

Supreme M 66

Chapter 66 Error Of Judgmen

The next day, after breakfast, Lith could notice that people were looking at him with astonished eyes. He had no idea if it depended by his new set of rings and the amulet in plain sight, over the shirt. After all, only the user knew its quality, they looked all the same.

Another possibility was that the news from the Master healer class had started to spread. Either way, he didn't care. Lith just waved his hand to those who stared at him for too long, giving them the finger and forcing them to turn around.

The first lesson would be with Professor Trasque again, this time in Theory of Combat Magic's training hall. While everyone else was on foot, checking the map from time to time, Lith flew straight to destination, arriving several minutes earlier.

He spent that time with Solus, reviewing all the contingency plans they had prepared against Professor Nalear's dumbing effect.

Thanks to Soluspedia, he had no need to read and memorize what was required for any lesson, but he still needed to practice the accents and hand signs.

Knowing was not doing. Still, Soluspedia had given him a lot of spare time, compared to his peers, and he had used that time to prepare for the worse.

Lith had no idea if his new body was so much worse than his old one against hormones, or if his problem was psychologic.

Maybe he was so disaccustomed to strong positive feelings, that the unexpected first crush had been able to caught him off guard. All the good things that happened in his life, he had obtained them through effort and hard work.

He wasn't used for things to go well just because of luck. Lith needed years of constant care and affection, before accepting that his new family was composed by good people.

And now, out of the blue, he had such strong feelings for a complete stranger, that just thinking about her, would make him feel all warm and fuzzy inside.

- "If just the idea of looking into those eyes, bright green as a luscious forest during spring, under the noonday sun, makes me weak in the knees and dries my mouth, I'm scared to death by what the real thing could do." Lith thought.

"Yeah, agreed." Solus sneered. "It's only getting worse, you are only a few bad rhymes away to write her a poem."

"Yes." Lith inwardly sighed. "The good thing is that unless I think about her, I'm able to be my usual self. I must avoid turning into a rambling fool if she comes near me. Solus, I'm depending on you in case sh*t hits the fan. Do your worst." –

The training hall was even bigger than the canteen. The space inside was completely empty, except for circular rings with a diameter of ten metres (11 yards), evenly spaced among them and spread throughout the whole room.

Lith's train of thought was interrupted only when he saw Professor Trasque arrive, followed by Headmaster Linjos. After all of the students had arrived, Linjos made them sit down on the ground. He had something to tell.

"If any of you is asking himself why Lady Hestia, Lady Vark and Lady Carn haven't attended any of yesterday's lessons, the answer is they were busy packing their stuff. As a matter of fact, they have been dishonourably expelled from this academy.

The terrible events that transpired yesterday, have been added to their personal files. They can apply to other academies, yet I doubt anyone will give them even a probation admittance.

I am not telling you this because I want to threaten you. I just want you to realize that your actions have consequences. Life isn't a game, there is no do over. More importantly, I want you reflect about the society you want to live in.

Does anyone of you know that, despite at the beginning of each year six out of ten students belong to the great noble families, seven out of ten of those that actually manage to graduate are just commoners, merchants and small nobles?

And why is that? Because while the nobles waste their time harassing others, thinking that their family name will always solve every problem, the others work hard, knowing how important magic is. They don't have the luxury of a second chance.

If a noble fails, he just returns to his beautiful manor, his whole life is still planned ahead for him. Those who succeed, instead, have too much to lose, and their motivation keeps them focused. Most of the time, a huge part of that motivation is revenge.

Do you realize how many mages have destroyed entire noble households because of past grudges? Do you really want to live in a world where commoners tremble in fear of the nobles, while the nobles in turn fear the mages?

It's because of this flawed morality that our Kingdom is slowly devolving into chaos. The academy rules don't just protect the commoners from you, they also protect you from the mages of tomorrow.

Might makes right is all fun and games, until you find someone stronger than you. Then, it becomes a nightmare, where you can lose everything on a whim of your better. Law is a shield to defend the weak, not a sword to threaten others' lives.

I hope that you all take my words to heart. Thanks for your time."

As soon as the Headmaster left the room, the air filled with comments about the news. It had been years since the last time someone managed to get expelled, and it only happened because a Professor witnessed the events.

It was easy to predict where the discussion was headed, so Lith took out the Ballot and stood up near Professor Trasque. He had joined the academy a little more than 24 hours ago, and all that mean looks routine had already bored him to death.

Trasque didn't miss any of it.

"Still blaming the victim, uh? Our Headmaster is really a good guy. He really believes in you lot. As for me, I believe that humans are too arrogant and self-centered to have any concept of pain outside their own.

People are only able to empathise with things they experienced hard enough to get hurt themselves. That's why I took this job."

The contrast between Professor Trasque's handsome face and the cruel smile he made, managed to make it even creepier.

- "Between his veiled threats and the grins, the Professor really seems a full-blown psycho. I doubt he'll receive many love letters from the female students."

"Harrumph." Solus objected. "The pot calling the kettle black. That's the same face you do almost every minute of the day."

"Do I really have such an unsettling expression?!" Lith was flabbergasted.

"No sh*t, Sherlock!" –

"Now, let me explain today's lesson." Professor Trasque continued.

