

Supreme M 501

Chapter 501 Hybrid Part 2

The monster-Eldritch hybrid executed Tezka's tier five Chaos magic spell, Hungry Void. Normally it would've been impossible to weave such a powerful spell so fast, but the wargs mind link allowed the Abominations to use the fleeing monsters as catalysts.

Each one of them cast a small part of Hungry Void, leaving to Tezka only assembling and harnessing its energy. A black sphere materialized in front of the hybrid, clashing against Lith's spells with such strength to make the ground tremble.

Lith didn't like this turn of the events, but everything was still within his expectations. He believed that just like the warrior he had previously defeated, the warg in front of him was simply being empowered by its pack.

He had his spells envelop the black sphere as he unleashed more spells to finish off the wargs still in sight and cripple the enemy.

'You lied! You said we could save them!' The alpha cursed Tezka when more of its kin fell due to deadly wounds. Not even the maelstrom created by the conflicting spells made Lith miss his marks.

'Focus, you idiot! The enemy did it on purpose!' Tezka tried to warn the alpha, but its fury made Hungry Void unstable. Lith didn't miss his chance and had his spells detonate, tainting the enemy's spell with his own energy.

The resulting explosion engulfed the hybrid and ravaged its flesh. The Chaos magic was now unable to recognize its master, adding its remaining strength to what was left of the other two tier five spells.

Thanks to Life Vision, Lith could see through the smoke and debris that the hybrid's body on the verge of breaking down. Only tendrils of black energy kept it together by wrapping around it like bandages.

The Tezka-alpha hybrid had its tendrils collect the Abomination's fragments from the bodies of the dying wargs as he took away their remaining life force and forced them to take his wounds.x

x It yelled as Lith ignored its ramblings and gave chase to the rest of the pack.

"Scum of the earth, don't you have any honor? Come back and fight!"

Lith sneered in reply, using the spell he had readied to survive the cave in to actually cause it and bury the hybrid under tons of rocks.

'Yeah, right. You have an extra life for every member of your pack and I'm the one with no honor? I'll face you as soon as I get rid of your mushrooms, dear Mario.' He thought.

'Lith, those aren't simple monsters. They have feelings, they can even talk and reason. The one behind us is almost like you. He's a hybrid.' Solus said.

'A lot of those who I kill have feelings. Humans, crazy beasts, game, undead, take your pick. Yet it has never stopped me because it's a matter of survival. Also, he is nothing like me.

'These wargs have been modified in a similar manner to what Balkor does to his undead.' Lith replied. He could sense the hybrid's aura behind him becoming more powerful.

Half of the warg's body was now composed of raw darkness element, giving the alpha a demonic look. Its yellow eyes burned like torches as several horns were growing on its head. Its fur was now completely red, making it look like a living incarnation of fire.

Its body was completely healed thanks to its packmates' sacrifice, and now it had two tails. His own plus a fox tail comprised of pure energy.

"I said come back!" The hybrid yelled as he unleashed the tier four Chaos magic Howling Void. A spear made of darkness as thick as an arm erupted from his palm, aiming for Lith's heart faster than a bullet.

Lith Switched his position with the nearest warg, making the pack's strength dwindle even further.

'That's the problem with sudden power ups. What you gain in strength, you lose in accuracy, sucker!' Lith Blinked behind the hybrid, thrusting the Gatekeeper towards the creature's head.

Somehow, the Tezka-alpha hybrid perceived Lith's movements and turned around abruptly. A new horn grew on his forehead. It moved fast enough to push the blade aside and aim for his enemy's throat.

Lith Switched position again, and another warg died by its own alpha's hands. Another of the lights in the hybrid's mind was replaced by a sudden void, driving him almost mad due to the guilt he felt for his incompetence and his hatred toward the human.

Even though Tezka controlled half the body, he didn't have the mastery to perfectly control the body nor was his essence developed enough to allow him to use most of his skills. The alpha's emotional instability was crippling their already limited battle prowess.

'Fuck! They had an escape strategy planned. The wargs divided into small groups and took flight in different directions.' After killing the wargs who had yet to run away because they were too tired after sharing the barrier's burden, Lith turned to the alpha.

He could follow only one group at a time and that would mean leaving his back exposed to someone capable of using Chaos magic. Lith had already witnessed how powerful it was. Even though he had yet to understand its nature, Lith didn't underestimate his enemy.

'How many did we take down?' He asked.

'Eleven.' Solus sighed. She almost felt like they were the bad guys, chasing creatures that just wanted to live. 'Fighting the Black Star or the Carpenters was so much easier.'

Lith had her assume her gauntlet form and take the Gatekeeper, leaving his hands free. Now a yellow gemstone was embedded on the back of the gauntlet's hand, right beside the green one.

He decided to investigate what that evolution meant after getting rid of the last warg standing in front of him.

"Curse you, human." Tezka was afraid of the sword flying circles around them. He was using sheer willpower to hold the alpha back, but after losing so many developed fragments and the rest of the pack getting farther away by the second, his consciousness faded away.

The hybrid bolted at Lith who infused himself with all the elements and took the charge head on.

'Please, don't! It's a trap!' Tezka begged the alpha in vain. Being so close to its nemesis that it could almost smell his blood, sent the alpha into a frenzy. The hybrid unleashed a chain of lightning that Lith grounded with earth magic and countered with a volley of Wind Blades.

The dark matter of the Abomination half of the body absorbed part of the damage and immediately started to heal the rest, but it needed time. Unfortunately, time was running out.

Lith's hands grabbed the hybrid's claws, leaving it shocked in realization that the human was physically superior to itself. Without its pack, even merging with Tezka wasn't enough to face Lith's enhanced body while boosted by fusion magic.

Things became even worse when Lith unleashed the tier four darkness magic spell, Grim Reaper. The power of dozens of Plague Arrows flowed from his hands into the trapped claws. Direct contact made the spell's slow speed irrelevant.

The hybrid felt his strength flicker as his fingers were crushed into a broken mess.

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The creature tried to bite Lith only to have his mouth forced shut by a headbutt before the Ranger released his grip and performed a front kick which hit its solar plexus like a truck.

The alpha grinned as it jumped back to dissipate part of the impact, gaining more distance and time to heal its wounds.

'What part of trap did you not understand?' Tezka sighed in resignation. The kick coupled with the alpha's own strength, allowed Solus to pierce the creature's heart from behind.

The darkness infused Gatekeeper went straight through its chest, until the hilt of the blade struck the fur on its back.

"And that makes twelve." Lith said after ripping the hybrid's head from its shoulders. He stored all the carcasses inside their pocket dimension as Solus returned to his hand.

'Good job. I wasn't sure if it would work, but it was worth a shot.'

'Thanks.' She replied. 'I noticed that the angrier it got, the stupider it became. Also, the moment we separated the warrior from its pack, both its physical and magical strength plummeted.'

'Even if it has been artificially boosted, their sharing ability still has a limited range.'

'I was counting on that. Why do you think I was so focused on getting rid of those who stayed behind? The bestiary is right about one thing: a pack is dangerous, a warg is just annoying. At least to me.' Lith inwardly smirked.

'By the way, what does the second gemstone on the gauntlet do? I always thought the first one represented your mana core, so a second one should mean you got another core.'

