

## Supreme M 571

### Chapter 571 Round Two Part 4

Pelion managed to block Lith's last lunge with the hook shaped hilt of his weapon, shattering the rapier with a quick flick of his wrist.

"I'd run if I were you." He said with a grin. The creature was now unarmed and Ailia was done with the explosion. Together, they were unbeatable.

"Because I've lost a toy?" The demonic beast sneered. The rapier was just one of Lith's failed prototypes in the attempt of replicating the Gatekeeper's properties.

Having sparred a lot with Phloria and Friya in the past, it was one of the weapons Lith knew best. Also, due to its light weight, it required a minimum amount of ingredients.

He would have preferred to avoid using the Gatekeeper while he was in his hybrid form. It was Lith Verhen's signature weapon, but he couldn't afford to hold back now that they were three against one. Besides, he had come prepared.

"Come forth, my soul. Feel my wrath!"

A set of giant membranous wings popped from his back as the space in front of his hand was torn apart by emerald flames. An eerie light painted the night green, sending shivers down the spine of both the men of the night watch and the Awakened ones.

A small sphere of stone emerged from the fissure and it grew into a huge black sword.

"I'm not going to fight a Wyrmling who possesses an omni pocket just to avenge an idiot like Kieran. I'm out of here." Ailia grabbed Pelion and Deraniel from the collar of their shirts and Warped away.

The several spells Lith had just conjured hit only air, so he dispelled them before the ruckus could draw too much attention. After checking with his mystical senses that he really was alone, he followed suit and opened a series of Warp Steps leading to random destinations before returning to his room in Krame's mansion.

Both Lith and Solus were racking their brains trying to decipher the Awakened woman's words.

'What's a Wyrmling? What's an omni pocket? And how did you do that thing with the emerald flames again?' Lith thought.

'Me? What about your wings? Since when can you do that?' Solus had no idea what he was talking about.

'I was just flexing my shoulders for the evil overlord pose while you coated the Gatekeeper to make it unrecognizable. Maybe my second life force is growing over time. Why every single time we go out for answers, we only get more questions?'

Lith had no way to know that the reason why Ailia had preferred retreating was their pocket dimension, which was referred to by other creatures as an omni pocket.

Unlike common dimensional items, once a mage had imprinted an omni pocket, they could access it without actually carrying it with them. It made them unpredictable and usually only ancient, powerful beings like Tezka had one.

Ailia had recognized it because, due to Orion's ring shielding Solus's existence, Lith was apparently carrying no magical items while in his hybrid form. She had no idea that Solus's long slumber had destroyed all the treasures it contained.

Ailia didn't felt like fighting an unknown enemy in possession of such a treasure while Deraniel was still shocked out of his mind.

Lith experimented a few times by taking several objects of different sizes out of his pocket dimension, yet nothing happened. Lith sighed as something pulled at his shoulder, almost making him stumble.

One of his wings had struck the wardrobe without him noticing. It took him several tries to fold them above his shoulders and even more to make them disappear inside his shoulder blades before going back to his human form.

'Damn. I'm sure I can take down a couple of Awakened of that level with Friya's help but three?' Lith set aside all the questions he had to ponder about his predicament.

'Three is another matter entirely. To make matters worse, there could be actually five of them.' Solus pointed out, making Lith groan.

'You're right. The fucking Church of the Six! Six entitled idiots playing god with humans.'

'More likely they are just helping behind the scene. Taking care of a religion requires time and effort, whereas Zantia's problems only started after the winter lockdown.'

'I think you may be right.' Lith thought.

'I still have no idea what their endgame is, but here is what I think it might be happening. For some reason, they have a beef with me. They know I'm a Ranger, so they use the church to call me here.

'Maybe the snowstorm is just a coincidence, or maybe they predicted its arrival before having me summoned here. With no Warp Gate, no one can help me. In theory, I'm on my own.

The silver lining is that if they took so many precautions, it means that they can't afford being detected. That's one toy I can mess with.'

Lith took his army amulet and called his handler, telling her all about the ambush and the two mysterious individuals who he reported as capable of using an odd kind of magic like Nalear the Kinslayer did.

When her army amulet had woken her up in the middle of the night, Kamila didn't care about how she was dressed. Lith's rune could only mean an emergency. She wrapped a bedsheet around her nightgown as fast as she could and answered the call.

"Gods! I've checked the weather mages forecast. The storm will last at least for a week. I'll make sure they send you a Spellbreaker as soon as possible. In the meantime-" Kamila clenched her teeth.

For the first time since she had joined the army, she hated her job for what she was forced to say.

"Continue the mission. The High Command agrees with us. Your duty is to uncover if there is any correlation between the Church and this fake illness. You are hereby authorized to act as the ruler of Zantia until the crisis is resolved.

"As for those assassins, can you provide me a description?"

"I can do much better." Lith had to repress both a sneer and a snort while he projected the holograms of the two Awakened.

The assassin was dead, but the man from the Blood Desert was about to enter a world of trouble. Hence the sneer.

The snort was due to his inability to show the holograms of the other two Awakened he had met earlier. They had faced a hybrid, not Ranger Verhen. By exposing them he would expose himself too.

This way, if the assassin had a vengeful master, they would have a hard time tracking the culprit.

"Excellent. I'm forwarding our conversation right now. Over and out."

She called him back on his civilian amulet, begging him to ignore the orders and stay safe. It took him a while to calm her down, yet after the call ended, Kamila didn't manage to fall asleep until dawn came.

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In the following hours, Lith's report moved through the official and unofficial chain of command. There was more than one middle ranked official handsomely paid to report keywords like "Nalear" and "incredible magic".

Once put together, it took barely an hour to reach all the right and wrong ears. The Royals didn't like having Awakened messing with their territory, and neither did Tyris.

Deraniel was an outsider, so he didn't fall under the free will umbrella she granted to the citizens of the Griffon Kingdom.

"Are you insane?" Deraniel's master, Tasaar Quinus, was mad with rage.

#### Chapter 572 Master and Apprentice Part 1

Tasaar Quinus was an Awakened almost 600 years old, yet he didn't appear to be one day past his fifties. He was 1.8 meters (5'11") tall, with deep bronze skin, greyed black hair, and a beard that emphasized his pearl white teeth.

He was considered one of the best Wardens and swordmasters of the blood desert.

He was still inwardly debating if being angry for his heir's defiance or for him having failed to kill a seemingly rogue Awakened. The purple aura exuding from his body made his white robe flap like he was amid a windstorm.

"Do you have any idea how long did it take me to obtain my territory? To have Overlord Salaark bestow upon me full authority over my tribe? Now I risk everything, and for what?"

The only reason why Tasaar wasn't already in Zantia to murder his successor with his own hands instead of talking to him with his communication amulet, was the distance between them.

"Have you forgotten what happened to Treius? Are you eager to join him in death? Well, I'm not! Come back here immediately."

"But, father, there is a storm outside..."

"Don't call me father! I've had dozens of children, but you are the only one who managed to go from most talented to most idiotic in less than a day. I prefer you dead in a snowstorm than alive doing more damage.