"These rings are special. Once activated, they become a closed cage, nothing can get in or out. I can also modify their internal structure as I see fit."

With a few flicks of his fingers, the pavement rose in different sections of the nearest ring, forming first a small corridor, then a stairway, and lastly an L shaped path.

"You will enter in this ring, in pairs. I'll prepare for you different scenarios, and in each one there will be an assailant and a victim. The assailant can either use first magic or a knife like this."

Trasque showed them a blunt piece of metal that could barely pass for a wedge.

"The victim can only use first magic for self-defence. The scenario ends as soon either one gets a direct hit."

Seeing a little too much enthusiasm in some of the students, he decided to make things clearer.

"I know what you are thinking, but it's not as it looks like. This room is for training, not fighting. It means that even winning every scenario, no matter as victim or assailant, won't necessarily give you any point.

You are here to learn how to handle difficult situations. What it really matters is not the result, but what you learn from experience. There's a lot of you, so we'll use two rings simultaneously. Don't worry, it won't take long.

This is a real-life simulation, not a bard's tale. Each try will last around five seconds, ten if you really take things slowly. We have plenty of time. To follow the Headmaster's wishes, I divided you in pairs composed by a commoner and a noble.

Let's do a few warm-up rounds, to give you an idea. Mister 'most wanted' here, has just volunteered. Who else?"

Seeing no raised hand, he picked a random student.

- "Solus, since I have impulse control issues, limit my output to Nana's first magic level."

"Copy that." –

In the first round Lith was the victim, while the assailant was a fifteen years old girl with shoulder length curly red hair. Despite she was at least five centimetres (2 inches) taller than Lith, she had no confidence in her physical skills, so she decided to use magic.

When Lith saw that she was actually performing hand signs for first magic, he weaved together two spells. The first made a thick layer of ice appear under her feet, while the second was a wind blow, the equivalent of a push.

When she tried shifting her weight to resist the push, she slipped, falling down head first. Trasque started laughing his a*s off. The fight had lasted barely two seconds.

"I'm sorry, I really am." He said while helping her to get up, healing her broken nose.

"I completely forgot he is a perfect silent hexacaster, that made a living out of hunting since he was four, while you led a pampered life, composing poems. There was no malice on my side, gods are my witnesses."

No one believed a single word he was saying.

"Jokes aside, that was terrible on your side." He said to Lith.

"Let's see if the problem it's you or your opponent. Who is capable of at least silent triple casting?" Few hands were raised.

"Okay, among you, who received military training?" Among the remaining ones, Trasque picked the biggest guy he could find. It was a fifteen-year-old boy, already 1.77 meters (5'9") high, weighing at least 80 kilograms (176 pounds).

His muscular body resembled that of a marine.

As soon as Trasque let them start, Lith threw the knife at his victim, guiding and accelerating it with a sliver of air magic.

The student dodged it easily, but not having any real combat experience, he kept his eyes on the knife until it clashed with the translucent yellow barrier that enveloped the ring. When he looked back at Lith, he was already in front of him.

Lith's right hand released a blinding light with the same intensity of several cameras flashing together, while the left one was holding a small ice knife, aimed to the victim's throat.

"Okay, stop." Trasque appeared between them, grabbing Lith by the wrist.

Once again, the battle ended a second after its start.

"Kid, I don't remember stuttering. Your performance is a perfect example of what you don't have to do. Get off the ring. Minus twenty points for you, and that's because this was just a warm up. The next time you do that, it will be much worse."

Chapter 67 Impulse Control Issues

Lith came down the ring with a dumbstruck expression, trying to understand what had just happened.

- "Maybe Professor Trasque wanted to teach you respect for the opponent. By beating them like that, you abused your power, and that's exactly what the Headmaster criticised earlier." Solus pondered.

"Trasque caring for respect? After how he threatened everyone and how he laughed in the face of that girl? Unlikely." –

Lith stood there, watching the other students performing their training. As Trasque predicted, every exchange was fast, but not as fast as Lith's. The performances he saw were mediocre at best, no points were assigned, but none were deducted either.

He was about to ask Solus to replay for him the exact wording Trasque had used, when he finally understood.

In the following two hours, whenever it was his turn, Lith would let his opponent perform his/her attack before neutralizing it when he played the victim, while as the assailant he would give them the time to react.

Doing so costed him several defeats.

Despite all his battle experience against savage and magical beasts, letting the opponent set his/her own rhythm would sometimes put him at a disadvantage that was unsurmountable in such a limited space, with only first magic.

Lith spent most of the time spectating the others, often clicking his tongue at a bad move or to his own stupidity. At the end of the lesson, most of the students were mentally exhausted.

The uniforms protected them from any harm first magic could do, but in such a competitive environment, even a simulated life and death situation was faced as real.

Playing in both roles, had made them realize how easy it was to take their lives, how big was the advantage that having a weapon granted during an ambush.

Only very few of them were actually capable of using first magic properly, the others were forced to improvise on the spot, desperately trying to score at least a win.

Lith was still fuming when Trasque came to him.

"Have you figured out your problem?" Trasque asked.

"Yes. This is an academy, not a battlefield. Hence my problem is an impulse control issue. During the warm up rounds, I took my opponents down so fast that neither of us could learn anything from the training.