'Beats me.' She replied honestly.

Whenever Solus gained a new ability, she would also acquire the knowledge to use it as if it was something she was born with. This time, however, aside from her temporary energy form she had gained no ability that would justify the change her gauntlet form had undergone.

After she gave him her consent, Lith performed Invigoration on Solus, discovering that she still only had a single green core.

'We'll solve this mystery another time. We should get back to Maekosh, I need some rest.' Lith sighed.

There was a mana geyser just a few kilometers from the city, but he had no way to justify to his superiors why he loved "camping" so much to leave the city unprotected in the middle of a crisis.

While he flew toward Baroness Enja's mansion, Lith called his handler and gave her a full report on the situation.

"Oh gods!" Was Kamila only reaction. She forwarded the report as urgent to her supervisor who joined their open channel right after she heard about Lith's hypothesis.

"Do you really think this is Balkor's doing?" Captain Legato asked. She was a woman in her mid thirties with blonde hair, blue eyes, and such a serious face that you would expect it to crack at the slightest smile.

"It would explain the Abomination, the hive mind, and the sudden monster outbreaks. Maybe during his absence, he was experimenting on something different from undead, or maybe these monsters will be the base for his next batch of creatures." Lith replied.

"I will inform the Crown immediately and send someone to retrieve the fallen wargs. The Balkor department has a long history in dealing with his creations and they could extract useful information from them.

"Sadly, our resources are stretched thin. I can't offer you reinforcements unless it's strictly necessary. In some regions, the monsters' population has grown big enough to require joint operations between the army and the Association to eradicate them."

Lith understood the implied apology and gave Legato a salute before she left. He was actually happy to work alone. Aside from Jirni and a few others, companions were usually dead weight to him.

"One more thing. I need a background check on Baroness Enja."

"Just one second." Kamila knew what he meant and didn't know whether to be jealous or giggle at his stinginess. Lith would never ask a noble for hospitality unless he was forced to.

Being a guest in their homes usually meant giving them the opportunity to require his services as a Healer or, even worse, to set him up with their daughters. Lith much preferred investing a few coins for a hotel room.

Commoners were too scared by mages to delude themselves enough to try and seduce him. Maekosh was a special case. No one would bother him, yet Lith wouldn't trust eating anything he hadn't prepared himself.

Especially after locking up the tavern owner.

"She only has sons, no daughters nor nieces." Kamila replied.

"Thank heaven. I was starting to fear I would have to spend the night in jail with the merchants."

"Is Maekosh that bad?" She giggled.

"It's even worse. I can't wait to come back to Belius and eat the delicacies my girlfriend promised me she would learn to cook." He teased her.

"These are terrible times. You'd be lucky if she practiced just one of them, with all the mandatory overtime she's sure to be experiencing. Give her a kiss for me the next time you see her." She managed not to laugh while talking about herself in the third person.

"Will do. Over and out." On his way, Lith opened a small Gate and gave Xelos, the Prancing Griffon's owner, enough bread and water to last for a couple of days. If properly rationed, of course.

The Baroness was very happy to have him as her guest. The whole Enja family sighed in relief knowing that the only Ranger and Healer for hundreds of kilometers was just a few doors away.

After a delicious meal he could enjoy without worrying if it had been "spiced" with spit, snot, or maybe walked over by a couple of roaches, Lith disappeared in his bedroom with the excuse that he needed to rest in case something happened during the night.

Maybe it was his keen instinct talking, or maybe the heavens didn't want him to pass for an ungrateful freeloader. Whatever the answer was, something did happen. A family of five was butchered overnight and their house set ablaze.

This time the culprit didn't bother to cover their tracks. The bite marks on the victims' bodies left no room for doubts. Something big and hairy had barged through the front door for a late-night snack.

No one had noticed anything until the fire broke out because the house was surrounded by vacant homes. At first, everyone blamed the merchants, but when Lith showed the Baroness and the Captain of the city guard that they were still locked up and their clothes were pristine, the crowd had to put down their pitchforks.

Maekosh's only protective formation was a detection array that would've been triggered if someone had entered the city's premises without passing from its gates, so the wargs couldn't have come from outside.

Old grievances resurfaced and soon people started pointing fingers. Only the rising sun and their need to get ready for work prevented the body count from increasing.

'This is really bad.' Lith thought.

'Either some wargs are capable of shapeshifting, or I'm about to play a goddamn round of Town of Salem.'

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Contrary to Lith's expectations, the following day the wargs didn't attack the city and during the night no one died. Yet it didn't make him feel happy, it only made his worries increase.

'So much self-control can only mean one of two things. Either they are waiting to increase their numbers before they resume attacking, or losing two warriors in a single day made them scared.' Lith thought.

'In their shoes, I'd regroup and pick an easier target. Since I'm in my shoes I need to find them as soon as possible either way. If the pack becomes too big and they all learn true magic, I'll need backup.

'If they change targets, it will just be the same situation in a different location, since I'm in charge of the whole damn region.'

Lith was no Jirni, but after spending so much time together in Othre, he had more an idea of how to conduct his investigation. Tracking the wargs' accomplices within Maekosh was just a waste of time.

No matter if they were shapeshifting wargs or just humans that had smuggled them inside the city and hid them in their homes, if they had managed to fool the overly paranoid inhabitants of the city, Lith had no way to find them.

There were simply too many people to check with Invigoration, without a solid lead, it would be like looking for the proverbial needle in the haystack. Finding the wargs, on the other hand, was likely to be easier.

To feed the pack and increase their numbers, they needed food and a lot of it. Lith had no idea if a monster could die of starvation, but he was almost certain that they would not fast for long willingly.

During winter there wasn't much they could hunt, so he found the closest settlements to Maekosh on his map and alerted them of the threat with his communication amulet.

He could only hope that hunger would cause them to make a mistake or that by examining the carcasses the Balkor department could help him to track his prey.

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

Like any decent mage in the three great Countries, The Master received countless reports about the monster outbreaks he had caused. At first, they had considered the anomalies to be a good omen.

Their treatment worked even better than they had predicted and if it was applied to an orc shaman, it could make them friendlier to the cause. Soon, however, everything spiraled out of his control.

Some spawned too fast, other had become too powerful, but the worse part was that all of them stuck out like a sore thumb. Their plan of raising Abominations disguised as monsters quickly backfired as every country started to investigate the phenomenon.

"I don't get it, Xenagrosh. What could have possibly gone wrong?" The Master whined.

"It's the nature of research." The Eldritch shrugged. "A lot of failures are required before succeeding. Now we know why Thrud limited her experiments to humans. Monsters are great breeding grounds, but their unique nature makes them unpredictable.

"From this experiment, we learned that it's better to stick with Thrud's strategy. Humans for the Abomination who were humans, beasts for beasts, and so on. It will be slower, we'll still need to kidnap a lot of people, but it's much safer.

"Your plan was sound, my disciple, only its initial result was poor. We'll do better the next time." She patted his shoulder.

"I guess you are right." The Master sighed. "I've never been so wrong, though. I never am, dammit!"

"Don't worry, sugar, you weren't wrong." Xenagrosh's sensual voice said.

"Sugar? Are you drunk or what?" The Master respected her but there was nothing more between them.

