

Supreme M 471

Chapter 471 Impossible Magic Part 4

The vampire noticed ice spears and darkness bolts materializing near his opponent. The ground spun underneath Lith's feet in a grand vortex, ready to swallow his enemy.

'Turtle up as much as you want. It takes more than a few hits to injure me, I still have a lot of juice.' Zarran thought while he shot downwards like a bullet.

His blood core empowered his new form to the point that its movements were almost a blur even to Lith's enhanced vision.

Almost.

The moment Zarran turned his back to the array, Lith dispelled Silverwing's Hexagram. His mind was no longer burdened by the need to be in perfect sync with every element that composed the world energy.

All of his spells crackled with new energy as their master's undivided focus flowed into them. The sand exploded upwards, covering the vampire's field of vision and making him slow down for a split second because of the sudden updraft filling his wings.

It was all the time Lith needed to pinpoint Zarran's position long enough to Switch their positions. Lith appeared in mid air while the vampire's momentum made him crash against the ground like a meteor.

Stunned by the impact, Zarran failed to react to the point blank Checkmate Spears and Plague Arrows converging on him from all sides. While the low tier spells pierced the membranous wings and ravaged the vampire's life force, Lith activated the tier five War Mage Burial Ground spell.

Several pillars erupted from the sand and surrounded Zarran while he was still stunned from his many injuries. The pillars grew in height by the second as countless stone spikes emerged from them, moving in every direction.

Some stabbed the vampire, while the spikes which connected to each other would form new pillars, that in turn generated more spikes.

The spell was a hybrid of earth and darkness magic. The stone was a conduit for the dark energies, so even standing close to it was enough to sap its victim's life force. Count Xolver went pale, praying to any god from above or below to spare the champion's life and his own.

Kaelan jumped out of his armchair, swearing so much to put a sailor at shame. Unluckily, the Lich couldn't hear him above the noise of his own laughter. The whole Dawn Court was astonished.

The fight had lasted less than a minute. A human less than half a century old had defeated a vampire who was twice his age before being turned with apparent ease. Being an Awakened wasn't enough to explain how the unlife of someone who had spent twenty years mastering his vampiric powers could be snuffed out so fast.

"Apparent ease" were the key words.

Lith had used Invigoration multiple times during that minute, channeling so much mana non stop that his body was aching in places he wasn't even aware could hurt. The mental and physical exertion he had just gone through left him with a splitting headache.

Yet he returned nonchalantly to the ground, wearing the same serial killer frown he had at the start of the match.

'I don't care how close Manohar is. I need at least an hour's sleep or the next time I use Invigoration might be the last one which has any effect on me.' Lith sneered at the undead crowd.

No one was smiling anymore.

"Female and male scum, whatever you are, we have a winner!" Inxialot raised his hands, dispelling the barrier and giving Count Xolver an excruciating death by black flames of unknown nature.

As the Lich beckoned with his finger, Kaelan floated toward him from across the room until he was in the middle of the arena.

"A deal is a deal. Now you better start talking, because if I'm forced to stay here one more minute or I'll make sure Othre's Night Court goes extinct."

Hessie's Mansion. Now.

The Carpenters had stopped rushing forward once they noticed that none of their attacks or spells seemed to hurt the shadow monster or its master. The Death Ruler's vampiric touch would heal any injury inflicted on Manohar's body.

Manohar dispelled the Death Ruler as soon as he cleared enough space around him to handle the closest enemies. Balkor's spell consumed a lot of mana, even by the Mad Professor's standards, and stopped the caster from weaving new spells or even using delayed ones.

Several Carpenters each unleashed a tier four spell to cover their companions advance while those in the back row pushed their vortexes to the limit and overloaded their mana cores.

If even the combined assault failed, their master had ordered them to perform a suicidal attack with the aim of burying Manohar under tons of rubble. Luckily for the Professor, Death Ruler had allowed him to retain both his focus and the spells he had ready.

He chanted his next spell while activating the tier five "Talk to the Hand" light magic. Giant hands materialized in front of the charging Carpenters, grabbing and using them as literal meat shields against the incoming spells.

Before the middle row enemies could reorganize, the hands of light adjusted their grip. They now wielded the captured creatures by their legs and swung them at their companions like living maces.

'That's what I call fighting fire with fire.' He inwardly laughed.

Meanwhile, in her throne room, Hessie had reached her true body. It was in suspended animation, inside a capsule made of metal, glass, and mana crystals placed right behind her royal seat.

The body was floating in a purple liquid which was constantly pumped into the capsule through a series of tubes. Each tube was connected to a member of her court, who were exact replicas of the body inside the capsule.

She sat on her throne and activated her tier five light magic Life Flow. A stream of life force flowed from Hessie to the body in the capsule. When the transfer was completed, only a small amount of the original Hessie's life force remained.

Just enough to keep the body alive in a vegetative state. Thrud Griffon, daughter of Arthan the Mad King, opened her silver eyes. Her body was back to its early twenties and had reached a new pinnacle.

She had improved her father's procedure countless times, yet there were still so many problems to fix before it could be considered perfect. The arrogant Night Court had provided her the means to spread her puppies among Othre's population.

All she had to do was to take over the body of one of their Vassals and use him as a strawman to introduce a new kind of alchemical drug in the back market. It was a wonderful product which gave a great high and had no adverse reactions.

Except it was no drug, it was just cough potion mixed with a few of her cells. They were enough to create a small vortex which sucked in the world energy, inducing a sense of euphoria and might.

Only in the right subjects did the cells manage to develop and grow, until they turned their victim into a clone of Thrud. The clones were perfect donors, their life force and mana identical to her own.

Thanks to her "court", even though Thrud had yet to crack the secret of Awakening, she had obtained the next best thing along with eternal youth.

Chapter 472 Pointless Struggle Part 1

Ingesting Thrud's cells only had three possible outcomes. Inside an incompatible host, they would die in just a few days. This was the most common scenario. In the case of partial compatibility, the subject would become a made mage.

They would be useless as energy donors, but the symbiotic relationship with Thrud's cells would allow her to influence their thoughts, to use them as her spies, or simply as sacrificial pawns to keep the authorities busy.

Arthan's daughter had played that game many times. The trick was to constantly move from one country to another. She only needed one treatment once every hundred years and she was careful to pick cities that were both populous and corrupt.

By the time the local authorities noticed something was going on, Thrud was already gone. Once the odd phenomenons ceased, everything would be dismissed as an unknown disease, leaving not even a footnote in history books.

This time Thrud had played with her food longer than usual, but for a good reason. Since her last treatment, magic had improved by leaps and bounds. The Griffon Kingdom was famous for having the best Healers in the three great Countries.

She needed to be sure that her technique was still able to escape detection before moving to more efficiently organized realms, like the Empire or the Blood Desert. Thrud took pride in her work, and until that day she had believed it to be close to perfection.

It only had two major flaws. The first was the difficulty of finding a perfect match, the second was that Mogar would only tolerate someone stealing its energy for so long.

Be they made mages or the stupid nobles she lured with the promise of power, if they were too greedy in using their newfound magic abilities, Mogar would feel the "itch" and scratch itself in the form of a pillar of blue light.

The planet would take back the stolen world energy, usually killing the burglar in the process. If one didn't have enough mana to pay their debts, Mogar would also take their life force as compensation.

