

Supreme M 76

Chapter 76 End Of Day One

"I have always fought alone, I know nothing about formations or teamwork. And if I give orders, I can't cast any spell. I think it's better to have a skilled hunter, rather than a makeshift leader.

Anyone of you that has received military training, either as a strategist or a soldier, is much better suited for this than me."

- "Not to mention that I don't give a damn about any of you. I don't have any motivation for being a good leader. As long as I keep at least one of you standing, anything goes for me. The important is avoiding the wipe out." – He inwardly added.

Lith's teammates started talking to each other, honestly searching to determine who could best take charge, setting their pride and personal ambitions aside.

Reluctantly, he had to burst their bubble.

"Do you mind a simple advice?" Everyone turned towards him again.

"Whoever becomes the leader has a huge problem: we know each other's class, but not what we are capable of during a real fight. In a life and death situation, you can't give detailed explanations, only generic orders.

An order is good only if executed in a proper manner. You have experienced first-hand how easy is to freeze due to panic. In my case, I tend to let my bloodlust blind me. Both issues would cause any plan to crumble in the face of the enemy.

My suggestion is to put the leader matter aside, and just watch each other's back. Only by familiarizing with our skillsets and behaviours, a shoddy team like this has any chance of survival."

After the team agreed, Lith started explaining to everyone how to make use of first magic in the wilderness.

They had to use the darkness spell Concealment to hide their smell all the time, and never leave the cave on foot, but by using Flight or Float to not leave prints going in and out from the entrance. The same applied to hunting.

Coupling those spells was the best way to sneak up on a prey.

Lith, Mirna and Phloria left the cave, while Belia and Visen stayed behind. Visen decided to employ the time at hand to make the cave more stable, spacious and to solve what would be an inevitable hurdle.

Soon someone would be in need of a bathroom, and he doubted that anyone would consider the idea of going alone outside. Getting literally caught with your pants down was nightmare material.

Once on the outside, the hunting team relied on looks and hand gestures, trying to speak only as a last resort. Being a Mage Knight, Phloria decided to pair up with Mirna to protect her, while Lith would move on his own.

- "Sigh, I can't believe I have to babysit these kids."

"I know." Solus replied. "But it's the purpose of this whole exercise."

"Yeah, it took us a while to understand why during the second day Trasque didn't assign any points. It was because he wanted us to teach each other actively, not just beat the cr*p out of your opponent."

"And guess who do you have to thank for having understood the real nature of this test?" Solus giggled.

"And guess who do you have to thank for keeping me alive and avoiding you the trouble of finding another host?" Lith sarcastically replied.

"I'm sorry, your Ladyship..." He performed a mind-curtsy. "but while you enjoy the show in your front row seat, I'm the one in the Colosseum. So is not such an amazing result.

You can watch the bigger picture, but I must focus on teeth, claws and keeping my guts where they belong."

"Meanie! Like I don't worry all the time! A simple 'thank you' would suffice."

Lith felt like cr*p, snapping at her for no reason.

"I'm really sorry Solus. I know you were just trying to lighten the mood and cheer me up. It's just that I am already so stressed that I'd need some way to vent out. And thank you. You are the only one that knows all my flaws, yet still cares for me.

Thank you for all the help you give me every day, and for never stopping trying to make me into a better person." –

That was the first time his chatterbox mage tower had nothing to say. Her mind was blank as a slate. Lith preferred not to pry further, she was likely to be either angry at him or just too surprised to reply.

They often joked about it, but he had never earnestly thanked her before for meddling in his private life.

The woodlands were denser than the Trawn woods, despite all his experience Lith was at loss. They couldn't get too far away from the hill without risking of getting lost, nor they could split too much, in case something happened.

This time he couldn't cheat his way out with Life Vision and spirit magic. How could he possibly explain being able to spot animals underground or in tree trunks?

Mirna and Phloria weren't having better luck. Keeping two spells always active wasn't something they were used to. Double casting was demanding for their focus, and at the slightest slip up they had to cast them both again, consuming even more mana.

While Mirna's ego seemed to have recovered quickly, regaining her confident attitude, Phloria had never felt so ashamed in her whole life.

She was the most promising descendant in a bloodline of Mage Knights, yet she kept stumbling through her specialization course.

Her father had taught her personally both magic up to tier three and swordplay. He even made her fight wild beasts to give her real enemies. But now she realized that all her confidence was built on a lie.