"That wasn't me." Xenagrosh said turning toward their surprise guest.

She was a woman of rare beauty, with grey skin and silver hair. She was wearing a comfortable mage suit which emphasized the perfect proportions of her body. More than her skin or hair, it was her second set of arms that identified her as not human.

Xenagrosh couldn't believe her own eyes. The body was all wrong and so were the creature's golden eyes, but she could never forget that face nor the dress she was wearing because they were her own.

"I know I've never been this beautiful, but who cares?" Said the woman.

"Trolls have such magnificent bodies in their true form. I'd say it's only fair to enjoy them for a while after being stuck for centuries as a monster."

Being an Eldritch, Xenagrosh could shapeshift into many forms of her choosing. Sure, in her natural state she wasn't easy on the eyes, but Abominations were survivors. Only being pretty just meant leaving a pretty corpse to them.

Yet the insult bothered her because it voiced one of her most private inner thoughts.

"Why are you here?" Xenagrosh asked her troll-self.

"What do you think?" She replied as one Chaos spell appeared on each of her twenty fingers.

"I'm not going to let you use me as an energy potion. We're going to merge on my terms and using me as the base. There can be only one."

And so, the fight for survival began.

The mages from the Balkor department came to pick up the bodies first thing on the morning of Lith's second day in Maekosh and gave him the results of their preliminary analysis the next day right after noon.

'Already? That was fast.' Lith was also amazed the investigative department had sent someone instead of just using a communication amulet.

"Let me begin by saying thank you for storing the bodies immediately after their death." Said mage Pazeol, a man in his early twenties with black hair and brown eyes. Three long and thin scars ran from his jaw to his neck.

Lith recognized the marks left by Balkor's Valors. Like many survivors of his last attack, Pazeol had decided to keep his scars to never forget and never forgive.

"Well preserved specimens make our work much easier. Sadly, the monster outbreaks aren't Balkor's doing." He sighed.

'That news should be worth celebrating. Being so obsessed about anything is an unhealthy behavior.' Lith thought.

'Hello pot, my name is kettle.' Solus chuckled.

"The people responsible for these wargs have improved his method, turning it into something completely different. The Abomination fragment is not used to just create a hive mind and give the monsters new powers, it's a seed meant to grow.

"Almost a quarter of the body of the second warrior you fought had turned into a monster-Abomination hybrid and I'm sure that the Abomination side is programmed to convert its host over time.

"As for the good news, whoever did this planned to retrieve their creatures, so they added a tracking spell to each Abomination fragment." Pazeol took out an enchanted amulet made of silver the size of a tablet.

It had a blue mana stone on its center and a green one on each of its corners.

"We managed to prepare a receiver for the signal that you can use to track them down. There is one problem, though. Even if the bodies were perfectly preserved, the spells deteriorate fast after death takes away the mana fueling them, so the data was corrupted.

"It will not work unless you are within 200 meters (656') of the signal's source, but once it locks onto the target you should be able to follow it with ease. Have a good hunt, Ranger Verhen."

A cruel smile appeared on Pazeol's face. Destroying every trace of Balkor's work was the sole reason for his existence.

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Lith thanked Pazeol before he left and started to plan his next move.

'Well, for once the Kingdom is being really helpful instead of just trusting me to clean up their mess.' He thought. 'Now I can search the city for enemies. Once I find them, the tracker will lead me to their nest. Easy peasy.'

Yet even after scouting the entirety of Maekosh twice, the magical device didn't pick up any signal, making Lith doubt it even worked in the first place. After even a third round of the city gave no results, Lith felt dispirited.

'Time to fill up on spirits.' He sighed as he went back to the Prancing Griffon for a few draft beers. Ever since he had made the kitchen staff quake in their boots with an alleged infective disease, the tavern was much quieter.

Lith was one of the few brave souls that still dared to step inside, so the waiters treated him like a VIP. The fear of ending up locked in isolation along with Xelos, their employer, was a strong motivator.

Yet he didn't eat anything that didn't come out from his pocket dimension. Unlike the freshly tapped beer, food couldn't be prepared in front of him.

'I don't have much time, but luckily neither do the wargs.' He thought. 'The first warrior was weak while the second one was already a hybrid. If I'm lucky the lack of food will prevent them from focusing on magic and slow down the Abomination fragments' development.

'If I'm not, I might have to face a small army of hybrids or a single combined entity. According to Pazeol, all of my wargs bear fragments of the same creature. It wouldn't surprise me if they merged into one like the second warrior did to boost its strength.'

'Agreed.' Solus pondered. 'Another problem we have is the enemy within Maekosh. At this point, I have a theory but I'm pretty sure you won't like it.'

Lith inwardly nodded for her to continue.

'The reason to choose monsters as guinea pigs is pretty obvious. They are strong and spawn fast, which means that somehow the procedure they have undergone allows the Abomination fragment to be passed down to their offspring.'

'Well, yeah. Otherwise there would be no hive mind nor would there be any sense in letting them roam free.' Lith pondered.

'Exactly.' Solus continued. 'The presence of the tracking spell tells us the hybrids are meant to be harvested at some point, but what if the wargs aren't only limited to spreading the fragments to other wargs?

'Sharing is their innate ability and we have no idea about the limits of their mutation.'

'So you are saying that we have been looking at things from the wrong angle. That maybe there are no wargs in Maekosh but human hybrids?' Lith was getting a headache at just the thought of it.

'Yes. It would explain a lot. The night of the attack we had just killed a lot of wargs, maybe the collective grief drove the human hosts mad. Also, the tracker doesn't pick up anything either because the signal is being generated by a human body or maybe simply because the fragments are still too small.

'Humans develop in years, not days, so even if they are turning into wargs it could take months before it actually happens.'

"I'm really sorry to bother you again, but I think I need a Healer." Lith had just started to inwardly curse his bad luck in every language he knew when someone interrupted his creative flow.

It was the same redhead waitress who served him the day of his arrival. Lith was about to give her the finger when he realized the opportunity in front of him.

"What's wrong with you, exactly?" He asked pretending to be annoyed. People were much more grateful when they believed you were doing them a favor rather than using them for your own purposes.

The girl listed many and disparate symptoms that casually had manifested after Lith's petty revenge against the tavern staff's rudeness. It only took him a glance to diagnose her and he used a touch of Invigoration, just to stay on the safe side.

'Hypochondria.' He thought.

"It's pretty bad, but nothing contagious." He actually said. It wasn't a lie and made Solus laugh heartily.

"Can you help me?" She asked on the verge of tears.

"It depends if you can help me. My services aren't cheap, you know?"

After clearing the merchants from his suspects' list, Lith had interrogated the gatekeepers about who had gone out of town before the wargs had been spotted. Unfortunately, the winter was cold and their pay was low.

Aside from foreigners, they didn't keep any records. Many citizens went in and out of Maekosh to gather wood, seek out the nearest healer's help, hunt, or simply to check the frozen cultivated fields outside the city walls.

Aside from the guards, no one had been willing to talk to him. Until now.

"I don't have much money. I'm a waitress and only a waitress." She blushed a little, having completely misunderstood his words. She found mages to be scary, and the Ranger wasn't even of her liking.