The death of a few pawns or Carpenters wasn't a big deal, but blue pillars from the sky were something no one could gloss over. Aside from that, her plan was flawless. The perfect matches knew how to reach her and, by sharing her mind, they had all the necessary skills to disappear without leaving a trace.

Even if the drug was discovered, there was no direct connection with her. The nobles under her thumb kept the authorities away, while the made mages served as a diversion. Thrud always had everything under control, or so she had believed until that night.

Now that she was back in her body, she could appreciate its inhuman strength, its enhanced senses, and the increased vigor of her mana flow. She drained the last members of her court before flushing the purple liquid out of the capsule.

"Finding Manohar is actually a blessing in disguise." She said to herself while wearing her battle suit.

"I have the opportunity to test my abilities against the Griffon Kingdom's greatest genius in centuries. If I can kill such a monster, then the day when I defeat the accursed Tyrus is not far.

I'll avenge my father and take back the throne that's rightfully mine."

Meanwhile, several corridors below her, Manohar had used the Carpenters' suicide squad to wipe out the rest of his enemies. His tier five "Can't touch this" light magic spell had sealed the trigger happy creatures inside a spherical dome along with their companions.

Aside from a hole in the ground, the explosion resulting from their cores overloading had produced no effect.

"This is bad." Manohar was also used to thinking aloud, not because of centuries of isolation, he simply considered himself the only one worth listening to.

"I've consumed about half of my mana reserve and I don't think that miss whatshername will give me enough time for a cat nap. I need disposable... I mean I need help!"

He said while turning around abruptly, scared at the idea that Jirni would appear behind his back like she usually did at the worst possible times. There was something in that woman that reminded him of his mother enough to scare him out of his wits.

A simple earth spell allowed him to identify the path of least resistance, while a light spell did the rest. All he had to do was to wait and rest.

Dawn Court branch, Outside the city of Othre. Now.

Having lost his most recent Vassal, his most promising chosen, and most likely his rank of Lieutenant Colonel in the Night Court all at once, Kaelan was as close to having a stroke as an undead could be.

"I can't give the human an address, since the place he is looking for is in the middle of nowhere. I can show him where it is, though. We need to get outside first." He said.

A snap of Inxialot fingers Blinked the four of them several hundreds of meters above the ground. Lith, Sylla, and Kaelan were all shocked. Blink's range was about thirty meters and extending it even by a dozen meters required lots of mana.

Yet the Lich had moved all of them at once over a distance that usually only a Warp could cover. The vampire tried and failed to not appear impressed while he looked at the horizon in search of landmarks.

The Night Court had discovered of Thrud's existence soon after the first made mage appeared.

If someone asked them why they hadn't made a move against her, the undead would reply that she had provided them with plenty of humans whose bodies were somehow highly enriched with mana.

Feeding on their flesh, blood or minds strengthened the undead's blood cores almost as much as if they had consumed a mage. Thrud was responsible for only a small portion of the missing person cases, the others were all victims of the Night Court's feeding frenzy.

The truth was that they had already tried and failed. Some of the most prominent members of the Court had assaulted her home to discover how she nurtured her humans.

If the entire Night Court from every branch on the continent took part in the feast, the balance between the three factions would crumble and the undead world would belong to them. Unluckily, no one had returned to tell the tale.

That was how Kaelan had earned his rank, by filling an empty spot. Thrud just gave them her crumbs and they could only suck it up. Any more losses would reveal to the world that a whole branch of the Night Court was under the heel of a human woman.

"The place you are looking for is..." Kaelan was cut short when a full body hologram of Manohar the size of a hill appeared in the sky, along with an equally big arrow pointing at a ruined outpost in the wilds.

"Come here, quick! You need my help." The colossus would say at fixed intervals, followed by fireworks visible from miles away.

Inxialot laughed like a madman, while Lith despite his exhausted state could hardly repress the urge to kill Kaelan first and Manohar second.

"Let me guess. I need to go there."

Chapter 473 Pointless Struggle Part 2

Kaelan gritted his teeth while inwardly cursing at Manohar's untimely appearance. It had rendered the information he was forced to share due to the Foul Moon ritual useless. Luckily, he had another ace up his sleeve.

"Yes, but the place is heavily protected. You can't go in through the front door..."

"I can see that by myself." Lith cut him short. Life Vision showed him an energy dome around the outpost so strong that it would take hours to destroy it from the outside.

"Let me take another guess. I can get inside by using the Warping array hidden in the old temple of the god of healing."

"Correct again." Kaelan snarled, revealing his fangs in annoyance. "I hope to never see you again."

"Not so fast." Inxialot stopped the vampire in his tracks. "The deal was for information, so far you have provided nothing. Are you saying that you have just wasted my time... I mean, that you are willing to break a sacred oath?"

The Lich King had been itching to kill someone for hours for dragging him out of his lab. Finally the rules of the competition gave him a reasonable excuse to vent his anger.

"I would never do such a thing!" The vampire rushed to say as his fingers were turning to ashes.

"I can still tell him the name of his enemy!"

"Oh." Despite most of his flesh being gone, the Lich's face still managed to express every bit of disappointment that he was feeling.

"You are going to face Thrud Griffon." Kaelan had a solemn expression while uttering her accursed name.

"Gods, Thrud Griffon! I never thought the day would come that I would hear that name." Inxialot said with a shocked voice.

"Do you know her?" Lith was underwhelmed by the revelation. Griffon was a very common last name.

"Not at all." The Lich replied. "It's just one of the most horrible names I have ever heard"

"Am I free to go?" Kaelan had no idea what Inxialot had done to his hands, but regenerating them caused him a great deal of pain.

Another snap of the Lich's fingers Blinked everyone present back to their respective apartments, even though all three of them were supposed to be warded against dimensional magic.

Kaelan and Sylla were both quaking in their boots, swearing on their undeath to never meddle with the Council of the Awakened again, no matter the reason.

Lith was so pissed off for having gone through all that danger for nothing but a stupid name, that he almost ripped the door of his hotel room off its hinges before taking flight to reach the Mage Association.

'Damn Manohar! One more hour and I could have gotten actually useful information and some rest. I have nothing to offer the Crown except for a name that might well be a pseudonym or just a moniker.' He couldn't delay his return.

The Mad Professor's hologram was perfectly visible even from Othre. Once the Queen learned about it, she might order a full scale attack on the outpost. Lith couldn't let Tista, Jirni, or Kamila go anywhere near the Carpenters' nest.

The array surrounding it would either kill them or slow them long enough to make their contribution to the fight irrelevant. He had never witnessed Manohar's battle prowess and being paranoid, he assumed the worst.

'I can only count on myself. Too bad that right now I'm too weakened to face even one Carpenter on my own. The only silver lining is that with every breath I take I can feel my body healing and my power growing.'

Only when the clerk at the reception of Othre's Mage Association branch refused to let him in did Lith realize that he was still dressed like a dandy.

'The good news is that it was just a spare uniform. The Kingdom will hardly miss it. The even better news is that I kept the clothes without even asking for them.' He and his wallet both inwardly smiled.

Luckily, even a desk clerk of the Association had access to their database. It only took her a few seconds and a call to Dorian to verify his identity.

"Where have you been?" Jirni had the Gatekeeper with her.

"Are you all right?" Kamila threw her arms around him checking for injuries.

"Why are you dressed like that?" Since the others had beaten her to the punch, Tista decided to clear that small mystery while handing Solus and his Skinwalker armor back to him.

