

Supreme M 51

Chapter 51 Darkness Falls 2

"Black?!" Lith was flabbergasted, according to their light spectrum theory, a black mana core would indicate the complete absence of any form of mana. In a world where even rocks had it, how could a living being have none?

He immediately activated his Life Vision.

"F*ck me sideways." Despite the small build and the thin limbs, the Wither was emitting an energy signature stronger than the four of them put together. To his eyes it was like staring into a black sun.

The three kings and Lith surrounded the Wither with a square formation, alternating attacks with paralyzing spells. If the Wither moved in a direction, the whole formation moved along with it, trying to prevent it getting closer or away.

Lifebringer was capable of using earth and water magic, using the first to slow it down, and the second to attack with a torrent of razor-sharp ice blades.

Reaper used both air and earth magic, using mainly air to restrict the Wither's movements and lightning to attack. Speed was crucial in inflicting damage, the black fog surrounding the Abomination was capable to eat away everything, even sunlight.

Protector's fire magic was useless, he could only use air magic, following Reaper's lead.

Despite Lith's help, the situation wasn't getting any better. As the Wither weakened, it always started ignoring the attackers and forcibly move toward a new area, to replenish its vitality.

Lith's and Solus's brains were spinning at top gear, trying to find a way to end the struggle.

"If it's alive, why can't we kill it? What are we doing wrong?" After another two acres of woods were lost, Lith's Life Vision could see the three kings' mana and stamina dwindling.

It was only a matter of time before the Wither had all of them for dinner.

"F*ck! Is this the level of strength of a monster? If it wasn't for the formation and their impeccable teamwork, I would have died within the first minute! Also, how the f*ck do they have so much energy after three days of this?

I'm here from barely an hour and had to use Invigoration thrice to replenish my energies. I don't even remember when was the last time I actually slept, my timer is ticking even faster than theirs. Magical beasts are damn overpowered."

"Protector!" Lith called for him, being the closest to his position.

"I'm going to get close, there's something I have to try. If I am right, you should notice immediately, so leave me there. If I'm wrong, pull me out as fast as you can!"

The Ry was too busy conjuring a lightning storm after another, so he just nodded.

Lith broke the formation, entering the black mist. He immediately felt his body becoming heavier and heavier, his life and mana were slipping away with every breath, allowing the monster to get stronger again.

"If that thing has a black mana core, maybe is like a darkness elemental. That should mean that light magic is its weak point. I need to get closer to hit it with my most powerful healing spell."

Light and darkness magic had by nature a shorter range than the other elements, and moved slower when casted against a target. Lith needed to get close enough for his next spell to hit, not giving the Wither enough space to dodge the sudden attack.

As soon as Lith started merging his mana with the world's light energy, he felt a strong pull at the level of his mana core. The spell was getting drained even before manifesting, the Wither suddenly looked stronger, his body less ethereal.

His low-pitched scream of agony was now a moan of pure joy.

Suddenly Lith remembered the words of the Lochra Silverwing (see chap 27). Hers was the only book he had ever copied from the first to the last word, reading it over and over while mulling over new spells.

Lochra Silvering was a Magus, and most likely another true magic user. Her wisdom was something Lith treasured deeply.

"Dammit, how can I always be this stupid? This is not a video game, there is no such thing as elemental vulnerability. Magus Lochra repeated it over and over, light and darkness are not opposites, but two matching pieces of the same puzzle.

Darkness greatest bane is not light, but darkness itself!"

Lith cancelled the healing spell, spreading out a dark aura of his own. The two forces started colliding, emitting black sparks every time they came into contact, trying to cannibalize each other.

Lith's aura was weaker, but he was free to manipulate it whenever the two dark fields clashed, condensing it were the enemy's defence was weaker.

The Wither, instead, was constantly harassed by the three kings' attacks, disrupting its focus and weakening its life force.

The Wither's body was getting incorporeal again, but this time he could not turn his back and run, otherwise Lith's dark aura would consume it mercilessly.

Lith was full of joy, intoxicated by bloodlust and the pride of having finally cleared the mystery.

"That creature is not burning with power, rather it's bleeding it from every pore or whatever it has! That's why it need to relentlessly feed on so much energy. Its metabolism is akin to a shark, if it stops, it dies!"

The Wither was getting weaker and weaker, its high-pitched scream filled with fear and pain.

Thanks to their coordinated efforts, Lith's aura managed to consume a whole chunk of the Abomination, giving Lith a sudden, unwanted enlightening.

It was very similar to what happened with Solus the first they introduced to each other.

Lith was once again inside a memory.

He could see himself as a young bear, striving to become strong enough to surpass Irtu's strength and become the new king in the east.

Somehow the young bear knew about mana cores, and was able to refine its own in a way disturbingly similar to Lith's.

But unlike Lith, the young bear was a natural at both earth and darkness magic, so it continued to relentlessly refine its mana core, even when it got painful. Its hunger for power grew along with the mana core strength.

Tired of waiting for its body to develop naturally, the young bear decided to try at all costs to evolve the mana core from green to cyan, so to become strong enough to claim the title of king.

It fought against the pain, bravely and recklessly at the same time, until it made it!

But its happiness lasted less than a day. The mana core was too big and strong for its young body, and soon started to fall apart, while the energy contained inside started to leak out.

Darkness magic went out of control, the survival instinct kicked in, trying everything just to survive a second longer. The young bear let the dark energy overflow, until it became the Wither.

Lith's bloodlust dissolved like a bubble.