"The dead family. Did they have enemies? Someone in particular that resented them?" Lith didn't care about her assumptions, only information. If he was looking for humans instead of wargs, then maybe they had a motive to attack that specific house.

"No. Not that I'm aware of. They were just farmers. It's hard to have enemies when you have nothing to be envious about." She blushed even more, feeling incredibly stupid and a bit perverted.

"Did something bad happen before the wargs? Something that could create a lot of resentment?" Lith was clutching straws. If there was no solid information, rumors would have to suffice.

The redhead told him about a lot of petty quarrels, of how the Baroness taxed the brewing industry too much, cases of domestic abuse, and many things that made Lith think he was at a hairdresser rather than a tavern.

Soon the rest of the staff, who were bored from doing nothing, joined the conversation when they understood they would get treatment in exchange for gossip. To avoid his headache getting worse, Lith jotted down the most likely suspects.

Workers who had unjustly lost their jobs without receiving any support from their peers, grieving parents who had lost their children due to the constant harassment from their fellow citizens having driven a foreign Healer out of town before winter, and things like that.

'If I lost everything because of those blockheads, I would cheer for the wargs too. The more I hear about this city, the more I wish I could just wash my hands of its fate. At least the wargs fight for each other, these guys would sell their mother for a few coins.' He thought.

Lith's new suspect list was longer than his arm. The silver lining was that no one aside from a couple of waiters with the flu needed any healing. He just chanted a few light magic cantrips and pretended to have cured them of a few illnesses he made up on the spot, earning their gratitude and a steaming steak on the house.

He was just about to comment about how delicious it was while Solus stressed the importance of being nice to others, when his army amulet rang.

The wargs had just attacked a nearby village's granary, leaving him no time to spare.

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Lith had already been to the village of Trauros to share his communication rune with its elder. Crossing the couple hundred of kilometers which separated it from Maekosh with Warp Steps only took him a handful of seconds.

Lith appeared inside an isolated alley while people all around the village were screaming and begging for help. Their prayers didn't stop the wargs' fangs nor their claws.

A dozen wargs were pillaging the food supplies while several others were feasting on those who had attempted to stop them and the passers-by who had not fled from the scene fast enough.

The starving monsters' aim had only been the stored meat, but the first drops of human blood spilled during the initial assault had sent them into a feeding frenzy.

Wargs were predators, whereas the squishy humans were just food after all. Much to Solus's dismay, aside from cloaking his presence with darkness magic, Lith did nothing.

He held the magical tracker and watched the green gemstones at its corners lighting up one after the other. The device needed time to lock onto the signal emitted by the Abomination fragments inside the wargs' bodies.

'You can fight while I take care of the tracker!' Being helpless in front of the massacre was killing her soul. With each passing second, someone was dying.

'Then what? The wargs would split up again and fly away. If the warriors left to fight me commit suicide before the link is established, we'll go back to square one and the next time even the army might not be able to stop them.

'I'm not a fan of collateral damage either, but if we don't find the whole pack, it will be all for nothing.' Lith replied while impatiently looking at the tracker and weaving all the spells he could need.

Only when all the gemstones lit up and the holographic display not only pointed the nearby wargs, but also the location of the rest of the pack did Lith came out of the alley.

The monsters that had yet to take off died before they could even realize what was happening. Lith's surprise attack struck them while they were still recovering from their berserk rage.

In the blink of an eye, six wargs were dead. Lith stored their bodies away and healed all the injured villagers before leaving. He couldn't stand Solus's suffering and he needed some time to recover his strength with Invigoration anyway.

Warping there so fast would have left a fake mage with little mana left. Helping Trauros would look good on his resume and lull the wargs into a false sense of security. Lith wanted them to have all the time they needed to regroup and maybe even change the location of their den.

He had already killed a total of 18 wargs out of the 50 he had counted during his first day in Maekosh. Even if a few more had been born during the last two days, they would still be cubs.

His plan was to wait for them to settle down and strike at them while their mind and bodies were lethargic from the feast that they would soon have. Just as he predicted, his first ambush had made them cautious.

The pack moved as soon as the last warg carrying the supplies arrived, flying for hundreds of kilometers before stopping. Only then did Lith left Trauros. He was back to his peak condition and was certain that by the time he arrived, every warg would be too busy stuffing their muzzles to notice his presence.

Once again, they had chosen the base of a small hill to build their den with earth magic. Lith checked his surroundings with Life Vision and the terrain with the array detection spell before landing.

This time, several arrays were in place.

'Fuck me sideways! They didn't waste a single second. Their mastery of magic is progressing so fast that I wouldn't believe it if I wasn't seeing it with my own eyes. Could it be that the one behind the mutated monsters is an Awakened?

'If so, how come despite the amount of time he has invested in training them, we've never seen him?'

Solus had no answer to offer, so she focused on the arrays to identify their focus points and dismantle them with true magic while they were still inactive. Lith and Solus each took care of half the magical formations.

After checking the underground maze with Life Vision, Lith decided to place an anti air array right above the den. He had no time to waste searching for all the possible exit points, so he made it impossible to fly away.

It was supposed to take the fleeing wargs by surprise and give him enough time to catch up with them in case something went wrong.

'By my maker! Lith we must hurry!' The shock in Solus' voice gave him a bad feeling about the mission. She hadn't lost her cool even when they had faced Scarlett the Scorpicores.

He followed the ever changing tunnels to the huge cave located several dozens of meters underground as Solus kept watch on their surroundings with mana sense.

'When we were outside, some of them must have Awakened or something. Their mana signatures grew so much that I could clearly see them even from such a distance. Yet now I can't feel them anymore. I don't like this at all.' She said.

Lith focused on moving fast without losing his breathing rhythm. Whatever was going to happen, he wanted to be at his peak condition and disabling so many arrays without alerting their maker had taken a toll on him.

Solus was already in her gauntlet form and both of them had woven their best spells. If the enemy now had both quality and quantity on their side, the only advantages Lith and Solus had left were speed and battle experience.

When they reached the underground cave, they stumbled into a scene completely different from what they had been expecting. The wargs were almost all dead, the floor was littered with mutilated corpses and entrails.

The smell of blood, bile, and shit was overwhelming, yet Lith barely noticed it. The tight knit warg pack seemed to be fighting among themselves, with many grey wargs fighting and losing against a few black wargs as they tried to defend pregnant females and cubs.

The black wargs had a similar appearance to the hybrid alpha. Half of their bodies was composed of raw darkness element, giving them a demonic look. Their fur was shiny and black, quivering under the magical light like it was alive.

Their yellow eyes burned like torches and now Lith could see that the things he had previously mistaken for horns, were actually quills, like those of a porcupine. They grew not only on their heads, but also on the rest of their bodies.

Each one of the black wargs had at least two tails. Their own plus one or more fox tails comprised of pure energy.

'What the fuck? That's no internal strife, it's a battle royal!' Lith realized as the black wargs also fought among themselves. The winner would assimilate all the black matter from the loser, whose corpse would then revert to a normal warg's.

Everything happened in just a few seconds, while Lith's and Solus's minds were processing the events taking place in front of them.

Chapter 506 Fury Part 1

Lith dashed forward. The chaos and mayhem of the cave made caution irrelevant.