Solus had perceived his arrival the moment Lith was back in their mind link's range. She didn't contact him because of the conflicting emotions caused by their separation.

She was happy to see that Lith was fine, yet it also exacerbated her feeling of helplessness. Solus was afraid that she would discover that Lith hadn't missed her as much as she did him. Afraid that he had no use for her anymore, inside or outside the battlefield.

During the last few hours, Solus had been surrounded by people, yet had never felt so alone. While others could speak, hold hands in search of comfort, or just take a walk to calm their nerves, she had been stuck in Tista's hand.

Comparing her life with that of others made Solus scream and cry, yet no one could notice.

'I finally understand what Lith means when he says he is a shadow in a world of lights. We are both too different from normal people. Gods, I wish we could leave Othre and find a mana geyser.

'I don't care if it's just my wisp form, I want to move around, hear my voice without using magic, feel the touch of another person. I want to be normal.' She sobbed. Without Lith, Mogar looked brighter, but it only made her feel worse.

It was a cold light that emphasized everything she never had despite having it just a few centimeters from her. Having the objects of her desires so close and yet being unable to reach them was just torture.

The moment Solus's ring slipped onto Lith's finger, their experiences flooded into each other's mind. Lith had willingly shared his memories to bring her up to speed, whereas Solus was so overcome with grief that she forgot to hide her feelings.

'What's this bullshit about you being useless?' Lith gave her the telepathic equivalent of a hug. 'Have you seen what happened to me? How much I missed you? How much I needed you? Not for your abilities, but for who you are. This life is mine as much as yours, I...'

Their mind link was fast, but it still took time. Seeing Lith in a daze, his companions repeated their questions with a worried expression.

'Dammit, I promise you that as soon as we are done here we'll find a mana geyser even if I have to delay finishing my rounds.' He thought before focusing on the outside world.

"Please, I'm dead tired." Lith raised his hands to ask them to let him talk.

"I know that Professor Manohar is in danger but I need to sit down for a second and tell you what I learned while dealing with the Dawn Court."

Chapter 474 Royal Pains Part 1

Lith's report left out almost everything that had happened to him, there was no time for storytelling. He emphasized the strength of the array surrounding the outpost before explaining how to bypass it and mentioning their enemy's name.

"Never heard of her." Jirni checked her Royal Constable communication amulet and came out empty handed.

"I'll update the Crown and let you know their decision. In the meantime, give Lith a Tonic and some food. We'll be out of here in five minutes tops."

Tonics were among the highest grade potions. They temporarily enhanced their user's metabolism, induced a state of relaxation, and provided most of the nutrients required for a hasty recovery.

Their effect allowed a body to digest and assimilate a meal in a matter of minutes instead of hours and relieved mental stress. A tonic couldn't replenish mana reserves, but at least it removed the side effects of mana depletion, like headache, lack of focus, and blurred vision.

Lith's physical condition shocked both Tista and Solus. All of his muscles were almost torn due to mana abuse, his life force was flickering from exhaustion, and his mana flow was at less than half capacity.

Tista had him sit on a couch while she used tier four light magic to heal his body and supply him with life force at the same time. It would make him hungry but keep his strength intact. Solus preferred to save her energy for the incoming dangers.

She reviewed all of his experiences with the Night and Dawn Courts. Solus studied his opponents, trying to find out their weak points and collect enough data to understand how powerful an undead was based on their blood core.

The desk clerk, a blonde girl so young Lith suspected she had just finished her academic studies, brought him a purple colored potion and a tray full of his favorite foods. Lith ate everything and took a deep breath before sharing his experience with the undead.

Or at least that was the idea. The combination of the tonic's relaxing effect, the accumulated fatigue, and the comfy couch with Solus keeping watch, made him fall asleep until Jirni's return fifteen minutes later.

"How do you feel?" Once again Jirni didn't like her orders, yet she carried them out nonetheless.

"Like someone who could sleep for a week." Lith replied with a groan.

"I have bad news. The situation is even worse than we thought and you are the only one who knows how to operate the array in the old temple. Go get changed, we're leaving as soon as you're done. I'll explain everything along the way."

"What about us?" Tista asked. Her experience in Othre had made her realize just how helpless she was. How waiting behind the lines was worse than fighting. She felt as if nothing had changed since the days when she was a sick girl.

Tista was tired of depending on others, yet neither graduating from the academy nor Awakening had allowed her to make any difference.

"You are staying here along with the others. Sorry, kid. This is a Spellbreaker only mission. Don't worry about your brother, we'll have plenty of back up."

"I'm Manohar's assistant! I'm supposed to go where he goes." The excuse was weak, but it was the only one she could think of.

"I like you Tista. You remind me of my daughter, Quylla." Jirni patted her arm, speaking with a soft, motherly tone.

"So I'll tell you the same thing I did to her when she asked to join me in my work. In this world, no matter the age, there are two kinds of people. Those born for peace, like you, Linjos, and Quylla. Good people who make this Country a place worth fighting for.

"To make it thrive and grow. Peace comes at a price, though. The same magic that allows you to perform wonders also breeds monsters like the one we are going to face. To keep the peace in here there's a war to fight out there.

"In war, you don't need good people. You only need killers who will make peace last one more day. Why do you think your brother, I, and even Manohar got picked for this mission?"

At those words, Tista turned toward Dorian, who lowered his gaze and said nothing.

"Because we belong to the second kind of people. We are the killers this Country needs." Jirni noticed that Kamila had turned pale at those words. She moved in front of the Lieutenant who was staring at her in fear.

"We are still humans, though." Jirni didn't like giving a pep talk to a business rival, but respected Lith too much to purposefully mess with his personal life.

"If you cut us, we still bleed. We love and experience pain like anyone else. We're not monsters and we need a family." Lith's return made the conversation end abruptly.

When their gazes met, Lith gave Kamila a warm smile and she found herself returning it from her heart.

Kamila had a hard time making the image of the stingy Ranger, who played a song for her and made the camellia match with that of the person who she had seen fight monsters with inhuman ferocity.

Lith could feel that the mood in the room was wrong, but since no one was speaking, he described to Dorian the kind of magic crystal which was needed to activate the array. They had to go to the armory to get the right one.

Lith pretended to recognize it while Solus extracted from his memories its energy signature and used her mana sense to identify a matching one among dozens of similarly shaped magic stones.

"Are you sure?" Dorian was no longer surprised that he hadn't recognized what Lith had been talking about.

"That antique is merely for display. It belongs to the age when Forgemasters had yet to discover how to fuse magic crystals with their creations."

The Warping array Thrud and the Courts used was an antique as well. Unlike modern Warp Gates, the magic circle had to be carved rather than built. Their design had been long forgotten because anyone with a proper magic stone could activate them.

Ancient Warp Gates couldn't be imprinted with mana, making them a security nightmare. They had many advantages in present times, though. Without a power source, they couldn't be detected with spells nor with Life Vision.

Also, they could bypass modern dimensional magic blocking arrays because they worked according to different principles than those currently in use. Ancient Warp Gates would permanently fuse two points in space, whereas modern ones could connect to multiple locations via dimensional corridors.

It made them more versatile, but also susceptible to being jammed by preventing them from locking on to their exit point's coordinates. Ancient Warp Steps had no such problem. There was no corridor to create, just a door to open.

Lith and Jirni left the Mage Association, reaching the old temple by flight.

"Do you want the good news or the bad news first?" Jirni asked as soon as they took off.