"That poor b*stard it's not a monster, he is me. A me who failed promoting his mana core, too eager to do things his way to care for the consequences. A me that just wants to live, fighting against an unfair life."

Becoming aware of his opponent's story, Lith no longer wanted to play with it. Its screams of agony were a torture for his heart.

"I'm sorry for what happened to you." He said. "I'll do my best to give you a peaceful death."

Lith's compassion didn't make him lose his cool, on the contrary it gave him a renewed focus. He knew that to achieve his goal he needed killing intent, not mercy, so he looked inside himself in search of hatred.

He recalled his first life, his father's abuses, his mother indifference, until the day Carl died. He remembered the burning anger and desperation, how it peaked before Carl's murderer got his joke sentence.

His angriest day happened when he was planning Carl's funeral. Out of the blue, after ignoring their lives for years, his mother had the gall to come to his door.

Crying, she asked for his forgiveness, offering to pay for Carl's memorial service. Lith could still remember his eyes seeing red, his right hand holding her throat, trying to squeeze the life out of her.

That woman, that seemed to strong and cruel when he was little, was now a frail little thing.

She begged him to kill her, to let her atone for her mistakes and join her little boy in the afterlife. It was then that Lith anger burned brighter than ever. He threw her out of his house, alive and well.

"Too little and too late, you b*tch! I hope you live a long and miserable life, knowing that for both your sons you were nothing but an embarrassment, a sh*t that they flushed out of their life as soon as they could." Those were their parting words.

In a corner of his mind, Solus was crying for him. Yet she couldn't avoid noticing that despite all he had done, Orpal amounted to nothing in Lith's mind. His existence was merely an annoyance.

Focusing all that rage and anger in his fist, Lith released a stream of dark energy that struck the Wither's mana core, forcing it to crumble, unable to withstand the conflicting forces from within and outside.

After that, the young bear agony finally ended.

Its purified spirit finally able to return to mother earth's embrace, in search for a new life.

Chapter 52 Unexpected Answers

After the battle concluded, everyone dropped down on the ground, finally able to relax. Despite the victory, there was no place for joy or celebration. The Trawn woods would bear a scar that could take, months if not years to heal.

The three kings were already discussing how to rearrange the borders of their areas of influence, to prevent future food shortages to affect them too harshly.

Lith, instead, was still pondering on the young bear memories, comparing their lives. It was only because he had been reborn in a good family that he had not ended up obsessing with power, being able to afford taking care of his body.

In its place, with the fierce competition of the wilderness, he may have been tempted of doing the same. All his life up to that point had been all a huge risk/rewards assessment too, Lith had simply been luckier.

It was the second time in a single day that his victory had been hollow. He started to feel depressed, making the adrenaline rush dissolve much faster. Soon exhaustion would have taken its toll, he needed some real sleep.

Before going home, thought, there were still some things he had to do. First, he gave the Shyf a whole boar to eat, then Lith proceeded to heal its atrophied leg.

He couldn't do it before, because the fatigue from recovering from such a wound, coupled with its already debilitated state from the prolonged battle, would have made the Shyf faint.

Being a healer was almost a second nature to Lith at that point. He also wanted that whatever happened next in the woods, they would face it on their own. Lith had already enough on his plate, all he wanted was to sleep and eat for a week straight.

Second, he finally could express not to one, but to three powerful magical beasts, his doubts about tier four magic with a practical example.

With the energy he had left, Lith executed with true magic a scaled down version of the tier four Lightning God's Finger spell, weaving together fire and air magic to conjure a small sphere of plasma.

"The real deal would be bigger, hence doing more damage but also requiring much more energy." Because of its nature, plasma was highly volatile and would disperse at the smallest mistake.

It could indeed generate temperatures in the orders of thousand degrees, even striking with surgical precision, but it was incredibly slow to move, and Lith couldn't find a single practical use to justify spending so much mana in just one spell.

Both the Ry and the Shyf were natural air magic masters, so they could immediately understand the nature of the spell and its underlying effects.

"That's just useless!" Reaper blurted.

"It the prettiest waste of mana I have ever seen." Protector laughed.

"With much less energy and effort, you could wipe away an entire acre of the woods. I think the problem is not you, but the spell itself.

According to what you told me in the past, humans deems each other so stupid and untrustworthy that they divided magic into steps, or tiers, as you call them.

In my opinion either the human that invented that cr*p did have more free time than brains, or the spell is incomplete on purpose."

"Are humans really so idiotic? To teach their cubs how to kill a prey but not where the best parts are?" The Shyf was flabbergasted at the idea.

"Another dead end." Lith sighed, his depression getting worse. The Ry was his last hope to make head or tails of the magical conundrum.

"I'm sorry, Scourge." The Ry said. "But us magical beast have a much more practical view about magic, most of your human issues are either senseless or idiotic to me. Another problem is that we are incapable of controlling the whole world energy.

Only king level beasts can manipulate two elements, while the most complex spells you showed me sometimes use three or more.

I would love to help you further, but between my duties and this tragedy, I need to focus on avoiding the impending famine. Sorry."

The Ry and the Shyf left him, starting to discuss how to make the whole forest, especially the zone most damaged by the Wither, survive the coming winter.

Lith could feel his headache getting worse by the second, so after bidding them goodbye, he started to move as fast as he could towards home.

"So much for a second and third opinion. If the Ry is right, then we are f*cked up big time. No academy means no tier five spells, which in turn implies that we will be stuck with tier three as our main source of inspiration.