She was so used always having him by her side that she never took any challenge seriously. Her father would always help her, if something went wrong.

At the academy, instead, she was alone.

The Professor was tough and demanding, the competition so fierce that her so-called friends were too busy fixing their own mistakes to pay her any attention. When the Headmaster had announced the mock exam, she had rejoiced, thinking it was her time to shine.

But she had never seen something so big like a magical beast. At the moment of truth, her nerves had failed her, turning her into a burden for everyone.

Despite Phloria's earlier brave façade, she was still scared out of her mind, trembling at any noise, her hand clutching the hilt of her sword so tight that it was white. Phloria could not help but envy Mirna.

She was so pretty compared to her, and despite all that she had went through, her will was rock-solid.

Mirna, on the other hand, reciprocated such feelings in full. She was jealous of Phloria, so tall and strong, she was bound to have lots of admirers. The reason why Mirna appeared so confident, was because she believed not having any more face to lose.

She had already gone below and beyond the bottom of the barrel, in her mind she could only rise up.

"Stop squirming like that, you are making me nervous too!" Mirna whispered. She couldn't bear anymore her guardian's twists and turns.

"Sorry. But I have an eerie feeling about this."

"This whole forest is an eerie feeling. Where the f*ck are the animals? I can hear animal's calls, but we still have to meet a single soul."

The minutes quickly turned into hours, and the only creatures they spotted were too far and fast to get any shot at them.

The sun had reached the zenith, so they decided to give up and check if Lith's luck had been any better. A few dozen meters away, Lith had come to the same conclusion.

Even using all the tricks in his book, his preys would amount to a poor meal for one person. He had never learned how to follow tracks or use traps, he had always been reliant on true magic. But while he was observed, those abilities were sealed.

Suddenly, an odd chirping resounded. The three of them listened carefully, hoping for a last-minute big catch. The more they listened to it, the less it sounded like birds.

It was more of a mix of a rhythmic cricket's chirruping and a mouse's high-pitched squeaking.

- "Solus, this sounds a lot like bats, but it makes no sense. They are mostly nocturnal animals. Not to mention it doesn't explain why all the other animals have gone silent."

"Definitely close, but not bats." She replied. "It's not squeaking, more like joints clicking." –

The noise kept growing in intensity, until it was all around them. Expecting another magical beast to attack right after announcing its presence, they tried to regroup as fast as they could.

The moment they lowered their guard, looking for each other's position, was the beginning of the end. From the treetops and countless holes in the ground, well hidden by the thick vegetation, countless spiders attacked them from all directions.

Some of them were small and round, their body size close to a basketball, while others were as big as a Labrador. Their black bodies were covered in long bristles, with red dots all over.

"Watch out! Those are Clackers!" Mirna yelled, but her words fell on deaf ears.

Neither of her teammates had ever heard of them.

- "F*ck me sideways!" Lith cursed. "None of the books in Soluspedia ever mentioned that insects or arachnids can turn in magical beasts. I have no idea what these things are capable of!" –

The attack had been too sudden, the clicking noise wasn't a warning, it was how the Clackers had coordinated their attack, leaving them no escape routes.

The spells in Lith's rings were useless. Checkmate Spears was a finisher against big opponents, against a small army it had no effect. The tier two ring held a healing spell, while the tier one was a simple blinding spell.

Sure, no one beside him knew what his rings contained, but that still left him with just three true magic spells. After that, Lith had either to accept the loss or blow up his cover.

He had no real weapon outside first magic, he had been caught completely unprepared.

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The Clackers' strategy was simple and effective. After having surrounded their preys, they swarmed them in a one wave rush. The ones on the ground tried to overpower them, while those on the trees threw spider webs the size of a tablecloth.

All the while those that kept hanging from their threads spat poison non-stop, aiming for their eyes.

Lith did his best, using water magic to turn his hands into razor-sharp blades and cutting off everything that came too close, but there were simply too many. He wasn't used being ambushed, and never encountered such situations.

All the spells he had at hand, both true and fake magic ones, were aimed toward bigger single opponents, he had no idea how to manage a swarm of small enemies.

The girls were faring much better than him. As soon as Phloria had seen the Clackers, her father's teachings had kicked in, and she had quickly conjured a tower shield made of white-hot rocks.

