

## Supreme M 401

### Chapter 401 Cornered Part 2

There was no time to seal the opening with a third wall. From outside the temple, Treius grinned as his spell invaded the small space between the pillar and the conjured walls.

'It's too late to Blink away. With the walls around him and the incoming attack, he can't visualize an exit point. Checkmate!'

His smug expression disappeared when he noticed that the Ranger was taking to damage. Wave after wave, the lightning ring surrounding the main temple faded away, yet Lith was unscathed.

'After the orc shaman used the crystal to unleash real lightning against me, I knew I had to come out with a solution. Luckily, a Faraday's cage is as cheap as effective.' Lith thought while inside a bell shaped copper mesh large enough to give him some personal space.

'This doesn't make sense. How can metal protect from lightning?' Treius couldn't believe his own eyes. The flimsy grate had withstood all of his attacks.

Lith put the cage back inside his pocket dimension before flying out of the window that was in the opposite direction of his opponent. With the Gatekeeper in his hand, he circled around the castle walls while preparing a new set of spells.

Treius was outraged. Even after witnessing his power, the Ranger wasn't running away. He had the gall of thinking he could actually win. Treius opened a Warp Steps leading right behind Lith. Each finger of his left hand crackled with the energy of a different spell ready to be released.

The moment Lith saw the Warp Steps forming on the other side of the building, he turned around and spotted the exit point. On the other side, there was a young man about twenty years old.

He was dressed in a white long wool robe and what reminded Lith of a tagelmust, the turban symbol of the Tuareg people. They emphasized his dark bronze skin and the colourful makeup around his eyes.

Lith had never met someone that didn't look Caucasian on Mogar. A part of his mind wondered if the young man came from the Blood Desert, but his survival instinct was focused on the fact that he had yet to see the enemy perform a single hand sign.

'I knew it! The sucker is an Awakened too, but he hasn't realized this is a fair fight. Or better, it was.' Lith thought while unleashing all the spells he had ready through the portal.

Treius gasped in surprise when six fireballs exploded around him from every direction. Ice spears the size of a small tree had invaded all of the surrounding space, waiting for their master's order to strike.

Just like Lith a few seconds before, Treius couldn't Blink. Both the explosion and the ice spears covered an area bigger than the dimensional spell's measly ten meters (66') range.

'I could exceed the limit, but it would cost me a lot of mana. It's not a luxury I can afford, not against another Awakened one. The only way he could spot the Warp Steps despite the castle blocking his vision is with Life Vision!' Treius thought.

He was surprised, but not scared. One of his bracelets generated a powerful barrier made of pure mana that blocked the heat, the shockwaves, and the spears at the same time. The enchanted item wasn't devised to block such a powerful combined attack.

The barrier cracked at several points. The pseudo core fueling the protection was quickly depleting its energy reserves. The mana crystals embedded on the silver bracelet turned dull one after the other.

During the split second Treius was blinded by the explosions, Lith Blinked through the enemy's Warp Steps, lunging with all the strength he had. The Gatekeeper crashed the magical protection only to be stopped by a second one.

The attack had been so fast that the new barrier had formed around the blade. Part of the Gatekeeper was inside, stuck like the proverbial in the stone.

Treius turned around just in time to see darkness magic that coursed through the weapon filling the space inside the barrier with a black miasma. With no option left, he Blinked away.

Treius knew that Lith would see his exit point and intercept him, but he would get away from the deadly spell and the barrier would still block any incoming attack. Lith knew it too, yet instead of pursuing the enemy he remained where he was kept weaving spells.

The moment Treius reappeared, a volley of fireballs crashed against his barrier with enough strength to push him backward.

'What a cunning bastard.' Treius thought. 'The mana released by the explosions in blinding my Life Vision and with barrier active I cannot retaliate even if I guess his position from the fireballs.' point of impact.

'He must be buying time for something big, like an array. It's a good plan, too bad I saw through it. A trap it's not a trap if you know where it is.'

Treius bolted in the opposite direction the fireballs came from, pushing his flying spell to its limits. Before the smoke could dissipate, he crashed against a solid rock wall.

Even with the enhanced body of an Awakened, the impact was enough to crack his head, broke his nose, and squeeze all the air out of his lungs. With several ribs cracked, even breathing was an agony.

'Impossible.' Treius's mind couldn't accept the idea that the items his uncle had crafted had failed him. 'Nothing can get past the barriers, no matter if it moves fast or slowly. They react even to mana. How could his spell blatantly ignore them?'

The broken nose made it hard for him to breathe, just like tears of pain blurred his vision. It took him a while to realize he had hit the castle walls. While Treius was blinded, Lith had opened a Warp Gate beyond him, using the explosions to push him through.

The dimensional door had moved the youth away from the sky and very close to the ground nearby the castle. Unless Treius moved upwards, he was bound to crash into something.

'The barrier works just fine. It just isn't designed to protect me by myself!' Treius had just started to heal his wounds when Lith plunged from the sky like a meteor. The impact with the Gatekeeper infused with darkness magic caused the barrier to crack instantly.

Treius didn't panic. He used the few seconds the dying protection bought him to open a Warp Steps that closed as soon as he crossed it, leaving the Gatekeeper biting air.

'Where the heck did he go? He can't Warp outside Kaduria, he must still be nearby.' Lith thought.

'He's not within the range of my mana sense. I couldn't see well inside the Steps, but it was a big closed space. We can deal with him later, let's finish the Black Star first.' Solus suggested.

Treius had escaped to the main temple. His wounds were healing and Invigoration was restoring his energy reserves, but he knew it wasn't enough. The Ranger was more than ten centimeters (4") taller and ten kilograms heavier than him.

Treius cursed at himself for not practicing self defence or magic like his uncle always encouraged to. Yet seeing the cursed item almost broken gave him hope.

#### Chapter 402 Team Battle Part 1

"There's no time to lose, old friend." There was enough venom in Treius's voice to kill ten men.

"During the last year, I took care of the Rangers for you. It's only thanks to me if you are so close to achieving your freedom, yet you always denied to fulfill your part of the bargain. Make me your partner and together we will kill that pest.

"Refuse and I'll walk away. I have no qualms leaving you to your fate. There are many artifacts on Mogar, but only one me."

The Dark Star wanted to curse in outrage. It had refused to have a master for centuries. It was ready to die rather than to yield.

Or so it believed, until Lith entered from one of the windows, back at his peak condition.

"Now!" Treius said while opening a Warp Steps that would lead him to safety, ready to relinquish his dreams of power.

"So be it." The cursed object spat those words with despair. Treius touched the white mana crystal, allowing the Black Star to seal the pact.

The Freeze spell still prevented it from using its powers, but it could do nothing when the two beings merged into one. Power surged inside Treius, giving him the feeling of godhood he had dreamed about ever since his uncle awakened him.

His body shone like a star while his mana core was promoted to blue. He had avoided the event for years. According to his uncle, it was an excruciating event that could turn out deadly, if the body and the mind weren't properly honed by relentless practice.

Treius felt only bliss while the Dark Star's energies mended his body as soon as it was harmed. Endless vitality seemed to flow through his veins, destroying the expelled impurities.

