant took off his wide-brimmed hat while looking around to assess the situation. There was one cadet sitting on the floor with a terrified expression on his face. Another one was walking around like he owned the place, while all the others were huddled up in a corner, like lambs facing a pack of wolves.

"Cadet Liwell, get your a*s up and pray the gods I like your explanation." The Sergeant had his name and service number embroidered on a pocket right above his chest. His name was Tepper.

"That guy's insane!" He replied pointing at Lith. "He attacked me for no reason and almost choked me to death. Everyone here witnessed it."

Both Lith and Tepper didn't miss Liwell's voice getting higher, or him avoiding to make eye contact. Not to mention that his story sounded fake like a three dollar bill.

'If the big guy attacked him, why is Liwell without a scratch?' Tepper was unaware Lith had healed his opponent to not leave bruises.

'At the same time, I doubt someone could be so stupid to attack a monster like that alone.'

"Is it true, cadet... Lith?" While the Sergeant looked at Lith's service number and someone learned his name, Lith noticed a couple of interesting things. First, Tepper's perfectly shaven face revealed a few small scars.

They were too small for being the result of an injury but too big for being caused by a Healer's incompetence.

'That's intentional. He kept them as a memento. Either this guy's sentimental or batsh*t crazy.' Lith thought.

The second thing was his second question contained a subtle strain of killing intent. Mana and aggression had been mixed to his voice, making the victim feel pressured. It was something he had only seen Jirni doing.

"Sort of." Lith shrugged before telling him most of the truth. That level of killing intent was useless against him. In his version of the story, he belittled the amount of strength employed and made Liwell appear as the sole culprit.

"Let me get this straight. Liwell threatened you, you roughened him up, and the others just stood there and did nothing?" The Sergeant questioned the other cadets, who unlike Lith folded like a cheap shirt as soon as the killing intent hit them.

"The bad news is that you are all in trouble." Tepper said. "For assaulting a comrade and lying to a commanding officer, Liwell is trash. Resorting to violence when a glare would suffice, speaks volumes about Lith. You guys back there are the worst, though.

"You didn't stop Liwell despite knowing that what he was doing was wrong. You didn't help him when he was in trouble and ratted him out without a second of hesitation. The army isn't only about giving and receiving orders.

It's mostly about loyalty, camaraderie, and mutual responsibility. With friends like you, one doesn't need enemies. The good news is that since you are all guilty, I'll punish no one. I'll just tag you as one of the worst units I have ever trained. Follow me."

Tepper led them to the next block and picked up three female cadets, making the group a ten people unit. He then gave the unit a tour of the camp before taking them to the barber. The man gave the girls a buzz cut with air magic, while, after a hand sign from the Sergeant, he shaved the others bald.

'I guess he's punishing your misbehavior.' Solus said. 'Why you didn't make up a story or something?'

'It would have been useless. They could have backed up each other, painting me into a corner. By healing Liwell's neck before letting him go I've turned him into a liar.

'By not mentioning the others' role in the attack, it appears I'm protecting them as a good little soldier would do.' Lith inwardly grinned.

'When they told the truth and exposed my lie, it made them appear as ungrateful cowards. Perfect damage control.'

Tepper then explained to them how to address a superior officer, what would be their routine for the following six months, and that fraternizing with members of the same unit was forbidden.

Lith and the others inwardly sighed at those words. One of the girls was really cute, even with the buzz cut.

"Dating members of other units is allowed." The Sergeant said with a grin.

"I swear to the gods that if any of you manages to get a single date despite your training, your duties, and the curfew, I'll eat my hat."

During the following days, Lith's unit underwent a series of exercises to measure their physical abilities and separate the wheat from the chaff. The final result was that the whole unit came to hate Lith's guts.

He held himself back just enough to appear human and completed all of them with ease.

Chapter 349 Overwhelming Part 2

While the others cleared an obstacle course's time after several attempts, he only needed one.

If running around the camp with a full backpack left them exhausted and drenched in sweat, Lith came out as fresh as a daisy. The group had no meaning to him, he knew that after six months they would be split according to their results.

They had to wake up before sunrise every day, with only half an hour to clean the barracks, prepare the uniforms for the day, and personal hygiene. Lith used chore magic to perform his share in less than five minutes, leaving him plenty of time for a hot shower and a good shave without cutting himself multiple times.

Time was a luxury, yet he could afford it.

Before breakfast, they performed individual physical training led by the Sergeant, but no matter what exercise he chose, Lith would breeze through it like a walk in the park.

The most relaxing moment of the day was the two hours of lessons that followed breakfast. During that time, they would be taught about the drills they would perform in the following days, military strategy, or about the army's values, traditions, and ethics.

After that, the real nightmare began.

"Who here has hand to hand combat experience?" Tepper asked.

Lith raised his hand in response, like usual. His achievements left the Sergeant as amazed as annoyed.

'How the heck does someone so young have already so much experience? Did I waste my life or what?' Was one of his most recurring thoughts.