Not to mention that I really do not envy all those students that waste a whole year of their life practicing incomplete spells."

"Actually, I have been pondering about what Nana told us, and I think there is yet another possibility. Maybe tier four and fire are so rare to come around because they are strictly related to a mage specialization." Solus suggested.

"What if the Lightning God's Finger isn't an offensive spell, but rather an energy source for constructs? Or maybe it's the only way to carve magic runes in the hardest materials used for weapons or armours.

We know nothing about forgemastering, potion brewing or anything related to indirect magic."

"F*ck! You are probably right. And that adds insult to our injury. Seems we are destined to live four very uninteresting years."

As soon as he came home, Lith refused to move a finger, going to bed right after dinner, hoping that the next day would bring him good news.

Yet months passed, his birthday was getting closer and so was the deadline for applying to any academy.

Meanwhile, Count Lark hadn't been sitting on his hands. He had used every single opportunity, every pretext, no matter how flimsy, to seek audience with the King, and when that failed, he worked his way down the Court's hierarchy.

He had pestered everyone so much that many would hide at his presence, or pretend to not even notice him to not give any opportunity to persist in his fool's errand.

But the Count was a stubborn man, he knew rules and regulations inside out, and by using real problems related to Lustria County as a cover, there was only so much they could do to avoid him without setting a dangerous precedent.

He was able to endure hours long waits like they were nothing, and then still have the energy to plea for his case until his hosts were so exhausted that to get rid of him, they had to at least promise to consider his claims.

When Headmistress Linnea talked about wanting to send a political message, this wasn't the result she was hoping for. Soon her name would get associated with ingenious curses and swearing, and so her bloodline until the seventh generation.

Count Lark soon became a hot topic, receiving the same degree of attention an impending flood or plague would get.

One way or another he achieved part of his objective, making the whole Court discuss the possible implications that Headmistress Linnea's new rule could cause in the future.

Was it really worth to bar the road to a promising magician because of how or where did he/she learn her spells? Why punish the victim of a crime just because he/she had asked to uphold the law?

Should a Headmistress of such an important institution be allowed to change the rules of admission on a whim, without any form of control?

An important discussion like that needed time, but most importantly peace and quiet, so the Court unanimously resolved to grant Marchioness Distar, the true ruler of Lustria County, extraordinary powers, to face Count Lark as she thought best.

In other words, she was left with the short end of the stick.

Now Count Lark would relentlessly pester her, while everyone else would live happily ever after.

Marchioness Distar already had her fair share of trouble, Trequill Lark was just the icing on the cake. She pondered more than once to use her newfound authority to behead him, but her good sense and all her personal advisors stopped her.

Lark was one of his best retainers. He was sincere, didn't skim on the taxes, never had sordid affairs that she was forced to cover up.

Not to mention that under his guiding hand, Lustria County had been flourishing for over twenty years, without that the Marchioness and her mother before her had ever to move a finger.

It was a well-oiled machine, and honest to boot! Replacing him would cause her much more trouble than executing him would prevent.

Having her back against a wall, she decided that honesty was the best policy. Lark was a loving father, after all. Maybe he would understand her position and leave her alone if he knew the truth.

After granting him the thirty-seventh audience in less than three months, she explained to Count Lark her family's plight.

"As you know, the higher you get the more trouble you incur into. A few weeks ago, my family experienced an attempted murder. Thanks to the safety measures we have surrounded ourselves with, it failed. But it didn't pass without consequences.

One of the assailants, managed to reach my daughter. Her magical protections took the brunt of the hit, reducing a deathblow to slightly more than a pinprick."

"All is well that ends well." The Count commented.

The Marchioness had to stop herself from slapping him to death, rubbing her forehead instead, trying to calm down.

"I wish! Because of that pinprick my daughter has been cursed"

"Cursed?" Count Lark's monocle jumped out his orbit from the surprise.

Usually he would scoff at such preposterous concept. In all his years of exploring magic curiosities from all over the world, he had encountered curses only in the bedtime stories he read at his children.

But the Marchioness glare induced him to put his monocle back in place and let her continue.

"Yes, cursed. I wouldn't believe it myself if I hadn't seen it first-hand. When the healer tried to help her, preventing a scar, instead of disappearing, the wound became bigger.

I tried everything, calling renowned master Potionists, healers, medicine women, shamans. Nothing worked.

Now the only thing that keeps my ever-bleeding daughter alive is the constant consumption of potion and the help of my personal magician, Ainz.

As you know he is considered a genius, maybe the best ever graduated from the Black Griffon academy.

To make things worse, when the assailants understood they had no chance of escaping, they chose to blow themselves up, destroying all the evidence. There was no one to interrogate, nothing left to examine to understand what they had done!"

"This is fantastic!" The Count thought.

"This is terrible!" The Count actually said, keeping his best grieving face.

Chapter 53 Unexpected Answers 2

"I know you will call me an old fool, but I think I have the solution to your problem."

"If you are referring to your little protégé, you are more than a fool, you are certifiable. I tried, Ainz tried, I could write a book with the names of all those who tried.

I can only hope for Krishna Manohar, the god of healing, to return soon. Only he can save me from this anguish. The only reason he is not here yet, is because that goddamn lunatic is nowhere to be found.

He is doing his experiments in some remote village, forsaken by both humans and gods. He even left his communicator behind, to not be disturbed. My mother always said that bachelors are unreliable, and damn if she was right.