"Bring Kieran with you. I hope he has a good explanation. You know that I'm not serious when I say that I will kill the two of you, whereas Lesalia might not be so kind." Tasaar said.

"Master, I- I can't obey." Deraniel stuttered.

"Kid, if you make me come there, Lesalia will be the least of your problems." Tasaar's eyes flared with mana. He could understand his young and hot-headed successor making a blunder, but defying his orders was unacceptable.

"I mean I'll depart immediately, but Kieran is dead. I can't even bring his corpse back because it exploded." Deraniel went pale. His father was a meek man, but once angered he could upturn his entire domain to find a single missing coin.

"What? How?" Deraniel took his father's curiosity as the opportunity to get off the hook and told him all about the demonic beast they had faced.

"You moron! Are you telling me you asked the permission of neither the Awakened human nor the beast who rules over the Kellar region? I swear, if I have to offer them any compensation, it will come out of your pocket! Get home, now!"

Tasaar hung the call without waiting for a reply. He had a lot of calls to make. Tyris, Raagu of the human Council, the rulers of the Kellar region, but more importantly his life long friend.

Kieran was Lesalia's successor just like Deraniel was his own. They had hoped they would grow into good friends like their masters were, but life had decided otherwise.

'I don't want her to learn about her heir's death from a stranger. Kieran might have died an idiot, but she deserved better.' Tasaar sighed. He opened a Warp Gate leading directly inside her Forge.

Not only Lesalia was one of the best assassins in the Blood Desert, but she was also one of its best Forgemasters. She trusted no one, so all the equipment she used, no matter if clothes or caltrops, she made them herself.

"Dammit!" He heard her yell.

"I can't further purify adamant without Origin Flames and those damn beasts demand a lot of money for it. Do you have some left?" She asked.

"No. The only dragon I know asks so much for a single flask that it's more convenient to call him when necessary rather than stockpiling it. Look, we need to talk."

Lesalia took off the white mask covering her face revealing skin with the color and the wrinkles of hardened leather. Being almost 600 years old, she looked like a woman in her mid sixties, with several grey streaks amid her raven black hair.

She was wearing a scaly leather apron over a black tank top and leather work pants. Her gloves covered her arms up until her elbows and just like her apron, they were made from the golden skin of a Wyvern.

They protected her from the intense heat of the furnace which was strong enough to harm even an Awakened's enhanced body.

Her figure was slender, but she was strong enough to crush stone with her bare hands. Her average height and build allowed her to go unnoticed. She had sharp eyes and a long nose, giving her the look of a demanding artisan, but Tasaar knew better.

Her Forge resembled more a real blacksmith rather than a magical lab. Several furnaces and silvery tables occupied most of the stone cave she had built inside an active volcano, sometimes even using its heat for her most difficult pieces.

She was currently working at a forge fueled by a mix of lava and magic which made even her enchanted tools white hot. Yet the silvery liquid inside the obsidian mold refused to boil.

A snap of Lesalia's fingers made the purple flames and the small tornado empowering them disappear. The liquid turned solid in an instant as she cursed her bad luck.

"Is this about Kieran?" She asked making Tasaar choke on his condolences.

"You already know?"

"Of course, I do. I had a tracking device and a communication system embedded in his suit. I can show you how hard we failed teaching those youngsters."

Another snap of her fingers and the green crystal lighting the cave made the room go dark as its light focused on the nearest wall to project a hologram of both ambushes. The one the two Awakened had performed and the one they had suffered.

"See? In the alley, Kieran had all the advantages, yet he lost. He wasted time talking, he didn't capitalize on the venom, and stuck too close to the opponent." As one of the greatest assassins alive, every tiny mistake Kieran made was a capital sin to her.

Tasaar couldn't see anything wrong in the assassin's moves. If he had been in Lith's shoes, he would've survived only thanks to his artifacts

"This Lith is an interesting fellow. He turned the tables as soon as Kieran revealed to be an Awakened. His technique is a bit rough around the edges, but he adapts fast and there's no wasted movement. He clearly practiced a lot." She sighed.

"At the warehouse, it was an outright massacre. Once Kieran triggered the trap, his fate was sealed. That's what I tried teaching to all of my disciples, yet even the best of them was beaten by a mere Wyrmling at our own game."

"What are you going to do about it?" Tasaar asked.

"Nothing. Kieran failed twice, proving to be unworthy of inheriting my legacy. I told him many times that we are assassins, not warriors. Patience is of the utmost importance. Yet he mistook discipline for chains and my warnings for insults.

"I'm not going to cross two Countries and as many Guardians for a broken blade. Because that's what he was. I forged many before him, hoping they would receive my heritage. Some of them were too soft and were bent by my teachings. Others were too hard and couldn't endure them.

"When a smith fails, they don't blame the flames or the metal, they blame themselves. When a blade breaks, they don't collect its pieces, they learn from their mistakes and move to a new project."

City of Zantia, now.

"You heard my master. I can't stay here a second longer." Deraniel had packed everything so fast that when he was ready to depart, Pelion had yet to complete his Warping array.

With the strength of the four remaining Awakened, it was powerful enough to at least Warp him past the storm they had previously fueled and were now unable to control.

"I would leave in a hurry if I were you. If the Wyrmling contacts his master, both Pelion and Ailia are in danger. He has seen your faces. The Ranger must have powerful connections with magical beasts to summon the aide of the Lord of the region."

All of those present shuddered at the memory. If both master and disciple were capable of using Origin Flames, there was no telling what Forgemastering marvels they had access to.

"I don't care about the Church of Madmen, nor about Zantia. As long as we are alive, there's always next year." He walked through the Gate, leaving them to wonder if their plan of using the Ranger as their main ingredient had actually been a mistake.

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A cave near the southern border of the Kellar region.

After receiving the apologies from the two Awakened humans of the Blood Desert, Xedros the Wyvern, the Emperor Beast ruling over the region immediately called his dear friend, Faluel the Hydra.

"I just heard the strangest thing. It seems a Wyrmling is protecting my territory, yet all of my children have long since left and it's been decades since I've mated with a human. Is him one of yours?" He asked.

She was the only other draconic Emperor Beast he knew in the Griffon Kingdom who could have spawned such a powerful creature.

A Wyrmling was the offspring of a dragon or a lesser dragon with a member of another race. A hybrid who was forced to choose the race he would belong to before reaching the twenty years of age.

One of the Hydra's seven scaly snake heads squinted her eyes, trying to remember when it was the last time she had copulated with a human while her other heads kept sleeping like logs.

Among the various species of Emperor Beasts, Hydras were considered part of the lesser dragons.

They had a stocky lower body with four short legs and a heavy tail. Both were necessary to balance their long, serpentine necks ending with a snake-like head the size of a muscle car.

Hydras' number of heads varied with their power and age. A newborn had two, whereas the most powerful of them could grow up to seven heads. Each head was capable of independent thought and casting its own spells.

Ancient Hydras were almost unbeatable thanks to the explosive attack strength they could achieve by alternating physical and magical attacks from seven different sources. Their weakness and strength overlapped, though.

Seven heads also meant seven times the energy consumption. No matter how many heads they had, they all belonged to a single Hydra, after all. If not careful, they would exhaust their mana and stamina in just a few seconds.