In a real-life situation that would be good, but this is just an exercise, where I lost control on my pride and bloodlust. I risked to lead the others by example, making them so focused on winning to not learn neither from their fights or those of the others."

Trasque had a pleased expression.

"Not bad, kid. You avoided ranting about my allegedly unfair judgement and actually self-doubted yourself. Usually kids your age are incapable of introspection.

For that, I'll give you ten points for having learned your lesson, but the total still remains minus ten points, because I want you to remember it. A mage incapable of controlling his actions, is a danger to himself and others."

Lith bowed to him in sign of respect before leaving for the next class. Ten points were worth the Professor's respect, yet he realized that his reactions were out of proportions.

He was used to always be calm and collected, while now he was acting like a caged tiger trying to forcefully escape.

- "This is so unnatural for me. Why didn't I pretend to accept Yurial's peace offering yesterday? I had all to gain and nothing to lose. And today I wasn't able to grasp the meaning of the exercise until it was too late.

Could this be another effect of the hormones, or is it my body somehow rejecting my mind?" –

The thought was quite frightening, so Lith used Invigoration while walking, checking every nook and cranny of his being, searching for a clue. At a first look, everything was fine, everything was as he remembered from over a year ago.

But then he noticed that the impurities in his body had moved a little toward his mana core, yet that made no sense. It would only happen when he refined his internal energy, and he had long been stuck by the bottleneck.

So, Lith focused on his mana core and discovered the source of all his troubles. It was pulsing, like a heart, at every beat it would turn to a lighter shade of cyan, while turning back at its normal colour when at rest.

- "Oh F*ck! My refining of the mana core has overlapped with its natural evolution. My core gets stronger over time, like everyone else's, but I have pushed mine so far that my body can't tolerate any further strengthening.

My body and core will be at war, until the latter isn't allowed to expand properly. That's why my first crush hit me so hard, the imbalance is also affecting my mind. From now on, I better count up to one hundred before taking any decision." –

The fear of ending like the Wither, sent chills down his spine. It was a fate far worse than death, and he could do nothing about it but hope for the growth spurt to finally arrive.

He was so depressed, that when he reached the Principles of Advanced Magic training hall, he barely noticed Professor Nalear.

The room was almost identical to the one they had just left, but instead of rings, strange contraptions occupied most of the space.

They consisted of a small pedestal, from which came out a reversed test tube, 1.8 meters (5'11") high, containing a black sphere made of metal. Every 30 centimetres (less than 1 foot) there was a mark on the glass, for a total of six marks.

"I hope you have studied and understood the first spell of your book, as I recommended last time, because that's what we are going to do today. Contrary to all others tier four spells, Lift works almost like an inferior spell."

She recited the spell, "Brezza Reale", and the weight inside the contraption in front of her rose completely above the first mark.

"The problem is, it has no use outside practicing higher magic. What you did just see, is the effect obtained by casting it as it was tier three. But..."

She recited the spell once again, and this time the weight arose above the second and then the third mark before falling down.

"...you can freely add as much buckets of mana as you want. Your goal for this lesson, is to manage to rise the weight to the top of the bell jar. You have two hours. To barely pass, doing it just once is enough.

Ten times out of ten means passing with flying colours. Choose your station and start whenever you want. For those who don't remember the spell, you can study it now, but the time limit is always two hours, starting five minutes ago."

Professor Nalear ignored all the swearing that followed the students taking their position.

"Is she crazy?" "This is insane! How can they demand for us to become hexacasters in two hours?"

"If this is her way to get even with us for yesterday, I'll report that b*tch to the Headmaster!"

Those were the politest remarks addressed to her.

Lith chose a bell jar in line of sight with Yurial, intending to use him as a beginner standard.

According to the school records he had in Soluspedia, an A rank magician was able to complete the exercise within half an hour, a B rank in more than one hour, C rank and below could fail.

That gave him an idea of how much time before succeeding, but not how to begin. Since Yurial managed to start from the third mark, he did the same just a minute later. The exercise was incredibly boring for Lith.

For a true mage, Lift was an oversimplified spell, that made getting the weight up to the last mark easy as cake. Compared to achieving the same feat with spirit magic, it was ten times easier.

Lith could have done it at the first try, but that would make him too outstanding. The worst part was that the only way he had to measure time was for Solus to count the seconds.

After fifteen minutes, he allowed the weight to reach the fourth mark. After a little over twenty it reached the fifth, and less than five minutes later it reached the top. The bell jar turned red, emitting a "Ding!" sound.

Lith was so startled that made a little jump back.

"Seems someone finally made it." Professor Nalear came to his side, her hair smelled like roses, making Lith's pressure spike.

"Twenty points for getting the first spot without any help." She said in her communicator amulet.

"But are you capable of doing it again?" She asked, coming dangerously close.

Solus did go straight for protocol omega, generating cold spots under his armpits and at the back of his neck, to avoid Lith sweating bullets.

"Yes, of course." He tried focusing on the spell again, despite having troubles swallowing down, like he had a tennis ball stuck in his throat.

The weight rose once again to the top, producing another ding.

"Interesting, I can see the weight has a fluid motion. Five steps?"

"Yes, once you get the gist of it, is quite easy." He said looking at her nose instead of her eyes.

"Okay, champ. Since no one seems to be brave enough to ask for a hint, humour me. Try going slower, put half a second between every step."