"No matter if you are tall or short, male or female. Combat techniques are devised to allow the weak to beat the strong, to overcome the difference in weight, height, or both. A skilled soldier can easily take down any untrained man." Tepper explained.

"What if the opponent has our same level of skill?" Asked Miden, the shortest girl in the unit.

"Then either you beat them with tactics and fighting spirit, or you pray the gods to strike them down with a lightning bolt." No one liked that answer. Lith was one of the three who raised their hand, meaning he would probably go undefeated again.

The exercise was a simple knife disarming technique that the Sergeant demonstrated using Liwell as a sparring partner. The attacker would attempt to stab while the defender had to dodge or block the knife-holding hand before grabbing the wrist and twist it together with the arm into a submission hold.

In the first part of the training, everyone was required to win or lose according to their role in the scenario. It served the purpose to get acquainted with the technique and its footwork.

In the second part, the attacker was allowed to resist and try to counter. That was when Lith shined the most. He wouldn't use speed or strength to win, but pure technique.

As the attacker, the slightest mistake in controlling his arm would result in an elbow strike to the face, while focusing too much on his arm gave him the opportunity to use his legs to trip the opponent.

"Don't forget to move your legs, you idiots! The moment you stop moving you are nothing but punching bags!"

As the defender, Lith used the smallest movements possible to disarm the opponent and get ahold of the knife.

The next part of the training was about marksmanship and learning how to use magic wands as long ranged weapons.

"Sir, why do we use wands instead of arrows or other kinds of projectiles?" Vipli was a skilled hunter. He was eager to show his talent, but he never used a wand before.

"Projectiles have been decommissioned ever since Forgemastering was born." Sergeant Tepper was tempted to ask if someone knew why, but even he was sick of seeing Lith's hand.

"Even the most common enchanted armor is equipped with a gravity sheath that reacts to fast incoming objects reducing their weight to the point of making them harmless as peas. Once, long range weapons were devised to shoot high speed projectiles, like this one."

Tepper took out what looked like a revolver from his dimensional amulet. He emptied the barrel against one of the training dummies wearing an old set of armor, producing a loud series of bangs. Most of the bullets hit the target, but without leaving a scratch.

"As you can see, this piece of junk is loud and clumsy. You need to train your aim and take into account a lot of factors. As the accuracy of the weapon itself, the distance from the target, the wind, the friction caused by the air and so much more."

"Magic is energy and it's unaffected by such things and even the gravity sheath is powerless against it. Only a physical barrier can block magic projectiles. Hence why you are equipped with earth magic wands.

They can provide you instant protection from all threats, not to mention that earth magic barriers are the only ones that can stop every other element."

'So many words just to say that force equals mass times acceleration. Enchanted armors reduce the already small mass of bullets, bringing it almost to zero. At that point the speed becomes irrelevant. Anything times zero becomes zero too.' Lith inwardly sighed.

'I dreamed for so long to make me a gun as a secret weapon, but after getting my uniform, I discovered the existence of the gravity sheath. It's amazing how Forgemastering and Alchemy allow imbuing rare things like fusion and gravity magic into the most common objects.'

"I will teach you which wand is best to use according to the circumstances. As a rule of thumb, fire magic is better suited for open spaces and enemies grouped together. Lightning is particularly effective against heavy infantry, since it bypasses the metal's protection."

Contrary to Tepper's expectations, Lith wasn't an expert with wands. His first attempts were almost as clumsy as everybody else's. His experience with magic, however, was top notch so it only took him a few tries before securing himself the best score.

At the end of the first four weeks, each member of the unit received their report cards. Some, like Vipli, achieved a lot of As and Bs boosting his confidence and earning him the respect of the unit.

Others, like Miden, received too many Cs to let them dream of becoming members of an elite squad. Last, but not least, Lith had no idea what his own report card meant.

"I'm sorry, sir. I think there has been a mistake with my grades." He asked handing the piece of paper to his commanding officer.

"It seems normal to me." The Sergeant replied.

"I'm sorry again, sir. I've attended another school in the past, but I never scored an M as a grade. What does it stand for?"

"Monster."

Chapter 350 Abyss Part 1

That day the mess hall was still open during the one free hour the cadets had between the end of their daily duty and the lights out. It was an opportunity for them to fraternize and get some extra food while celebrating the first evaluation.

While the rest of the unit was waiting in line to get their snack, Lith was alone in the barracks, grumbling like usual.

'I really can't stand this place. The academy is a wet dream compared to the army. I get scolded every day, no matter how well I perform. The mess hall is so small that every unit is forced to eat in a rush or others will not get their turn before resuming their duty.

'I don't give a damn about the Sergeant insulting all of us for no reason, but what really drives me insane is when they make us stand at attention until someone moves so they get to punish us. Everything is designed to be a frigging torture!' He thought.