Unlike Wyverns, they weren't able to use Origin Flames nor to fly without a spell, so they were considered among the weakest of the lesser dragons.

Faluel was still half asleep, so it took her a while to understand what the Wyvern was saying. She hated cold in general and winter in particular. She lived in the Distar Marquisate, yet even its climate was too rigid for her tastes.

She liked to spend the cold season asleep unless it was strictly necessary otherwise.

Her nest was located under the Black Scar, one of the rare mountains in the south of the Griffon Kingdom which took its name from the obsidian rocks covering most of its surface.

Once it had been a volcano, whereas now the steaming hot springs heating Faluel's lair were the only legacy left of the mountain's fiery core. The rest of the underground cave was decorated with enough riches to put the Ernas Household to shame.

Piles of gold and precious gemstones were mixed with small mounds of magic crystals. The more precious a pile, the nearer to Faluel it was. All the artifacts she had collected and Forgemastered over the centuries were carefully stored inside a crystal case only she could open.

"One of mine? In the north?" She said.

"It's possible. Most of my hatchlings hate me because I haven't Awakened them. Can you describe him to me?"

Xedros, the first Wyvern, and father of the late Gadorf was a master of light magic, so instead of speaking, he showed her a hard light construct of the recording Lesalia had sent to him. His scoundrel son had inherited his talent, but none of his wisdom.

"By the Great Mother!" All the seven heads hissed in unison.

"I knew he was one of yours! Don't worry about him, I told them he's my apprentice. I don't give a shit about humans, but if they so much touch one of us, I'll Warp a whole mountain above their heads!" He roared.

"Well, thanks for your concern but actually no. He used Origin Flames and he has wings, so he's not a Hydra."

"What a shame. I was hoping you had found the right partner to further evolve your species. Why that reaction?" All Emperor Beasts strived to overcome the bounds separating them from the purest races, like Griffons and Phoenixes.

Unfortunately, none had ever succeeded.

'Because even though he is still in the embryo stage he already has seven eyes.' She thought. There was a reason if Hydras had seven heads and more than one for not sharing its secret.

"Because I know him." She actually said.

"He's a friend of my latest disciple and he asked me to watch out for him. I might need to send him over to you." Emperor Beasts had no Warp Gates, but by conjuring a Warp Array each, two of them

could obtain the same effect.

Xedros nodded and ended the call. He spent several minutes watching the construct between his claws, trying to figure out what Faluel was hiding from him.

'If that old fox sends her disciple here, it might be a show worth watching.' He thought.

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City of Zantia, the next morning.

Lith had spent the night sleeping to reset the effects of Invigoration. If he was right and there were still five Awakened on his tail, he couldn't afford to be the first one to run out of gas.

According to Solus, with her deep blue mana core, the woman was the magically strongest among those he had already met, while the two meters (6'7") guy was physically almost on par with him thanks to the gap in height and build.

'Unless they are geniuses on par with Manohar or much older than they look, I'm confident I can take them out one on one. With Friya or Solus I can take two of them out at once, but three or more would be potentially lethal.

'Not to mention that I should introduce Friya to Solus and things could get really awkward.' He thought.

'I don't get it. You have no qualms asking her to risk her life for you yet you are afraid of introducing me to a friend? It wouldn't be the first secret she keeps for you. I think Friya is a woman wise enough that she can accept my existence.' Solus said.

#### Chapter 574 Balance of Power Part 1

'No, she can't. With her trust issues, she would stop believing in me. Put yourself in her shoes. Friya wouldn't know with who she has really interacted so far and she would be afraid that you are somehow manipulating me. She too is paranoid. Telling her is a liability.' Lith said.

Solus sighed and said nothing more. Friya's level of craziness was dangerously similar to Lith's. She had chosen to establish a guild, yet she treated her companions as a means to an end and changed them more often than her socks.

Unless the opportunity presented itself, she would react badly to a revelation as big as Solus's existence was.

While waiting for Friya, Lith and Solus tried to sketch together all she could remember about the assassin's garb's pseudo core.

'Orion said that a gold alloy can't hold more than one incantation at a time, yet that garb had three of them. Maybe it used adamant instead of silver.' He thought.

'My thoughts exactly.' Solus forgot about her sense of isolation the moment they started to consider how to replicate the lost artifact. Ever since Ratpack's words had triggered her memory, her passion for magical research had become even stronger.

The more she learned, the more she could feel her lost memories scraping at a corner of her mind, like words she had never forgotten yet she was never able to express.



'A new armor would be the perfect recipient for all of our resources. Even if magically boosted, a cloth remains cloth. Adamant is one of Mogar's legendary metals. If we can combine the Skinwalker's properties with those of the garb, the durability lost due to mixing it with gold would be plenty balanced by its stealth properties.

'No one would recognize you as an Awakened anymore and by switching clothes at will you would always remain just a face in the crowd.'

'Agreed. The problem is that while I know the Skinwalker's pseudo core like the back of my hand, I've no idea how to infuse an object with Full Guard. I need to ask Orion if he's capable of doing it and if yes, I have to convince him to share the procedure with me.

'Something we can do as soon as the crisis is resolved, instead, is to take a second look at the fire I can produce while in my hybrid form. When it burned the layers of the assassin's garb, I realized that it can do much more than just destroy.' Lith thought.

'I am eager to see what happens to an enchanted item if the flames aren't put out. What if they can drain a pseudo core completely? They could open doors, disrupt arrays, maybe even delete the imprint left by the item's owner.' Lith thought.

'It's not so simple. I remember the Abomination who possessed the wargs calling them "Origin Flames". I don't remember what they are, but something tells me they are very important. We must find out their real nature.'

Solus couldn't put her finger on it, but she felt that they shared a connection with the title 'Ruler of the Flames' her master Menadion mentioned in her memories.

Lith and Solus spent the time before breakfast drawing and visualizing the assassin's garb's pseudo core. Solus hadn't seen it from many angles, and to make matters worse, the distance had made the mana pathways appear like a blur to her.

They only had one Forge of adamant, so their blueprint had to be perfect or everything would go to waste.

"Well, how did your hunt go?" Friya was happy seeing him in one piece, yet she knew it didn't mean much. Phloria wasn't the only one who back at the academy had noticed his ability to heal from deadly wounds like they were just scratches.

"One down, three more to go." Lith sighed while following her to the Dining Hall.

"Three? Oh, gods. We might need some of my men. Three versus two would already be bad against regular mages and it took four of you to take down Nalear. I don't like our odds."

"Don't worry. They are weaker than Nalear was and I'm much stronger compared to four years ago. Yet I agree with you, we need a contingency plan." Lith said.

They stopped talking the moment they saw a member of the house staff. Neither of them trusted their discretion, so they moved to a less sensitive topic.

"The Viscount was ecstatic of my discovery about the Griever." Friya said with a smug grin.

"He has doubled my guild's pay and fired half of his staff." Her smile disappeared thinking about all those poor people jobless in the dead of winter.

"Why did he do that?"