Then, everything changed.

'Who does he think he is? Some kind of magical girl?' Lith inwardly sneered at his defenseless opponent. 'Nothing forces me to wait until he is done.'

He held the Gatekeeper in a two handed grip while using air, fire, and earth fusion to boost his attack. The lunge hit with surgical precision the chest area above the heart, but instead of putting an

end to the enemy's life, it bounced against a crystal armor that promptly appeared to protect the cursed object's host.

The impact was strong enough to lift Treius from the ground and make him spit blood. Seeing that even an all out attack had left the armor unscathed, Lith turned the blade to the flat side and while the enemy was still in mid air, he struck using the Gatekeeper like it was a mace.

Treius flew backward with such an angle that would have made him reach the bleachers of a major league stadium as a magnificent home run. Treius's ribs shattered and healed almost at the same speed, the bone fragments puncturing his lungs realigned as nothing had happened.

Yet the pain remained. It became worse when he crashed against the wall behind him and bounced towards his merciless aggressor that had no intention of stopping his attack.

'What are you doing, you worthless piece of garbage?' Treius cursed through their mind link. 'Why aren't you protecting me?'

'Do you really think I would need your help if I wasn't paralyzed? You are on your own, flesh bag. I can give you energy, but using it is up to you. There are a few abilities we can share, though. Like my armor.'

The Black Star returned one of the mighty artifacts it had consumed during its youth, making it appear between Treius's hands. It was a magnificent longsword, with one purple mana crystal on each side of both the hilt and the blade.

Even without being imprinted, it emitted a powerful aura that seemed to be able to tear the whole castle asunder.

'It's the blade of the king. Use it wisely.' The cursed object's black heart cringed at the idea of parting from such a masterpiece, but it had no other choice.

'What am I supposed to do with it?' Treius screamed with frustration holding the sword like it was a mop. Their conversation was fast, but so was Lith. He was now in front of the enemy in a shoulder charge boosted by earth, fire, and air magic.

The hardness of the Skinwalker armor wasn't much compared to the diamond like crystal. Yet it was superior to steel, making the following impact far more terrifying than if Lith had used his body alone.

The crystal armor was like an unbreakable safe, but it could do nothing to protect its content from being rattled. Just like most magic protections, it was much less effective against blunt impacts.

Treius's scream of pain was muffled by the mouthful of blood that filled his throat. The Gatekeeper struck the longsword's tip and sent it flying away. The Black Star cursed at its host incompetence while retrieving the blade a split second before Solus could steal it.

'Dammit! So close.' She was in her glove form, the green gemstone on the center of the back of Lith's right hand glowed with power. Lith wasn't the only one that had grown stronger over the years.

Now Solus was able to amplify the effects of the mana coursing through her stone body by consuming a bit of her own energy. It could reinforce spells and fusion magic, giving her partner an edge over other Awakened ones.

Keeping the two mana flows in synch required a lot of her focus. The smallest mistake would create a destructive interference that would leave them exposed to a riposte. It was the reason she had missed the chance to snatch the artifact.

The Black Star was rummaging through Treius' memories to find something that could give them an edge. The results were appalling. The youth had done the bare minimum in every field he had ever applied, using true magic as a crutch to compensate for his laziness instead of turning it into a weapon.

The artifact deemed his twenty years of life as trash. Treius had used his uncle's knowledge and creations to take shortcuts, achieving his goals with no effort. The thing that baffled it the most was how despite his happy go lucky lifestyle, Treius had an unquenchable thirst for power only matched by his groundless pride.

Among the garbage, there was a treasure and the Black Star rejoiced upon its discovery. It was a skill that Treius learned after countless hours of practice. He had been tricked by his uncle into believing that there was a shortcut to greatness.

One spell to rule them all.

Of course it was just a ruse, the purpose of which was to show the youngster how hard work repaid itself.

'You idiot!' The Black Star roared. 'How can you have studied me for so long yet you understood nothing about my powers? Follow my instructions, foolish man-child!'

Treius snarled at the voice inside his head while spitting teeth and blood. The pain Lith was inflicting him was excruciating, but what the cursed object was doing worse. It kept peeking in his personal life, in every of his most private or embarrassing moments.

To add insult to the injury, it was berating his life choices like no one ever had before.

## Chapter 403 Team Battle Part 2

Treius was used to be scolded by his uncle, but the old man did it because he cared for his nephew. His words were always filled with worry and affection.

The Black Star, instead, was dissecting his life and commenting on it like it was a failed magic experiment. There was only scorn in its thoughts.

Treius swallowed down its pride and obeyed. His body grew in size and weight until his head scraped against the ceiling. The Black Star absorbed all of his equipment to replenish its strength before the transformation scattered everything around the room.

His newfound tail was as thick as an SUV but much better armored. It was covered in flaming red scales the size of a buckler shield. Treius instinctively tried to swat his enemy like a fly, but Lith had no problem blocking the massive extremity with one hand.

'What the heck is he thinking?' Lith raised his eyebrows while looking at the over twelve meters (40') tall red dragon in front of himself.

'What the heck are you thinking?' Treius echoed Lith's thoughts. 'My uncle fooled me into learning how to shapeshift. It only served to teach me light magic and the art of controlling my own life force. It's a useless trick. No matter my form, my strength and mana do not change.'

'You whining idiot!' The Black Star was so annoyed it was running out of insults. 'That was before you merged with me. I have the life force of a whole city. I amassed mana for centuries. I can't bestow you the intelligence or the wisdom of a true dragon, but together we have the body of one!'

Treius finally understood his partner's intent and called upon the life force stored inside it to fill his limbs with strength. Lith felt the tail getting so heavy he couldn't hold it anymore, forcing him to retreat.

'Solus, what's happening?' Lith asked as the dragon's scales turned into shining rubies. Treius was getting accustomed to his new form and he spread the crystal armor all over his body, making it impervious to the Gatekeeper's edge.

'The Black Star is still under the Freeze spell, but it seems their bond is similar to our own. By pooling up their resources they can achieve the physical prowess of a real Evolved Monster. Fight or flight?' Solus would have loved to destroy the Black Star.

If before she wanted to do it to relieve the Kadurians from the living hell they were trapped in, now it was personal. The bond between Treius and the cursed object was a mockery of everything she held dear, a perversion of her very existence.

Yet it was Lith's life being at stake. Solus would never ask him to put everything on the line just on principle.

'I'm not going to run.' Lith replied clenching the Gatekeeper tight.

'It's going to take time before the Black Star can act on its own. Until that moment, this guy is just a man with a weapon. No matter how powerful they are, all weapons share the same weak point. Their user.'

Lith infused himself with all the elements but darkness, which was imbued inside his blade. He darted behind the ruby dragon's foot, aiming for the Achille's heel. The scales were thick and sturdy, but once crystalized they were stuck in position, leaving the tender meat underneath exposed.

Treius turned around to follow his movements, their speed almost matched. Sadly, the main temple begged to differ. The tail struck one of the columns and the wings got stuck into another. Dust fell from the ceiling while Treius swayed around trying not to fall.