'I must stop the hybrids from getting stronger!' He thought as he unleashed a series of tier four spells that struck the black wargs where their vitals were supposed to be with surgical precision.

Lith had added the bestiary to Soluspedia, so that he would always know the most efficient way to kill the monsters it contained. Three hybrids died on the spot, but four somehow survived even with their heads removed or their hearts replaced by a gaping hole.

At least until a fifth hybrid extended its tendrils to suck them dry.

"Thanks, brother. Much appreciated." The creature said before exploding into maniacal laughter filled with ecstasy. Lith could distinguish two voices talking in unison.

One of them was feral and rough, yet it was barely audible, like it was fading away. The other was ancient and erudite, its phrasing a bit out of date. It held a feeling of malice and power that gave Lith the creeps.

One of the female wargs ran in front of Lith, her teeth bared, her eyes pitch black with the same darkness which was coursing through the hybrids. She tried to stab at Lith's throat, but he easily avoided the hit and pierced her heart.

Lith let darkness magic flow through the Gatekeeper, expecting her to commit a suicidal explosion. The warg's attack had been too sloppy and hesitant. Killing her had been too easy. It had to be a trap.

Except it wasn't.

"Thanks, brother." She said as the darkness faded from her eyes. The gratitude in her voice, which terribly resembled Rena's, almost shattered Lith's heart.

"It's eating us from the inside." The warg coughed blood, revealing the small furball shivering with fear she had hidden in her other arm the whole time.

"I couldn't resist much longer. Please, I don't want to kill my baby, nor do I want him to become part of that thing."

The Gatekeeper flickered in Lith's hand severing both lives at once. The two wargs died painlessly, but Solus was crying. The remaining grey wargs literally threw their lives at Lith, unwilling to hurt their pack mates.

The Abomination inside of them was too strong to resist its calling. They could only ride its hate toward the intruder and use him as a means to escape their fate. With each swing of Lith's blade, a warg fell into oblivion and Solus cried harder.

Rage and hatred burned like a sun inside Lith's heart, making him once again wonder if death was just a part of life or more like a part of him. Death had brought him to Mogar and had kept walking with him the whole time.

He would either fight it as a Healer or dispense it to those who stood in his path. For the wargs it had been a blessing. A quick, painless, way out from an eternity of slavery, trapped inside the monstrosity consuming them.

He promised to his companion that the thing in front of them would receive no such mercy.

"You shouldn't have messed with my plate, brother." Tezka was busy consuming the four hybrids before their energy was lost forever while Lith killed the last wargs.

"It took me time and effort to make proper nourishment out of this horseshit. I'm still far from being whole and every bit helps."

During the last two days, the warg pack had followed Tezka's instructions. They had exhausted all of their food reserves while practicing magic under the caring eye of the magical beast's memories.

Until the hunger prevailed, awakening the real Tezka. For the centuries old Abomination, they weren't cubs but merely a means to an end. He would use them to regain his body and power before confronting his other self.

It would lead him on the next step of the evolutionary scale that had eluded him for so long despite all of his efforts. Despite the countless lives Tezka had consumed, he was still just an Eldritch. Now, he could become so much more.

The Eldritch was sure of it.

The last grey warg had yet to reach the ground when Tezka charged at Lith like a freight train. Two quills as long and thick as a blade erupted from his forearms while his fur turned into an armor composed of small spikes.

Lith infused himself with every element and sidestepped the enemy's attack. His gloved fist struck Tezka's liver like a machine gun. Each hit delivered a tier four darkness magic spell, Grim Reaper, right inside the hybrid, sending him crashing against a wall with a boom.

Tezka shook off both the spell and the impact before the tier four fire magic spell, Burning Prison, could trap him. He Blinked to safety only to find Lith right behind him.

The left handed hand slash from the Gatekeeper severed Tezka's head as the razor sharp claws of the gauntlet made it possible for Lith to pierce through the Eldritch's heart.

The Abomination just laughed and retaliated at the flabbergasted Ranger with an elbow strike that would have shattered his ribs if Lith hadn't Blinked away at the last second. Black tendrils reconnected the head to the body and sewed it back in its place.

"Who are you? Why did you do this?" Lith asked, voicing the questions that were ravaging Solus's heart as he planned how he was going to kill something with no vitals.

"I'm just like you, brother. An Abomination. As for the why, I did it because I can!" Tezka wasn't a big talker either. He would speak only to mess with his opponents' head while he cast his spells.

His right hand released the tier five Chaos array, Chaos Dimension. Grey specks of light filled the underground cave, making it impossible to use dimensional magic unless it used Chaos instead of darkness.

The Eldritch's left hand drew a circle in mid air, tearing space apart to take out his prized sword, Endless Night.

"Let's see how good you are without the edge Life Vision gives to you, brother." A cruel grin twisted Tezka's snout as he Blinked in for the kill, now that he was certain that Lith couldn't follow his movements anymore.

Blood Desert, Outside the Forgotten Plum camp, now.

The real Tezka had been sent by the Master to keep an eye on Balkor's family and kill them the moment the opportunity presented itself. With them gone, the god of death would have no reason to help the Guardians.

The Eldritch didn't like the job, nor following orders, but the Master was the only chance he had to overcome the bottleneck he had been stuck at for decades.

Suddenly, he felt like his soul was being ripped apart. He felt something he had thought long forgotten. Tezka felt fear.

'What the heck? Someone just stole my Endless Night! That's impossible. Both my omni pocket and the sword are linked to my life force. Fuck Balkor, I want answers, now!'

Lith was sick and tired of Tezka calling him "brother." Carl called him that and so did Tista, Rena, and now Aran. It was a word that meant the world to him, no matter which planet he was on.

Every time it came out of Tezka's mouth, it was filled with poison. It tainted the memories of his lost brother and those of every happy moment he had ever lived. Tezka's Blink landed him right in the middle of a stream of blue flames that was coming out of Lith's mouth.

They burned through everything they touched. The array, Tezka's body, even the rift in space was forcefully shut down, almost cutting the Eldritch in two.

"Origin Flames?" The hybrid had no idea what those words meant, but a shiver ran down his spine. That was before Solus's gauntlet started to grow.

Chapter 507 Fury Part 2

Origin Flames, also known as dragon fire or phoenix flames, were a peculiar type of flames that only a few living beings could employ. Unlike normal fire, Origin Flames didn't require the expense of mana to ignite the world energy, but only a spark of life force.

Born from life, they were capable of destroying anything, no matter if they were physical or magical in nature. They were purifying flames capable of restoring the natural balance. Magical

beasts considered them a manifestation of Mogar's will to clear any past mistake whereas its targets just called them "death".

The hybrid only had a part of Tezka's memories, but it was enough for him to be aware of the danger they posed. He Blinked away to safety as he used a water spell to extinguish the flames.

Chaos Dimension had no means to defend itself. The blue fire spread along its lines of power, making the array crumble less than a few seconds after its creation. Meanwhile, Solus's form had turned into a full arm protector, which covered Lith's right arm and shoulder.

Her rage was as hot as Lith's was cold. Mana endlessly flowed from the green gemstone on the back of the hand to the yellow one engraved on the shoulder pad, like a raging river about to breach its banks.