It served as both offense and defence, since her own magic could not harm her. Spiderwebs would burst into flames like made of paper, the poison would just fizzle without any effect, while everything that touched the shield would lose its limbs if not its life.

From the moment she had recognized the nature of the enemy, Mirna had stuck her back against Phloria's, using her protection to put her War Mage specialization to use.

Mirna filled the space around them with ice shards as long and thick as an arm, raining down on the Clackers like they had a mind of their own, without missing a target.

She could freely cast a spell after the other, switching place with Phloria in case of attack while her magic exterminated dozens of enemies at a time.

Back at the White Griffon, Professor Vastor, who was in charge of surveillance for that area, contacted Scarlett demanding explanations.

"What in the gods' names are Clackers doing? This is not part of our deal!"

"Of course not." Vastor went into a daze, seeing through the communicator amulet that the Scorpicores were sipping tea from a porcelain cup the size of a bucket.

"Insects and arthropods have no respect for any hierarchy except for their own. I do agree that they are spawning too fast, though. A culling might be needed, but right now I have other business to attend. If you need our help, you just have to ask."

Scarlett scoffed at his face, picking a cookie the size of a plate.

"No, thanks!" Vastor closed the call, cursing the monster and its arrogance for trying to copycat humans.

"Thorman, get ready to retrieve three students." He said to a bulky middle-aged Professor, in charge of the Mage Knight specialization.

"One of mine, one of yours plus one." Thorman laughed at his colleague's lack of manners, setting the coordinates for the pick-up spot in his ring. He remembered his student, a talented girl that was allowing herself to get drowned in insecurity.

- "Linjos was right, after all. With the old rules, even someone like Phloria would have been eliminated before the hour mark. The academy's system needed to be changed." - He was now regretting being one of Linjos' fiercest opponents.

Lith's situation was getting worse by the second. Despite his heightened senses and reflexes, there was only so much he could do. The only reason he was still standing, was because he could use up to six first magic spells at a time.

Even so, he could only delay the inevitable. The Clackers were now so close that even if he was at liberty of using true magic, he would not have the time. No matter how many he killed, there were always more coming forward.

"Help! I need help!" Was the only thing he managed to scream from time to time.

Phloria, instead, was swept by euphoria. The spiderlings normally lacked fear, but the fight had long turned into a massacre. The flaming shield was impenetrable, and every time the sword flashed behind it, many would get mutilated or worse.

They had only two paths ahead, to retreat or die.

Mirna tried her best to keep up with her, but while casting she couldn't move very fast. Phloria was becoming increasingly reckless with her attacks, pursuing the enemies fleeing in front of her, uncaring for the consequences.

"What the heck are you doing? Come back here!" They were now several meters apart, enough for the spiders to surround Mirna again.

When Phloria realized her mistake, a Clacker hanging from a tree branch cut off its string, falling on top of Mirna and inflicting its venomous bite.

Before she could reach the ground, the Clackers swarmed over her. The smaller spiders bit her unconscious, while the big ones were carrying her away with their threads.

Phloria was between a rock and a hard place, no matter her choice, someone was bound to die! Lith and Mirna were in opposite directions, there was no way of saving both.

She remained frozen on the spot, incapable of making a decision, until it was taken out of her hands. Thorman appeared through a Warp Steps, right beside the cocoon containing Mirna.

His body was exuding a blue aura, whenever a spider closed in, it would be squashed by his war hammer. Thorman slammed it on the ground, holding it with both hands. The shockwave resulting turned all the nearby spiders into dust, while the cocoon at his feet suffered no damage.

Thorman loaded it on his shoulder, before looking at Phloria in the eyes with a stern look.

"I'm sorry for being such a cr*ppy teacher." And then he disappeared into another warp steps.

Phloria felt ashamed of herself. Once again, she had disappointed her teacher, and this time she had managed to do it in front of all the academy staff, while also failing her teammate.

The arm holding the estoc fell alongside her body, the weapon almost slipping out of her fingers, already touching the ground.

"What a poor excuse of a Mage Knight I am."

The Clackers noticed the opening and prepared to exploit it.

"Sorry if I exist, but HELP!" Lith yelled on the top of his lungs.

Between the previous ambush and Thorman attack, he was facing a far lesser number of spiderlings, so he took the chance to regroup with his companion.