'This guy is an idiot. He may have the body of a dragon, but he's not used to it. Size matters only if you know how to exploit the advantage.' The Gatekeeper found its way between the scales, ripping through the flesh and bone like a scalpel.

Treius screamed in pain, but he didn't fall. He kicked backward, trying to squash Lith like a bug. Lith managed to dodge the heel's claw by a hair's breadth and watched the enormous foot leave a deep mark on the wall.

'I stand corrected.' Lith thought while getting some distance from the enemy.

'He is an idiot that can one shot me. I didn't take into account that the Black Star gives him an almost endless supply of energy. I can't win this by wearing him out like usual. I must kill him in one go. If they are like us, once the host is dead, the artifact will be a sitting duck.'

The dragon roared in outrage and unleashed a lightning the size of a house. Lith took out the Faraday cage again, hoping the enemy wouldn't attack physically while he was unable to move.

Treius didn't have the opportunity to do it. His draconic hands emitted a popping sound, exploding like a balloon. He screamed in pain until light magic restored his limbs.

'What did you do to me?' Treius was so shocked that he didn't even notice the cage.

'Quit whining!' The Black Star said with a disgusted tone. 'Your mana core is too weak to handle so much mana at once, so the excess energy flown directly through your flesh making it burst. Would have you preferred to lose your core instead?'

Lith had barely the time to put the cage back inside his pocket dimension when the dragon unleashed a barrage of punches boosted by air and fire fusion. Even with Solus's help, Lith was running out of places where to hide.

The dragon's fists were the size of a truck and moved so fast they generated a gale strong enough to stumble Lith after he dodged each hit. Treius spun around himself, using the tail to sweep the whole room.

The columns crumbled one after the other, adding the falling debris to the already extensive list of things Lith had to watch out for.

'If only I could Blink. There isn't much I can do from down here. Because of the scales I can't reach his heart and because of the constant regeneration attacking the main arteries is useless. My only shot is the brain, but I think even that idiot has realized it by now.'

Lith kept running around the room while racking his brain for a solution.

'The guy seems to have a very low pain tolerance.' Solus pondered. 'I have an idea, but I don't think you're going to like it.'

'Hit me.' She was right, Lith didn't like it.

Treius was sick and tired of playing tag, so he produced a barrage of fireballs throwing them in random directions, literally bringing down the house. Lith was forced to use his flight spell to escape from the blazing inferno.

While flying, he was forced to focus looking forward, limiting his peripheral vision to a dangerous degree. A fireball exploded close to his feet and the resulting shockwave made him faster than he could control.

He crashed against a falling piece of the ceiling. Because of the impact, his movement came to a halt for a split second.

It was all Treius needed.

His fist struck Lith with the strength of a freight train. Even if Lith had managed to conjure an air barrier to take the brunt of the damage, even with the protection from the Skinwalker armor and earth fusion, Lith would have died when his body crashed against the wall.

Solus saved his life by the skin of his teeth, using an earth spell that made his landing spot elastic. The impact was still violent enough to blur his vision and squeeze the air out of his lungs.

Lith bit his lips, using the pain to remain conscious. Another punch followed a split second later, when he was too groggy to dodge it.

#### Chapter 404 Wrath Part 1

'Now!' Solus used a bit of her energy to nudge Lith out of his daze. There was no time to weave new spells, but as long as he was conscious, Lith would retain all those he had prepared beforehand.

He clapped his palms together and then spread his arms wide, making sure the core of the spell traveled through Solus's mystical glove. Both the gesture and her help were necessary to attempt such a quick cast.

A huge Warp Steps appeared in front of him, the biggest he had ever conjured. The ruby dragon's fist disappeared inside the portal and came out from the exit point located in front of his snout.

Treius had stepped forward while performing the attack, putting all of his weight into it. His own punch had been turned into a cross counter, doubling its strength. The impact was so violent that the neck twisted, snapping like a twig.

Not even the ruby armor could withstand the strain and several gemstones shattered, hitting the ground with a silvery sound. The Steps closed a split second later, severing the arm at the elbow.

Pain and shock made Treius fall to his knees, screaming toward the sky at the top of his lungs while holding the stump with his remaining hand. A fountain of blood painted the collapsing room red.

The neck was already healed, but regrowing an arm would be much slower.

'Do you have no shame?' Treius's pain was the Black Star's own, yet it ignored it like it was a gentle spring rain. 'Pick up the arm so we can reattach it! There's no time to lose, our enemy...'

The mind link allowed for quick communication, but Lith's speed was nothing to scoff at. Solus's plan had been implemented down to the last detail. To sacrifice a bishop to capture the king.

Lith had allowed himself to fall into a disadvantageous position to bait an all out attack. Yet the cross counter and the mutilation were just the preparatory steps. Lith exploited the literally blinding pain to Blink without the opponent noticing it and appeared between the dragon's eyes.

The Gatekeeper penetrated the cornea until only the hilt was visible. Lith gave everything he had to the sword, channeling air magic which generated a lightning that gave the dragon a violent seizure while a wave of darkness magic made its way toward the brain.

Lith had done everything he could, his execution had been flawless.

Yet it wasn't enough. Treius used darkness fusion to suppress his pain receptors and became able to move again. With earth fusion countering the lightning and the Black Star repairing the damages the moment they were dealt, darkness magic was just too slow.

Treius tried to catch Lith, but he Blinked away exploiting the dragon's blind side. He twisted the Gatekeeper while pulling it out and left behind enough fire and darkness magic to slow down the eye regeneration.

"Why are you doing this?" Lith's opponents screamed as one.

"You are bound to a powerful artifact. You pillaged Kaduria for power. You kill with no remorse to pursue your own ends. You are just like us! We should be allies, not enemies."



Those words irked Lith to no end, making his blood boil and his rage seethe.

'I'm nothing like you!' He thought as he appeared next to the severed limb and used the darkness still coursing through the Gatekeeper to rot it into oblivion. Without any life force inhabiting it, the arm offered no resistance to the hungry energies devouring it.

'Solus is not a monster, I am. Yet not even I prey on people's suffering for petty reasons. The Black Star has turned a whole city into a nightmare version of my own life and that idiot who fused with it is willing to set it free.'

The memories of the Kadurians Lith had assimilated earlier resurfaced. Their hopelessness, their despair, their constant grieving until their hearts were replaced by the endless void of the abyss were things he knew all too well.

'You two are worse than any Abomination. You are a cancer to this world and someone has to wipe you out like the disease you are.'

Black clouds formed inside Kaduria while the whole city trembled. Even though the Black Star was still paralyzed, the light phase had reached its limits. The shadow phase was about to begin and the living artifact rejoiced for it.

'I'll get back the energy I wasted to rebuild the city and reanimate those flesh bags. If you can't squash a single bug with that much power, then I will terminate our deal. I have no use for a weakling like you.' The cursed item had long regretted fusing with Treius.

The only silver lining was that thanks to the Freeze spell the bond had yet to become permanent.

Black clouds formed outside Kaduria too. The whole area quaked lightly as the world energy gushed from both the ground and the sky, piercing the barrier like it was a piece of paper.