"The bad news."

"This Thrud Griffon is the daughter of Arthan Griffon, the Mad King."

"He was publicly executed centuries ago for his experiments with forbidden magic. Which means that..." Lith couldn't wait for this horrible day to end.

"That we are about to face one of the oldest and more powerful mages in the Griffon Kingdom's history, who had plenty of time to prepare for our arrival." Jirni finished the phrase for him.

"I'm starting to think they are right." Lith groaned.

"They who?"

"The ones who say I'm bad luck."

Chapter 475 Royal Pains Part 2

"Tell me that at least the good news is really good." Lith wasn't the type to complain so much, yet Jirni understood his reasons.

'In the space of a few hours, he has faced a vampire, several meat puppets, and whatever opponent the Dawn Court forced him to fight in exchange for their information.

'I noticed at first glance that he was too tired for someone who was supposed to just have a chat with them. I never saw him so tired, poor kid. It's better to cut him some slack.'

"Very good. First, we don't have to fight unless strictly necessary. Our is solely a rescue mission, no one expects us to face Thrud Griffon and win. We get in, find Manohar, get out, and destroy the Warp Gate from Othre's side. As simple as that."

"I think you just jinxed the mission." Lith sighed. He had almost forgotten what the word "simple" meant.

"Second, we'll only enter after the other Spellbreakers have surrounded the outpost. The attack will start when we are sure to have her outnumbered and outmatched. The Crown is calling mages from every corner of the Kingdom." Jirni ignored his pessimistic remark.

"Third, since you are tired and I'm not a mage, we'll work with two more Spellbreakers. Even if I 'jinxed the mission' a team of five Spellbreakers can hold long enough for the platoon to destroy the array and swarm the place."

They reached the old temple of Xhal, the god of healing, almost at the same time as their reinforcements. Lith was pleasantly surprised by the unexpected reunion with Professor Vastor and Captain Kilian Aluria.

Vastor was a short man in his mid sixties, barely over 1.55 meters (5'1") tall.

The top of his head was completely bald while the hair he had left on the sides was snow-white and so were his waxed handlebar mustaches. His belly was so big that it made it hard to guess if he was larger than tall. That, together with his pure white robe, made him resemble a real life Humpty Dumpty.

"Oh, oh, oh!" Vastor laughed loudly watching them land. "Jirni, dear, should I tell Orion to be jealous? This is the second time in less than a month that you work together with that little demon. You know he likes older women, right?"

"What are you doing here, Vastor? I was expecting Marth." She ignored his remark.

"Marth is the Headmaster of the White Griffon and the second best Healer of the Kingdom, while this old coot is expendable." Vastor sighed. During his youth, he had been considered eligible for the title of god of healing multiple times.

Until Marth became Professor, stealing Vastor's spotlight thanks to his achievements. Vastor had dreamed for years of being once again the number one, but Manohar had outshined both of them like the Sun does the stars.

"Constable Ernas." Kilian gave Jirni a deep bow before shaking Lith's hand.

"Long time no see, Lith. I've heard great things about you."

They knew each other since the plague in Kaduria and had seen each other again during Balkor's attack on the White Griffon academy. Kilian was a Captain in the Queen's corps. He was a man in his early thirties, around 1.9 meters (6'3") tall, with shoulder-length pitch-black hair, and ice-blue eyes.

"Thanks, Captain. It's sad that every time we meet there are hundreds of lives at stake." Lith said before entering the old temple.

He didn't want to give Vastor enough time to tell them about his days as Assistant Professor at the academy. There were too many embarrassing details Lith preferred remained forgotten.

"The runes composing the Warping array are mixed with gibberish. We need to look for a hole big enough to fit this mana stone." Lith explained to prevent any further conversation while showing the marble sized yellow crystal.

"If we get through this, you'll become the youngest Spellbreaker in ages." Vastor used air and water magic to clean the altar's surroundings, revealing in the process many more runes on the floor.

"It will be the perfect moment to get married. Listen to an old fool's advice and don't repeat my mistakes. If you rest on your laurels, your star will start declining sooner than you think. Aim as high as you can now, otherwise you'll have to settle."

The Professor was one of those people who could talk without losing focus in the matters at hand. Jirni and Kilian were used to much more annoying quirks, so they didn't mind him. Lith wasn't as patient.

"I seem to recall you married one of the most beautiful and influential women in the Kingdom." He rebuked. "How can you call it settling?"

"Back in my heyday, I could've married the Crown Princess." Vastor sighed. "Later I had to give as much as I got, otherwise Vilya wouldn't have even looked at me. I..."

"Found it." Kilian cut him short. "Right at the center of the altar."

"Then we have a problem. Because there is another hole in the chapel." Jirni said while pointing at the feet of the stone statue.

"There's another one here." Vastor had found a third one at the base of the altar.

"It's likely that only the right one activates the Gate. The others must have defensive properties, like destroying the array or making the temple detonate." Kilian was a Master Warden. That was how he would have defended a strategic asset.

"Can you describe to me what the Dawn Court's array looked like? I need a starting point to understand what we are dealing with."

"I can do better." Lith cupped his hands as Solus recalled from his memories the exact design of the Warp Gate, allowing him to conjure its scaled size image with light magic.

"What the fuck?" Vastor flinched at the sight. "Lith, my boy, are you really like Manohar?"

"What do you mean? This is just what a communication amulet does. It's good for projecting stories for the kids, but that's it."

His words made no sense to Lith. According to all the Forgemaster books he had read, it was one of the easiest enchantments to apply among those required to make a communication device.

"You can even move them?" Vastor admired look was now shared by Jirni and Kilian.

'Fuck me sideways. I'm getting the feeling that what I considered a parlor trick is actually much more important.' Lith inwardly cursed.

After watching Lith's hologram and studying its runes for a bit, Kilian knew what to look for in the archives.

Kilian used his amulet to access tomes about ancient Gates and the runes necessary to activate them. Every time he recognized one, he marked it with a wisp of light. Soon the runes formed a circle.

"I'm done. Prepare your spells, there will be no time to chant once we get on the other side." Kilian warned the group. Jirni wasn't a mage, so while the others chanted, she gulped down a few potions, just to be safe.

Kilian placed the magic stone in the hole at the base of the altar. The runes he had marked earlier lit up one after the other, forming a Warp Gate right in front of the statue.

The Captain activated the tier five Warden spell Third Eye before stepping through it. The dimensional door led to a corridor that was full to the brim with arrays made visible by Kilian's spell. One of them shone brightly for a second before fading away.

"I've bad news. The enemy has just been notified of our arrival."

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Kilian cast the tier five Warden spell Disarray. His will overrode the commands programmed in the magical formations, twisting the energies coursing through them into chaos and turning their mana flow against itself until their structure collapsed.

When he was finished, the Gate's edges had already started flickering. The team managed to cross it before it disappeared, while the Captain used his Third Eye to scan their surroundings for more traps.

Lith noticed that Kilian's spell was able to reveal all kinds of enchantments. Under his gaze, the equipment of his teammates glowed, even Solus, and so did the doors along the stone corridor.

"No more arrays in sight and Manohar is not here. Let's move before our Mad Queen sends her thralls to kill us." Jirni signaled Kilian to take point, following him closely. There was a wall right behind the Gate's exit point, so they could only move forward.

