

## Supreme M 491

### Chapter 491 Meet the Parents Part 4

Kamila had to admit that although Leria was young, she knew her stuff. Lith's cooking was really delicious. Elina asked Kamila about her past and when she noticed that Kamila didn't mention anything related to her life before the army, Lith's mother decided to not pry further.

"Your house is really beautiful." Kamila said after noticing the many magic fueled home appliances inside every room and spacious bathrooms.

"My apartment is much smaller, yet I could have never afforded such a comfortable place if it weren't for Belius being a giant army base. Sometimes I can't believe I spent most of my life without running water and all these conveniences."

Anything which required even a small magic crystal was the result of forgemastering. They were very expensive and usually only noble and rich households could afford them.

Belius was one of the rare exceptions in the entire Kingdom where anyone had the equivalent of a modern Earth home because of the nature of its arrays, which protected the border with the Gorgon Empire.

Everyone else was still forced to chop wood to get warm during winter and get their water from a well or another water source all year long.

"I hear you, Kamila." Rena nodded. "After I got pregnant with Leria, I've basically moved back to my family home. Once you get used to hot and cold water on tap, heating during winter, and cooling during summer, it's hard to go back to the old lifestyle."

"Also, having a Healer available 24/7 is priceless, especially when you have your first child. I went into a panic whenever Leria sneezed and Tista was away."

After lunch, Lith used light and air magic to stage one of the children's favorite shows: the legend of Bang, the last airmaster. It had everything they could wish for. A young, dumb protagonist, good feelings, funny animals and cool fights.

Light shaped the holograms while air magic gave them voices and the other elements were used only for the special effects. Lith had never projected a movie for Kamila, just like he avoided using magic as much as possible in front of her.

He was afraid that showing off his powers too much could widen the small gap he felt was still between them. He had learned from experience that normal people would see a mage as either an asset or a monster.

It was one of the main reasons mages mostly married nobles or colleagues. The former would boost their social status, while the latter were the only ones who could truly accept them.

'In for a penny, in for a pound.' Lith thought. 'Between Warp Steps, my special cooking style and what she witnessed in Othre, this shouldn't be too bad. If she wants to be a part of my life, I can't hide forever. Especially in front of my family.'

The play didn't seem to scare Kamila. Quite the contrary, she remained enraptured by it. After the food and the fun tuckered out the kids for their afternoon nap, she asked Lith to show her around the farm.

"That light show was amazing." She said after he brought her to see Selia's old house.

The huntress had moved away years ago, yet Lith returned there from time to time, hoping to learn what had happened to the woman who had taught him how to hunt back when he was still a kid and to his first true friend, Protector.

"Too bad the story was so childish and full of plot holes. It would be marvelous if you could project more mature stories, even if just for the two of us." She snuggled on his arm while he used water magic to make the snow part in front of them.

"More mature stories? It's doable, but I prefer living certain situations rather than just spectating them." His lecherous tone left no doubt about what he was referring to.

"Pervert! I meant like those from good books or theatrical works." She giggled and punched his shoulder.

"I have always dreamed of meeting the protagonists of my favorite novels or watching the best scenes of the plays I love the most over and over again. Maybe, now that I have a giant mage boyfriend, he could make my wish come true."

"Maybe." Lith nodded. "I don't know who this sucker is, but my suggestion is to entice him by wearing as little as possible when you ask him for a favor. I also heard that hot, passionate sex is a great way of saying 'please' or 'thank you'."

"What's wrong with you today? Are you this cheeky because it's your birthday or does Lutia bring it out in you?" Kamila's tone sounded like a rebuke, but she actually moved his hand from her shoulder to her hip.

"I'll tell you what's wrong. After bugging me for days about what to give me as a present, I have yet to receive a single present. I'm the birthday boy yet I have worked all day to fill your bellies and keep the kids entertained. How is that fair?"

Lith said with an overly dramatic tone while pretending to be heartbroken. His acting was as terrible as he wanted it to be, making Kamila laugh heartily.

'Maybe Lady Ernas is right. Maybe if I really get to become a Constable, I should get myself a Forgemaster for a husband.' She thought as she pulled the collar of his coat with both hands to give him a passionate kiss.

"Does it feel better now?"

"Not yet, but it's definitely a start."

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When the presents were finally revealed after dinner, Lith thought that by mentioning them he had jinxed his own birthday. Both Kamila and his parents had only bought clothes for him, the thing he hated the most as gifts. If they weren't enchanted, of course.

His face when opening them was worse than the one he made when checking the bill at a fancy restaurant, which made most of those present laugh until they cried.

"I'm sorry sweetie." Said Elina once she managed to catch her breath.

"Gifting enchanted items to a Forgemaster is like pouring water in a river. You have no hobbies and you already decorated your house as you thought best. It's not like you left us a choice."

"Same here." Kamila said.

Lith cast the Hush spell around the kids' ears and was about to say something very rude when his army amulet drew his attention. His free days weren't actually free, he was always on call.

His temporary handler warned him about an emergency in Kogaluga. Something had been pushing on the barrier protecting the lost city with growing intensity. It was an alarming sign since Lith had cleared the zone recently.

The only good thing about the lost cities was their predictability. Any anomaly was considered a high level threat to the Kingdom.

Lith cursed his bad luck and left along with Kamila.

"Actually, half of my gift is waiting for us in my apartment. It's something I'm planning to wear the next time we spend the night together." She whispered in his ear before she took the Warp Gate to Belius.

"Please, take care. If something happens to you, it would become useless and there's no way I'd get a refund."

"I'm really rubbing off on you." Lith chuckled trying to cheer her up. She was clearly disappointed of having to part from him so abruptly after planning that day for so long.

## Chapter 492 Growth Part 1

After she left, Lith had the Desk Sergeant set the coordinates of the Gate to the city of Othre, the nearest waypoint to Kogaluga. He had the impression that after Kamila met his parents, that small gap between them was gone.

Lith didn't know whether to be happy or worried about it. He only had one year left in the army and after that, he might be forced to expand his search to other countries. He hadn't planned Kamila just like he had never expected to become so attached to Phloria during the academy.

He was afraid history was going to repeat itself, setting an expiration date on his new relationship too.

Once Lith reached Kogaluga, it took him only a few hours to discover the truth. The anomaly detected by the lost city's array system didn't come from the inside. Lith had been thorough during his last sweep and the undead inside were still few in number.

A tribe of trolls had reached the city, lured by the darkness magic flooding from the rift. They had been trying to get in for a few days. Without food, their numbers wouldn't rise, but the energy seeping out of the barrier was enough to strengthen each one of them over time.

The good news was that all Lith had to do was kill them from a distance with fire magic and make sure they stayed dead. Trolls could regenerate even from their smallest bits, so even with Life Vision it took him a while.

The bad news was that once he was done with them, it was already late at night. Too late to go back to Belius to spend the night with Kamila or even to give her a call. The only silver lining was the

presence of the nearby mana geyser, so he could at least spend the remaining hours of his birthday with Solus.

Once inside the tower, he noticed that the core inside the wisp had grown bigger from the last time he had seen it.

"Solus, did you have a breakthrough?"

"Yes!" She had an ecstatic tone. "It's the second one already since you got your blue core. At this rate, I'll get halfway through green in just a few months."