If that b*astard had a wife, a husband, even a cat, someone would know where to find him!"

"I completely agree with you. Only a married man truly understands the burden of responsibility." Count Lark suck up to her.

"But allow me to say that you are underestimating my protégé." Lark ignored the ferocious snarl from the Marchioness and pushed forward.

"As I told you more than once in the past, he is blessed by the light. I'll share with you a family secret, he actually helped my daughter with a similar problem."

"Your daughter was cursed?!" The Marchioness rose an eyebrow in disbelief.

"Sadly, yes. It plagued her life for years." Count Lark knew that the best lie was the one shrouded by a half-truth. Keyla had always called her acne a curse, after all.

"What do you have to lose? If I'm wrong, we'll leave, and you will never hear from me again, outside official business."

"Is that a promise?" It was too good to be true.

"I swear on my ancestors. If he fails, the only things we will ever talk about are County matters."

After shaking his hand to seal the deal, Marchioness Distar had him contact Nana, which in turn called Lith.

When he arrived to Nana's house, Ainz was already there, waiting for him.

He was a man in his mid-twenties, wearing a full black robe that covered his entire figure except his head and hands. He had long fingers, pitch black hair and eyes, with some odd black shades that seemed to devour sunlight at contact.

Ainz had sharp, and intelligent features, with a blood red gemstone embroidered on his chest.

"Aside from the tacky gem, that's the kind of man I would gladly marry one of my sisters to. Too bad he is too old, noble and tacky." Lith thought.

Ainz gave him an odd look, but his eyes didn't betray any emotion.

"My liege requires your help, young magico. Do you know how to fly?"

Lith nodded, swallowing back a snarky remark.

"Then go in that direction as fast as you can." Ainz pointed at north, northeast.

"I'll follow you closely."

Lith pretended to cast a personal spell, wriggling randomly his fingers and counting backwards from ten to seven, in English. By mimicking the Ry, he coupled his best flying spell with the slipstream effect one, reaching a speed close to 500 kph (311mph).

It took Ainz only a bit of effort to catch up with him.

"Not bad! Purple mana core guys are really impressive." Both Solus and Lith wanted to see with their own eyes what someone with such talent was capable of.

"Impressive! So young and he already has devised some personal spells. Maybe the old lunatic isn't so crazy, after all."

When they reached the Marchioness' house, Ainz moved so fast through all the barriers and guards that Lith didn't manage to take a proper look around. He had to spend all his energies just to keep up with his pace.

Before he realized it, he was in a fancy parlour. Both nobles stood up at their arrival.

"That was fast, Ainz." The Marchioness seemed pleasantly surprised.

"The young one seems to have more than one ace up his sleeve."

"Is this commenting my skills supposed to be subtle or something? Seriously? How stupid to you take me for?!" Lith was seriously pissed off, but the looks from the Count and his guilty conscience kept his mouth at bay.

The Marchioness gave Lith an abridged version of the story, dragging him to her daughter's bedroom without giving him the time to think or even express his opinion.

"I get it already! You don't have any faith in me. Quit dragging me around like a f*cking parcel!" Lith thought.

He was seriously considering failing on purpose, just to get even with her, but from Lark's troubled face, his instinct could tell that there was more at stake than the life of a girl.

Just from his countenance, Lith could deduce that the Count had exerted a lot of pressure just to get him to that spot. Lark had faith in him, and judging from the Marchioness expression, she was clearly expecting, if not straight wishing, for Lith to fail.

It wasn't the time to stand on the side-lines anymore, he believed that if the Count assumed he could do it, there shouldn't be any risk playing his "blessed by the light" card.

After catching his breath, he performed more finger wriggling while counting up from one to three, in English, while activating Invigorate on the poor girl.

It was a beautiful young woman in her early twenties, with only cotton gauzes to cover her chest area, compressing a huge wound, ten centimetres (4inches) wide that cut her diagonally from the left shoulder to the right hip.

After a few second, he could only say.

"Interesting."

The Marchioness scoffed, everyone before him had said the same word.

"And?"

"And it's not a curse. Just some kind of magically laced poison."

"What?!?" The Marchioness lost control, stamping her feet on the floor.

"You heard me." Lith was tired of being looked down upon, treated like some illiterate barbarian.

"It's a slow release poison that disrupts the effects of light magic, turning any attempt to cure it into a new wound. Simply brilliant.

It's almost impossible to cure such condition."

"Almost?" The Marchioness knitted her eyebrows. "Are you saying you can cure her?"

"Yes." He nodded. "It will take about a week to make the proper adjustments to one of my spells. It's the same thing I did for Count Lark a few years ago, just more complicated." They hadn't arranged together this speech, it was the truth.

It was just like Keyla's acne, only instead of removing natural impurities, he had to remove the artificial ones in order to make the healing possible.

"Kid, my daughter's life is no joke. I tried, Ainz tried." She pointed to the black obsessed mage.

"Are you sure?"

"She tried?!" Lith thought. "Solus, didn't you tell me she had just a red mana core?"

"Indeed, and is still red."

"Try scanning her clothes, accessories, anything that doesn't have any mana."

"Her barrette!" Solus exclaimed. "It has no magic flow, but that's impossible! This means that even items capable of hiding one's talents do exist."

"Forgemaster is definitely a specialization we have to take."

"Pretty sure. I will be back in a week and..." Lith tried to move, but the Marchioness stood in his way.

"If what you say is true, you'll stay here and cure her as soon as you are finished, not a second later!"