A world tribulation had just begun.

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Griffon Kingdom, Royal palace.

Lady Tyris was pondering about the recent news she had received. During the last four years, she had enjoyed the relative peace after decades of struggles. The academy system had been reform thanks to Linjos' legacy.

The Headmaster hadn't lived for long, but his actions had earned him an important place in the Kingdom's history books. After Nalear's attack, the last embers of civil war died out.

The Crown restored his authority by cutting off all the dead branches of nobility that spread corruption to keep themselves afloat. With the Master and Balkor ceasing their attacks she had not much to do.

Kaduria sounded like a lot of trouble. It was an ancient problem, older even than the Griffon Kingdom. Tyris was already a Guardian back then. She and Leegaain had helped set up the barrier.

Both could have destroyed the High Lord, but chose otherwise. Tyris because she wanted it to serve as a reminder of the foolishness of men. It was the era when there was no such thing as forbidden magic.

Humans kept exploiting the less fortunate in their quest for power and longevity. No matter how many she killed, hundreds of others were ready to pick up from where her victims had left their research.

Only one thing seemed to be able to stop them: fear. Lost cities were popping up like mushrooms as the legacy of Lochra Silverwing was abused in every conceivable way.

The only silver lining was that every monstrosity born from those experiments was a common enemy that allowed people to put aside their differences and rethink their way of life.

The mages who lived in the same region of a lost city became more judicious, while its inhabitants were inclined to topple any ruler who made the poor disappear instead of praising them for it.

All of them had learned to do the right thing, albeit for the wrong reason.

Leegaain hoped to find a way to free the Kadurians without killing them, instead.

'I recognize the design of this array.' She shook her head, making her long golden hair danced in the sunlight. 'This is the work of one of the Awakened one of Salaark's turf. I will not let the people of my Country suffer for the mistakes of others.'

#### Chapter 405 Wrath Part 2

'I didn't stop Nalear because she was born out of the Kingdom's unfair treatment. She was just like Balkor, the symptom of a disease that made it impossible for the upper echelons to ignore any longer. A foreigner causing troubles is another matter entirely.'

A sudden surge in the world energy coming from the Kellar region made her and Leegaain turn their heads at the same time.

"It's the anomaly kid again. Are you interested?"

"Thanks, but no thanks. I'm at a critical step in my research. Keep me posted if something interesting happens." The Father of all Dragons replied.

It took Tyris but a thought to Warp at the borders of Kaduria.

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The black rain was falling with the intensity of a summer storm, but luckily it had no effect on Lith.

'I recognize this feeling. It's the same coming out of the cursed item. A twisted version of world energy.' He thought while his body shivered in disgust. The rain was the will of the Black Star taking physical form.

When the temple of the High Sun imbued so many lives inside their weapon, they made a huge mistake. Dozens of conflicting personalities had been forced together in a single mind, giving birth to a deranged individual with no memory nor morals.

The only thing left after their merging was the obsession to control everything under the High Sun's gaze and destroy everything that couldn't be controlled. Kaduria had been the field test and the Black Star was pleased with the results.

Every living being on Mogar would be at its mercy. Life and death would disappear forever under its rule. The worthy ones would live in a utopian world while the sinners would have an eternity to be redeemed through pain.

The black rain ripped the life out of the Kadurians, taking away everything they had but their minds. The process was unbearable, causing them to emit a collective telepathic shriek. Waves of agony made Lith and Treius fall to their knees.

They became part of the hive mind and were forced to experience the memories of all the Kadurians. To share their centuries worth of suffering. It lasted only for a few seconds, yet it almost drove them insane.

The mental pressure overwhelmed their minds, making it impossible for them to distinguish their thoughts from the Kadurians'.

The two Awakened ones rose to their feet at the same time, albeit with completely different mindsets. Treius was regretting his decision of merging with the artifact. Until that moment, he had always thought that no price was too great to achieve his goals as long as he wasn't the one paying for it.

Now he wasn't so sure anymore.

As for Lith, he stared at his opponent with eyes filled with a mix of pain and hatred. All seven of them. Two new pairs of eyes had appeared. One above and the other below humans' eyes were supposed to be.

The seventh was a vertical slit opened in the middle of his forehead.

He was now over two meters tall (7 feet) and covered by black scales the tip of which was bright red from the scorching heat that coursed through them. Aside from the eyes and a pair of curved horns protruding from his forehead, his head was a featureless black slate.

Two pairs of upside down membranous wings came out from his back, conjuring on their own enough wind to keep him a few centimeters from the ground. A long tail ending in several bone blades whipped the air in a frenzy.

The Shadows looked at the ruby dragon with unbridled rage. Just like the two Awakened had experienced the Kadurians' lives, the Kadurians had experienced theirs. Thanks to that, they recognized the giant as their sworn enemy.

Instead of being high in the sky, outside their reach, it was finally standing in front of them. The army of Shadows charged forward with only one thought in mind: revenge.

Treius's missing arm was regenerating at a speed visible at the naked eye, the stump had already reached the wrist level. He swatted them with a simple wave of the end, turning dozens of them into black snow at once.

Lith took off like a bullet with the Gatekeeper aimed at the still blinded eye. Treius cursed at himself for having forgotten about his real enemy. His tail whipped at Lith boosted by air and fire fusion.

Because of the partial blindness it only grazed its target, yet it was enough to send Lith crashing against the ground while spinning like a top. His collarbone was broken and so was his hip and left arm.

He just shut off his pain receptors, letting light fusion mend his wounds while he resumed his attack. For the first time since they had met, Treius felt confident about his chances of victory.

'Now there is no obstacle slowing my movements, nothing that the Ranger can use against me. Even if he has changed form too, in a contest of raw power we are still a dragon versus an ant!' He thought.

'What are you doing, you dimwit?' The Black Star reprimanded him. 'Don't underestimate those Shadows. They are leeching my powers!'

'Our powers, you mean. Feel free to break our deal. I'm sure the Ranger will be happy to finish his job.' Treius had no intention of letting the Black Star order him around anymore. Still, its advice made sense.

He stomped the ground repeatedly before taking flight with air magic. He tried flapping his wings, but they were slow and clumsy. They reduced his mobility instead of improving it.

"Haven't you had enough?" Treius said with a laugh while watching Lith flying in circles above him.

"I have to admit it, you are smarter than me and probably you worked your ass for years to become so strong. Yet it doesn't matter. Nothing matters against overwhelming power!" He opened his mouth, releasing a densely packed jet of purple flames.

It was a tier four true spell, Fire Blade. Treius wasn't able to actually breathe fire.

Lith burned with hatred at those words. In his mind Treius, the Black Star, his Earth father, the boy who had killed his brother, were all the same person. Someone who held an underserved power and used it only to spread misery.

He took a deep breath to shout in defiance, yet no voice came out. The scales on his face opened up revealing his fang-filled mouth from which erupted a stream of blue flames that clashed with the spell in mid-air, like snakes wriggling in a deadly embrace.