Lith immediately understood what she meant. To be able to pull the giant hologram stunt, the Professor must have escaped from his captor. There was no trace of battle along the corridor and the doors were intact.

Thrud Griffon knew of the incoming attack, she wouldn't waste time repairing her base. She would either run away or prepare for battle, and since her arrays were still functional, the latter was the most likely scenario.

No one would be so foolish to leave behind the rare and expensive mana crystals needed to fuel them.

'I don't like this place.' Solus thought. 'It's built over a mana geyser. If our enemy knows how to harness its power, there's no limit to the mana at her disposal. Even most of the furniture inside the rooms is enchanted.'

'What do you see?' Lith moved to the rear guard, to be able to use Life Vision without the others noticing his glowing eyes.

'The first part of the corridor was a storehouse, while all these doors lead to labs for different specializations. This woman must be an eclectic genius.'

'Or maybe she just had a lot of time to learn. What about Manohar?'

'Sorry, I have no idea. Between the arrays, the labs, and whatever there is on the other floors, it's like looking into the Sun.' Lith tried to use Life Vision, only to be blinded by the sensory overload.

The silver lining was that among all that white, he had caught a glimpse of red wind living beings emitted coming from below and a sea of it coming from above. His problem was how to share the information with the others.

"I was glad to hear you found someone after joining the army." Vastor blabbered again, making Lith inwardly gripe.

"You know, he brooded for a whole year after your daughter broke up with him."

"Really?" Jirni was really interested in the matter.

"Yeah. It took some effort to convince him to get back in the game. Him getting turned down multiple times didn't make things easier. He kept hitting on the staff instead of the students and..." Luckily for Lith, the corridor wasn't that long.

They found a flight of stairs leading to the upper and the lower floors.

"I think we should go down." Lith was eager to change the topic. "Prisons are usually built on the lowest level, to make it harder to break out."

Jirni inwardly laughed at his efforts. Knowing Vastor, it wouldn't take him long to start talking again on his own, giving her plausible deniability.

"Oh gods!" Kilian cursed as he saw that there were arrays on the floor, the ceiling, and the walls.

"I'll exhaust my mana way before we reach the next floor if I'm forced to disable every trap we met."

"Kids these days." Vastor snickered. "I'll show you how it's done."

While Kilian's Third Eye revealed the magic circles' lines of power, Vastor struck them with darkness magic. His ability in using simple first magic to disrupt their critical nodes with surgical precision amazed Solus.

'I can see them thanks to mana sense. How can he do it?'

Kilian shared her feelings. His mouth was almost touching the floor in surprise.

"Arrays are just like Forgemastering. You can't afford the privilege of getting old in the Queen's corps if you don't learn a thing or two about them." He answered to the Captain's silent question while shrugging.

Both Lith and Solus learned a lot during their descent to the lower level. Vastor disabled every array they met by expending a negligible amount of mana. Not only did he always strike at the right spot, but he also adjusted the strength of his spell at every node.

His method destabilized the arrays without triggering them nor leaving any trace of their passage. Then, a sudden smell of ozone and death put everyone on alert.

The heavily enchanted metal door in front of them was intact, but all of them recognized the stench of rotten flesh mixed with enough static to make the hair on their necks stand up. They were signs of a big fight.

"This is odd." Vastor said after Third Eye assured them there were no more arrays.

"Why haven't we met any resistance? And why Manohar didn't open this door? This smells like a trap."

'What the heck does he mean?' Lith thought. 'According to Solus's mana sense, the pseudo core of that thing is quite complicated. Its aura protects even the walls. Forcing it open, even with magic, would have disastrous consequences. I could do it with Invigoration, but...'

"Stay back!" Vastor said as he cast the tier four Forgemaster spell Clean Slate, which generated a combined pulse of light and darkness magic. It temporarily short circuited the imprint on the door and released its lock.

"How did you do that?" Lith couldn't believe his own eyes. During his fourth year at the academy, he had spent months learning how to open Hatorne's boxes.

"Sorry, kid. It's a secret spell, I can't teach it to you. Just know we are lucky there was no self destruct spell, or this thing would have blown up in our face."

Vastor didn't cross the threshold, not even when Third Eye confirmed there was no danger ahead. The door led to another long stone corridor which was lighted by magical stones hung along the walls.

The cells on the right side had bars, allowing Lith's group to see that most of them were occupied. The people inside looked clean and well-fed, but there was no life in their eyes. They just stood with a blank stare, uncaring for the bloody mess in front of them.

The cells on the left side all had solid metal doors and what reminded Lith an air conditioning system on the outside. They were all closed but one. In front of it, there was a huge hole in the ground and what seemed like the set of a slasher flick.

The area was littered with blood spatters, various body parts, and enough corpses to make it almost impossible to see the floor.

"Manohar, are you in there?" Jirni yelled.

"Finally!" Replied a familiar, petulant voice coming from behind the opened cell. "Stay away from the door. I'll be there in a second."

Lith and Jirni kept a close eye on the prisoners. They were all potential Carpenters, allowing the enemy to watch and listen to everything they did.

"Keep casting." Jirni ordered the mages. "Something is off."

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They all backed away from the threshold, each weaving their best spells.

Manohar came flying out of his cell at breakneck speed. The prisoners' eyes turned blue as several Warping Arrays appeared throughout the room, trying to intercept the Mad Professor.

He dodged them all by continuously changing his flight path. He stopped at the last second in front of the door, avoiding the one which appeared where he would have been if he had kept flying straight.

"I beat you again, woman." He yelled in triumph while escaping. "I knew you would try to get me once I crossed the..."

His euphoria disappeared when he noticed there was no one behind the door. The Warping array had affected an area large enough to capture Lith's team.

"Wait, did I say stay away from the door? I meant: stay as far away as you can. Dammit. What kind of world do we live in where a kidnapped man has to rescue his rescuers?"

For a second, Manohar thought about leaving on his own, but dimensional magic was sealed again and he had no idea how to get out of what was clearly a death trap. The real deal breaker, though, was that losing his companions or a fight was the same for him.

"I never lose!" Manohar yelled while preparing all the spells he could hold before walking back in front of the prisoners.

"Round 2, lady. Ready when you are."

Thrud was amused by his spunk and more than happy to oblige. A Warp array brought him in her throne room, where they were all waiting for him. She was sitting on a perfect replica of the royal throne, sipping red wine from a glass.

The throne was made to resemble a rearing griffon. Its hind lion paws were the chair's legs while its front eagle talons made the armrests. She had a broadsword on her lap. The blade had seven magical stones of different colors on each flat side.

The ones closest to the hilt were bright red while the ones near its tip were bright purple. A white mana crystal went straight through the center of the cross shaped hilt, pulsing in unison with the other crystals.

Every one of those present was in shock from the moment of their arrival.

'Say that again.' Lith thought, unwilling to believe his own eyes or even Solus's mana sense for the first time since they had met.

'That woman is insanely powerful,' Solus repeated for the fourth time with her voice flat in astonishment. 'and her mana core is rainbow colored, whatever that means.'

Just like the artifact on her lap, Thrud's core had every possible shade of the known mana core ranks. Arthan's Madness wasn't as effective as Awakening. Even though it managed to strengthen her core over the centuries, the accumulated impurities prevented Thrud's mana core from stabilizing.

Yet that didn't make her any less deadly.

"That's the Sword of Saefel." Jirni's voice was barely a whisper. She was well aware of the powers of the weapon that once belonged to the Original King, Valeron Griffon.