'I think it's on purpose, to train the cadets both physically and mentally. You said it yourself: it's only under critical circumstances that people reveal their true selves and reevaluate themselves.' Solus tried to cheer him up with some of his favorite food.

After checking with mana sense no one was in the proximity, she took out a steaming steak from her pocket dimension. Lith was so used to fast eating that he finished half of it without even feeling its taste before slowing down.

'What about the Ms in my report card? Even grades sound like an insult here.'

'Maybe they didn't expect someone to break past the S rank.' Solus sighed. Usually, she liked to rebuke at Lith's complaints, but this time she had a hard time not joining him. The army was putting even her patience to test.

'More importantly, why didn't you join your comrades? The Sergeant always speaks about camaraderie. If you keep being a loner, it may affect your evaluation.'

'And waste my only free hour of the day together with people that can't stand me and vice versa? For what? To get some insipid food I'd have to swallow like an ostrich?'

Lith didn't have time to waste, not even for nagging. He cleaned his boots and squared his uniforms for the following day before being finally able to rest. Even if he didn't sweat as much as his comrades, he was forced to change uniform after every meal.

He was also forced to use his free time to keep them clean and ready for use. It didn't take him much since magic could take care of most of his daily chores in a matter of minutes.

It was all the little things that piled up together, grinding his nerves one day at the time. Lith had underestimated the army and its regulations. In the past years, he had got too used to being admired, respected, and most importantly, left alone when he wanted.

The total lack of privacy made him want to kill someone on a daily basis. While the physical exercises were far too easy for him, the mental strain was enormous.

"Gods know if I'd love to kick his a*s back to the dragon who birthed him." Sergeant Tepper shivered despite the officers' mess hall being warm and cozy.

"Are you speaking about the Monster?" The other Sergeants didn't share his pessimism. Lith was a mystery to everyone, but a really promising one.

"I can take cocky recruits. Heck, I eat spoiled rich kids for breakfast. What really creeps me out is that he not only seems to already know everything, but also how he stares at you when you scold or question him about his duties.

"No matter how much mana or aggression I use, he doesn't flinch. He just stands there, with those cold, lifeless eyes. I swear that once I had the impression he was about to rip my head off and shove it up my a*s." Tepper had it right.

Lith took the army's though love as a personal affront. He wasn't cut out to be a soldier. Loyalty, discipline, and obedience were mere words to him.

"Why don't you fail him, then? Rule number one, always follow your gut." As seasoned veterans, they wouldn't underestimate a fellow officer's evaluation. Giving training to sociopaths was like handing matches and oil to a pyromaniac.

"I can't." He sighed. "He never falls for any provocation and his performance is outstanding. His psychic evaluation is a bit lacking but well within parameters."

Lith's unit hated his guts, but most of all, they were scared of him. His barracks mates had learned the hard way that catching him unprepared was impossible. Lith slept only once a week thanks to Invigoration and even when he did, Solus stood guard.

The one time they attempted to pull a practical joke on him, he emitted killing intent non stop for three consecutive nights, making it impossible for them to rest. One of them even collapsed due to exhaustion and had to be hospitalized.

The worst part was they still had no idea who he actually was. Lith's mastery of chore magic was that typical of a magician, yet he fought like the heir of a military family and performed his daily chores with more skill than most commoners.

"Good morning, maggots. I hope you rested well because today you'll start learning about swordsmanship. Wands are not suited for close combat and knives are either the last resort or something to perform a sneak attack.

"Pick from the rack a weapon you want to learn how to use." Sergeant Tepper was charming as usual.

After the cadets made their choice, Tepper continued his explanation.

"The difference between an amateur and an idiot lies in their mushy brain. Only an idiot would pick a weapon too big or too heavy to use. This isn't a damn bard tale!" He yelled at those who chose their weapon based on how cool it looked.

"Bigger doesn't mean better, just like using two swords isn't necessarily better than using one! Cadet Lith, how did you choose your weapon?"

"I simply looked for a single handed weapon light enough for me to use it without effort." Lith was holding a rapier.

"You see that? That's the difference between an idiot and a damn amateur. At least the amateur has a brain!" The Sergeant ripped the improper weapons off the cadets' hands and replaced them with rapiers and estocs.

"Now, the difference between an amateur and a good swordsman lies in the wrist. Whereas an amateur will limit themselves to stabs and slashes, making their attacks predictable, a good swordsman is capable of executing multiple strikes from the same starting position."

Tepper crossed his sword with Lith and while keeping his arm still the sword struck at Lith's head, right shoulder, and leg in quick succession. Lith's rapier followed suit, timely blocking each strike while keeping his blade against the point of the Sergeant's to multiply the block's effectiveness.

Each parry would have been enough to disarm a less skilled opponent.

"Let me guess. Your father taught you." Tepper said with a snarl. He had hoped the humble the Monster for once.

"No, my girlfriend did." Lith replied, keeping his eyes on the Sergeant's shoulder rather than the blade. Phloria had kicked his a*s until the basics had become second nature to Lith.