None of those present, except for Lady Tyriss, knew what had just happened. Lith didn't let the surprise slow him down, bringing his array to completion. Yurial's Hexagram was a six-pointed blue star inscribed inside a circle.

One of the points shone with a yellow light, neutralizing air magic within his area of effect. Treius fell to the ground with the grace of a brick and the Shadows resumed their assault.

Lith tried to use the debris on the ground to cover his movements, but once again Treius's tail intercepted him. Even if he dodged the hit, the shockwave sent him rolling onto the ground.

'Dammit, I almost forgot he can use Life Vision too. I must... What's that?' Lith recognized from the giant footprints the spot where Treius had killed several Shadows. Among the debris, there were several black floating orbs of different sizes.

## Chapter 406 Leave Part 1

'Solus, do you have any idea about what are those black orbs?' Lith thought.

'Incoming at 12 o'clock!' She shouted when Treius opened his mouth once again.

'Leave the idiot to me. I need an edge to win this fight and you are my only hope.' A snap of Lith's fingers made another of the six points of Yurial's Hexagram light up with a red light as the yellow one faded away.

The tier five Raging Sun that Treius was about to unleash died out like a lighter out of gas. Even with the Black Star's support, only a few sparks came out.

The array was a variation of Silverwing's Hexagram that Yurial had theorized after gaining a deeper understanding of the impossible array. His take on the spell was weaker, yet in exchange it caused much less strain on the caster.

It had taken Lith years to turn his old friend's theories into reality. Just looking at Treius shocked expression repaid him of all his hard work.

'First, he took away my flight spell and now this? What's happening?' The moment the ant started retaliating to brute force with technique, the dragon lost his spunk.

'You are still under the array, you idiot.' The Black Star's thoughts were filled with contempt. 'I have no idea what it does, but I'm pretty sure that if you get out of its area of effect it will stop working.'

Lith saw Treius muscles contract and with a thought released Yurial's Hexagram's full force. The array didn't simply negate one element at the time, it absorbed the mana composing the nullified spells and stored it for later use.

All the six points of the star lit up. The magical formation was now employing the stolen energy and the array's to generate a powerful gravity field that made Treius collapse under his own weight.

The Shadows exploited the situation to attack their enemy with all their might.

'It will not hold for long. The array drained only two spells, one of which was a cantrip.' Lith thought.

'Okay, okay.' Solus replied with a frustrated tone while scanning the floating orbs with all of her senses and making her brain spin at top gear to get at least a hypothesis about their nature.

'Done. We know that when a Shadow touches its victim, it saps their life force and mana. Also, after killing the Shadow, you recover your life force, right? Each of these spheres has its own energy signature, like a proper living being.

'I think that by attacking the Black Star, the Shadows are retrieving their own life force that the cursed item stole in the first place. They are still here after the Shadows' defeat because they have nowhere to go until the Black Star absorbs them again.'

Lith nodded in understatement. Even in death, the Kadurians were fighting against their oppressor. They were clinging on the retrieved life force with all their might.

'Then maybe...' Lith grabbed the nearest sphere. 'If I can absorb them, then I might be able to get as big as he is and regain the upper hand.'

Yet nothing happened. Lith could feel the residual mental energy recognizing him a friend, but nothing more. Like a mother that had just found her lost child, it refused to let the energy go.

'So much for all that "share your power with me" bullshit.' Lith inwardly cursed. 'Useless humans. We are fighting the same battle yet they can only think about themselves. Every man for himself then.'

Lith cast the tier five healing spells Scanner and Scalpel.

'Haven't those poor souls suffered enough?' Solus said. 'Is this really necessary?'

'Heck, yes.' Lith replied butchering the spheres near to him at once. 'Life is for the living, not for the dead. Their lives ended the day the Black Star was born. If we lose this fight and that bastard walks out of the barrier, all cities will become like Kaduria.'

Solus had seen their memories, she knew their suffering. Yet she was glad to have raised her objection. She couldn't have lived with herself if she just stood there doing nothing. Also, it allowed her to take a peek at a hidden side of Lith's mind.

Breaking the oath he had taken the day he had become a professional Healer meant nothing to him. Pretty words couldn't save lives nor stop monsters. He didn't base his actions on concepts like innocence or guilt, Lith only thought in terms of survival.

Yet he considered the Kadurians like brothers in arms. They knew pain even better than he did. Lith could not only relate to them, but they also had his respect. It was the reason why he could butcher their life force without a second thought.

He knew that in their place he would do anything to get free from his oppressor. Pain would be momentary, freedom would be everlasting.

Lith darted across the battlefield, maiming all the spheres outside the array that was quickly running out of juice. That day his Scalpels turned into Cleavers. One strike was all it took to inflict a damage that would take him hours to heal.

Yurial's Hexagram disappeared and Treius stood up in outrage. He stomped the Shadows swarming him and unleashed an endless barrage of spells against Lith. He managed to dodge most of them, block some, and was forced to tank the rest.

There were countless spheres at Treius's feet, some almost the size of a person. An ice spike ripped one of Lith's wings off. Inside it there were pain receptors he didn't even know he possessed, so they were still active.

The agony of the mutilation almost made him stumble.

Almost.

He never stopped moving and neither did his Cleavers. A burst of flames from a dodged fireball ripped off the scales from his left arm, leaving the bloody flesh underneath exposed.

Lith kept waving his hands like an orchestra director in the exploding inferno around him. Solus used her own mana to generate more Cleavers to help him finish the job. Just a few seconds had passed since Treius was back on his feet, yet all the Shadows were already gone.

He was free to focus on the last pest. Treius infused himself with all the air, fire, and earth fusion prowess the Black Star could bestow upon him. He became a god of speed, a god of destruction.

A single stomp of his made the earth tremble as it was afraid of the titan ravaging its surface. The impact generated a subsonic shockwave that sent debris flying for kilometers until they struck the barrier surrounding Kaduria.

Lith flew backward and conjured a series of massive earth walls to protect himself. They took the brunt of the impact, buying him precious fractions of second that let him escape from the epicenter of the strike.

The walls crumbled one after the other. The shockwave was still strong enough to make Lith tumble and fall on the ground. He got back on his feet with a kip-up, never letting his eyes wander off his opponent.

"I told you, no matter what trick you employ, you can't beat overwhelming power." Treius guffawed at his opponent's still defiant eyes despite his battered body. He bolted forward for the finishing blow as he spoke.

## Chapter 407 Leave Part 2

Lith's seven eyes burned with mana and determination. The punch was unbelievably fast, but telegraphed. He dodged before Treius's arm even started to move and conjured at the same time an air cushion.

The moving fist produced shockwaves in the air which Lith surfed like a wave thanks to the air cushion. The maneuver made him avoid the blow with ease. Treius reacted by twisting his hips and aiming the next punch where Lith was supposed to land.

A sudden jolt of agony made him miss the target by almost five meters (16'). A second and a third one forced him to fall on his knees, his stomach twisted in a knot.

'I cut off all my pain receptors, why do I still feel it then?' Treius saw the Gatekeeper appear in Lith's hands amid blazing emerald flames. He knew no blade could hurt him, but nonetheless he felt fear.