Lith was enraged even more, he was being taken hostage by a grief-struck madwoman abusing her power, but remained silent. Both Count's Lark and his family were in danger.

When Marchioness Distar noticed Lark's shocked gaze, she had already gone too far.

"It is never wise mistreating a healer, my liege." Ainz used one of his personal spells, sending in her ear a whisper that only the Marchioness could perceive.

"Healers tend life, but how you relate to them changes their attitude and care toward their patients. If Manohar is unavailable in the future, if this Lith can actually do what he says, do you really want to make an enemy out of him?"

"Please, save my daughter." The Marchioness said with a deep bow. "If you manage to heal her, I will send you to whatever academy of your choice. I swear to the gods."

"This is much better." Lith thought.

The following week was pretty stressful for him. Being paranoid, he was sure the Marchioness or one of her servants would spy on him 24/7. Lith had to sleep every night, and spent the following days pretending to experiment with hand signs and accents.

He could actually cure the girl right off the bat, but that would have been too fast. Lith had followed Count Lark's advice, preparing himself for revealing at least part of his talent.

When Manohar was his age, he had solved a similar case in less than three days. Lith didn't want to appear as good as him, so he took as reference another contemporary great healer whose records were stored in Soluspedia.

"I can't be too much of a genius, but being average is out of question. To achieve what I want I must be treasured, but not envied or used as a paragon. Scoring 90/100 is more than enough for my needs."

A week later, he entered again in the young lady's bedroom, under the eyes of her family and Ainz.

Lith first put his hand on her sternum, taking control of her mana flow and forcing the poison to move in a single spot before extracting it.

Then, he made it float in a bubble, before dripping it in a vial he had made prepare beforehand.

After that, Lith executed his best healing spell, closing the wound in one go, without leaving a mark or a scar.

The girl immediately regained a healthy pink colour, her breathing turned from quick and shallow to strong and steady.

Marchioness Distar couldn't believe her eyes. She quickly unwrapped the gauze, barely giving Lith and the male side of the family the time to turn around.

Doing it left him full of regrets.

"Be strong, old man. We are still physically young, there are still plenty of wonderful breasts waiting for us in this new world. Think of it as an investment. It's better to start our relationship with our new backer with a clean slate."

While the Marchioness was hugging her daughter, sobbing, Ainz took the poison to analyse it, while Lith exited the room, waiting for the permission to go back home.

Chapter 54 A Good Start Is Half The Job

A few days later, Marchioness Distar summoned Lith once again, this time in a proper polite way, giving him time to prepare and an explanation for their meeting.

They met in a neutral territory, in Count Lark's lounge. Contrary to etiquette, the noblewoman stood up when he entered the room, making a curtsy even before Lith had greeted or bowed to her.

"Welcome, young mage. Thanks for saving my daughter's life. No one knows how much time she had left in such conditions."

"I actually do." Lith thought with a cruel inner smile. "She had barely two weeks left when I first visited her, before her organs started failing one after the other. Luckily, she has a tough skin, so I wasn't forced to play the sink or swim healing attempt."

I wouldn't have cured her before at least five days, my safety comes first. I can waste time and lose opportunities, but I will not gamble my whole life for a stranger, no matter who he or she is!"

"Also, I have several reasons to apologize to you. First, for how I treated you. I was rude and condescending. I shouldn't have tried forcing your hand, but I was desperate at the time. Your sister was ill too, I hope you can understand me."

Lith inwardly sneered.

"You only say this now, because I succeeded and you are afraid of needing my help again in the future. I feel no compassion for the likes of you."

"No need to apologize, your Ladyship. Life sometimes burden us with a weight we are unable to carry, and desperation can make even the best of us lose his morals." Was what he actually said. He needed a new and more powerful backer.

Being friends was of secondary importance, their relationship was strictly business related. It was important to lay solid foundations for it, putting aside pointless grudges. But he wouldn't forgive nor forget.

If she failed or betrayed his trust, it was a good thing that revenge is a dish best served cold.

The Marchioness shook her head.

"I think that your forgiveness is still undeserved. I lied to you that day. I have no authority outside my Marquisate, so I cannot guarantee your successful enrolment in any academy outside the Lightning and White Griffon."

Her gown had many small pockets, hidden by the complex embroideries. From one of those, she took out a ring bearing the King's crest.

"It's a long and boring story..." She said looking furtively at Count Lark, suppressing an ironic laughter.

"...but what it matters is that at the moment in my Marquisate I hold a power on par with the King, so both academies can only accept my orders."

Lith wasn't yet completely convinced that going away, even for just two years, was the best course of actions. He decided to test the waters first.

"Wouldn't be possible to be home-schooled? If you hold such authority, it should not be a problem giving me the same benefits I would get from an academy and private tutors. After all, the location isn't that important."

"It actually is. The forests surrounding the academies play a big part in both the points and grades system. Also, yes, if you insist, I could achieve what you asked, but bear in mind that my situation is merely temporary.

Once the Court finishes deliberating the current matter, everything would get back to normal and I'm not sure to have all the resources you'll need. On the other hand, if you enrol in an academy now, it would be like according to a King's decree.

And once inside, even if I lose my almighty status, you would be protected by the rules of the kingdom and of the Mage Association. No one would be fool enough to make an enemy out of the King. Archmages and Royalty are deeply intertwined."

"It sadly makes sense." Lith inwardly sighed. "It's best to exploit the situation to its fullest. Between her desire to make up to me, no matter her reasons, and her temporary King status, I should be able to get some extra safety measure."