"Because he removed all those who had the magical talent to cause that kind of wounds and all those who have any affiliation with the church. Now my men have to sleep, eat, and drink with the members of Krame's family." Friya's explanation made sense.

'I have the authority of the King now. I could conscript the members of the Crystal Shield guild to compensate for the lack of manpower, but how much can I trust a mage who follows me only because he's forced to?

'At the same time, all of the city guards can't put a dent in an Awakened's body. Only a mage can defeat an Awakened mage.' Lith thought.

The dining room walls were painted of a pale blue and the floor was entirely covered by a single red and blue carpet with floral figures depicted on it. The chairs' lining had the same pattern as the carpet while the Viscount's coat of arms was engraved on their armrest.

The walls were decorated with several paintings depicting Krame's ancestors, and the room's furniture was adorned with blue porcelain vases.

The mercenaries sitting at the long rectangular table were all laughs and smiles due to the news of their pay being doubled, whereas the house staff was gloomy as if they were attending a funeral.

Not only their workload had just doubled, but they were also afraid to lose their job. The Viscount offered food and accommodation to them and their families. Getting fired meant becoming jobless and homeless in one fell swoop.

The members of the noble family weren't much happier having lost any shred of privacy. Yet they turned their frown upside down the moment they saw Lith.

They considered Friya the strongest noble in the city, but now that the existence of an enemy capable of violating the safety of their house had been uncovered, none of them was foolish enough to refuse the help of the most powerful being for miles.

Noble or not, Lith now appeared like a savior to their eyes, and they could only hope to not have compromised their relationship with the youngest Spellbreaker of their generation.

"I am very sorry for how I treated you yesterday, Regent Verhen." The Viscount said, making all those sitting around the table choke on their food. Krame rarely apologized even to the city Lord and even when he did it, his tone made it clear it was just a formality.

This time it sounded like he really meant it.

## Chapter 575 Balance of Power Part 2

The Viscount despised commoners, but he was a man smart enough to know when to swallow his pride and play nice. Just a few hours ago, he was angry at Lady Ernas for bringing an unwanted guest inside his house.

Krame didn't complain to her about it only because he was hoping to establish ties with the Ernas Household. The sudden turn of events had made Friya a goddess of victory to his eyes.

Having the city Regent under his roof would ensure that all of his plans would come to fruition once the crisis was resolved. The Viscount was so angry at himself for his lack of foresight that if he could have traveled back in time, he would kick his own ass.

'Bad news travels fast.' Lith thought. The High Command had bestowed upon him full control over Zantia in the middle of the night, yet the Viscount already knew about the shift in the balance of power.

"Between that incompetent fool of Cestor, those lunatics hurting my business, and my family under siege, I must have lost my mind due to the stress. As a fellow noble and family man, I hope you can forgive my rudeness.

"If there's anything I can do to help, you just have to ask." Krame stood up, giving Lith a polite bow even though he was the Lord of the house. His hypocrisy made Lith want to puke, but he had more important matters to attend to.

"The past is in the past. I'm sure Mage Friya has mentioned to you our need for a piece of sensitive information." Lith said.

Before he could even finish the phrase, the Viscount took a folder out of his pocket dimension and handed it to Lith.

"I hope this is enough. I took care of procuring it through safe channels. The nature of your inquiry is known only to the three of us."

Lith quickly checked the folder's content. Not only there was a complete list of all the people affected by the Griever, but also another one containing all the names of the known members of the Church of the Six along with their addresses.

"It's perfect, Viscount. You can rest assured that the Crown will hear from me about your cooperation." Lith's words were actually far from being benign.

He meant that he would not forget to mention how the noble had put his own interest before Zantia's and how Krame had treated him when he believed to have the upper hand.

Yet his warm smile and calm tone fooled the Viscount, who could already picture himself obtaining the city Lord's seat thanks to Lith's recommendation.

After they finished eating, Lith and Friya went to her room to plan their next move. The Viscount had gracefully relieved her of all her duties and had assigned her as Lith's aide until the crisis was resolved.

"This suck! I didn't get to give you a single order that our positions are already reversed." Friya said while opening the door.

Her room was actually a small apartment. It had a living room, a bedroom, and its own bathroom. Each one of them was bigger than Lith's room and was equipped with all comforts.

"It seems that I got the room reserved for the unwanted guests." Lith sat at the high table in the living room and unfolded a big map of the city of Zantia from the folder the Viscount had given to him.

Then, he also took out the list of people affected by the Griever and marked their addresses with red dots. Friya helped him, cross-referencing their names with the known affiliates of the Church of the Six.

"This doesn't make much sense." She pointed out once they were done.

"The number of people suffering from the Griever are way less than I expected. There are barely more than 200 names on the list. Even a medium city like Zantia has thousands of citizens. Not even a hypochondriac would call something of this extent a plague."

"You are right. We are missing something." Lith said.

After witnessing the anguish of the city guards, the fear in the eyes of Count Cestor, and how the population of Zantia was split between believers and non-believers, he was expecting a much worse situation.

The dots on the map were just a mess and he didn't recognize most of the names. He called his handler and asked her help. Kamila was a data analyst, if there was a pattern, she should have been able to find it.

"Well, it's a very short list. It will just take a few minutes." She said after Lith had scanned for her all the information he had at his disposal. He could see her hands dancing on the holographic interface with the speed and the grace of a piano player.

"I can already tell you that the number of people on the list is oddly convenient. It's just a few units below the threshold that makes mandatory to alert the authorities."

Kamila's words made Lith realize another piece of the puzzle. Up to that moment, he had thought that the limited number of victims was due to the Awakened behind the church lacking the manpower for a bigger scheme.

Now, instead, he was sure it had been an intentional move to prevent outsiders from messing with their plan.

'Picking an isolated city in the middle of winter lockdown, the timing of my summon and of the snowstorm. This cannot be just a coincidence. Whatever they are doing, they must be hiding from the Council, not the army.'

'Otherwise they wouldn't risk involving me.' Lith thought.

"I'm done." Kamila said as the list on Lith's hologram was now reduced to 84 names, each followed by their position in the city's administrative offices and their clearance levels.

"Aside from the obvious city Lord, these people are all bureaucrats and officials of medium importance. None of them holds a special relevance to the city, but if you put them all together, they give you access to all key points of Zantia.

"Among them there are the guards tasked to check the city entrances, clerks that can hasten or slow down any paperwork you might need, and even those in charge for the maintenance of the emergency arrays"

"With their combined help, a smart person would have full control over Zantia's available resources. They could smuggle or hide anything inside the city and even take some of the relics stored there for emergencies without anyone noticing."

"I doubt it's anything that big." Lith shook his head.

"How long ago was the Church of the Six founded?"

"Over nine months ago." Kamila replied.

"When did the Griever first appeared?"

"A month ago, right after the lockdown."

'I can't imagine six Awakened wasting a whole year in the middle of nowhere. According to Firgon, the Church was on the verge of collapsing before the Griever. They must be using the Church as a cover and as a scapegoat in case something goes wrong.' Lith thought.

"We need a second map. Maybe if we remove all the marks belonging to the officials, we can get a better picture of why they picked those people as victims." Friya said.