'I don't know.' The Black Star replied, experiencing terror for the second time in its life.

Lith didn't only cleave the Kadurians' life force, but he had also enveloped it into a bubble made of spirit magic. The moment he had completed his harvest, he had brought the black spheres near the dragon.

The Black Star predatory nature had done the rest. The butchered energy had been mixed together with the healthy one and was now crippling Treius's dragon form. To work properly, a body needed a precise set of instructions that were provided by the life force.

Even if the Black Star was adapting the human life force to match the dragon form, all the damage Lith had inflicted on it was still there. The corrupted energy was a living torture for its host, stopping the organs it flowed through.

Limbs would fall limp, organs would stop working. The Black Star didn't realize the gravity of the situation until the illness spread to Treius's brain and heart. The failure of such organs would bring more than damages it could easily heal.

The dragon's eyes rolled over, leaving only the sclera visible. He couldn't breathe or even think. Treius fell to the ground while Lith darted toward the mighty creature now reduced to a fish in a barrel.

The Black Star had no choice but to withdraw its powers. Treius gasped back to life, feeling weak and sluggish. He saw Lith approaching with his blade ready at hand, brimming with power.

He used air and earth fusion to dodge, but without the cursed object's help, he was back at square one. His body never had the time to adapt to the new core nor he wore his uncle's magical protections.

Without enough vigor, such a huge body was just a bigger target. Lith's first slash chopped off one of the giant feet, making Treius fall backward. Lith vertically wall ran on the stump while the opponent's body was still in mid air.

Treius had no time to cast a spell, so he tried to claw the enemy away. His hands flew off with a spurt of blood yet not a drop touched Lith who was already above the chest area.

Treius screamed in terror while Lith roared with anger, releasing from his mouth another jet of blue flames that entered the dragon's maw. Treius's head burst into flames, his eyes popped like balloons. Lith decapitated him anyway, just to be safe.

When the Black Star emerged from the dragon's mutilated body, the forgemastering circle was already active.

The runes from the Repentance spell flew inside the cursed object. Lith had no more words but the chant until its very end. At the seventh rune, the cursed object rather than a crystal star resembled a bunch of glass shards glued together.

"Stop! I beg of you! You have seen what I'm capable of. Imagine if I had a suitable host instead of a pampered idiot. You have no reason to kill me. You know how to paralyze me, take your time and think carefully about what you're doing."

Treius's body reverted to his natural appearance, yet the head kept burning until only ashes remained. When the twelfth and final rune crashed into the Black Star, its fragments imploded emitting a thud sound.

The black clouds inside and outside Kaduria disappeared. The tribulation was over. The light phase and the shadow phase were no more, only the real sun shone high above Lith's head.

Then, the ruins of Kaduria emitted a blinding light that took the form of countless shooting stars of different sizes. Most plunged into Mogar, returning to the planet the energy that had been stolen over the centuries.

The rest flew toward the horizon, disappearing with the speed of light.

Lith used Invigoration to mend his wounds and recover the energies spent during the battle. The rage was gone, only the abyss remained. It made him feel emptier than ever.

"I hope you have watched me carefully, Yurial." Lith spoke to himself. If not even a nutjob like Redan had turned into a ghost long enough to say goodbye, someone like Yurial was bound to be at peace, wherever he was.

"I told you countless times, Wardens are not useless and neither were you. It's all a matter of timing your decisions. If you had asked Quylla out instead of admiring her from afar you would still be alive, you damn moron." Lith said with a sigh.

"What I'm trying to say is: thank you. Today you saved my life."

'Lith still thinks about Yurial whenever he casts an array.' Solus thought. 'I wish they had more time together. I wish I could hug Lith tight and tell him that everything will be alright.'

Lith walked outside the barrier and after a lot of thinking, he called Lieutenant Kamila Yehval, his handler. He gave her a full and meticulously doctored version of the events in Kaduria.



Kamila had a hard time believing him. She asked him to go back inside and gave him precise instructions on how to take scans of his surroundings with the army's amulet.

"It's amazing!" It was the only thing she managed to say once she received all the data. She put him on hold before contacting their superiors. Even the smallest events regarding a lost city had to be reported up to the top of the chain of command, let alone its recovery.

It was an unprecedented event.

"Our Commanding Officers want to hear it directly from you. You are expected to meet them tomorrow at noon at the Headquarters. Aside from that, you are on leave for the next three days."

"A three days leave? I was in the field for only two days." The news surprised Lith.

"I know, but orders are orders. Return to Belius as soon as you can and enjoy your vacation."

After turning off his military communication amulet, Lith took out his civilian one and called his potential date.

"Hi, Kamila."

"Hi, Lith. Wasn't expecting to hear from you so soon." She replied with a giggle. Her tone was different from before. She sounded more relaxed.

"Me neither. That pain in the ass of my handler just gave me three days of leave out of the blue. Can you believe it?"

"Really? Three days?" She chuckled. "What will you do with so much free time?"

"Depends. Are you free for dinner tonight?"

#### Chapter 408 Belius Part 1

"Yes, I'm free tonight, but your invitation is a bit sudden. I usually don't date people I met only once. We barely know each other." Kamila said with a pensive tone. She liked that kind of role play.

'She hasn't said no and she called it a "date". Kamila isn't considering my offer as a simple colleague get-together. So far so good.' Despite having his dating experience from two lives, Lith felt awkward every time he asked a woman out.

His paranoid nature made him overthink over the smallest details and being a control freak didn't help. He considered making the first move like exposing a weakness and he hated feeling weak.

Since all the complaining in the world wouldn't change the rules of the game, Lith knew he could only bet or fold. If he played, he could lose but if he didn't his victory chances would always be zero.

"I didn't tell you before because I didn't want to make you worry, but I'm a Ranger. It's a very dangerous job, sometimes I risk my life multiple times a day. I don't know when or if I'll be granted another leave, so think carefully before making your decision."

He said in an overly dramatic tone, making it sound like he was part of a suicide squad.

"If you put it this way, I can't refuse." She giggled while looking again at his personal file.

'Lith is a bit young but sure he went through a lot.' The plague, Balkor, the assassination attempts, the White Griffon massacre and now the recent events in the north. Lith's life seemed to be an anthology of short horror stories.

'He sounds definitely wise beyond his age. Still, it's a bit of gamble. Let's hope I won't need a timely "headache".'

"Have you already thought about the place?"

"I have never been to Belius." Lith shook his head. "I'll let you decide the time and the place. Let me know if you need a ride. I can Warp us anywhere."

"Thanks, but I'm good. Let's meet at Velorian, at seven o'clock..."

"Lieutenant Yehval, I need those documents and I need them yesterday." A voice interrupted her.

"Sorry, I got to go. An idiot intern of mine turned a simple recon mission into a hero stunt and it's up to me fill the paperwork. If I don't fix this mess, I'll get stuck overtime. See you later!"

The communication ended abruptly, leaving Lith second guessing himself.

'I guess I'm that idiot.' He sighed. 'Lots of people now have lots of questions about how I solved a centuries old problem. I need to play this smart. The silver lining is that there is no witness, so no matter what bulls\*it I make up, they have to take it at face value.'