Lith activated the tier one magic holding ring, generating a flash like another sun had appeared in front of him. The spiderlings groaned and took a step back, while he jumped above them to escape the encirclement.

Sadly, the Clackers had a poor sight to begin with. They sensed the outside world mainly through their bristles, capable of detecting the movement of their preys through the vibrations they created by moving.

Phloria could see a replay of what had just happened. Another spider fell from above on Lith's back, biting him right below the neck. Feeling his consciousness fading away, with his last coherent thought Lith unleashed Checkmate Spears on himself.

Being encircled, the ice spears would trample everything along the way, while being incapable of harming him. As much as he hated it, he had to pin all his hopes on a perfect stranger, who Lith valued more or less like a used car salesman.

After that, he fell limp on the ground, the venom quickly reached his brain, disconnecting it from the rest of the body.

Just as he had predicted, the spears turned into toothpaste all the Clackers between them and their target, before passing through Lith's body like they were just an illusion.

The spell created a path between them, but it was only a matter of seconds before more enemies reinforced their ranks.

Cursing herself for her stupidity, Phloria threw away the self-pity finally realizing what Thorman's words actually meant. Most Mage Knights' spells had a short range, but they had the invaluable virtue that they needed only one hand to be cast.

In less than a second, she conjured the Full Guard spell, creating a spherical blue aura with a radius of 1.65 meters (5.41 feet) all around her. The same Thorman used, with a radius slightly bigger than her estoc's range.

Thanks to Full Guard, she had no blind spots. Whatever entered the sphere would be detected, Phloria was able to strike with surgical precision without looking. It didn't matter if it was spit, webs or spiders, everything would be met by the shield or the sword.

Her estoc was the goodbye gift of her father, forged with a secret family technique. The point stabbed like a spear, while the sword's single edge would cut like a katana. She moved towards Lith's position, releasing small darkness bursts with each strike.

For so little creatures, the vital organs were closely packed to each other. The flesh would rot as soon it was cut, making even suicidal attacks useless. Each stab to the body or the head would mean instant death.

- "So cool. It's awesome." Lith feverish mind was still able to work, but barely. The venom was impairing both his nervous system and mind. "I... we must look into that. It's so... something."

"Lith, are you okay?" Solus was really worried. "You sound a lot like in the memories where you were drunk and under the effects of mar*juana. Your thoughts are incoherent and erratic. Are you sure you are okay?"

"Is okay. If death hammer man saves me."

"By my maker, you are getting worse! Move that a*s, sister!" –

Phloria charged forwards, using her burning tower shield as a ram, reaching Lith's side. She then used her free hand (NA: remember that the shield is conjured, she does not need to hold it, it floats by itself.) to cast the second spell Thorman reminded her of.

By planting her estoc in the ground, she activated Blast Guard. It generated a small flaming sphere that affected everything in the surroundings except for the space within a meter (3.3 feet) from her body.

To avoid accidents, she crouched down, holding her fallen comrade as close as possible. The spell had a short duration, but long enough for her to cast a tier three detoxifying spell.

"Come on, come on! I can't screw up three times in a single day! Snap out of it, you are the healer, not me!"

The spell was meant to neutralize the most common venoms and poisons, magical beasts' secretions were a class of their own. She realized how stupid she had been not purchasing any potions.

If she had them, maybe she could have saved both her team members, without having to rely on gambles and wishful thinking.

Like reading her mind, Lith started to cast the same spell he had used to save the Marchioness' daughter. Phloria spell served its purpose, giving him enough clarity to weave the spell and disguise it as a fake magic personal one.

A small orb of venom was expelled, preventing any further damage to his body, while he activated the second-tier healing spell in his ring, recovering a good chunk of his mind.

"If I were you, I'd start running." Lith said, chuckling like an idiot. His pupils were still dilated.

Phloria sheathed the estoc before lifting Lith with a princess carry, activating the flight spell stored in one of her rings. After what had happened earlier, she had prepared it in case she needed to escape again.

The tower shield moved on her back, preventing further assaults from above.

She took a roundabout path to lose the Cacklers before returning to the cave, activating Concealment again to hide their presence.

Lith would look at her stern face from time to time, giggling like a little girl.

"Look, Solus, I got my knight in a shining armour to save me!"

- "Lith, you are still confused. You are thinking out loud, please shut up!" She mentally screamed. –

"Who's Solus?" Phloria asked when the situation seemed to have calmed down enough.