"It's a waste of time." Lith extended his arms and used light magic to create a holographic copy of the map right above the real one. Thanks to his training, he was now able to add a tinge of colors by using other elements, giving it a higher definition.

Chapter 576 Borrowed time

"Good gods!" Friya had seen Lith's creations during Jirni's birthday, but back then they were all based on a single element. Something that more or less, she too could do.

She waved her hand through the hologram, feeling its warmth and shattering it into stardust.

"Friya!" Lith said.

"I'm sorry, I was just too curious. It almost looked solid. Was it solid?" She didn't sound sorry at all. Her hazel eyes sparkled like during their academy days when she was about to learn one of the marvels magic was capable of.

"I wish! Do you have any idea how hard it is to create a map? There are hundreds of streets and buildings that I cannot possibly remember. I need to be able to look at the original to keep it stable. The moment your hand covered the map, I've lost both my focus and mana!" Lith snarled while creating a second one.

He was actually capable of creating a map from scratch, but only if the original was stored inside Soluspedia.

"Sorry, Lith." This time she was sincere. Friya felt stupid for both her action and her words, yet she didn't regret them. For the first time in years, she was having fun. Ever since the academy had ended, her life had been one of duty.

First, she had to take care of Quylla. Friya had helped her to retake her fifth year at the White Griffon and overcome the trauma Quylla had suffered after killing Yurial under the influence of Nalear's slave ring.

Then, her sisters had left Friya alone to search for their own path in life. After all that had happened to her during the Academy, Friya trusted no one and was unable to relax unless when in the safety of her own home.

The Crystal Shield guild was her creature and her cage at the same time. Leading arrogant and disgruntled mages was a full time job that left her no time for a personal life. Lith was a safe oasis for her.

Someone she could trust almost as much as Quylla, but who unlike her sister and guildmates didn't need her protection. Whenever they met, he always had something to teach her about magic, and that was the most precious gift anyone could give her.

"Don't worry. Lieutenant Yehval, please this time read me only the addresses of all those who have no role in the city's administration." Lith said while patting Friya's shoulder.

That small gesture made Kamila hate her job for the second time in as many days. Hundreds of kilometers and a snowstorm separated them, yet it was being called by her last name that exacerbated the distance between them.

For a moment, she envied Friya for her strength, her magic, and because Kamila imagined her free to do what she wanted rather than what she had to. Then, she started listing the addresses and a new pattern appeared on the map.

What appeared in front of their eyes was still a mess, but at least it didn't look like a Pollock anymore. They spent a few minutes trying to make sense of the image, but to no avail.

"If you tilt your head and remove these dots you can almost see a magic circle." Lith said while tapping on several locations on the map.

"Right idea but wrong dots. If we ignore the dots you proposed, you can see that some of the remaining ones form this array." Friya's slender finger traced a circle above the map.

"The problem is that you can't ignore any of those points. If all of the locations are magically marked the same way, then they would disrupt the formation. Even if you are right, two overlapping arrays would cancel each other without proper insulation."

Kamila's words left Friya flabbergasted.

"How come you are an array expert?" She asked.

"I'm not. I just repeated what Lith and Manohar yelled at each other back in Othre. They quarreled about runes and lines of power so much that I ended up learning a thing or two." Kamila chuckled.

'Wait a minute. I think you're both right. Check the list more carefully.' Solus thought.

"Sons of a bitch" Lith blurted out as he realized the meaning of her words.

"Kami- I mean, Lieutenant Yehval, please filter the names based on the floor they live on." Like most cities surrounded by walls, Zantia had no choice but to expand vertically rather than horizontally.

Most buildings were at least three-story high.

Instead of ignoring the dots, Lith split the map into three different layers, each one with its own set of tokens and marked with a different color. Even a layman like Kamila could easily recognize the magic circles formed by connecting the dots.

"Okay, this is not good." Lith said.

"I recognize the array on top and the one at the ground level, but I have no idea what the middle one is. The upper circle is a containment array, similar to those I use when I practice Forgemastering.

"Its purpose is to contain great masses of energy and prevent them from escaping. It maximizes the effects of a magical procedure. The bottom one is a grounding array, used to safely disperse mana in case a spell goes out of control."

"I've already taken a scan of the holographic map and of the three arrays." Kamila said.

"I'll contact immediately General Vorgh, the Master Warden, and call you back as soon as I have some answers. Over and out."

Lith pulled the curtain covering the window to check the weather. The wind carrying the snow was so strong that he wasn't able to see further than ten meters even with his enhanced senses.

'I have no idea where the Awakened could be and even if I did, I can't risk making a move before I understand what their endgame is. Going to the Church of the Six now would be pointless.

'The clerics are likely to be unwitting puppets in their hands, so interrogating them would be a waste of time. The ones performing "miracles" are the Awakened ones, but they will not show up without a crowd.

'Once the storm settles, I need to attend one of their ceremonies. If they made me come here, it means that they are almost done with their preparations.' He thought.

"A bronze coin for your thoughts." Friya said.

"We're on the clock. The arrays are completed and they felt so confident that one of them attacked me in the open. I don't like that they lured and trapped me here. If I don't get rid of them now, they could find me again.

"Also, I hate them for using arrays to perform their crap. Whenever I use an array, I can still hear Yurial whining about Wardens being useless." Lith replied. His voice went from calm to stone cold when he talked about his enemies and then it became sad while he remembered his lost friend.

"Me too. I miss him so much." Friya sighed.

"You know, right after Balkor's attack, when you and Phloria started to be all lovey-dovey, he asked me if I was interested in being his friend with benefits."

"Sounds like Yurial. What did you answer him?" Lith said with a light smile.

"I slapped him and said no, of course. I never regretted my choice, I'm only sad that he never got the opportunity to get the happiness he deserved."

## Chapter 577 Borrowed Time Part 2

"Do you mind if I ask you a personal question?" Friya said while pouring them some hot tea.

"No, but I can't guarantee you that I'll answer."

"Don't worry, I'm not going to pry your wall of secrets." She chuckled.

"We all knew you had a crush on Nalear and a soft spot for Wanemyre. I was wondering why you never made a pass at me. Now that we are not young and stupid anymore, I'm not embarrassed to say that it hurt my pride for a bit."

"Well, it's simple. When we first met, you were just another pompous, stuck up noble. After the second exam, when we started to become friends, you had already become too similar to me." Lith said.

"You have always been the most beautiful girl in our class, but I have a thing for cute girls and you have never been cute. You went from obnoxious to dark and gloomy. You and I are like moons. We may shine, but our light is cold and distant.

"We need a sun, someone willing to walk that distance and accept us for who we are instead that for how we look like. That's why I ended up with Phloria first and with Kamila now."

Friya had to admit that even if they were good friends, her crazy matched Lith's crazy in all the wrong possible ways. Just the thought of being together with someone more paranoid, grumpy, and aggressive than she was, gave her the creeps.

"Are you still practicing the impossible arrays Yurial found for us?" Lith asked.

"Every single day. I'll always be grateful to you for teaching me the importance of first magic. There are so many things that I would have missed if I didn't follow your crazy training routine during the fifth year.