If only half of what Nana told me is true, I'll need every advantage I can get to avoid useless drama and pointless face-slapping."

"I understand. I think that going to the Lightning Griffon is out of question, the Headmistress will probably want my head on a stick either way."

"I wouldn't be so sure." The Marchioness replied. "Anyhow, with your talent as a healer, I had guessed you wanted to go to the White Griffon. You do know it's the school with the biggest light magic department, right?"

"But of course." Lith lied through his teeth. "But I'm also quite interested in the art of forgemastering. Which academy would be the best choice for such specialization?"

"Any of them." Marchioness Distar shrugged. "They all have good Forgemasters, but the great ones avoid academies like the plague. Artists like to be free, while in an institution they have to take care of paperwork, teaching, the student's items."

All things that would keep them away from their research. Not to mention that for an academy Forgemaster, keeping the nature of his research secret is much harder. To get funds from the academy, you have to share. All great mages hate sharing."

That piece of news reassured Lith.

"White Griffon it is, then. How long will the trip take?" Lith recalled that Nana once stated that the academy was more than five hundred kilometres (311 miles) away from Lustria. Even if it was just for an audience, he would need to pack some clothes."

"From my house? Considering that we first have to speak with the Headmaster, and then you have to take your admission exam, I'd say three, four hours tops. You'll get home in time for dinner, that's for sure."

Lith found difficult to do the math. Even flying at his top speed, he would need at least two hours to get there and back, not to mention that the Marchioness didn't seem the type to fly that long, messing her hair and dress right before meeting the Headmaster."

But they were already off a rocky start, Lith preferred to pretend to have understood everything, instead of flaunting his ignorance once again, destroying that little of respect he had gained so far."

Seeing his conflicted expression, the Marchioness completely misunderstood the situation."

"Don't worry, young mage. It's just the admission exam. You will get the opportunity to say goodbye to your family and friends. The academy will not start before another two months. You have plenty of time to settle all your business."

Lith thanked her with a deep bow."

"Please, don't thank me yet. I hope you'll accept this as part of my apologies."

She handed him a communication amulet, very similar to all those he had seen up to that point, except for the fact that it had only one rune on it, right on its center.

"To mark it as your own, just send some mana in the stone." Lith did as instructed, both the gemstone and the lone rune lit up, like they had become scorching hot.

"To exchange your contact rune, you just need to make two amulets touch while they are activated." Both the Count and the Marchioness held their amulets out, every time they touched, their rune got impressed on Lith's amulet and vice versa.

The Marchioness amulet was completely covered in runes already, to accommodate the new one, all the other runes shrank in size, just enough to leave enough space for another of the same dimension.

"There's no limit to the number of contact runes an amulet can hold." She explained.

"This will help you get in touch with me or Lark if anything happens. It will also make staying in touch with your family easier." She gave him a little box, holding a second amulet.

"Only one person can activate it. So, your family has to choose wisely."

Lith bowed profusely, that gesture had taken a big burden off his heart. She had explicitly offered as his backer, and thanks to the amulet he could always help his family through the two nobles, if necessity arose.

The appointment was set at the Marchioness' house at noon. Lith always had trouble with time, so he arrived early, to stay on the safe side. Servants treated him with the utmost respect, but were unable to hide their surprise

Clearly the rumors in the house had spread fast, and he probably didn't fit the image of the great healer that saved the young mistress that they had pictured in their heads.

Marchioness Distar made him wait but a few minutes. She wore a simple day dress, her long hair down. It was impossible to suspect that she was actually the Lord of the entire region.

"You are already here. Good. Let's move."

"On foot?!" Lith couldn't avoid asking.

"We could take a stagecoach, but it's a waste of time. The Mage Association's branch is right there." She pointed to another luxurious building, not even a hundred meters (110yards) away.

Lith bit his lower lip, thanking fate for being still short enough to make impossible for her noticing his shocked expression when he wasn't looking up.

The door was closed and with no guards, yet all she had to do was to press her family ring where the keyhole was supposed to be to open the way.

The inside of the house resembled very much an embassy. The clerk at front desk stopped them in their tracks, asking for their proof of identity and the reason of visit.

The Marchioness handed to him a piece of paper that appeared out of thin air.

"She probably has a dimensional something on her too."

The clerk passed the paper over a blue gemstone set into the desk. When both glowed of a pale blue he said.

"Everything seems all right. Your destination is right beyond the door."

He waved at the wall at his right, appearing incredibly stupid in Lith's eyes. But then several rune markings appeared from the wall, forming a small ring of energy that quickly expanded, becoming big enough for both of them to pass through.

"A real dimension door! If I have to choose between healing and forgemastering, I'll take the second without any regret."

It took but a step to travel all the distance between the capital of the Marquisate and the Headmaster office of the White Griffon. Lith recognized it because it was almost identical to the Lightning Griffon one.

The only differences were how the furniture was positioned, and the Headmaster personal effects on display. Books he had written, certificates of merit from both the Kingdom and the Association. They covered the whole wall behind his desk

"No frigging antechamber?!"

The Headmaster was waiting for them, he stood up as soon as the door appeared, approaching Marchioness Distar and welcoming her with great warmth.

"Marchioness Distar! Is always such a pleasure to meet an alumnus of our academy, even if she graduated before my time." Without waiting for her reply, he made her a deep bow, that she reciprocated.