"A good friend of mine. We know each other from years. By the way, isn't this the time when the hero tries to hit on his rescue? Please, don't try to kiss me, I don't think I could stop you right now, I like living too much."

Phloria's cheeks reddened, Solus couldn't tell if from embarrassment, rage or both.

"Why would I want to force me on you? Who the f*ck do you think you are?" The rage sounded genuine. Lith kept laughing.

"Ah, kids. So cute and naïve, getting embarrassed by stupid jokes. You need to get out more, get a life!"

"Who are you calling a kid? You are younger than me."

"Want to bet?" Phloria was getting annoyed, he was clearly out of his mind.

"Is Solus your girlfriend or just an ex?" If he was trying to embarrass her, it was a game that two could play.

"Nah. She's a girl and a friend, but that's it. We are both heartless and stone-cold, so we have a lot in common. Also, it would be really difficult get in touch with her. Get it? Get in touch!" Then he started cackling like it was the best joke ever.

She ignored him for the rest of the flight. Lith was rambling nonsense, sometimes even speaking some sort of gibberish

Back at the cave, she could finally relax, and with the help of the other two, they kept healing Lith until he was clear headed again. After cleansing his body from the last traces of venom, Lith shared a couple of freshly cooked blinkers.

"I don't know you, but I had enough for today. I'm not stepping out of here until tomorrow."

The motion was unanimously approved.

Chapter 78 Day Two

After the end of their shift, Vastor and Thorman went back to their quarters. Vastor waited until they were alone, before expressing his hilarity.

"Thorman, old friend, I would have never imagined you had it in you. Helping your student like that. Technically, that's against the rules." Vastor tone of fake indignation wouldn't have fooled a deaf man.

"I did no such a thing. I just used the spells that I considered best for the situation at hand. If she ended up copying me, how is that my fault? Are you going to report me?" It was a rhetoric question, Thorman already knew the answer.

"Are you kidding me? Your student ended up saving mine. The least I could do is gifting you that bottle of 50 years aged Blue Flame you keep eyeing every time you enter into my office. I'm glad you loosened the stick up your a*s."

In an underground maze, several kilometres away from the castle, another kind of conversation was taking place. After slaughtering its way through the nest, Scarlett was facing the Brood Mother.

It was the creature responsible for the abnormal spawn rate of the Clackers. Every single one of them was one of her children. Its abdomen was that of a giant spider, with eight long legs, but in the place of the head there was a human-like figure.

It was like someone had attached a human, starting from the thighs, to the spider body. But it was a human with no distinctive features, its chitinous skin was grey, the hands had unnaturally long fingers ending in razor-sharp claws.

The head had eight eyes, and a long slit where the mouth was supposed to be, allowing it to speak.

["Look, I'm tired of playing hide and seek. I only came here because I know you are smart enough to understand me, and because I hate senseless destruction."] Scarlett was quite angry from the repeated assaults it had suffered along the way.

They had no effect except wasting Scarlett's time.

["What do you want, oh mighty ruler?"] The Mother's voice was low and hoarse, every word sounded more coughed rather than spoken. Yet it managed to laugh, sneering at the Scorpicores claimed title.

["Stop laying so many eggs. Your children are a plague for the forest, you have already invaded other's territories. I won't repeat myself a second time."]

The Brood Mother chuckled again.

["It's that so? Then I challenge you, oh ruler. The forest needs a new guiding hand..."]

Scarlett scoffed, it had heard that speech countless times, either from humans or magical beasts.

["Fine. Challenge accepted."] The conversation was cut short, much to Mother's annoyance.

Violating all the rules of the challenge, the Brood Mother attacked without notice, making the fully developed Clackers that guarded the throne room, each the size of a bull, coordinate with its attack.

The Scorpicores' roar struck in two waves. The first was a cold one, turning the whole underground nest in a frozen wasteland. The second was an ultrasonic one, that turned the newly formed ice sculptures in countless shattered pieces.

["Oh! I won. Big surprise! Long live to me."] Sad for having no witness of its crushing victory, Scarlett called Linjos.

"The Clackers' issue is solved. With the Brood Mother dead, the survivors will go into hiding until another comes up. Let's hope the next one will have more brains than brawns."

"Thanks for solving the matter so quickly." Linjos replied.

"What do you want in return?"