"I may not be able to create holograms yet, but I can assure you that once we find those rogue mages, they are in for more than one nasty surprise." She said with a ferocious grin.

Since the snowstorm continued unabated and Kamila had yet to call back, they started exchanging pointers about magic. Friya revealed to him that she had kept in touch with Professor Rudd, the dimensional magic expert of the White Griffon.

They were reminiscing together all the cruel words the man had said to his students in general and to them in particular when someone knocked on her door.

"I'm sorry to disturb you, Lady Ernas." A butler in a white and dark blue livery said her with a deep bow. He was a middle aged man with receding red hair and the face of someone who had just seen a ghost.

"There's a guest on the door who claims to be a friend of someone named Scourge. I tried to send him away, but he refused. Some of your men intervened, but I'm afraid they will only make things worse."

"Did he say his name?" Friya and Lith exchanged a quick glance hearing the name magical beasts had bestowed upon him.

"No, I didn't even ask him about it because he has clearly got the wrong address..."

Friya didn't let him finish the phrase and opened a Warp Steps leading to the mansion's hallway. The front door was wide open, letting the freezing wind in as snow started to pile up on the magnificent blue and gold carpet covering the floor.

Several members of the Crystal Shield guild lay on the ground unconscious. Only a few of them had managed to even draw their weapons, but none of them had the time to use them. Not a single drop of blood had been spilled.

The man in front of them was a barbarian, at least 2.1 meters (7') tall. He wore a hunter set of heavy clothes made of warm animal fur and boots bigger than a bucket. His face was rough and savage, with a square jaw and a cleft chin.

The hunter's long hair and his well trimmed beard were flaming red, with not a single snowflake on them. Even though he was lifting one of Friya's men from the neck with a single hand, waiting for him to pass out, his emerald eyes were calm and wise.

There was no way Lith wouldn't recognize him, even after all those years.

"Put Kallum down!" Friya said while unsheathing her sword.



"It's good to see you again, Friya." He said with a warm smile as he let the man's feet touch the ground again, allowing him to breathe.

"You may know me, but I don't know you. What do you want from Lith?" She said while never lowering her weapon.

A sudden gust of wind swept her hair as a blurry figure moved past Friya and struck the hunter on the side of his jaw with pinpoint accuracy, sending him tumbling outside.

"You bastard! How dare you to show your face like that?" Lith's anger was so great that, without Solus's help, his blue aura would have already filled the manor's hallway.

She would have liked to say something, but even though she was already restraining his mana flow, both the lights and the shadows were seconds away from coming to life. Solus couldn't afford to lose her focus.

Blood trickled from the hunter's mouth as he stood up.

"You've gotten stronger, Scourge. I hoped you would rather focus on becoming a better person. Power isn't everything." The man said as if Lith had offered him his hand instead of sending him flying with a punch.

"Five years! Five fucking years without a single word from you." Wind and snow slapped Lith's face. He ignored the former, whereas the heat emanating from his skin was so strong that the latter evaporated on contact.

"I almost died for you and what did I get in return? You deceived me! You turned the only friend I had ever had against me! You abandoned me! You took away Selia from me! Tell me why I shouldn't kill you on the spot." Lith said.

The snow melted and boiled under his feet as the whole street was plunged into darkness, as if the sun had been blotted out of the sky. The hunter stood tall, uncaring of the ongoing unnatural phenomena and Lith's accusations.

"You didn't do it for me, but for yourself. What I did, instead, I did it for you. To stop your madness. It was the only way I had to give you a better future and judging from what I've heard, I'd say I succeeded.

"I never abandoned you. I simply couldn't afford to return and waste our sacrifice. As for Selia, she was never yours to begin with. She followed me of her own will. You are only right about one thing. I owe you.

"Without your reckless, selfish act I would be dead. I live on borrowed time, your time. My life is yours to take if that's what you truly want." Protector opened his arms in a defenseless position, exposing both his neck and heart.

Lith extended his clawed hands toward Protector's chest and hugged him as strong as he could.

'Solus, analysis.' He thought.

'Protector is barely halfway blue and his physical strength hasn't improved much.' She replied as Lith's fury faded.

"How can you be so weak after all this time?" Lith said.

## Chapter 578 Catching up Part 1

"Raising two children while taking care of a pregnant wife doesn't leave much free time for training. Besides, it's not me being slow so much as you being relentless. Do you at least have a girlfriend?" Ryman said while returning the embrace.

Lith was happy to hear that his long since lost friends were all right and that Protector's manners had significantly improved. In the past, he would have opened the conversation by asking Lith about his mating habits.

"I do have one."

"Is she the one in the ring?"

"No."

"Is she the one waiting for you on the doorsteps?"

"It's a long story." Lith said.

"Come inside. I doubt you are here just to see me."

"I would never leave Selia and the children in the middle of winter for a social call. I'm here because you need my help, Scourge. Is this your new house?" Ryman said while pointing at the Viscount's manor.

"It is now. Remember to watch your mouth. I've yet to share any of my secrets with anyone."

At those words, Ryman lost his cool and stopped in his tracks.

"No one knows about Solus, the Awakening, your other form, or Carl?" He said with a whisper.

When Lith had given Protector part of his life force to repair his damaged mana core, the Emperor Beast had accessed to all of his memories, even those from his life on Earth.

"Tista knows about Solus and Awakening, Phloria knows about my other half, but that's it. Only you and Solus know everything about me." The tone Lith used made it clear he was still unwilling to open up.

"Who is this guy? How does he know my name?" Friya had put away her sword when she had seen the two men hugging, but her confusion still remains.

"He is..." Lith was searching for a plausible lie when Protector cut him short.

"We briefly met during Balkor's attack. You know me with the name of Protector, but I'd like you to call me Ryman Fastarrow. Selia says I should always introduce myself with a real name rather than just a title."

Friya racked her brain, trying to remember where she had heard that name before. Her mouth almost dropped onto the ground when she realized their guest's identity.

"No way! You are..." Lith snapped his fingers, Blinking all three of them back inside Friya's room before it was too late.

"...an Emperor Beast. How can you possess a human body?" A Hush spell prevented her voice from being heard.

"I didn't steal anyone's body." Ryman said with a tinge of annoyance in his voice.

"Once we reach this stage of evolution, we can shapeshift. It's not a big deal, a lot of creatures can do it." Lith didn't like how Protector looked at him while saying that.

"Yet it's a big secret among beasts, like the fact that they can talk." Lith chimed in.

"He is putting a lot of trust in you. Most humans would go crazy if they knew that beasts and plants can shapeshift. Do you remember Gadorf the Wyvern? He was able to do the same."

His words calmed her a bit, but not much. Suddenly she had no idea how to recognize who was human and who was just pretending to be one.

"I need to sit and something strong to drink." She shook her head, hoping the room would stop spinning soon.

"How is Selia doing?" Lith asked.

"I had to propose to her to make her move away from Lutia on such short notice." Ryman's words made Friya choke on her drink.

"Isn't Selia a woman? I mean a human? Are you two really married?" She blurted out.

Lith had to repress laughter. The same Protector who was always so patient and kind, the closest thing to a magical father figure Lith had, was now dilating his nostril in annoyance.