"Headmaster Linjos, is an honour to have the chance to finally meet you. I heard a lot about the incredible feats you managed to accomplish at your young age. It's no surprise at all that for you becoming the youngest Headmaster ever."

"You are too kind. Excuse me for my bluntness, but I was really surprised by your sudden request for an urgent meeting. Has anything else happened to your family? Is there anything else that White Griffon can do for you?"

Linjos was deeply embarrassed, the academy was about to resume its activities and Manohar was still unreachable. The Headmaster had taken multiple notes to reprimand him sharply.

Taking a short personal leave was okay, disappearing for almost six months straight, not so much.

"Thanks for your interest, but my family managed to survive, one way or another. The reason for this audience is that I wanted to introduce you this brilliant young mage. He is pretty famous, you should have heard of Lith of Lustria."

"Ah!" Finally recognizing the youth behind her, Linjos stepped back. A beehive had just walked unannounced in his office.

Chapter 55 Politics And Ideals

Linjos was a man in his late twenties, about 1,77 meters (5'9") high. His ample mage robe made his build a mystery, he could as well be a mountain of muscles or thin as a stick. He had a perfectly shaven long face, a cleft chin and an aquiline nose.

His hair was chestnut brown, with shades of silver. His brow eyes were brimming with intelligence and worry. Lith could almost hear his panicking thoughts.

"Judging from the difference in treatment Lark and Distar received, he must be aware of how powerful she is at the moment. I am really curious to see how this will play out."

The Headmaster's bushy eyebrows were wriggling like furry worms, while he was deciding how to face the unexpected event.

"He too has a light blue mana core." Solus observed. "He is weaker than Ainz, but stronger than anyone else we met, except for that b*tch Linnea. Blue must be the minimum requirement for the position."

"Well, this is really embarrassing to say, dear Marchioness, but I don't know if I can help you." Linjos considered Linnea's political stand bulls*it, he had fiercely opposed to her motion during the last Headmasters Council.

But he had lost, even if by a small margin. The rules were clear, he could only follow the regulations approved by the majority of the Council.

"Well, I think it will be easier than you think." The Marchioness sat down on an armchair, inviting Linjos to do the same. Watching the Headmaster getting ordered around in his own office, filled Lith with joy.

"I wish it was me, being so powerful to make them all bend the knee! No more hiding, no more lies. Just unbridled power!"

"What do you mean?" Linjos asked after sitting behind his desk.

"You see, I am partially at fault for this whole situation. If I had just told the truth from the beginning, nothing would have happened. But I had my own reasons, so I hope you do understand how confidential it is what I am about to share with you."

The Headmaster's interest was piqued, and while Lith had no idea what she was talking about, he was a liar skilled enough to know when to shut up and get her back.

"Of course, everything you say will never get out of this room. You have my word."

"You see, I met Lith a few years ago, and I was so amazed by his skill and talent that I took him as my apprentice." She closed in to the desk, almost whispering.

Both men were taken aback by that revelation.

"So Nerea actually taught him only the basics, it was actually I that imparted to him the ways of magic. The problem was, and still is, that my family is under the scrutiny of too many eyes. I have too many enemies.

So, to prevent that one of them could snuff him out before he could achieve his true potential, we decided to keep everything a secret and let the world think that Count Lark and Nerea were the ones actually taking care of him."

"That would explain a lot!" Linjos exclaimed in shock. "His achievements are too outstanding for someone without a proper background. Not to mention why the Court has taken the matter so seriously, despite it came from a low noble appeal."

"Well, f*ck you too, mate." Lith thought. "Diss Lark one more time, and you and I will have a problem."

"Exactly." The Marchioness nodded, passing him several papers that came out from one of the rings she wore.

"I still can't afford the truth to see the light, you know what happened to my daughter. So, I would really like to avoid officially forcing you accept him with the authority entrusted me by the King. It would raise a fuss on multiple levels.

I hope that you can understand my position, and that those documents will give you leverage enough to defend your standing, if the Council tries to reprimand you."

Linhos read the papers, and at some point, almost jumped up from his chair.

"He is the one that cured your daughter and extracted the magical poison our labs are currently studying?!" He simply could not believe his eyes.

The best healers among the Griffon academies staff had tried and failed, while this kid was supposed to have correctly diagnosed the nature of the illness and managed to cure it.

"I'm sorry for being rude once again, but all the testimonies come from your family members. The Council will surely object that this is just a ruse to force their hand. This story is simply unbelievable."

"Go to the next page, please." She didn't even care to hide her smirk.

The second page was also a statement. Ainz was one of the witnesses, and reported everything he had seen during that day, giving a professional assessment on Lith's skills, pointing out and describing the numerous personal spells he had witnessed him using.

Linhos went completely pale.

Ainz testimony was a sworn one, just like the others, but coming from a mage it had a completely different significance from that of a noble.

Doubting his word was the same as calling him a liar and an incompetent, the consequences of that would be terrible.

Despite being so young, his talent and power were beyond question, not to mention that the Black Griffon would become a sworn enemy of anyone who tried to taint their genius' reputation.

Such a heavy insult could even bring Ainz to personally challenge whoever dared to question his judgement, and there was no Headmaster that wanted to face him in direct confrontation, be it a magic duel or contest of wits.

The two documents were more than enough to defy the will of the Council without repercussions, but Linjos wasn't the kind of man who acted on impulse.

"The fact that I can, doesn't mean that I must do it." He pondered.

"Whatever I do, I will face a different backlash, either from the Marchioness or the Council. From a political standpoint there is not much difference, and that makes my decision much easier.