Lith did as instructed, discovering that the spell was actually really versatile, allowing to add mana freely, without fixed intervals, as long as the amount was always the same.

"Bravo! Now try faster, like you want to break the bell jar."

Soon the situation degenerated in a series of "Faster", "Slower" and "Not so rough, be gentler".

Despite she was clearly referring to the handling of the weight, carrying no double entendre whatsoever, those words conjured in Lith's feverish mind images that were completely unrelated to magic.

Despite doing his best to focus on the task at hand, while Solus was cooling him off as fast as she could, only Lith's paranoid nature ended up saving him from embarrassment.

That morning he had bandaged his nether regions, so that in the worst-case scenario, the rise of the spear hero would cause no bulge in his pants, keeping it sticking to his abdomen.

Chapter 68 Racking Points

"Well, we have just passed half an hour from the start of the exercise." Nalear said after her communication amulet emitted a low ringing noise.

"Seems I have nothing more to teach you about Lift. Now, do me a favour. Soon many will start to get scared or frustrated, and will call me for help non-stop. Be a dear and give hints or suggestions to your classmates stuck at least at the third mark.

I'll take care of the desperate cases."

Lith had nothing to do for at least another hour and a half, so he accepted, rubbing his forehead and closing his eyes, to not look at her face.

"Great! Ten points for demonstrating complete mastery of the Lift spell, and another ten for helping me out." She made a smile so radiant that would have made protocol omega useless, despite Solus' best efforts.

But Lith had timed correctly his thank-you bow, avoiding her gaze, and immediately turned back. He had so many people to look down upon, that he felt like a kid in a candy shop.

Yurial had made no improvement, but Lith didn't feel compelled to help him. He'd rather preferred for his help to be openly required, if not begged for.

After looking around, he noticed that Quylla too wasn't too far away. She seemed to be swamped at the second mark, sometimes managing to reach the third.

She was 1.35 meters (4'5") high, with such a scrawny build that she could hope to weight over 30 kilograms (66 pounds) only if soaking wet. She looked so frail and weak that a gust of wind would be able to carry her away any moment.

- "It's amazing how she managed to get a bright green mana core despite being so malnourished. If the tonic she received from Vastor really works, I wonder how powerful she will become." – Lith thought.

"Need a hand?" He asked. She was a commoner too, and up to that point, the only person that had apologized to him without a hidden agenda.

"Yeah, thanks. What am I doing wrong?"

"Nothing, is just that you failed to grasp the spell's explanation." Quylla looked at him with a downtrodden expression, racking her brain while her neighbours at the fourth mark were sneering at her.

Lith was really tempted to kick them in the nuts, but alas, too many witnesses.

"If you remember, it mentioned that this exercise requires creating five steps, right?"

"Right." Quylla nodded, taking a break to give Lith her undivided attention.

"Every step pushes the weight above a mark, so you may think that you need to create five steps, or if you prefer, five small pulses of mana, to push the weight up to the top."

She nodded again.

"But the book never mentioned that you need to generate them all together. Lift gives you a wide window of opportunity to create the steps."

Noticing that she still wasn't understanding, he dumbed down the concept.

"Imagine that you must walk a stair to get to an upper floor. You need five steps to do it, and it's your mana that creates them. Even if you can maintain only two steps at a time, it's plenty enough.

You just need to get up to the second step, let the first one dissolve, create the third..."

"Move up to the third, rinse and repeat!" Quylla completed the thought. "That's why the book called them steps instead of pulses or pushes. To be honest the choice of words had puzzled me quite a bit."

Lith nodded.

"Otherwise it would require to be able to cast five pulses at a time, and it would be completely unreasonable for the second lesson."

But Quylla was listening no more. After thanking him quickly, she went back to practice, managing instantly to always reach the third mark. In less than ten minutes, another ding resounded.

Her neighbours had long stopped sneering, and once they managed to find the courage for asking Lith for an encore, he was nowhere to be found. Quylla ignored their requests for help, working hard to master what she had just understood.

After her, Lith helped Yurial and then Friya. He had yet to decide what to do with them, but he had nothing to lose in the exchange. He would kill two birds with one stone, showing them his superiority while also making them feel obligated.

Managing to establish a relationship on equal terms with the heir of an archmage and the daughter of an influential noble, would discourage his peers to show open hostility if not force them to avoid any further harassment.

Soon, his outstanding performance in the light department would be well known, very few would dare to move against him once Marth and Manohar had shown such interest towards him.

All he needed was just another push, and all the young master/mistress drama would become a relic of the past.

At the end of the lesson, Lith received ten more points from Nalear, since many of those he helped had managed to completely understand the true nature of the exercise.

- "That makes fifty points!" Solus was ecstatic. "Too bad we must also deduct the ten Trasque took away."

"It's no use crying over spilled milk." Lith replied. "Besides, after lunch we will have our first Forgemaster lesson. I can't wait to get my hands on it!" –

At lunch, Quylla, Yurial and Friya tried to join him once again, and this time Lith didn't send them away. He was curious to see what they had to offer in terms of knowledge and power.

Instead, he ended up swamped in small talk. Lith had completely forgotten what high-school conversations were like, how teenagers mostly talked about boys, girls or whine about their teachers.