"Lucky you. Between the boot camp and the constant traveling, I couldn't use Accumulation as often as usual. I've only promoted my core by one shade so far."

"I'm two levels apart from you even though and I'm constantly nurtured by both you and the world energy. I should be the one complaining." She rebuked him.

"Did you enjoy your birthday?"

"Well, it went much better than I expected." Lith said while taking a long hot bath. Even though he had acted tough all day, he had actually been worried things could not work out for either Kamila or his family.

"Indeed." Solus replied from the Alchemical lab, where she was sorting out all the new equipment they had received from the Crown as a reward. Much more had yet to come.

It would give her something to do the next time Lith didn't need her help or presence.

"It's the first time we have to skip your second birthday, though. I'll miss Count Lark and his staff who still believe you are his son, just like I really wanted to check on Friya and Quylla. We haven't seen them from over a year now." She sighed.

Lith usually celebrated his birthday twice. Once only with his family and his closest friends, like Nana or Selia, and a second time during a social event hosted by the Ernas or by Count Lark.

Lith was tired of always being alone, but he had no other choice. He regretted not meeting Count Lark, Jirni, or any of the Ernas girls for his birthday, but he had only one day and had to make it count.

"Me too, Solus. Yet Kamila is my home away from home now. I have to give her and my family priority. I will call the others tomorrow, first thing in the morning. Okay?"

"Okay."

Later, that night, while Lith was fast asleep inside his bed, Solus's wisp form escaped from his embrace and moved to the bedside. Suddenly, it started to pulse as its core expanded until it touched the fringes of the wisp's sphere of light.

Solus's life force broke free of its restraints, taking the form of a humanoid female, entirely made of golden light.

It had no facial features aside from her shining eyes and lips half-opened in a very sweet but sad smile. A cascade of golden hair enveloped her whole body as it floated in the air like she was underwater.

'Yes! I knew I felt different the moment I assumed my tower form.' Solus danced in the air out of joy before looking at her figure thanks to a series of mirrors that she had conjured around her.

'I do have some baby fat.' She inwardly griped while she stared down and squeezed her belly.

'Whoever I was before turning into a tower, I must have been a couch potato. There's no way a mage would be so cruel as to make their tower's avatar short and paunchy. I've always known I'm not a thing!'

After looking at her form from every possible angle, Solus was satisfied overall.

'At least I'm well proportioned for my height and have a tight ass. Yay me.' She chuckled.

Solus swept her hair back, to be sure it wouldn't tickle Lith's sleeping face before kissing him softly on the cheek.

"Happy birthday, Lith." Her voice was barely a whisper.

'I've waited for 12 years, I can wait a bit longer. If I tell him now, it would make our relationship even odder. I don't want to risk ruining his relationship with Kamila for just... this.'

Solus had waited for three years to have even a semblance of a body, just to discover it was still not enough. It still didn't allow her to have a normal life nor to be with Lith like she wanted to.

Solus caressed his hair for a second before going out to see the stars accompanied by a glass of milk and a trail full of all kinds of biscuits.

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The following morning, Lith noticed immediately that the tower had changed overnight. The stones which composed his room were sturdier and smoother compared to their usual crude look.

Every room of the tower was now larger than he remembered.

"Solus?" He looked around before noticing the wisp snuggled in his arms under the blankets.

"Let me rest five more minutes. I'm dead tired." She grumbled.

'Not only did I eat so much that I got a stomach-ache, but also I can't remain in human form for more than an hour without spending a lot of mana. Worst power up ever!' She was careful to hide her thoughts where Lith couldn't find them.

"How could you possibly be dead tired? We slept all night to recover from using all the Warp Steps necessary to go back to Derios and then reach Kogaluga."

Lith had indeed slept all night, whereas Solus had joined him just an hour earlier, just in time to experience what an embrace felt like before exhaustion forced her back into being a wisp.

## Chapter 493 Growth Part 2

Lith was true to his word and called all of his friends before hitting the road again. Some of the news he received was expected, some of it not so much.

"Damn! Jirni's birthday is going to be a real pain in the ass this year. I can only hope an emergency will give me a decent excuse for not attending." Lith cursed.

"So much for missing your friends." Solus grumbled. She had never felt so tired and would have much preferred to keep sleeping.

"They are going to celebrate their 25th anniversary, you should've expected something big for the occasion. Aren't you happy to finally see Phloria and the rest of the gang again?"

"No. Really no." Lith shook his head.

"If I don't bring my girlfriend to the party with me, Kamila will think I still feel something for my ex. If I do, there's going to be a showdown between them, and even if violence is rarely involved, back on Earth these kinds of things were never pretty."

"How can you say you feel nothing for Phloria? One of the reasons you asked Kamila out is because she reminded you of her. Even now you refuse to call her by her name and just use the 'ex' word. I think that says a lot." She sneered.

"I haven't forgotten what we had together. I owe her a lot, maybe more than I could ever repay her, but the past is in the past. By the way, someone is grumpy this morning and for once it's not me." Lith laughed, making Solus feel awkward.

She still had conflicting feelings about her new ability and, most importantly, about her decision to not share it with him. The exhaustion coupled with the guilt were making her touchy.

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Lith resumed his duty and for more than a week he was unable to stop in one place if it wasn't for eating or sleeping. Winter in the north had started earlier than usual, catching many cities and villages unprepared.

He would often be called by their local authorities to resolve disputes about food provisions or to rid them of potential threats. Even bandits needed a place to shelter from the snowstorms, but no one wanted them to live in their neighbourhood.

Criminals would try to infiltrate settlements at the last moment, hoping to either escape detection in the slums of medium sized cities or exploit the lack of security typical of small villages.

Unfortunately for them, the people in the north were as harsh and unforgiving as their climate. They hated even the foreigners who wore the Kingdom's uniforms, let alone those whose faces only a mother could love.

Once Lith reached a village, he would give them two choices: to spend the rest of the winter in prison or in the graveyard. Banishing them wasn't an option. They could return as soon as he left and he had no desire to waste his time with mercy.

Some of them tried to escape while the bravest ones attempted to resist being arrested. They all died the same way: with their neck snapped by a flick of Lith's wrist and a touch of spirit magic.

'It seems until people settle down for winter, we'll be doing a lot of back and forth around the whole Kellan region.' Lith thought.

"Yeah, you won't be able to go back home for a while. I expected you to nag like usual, yet you are smiling." Solus was confused seeing him so laid back.

'I would if I were a normal Ranger, stranded in the middle of nowhere during a snowstorm. I'm a lucky man who can seek shelter inside his own mage tower and enjoy the company of his only true friend instead.'

Lith was eating a steaming meal in the dining room Solus had created for him.

'Between working, taking care of my family and Kamila, it's been a long time since we could just spend a bit of time with just you and me.' He patted the wisp who was floating in front of him.

'Even though we are always together, I still missed you a lot, Solus. I wish we could share this meal together.' The lights in the tower turned beet red.

Not for the overly casual physical contact which had become even more awkward since she had acquired a human body, but because she had actually already eaten her fill while Lith was setting up the Forgemastering lab for their next experiment.

"You have an odd concept of quality time!" Solus telepathically pouted.