If this kid is really so talented, it would be a crime against magic to blindly follow the orders of those old fogeys. I remember well how they opposed to me becoming Headmaster, claiming I was too young, too 'radical' for the position.

It's time to teach them a lesson. Their wrinkly as*es have been rooted to their chairs for so long that they have forgotten about the passion that teaching magic requires.

I accepted the position the Queen offered to me, because I was disgusted seeing how academies were being reduced to paper-pushers, neglecting to nurture true talents and bootlicking those who are already powerful for petty political gain."

The Marchioness waited patiently. Being thoughtful was a plus on her book, only idiots and lapdogs would mindlessly charge toward danger.

"I will be glad to take your disciple in my academy, but only if he reaches the minimum requirements. Under my guidance, there are no favouritism in the White Griffon."

Both the Marchioness and Lith had no objections. Lith had been instructed about the admittance test by Nana well before his visit to the Lightning Griffon, and before going to the White Griffon he had asked confirmation from the Marchioness.

Nana's admittance had happened decades ago, something could have changed over time, but from Distar's experience, the structure of the exam was still the same.

Headmaster Linjos used his communication amulet to assemble the Heads of all the magical departments in the test room. Lith was curious about exploring the academy, but the Headmaster opened another dimensional door, bringing them to destination.

It was a big square room, with each side thirty meters (33 yards) long, that seemed carved out a single huge piece of stone. The walls, floor and ceiling were all smooth with no gap except for a door.

The only pieces of furniture were several chairs lined up against a wall, where the Marchioness, the Headmaster and the faculty heads sat as soon as they came out of several dimension doors.

Lith felt a new respect for fake mages. Compressing space with such ease, allowing instant movements was something beyond his wildest dreams.

When all the seven Heads arrived, the Headmaster said:

"Show us your basics."

He was asking Lith to show his proficiency with chore magic, the foundation of all magics.

"If only you knew what you are missing..." Lith Inwardly smiled.

Lith took a deep breath, stimulating his mana core to its maximum output. He stood straight, extending his right hand upwards, right above his head, generating a sphere of dazzling white light the size of a chestnut.

His sharp earring could already listen to some whispered comments.

"Perfect silent light magic. Trivial but effective." "Hope he can do something better, I have so much paperwork in my office..."

Lith openly smiled, moving his arm clockwise, and when it reached two o'clock a fiery fireball appeared.

"Two kinds of perfect silent magic! Not bad, for a commoner." "Double casting, finally something interesting."

The arm kept moving in a fluid movement, not letting them the time to chat. At four o'clock a small thundercloud appeared. The audience started to get interested.

"Triple casting at twelve years?" "What the f*ck? Triple perfect silent..."

The arm reached six o'clock, a blot of pure darkness started consuming the light, pulsing with hunger. Both the Headmaster and the Marchioness had already understood what it was, but while the Marchioness had seen Lith in action, Linjos was shocked.

"It couldn't be Silverwing's..."

At eight o'clock rock, dust and dirt condensed into a small round stone, while at eleven o'clock a small bubble of water constantly shifted between gas, liquid and frozen state.

"By the gods! Hexacasting with perfect silent magic!" "That's almost Magus Silverwing's Mana Hexagram." "The last student that managed to do that..."

The Headmaster hit the department Head with the elbow, forcing him to shut up. Lith's interest was piqued. Why interrupt him? Was the identity of the student a secret?

"There is no almost." He thought.

His arm didn't stop, at the second round of his arm, the single dots of energy became connected by tendrils of power, forming a perfect hexagram inscribed in a circle.

Through the shared connections, energy started to circulate, until the single elements disappeared, leaving only a golden hexagram floating in the air. (AN: If you have problems imagining the result, just look again at the book's cover :P)

That was the reason why Nana had been admitted back in the day, and she had passed it down to Lith.

Lochra Silverwing's Mana Hexagram was a rare feat, that barely a magician out of a hundred was capable to perform. It was an exercise that demonstrated not only mastery over all the elements, but also a deep understanding of the flow of mana.

It emphasized the mental strength and focus. It was an unwritten rule that whoever was capable of casting the Mana Hexagram was automatically admitted, even if he/she was a slave.

After that Lith started to cast fake magic spells as fast as he could. Now he had to prove his mastery and control over the first three tiers of magic to skip the beginner's years.

He was supposed to cast at least twenty tier one spells, but he performed thirty. He could have done more, but avoided to.

Lith had already studied and memorized all the White Griffon records, if geniuses scored 110/100, 90/100 was a perfectly fine result for him.

He didn't want to get too much spotlight, just enough to get his talent recognized and maybe turn some professors into his backers, to spend the next two years in the most calm and peaceful atmosphere.

He was there to learn, not to fight. Lith stopped at tier three spells, going further would be too dangerous. Not only he would have exposed too much talent, but he would also risk to skip even the fourth year.

Specialization courses started on the fourth year, and Lith wanted to remain in the academy long enough to assimilate everything it had to offer about forgemastering, and maybe even healing. Not to mention he still needed powerful backers.

When he finished, there was no applause or congratulations, but the convened mages huddled up, starting to discuss wildly. Their 'whispers' were loud enough that even with his old earring Lith would still be able to listen to them.

"Outstanding performance." The Marchioness had left the group as soon as the discussion started, she had no place in it.

"Thanks." Lith pretended being tired and short of breath.

"Do you think I'm in?"

"Most definitely, unless heaven and earth turn upside down."