"Seriously..." Friya stabbed her lasagne like she had a personal vendetta against it.

"... what kind of Professor just puts you in a room and demands that you figure out everything by yourself? How big of a jerk can she be?"

Lith listened on and off to her, so when the topic at hand became his area of expertise, he was ready to answer the question he had just misheard.

- "At least a double D cup." He thought.

"By my maker, don't you dare say that out loud!" Solus mind-scolded him –

"I bet your family hired a tutor for you." Yurial chimed in, shaking his head at her remark.

"Yes, why?"

"Only tutors spoon-fed magic. My father never explained anything to me, unless I was incapable of understanding something on my own. He would just give me books and demand results."

Being clear-headed again, Lith joined the conversation.

"By the way, why your father didn't teach you all these exercises beforehand? It would have given you quite an edge, and I don't think the academy would care."

Yurial shook his head again, sighing.

"Oh, yeah. Just because my father is an archmage, I have all the knowledge of the world at my fingertips." He said gritting his teeth.

"I wish it was like that. Until my great-grandmother became a mage, our was a family of commoners. The two things she passed down on his bloodline are: the spite for nobles, no offense." He said raising his in sign of apology toward Friya.

"None taken." She replied, while actually shivering with fear. The Headmaster's words were finally clear to her. People like Lith would resent the nobles that abused their authority, and so would magic bloodlines.

- "That's why the King is so hell-bent on changing the system." She thought. "Over time, us nobles are isolating ourselves from the masses. If it keeps up like this, soon the status of noble will be like having a bounty on your head." –

"And her hard-working nature." Yurial continued. "In my family, the less you do, the farther you get from the line of succession. Some of my profligate siblings are as good as disowned, with no money or authority of their own.

The reason why I am the heir is because of my talent and efforts, and I could lose the title anytime if I start to slack off. When I asked my father to teach me the secrets of the academy, do you know how he replied?"

Yurial made a stern face, speaking with a low, harsh voice, mimicking archmage Deirus demeanour.

"Son, your grandfather was just a noble, not even a mage. My foundations and resources for magic were nothing compared to what I gave you. If you cannot achieve as much as I did despite all that, teaching you is pointless.

For our Kraston family to prosper, you need to be able to walk with your own legs. Getting unfair advantages make you lazy and reliant on other's help. There are no shortcuts in life to achieve what really matters. Now go back to work!"

The whole table giggled, Yurial had got so immersed in his persona to yell the last part, drawing on him the looks of their neighbours. Realizing his slip-up, Yurial had become red, so Lith asked Friya about her tutor, to cut him some slack.

"I asked her countless times." She sighed.

"But she always replied that our money was buying her services, not her loyalty. And that she had no intention of taking the smallest risk with the Mage Association for such a little sum." Friya scoffed.

"With the amount we paid her, we could have probably built a fortress. What about you, Quylla?"

Quylla was wolfing down her second serving of lasagna, looking at Lith's steak like a hungry tiger. The mouthful she had taken was too big for her to talk, so they had to wait for her to be able to swallow.

"I had no tutor." She explained, while trying to wipe the sauce off her face.

"The healer of our village had been killed by some bandits, so his books were available for everyone. I was an orphan, too weak to work in the fields, so I began studying them.

Once I understood magic, I became the next healer, until the Duke that was managing the rebuilt of the village heard about me. He built a house for me, and when I became old enough, he recommended me to the academy. You know the rest."

She returned to give her meal all the care she could.

"That story is really impressive." Yurial said. "But at the moment I am so amazed by the amount of food you are eating that I cannot think about anything else."

"I swear, she wasn't like this yesterday." Friya said.

"It must be Vastor's tonic." Lith said. "She is shorter than me by a good head, yet she is eating more than me. I guess she needs a lot of food to catch up. Mind if I touch your head?"

Quylla violently blushed, tried to say something, but her mouth was full again, so she just nodded, lowering her head. Lith pretended to cast a spell while actually activating Invigoration.

"Your muscles are severely undeveloped, and your bone density is terrible. You need to drink more milk, for your skeleton."

"It's the first time I hear this." Yurial asked with a curious look in his eyes.

"Mind to explain?"

- "Yeah, sure! How can I possibly explain the concepts of vitamins, proteins and calcium when your language lacks even the words necessary to describe them?" – Lith thought.

"It's an old saying from my village. Meat for the muscles, milk for the bones. How do you think I got so big at twelve?" Was what he actually said.

Despite being three years older than him, Yurial was just a few centimetres taller than Lith, while Friya was five centimetres (2 inches) shorter than him. To Lith's amazement, the three of them ordered a bottle of milk each, starting to drink it instead of water.

Chapter 69 New Specializations

As soon as everyone finished eating, Lith left with the excuse of needing to prepare the final details for his first Forgemaster lesson. The actual truth was that having a conversation with them, about anything but magic, made him want to rip his ears off.

- "Damn! Now I remember why back on Earth I never took a babysitter job, unless I was desperate for money. Kids are so annoying, always worried about what others think of them, obsessing themselves with the stupidest things." -

While he was walking toward his room, he noticed a group of four, one girl and three boys, that had pinned another girl in a corner. Before Lith could walk away, the bullying quickly escalated in a beating.