"You are using the mind link to communicate without interrupting your meal to save time and ever since we got stuck in here, we have done nothing but work on our magic. We could take a nap, watch a movie, read a novel, anything but work!"

'You are joking, right? Neither of us needs to sleep, the only movies we can watch are those I know by heart, and we read a book in a split second with Soluspedia. Any of the above would be just a waste of our precious time.' Lith was confused by her recent behavior.

She had always insisted on making him rest regularly and had always been fond of cuddling, but for a while now she wouldn't take a no for an answer. Truth to be told, Solus was trying to follow Tista's advice and live her own life.

Yet since she could only take physical form inside the tower and she could only do as she pleased when he was asleep, her window of opportunity to experiment with new things was quite small.

To add insult to injury, Solus really enjoyed spending quality time with him and in her book, work did not qualify.

'Besides, I don't care what we do. As long we are together, it's like a holiday to me.' Lith stressed his point by hugging her tightly and making the dining room turn even redder.

In the end, they reached a compromise. Lith would decide what they would do for 16 hours a day and Solus would decide for the remaining eight. By the end of the blizzard, Lith had converted a few of the new spells the Crown had awarded him with into true magic and gained a deeper understanding of first magic.

Once Solus noticed that even when she forced him to rest Lith would actually practice Accumulation to further refine his core, she came this close to giving him a piece of her mind.

Unfortunately, when she opened their mind link, the only thing that he was thinking about was the hope that, by improving his core, he could help her to gain the light form she had actually already acquired.

Solus was deeply touched by his affection for her, realizing once again she held a very special place in his heart.

A few days later, they were on the edge of the ruins of Kush. The creatures populating the city had such a strong life force that they would regenerate even after being pulverized by darkness magic.

Lith was studying the ghost-like life force of a freshly killed monster with Scanner. None of his tier five body sculpting spells were able to cause the slightest alteration to the ethereal figure in front of him who was silently collecting his remains floating in the wind.

'If my life force were to become immutable like theirs, I would achieve immortality.' He thought as his army amulet broke his focus.

"Fuck! Another call."

'More petty quarrels between nobles or is it bandits again?' Solus asked.

'Neither.' He replied when the call ended. 'A tribe of monsters is about to attack the city of Maekosh'

#### Chapter 494 Warg Part 1

'Another tribe of monsters already?' The news left Solus shocked.

'We dealt with another one less than two weeks ago outside Kogaluga. How can they possibly spawn so fast despite our rounds and the lack of resources due to winter? Don't tell me it's more trolls. Those things are disgusting, they give me the creeps.'

'No trolls, it seems they are dealing with a pack of warg. Also, I agree with you, it shouldn't happen this often.' Lith thought as he dispelled Scanner and Scalpel.

'I can only think of a few possible explanations for this. If we are lucky, it's just them coming out of their nests after running out of resources. Monsters are as powerful as they are dumb. They are incapable of planning ahead for a whole season.'

'Worst case scenario?' Solus asked.

'Someone is making them spawn to further their own agenda.'

'Yeah, right.' She chuckled. Even by Lith's standards, that was full blown paranoia. 'I wonder where you left your tinfoil hat. We don't want aliens to read your mind.'

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Free country of Lamarth. Beyond the eastern borders of the Gorgon Empire.

The Master had been on cloud nine for months now. The incident in Othre had given them exactly what they needed to put an end to the slump their research had been in during the last two years.

"I'm telling you, Xenagrosh, this is the will of Mogar. Everything happens for a reason." The Master's usual mean, lecturing tone had been replaced by one of a child on a sugar rush.

They spoke with a shrill voice, talking fast as their hands operated the experimental machinery the Abominations were assembling in the magical lab. Ever since the Master had managed to acquire a copy of the Spellbreakers' report, they had barely slept.

Xenagrosh, the Eldritch Abomination who served as their right hand was worried about the Master. Their maniacal enthusiasm for magical research was a double edged sword. It had brought them far, but had also caused many casualties among their ranks.



Abominations were even rarer than Awakened ones, their numbers were limited.

"Four years ago, Balkor taught everyone with a working brain how Abomination's tissues can be implanted inside other creatures to control and empower them. At first, I thought it was as ingenious as it was useless, until Thrud showed me how wrong I was.

"She brilliantly solved the main problem of Arthan's Madness' low energy assimilation rate by converting her victims into copies of herself before harvesting them.

"I've devised a way to fuse Balkor's and Thrud's research which has solved many of our problems. Abomination's tissues are much stronger than human's, they can take root in any living being.

"By creating copies of our associates, we can boost your powers endlessly and get rid of the madness which ensues after fusing several Abominations into one. If they share the same mind there will be no conflict. It's just perfect!"

Xenagrosh's enthusiasm was limited. She had been a powerful Awakened before turning into an Abomination and being forced to rebuild her strength from scratch. She knew all too well that saying and doing were two very different things.

"I don't know. Even if I knew I was just a copy of the original, I'd rather die fighting than let myself being sacrificed. Also, we still need to kidnap a lot of specimens for your experiments. I don't see much difference in our situation now." She shrugged.

"How can someone who once was so brilliant have become so idiotic?" The Master sighed. "We'll harvest them before they reach full sentience, we can't risk a civil war of our own. As for the specimens, we're only going to use monsters for the trial runs."

Xenagrosh was stunned by her mentee's brilliance. Monsters spawned fast, had great magical potential, and no one cared how many of them died.

"What about the orc shaman's crystal?" The Master asked interrupting her musings. "We need it as energy source, otherwise mass breeding Abominations will take too long."

"It's... lost."

"What do you mean lost?" The Master's good mood disappeared.

"The retrieval team spooked the shaman enough to make him detonate along with the mana crystal rather than let it fall in the hands of 'demons'."

Both the Master's rage and eloquence reached a new peak, making them say words so crude that it's best for them to remain forgotten.

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City of Maekosh, Prancing Griffon tavern.

It was Lith's second time being there and his first visit hadn't degenerated into a brawl solely because he was as happy to leave as everyone else was eager for him to go.

As long there was a mana geyser in the proximity, Solus's company was the only thing Lith needed to enjoy his stay in a new place.

"As I told you the last time, Ranger, your money is most welcome here. You, however, are not." Xelos, the tavern's owner, was glaring at Lith in such a way that if looks could maim, the Ranger's remains would easily fit into the establishment's trash bin.

Like many medium sized cities in the north, hospitality wasn't a strong suit of its inhabitants. Most Northmen lived in fear of the borders and of the spies that might come from the Gorgon Empire.

Uniforms and badges could be counterfeited, so even during the good season they only trusted strangers as far as they could throw them. Winter made everything worse.

With no Warp Gates and snowstorms that could isolate a city for weeks, a single foreigner mouth was one too many. No one was willing to share their rations and risk suffering from starvation in case something happened or if the cold lasted longer than expected.

The tavern's usual patrons shared Xelos's hatred for Lith. Everything he ate or drank was something they wouldn't get to enjoy. Even if he was paying for his meals, they still considered his presence like that of a thief.

"And as I replied to you last time, you will give me what I paid for, or suffer the consequences." Lith considered Maekosh a shithole, but the variety of beers they brewed there were top notch.