"Yes, yes, and yes. If you keep stating the obvious, I'll never get to the point, though."

Friya became beet red and hid her face behind her glass.

'I need something stronger.' She thought as she put the wine away and took a bottle of Griffon Fire out of her pocket dimension. A single malt whiskey with over 50% of alcohol content.

"Everything went fine until our first daughter was born. Thank the Great Mother, after almost getting killed I became proficient in healing magic, so Selia didn't need a midwife. It would have been a mess since Lilia had quite a fur."

Friya had one shot at the word "daughter" and another at "fur".

"Was she a hybrid?" Lith asked, giving Friya plenty of reasons for a third shot.

"Yes. Useless to say, Selia didn't take it well. She yelled at me for lying to her and kicked me out of our house. To be fair, I didn't lie. She never asked and I never thought of a reason for telling her about me being an Emperor Beast."

"How could you not tell her? That's a pretty big elephant, you know?" Friya said.

"I came out of the woods naked, I told her I knew her for a long time and I had uncanny magic powers. I thought it was pretty obvious."

"She must have thought you were a friendly but nutjob mage! What kind of logic is yours?" Another shot bit the dust.

"Is my life a drinking game or what? Gods, now I understand why you never speak about yourself with anyone. Silly me thinking you and Selia were just paranoid." Protector took the bottle away. She had already started slurring her words.

"Are you saying that Lith is an Emperor Beast too?" Friya was on the verge of a nervous breakdown.

"No, he's not. His body is on par with a veteran magical beast, but it's weak compared to an Emperor."

"Shut your damn mouth!" Lith couldn't believe how stupidly sincere Ryman was.

'He must have survived this far because Selia has him under her thumb.' He thought.

"I need more alcohol." Small sparks of light appeared around the bottle, making part of its content fill her glass again.

"Master of space, remember?" Friya was happy her ability with dimensional ability was able to shock the two monsters she was sharing the room with.

"After a few days, she calmed down and allowed me to return home. Selia was still pretty pissed off, but she had no idea how to raise a hybrid which made her desperate for help. She was afraid that if humans found out about Lilia, they would kill her.

"After I managed to make our daughter turn into her human form, things went smoothly and after a few months, she forgave me. Now everything is settled. We had a son, Leran and now Selia is carrying our third one.

"Selia picked all of their names in your honor. She says that without you, we would have never met and that without your sacrifice she would have been forced to raise our child alone. You are their godfather, so you should visit them sometimes."

On Mogar, it was custom to name a child with the same initial letter of the most esteemed member of the family as a good omen. Lith was moved by Selia's consideration towards him.

After Lith told him the part of his story Friya was allowed to know and they were caught up, Protector explained to them the reason for his coming.

## Chapter 579 Catching Up Part 2

"After almost dying by the hands of Balkor's Valor, I understood I needed to study magic more seriously. Whenever I'm not providing for my family or raising my children, I study under a powerful Emperor Beast, Faluel the Hydra.

"I never forgot about my debt of gratitude towards you, so I asked Faluel to inform me if she ever heard something about you. That's how I learned about your predicament.

"Fighting three A- amazing mages alone it's difficult to even for someone as experienced as you are. I still regret not learning about Nalear until it was too late. I couldn't be there for you then, but I'm not leaving you alone this time." Protector said.

"You know a Hydra?" Friya had already reached the point where no amount of alcohol could calm her down anymore.

"Yes, she is my mentor. I'm sure she would gladly help you too, Lith. Except during winter. She hates the cold."

"Wait, how does she know about Zantia's situation?" Lith asked.

"The Lord of the Kellar region somehow spectated your fight. Emperor Beasts don't care about humans but look after their own. He knew I was looking out for you and he alerted Faluel. You know the rest."

"Gods, I can't believe it! Magical beasts sent reinforcements to help you whereas the army is still sitting on its thumbs." Friya had no idea that Lith had reported about the existence of only two Awakened ones to protect his cover.

"Magical beasts care only for themselves, whereas the army has to protect the entire country." Lith said while winking at Protector to make him shut up.

Lith told Protector everything he knew about the Church of the Six, the group of Awakened one he had fought, and showed him the arrays they had planted inside the city.

"Do you really know even about arrays?" Protector was flabbergasted.

"Does this Kamila really exist or is she made up? He can't possibly take care of her, his job, their cubs, and be so good at magic!"

"No cubs." Lith's voice was stone cold, while Friya giggled due to being tipsy and because of Lith's embarrassment.

"But you are together for..."

"No cubs and not planning on making them!" Lith's army amulet blinked signaling an incoming call and giving him an excuse to change the topic.

Contrary to his expectations, it wasn't Kamila's hologram which materialized in the middle of the room, but General Vorgh's.

He was a short old man, barely 1.5 meters (5') tall wearing the light blue uniform of the army. Judging by the several wrinkles on his face and the spots on his skin, he had to be at least seventy years old.

Yet his sky blue eyes had the wild vibe of a predator on the chase. His short white hair and finely trimmed beard shone like silver fur under the sun, reinforcing everyone's impression of being staring at a beast of the north.

The man's sleeves bore a silver star. It identified him with the rank of Brigadier General. His right hand was wilding a staff made of white oak with six violet magic crystals engraved on it in a straight line.

Six more floated above its top, forming a perfect circle that orbited around the staff and followed its every movement. Lith had already seen it in action. It allowed Vorgh to use impossible arrays as if he was an Awakened.

The six engraved magic crystals were likely to be its power source, whereas the floating ones were responsible for creating the true arrays and harmonizing the world energy with Vorgh's mana.

"Spellbreaker Verhen, I'm afraid you are facing madmen." The title Vorgh addressed Lith with made those present aware of the gravity of the situation.

"Before we speak, you should send away these people. Civilians can't be involved in a military operation." He said while pointing at Friya and Ryman.

"General Vorgh, allow me to introduce you Lady Friya Ernas and Ryman Fastarrow. I conscripted them to help me. They have all the right to know since they are putting their lives on the line along with mine." Lith said.

"So be it. I agree with your assessment of the two arrays you identified, but you have failed to grasp how they interact with the third one. To be honest, I'm not sure either. Mine are just speculations, but it's all I have to offer you for now."

Lith nodded Vorgh to continue as Solus griped due to mana sense not working on holograms. She would have really liked to take a closer look at the staff's pseudo core.

"The array between the grounding and the containment ones was called Third Eye by its creator and Fool's Gold by everyone else. It channels the world energy inside a mage's body, making it possible for them to awaken their hidden talents.

"No one uses it, though, because not only are its effects just temporary, but also using it greatly shortens its user's lifespan. Horan Palanor became one of Mogar's most powerful mages for almost two days before dying for its side effects.

"No one uses Fool's Gold because it doesn't really give you any power, it simply condenses your life force, so you can achieve for a few months the power you would get in two years of practice by losing ten years in the process."

The news stunned both Lith and Protector. Even Awakened ones had to take care of their life force because it couldn't be replenished. Accumulation and Invigoration slowed down its consumption, but they didn't affect the amount of life force one was born with.