- "I like this human." Scarlett thought. "Always saying please and thank you, instead of treating me like a tool, like his predecessors did. I'll make sure he keeps his position." -

"Let's just say you owe me one. What's the survival rate of your cubs?"

"Better than the previous years, around 50% of the groups made it through the first day. It's time to kick things up a notch."

Back in the cave, Lith's group was finishing breakfast and planning the rest of the day. Everyone had much appreciated Visen creating a side-cave bathroom.

Despite everything was supposed to be a team effort, not all of them could be executed properly in front of others.

With so many mouths to feed, Lith's stash wouldn't last more than three more days.

Using magic burned a lot of calories, it exhausted both the body and the mind.

"Thank the gods you ended up in my group." Belia said gnawing away the last shred of meat from the bones. "After fasting for a whole day, I would have either surrendered or eaten Visen."

Everyone at the table laughed, but Lith.

"Why so glum, mate? And seriously, why do you keep so much food on yourself?" Visen asked.

"Not that I'm complaining!"

Lith glared for a long moment, before closing his eyes and taking a deep breath.

- "We are not 'mates', lucky b*stard." -

"In order, not glum, envious. Because clearly none of you has ever starved. And the second answer is linked to the first. When you suffer from hunger as long as I did, you do not feel safe unless you have some food with you at all times."

Visen realized his blunder and tried to apologize, but Lith dismissed everything as an accident, proceeding to explain what they could expect from magical beasts. After he gave them all the key points from his experience, there were still a few things left to say.

"Never underestimate a magical beast. They may be stuck with just two elements, but they can use them in ways we can only imagine. Their casting time is incredibly fast, and to make things worse, our physical prowess is nothing compared to them.

They need just one hit to incapacitate us, or worse. My advice is to always keep your distance, and never play the game like they expect us to."

"Doesn't that mean that we are already screwed? We have already lost our biggest hitter." Visen wasn't much of an optimist about the situation, and neither was Belia.

"We have lost only one member. Our aim is to survive, not to beat them all into submission." After the previous day, Phloria had shed away most of her insecurities, becoming more decisive.

"The main problem is, that after pondering a lot about it, I came to the conclusion that splitting up was a mistake. This is a group exercise, staying in a cave isn't getting us anywhere. You two could have helped us a lot yesterday.

Not only Mirna could have been saved, but you would have gained battle experience. After fighting the Clackers, I feel I have grown a lot as a Mage Knight. None of us will truly understand his own abilities without putting them to the test."

"Agreed." Lith chimed in. "That's the reason why I taught you about how to use first magic in the wilderness and about magical beasts."

- "That, and because otherwise you would fall without teaching me nothing. Mage Knight's spells are something I have to replicate ASAP. I can't wait to see what those two are capable of.

Plus, I discovered a huge hole in my toolkit. I have to devise something against a swarm of small enemies."

"And what about a swarm of big enemies?" Solus asked.

"In that case, my only option is to run away." –

"Also, I would like to propose Phloria as team leader. For an unexperienced unit like ours, defence is more important than offence. Her skillset provides us the best options to stall and regroup. Not to mention yesterday she proved herself."

"It's an odd way to say: 'thank you for saving my a*s'." She replied.

"If we are keeping a score, I saved yours twice. First from the Cingy, then from the Ry. You are still an a*s short from getting the right to brag." He rebutted with one of his very few charming smiles.

The forced cohabitation, coupled with facing so many dangers together, had helped the group to develop camaraderie.

Despite all the hardships, Phloria was starting to enjoy their situation.

It was the first time since coming to the academy, that she was being looked up for her skill, not her noble title. Her teammates didn't hope for her to fail to feel better about themselves, they were counting on her.

Lith, instead, wasn't touched at all. For him it was just a temporary setback, something he had to cope with, exploiting that time to regain his people skills. He knew that over time, his edgelord demeanour would do him more harm than good.

The world was big and unknown, he needed to play by the rules of society and avoid useless conflicts. In the grand scheme of his plans, one week was barely a rehearsal.

No one objected to Lith proposal, he had already gained their respect. After seeing Phloria carrying him barely conscious, and listening to their story, Visen and Belia needed no more proof of her valour.

"Before setting out of here, here's my orders. Visen, you'll pair up with Lith, is better to keep attack and defence of each unit balanced. I'll take care of Belia. Second, switch whatever you have in your magic storing rings with your best last resort spells.