He had got a taste of them from a merchant in Othre and found them a marvel for his taste buds, even at room temperature. Served cold they were simply divine. Lith had added as many kegs as he could to his stocks during his first visit.

Unfortunately, they didn't amount to much. Winter was coming and most of the supplies were already sold.

"Like what?" Xelos sneered. "You are nothing but a military dog, so follow your precious orders and get lost!"

"I'm glad you asked." Lith replied with a soft smile, as his mouth and fingers weaved an incantation.

"You can't use your magic!" Xelos didn't lose his spunk. "Everyone here is my witness. Uniform or not, the Griffon Kingdom won't stand criminals."

"Indeed." Lith opened a Warp Steps right behind Xelos, using a bit of spirit magic to push him through it before closing the Gate. The patrons jumped from their seats in outrage, but he remained calm.

"I'm a civil servant, not a slave. There's a big difference to it. According to the law, robbing a Ranger, refusing to serve him, and slandering him are all criminal offenses punishable by imprisonment.

"Which means that you only have two choices left. Waive my protection and face the monsters on your own or join your friend in a solitary cell for the entire time I'm forced to stay here."

Silence befell the tavern. When pride and fear clashed, the latter usually won by a landslide, especially when monsters were involved. The patrons went back to their seats and no one protested when the barmaid served the Ranger his meal.

Chapter 495 Warg Part 2

Lith's eyes were brimming with mana, but not because he was angry. He was staring at the steaming plates in front of him with Life Vision to make sure no one had spat in his food or beverage.

There was only a brief time window before saliva became invisible even to his magical perception. The waitress had no idea what was happening, so the scene made her quiver.

"I'll take that one, thanks." He said to a second waitress as he switched the tray she was carrying with the one in front of him. Lith had ordered the house specials because it made it much easier to replace them without notice.

"Tell whoever 'spiced' my food that they need a Healer fast, or they will not live long enough to see Spring. I advise throwing away the stuff on that tray, if you don't want to spread the disease." Lith lied through his teeth.

Not even he could diagnose something from saliva, but those present had no way to know that. Panic spread inside the tavern as a terrified yell came from the kitchen right before the service entrance was slammed by someone who was in a great hurry.

The tavern's patrons looked at their plates like they had been served live rats. Many of them started to hold their bellies while fear and self-suggestion made them feel sick one after the other.

"I'm sorry, are you also a Healer?" Asked a pretty waitress who looked like she had just dined on rusty nails. She was a redhead with a lot of freckles on her face and a nice figure.

"Depends. Can you afford one?" Lith loved it when his plans came together and hated his meals being interrupted. His voice oozed sarcasm and annoyance.

"I'm just a waitress." She replied.

"Then I'm just a Ranger." Lith's smile was as sweet as an unripe lemon. Soon he was the only one still inside the tavern.

'That was a low blow.' Solus thought. Her reprimand lacked conviction since she liked unwarranted hostility even less than Lith's antics. She couldn't understand how the very people he was about to risk his life for could treat him like that.

'All is fair in love and beer.' Lith filled his glass with a second pint and left the money on the counter. He was many things, but not a thief.

He had just finished his meal when a sadly familiar voice came from behind him.

"Was that really necessary?" Baroness Enja was the ruler of the lands surrounding Maekosh. She was a middle aged woman with long blonde hair braided into a single tress which almost reached her waist.

She had sharp features that together with several wrinkles and her ice blue eyes gave her the stern expression of an eternally disgruntled monarch.

"You have to be a little more specific than that, your Ladyship." He stood up calmly before giving her a small bow.

"The tavern keeper is a certified idiot, but sending him to the dungeon after taking all the keys with you is overreacting." She was still unaware of the fake pandemic spreading throughout her city while they were talking.

"Is it? It was a group of foreign merchants looking for shelter that spotted the warg and gave you the time to call for help. I'm a foreigner too, and I'm going to put my life on the line for every certified idiot who lives here.

"I don't ask for gratitude since I'm just doing my job, but your citizens could at least treat me with the respect this uniform deserves instead of like a thief."

"Real heroes don't ask for recognition, medals, or rewards. They just do the right thing because it's what heroes do." The Baroness' voice was as sour as Lith's.

"Well, your Ladyship, when you find one, I'm sure they will be glad to help. Meanwhile, as long as my services are required, I'll be this city's judge, executioner, jury, executioner, warden, and, when necessary, its executioner."

Lith Warped to the western wall, where according to the witnesses, the pack of warg was supposed to arrive. Warg were another one of the Fallen races.

They were wolf-like creatures that legends said descended from a tribe of hunters who had been cursed by the wolf god for killing one of their cubs. Taken individually, each one of them was as strong as a magical beast.

It made them dangerous, but alchemical tools and the protection offered by the city walls would be enough to decimate them if that was all they were capable of. Unlike real magical beasts, monsters were not intelligent creatures.

They were unable to coordinate their attacks nor to exploit their enemy's defenses' weak points. The larger a pack of warg, the stronger it was. They were able to share their life force, their mana, and even their wounds.

According to the bestiary Lith kept in Soluspedia, a pack with enough members could employ some animal tricks, like their intelligence also grew with their number. The Baroness had asked Lith to kill them in front of the city walls instead of hunting them in the wild for several reasons.

The most important one was that she hoped that by witnessing the Ranger's actions, her people would stop being so arrogant. It wasn't only Lith that was fed up with their attitude, but also the merchants and the Mage Association.

Without merchants, Maekosh would turn back into being a poor city. Without mages, the city would always be dependant on the army for its protection.

The second most important reason was that otherwise no one, her included, would have trusted the Ranger to do his job properly. After how they had treated him during his first visit, the Baroness had been surprised to see him arrive so quickly instead of making up an excuse or giving priority to another city.

Lith was unaware of her worries and if he learned the truth about her odd request he would simply not care. His success streak as a Ranger was the only thing that mattered to him.

So far, his services to the army and the Crown had been well compensated with money, resources, and connections. His policy had always been to follow his job through as long as he was paid.

The complaints of the inhabitants of Maekosh were just white noise in his ears

'I don't like this one bit.' Lith thought while scouting the city's surroundings from a turret.

'It's already odd that the merchant caravan spotted the warg without being attacked, but what really baffles me is what's taking them so long to reach the city. I checked the map, there are no settlements between the place they were spotted and Maekosh. There's nothing that should have delayed their arrival this long.'

Solus had no answers to offer. Their knowledge about their opponent was limited to what the book said, and bestiaries were written by survivors or based on their stories. The bestiary provided by the army was much more detailed than the old one they possessed, but Lith didn't trust it.

Not after what had happened with the orcs.

He stood watch for a few hours, using Accumulation to refine his core while he waited together with the city guards for the incoming attack. The setting sun blinded the watchers looking at the horizon, while its rays reflected on the snow blinded those checking the ground.

It was only then that the attack began.

#### Chapter 496 Mutation Part 1

'Timing their attack with the position of the sun is not just a trick, it's plain smart.' Lith inwardly cursed as one of the nearby watchtowers exploded, spreading the smell of barbeque and pieces of entrails in the afternoon air.

'They are not charging at the walls!' Solus's senses were unaffected by daylight.' The warg are taking down the guards first. This wasn't supposed to happen.'