Lith flew in a straight line toward Belius while revising with Solus his own report. They looked for inconsistencies and found none. After that, they ran several simulations of his upcoming interrogation to find the answers most suitable to avoid follow up questions.

They were so focused on discussing how to belittle Lith's endeavor as much as possible that they realized they had reached Belius only when they saw the maelstrom array surrounding the city.

Luckily, because of his unfamiliarity with the Keller region, Lith was just a dozen meters above the ground to use road signs and milestones to orient himself. He had all the time to stop and get down to the ground before his flight spell was disrupted.

After another round of glares and insults for skipping the hundred meters long line to get inside the city, Lith walked through the Warp Gate that led to the army Headquarters.

Much to his surprise, instead of being searched and questioned like during his first visit, the customs officer gave him a salute.

"It's an honor to meet you, sir. Please, allow me to take you to your apartments."

'My what? I expected to sleep in the barracks or at Kamila's place. What's going on here?'

The officer was a man in his late thirties that didn't stop talking for a second about how safer the citizens felt now that the closest lost city was lost for good.

"I can't wait to read the whole story on the army's interlink." The officer said referring to the database available to the public. They walked outside the main building, giving Lith the opportunity to see Belius.

The fortified city was different from all the other places he had visited. Because of the lack of running water or elevators, houses were usually two or three stories high tops.

Belius consisted of tall buildings, instead. Some even ten stories high and all made of the same grey stone blocks. At least one building in each residential area was occupied only by restaurants and shops.

The roads were paved and wide enough to let three carriages pass side by side. The sidewalks were filled with people of all social classes, each minding their own business.

If not for the lack of smog and pollution, Lith would have thought of being in an Earth's metropolis.

Noticing his surprise, the officer quickly explained:

"Belius was built as a military outpost to keep in check the Gorgon Empire's borders. Over time, the city expanded vertically rather than horizontally to be more easily defensible.

"There's only so much space inside the walls and it's not like we can take them down and rebuild the arrays from scratch. All these buildings once belonged to the army, that's why their design lacks originality.

"To distinguish a rich house from a poor one, you have to look for two details. The number of floors and gardens. Because of the lack of space, green is a luxury and so are mansions. A two stories high building is bound to be a noble house. Commoners live in condos."

"Why there is no traffic?" Lith asked after noticing that aside from military and nobles' stagecoaches the roads were empty.

"Because in case of emergencies we can't afford traffic jams. Unless someone is very important or filthy rich, they have to move around Belius with this." The officer pointed at two small Warp Gates standing next to each other.

"One to get in, one to get out." He neared his badge to a small gemstone standing next to the gate, making a small 3D holographic interface appear. It was a drop-down menu filled with addresses and road names. Some were greyed out.

"For security reasons, you can't operate it without an ID. Use your badge and follow me." The officer selected a place called Royal Road before disappearing through the Gate which closed right behind him.

Lith did as instructed, noticing he could go almost anywhere. Very few locations were not available. Royal Road turned out to be a block made only by mansions, each with high walls and a private garden.

"What happens if two people step inside a Gate at once?" Lith asked.

"They end up in jail. The system is unforgiving. Here we are to destination." The officer pointed at a two stories high manor surrounded by trees and flowerbeds.

The external gate opened as soon as the officer swept his badge in front of a magical gemstone nestled on a nearby pillar. There was a folded note attached to the door.

"Dear Lith Verhen, consider this a token of appreciation for your valiant efforts. I hope to meet you soon."

It was signed by Royal Constable Tyris Griffon.

Chapter 409 Belius Part 2

"Is there anything I can do for you before leaving?" The officer asked.

"Yes, thank you. How do I reach a place called Velorian?"

"Your lady friend has good taste. It's one of the best restaurants on Elm Street, right beside its Gate." The man replied with a smirk.

"How do you know I have a lady friend and about her taste?"

"It's a place popular among young couples. Also, the closer a building is to a Gate the more expensive it is." The officer pointed at the dimensional door standing in front of Lith's living quarters.

The word "expensive" made Lith's wallet bleed.

"I also need clothes. Do you have any recommendations?" There were two things Lith deeply regretted about having left the White Griffon academy. It's all you can eat free restaurant and not needing any clothes aside his Associate Professor's uniform to hit on women.

Wearing one was enough to be treated as a VIP in any establishment of the Distar Marquisate.

"I don't know your taste or budget, but if you go to Silk Road, you'll find what you need."

Lith thanked the officer before checking if the door of the mansion opened with his own badge too. He just peeked inside out of curiosity, there was so much to do and so little time to do it.

The ground floor of the house resembled a penthouse from a five star hotel. The furniture was made of high-quality materials, but its design wasn't ostentatious. On Lith's right, there was a large living room with several couches and armchairs arranged around a tea table.

On his left, there was a study room with a solid wood desk. The walls were covered by bookshelves filled with books about every topic but magic. Behind the only closed door there was a bathroom equipped with all comforts.

Lith left the house, heading to Elm Street. On his way there, he noticed how people would look at him in a funny way. Most would step to the side to let him pass, a few would cross the road to avoid him.

'Solus, am I showing my old serial killer frown again?' He asked after a mother dragged her children on the other side of the street.

'No. You look tired and in a bad mood, but no more than usual.'

Lith shrugged and walked through the Gate. One of the things he had learned back on Earth, was to never bring a woman to an unknown place. His focus would be split between his surroundings and his date, making him look distant.

On Mogar it was even worse. Not knowing the menu or the prices could lead to embarrassing moments. Lith had a short temper if the food was bad, overpriced, or both.

The Velorian was on the ground floor, its door open. The receptionist was a middle aged man in livery with black receding hair.

"Is there something wrong, Ranger?" The man started sweating bullets at Lith's appearance.

"No, I just heard about this place and I would like to take a look if it's not a bother."

"All the members of the King's army are welcome here." The man sighed in relief while dabbing the sweat with his handkerchief. According to the tag on the breast pocket, his name was Xilo.

After scouting the place, Lith asked for a menu. As he feared, he knew very few dishes and the ingredients weren't listed along with their names. Xilo helped him decipher the menu and even suggested some specialties that a man from the south was bound to enjoy.

"Is there a dress code for the restaurant?" Lith was happy to have come alone first. Despite Phloria's best efforts, he was still a cheapskate. Based on the receptionist's embarrassment, the prices had made Lith's poker face crumble more than once.

"None, but our customers would surely appreciate the lack of uniforms in the room."

"Meaning?" Feeling disrespected, Lith's expression turned stone cold.

"I'm sorry, it came out wrong. You are a foreigner, sir, so you are unaware of our customs. Belius is surrounded by enemies which makes us quite nervous. Seeing a soldier usually means troubles. Spies, terrorists, a lost city out of control.

"Only the gods know how many emergencies happen each year. Hence your uniform would ruin everyone's mood."

Lith understood why earlier the people looked so scared and flexed his shoulders. His clothes shapeshifted into his gala suit. The only other clothes stored in the Skinwalker armor were those he wore back in Lutia. It was better to be overdressed than looking like a country bumpkin.