There were no words that could express her fury, nor lift the weight she felt oppressing her soul. Only crushing Tezka's skull with their hand could give her peace of mind.

Lith had turned into his hybrid form and was floating in mid air without a spell thanks to his wings.

'Even though he's a hybrid like me, he has no vitals just like pure Abominations. The only way I can kill him is by making him exhaust all of his energy. Black cores cannot be replenished without feeding on life force or world energy. How strong is he, Solus?'

Lith hoped that his voice would snap her out of her frenzy.

'A bit stronger than you, but weaker than us.' She snarled.

Solus had always been a gentle soul. Seeing the wargs caring for each other had given her hope. Hope that not every living being was bound to just be what someone or something had turned them into.

If even a female warg could learn to love her cubs, then maybe she too could allow herself to fall in love and wish for a better future. Solus couldn't help but see herself in them, in their willingness to sacrifice their lives for their pack mates.

The same humans that would consider her just a thing to possess, saw the wargs as nothing but mindless beasts, but they had feelings, just like her.

Discovering that everything had just been a ruse, witnessing the Abomination forcing a mother to commit suicide to not injure her own child was more than she could bear. Solus wasn't Lith, she strived to live her life, not to just avoid death.

Tezka had just torn apart all of her hope and dreams right in front of her face, set them ablaze, and then took a dump on them to put out the flames.

"You are really handsome, brother." Tezka said while watching the mana Lith exuded with gluttonous eyes. By assimilating Lith's power, Tezka was certain he would be able to challenge his other self.

"I wonder why you feel the need to hide under a human shell despite the fact that you even possess a Living Legacy. I'll take good care of it for you."

It. The word struck at Solus like a poisoned needle. The hybrid somehow knew she was alive yet he had called her an 'it'. Solus almost snapped because of it, but feeling that Lith was as outraged as she was, calmed her down.

The hybrid charged forward, using Endless Night's ability, Nightmaze, to cut the space in front of himself and open several exit points throughout the cave at the same time.

It created a permanent dimensional crossroad that would make Life Vision useless in predicting the direction of the next attack.

A hail of black quills as big as spears erupted from a Gate on Lith's right. He conjured a stone wall to block them, but each one of them was imbued with both air and Chaos magic.

They pierced through the barrier like it was made of paper, taking Lith by surprise. The sudden turn of events forced him to stand still and deflect them with the Gatekeeper, leaving his back and sides exposed.

Just like Tezka had planned.

He emerged from a portal at Lith's back side, thrusting Endless Night toward Lith's leg, the only part of his body he couldn't move without his defenses crumbling.

Endless Night wasn't a common sword, nor had it been created with normal means. Its bite would create a link between Tezka and his prey, allowing him to feed even in the heat of the battle.

The hybrid was just about to strike when Solus reacted with her tier five spell, Tower Defence. The whole cave came alive, turning into an extension of her will. The ground at Lith's feet opened up, letting him take cover as the quills flew past him and ran into their own master.

The magic they were imbued with was Tezka's, so it couldn't harm him. The physical aspect of the quills', however, was another story entirely. The clash stopped the hybrid in his tracks, knocking him off balance.

The damage he sustained was negligible, but his opening was lost. Cursing his bad luck, Tezka dove back inside the closest Gate, ready to switch to plan B while walking into Solus's trap instead.

Endless Night opened several dimensional doors at once, making their user's path unpredictable, but the sword's ability had one weak point. All the Gates were static, making them exploitable once the element of surprise was lost.

Solus had countless stone spikes infused with darkness magic rain inside each of the dimensional doors. Tezka was already at the dimensional crossroad when he understood he had no way to escape the attack.

'Impressive! He analyzed Nightmaze and turned it against me with just a glance. Too bad he underestimated how powerful an Eldritch is.' Tezka grinned while he rushed towards one of the exits.

The quills covering his body would allow him to tank the stone spikes and suffer minimal injuries. Unfortunately, Tezka hadn't gotten a single thing right.

Lith already had his hands full keeping Life Vision active to predict his enemy's strategies, deflecting the incoming attacks, all the while he cast and kept active several spells at once. He had noticed nothing.x

Solus, on the other hand had long since learned to quiet her emotions to look at every battle like it was just a chessboard. In the past, her weak core didn't allow her to take part in the battle, only provide Lith intel.

Even now she barely had a couple of decent attacks in her, so she had to make them count. A deep green core didn't give her much juice, so what her spells lacked in power she had to make up with planning and accuracy.

She knew that she didn't have enough power to pierce the hybrid's skin, but that was what the previous attack with his own quills had been for. They had cracked her enemy's armor enough that Tower Defence's stone spikes had an easy time piercing through it and stopping Tezka in his tracks.

The damage combined with the surprise effect paralyzed him long enough for the spikes coming from the other Gates to reach him and stab him from every side.

Chapter 508 Hollow Victory Part 1

Living Legacy was just the name Abominations had for cursed objects, since for them they were more of a blessing than a curse.

An Abomination had no body that the living relic could corrupt, nor could their minds be swayed with promises of power. Abominations were power made flesh. They would actively seek cursed objects and enslave them to their will.

Lith smelled like an Abomination to Tezka, his gauntlet was clearly alive so he did the math. Or so he believed.

Living Legacies would never help their masters. They would only wait for their captor's destruction to regain their freedom and find a victim they could subdue. Abominations and cursed objects were like minded, they sought slaves, not companions.

Tezka's biggest mistake had been misunderstanding the relationship between his opponents and he was now paying the price for it. Solus's spell was now injecting darkness magic into his body, sapping his strength by the second.

Tezka tried to shapeshift into tendrils to escape the spikes' deadly grasp, but his body was still that of a hybrid. Cursing the weakness of his own flesh, Tezka had to employ an expensive Chaos magic spell to break free before it was too late.

While Solus kept him busy, Lith had cast his tier four dimensional spell Collapsed space to forcefully shut down Nightmaze and kill Tezka in result. Abominations were sturdy, but not even they could survive being ripped to shreds.

The hybrid could feel the space around him distorting and managed to escape from the jaws of death just in the nick of time. Lith welcomed him with a barrage of tier four spells that would have finished Tezka off if not for Endless Night's second ability, Night's End.

The enchanted blade cut the space around him and created a dimensional sphere that Warped the incoming attack in random directions.

"You are much better than I expected, brother." Tezka said, trying to buy enough time to mend his wounds while under the protection of the dimensional shield. He had more holes in his body than swiss cheese, making it impossible for him to even stand.

"We shouldn't fight, but join our forces. We are both incomplete. I can teach you Chaos magic and you can help me against my enemy. Once I train you, he will not be a match for us. What do you say?"

Lith didn't reply. He cast cantrips at the barrier's every side, making sure it had no gaps he could exploit. He didn't need Solus to notice Night's End weakness.

'As long as he stays in there, he is invulnerable but he is also completely blind.' They thought in unison as they used dimensional magic to empower Night's End more than it was necessary.

Barrier or prison, it was only a matter of balancing the elemental energies in play. A prolonged dimensional spell like those Endless Night unleashed, would already put the surrounding space under a heavy stress.

Lith and Solus boosted the defensive spell until cracks appeared in mid air, distorting the air like a kaleidoscope. Then, they twisted and turned the spatial cracks before darting away from the cave at breakneck speed.