Lith switched to Life Vision, noticing a barrage of spells were being unleashed on the positions where the guards had taken cover. Fire and lightning charred the stone and sent the guards into a panic, making them lose their tinted glasses.

'This is too clever for monsters who for decades have been recorded as mindless beasts.' A wave of Lith's hand dispelled most of the incoming attacks. They were just chore magic cantrips the warg used to cover their real targets.

The guards had no way to know this and stared at him with a mix of awe and fear, like a god of war had descended among them.

'How the heck can they attack with such precision even while being so far away that not even my mana sense can spot them?' Solus thought. The situation was becoming more absurd by the second. Lith racked his brain for an explanation but found none.

Even if it was a violation of his orders, he took off and flew at full speed and followed the spells back to where they came from. The area in front of the city walls was kept clear for hundreds of meters, which made a sneak attack a formidable feat.

The moment Lith passed near a small patch of trees, something as big as a horse and as fast as a missile bolted up from the ground to intercept him. Lith had seen the unknown enemy thanks to Life Vision and was waiting for them.

Despite the high speed he was moving at, he managed to dodge the living bullet as his right hand wielding the Gatekeeper sliced through the enemy's side and his left hand released three fireballs in a triangle formation.

The warg wasn't as skilled as Lith in aerial fights. The creature took the full force of all of his attacks and was engulfed in the resulting conflagration. Lith managed to catch a glimpse of his opponent before the flames consumed it.

The Army bestiary was right about the warg's appearance. The creature looked like a humanoid wolf, with a thick grey fur and bone spikes coming out of its spine and joints. Yet it was dead wrong about the rest.

The creature Lith had just killed was over three meters (9'10) tall instead of just two (6'7") and had hands bigger than Lith's head. Warg were also described as incapable of using air magic to fly.

Their eyes were supposed to be yellow and filled with endless fury. What Lith saw, instead, were black eyes filled with surprise, malice, and confidence.

'That wasn't the gaze of a dying man. Something is off.' Lith stopped advancing to scout his surroundings when the warg came out of the smoke like a speeding train. The creature wasn't just alive, it was unscathed.

Lith dodged the attack with ease, turning the enemy's body into a pin cushion riddled with razor sharp icicles, but that didn't even slow it down. The warg attempted another charge only to be showered with lightning bolts that flowed through the ice directly into its organs.

Once again, the enemy remained unfazed.

The clash continued for a few seconds, but despite Lith held the upper hand the fight seemed pointless. The warg was fast and strong, but it couldn't land a single hit. Every one of Lith's attacks struck with surgical precision, but none left a mark on the monster's body.

Lith stabbed the warg with the Gatekeeper several times, but the blade went in and out almost like it struck an ethereal enemy.

'Solus, please tell me this makes sense to you. The life force of this thing is still as strong as when the fight started.' Lith asked while weaving a tier five spell.

He would have preferred to save them for once he found the rest of the pack, but solving this mystery took priority. The idea of having an immortal creature within arm's reach made him worried and excited at the same time.

'Sorry, I have no idea what's happening. I think...' Before she could finish her thought, the creature howled in frustration and flew away.

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A few hundred meters from the scene of the fight, the warg tribe was cursing their bad luck. Many of them were gritting their teeth to withstand the pain of the terrible wounds that kept appearing on their bodies.

One of them had his side cut wide open, while others had their flesh covered in burns or their bodies trembling in a seizure.

'Retreat.' The warg alpha telepathically ordered to his chosen beta who promptly obeyed.

'Not enough food to mend so many wounds in so little time. We need more time to increase our numbers, we still...' The alpha paused, searching for the right word.

The Master's experiments had enhanced the warg's skill to share their abilities among pack members. Each one of them had a small fragment of the same Abomination inside of them.

A single piece was too small to have a consciousness, but because of the warg's nature, they were able to form a network that created a mind link. As the fragments developed, the mind link was turning into a hive mind.

'... too stupid. Don't get caught.'

Six wargs were sitting on the ground, weaving spell after spell which their brothers and sisters inside the city were able to unleash without blowing their cover.

"Take the wounded." The alpha said. He used the mind link only when he was forced to. The voice in his mind was too different from his own. "We retreat, now."

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Lith followed the fleeing warg, noticing how its size turned to what the army bestiary described.

'Probably it was that big because it was borrowing strength from its companions. Are they in the area?' Lith thought.

'Still nothing within range.' Solus replied

The monster tried to shake the human off its tail by increasing its speed, but the gap in air magic mastery between the two was enormous. Realizing he was no match for the mage, the warg grinned.

"For the pack!" It yelled as it recalled all the wounds it had sustained during the fight as well as all those the other members of the tribe had received during the march toward Maekosh.

The warg's body was ripped to shreds in an instant, leaving Lith shocked.

'You have heard that too, right Solus? I'm not imagining things, right?'

'I did. The warg used air magic to speak in the human language, just like a magical beast would. It shows they are both intelligent and willing to sacrifice themselves. We cannot underestimate them like the army did.'

Solus couldn't believe decades of information could produce such a poor result.

'I wasn't talking about that. The way it ended its life, the words it used. It reminds me of what happened when we faced Balkor's creatures.'

## Chapter 497 Mutation Part 2

Lith and Solus stored the warg's remains inside their pocket dimension before scouting the surrounding area to search for the rest of the pack. Thanks to the beta's sacrifice, the warg had been able to quickly retreat inside their underground den.

They hadn't been expecting a mage, but a voice in the back of their heads had warned them not to stray from their haven. Even though it was hard for them to even grasp the concept of caution, the alpha had followed the advice.

With intelligence came fear. None of the monsters would hesitate to sacrifice their lives to save their kin, but with each new member of the tribe, the warg experienced more emotions.

If before life was all about feeding and breeding, now they wanted more. So much more and enough time to enjoy their achievements. They weren't willing to die in a blaze of glory, the monsters wanted to live which made them more dangerous than all of their new abilities.

Lith was slowly expanding the search area when his army communicator drew his attention.

"Where are you?" Baroness Enja asked with more than a tinge of fear in her voice.

"Taking care of your enemies. Your call might as well have given the creatures the time to escape. I told you not to bother me unless it's an emergency."

"Four watchtowers are down, we have dozens of casualties and injuries, plus the only mage for kilometers is outside the city walls. I'd say it's quite an emergency. If another attack happens in your absence, the city will fall. Come back immediately!"

Lith hung up in reply, pondering what he should do.

'Dozens of casualties? Four watchtowers? This doesn't make sense. Only two exploded before we left and we counted less than six corpses. If the attack continued even after we engaged the warg warrior, it means someone else was acting as the tribe's eyes and ears.

'We'd better get back to Maekosh. Something doesn't add up' He thought as his civilian amulet lit up.

"It's everything okay? Are you alright?" Lith asked. Kamila had never called him during her working hours just to chat.

"That's my line! We are getting reports of monster tribes popping up like mushrooms. The central command is revoking all leave until the matter is resolved."

"Are you saying the whole north is affected? Not only the Kellar region?" Lith could see from the hologram that she was pacing around what looked like a smoking area.

"Not just the north, but the whole Kingdom. Or rather, according to a friend of mine in the foreign affairs department, the same is happening to all of our neighbors. To make matters worse, some of the reports say the monsters are abnormal."