"No, you are wrong." Thrud replied between sips.

"This is the Sword of Arthan. My father knew that people like you lot couldn't be trusted. That's why during his last years he took the precaution of having both the Royal Sword and Armor extensively studied.

"That way he could leave his full legacy to his descendants after you small minded, petty peasants destroyed decades of his hard work and sacrifices." Her voice was sweet, but full of poison.

The passing of time hadn't quelled her hatred. For her, it was like Arthan's beheading happened just yesterday instead of centuries prior. The ground trembled below their feet due to the unrelenting attack of the Spellbreakers on the array protecting the building.

Vastor couldn't take his eyes off the capsule behind the throne. Like any competent healer, he had studied all of the little information the Crown had disclosed about Arthan's madness.

Even though it was an evil contraption, it had helped the healing arts to progress by leap and bounds. The idea of killing even a single person made his innards churn, yet seeing Thrud so young made his mind spin so fast he had fallen to his knees.

'The real Arthan's madness. I wonder how would it feel to be young again. To become more powerful than Marth, maybe even than Manohar. Maybe my Vilya and my own children would finally respect me, instead of just seeing me as a giant wallet.'

Vastor wasn't charming or young anymore when he married, and he did it out of self interest. There was no love between him and his wife. He had always neglected his children to pursue his ambitions and now that they were grown up, they were returning the favor in full.

Now that he was old, Vastor regretted many things. For a second, he considered Arthan's madness as his second chance. As his opportunity to start from scratch somewhere far away from the Griffon Kingdom and do things right for once in his life.

Then, his eyes fell on the mountains of corpses piled up at the corners of the room. Thrud's clones were of different ages, some very old and some barely more than children. Some were still lying around, like dirty laundry.

Their bodies were all dried up, mummified by the extraction process of their life force and mana flow.

"How many?" Vastor gritted his teeth in outrage. Nausea and scorn snapped him out of his reverie, giving him the strength to stand up.

"How many people have you killed to keep yourself young?"

Thrud laughed at his question, like a Queen at her jester's joke.

"I don't know. Do you remember how much bread you have eaten in your life? Well, neither do I." To reinforce the effect of her words, she raised her glass above her head and tilted it slowly.

The wine fell down in red droplets which had small arms, legs, and heads. They weren't real people, just the effect of water magic on her drink to alter its shape. Yet Vastor shuddered as he could almost hear the screams of all her victims falling down her throat.

Kilian was stunned by both the size of the protective array surrounding her hideout and the power source that she had at her disposal to fuel it. He could see dozens of tier five spells crashing against the barrier through the windows, yet aside from making it visible, they seemed to have no effect.

'Even if they manage to take it down, we'll be long dead by then.' He inwardly cursed. When they had appeared inside the room, his Third Eye had revealed no arrays, but the sheer brilliance of Thrud's equipment was blinding.

Kilian tried calling for back up, but his communication amulet was dead as a doornail.

Manohar appeared less than a minute after they did, showing no concern for the dead bodies, the throne, nor for the gravity of their situation.

"Well, you're all alive, which could already be considered a miracle considering how dumb you are." He taunted them before turning towards Thrud. "Let's kick that old hag's ass and..."

The Mad Professor was expecting to see Hessie's homely body, while Thrud was quite a stunner and she was aware of it. She enjoyed the mix of terror and desire all of her victims experienced while gazing upon her true form like the goddess she believed she was.

"I take back the old hag part." Manohar raised his hands in apology. "You're definitely the second most beautiful woman I've ever seen, but we're going to kick your ass anyway."

Thrud ignored her prey's empty threat, but his words were unacceptable nonetheless.

"What do you mean second?"

Chapter 478 Overwhelming Power Part 1

Arthan Griffon had been born just three generations after Valeron. Tyris's blood ran thick in his veins compared to the present King. He had even married a distant relative, hoping to keep their bloodline pure and their magical talent unmatched.

Thrud had inherited part of Tyris' beauty, which made her a beautiful woman even before she underwent Arthan's Madness time and time again. Not only did the machine refine her body similarly to what happened to an Awakened one, but it also filtered out the human portion of her blood while enhancing Tyris' with each cycle.

Thrud was 1.78 meters (5'10") tall, with long ash blonde hair that framed the delicate features of her oval face. Her rosy skin was flawless, emphasizing the contrast between her silver eyes and her full red lips.

Not even the Royal armor could hide her soft curves nor her powerful aura suppress the sensual grace of every of her move.

Unluckily for her ego, Manohar had known Tista long enough to be unfazed by her presence.

"Yeah, definitely second." He repeated after rudely checking her out for several seconds, managing to make her fury grow.

Meanwhile, the barrage of spells kept hitting the external barrier so hard that for a second the resulting shockwaves made him almost lose his balance. Kilian ignored the two Mad Babblers and focused on the array.

His Third Eye was still active, revealing that cracks had appeared at several points along the barrier and were slowly but inexorably expanding. He used the Queen's corps sign language to signal the others to stall for time.

"Manohar, where's Mynna?" Jirni believed that she was actually staring at her. Even if her suspicions were incorrect, she couldn't care less about Mynna's fate at the moment.

She asked the question mostly to prevent the Professor from further enraging the enemy and avoid being attacked.

"Beats me. You should ask her loyal housemaid, HESSIE here." Manohar shrugged, pointing his finger at Thrud.

"HESSIE?" Jirni was honestly surprised. She had never suspected such a meek woman.

"You disappoint me, Jirni ERNAS." Thrud laughed, turning back to her arrogant self.

"You should play more of the game your young friend invented." She pointed her sword at Lith.

"You would learn that at the end of every game, Queen and Pawn go back into the same box.

"By always being forced to stick close to her incompetent young miss, HESSIE gave me access to the same information Mynna had, but with much more freedom of movement. Besides, I got tired of playing princess decades ago."

Another tremor made dust fall from the ceiling. Thrud inwardly cursed, realizing she had almost fallen for their trickery simply because it was the first time in decades that she could be herself.

Almost.

"Nicely played. Let's see which will last longer, your lives or my barrier." She snarled while darting forward with the point of her sword aimed at Jirni's heart.

Even though Jirni was under the effect of some of the most powerful potions Alchemy could produce, the assault was so fast that only Manohar's shields of light saved her life.

Despite them being a physical manifestation of the Mad Professor's mana and willpower, the Sword of Arthan pierced three shields before it could be stopped. Lith threw Manohar a body enhancing potion while cursing at himself.

'Damn, I was so surprised by all this shit that I almost let Jirni die.' He thought as the rest of the team drank their own.

His mind was racing thinking about all the possible applications hard light constructs may have. It could even help him figure out a way to give Solus a body. Yet a simple glance with Life Vision was enough to make his amazement turn into worry.

'Her sword isn't the only problem. Her armor emits a stronger magical aura than anything else I have ever seen. Even putting a scratch on it will be a challenge.'

'What really worries me is that she has yet to chant a single spell.' Solus warned him. 'Either she believes that she is strong enough to not need them, or just like us she has everything at the ready.'

Lith moved around Thrud, aiming to stab under her still raised armpit, where the armor was at its weakest because of the shoulder joints. She sneered as she executed a side kick to thwart his predictable attack.

Thrud's body was way stronger than Lith and centuries of being exposed to her own improved version of Arthan's madness had modified her cells to the point of making them capable of absorbing world energy by generating a vortex.