The sudden silence scared Tezka more than any explosion could.

'He could be casting an array to negate dimensional magic. It would make Endless Night useless, but at least neither of us could use Blink. It would take away the advantage he gets from Live Vision.' The hybrid thought.

As soon as he was able to move again, Tezka dispelled the barrier.

"Round two, brother. I..." He choked on his own words as Night's End disappearance triggered a chain reaction. The whole underground cave exploded with such strength to make the ground within several hundred meters tremble.

Free country of Lamarth. Near the Master's hideout.

The real Tezka suddenly fell to his knees, feeling like a part of his soul was being torn to pieces. Endless Night wasn't just an artifact, it was part of his own life force. Pain ravaged his body as he realized that whoever had stolen his weapon had managed to destroy it, probably for good.

From outside the cave, Life Vision, mana sense, and the tracker agreed about the eradication of the Abomination fragments. Even when Lith stood at the base of the hill, the magical device was unable to pick up any residual signature.

Normally, Lith would have grumbled about losing his loot due to the explosion or rejoiced at the destruction of his enemies. Yet this time victory felt sour. The satisfaction from killing the hybrid wasn't enough to make them forget about the rest.

Solus was still shocked by the carnage she had witnessed, while Lith was trying to find a way to cope with his actions. The desperation in the wargs' eyes when they had chosen to die rather than submit to their fate had opened old wounds.

It was the first time he empathized with his victims. The Abomination was their cancer and just like Lith back on Earth had used a gun, they had used him. He didn't feel what he had done was wrong, yet it upset him in a way he couldn't put into words.

'Are you alright, Solus?' He asked the only question that really mattered.

'No.' Her tone was sad. Giving in to her anger didn't make her feel better, it had just been a temporary respite before having to face her doubts and fears again.

'Are you?'

'No. Let's return to Maekosh. If your hypothesis is correct, the death of the warg pack will trigger their accomplices within the city.' He replied.

'Honestly, I don't care about the mission anymore. I just want to get out of here. I want to be alone for a while.' Solus meant it. This time each one of them was facing a personal crisis, making them unable to support the other.

At their arrival, the tracker revealed one weak signal coming from a house in the farmers' district. Pazeol's obsession led his creations to be so precise that now that the tracker was locked on, there was no escape from it.

Life Vision showed only one faint life force inside and it was slowly getting weaker. Lith prepared his spells nonetheless and readied himself for the worst. Unfortunately, it wasn't enough.

Inside the small and messy home that painfully reminded him of his own, there was a deadly pale man sitting on a chair. He looked so ordinary that Lith might have crossed paths with him several times during the past few days and not even registered his existence once.

The farmer's eyes were dimmer than his life force. He was still alive, but already dead inside. Lith recognized that gaze. He had seen it every day while looking at himself in the mirror after Carl's death.

Near the man, there was another chair where another woman was sitting with a small baby held in her arms. They both seemed to be peacefully asleep, but Lith knew they were actually dead.

"Do you feel proud of yourself?" The man wheezed while looking at Lith with a deep seated hatred he knew all too well. The farmer was able to recognize the Ranger from the memories of his fallen friends.

Chapter 509 Hollow Victory Part 2

"Bravo. You killed the monsters. Monsters that treated us better than this fucking city ever did. When my daughter fell ill, there was no Healer, because my fellow citizens drove him away." Each of the farmer's words was coated with venom and spite.

"My wife fell ill while taking care of the baby, yet no one did anything. I was forced to leave Maekosh on my cart, hoping to find a Healer before death claimed them. I found the wargs instead.

"Can you believe it? Monsters took pity on me when even my own kin betrayed me." Lith could see the man's life fading away with every breath he took, yet his hatred was stronger than death.

"They cured them. Cured me of my humanity, making us all stronger. Now they are dead and so are we. I regret killing those farmers, they had done nothing wrong. They were simply in the wrong place at the wrong time.

"When our alpha died, Etta and I lost our minds. The bond between wargs is something that a murderer like you could never understand." His breath became ragged, his voice barely a whisper.

"The wargs just wanted food and shelter. Is that so wrong? To try to escape from cold and starvation? Did my family deserve to die just so that fucking Baroness could pin a medal to your chest?"

Lith didn't reply. He had walked more than one mile in the dying farmer's shoes and knew that nothing he could say would matter to the man. Nothing would give the man his family back.

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

'Thank the gods I Warped both Xenagroses outside my lab. According to an old saying, when two Guardians fight, maps get redrawn. Yet I believe the same can be said for Eldritchs!'

The real Xenagros had the advantage of being able to shapeshift her body at will, the wisdom of centuries, and most of her magical artifacts. Unfortunately, the troll Xenagros still seemed to be able to hold her ground.

Trolls were naturally attuned with the light element and it was their inability to process the darkness element in the surrounding world energy that had led their race to their fallen status.

Abominations, however, had a black core that was naturally rich with darkness and incapable of assimilating the light element if it wasn't leached from other life forms. The Master's experiment had created a being with both the troll's and the Abomination's mana core, thriving together in a symbiotic relationship.

Their complementary nature had made the troll Xenagros into an almost perfect being. To make matters worse, by devouring her whole tribe, she had regained most of her original self's memories.

Also, before making her appearance she had taken the precaution of "liberating" from Xenagros's pocket dimension all of the artifacts she could get her hands on. She had got the first choice of which ones to use for this battle, but unlike the real Xenagros, she didn't know the strengths and weaknesses of each enchanted item.

The Master needed all of their energy and arrays just to prevent their battle from being detected from afar, since the destruction they caused had turned hills into plains and grasslands into barren lands.

The Master knew that unless one of them made a blatant mistake, their clash was likely to raze the entire country of Lamarin to the ground.

"Don't worry, old friend." The Master yelled at Xenagros. "As soon as I finish setting up this array, we will take down that knock off copy, together!"

The troll Xenagros laughed at those words.

"How low have you stooped to need the help of a human? Even if you win, I would not lose. I always strived to reach perfection and now I know I've made it. Think about all the pain and effort it costed us to become what we are now.

"Do you realize how much you are struggling despite your alleged superiority? You're a relic of the past, whereas I'm what we were always supposed to be. Not a weak human but not a filthy monster either. I've achieved the best of both worlds."

She released two tier five Chaos spells at the same time, Flames of Absolution and Judgment Call. The former was Xenagrosh's best attempt at imitating Origin Flames.

The black fire infused with Chaos magic filled the area within 100 meters of her, eating at all of the defensive barriers the original Eldritch had set up and also preventing her from Blinking away.

Flames of Absolution wouldn't so much cleanse as they would corrupt, but they were still capable of making it impossible to perform the fine mana tuning that complex spells like dimensional magic required.

Judgment Call was even trickier. It would conjure a twin stream of black lightning that would chase their prey leaving them only one of two options: take the damage in full or dodge them until the spell ran out of juice and leave the opponent plenty of time to set up something even worse.

Seeing her prized spell combination used against her, the real Xenagrosh roared in outrage. She assumed her true form, that of a Shadow Dragon so big that she could destroy the town of Lutia simply by sitting on it.