"Abnormal how?"

Kamila checked her surroundings to make sure she was still alone before answering.

"Some seem to be more powerful, others more intelligent, and a few both. The information is considered strictly confidential so as to not spread panic. At least until the central command can confirm the claims, so you heard nothing from me."

"Actually, you may hear about it from me soon. My warg case falls into the worst case scenario. I'll give you a full report as soon as I finish examining the corpse I collected."

"I don't care about a full report. When I call from my personal amulet, I'm your girlfriend, not your handler. I want to know if you are all right or not, you dummy!" Lith's lack of care for his own well being irked Kamila to no end.

"Oh, sorry. I'm perfectly fine. The warg I faced was completely different from what I expected, but overall it wasn't much. I'll call you later, Baroness I've-got-a-stick-up-my-ass is in sight." Lith put the amulet away before landing on the western wall.



Enja was waiting for him along with the soldiers. She was wearing the blue shirt and brown pants which made up the uniform of the city guard. On her sleeve, there was the insignia of a captain while an enchanted blade rested at her side.

The situation was much better than he had expected after looking at the Baroness' stern face. Aside from the destroyed watchtowers, there was no significant damage.

"Thank you so much!" Several guards offered him their hands.

"Thank the gods the attack stopped almost as soon as you left. Otherwise we would have lost a lot more men." Said a middle aged sergeant whose uniform was covered in dust and dirt.

"You saved our lives by blocking all those spells. Your powers must be unparalleled." Said a young guard who gave Lith a deep bow.

"Why did you disobey your orders?" The Baroness looked relieved to see the morale so high, yet she wanted to understand if Lith's actions had lessened or aggravated the carnage.

"The enemy wasn't in sight, there was nothing I could do by staying on the walls."

"Is that true?" She asked the guards who promptly nodded.

"It was a nightmare. An invisible enemy kept raining death on us from thin air. We were like fish in a barrel, waiting for the slaughter." Said the sergeant.

"There's no such thing as invisible enemies. Warg can use each other as relay points for their spells. It was only a matter of finding their sentry and kill it to stop the attack." It wasn't actually that simple, but spreading the news of mutated monsters in a city under winter lockdown was a recipe for disaster.

"Excellent work, Ranger Verhen. Please follow me." The Baroness made way without waiting for his reply. Lith could tell that all the angry façade and the captain dress up was for the troops.

Enja was good at bluffing, but not good enough to make him fail to notice that she had some urgent matters to discuss. The city lord would never expose herself for a small skirmish. To be where the crossfire could start again at any moment, she had to have a problem that couldn't wait.

Otherwise she would have just summoned him to her office. Enja walked down the stairs to the base of the wall, where a stagecoach was waiting for them. After a short trip, the carriage stopped in front of the city morgue.

It was a one story stone building. The ground floor was furnished as a waiting room for the relatives of the deceased and the underground floor was insulated to keep the bodies in a cold and dry environment.

Lith noticed a couple of guards were standing behind the double doors leading to the lower level. They tensed up when the entrance opened, but relaxed the moment they saw the Baroness.

The basement was neat and orderly. Metal scaffolds which held corpses covered by black blankets were placed along the walls. Most of them were empty, Lith counted a dozen bodies.

Three metal slabs occupied the center of the room, but they weren't enough to deal with the recent events. Several stretchers were lined up next to the slabs, and each one carried a body.

"The ones on the scaffolds are the victims from the city wall." The Baroness walked to the nearest one and uncovered a couple of corpses. Lith nodded, recognizing the damages an amateurish fireball could cause.

"The ones on the slabs guarded the west city gate. Please, tell me what you see." Lith's eyes sparked with interest. The attack site was far from the gate. He removed the blanket from the stretcher, revealing a butchered corpse.

Someone had tried to cover the claw wounds with first magic, but fire could never tear flesh that way and only made the marks on the bones more evident.

#### Chapter 498 Prejudice Part 1

"Clearly the attack on the watchtowers was a diversion. The wargs wanted to get rid of the sentinels before opening the doors and sneaking inside the city undetected." Lith pondered.

"My thoughts exactly. We have traitors in our midst." Said the Baroness.

"Yes, but you are lucky, your Ladyship."

"Winter has barely started and my city is cornered by enemies from outside and within. How dare you call me lucky?" She was seconds away from punching the Ranger in the nose.

"Idiots are the best kind of enemies one can ask for." Lith replied before examining the bodies on the stretchers. Some had been killed by a bite to the neck, others had been disemboweled by claws.

Each attack had been executed with deadly precision and then followed by a sloppy attempt at covering the wounds with fire or air magic.

"Does this look like the work of a warg to you?" Asked the Baroness.

"Yes, but it doesn't make sense. First magic can easily kill and so will blades. Using their bodies to attack was really stupid of them unless they didn't expect me to foil their plan. More importantly, how could something like this go unnoticed?"

Lith cleared off a slab before taking out the warg's corpse from his pocket dimension. Baroness Enja nodded as a disgusted expression appeared on her face.

"It shouldn't have, yet it did. The west gate remained closed the whole time, yet the people guarding it had been slaughtered. No matter how absurd it sounds, it must have been an inside job."

"Agreed, but something tall, dark, and hairy like a warg couldn't have hidden in plain sight." Lith replied as he cut open the creature's chest with an air blade. Even though he couldn't share the information Kamila had provided him, he could still find evidence of mutation on his own.

The army's bestiary had included a complete anatomical description of the creatures, allowing Lith to perform a necropsy. Unfortunately, the body's poor condition due to the extensive wounds sustained at the moment of death gave him a single clue.

'The internal organs appear to be slightly shifted from where they are supposed to be, leaving extra space near the creature's mana core. Yet I can't tell if it's because of a mutation or just because the remains more closely resemble a jigsaw puzzle than a carcass.' He thought.

'Solus, do you think the wargs could have infiltrated the city by shapeshifting?'

'That would be almost impossible.' She replied. 'Not even all Evolved Monsters learn how to shapeshift, like Kalla or Phillard. Even if the wargs could do it, in a city like Maekosh the slightest blunder would blow their cover.'

'The people here are far from welcoming and the creatures who attacked the guards are clearly dumb. Maybe the army can offer us some insight.'

Lith used his army communicator to give a full report to his handler. He stressed the creature's ability to speak, fly, and its temporary invulnerability. Then he explained the city's current predicament.

"Your situation is abnormal." Kamila said.

"Both the warg warrior's resilience and its death cannot be explained by their innate abilities. Even a large pack can only share part of the wounds one of its members sustains and not as fast as you described.

"I'll consult the archives and get back to you as soon as possible."

"What if it's a new species entirely? A single Ranger might not be enough! Send reinforcements immediately." The Baroness ordered.

"The army can't act based on a local ruler's worries." Kamila's voice turned stone cold. "You've been allowed to listen to the report only because as the city lord you must be aware of what's happening to arrange your citizens' safety. Over and out."

It was the second time in a single day that someone had hung up on her. The Baroness was livid.

"I need to speak with the merchants who first sighted the wars. Where can I find them?" Lith had no time to coddle her feelings.

"In jail, of course." The Baroness' eyes had no trace of humanity. Her hands gripped the metal slab like she wanted to tear it apart.