Lith never stopped walking, he just threw a glance of them, curling his upper lip in a disgusted expression.

- "Shouldn't we help her? Four against one is unfair." Solus asked.

"Life is unfair." Lith replied. "I don't know, nor I care for her. Besides, what could I do? Even if I saved her this time, as soon as I turn my back, they would beat her twice as hard for revenge.

If she is so stupid to prefer getting beaten instead of taking a Ballot, that's her problem. I don't plan on opening an idiot shelter." –

Back in his room, Lith took a long bath, discussing with Solus what they had learned from the book and how far it was safe to reveal his talent and mastery.

Soon the first gong resounded, indicating that fifteen minutes were left before the beginning of the next period.

Lith flew at full speed, discovering that the lesson would not take place in a classroom, but inside the Forgemastering training hall, right beside the Alchemist training hall.

When Lith landed, both the doors were still closed and many people were waiting outside. The students were mingling together.

From what he could understand, the two specialization courses would take place simultaneously, allowing people to meet before and after the lesson.

- "I'm really interested in the Master Alchemist course." Solus said. "I think it would be a perfect complement to Forgemastering. Who knows, maybe we could even fuse them together, obtaining powerful single-use weapons for when we are out of mana."

Lith's interest was piqued.

"Yeah, it would be great. Too bad I cannot afford another specialization, that would mark me as a S rank student. Besides, I can't be in two places at once."

Solus mind-shrugged.

"That's not a problem, since there's two of us. I'll piggyback on one of the students with my shapeshifting abilities. We'll get two specializations for the price of one. Wish me luck. See you later!"-

Before Lith could stutter a surprised reply, Solus had already left his finger. She turned into a snow-white blot, using the crowd as a cover, while she got under the robe of a kid with the Master Alchemist textbook in his hand.

Lith was so shocked that his mind went completely blank, until the Professors arrived and opened their respective doors. Lith followed her inside the Forgemaster training hall, still incredulous of Solus sudden departure.

Only the mocking laughter of one of his classmates managed to woke him from his daze. Luckily, it wasn't Lith the target, but another student that was whining about having forgotten his book.

Lith immediately regained his focus.

- "Keep calm, old man. Sh*t happens, this is just a small setback. We'll get her back in a couple of hours." -

Thanks to their mind link, he was still able to perceive Solus presence in the next room, just like her was able to keep moving, since they were less than one hundred meters (110 yards) apart.

But because of the distance and the magical nature of the White Griffon castle, they weren't able to share their minds as usual. It was like being in a crowd in a club event, they were still able to communicate, but it required effort.

He could perceive that Solus's mind was paying attention to something, the other lesson seemed to have already started.

"Hello, boys and girls. My name is Professor Lyca Wanemyre, and I will be your instructor in the path towards becoming Forgemasters.

My class will be different from all the others you follow, because forgemastering is different from any kind of magic you have ever learned. You have just moved your first step in the seventh department of the White Griffon, the crafting department."

Professor Wanemyre was a woman in her early thirties, 1.65 meters (5'5") high, with long black hair with shades of red held up in a chignon. She was wearing skin tight working gloves that highlighted her long and nimble fingers.

She didn't have her robe on, so it was impossible to hide her soft, luscious curves. Professor Wanemyre was better endowed than Nalear in every aspect, and despite she wore no make-up, that made her heart-shaped face stand out even more.

Her demeanour was less flashy and jovial than Nalear, her calm and composed attitude were those of a mature woman, not of an exuberant girl.

Lith could empathise with his male classmates, that were gulping non-stop, while staring at her with dumbfounded expressions.

- "Lucky me." Lith thought. "Seems that my heart is too little for more than a crush at a time. I couldn't bear acting out as an idiot again." –

Wanemyre paid no attention to the agape mouths and the bright red faces. Her students were barely teenagers, she was used at their first meet reactions.

"So many mages are so fixated on elemental magic, that they never mention the arts of crating to their disciples.

So, I applaud you for choosing a specialization too often inglorious and underestimated, instead of making things blow up with fire and lightning like most of your peers.

Contrary to what you may have heard or imagined, Forgemastering doesn't require a forge, a hammer or ingredients.

Sure, some proper magic imbued items like mana crystals or the fur of a magical beast or monster, can improve the results, but that's material for another lesson. Let's start with the basics. Who of you went ahead and learned about forgemastering from our book?"

It was mostly a rhetorical question, the books had been delivered just the day before, and between the classes and the self-study, she wasn't expecting much. Yet a couple of hands were raised.

"The early bird gets the worm! Good. Describe to the class how a generic forgemastering spell works." She was pointing at a fifteen-year-old boy with red hair, the only one to have raised his hand beside Lith.

"Uhhh, well, uhm... first you need to draw a circle, and... uhm." He actually has skimmed the first pages, and had raised his hand to make an impression on the Professor, he never expected to be questioned.

Wanemyre shook her head.

- "So typical of teenagers, always thinking with the head in the pants first. At least this time I got only two posers." – She thought.

"You, with the mean eyes, mind to step in?"

Lith ignored the remark, replying promptly.

"Forgemastering requires drawing two magic circles, one inscribed into the other, with a series of magical runes between them. The number and type of runes depends on the nature of the enchantment to apply.