Lith's Death Vision was a consequence of his attempt to saving Protector's life at the expense of his own.

"The worst thing is that whoever modified Palanor's array turned it into forbidden magic." Vorgh said making Lith even more confused.

"If a mage can get more power by simply sacrificing lives, I would expect it to be one of the most popular crimes. Why have I never heard of it before?" He asked.

"Because it doesn't work that way. Your talent requires your life force, your memory, your experiences." Vorgh explained.

"The upper containment array is used to store and amplify the world energy, Fool's Gold will temporarily enhance the talent of its user, and the grounding array will discharge the excess energy using the people affected by the Griever as a medium.

"It's not an illness. Those two mages injected their own mana inside others to both form the arrays and use them as catalysts. That way, the whole city will take part in the process and all its inhabitants will lose a decade or two of life!"

"What could they possibly gain from that?" Lith asked.

"My hypothesis is that they plan to lessen Fool's Gold's side effects by using the least necessary amount of world energy and discharging the rest on the population. This way, instead of losing twenty years they could reduce it to eighteen." Vorgh replied.

"It's a negligible amount, that's why I say they are madmen. The use of forbidden magic is a game changer. We are sending you Spellbreakers as soon as possible. Normally it would take them a couple of hours to get there between preparations and traveling, but the snowstorm will slow things down.

"The only other piece of good news I can give you is where you can find those responsible. To benefit from Fool's Gold's effects, the mage must be exactly in the middle of it. When they activate the array, it will become visible. Good luck, Spellbreaker Verhen." Vorgh ended the call.

## Chapter 580 Desperate Moves Part1

"What's our next move?" Friya asked. "Even though we now know their endgame, we can't just sit idly. Once the array is activated, there's no telling how long the process will take. I don't want to lose years of life!"

"I agree. We must make our move before they get the upper hand." Ryman said.

"We must lure them out in the open and to do it, we need to break their toy. Without the people affected by the Griever, their array will break. The only reason why they do not get themselves healed is that they have fallen for the Church's deception."

"We need to get rid of the Church and heal those morons." Lith said.

After learning about the presence of more than two Awakened inside Zantia, Lith had been forced to give up on his original plan of storming the Church in his hybrid form. It was something he had to do on his own since it would have been hard to explain to Friya about his shapeshifting abilities.

Protector's arrival was truly a blessing. He was both an excellent fighter and a perfect cover for what was going to happen. Friya already knew about Lith's abnormal body, Death Vision, and about him sharing his life force with Ryman.

Now all Lith needed was a better understanding of the Church of the Six's teachings before giving those Awakened a taste of their own medicine.

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Just a few kilometers away from Viscount Krame's mansion, the four remaining Awakened were arguing about their plan and cursing Kieran's name. If not for his childish pride of being the next heir of the Blood Desert's best assassin, everything would still be on the right track.

"We have no choice. We must continue even without Deraniel." Ailia said. Like Pelion, she was native of the Gorgon Empire. Her blue mana core was as strong as Lith's, whereas her body was weaker than his.

Her master had Awakened her when she already had a green mana core. Her body needed a lot of time to adapt, and she still needed help to survive whenever it was the moment to expel the impurities for a breakthrough.

She was 1.75 meters (5'9") tall with light blonde hair and green eyes. Thanks to being an Awakened, her figure would make most men break their necks while turning their heads at her passing. Yet among the Awakened ones, she was just one of many.

"Agreed. Not all of us have an Awakened daddy like Deraniel. 'There's always next year' my ass!" Pelion said while imitating Deraniel's accent and spitting on the fireplace, turning it into a pillar of fire with a spark of mana.

"I'm not saying to give up on the plan. I need Third Eye as much as you do. I'm just saying that maybe we should delay it. If we leave Zantia now, the Council will never find us." Benyo nervously bit her nails.

She was 1.77 meters (5'10) with flaming red hair and hazel eyes. She possessed a bright cyan mana core, but thanks to her master Awakening her when she was very young, her body refinement had been easy, at least compared to her companions.

Thanks to that, her body was stronger than Ailia, and her figure was even better.

"Delay it? We'll never get another opportunity like this. The city is isolated and the arrays are set in place. If you are so afraid, then I say that we start the ritual now and then we run away as fast as we can.

"During spring and summer, it would be impossible to keep so many people locked inside their homes, not to mention we will probably be already dead!" Jaren said.

He was 1.8 (5'11") meters tall, with brown hair and eyes. He wasn't as tall nor bulky as Pelion was, but he had the build of a professional fighter. He had a bright cyan mana core and his body was on par with Benyo, allowing him to go hand to hand with magical beasts.

He and Benyo were native of the Griffon Kingdom, but it didn't make them any less scared. The use of forbidden magic was a crime even in the Awakened community, in case the Council discovered their extracurricular activities, they were as good as dead.

Yet they weren't afraid of the Council so much as of their own masters. An Awakened mage was considered responsible for all of their disciples, so they would never bestow their gifts upon someone for nothing.

Awakening was a rare phenomenon, and not all of those who managed to do it on their own would live long enough to become hard to kill. There were those who died of starvation, in battle, or simply due to their own stupidity.

So, when an Awakened mage needed an heir, they would pick up one or more talented youths as their apprentices. The one who succeeded would inherit their legacy, while the others had to find a new master or die.

Deraniel was an exception since his master was also his own father. Even if he failed, Tasaar would not kill him. Kieran was another exception. Lesalia only picked one apprentice at the time and disposed of them as soon as she found them wanting.

Ever since Lith had destroyed the Black Star, Lesalia had used him as a benchmark to push her disciple to and beyond his limits. With his life on the line, Kieran had soon started to hate Lith's guts, fearing that the rogue Awakened's feats would be the death of him.

The remaining members of the group were the cream of the crop in their own territory, but only thanks to Third Eye. They were all brilliant, but not geniuses. With their talent alone they could see the top of the mountain, but never reach it.



That was the reason why they had resorted to using such an elaborate scheme. They had met each other during Council meetings, bonding thanks to their mutual age and problems.

Together, they had managed to alter Third Eye with forbidden magic, so that they would split his effects, both good and bad, equally between the six of them. They would still lose a consistent amount of their life force, but the ritual had brought them to the top.

They had calculated that to beat their competition they would lose a total of two hundred years of life each. It was a small price to pay to inherit their masters' legacy and territory.

Especially if the alternative was dying young after having spent their whole lives slaving away. Just like Vorgh had said, the forbidden magic allowed them to slightly mitigate the cost of the ritual each time they performed it.

Yet even one year of life force mattered, since thanks to Accumulation, it would last ten if not twenty times as much. The humans they harmed didn't matter. They would lose their own life force and die decades later, making their deaths seemingly unrelated.

The six Awakened had lured Lith for two reasons. The first was to use him as the seventh member and further reduce the strain on their life force. The second was because Kieran wanted to get rid of him and prove to be the best fighter in the three Great Countries.

Yet the plan was to make them fight after the ritual, not before. They needed both of them alive, especially since as a rogue Lith had no connection with the Council, so he couldn't report them even if he managed to escape.

The Wyrmling arrival, though, had proven them to be dead wrong.