"Aside from you, they are the only outsiders in the whole city. It was already suspicious that they spotted the wargs without a single casualty, and when the gatekeepers died, I had to lock them up. They are the main suspects."

Lith was flabbergasted by her words.

'That's idiotic. The merchants had no reason to warn the city about the attack, nor can humans bargain with monsters. They have nothing to gain if the city falls.' Lith was worried enough to place his hand on the Baroness' shoulder and use Invigoration while pretending to reason with her.

"You did the right thing for the wrong reason. At least in jail they are safe from angry mobs and when the next attack happens, because it will, you'll be forced to admit their innocence. You guards would never turn their backs to outsiders."

Invigoration revealed nothing and prejudice was something even light magic was powerless to heal.

Lith recovered the warg corpse and left the morgue for the prison below the city's courthouse. The flight wasn't long, yet it reminded Lith why he didn't like Maekosh.

He liked order. Lutia was a small village, but each home had its space and individuality.

Belius seemed like a Lego city, all blocks and squares. Its architects had sacrificed beauty in favor of efficiency, something that Lith had learned to love during his time at the academy.

Othre's outer circle could seem chaotic at first, but there was a method to it. Maekosh, instead, looked like a long line of different builders had worked on it on succession and for some reason, all of them had quit halfway through the job.

The same city block could host stone buildings and wooden shacks. Some had a lot of space between them while others were stacked on the top of each other. Merchant shops were so close to abandoned houses that sometimes suppliers would bring their merchandise to them thinking they were warehouses.

Maekosh was a poor city, which had gone through periods of rapid growth and recessions multiple times over the years. The brewing trade was its mark of success, while its inhabitants were that of its failure.

Their fear of outsiders made them reject any potential investors and no merchant liked to renegotiate their deals whenever a brewer had a bad day. When business went well, they were forced to hire people from outside of the city and temporary houses would pop up like mushrooms.

These foreigners were paid less and had to work more hours than the "real" citizens. Inevitably the outsiders became irate at their treatment and quit, ensuring that their unwavering employers did not reach their quotas.

Anyone who moved to Maekosh hoped for a better life. Slave labor jobs were available everywhere and finding one in a much friendlier environment was easy as pie.

After Lith reached the prison, he shook the merchants' hands one by one before opening the doors of their cells. Invigoration cleared them from his suspects' list. They had weak mana cores and bodies.

Shapeshifting could alter someone's physical form, but their strength couldn't be hidden. The group was composed of men and women of different ages. Each merchant traveled with their apprentices who served them as handymen.

At first, they couldn't wait to be released, but after hearing from Lith what the townspeople were going to blame them for, they were happy to remain behind bars.

## Chapter 499 Prejudice Part 2

"These people are crazy. I would never stop in a shithole like this if it weren't for the wargs. Our destination was Shaku. Do you know if my goods are safe?" Asked a scrawny middle aged woman with more wrinkles than a crumpled paper.

"How did you escape the wargs?" Lith couldn't care less about their cargo.

"We didn't escape. They ignored us." Said a lean man in his late fifties, with grizzled hair and beard. "They were too focused praying to pay us any attention."

"Praying?" Lith was even more incredulous than he sounded.

"Well, they were kneeling on the ground, doing nothing but chanting some gibberish." The man shrugged.

"It wasn't gibberish, master Dihel, but magic." Said a young man about Lith's age who looked more like an artist than a wannabe merchant. He had handsome features and arms so thin Lith doubted he had ever lifted something heavier than a toothpick.

"How can you be so sure?" Lith asked.

"I was the one standing guard. I noticed the wargs because of the light they emitted. They were divided into groups of six. Each group was engulfed in a magnificent golden light that formed a circle."

"Golden light?" Lith echoed as his stomach churned.

'Six points inscribed inside a circle?' Solus's stomach was nonexistent, but she felt like puking nonetheless.

"By chance did it look like this?" Lith opened his right hand, making a Silverwing's Hexagram the size of a towel appear.

"Yes! It was exactly like that, at least as far as I remember. What does it mean?"

'That we are royally fucked.' Lith thought.

"Nothing, don't worry." He actually said.

"You have helped me a lot. Just a few more questions. Did the monsters have something unusual about them? Anything at all?"

They shook their heads, making Lith inwardly curse.

'I hoped they had seen the wargs shapeshift, or at least in the company of humans. That way at least I would know where to start looking. My usual bad luck.' He griped.

"Where did you spot them, exactly?" Lith took out a map from his pocket dimension and had the merchants point out the location to him.

Before he left, he gave them enough food and water to last for a couple of days. Lith also barred the door and took all the keys with him. Then he called the Baroness.

"I'm leaving Maekosh, so I need you to stand guard and call me if anything happens. Trust no one but me. No one can know of my absence."

"What? That is unacceptable! Your duty is to defend the city, how can you leave?" Fear and outrage fought in her voice, but fear prevailed lowering it by one octave.

"The merchants saw the wargs practicing arrays." Lith lied.

"If we allow them to increase their numbers, they will be able to destroy the city from the outside. They need to be culled."

'It's actually much worse than that.' Solus quivered in anxiety.

'Someone has taught them the impossible array we used to practice true magic. can share the experience they gain by practicing individually, they could master it even with their limited intelligence.'

'Even worse, they are learning how to use every element instead of just two. Can you imagine the threat a tribe of Awakened that spawns as fast as monsters do could pose to our lives? On Earth there was traffic because anyone could drive a car.

'Magic is rare and Awakening is even rarer. Yet those things are breaking all of Mogar's rules we've learned so far.'

Lith Warped to the same spot he had fought the warg warrior, checking his surroundings for enemies. Neither Life Vision nor mana sense perceived anything so he flew at full speed toward the place the merchants had pointed out to him.

'I know where they trained and where they were going. If they didn't fly, I can hunt them down by following their smell!' Lith enhanced senses allowed him to even track a person's scent.

It was useless inside a city. Too many people and too many strong odors coming from every direction would easily mess with his senses. After all, Lith wasn't a trained dog, he had neither the instinct nor the skill to isolate a single smell among many.

In the wilds, though, especially during winter, there weren't many odors. Lith took out a piece of the warg to sniff it. It smelled like a wet dog after rolling in a pile of dirty sportswear and sweaty socks.

The stench made his eye water, but it also gave him a scent to follow strong enough that only an open sewer could mask it. The fair weather of the last few days also helped him greatly.

The snow preserved most of the tracks the warg left since they didn't bother to hide them in any way.

'I know how those poor bastards must feel. Practicing magic, hunting to eat, sleep, rinse and repeat. That's how I became strong. If we can, we need to capture one of the wargs alive.

'I want to learn the secret behind their mutation and kill the idiot responsible for this abomination!' Lith inwardly snarled.

He was unaware that if the Master knew about the magnitude of their failure, they would be the first to kick their own ass to the moon and back.

Lith could have reached the monsters' den in a few minutes of flight, but his paranoia slowed him down. He couldn't know that the wargs were still at odds with their newfound intelligence. They continued acting as predators, not prey.

Hence they had no caution while moving unless they were planning an ambush.

Lith was forced to keep his best spells ready and check his surroundings whenever he entered a good spot for an ambush. Nothing happened, but the tension of the hunt weighed on his nerves.