The circles must be perfectly drawn with no imperfections, and even their radius matter. It must be as close as possible to the size of the item that is going to be enchanted."

Wanemyre whistled in surprise and approval.

"Very well said. Where is your book, by the way?"

"It's all in here." Lith tapped his temple with the right index finger.

- "No way I take it out. Until it's in Soluspedia, I can quote it word by word." – He thought.

"Really?" The Professor raised an eyebrow in disbelief.

"Then do you mind drawing for the class the dimensional amulet circle? Page 22, diagram 4." She sneered.

While everyone was flipping their books, Lith closed in to Wanemyre, who pointed to him a flask holding a pungent smelled liquid.

- "I wish Solus was here. She would be laughing like a madwoman, mocking me for my know-it-all façade." – For the first time in so many years, Lith felt alone, and he didn't like that feeling, not one bit.

The room was so silent that he could listen to the steady beating of his own heart. There was no voice in his head, cheering for him or trying to make him laugh, everything felt pointless and hollow.

With a series of gestures, several drops of the liquid flew in the air thanks to water magic, splashing on several points of the perfectly smooth white stone table between Lith and the Professor.

The internal and external circles took form simultaneously, one drop moving clockwise, and the other counter-clockwise.

The innermost circle had a radius of ten centimetres (4 inches), while the other had a fifteen cm (6 inches) radius, leaving about five cm (2 inches) between them for the runes.

Only after completing both circles and checking that there were no imperfections, Lith moved the remaining drops, forming one of the thirteen runes at a time, devoting all his focus on each one.

When he finished, Professor Wanemyre clapped her hands loudly, and after a second, the class unwillingly joined her.

"Bravo!" She said. "You weren't pretending, you really studied. Sorry if I doubted you. Thirty points for your performance, and ten more as an apology. I guess I should have expected as much from Manohar's and Marth's new friend."

At those words, all those who were planning about revenge or how humiliating Lith without incurring in the Ballot, immediately took a 180° turn. It was already hard hiring Manohar as it was, if angered, there was no telling how he would react.

Not to mention that being the Royal Healer he held an enormous amount of influence and political power, he just didn't care using it. It was better not to rattle his cage.

"If I asked you to, would you be able to continue the explanation?"

"Yes." Lith answered. "But I hadn't the time to go much further, plus I don't believe I have fully grasped the contents. My exposition would be lacking depth and true knowledge." The first part was a lie, just to avoid standing out too much.

Reading twenty pages wasn't much, but the whole book was another story. The second part, instead, was the truth. If books were enough, anyone could get infinite specializations simply by going to the academy's library.

"Humble and honest to the boot, worthy of a Forgemaster. Another twenty points for you, Lith. Feel free to gather around here, everyone. Since your classmate has gifted us with a perfect circle, it would be wasteful not to use it.

I'll give you a practical demonstration of forgemastering."

Chapter 70 A Third Specialization 2

Professor Wanemyre opened a desk drawer, filled to the brim with cheap looking pendants.

"We buy them in stocks, just like the rings." She said picking one at random.

"The only way to differentiate the various rings, is by the stones embedded within. Red for dimensional items, blue for tier 1 magic storing rings, yellow for tier 2, green for tier 3. Tier 4 magic storing rings and above are not available in the Prize Hall.

As it is, it's just your average silver pendant." She placed it at the center of the innermost magic circle. After that, she called for help via her communication amulet and waited for her assistants to come.

"Fun fact: dimensional amulets are usually preferred to dimensional rings, since most mages prefer to have as many magic storing rings as they can. We still have to discover a way to use something other than rings for instant casting."

The door of the classroom opened, a man and a woman dressed like the academy's staff stepped in, and took place beside the magical circle, starting to chant the same spell.

With each cast, the space within the circle was filled with pure non elemental mana, to the point that the air inside started to crackle and pop with power. The energy became dense enough to lift up the amulet from the table.

"To use a blacksmith analogy, the circle acts as a magical furnace, withholding the stored mana within and saturating the item that has to be enchanted. The circle must be perfect, or the mana would leak, leading to a defective product." She explained.

"The higher the mana density one creates, the better the item will be. But that also mean that the Forgemaster will consume a greater amount of mana for the enchantment.

If the forgemastering spell used is weaker than the mana accumulated inside the circle, it will have no effect. A true Forgemaster must always be aware of her limits, balance is of the utmost importance in our line of work.

If the mana density is too low, the item will be useless. Too high, and it would cost so much to not have a market value, unless you do it for yourselves, of course."

When the assistants stopped chanting, Wanemyre stepped forward, gesturing the students to move away. Then, she started casting several consecutive spells, both her hands and voice almost never stopped.

One by one, the runes that Lith had drawn between the circles, started moving from their original position, taking place around the amulet. They formed an energy sphere, absorbing the mana from the surrounding space and injecting it in the amulet.

When the last rune completed the sphere, all the available mana had been compressed to the point of being barely able to enclose the pendant.

With a final spell, Wanemyre fused the sphere with the amulet, the runes shined on its surface for a few seconds, before disappearing forever. Only then she took the amulet in her hand, showing the class the result of her efforts.

"This little thing here is a top-quality dimensional amulet. Its value is about 340 points in the Prize Hall and above three hundred gold coins, if you were to buy it with cash."