Yet she wasn't a true Awakened. Thrud had no idea what fusion and spirit magic were, nor could she activate her vortex without having her core poisoned.

Solus was suppressing Lith's blue aura to not blow his cover, allowing him to go all out right from the start. Lith waited until the last moment before activating fusion magic.

Thanks to his enhanced body empowered by all the elements, Lith easily sneaked past her defenses. When the Gatekeeper made contact with Arthan's Armor, Lith felt its tip being dragged by the side, as if an invisible hand was deflecting his lunge.

He gritted his teeth, pivoting on his feet to keep the blade along its intended course. Despite having put all of his body weight and technique behind the strike, it only managed to emit sparks when the two enchantments clashed.

Lith's sudden change of pace had taken Thrud by surprise, but she needed only one split second to adapt. Lith used water fusion to make his movements so fluid that there was no pause between his attacks.

Although it failed to draw blood, he hoped the lunge would throw her off balance and used the residual momentum to follow up with a strike to the throat. Thrud's eyes burned with yellow light and so did the corresponding crystal on her sword.

Chains of lightning intercepted Lith as she side stepped and gained enough space to parry his attack. Jirni's needles tried to act as lightning rods, but Thrud's will was guiding her spell, making Orion's enchantment useless.

Even with earth fusion, the sudden jolt slowed Lith, allowing Arthan's Sword to make short work of his defenses. Jirni moved to Thrud's back, her needles had turned into knives as she aimed for a double kidney blow.

Thrud used the downward momentum of her slash to suddenly raise her right leg and kick Jirni's chest with the strength of a horse. A cushion made of light put itself between the kick and its intended target, while many others softened Jirni's crash against the wall.

Arthan's Blade was cutting into Lith's neck, his sudden loss of strength had put him on the literal back foot, when a white hand pulled him from harm's way. Thrud was unwilling to let her prey slip away, so she gave chase faster than the construct could move.

Suddenly a sphere of purple flames enveloped her. The armor protected her from the heat, but the fire burned all the oxygen around her, making her almost stumble while gasping for air.

A second later, the flaming prison turned into an ice coffin. The thermal shock would have shattered a lesser armor, but in Thrud's case, it only prevented her from breathing.

Her eyes turned blue as she activated another gemstone on her sword which took control of the ice turning it into harmless water.

Or so she thought.

Thrud had yet to take a single breath when streams of lightning crackled out of thin air, riding her now wet armor to bypass her enchanted protection. She was still convulsing when the floor came alive, slamming her against the ceiling over and over again.

It was Vastor's tier five spell Tetrastrophe. Four different tier four effects with a single cast.

"Seems you haven't lost your touch." Manohar said before activating another spell and chanting the next one.

"Old versus ancient." Vastor grunted. "This should be interesting."

Chapter 479 Overwhelming Power Part 2

The small wound on Lith's neck was already healed as he watched his two Professors fight against the human faced monster that was Thrud Griffon. Even after being hit with the full force of Vastor's spell, not a hair on her head was out of place.

'Solus, analysis.'

'It's exactly as we predicted. Her equipment, combat skill, and mana core are superior to yours. Judging from our exchange, she should be on par with Scarlett the Scorpicores overall. Plus, you have to take into account her artifacts.' She promptly replied.

'We have a few advantages, though. Fusion magic allows your body to exceed hers, even if not by much. Also, she is underestimating our numbers and the Professors' skill. Last but not least, this place is built above a mana geyser.

'Now that I have had the time to check, I have confirmed that she hasn't tapped into its power for her arrays, nor has she sealed the geyser. Which means it's mine for the taking.'

Solus's ring assumed its gauntlet form, and then it kept growing until it covered Lith's arm up to the elbow. Razor sharp claws extended from his fingers and small blades extended out from it along the outside of his forearm.

A gemstone rested on the back of his hand, which turned from a deep shade of green to a bright one as the world energy flowed into her body. Thanks to their bond, Lith's recovery abilities improved instantly.

Unluckily, there was no space for him in the current fight.

Manohar's light constructs had uncanny versatility and he used that to its fullest to be unpredictable. They would constantly turn from weapons into shields, or even into some kind of exoskeleton whenever Thrud forced him into close combat.

Vastor had never been blessed with a nimble body, but he had long since learned how to overcome that limitation. His tier five air spell Glide allowed him to fly around the room with great speed without sacrificing finesse.

Lith knew how hard it was to use air currents to propel oneself in such an enclosed space without crashing against the walls or the columns. Yet the Professor managed to move with short controlled bursts of speed.

They made him untouchable while he chanted one spell after the other and dodged everything Thrud threw at him. Lith went to check Jirni's condition while Solus kept an eye on the events, waiting for their opportunity to intervene.

Lady Ernas was puking blood and bile from the earlier kick. Manohar's protection had allowed her to survive, but she was still messed up. Lith removed her concussion, fixed her ribs, and healed her punctured lungs.

"Don't waste life force on me." Jirni said as she felt her strength returning.

"That woman is beyond anything I can do, whereas with your spells you might make a difference."

Lith ignored her words since it was Solus's mana geyser empowered Invigoration providing her treatment.

'I need every edge I can get.' Lith thought. 'Jirni's cunning and battle experience cannot be underestimated, yet it's what the Mad Queen is doing. What makes her so arrogant?'

The answer came in the form of a joyous laugh. A snap of Thrud's fingers conjured one of her tier five personal spells, Raging Griffon. It made a small tornado appear around her which drew everything inside the room that wasn't bolted to the floor towards her.

The pull it exerted was sudden and powerful, making Manohar almost lose his footing. Thanks to his hit and run tactics, Vastor wasn't as affected but he had other problems to worry about.

The tornado was sucking the air away, making chanting harder. It wouldn't have been much of an issue, if not for his need to avoid being pulled toward Thrud and dodge the sea of corpses which were now spinning around the room.

All of Thrud's clones were being lifted off the ground and turned into deadly projectiles. Thanks to their enchanted clothes, the corpses would deal no damage to the Professors, but the impact would break their focus or maybe even drag them into the whirlwind.

Thrud's spell consisted of countless air blades spinning around their master with enough speed to generate the tornado and blend everything it touched into a puree. Manohar had nothing prepared for such a threat, so he had to use gravity magic to keep his balance while his light constructs brought him to safety.

Vastor wasn't capable of using gravity magic. The only thing he could do was raise stone walls to protect himself.

'The fat rat is cornered, so I'm free to deal with the so called genius.' Thrud thought as she darted toward the defenseless Manohar.

"Son of a..." Was all he managed to say before the air blades surrounding Thrud almost bit into his flesh. Manohar recalled all of his constructs around him and avoided the worst.

The shields would crack and shatter after a few hits, but he could replace them with the others that surrounded him while his will reassembled the fragments. Yet even with his great mana reserves, it was only a matter of time before they were exhausted.

To make matters worse, Thrud snapped her fingers again and unleashed another tier five spell, Black Griffon. Six griffons as big as horses and made of darkness galloped towards her enemies.

Usually darkness magic's weak point was its slow speed, but aside from Thrud everyone else was locked in place. Lith was the only reason why Jirni wasn't already dead.

He had protected both of them with an air shield while casting spells from time to time to test the enemy's defenses. Earth and water magic were useless since they took physical forms that Rampaging Griffon had no problems destroying.