While facing an unknown enemy on their own turf, the line between hunter and game was paper thin.

'Their warrior didn't hesitate to commit suicide to hide its pack's location, yet they did nothing to cover their tracks. My enemies go from smart to plain dumb like they suffer from split personality.' He had no idea how close to the truth he was.

'I counted at least 30 adults and a dozen kids. What are we going to do about them?' It wasn't the first time they dealt with younglings, but Solus had never come to terms with what had to be done.

'Kill them. Or would you like me to wait a couple of days so they turn into adults? I can spare them, but are you willing to take responsibility for every life they will take?'

Solus didn't reply. It was an old unsolved argument of theirs. To her heart, giving the cubs a second chance was the right thing to do. Unfortunately, her common sense found it simply idiotic to let them go just to kill them a few days and many victims later.

That was one of the rare moments she was happy to not have a body, so the choice was out of her hands. Lith followed the smell until he found a well camouflaged cave at the base of a small hill a few kilometers from Maekosh.

He had used the Hush spell to cancel the noise and darkness magic to hide his smell the moment Life Vision had picked up a faint signal. The cave went deep into the ground and the surface of its walls was too smooth to be natural.

'Fuck, they have already grasped earth magic. Worst case scenario, they used it to be aware of my arrival and they will negate my spells with the Hexagram. Let's hope I'm not stepping into a frigging trap.'

#### Chapter 500 Hybrid Part 1

Lith was right about the wargs learning enough earth magic to create a den wherever they liked, but he was wrong about everything else. The voice in their heads was getting stronger with each new member added to their pack and pushed them to practice first magic relentlessly.

It left them enough time to hunt but none to care about their security. This pack bore pieces of Tezka, one of the Master's chosen. He had been a powerful Awakened when he was still a Xogh (Fox-type magical beast).

Even though he had yet to regain any sense of self, his habits were so deeply engrained in his personality that they influenced his hosts. All of their new knowledge, feelings, and tactics came from him.

In a way, their relationship was a twisted version of that between Solus and Lith.

'At least mana sense and Life Vision make it almost impossible to take me by surprise.' He thought as he floated along the ample stone corridors. Even his array detecting spell hadn't picked up anything, which reassured him about his enemies' abilities.

Inactive arrays were among the few things that their mystical senses were unable to perceive and one of the reasons Lith never underestimated Warden magic. The tunnels had been created with a defensible layout.

There were several turns at uneven intervals. After each one of them, the tunnels would change in width, height, or direction so that a group of rushing invaders would get stuck, slam their heads against the ceiling or run into a wall.

Lith was once again surprised when he realized that whoever had planned the den knew exactly how deep it had to be to escape Life Vision's detection.

'How can an Awakened one be so crazy as to mentor a tribe of monsters?' Solus couldn't find any other explanation for what they were witnessing.

'We'll ask them before we kill them.' Lith was simply joking. There was no way he would waste time talking if another Awakened was really involved.

The tunnel led them to a huge cave. It was a wide circular space with a diameter of about 100 meters (328 feet). Lith counted at least fifty pack members, most of whom were adults or close to maturity.

Aside from the mothers with small cubs, the others were divided into groups of six and were practicing Silverwing's Hexagram in a way that would've impossible for a loner like Lith.

'What the heck? Each warg is in charge of a single element, so that by keeping the array active they can not only train the element they are least proficient with, but also every other element at once simply by feeling and harmonizing with the mana flow.

'If I ever have one or more disciples, this can be a great teaching method.'

Lith studied them for a while as he planned his next move. He noticed that Silverwing's Hexagram allowed the wargs to switch the element under their control at will, further improving their training.

He cursed whoever created that method and took action. The cave was an open space which offered him no cover while he moved, yet Lith still had an opportunity for a surprise attack.

Those working on the arrays were too focused and while he studied their technique, the mothers had fallen asleep.

Lith used Invigoration to get back to his peak condition. Then, he prepared a new set of spells based on the most likely situation he expected to face. A Hush spell appeared around the nearest group, enveloping them in a shroud of silence.

The wargs were so focused that they didn't even notice Lith's tier three Full Moon spell create a circular spinning air blade which decapitated them all at once. The air dome surrounding them prevented any noise, blood, or even its smell from escaping Hush's boundaries.

'Okay, so they are not invulnerable nor do they have any magical protection. Otherwise Full Moon wouldn't be enough.' Lith inwardly nodded in satisfaction.

Hard kills worked. Whatever the wargs' sharing ability had evolved into, they still had vital organs.

He was about to Hush the next group when the pack suddenly turned toward their fallen brothers and sisters in unison. Their howls filled with pain and grief gripped Solus's heart.

Before he learned tier four light magic, Lith had lost many patients over the years. The sounds the wargs made were too similar to the wails of the mourning relatives of the people they had failed to save.

'Plan B it is!' Lith unleashed the tier five War Mage spell Raging Sun right in the middle of the cave, quickly followed by another one he had received from the Crown, Stormnado.

His own spells couldn't hurt him and he had ready another spell to survive the cave in. He quickly moved inside the Hushed zone, collecting the six corpses and their heads.

The alpha and the voice in their heads shouted as one. Tezka had sired many puppies, his parental instincts created a bond between the wargs and their younglings which wouldn't have otherwise existed due to their offspring's fast development.



The wargs' reaction speed and technique surprised Lith.

Despite the fact that they seemed to only be able to employ tier three spells, by acting as a single being thanks to their mind link, they were able to perfectly stack the effects of their protections and keep Lith's spells at bay.

The wargs used air and water magic to hold the magical monstrosity at bay while the others ran away through several hidden corridors leading outside.

Tier five magic wasn't so simple, though, and Lith had chosen those two spells because they synergized. Raging Sun was a mixture of fire and earth which generated a powerful explosion and flames so hot that they could melt stone.

Its effects were akin to a volcanic eruption.

Stormnado was a mix of air and darkness, which conjured a thunderstorm of poisonous gas. The resulting effect was a toxic tornado with a temperature in the hundreds of degrees that carried rocks as dangerous as small meteors.

Lith could feel his spells' every fluctuation and identify where the enemy formation was weaker. By focusing on those points, he penetrated the enemy barrier and destroyed it, like a flood bursting through a cracked dam.

Even though they were wielding the collective magical prowess of the whole pack, the area around the wargs covering the retreat turned so hot that it burned their lungs. Lightning bolts coursed through their bodies, bringing many of their comrades near death just to allow them to keep the barrier in place.

'You can't do it alone.' Tezka begged the alpha as his black tendrils were working at top gear to keep its body in one piece.

'Let me in. I can save them all. We can save them all. Together!' Along with the magic of most of the pack, the alpha was also wielding enough of the Eldritch's consciousness to turn it from just a voice to a person.

The alpha was unwilling to lose its identity, but its resolve was shaken when it noticed that the Ranger was exploiting their struggle to strike at the fleeing wargs and kill all those who were still inside the cave.

'Deal.'

The alpha howled in pain as the Eldritch's energy replaced his blood and devoured its mana core like a hungry beast. The Tezka-alpha hybrid let go of the barrier, devouring all the light in the cave to turn darkness into Chaos magic.