The idea of so much money condensed in such a little thing made even those born in wealthy families gasp in amazement. It was enough to build a manor and buy its land. Furnitures and pieces of art to furnish it, would take at least another amulet, though.

"Now, here a few things that books don't explain, and that you may have missed during the whole process. I'm especially referring to those that paid more attention to my chest rising and lowering, rather than to my brilliant performance."

She glared to some of the male students, whose faces turned to a bright purple, while squealing excuses and apologies. Lith felt compassion for them. If it was Nalear instead of her, he would probably be in their shoes.

The female students, instead, made fun of them, calling them perverts and other non-endearing terms. Professor Wanemyre was fuming, there was only so much she was willing to bear, even from teenagers.

She took pride in her talent and deep expertise, being treated like a slab of meat was the worst insult anyone could do to her. She covered her chest with her arms before taking a deep breath to calm down, in order to continue.

"Not everyone is able to become a Forgemaster. That's because together with the War Mage, is the specialization that requires the greatest mana capacity.

While for a War Mage it determines how much destruction they can bring, without a huge amount of mana, a Forgemaster cannot create the most powerful enchanted items in our repertoire.

Mana capacity is needed, not only to overcome the high mana density required for a great item, but also because every single rune requires its own spell to be engraved in the object.

Each spell is relatively simple and short, but you must need to be able to cast them in a rapid succession without delay. This because as soon the magical furnace is loaded, the mana tries to escape, and even a perfect circle can only hold on for a while.

Usually, after ten seconds, the circle destabilizes, and the mana begins to leak. This means that I had to cast thirteen spells, one for each rune, plus another to permanently imprint the energies in the amulet, for a total of fourteen spells.

Each of them was able to overcome the mana density, and I had to do everything within ten seconds, or I would have just wasted a lot of mana for nothing.

Bear in mind that once an object is saturated by mana, if the forgemastering process fails, it cannot be repeated. The energy remnants from the previous failure would still linger, making any further attempt a waste of time.

Even this castle is the product of the work of countless Forgemasters. Every single stone has been enchanted, before assembling them as you see it today. Otherwise it would be impossible to imbue with magic something this big.

And that is just the first requirement. The second is that a Forgemaster must be a jack of all trades, no matter if she is a master of none. In my line of work, I need to be proficient in all the six elements.

You will also need patience, love for research and a strong build. Manipulating this magnitude of energies is not something pipsqueaks can afford to do, not without incurring in permanent damages that would accumulate over time"

Lith rose his hand.

"Yes?"

"I can understand most of the items I saw in the Prize Hall, and link their properties with the six elements. But I don't get how Warp Steps and dimensional items work. What element do they belong to?"

"Excellent question. The answer is: to all of them. The only force that can bend space and time is gravity. Powerful Forgemasters of the past, discovered that air and earth magic are the bare minimum to create such powerful gravity.

But to stabilize it, to make such items not only reproducible but also to allow fine control over them, all the elements were required. It's a field of research that has never gone dry, there are still so many things to explain."

- "I think I understand." Lith thought. "They need the electromagnetic waves from the lightning to resonate with the gravitational pull earth magic generates, and enhance it to bend time and space.

Fire and water magic probably allow to avoid side effects, like the formation of vacuum, overheating or freezing while creating such powerful gravitational force.

I can't even fathom what darkness and light are used for, thought. They didn't exist back on Earth, science can't help me with them." -

During the rest of the lesson, Professor Wanemyre proceeded to explain how they would manage the rest of the course. She wouldn't allow any of them inside the training hall again, until they had learned the theory behind forgemastering.

Having students messing around with magic circles was too dangerous, since high density mana was highly volatile and could cause huge explosions, if not controlled properly.

After that, they would need to memorize all the basic runes and how to combine them, until being able to produce all the basic enchanted items.

Only those who passed all the tests would be admitted to the fifth year, learning how to add multiple properties to a single item.

By the end of the lesson, Lith was fuming like a volcano, ready to explode.

Being in the first row, helped him to better understand Professor Wanemyre's teachings, noticing the finest details about how to draw runes.

At the same time, though, he was also able to feel the pressure coming from all his classmates standing behind him.

In normal conditions, he would find disgusting the idea of being surrounded by strangers, hearing their whispers and being subject to their glares, yet he would bare it all.

But since his mana core and body were at odds, constantly fighting and messing with his mind, it was much harder for him to control his reactions and hide his emotions.

It was Solus' voice and presence that helped him paying them no heed, using their bond to soothe his most violent reactions. In the last two hours, though, they had been separated.

And now Lith was forced to wait for her outside the training hall, since the Master Alchemist lesson had yet to finish. It was really irritating for him, standing alone in a crowd for the umpteenth time since his first life.

Even during high-school Lith had always been different from his peers, focused on paying the bills instead of goofing around. Seeing their carefree attitude, how easy it was for them to relax and make friends, made him green with envy.

Suddenly, the Alchemist training hall opened, and a small insect came out of it, reaching Lith's leg unnoticed and then turning into a liquid, going back toward his hand.

- "Sorry it took so long, but everyone made so many questions that the Professor forced everyone to stay behind. Want to grab something to eat?" Solus asked.

"Good idea"- Lith anger dissolved like snow on the Sun.