The lack of oxygen greatly weakened fire magic, leaving only darkness and air magic viable for him to use. Lith and Solus were still racking their brains when they saw two Black Griffons rushing against them.

There was one for each member of his group and two for Manohar who also had to face them almost at point blank range.

"This doesn't bode well." He said as the summoned creatures ripped through his barrier faster than he could reform it.

"Save yourself, you idiot. There's no point in dying together." Jirni snarled while trying to push Lith away.

"How exactly?" He snarled back. "That thing would chase me and the windstorm would suck me in at the tiniest mistake."

Lith shot a barrage of Plague Arrows towards the Griffons. It slowed their advance and reduced their size but it didn't stop them. Lith activated Death Call, conjuring four arms made of darkness that tackled his aggressors.

'What the fuck?' He thought in surprise when the two spells made contact. 'Darkness can touch darkness like they are both tangible, maybe I can do this!'

Or so he believed until the huge energy mass composing Thrud's tier five spell consumed his thinner tier four.

Even with Solus helping him to constantly regenerate the shadow limbs, Lith could only delay the inevitable.

Hidden behind a column at the far end of the room, away from the fight, there lay the last Spellbreaker. Kilian had worked hard in the backlines, using his skills to tamper with the outposts protections despite the distance separating him from their source.

"Short distance Warps are now possible!" He yelled as he Blinked to the other side of the room. The Black Griffon chasing him didn't stop in time. It crashed against the layers of runes which sealed the area and disappeared in a puff of smoke.

Chapter 480 Overwhelming Power Part 3

"About damn time!" The rest of the team yelled in unison. Manohar Blinked as far away as he could from the enemy, using the temporary respite to rebuild all of his constructs and plan his next move.

Vastor was faring much worse. The same stone walls which had protected him from the tornado also made him blind to the incoming danger. He became aware of the Black Griffon's threat only when it tore apart his defenses, leaving him almost no time to retaliate.

Almost.

Vastor unleashed against the conjured creature all the spells he had at ready, buying himself a few precious instants. When the Griffon finally reached him, it was weakened enough to not disrupt his focus, but still capable of snuffing his life.

When Kilian gave him the good news, his Professor suit was on its last leg. The Griffon's chaotic energies were slowly robbing Vastor of his vitality. Blink saved him just at the last second, but the creature, guided by Thrud's will, went after him.

Lith unknowingly followed Kilian's example. The Griffons were so close to the wall that when Death Call's hands Blinked away, they weren't able to stop their mad charge.

The darkness energy composing them dissipated, but not without further weakening the defensive array from the inside. Lith left Jirni beside Kilian and Blinked again, this time right above the eye of the storm.

It was the only safe place from the air blades and also Thrud's blind spot. Lith descended with the Gatekeeper's tip pointed downwards, aimed at her head. Once again, he experienced an invisible force pulling the blade away, but this time they were waiting for it.

Lith and Solus infused their blade with all six elements, generating a gravity sheath that countered Arthan's Armor protection. The hit took Thrud by surprise, dissipating all of her active spells.

'I knew it!' Solus gloated. 'It's like the protection that makes our armor impenetrable to conventional bullets, just much stronger. It alters our direction and acceleration but it's not invincible!'

Unfortunately, aside from a small trickle of blood, it dealt no damage. The Mad Queen turned around so fast that Lith had no time to follow up on his attack. Her sword lunged to his heart, forcing him to side step and focus on the defense.

He had yet to find a way to inflict her real damage, whereas Arthan's Sword had already proven capable of piercing his Skinwalker Armor with ease. Trading blows was off the table.

'I can only buy the others some time.' He thought while triggering his tier four spell Burning Prison. Six fireballs appeared from Thrud's every side, but she only needed to activate Ruler's Will, Arthan's sword's blue gemstone's power, to make them disappear.

Ruler's Will allowed the wielder of the sword to control any tier four or below spell like it was their own. It was the same power Thrud had employed to get rid of Vastor's ice prison.

Although it was a very strong ability, it came at a heavy price. It was a simplified version of Silverwing's Hexagram, so it required from Thrud to spend as much mana as Lith had poured in the spell.

Yet for her rainbow core, which she had overcharged while waiting for her guests, a tier four spell was like a tear in the rain: unnoticeable. She pivoted on her feet, following Lith's side step like they were dance partners. Her blade still pointing at his heart.

Lith deflected her weapon time and time again, but she managed to push the Gatekeeper farther away with each hit, leaving on its surface a deep scratch every time the blades clashed.

"How dares a filthy commoner, the son of a wretched farmer, to draw a Queen's blood?" Thrud's fury multiplied her energies, making Lith almost incapable of following her swordplay.

He was faster and stronger than her, but her centuries of practice made the skill gap between them abysmal. Solus tried to help him with her spells, but even at point blank Thrud was able to use Ruler's Will to nullify them.

The only silver lining was that Solus finally understood what was happening.

'Tier four and below are useless! We can only rely on tier five spells.'

'Great! Too bad I have none ready. Not only didn't I had much mana to start with, but also the ones I know have a huge area of effect. I risk wiping out my team with them.' Lith grunted in reply.

He Blinked away, leaving the Mad Queen flabbergasted.

'I didn't see him chant nor perform hand signs. How many Blink can that runt keep at...' Her split second of hesitation was exactly what Manohar had been waiting for. That and Lith being out of his way, of course.

"Now, you idiots!" He yelled while activating his trump card, the tier five "Double Standards" spell. Manohar had never liked being a team player, but experience had taught him that sometimes quantity had a quality of its own.

A cube made of translucent light appeared around Thrud. The moment she tried to cross it, it became solid, blocking both her sword and body. Vastor and Kilian didn't waste any time, releasing respectively the tier five spells "Raging Sun" and "Dark Star".

The former released a blast of purple flames capable of blowing a castle's doors open, while the latter generated a pillar of darkness with a radius of ten meters (33 feet).

When Lith recognized Vastor's spell, he almost panicked.

'Is he insane?' Lith thought while setting up his defenses. 'Raging Sun should never be used in enclosed spaces. It could kill us all!'

Unlike his companions, he had never seen Manohar in action. Double Standards was a nasty spell that prevented anything from getting out while letting everything getting in.

The Mad Queen did her best, using both her sword and spells to get out of the death trap, but to no avail. Raging Sun's effect was amplified by the cube, which gave the flames all the oxygen they needed while forcing their shockwaves to bounce on its walls like pinballs.

It also allowed Dark Star to unleash its maximum potential. The pillar of darkness couldn't move, but neither could its target. Jirni used that time to pour one of the best tonics on Vastor's body.

Between the aftermath of Thrud's Black Griffon spell and the non stop spellcasting, the old Professor was as pale as a ghost. The moment Lith understood what was happening, he dropped his guards and cast his personal tier five darkness spell Death Zone.

A thick, black mist resembling a small storm cloud appeared in front of him. After conjuring it, Lith needed only a thought to send it toward the light cube. Like all darkness spells, Death Zone moved slowly, but its destructive power was unmatched.

It was the perfect weapon against a trapped enemy.

Manohar's ego was flattered by his companions thinking so highly of him, but three tier five spells plus Thrud's efforts to escape were too much even for him. He clapped his hands, making Double Standards implode on itself with a thud.

Thrud Griffon stood amid the specks of flickering light. Her body was enveloped by a blinding light which restored her charred skin and withered flesh. She looked tired but satisfied as she clapped her hands at their performance.