Xilo yelped in surprise. He couldn't believe that someone who could afford a Skinwalker armor and that kind of suit was also capable of being shocked by their honest fares.

Lith went to the Silk Road, ordering a few tailor-made suits, jackets, and shirts. He then rented a few clothes to put together a smart casual suit for the evening. Thanks to the armor, they would look like they were tailor-made anyway.

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Gorgon Empire, Leegaain quarters.

"Are you sure about it?" Leegaain asked. After hearing Tyris's story about the events unfolded in Kaduria, he now regretted missing the show.

"As sure as the sun will rise again tomorrow." She replied.

"The anomaly used dragon fire twice. If he keeps passing his world tribulations, you'll have to change your title to 'father of most dragons'."

"Like I care." He scoffed at the idea. "Imitation is the sincerest form of flattery that mediocrity can pay to greatness. It's you who should be worried. A single country is too small for two Guardians."

"I'm not going to kill him just because of what he could become." Tyris shook her head.

"Even if that could mean the end of the Griffon Kingdom? When two Guardians fight..."

"Maps get redrawn." She completed the ancient proverb for him.

"He may be a piece of work, but I believe Mogar chose him for a reason. I will not stand in the way of change. Besides, we have a date tomorrow. Who knows, maybe we'll reach a compromise."

#### Chapter 410 Birds of Prey

Blood Desert, Salaark's tent. An hour after the Death Star's destruction.

Salaark hated having unexpected guests. Ruling the biggest of the three great Countries, slaying Abominations, and keeping the borders safe were all full time jobs she did by herself.

They left her little free time that she enjoyed spending tending her personal matters. New fashions designs, love interests, books, magic, martial arts training, patronage of the arts were only a few of her many activities.

Unlike the other two Guardians, Overlord Salaark hadn't detached herself from human society. Quite the contrary, she was deeply invested in it and kept herself active in many fields. In a sense, she was the most human of the three.

That was the reason she hated guests. Every second she spent solving someone else's problem was a second wasted. Soon she would resume her duties, no matter how much fun she had or missed.

Her furious expression released enough killing intent to turn any sane man's hair white. Yet her guests were unaffected. Tyris has seen her in way worse moods and Glamus's hair was already grey.

Salaark had the appearance of a stunning woman in her mid twenties. She had silky black waist long hair, emerald eyes and a bronze tinge of skin so clear that it seemed to emit a gentle radiance.

She sat on her throne, wearing a flaming scarlet robe, the Blood Desert equivalent of a cocktail dress, that left exposed her fair shoulders and her crossed legs from a side slit. The beer in her right hand was getting warm, while the food on her plate was getting cold.

"You disappointed me greatly, Glamus Clein. You did not only violate my laws, but you also brought shame upon me and interrupted my first party in a month. What do you have to say for yourself?"

"He was my only relative." The old man cried, yet his voice remained steady. "I know I shouldn't have Awakened him, but I couldn't stand watching the last of my kin die."

"That's not the issue." She stood up in anger, making the ground quake.

"An imbecile like Treius wouldn't be able to devise a multi function array even in a thousand years. He used your library to learn Kadurian language, your resources to set the array, your Warp Gate to cross the borders. Why didn't you stop him?"

"He was young and foolish, my Overlord. I hoped that he would learn from his mistakes. That seeing the horrors of Kaduria would turn the boy into a man. Someone worthy of inheriting my legacy."

Glamus was old even by Awakened ones's standards. He had spent centuries amassing power and wealth, but with his death approaching, he realized that nothing of him would be left. He had no family nor apprentices.

The world would forget about him the moment he passed away.

"Please, spare my life and I'll be your loyal servant. I need to find an heir. I refuse to die without leaving a single trace on Mogar. No one knows my name or my achievements." He said bowing down with his head pressing against the floor.

"Youth is Treius's excuse, but what's yours?" Salaark replied.

"Because of you, the Griffon Kingdom now has learned about one of my arrays. You almost unleashed a cursed object upon my lands, even though you knew how even researching them is against the law. You are not an asset, only a liability."

A light flickered in her eyes and a purple flame set Glamus ablaze. It turned his body into ashes before he could even scream, yet left his clothes and all of his enchanted items intact.

"Old fool. He knew that the reason the Blood Desert has no lost cities is because of me. I'm not a softie like the two of you." She said to Tyris.

"I keep track of certain materials and if I catch someone creating a cursed object, I kill them along with everyone involved. Even the merchants that supplied them with the resources."

"What will happen to his legacy?" Tyris asked.

"I'll have it collected and examined to see if there something worth using in my schools of magic. The rest will become part of my personal collection. Once you have collected your share, of course."

Tyris was both the offended party and the one that had captured the rogue Awakened. According to the Guardians' treaties, she was entitled to half the spoils.

"Well, time to get back to the party. Do you want to join?"

"No, thanks. I have still much to do today." Tyris replied with a grateful smile.

"Still grieving after all these years? You need to get a life. Spend too much time alone and it'll breed desperation. You have seen how desperation leads to madness." Salaark pointed at the ashes dirtying her carpet.

"The lizard at least has his apprentice, daughter, whatever, but what about you? You pass your days locked up in a basement with no contact with the outside world except for those fake Awakened of yours. When was the last time you had fun? Live it up for once!"

"When I was still the queen." Tyris sighed. A wave of her hand turned her dress into a copy of Salaark's robe, except it was silver colored.

"I like your style, sister." Salaark linked her arm to Tyris's and led the way.

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City of Belius, now.

Lith checked his pocket watch for the time. It was a magical item he had crafted while he was working as Assistant Professor at the academy. Aside from the army and the Mage Association, very few used clocks.

Because of its complex function, a watch needed to be made of silver and required a green magic crystal. Like any other enchanted object, only the one imprinting it could use it. Between the materials and the craftsmanship, they cost a pretty penny.

Hence they were considered too expensive for their use. Commoners made their own schedule while nobles preferred sundials and hourglasses.

'Seven sharp. Let's hope I'm not overdressed nor underdressed compared to her. The first impression is vital.' Lith was wearing a beige coat over a red shirt and white pants.

He loved dressing in dark colors, especially in black. Unluckily, all the women in his life, from his mother to his last girlfriend, agreed on them making Lith look like a mortician. Light colors emphasized his brown eyes and olive skin, instead.

Kamila was already there. She was talking with Xilo, the receptionist, and he seemed to be a really funny guy since Lith could hear her laugh through the solid wood door.

"Sorry to keep you waiting. Have you been here for long?" Lith inwardly cursed at the apparently unreliable pocket watch.

"Don't worry, I arrived early. Xilo here was telling me an unbelievable story about a mage so stingy to make faces while reading the menu."

"Sounds like a piece of work of a guy." He said while nailing Xilo with a stare that held the promise of an excruciating death. The poor receptionist avoided the need of changing his pants only because when Kamila turned toward Lith the killing intent disappeared.

"Let's go, I've already chosen our table." She took his hand and dragged him to the adjacent room.