A jet stream of purple flames came out of Xenagrosh's maw, true Origin Flames, which consumed Judgment Call before unleashing their fury against the troll Eldritch.

"Not so cocky anymore, eh?" Xenagrosh said with a laugh. "Seems my little defective counterpart doesn't remember much, but she's right about one thing. This fight will prove which one of us is worthy of living." She said to the Master.

"If I don't win on my own, it would be a hollow victory. If I need someone's help, no matter the reason, then my whole existence would be a lie!" The Shadow Dragon roared her challenge before unleashing her most recent and powerful creation.

Tyrant's Will severed the light element from the surrounding world energy, turning all the other elements into Chaos magic. The hybrid could only conjure her best defenses as the whole Mogar became her enemy.

The air she breathed was toxic, the humidity turned into acid as the ground beneath her erupted, trapping her in a pool of black magma. Her barriers shattered one after the other, forcing her to sacrifice some of her artifacts to escape from the clutches of death.

When the dust settled, the troll Eldritch was still alive.

"Not bad, 'sister', but it wasn't enough." She had lost most of her body in the assault, only part of her head and abdomen remained. She had sacrificed the rest to make sure her twin cores wouldn't suffer any damage.

"Trolls regenerate fast. A dragon is indeed sturdier, but how quickly does that massive body heal? How much energy does it drain? I bet that was your last card and it failed. Once I get my arms back, you'll be a sitting duck until you recover from the exhaustion."

The Dragon Xenagrosh knew her other self was right, yet she still laughed her heart out.

"Well, what do you think I'm here for?" The Master used one of their arrays to completely seal the injured troll before throwing her inside the Dragon's maw.

"How could she possibly be you and still believe all of that bullshit? If you really were unwilling to get help, you wouldn't be here. You wouldn't have taught me everything I know about Awakened and Abominations."

Chapter 510 The Day After Part 1

"She was me, yes, but the past arrogant, selfish, and conceited me." Xenagrosh replied as she feasted on the flesh and mana cores of her doppelganger.

"Back then, I thought that I was invincible. That as long as I kept my belly full and my turf clear from any rival, I would be happy. Now I know better. Abominations don't thrive because they all live alone.

"While other races pool up their resources and knowledge, we hoard them and spend our eternal lives in seclusion. I came to you when I realized the limitations of that kind of lifestyle, when I decided I wanted more than be powerful to be happy.

"Otherwise I wouldn't have undergone all of your experiments, traveled Mogar to find companions for our cause, nor realized that even an Eldritch is flawed in both the mind and the body. Or at least, I was."

Xenagrosh yelled with joy as she felt her body changing. The shadows composing her dragon body were now less ethereal and more physical. A new power flowed through her black core, making it different and more powerful than it had ever been.

The Master looked at her in amazement. Even after returning to her humanoid form, the Eldritch was now womanlier than the previous construct made of stolen energies. Her body had partly recovered its features, like her shiny golden hair and two lively chestnut eyes.

"Do you think you could face a Guardian now?" The Master's voice was full of expectation.

"No, but for the first time in centuries, I'm not hungry. Whatever I have become, I'm already more than just an Eldritch. Imagine what I could be tomorrow."

After the farmer died, Lith returned to the Baroness' mansion and announced her that the crisis was averted. She was so happy that she wanted to throw a party in Lith's honor, who politely declined.

Winter didn't allow to waste provisions, nor he wanted to spend a single second more than necessary in Maekosh. Both Solus and him felt there was nothing worth celebrating and the city's inhabitants made their stomachs churn.

Lith returned to Belius to give Pazeol his tracking device back and all the corpses he had collected, even those of the farmer and his family. Lith understood the man's rage, his spite for mankind, but at the same time, he had a duty.

A duty toward Solus and himself. If all the tribes involved in the monster outbreaks were bound to give birth to hybrids that powerful, then he wanted the Griffon Kingdom to take care of them on its own.

The idea of the corpses being subjected to Pazeol's experiments was much less disturbing than that of him being forced to face those things again before he could even understand the nature of the inner conflict he was experiencing.

For once, Solus had nothing to object. Rather than see such misery and death again, she would have rather preferred that Lith deserted. She was having a hard time understanding how big was Tezka's role in playing with her emotions and how big was her own.

'Was it really his plan to make us feel sympathy for them, or did I just delude myself into hoping for the impossible?' She pondered.

Pazeol was so happy while Lith described him the effectiveness of the magical tracker that he laughed like Lith's report was the best joke ever.

"Now if only Balkor dares to raise his head, we'll be able to find him and pay him back in full!" There was madness in the youth's eyes, the same madness that led him to never fully heal his own scars.

Lith left him wondering which one of them was more disturbed.

'At least I don't rejoice at the idea of someone as dangerous as Balkor returning, but maybe it's just because he took away nothing from me.' Lith wondered.

Such morbid thoughts left him the moment he opened the door in front of him. Since he was in Belius, he could give his report in person. It was the real reason why he had personally delivered the bodies.

At first, Lith had considered having his girlfriend as his handler as a bother, especially after Othre's events. The fact that people like Berion could use her was a weakness irked his paranoia to no end.

After a while, though, he discovered that the issue was irrelevant compared to the benefits it provided. Lith had always kept many secrets from everyone, some because of need, others by choice.

All the things he went through, the price he had to pay to provide for his family and his research, he had never shared them with anyone but Solus. Back then, Phloria was too young and came from a pampered background.

She only did things because she wanted to, not because she had to. It created a small but significant gap between them that prevented Lith from sharing with her the most horrible details of his experiences.

Not because he thought they would scare her, but because he was certain she wouldn't be able to understand them.

As for his family, he didn't want to become their window on that side of the world he had spent his life protecting them from. Lutia was a small piece of paradise for them and he wanted to keep it that way.

With Kamila, everything was different. As a member of the army, Lith had to explain everything relevant to his missions, no matter how gruesome, and she had to listen. He would always hide the parts about his hybrid nature or true magic, but he could speak freely about anything else.

Over time, giving a report had turned from a duty to a way to share part of his burden. It had allowed him to open to her bit by bit, to let her in the loneliest part of his life and realize they grew closer for it.

"Welcome back, Ranger Verhen. I'm glad to meet you again." Whenever they interacted because of their work, her voice was detached and professional. Yet the moment Kamila saw him a warm smile appeared on her face and extended to her eyes.

It always rose the temperature in his heart by several degrees. They sat down in the report room after shaking their hands. A report room was a small office that reminded Lith of an interrogation room from crime series.

The furnishing consisted of just two chairs, a desk, and a recording device. There were no magic mirrors nor cameras. On the contrary, the room was enchanted to guarantee their privacy.

"Sorry if I rush you, but the Balkor department is eager to hear about all the details of the mission." She turned the recorder on.

Lith told her everything that had happened that day, without stopping not even when in his mind the image of the warg mother he had killed overlapped with Rena's, nor when he could almost identify himself with the dead farmer.

In his shoes, Lith would have done much worse to save Carl's life or that of any member of his new family for that matter.

He only stopped when a click made him aware that Kamila had stopped the registration. Only then, did Lith notice that she was covering her mouth with one hand and that tears were streaming down her face, forming two irregular pools on the otherwise pristine surface of the desk.