So far, nothing else worked, and things go downhill pretty fast."

Having learned from his past mistakes, Lith had already prepared, so he used that time to pass something from his pocket dimension to Phloria's, leaving her dazed.

"There something definitely wrong with your head." She said looking at his cold smile, while he was explaining his idea.

"But that's so wrong to be good."

The morning hunt did go much better than the previous day. By going the opposite direction of the Clackers' nest, they found much more wildlife. Lith managed to disguise multiple times spirit magic with air magic, claiming quite a catch.

Phloria helped too, while Belia and Visen focused on finding edible plants and fruits, their hunting skills were zero, and the others couldn't waste the precious light time teaching them.

Moving around for so long in the forest, it took Sentar only a few hours to find them and report their position.

["Do I have to announce myself and act alone like an idiot, again?"]

Making mistakes on purpose didn't upset the Cron, unless they ended up losing.

["No. New day, new rules. Only one of you has to be spotted, the others can lay low and coordinate their attacks with you."] Scarlett replied.

["One glove is off, let's get round two started!"]

Chapter 79 Day Two 2

It was almost noon, Phloria's group was about to call it a day, planning to resume after lunch. Belia was walking in the air.

After all that had happened during their first day, she had kept picturing the forest like a hellish place, with dangers lurking behind every corner. That morning, instead, had been so peaceful that she had managed to calm herself and regain a bit of self-esteem.

Visen was of a different opinion.

- "Damn! Seeing Lith's and Phloria going along so well after a single fight together, I was really hoping to get the opportunity to prove myself to them.

If a trembling jelly like Phloria has managed to become our team leader in one day, why should I be any different? My family is in the magic business from generation too, and my mom always told me

that I am talented.

Too bad that the academy's Professors do not agree with her. With Phloria's foolproof plan and Lith covering my a*s, I could show those beasts who is the boss. Sigh, instead all I did was picking fruits like a f*cking monkey!" –

Suddenly, the wildlife calls that had filled the air until a moment ago went quiet. Sentar's shriek cracked the silence, announcing its presence.

Lith flew to Visen's side, while Phloria did the same for Belia. The 2 men units kept a distance between themselves of about ten meters (11 yards), close enough to be able to help each other in case of need, but far enough to not get caught by friendly fire.

Unlike the first day, Visen wasn't scared at all. Lith was already covering his back, so he started chanting his first Warden spell, confiding in his partner skill to buy him enough time.

- "Thank you, gods! This is really my lucky day, I feel we can do it. But since you are already listening to me, can I also have the hot teacher from Principles of Advanced Magic fall into my arms, completely naked?" –

Sadly, the mystic line between a man and his gods had to be gone bad. Instead of Nalear, it was Sentar diving downwards Visen, its talons spread wide for the kill.

Truth to be told, it was a female and was naked too, hence many could argue that two thirds of the youth's prayer had actually been granted.

Lith managed to finish his spell in time, conjuring three fireballs at once in a triangular formation along the Cron's trajectory.

To avoid getting hit, Sentar was forced to conjure a strong updraft to make a U-turn and avoid the blunt of the explosion. Seeing that all eyes were still following its movements, after gaining altitude Sentar started flying in circles and preparing a trap.

Coming from the opposite direction from their partner, Termyn and M'Rook tried to take the humans by surprise. Yet no one had actually paid any attention to the Cron, their casting uninterrupted.

Phloria had already conjured a tower shield made out of earth, its surface completely frozen. A perfect counter to most spells based on air or fire magic, the only elements a Ry could use.

Belia was now wearing a thin suit of armour, formed by countless shards of ice, the number of which was rising at dramatic speed, covering every inch of her body and forming odd spikes on her back and arms.

M'Rook had often seen that spell in the past years, the Ry knew it meant troubles.

["Termyn, we have no time to lose. If the armour fully forms, we'll lose our physical advantage against that pup and will be forced to rely more on spells."]

["Then what are we waiting for? I'll take care of the pups so dumb to use my elements, while you knock the others unconscious. Sentar has almost finished setting up the array, it's a foolproof plan!"]

["Stop thinking with your tusks, dimwit! It's all too obvious. This is either a trap or the most idiotic plan I have ever seen. Let's pretend to fall for it, but be ready to switch opponents once we

understand their ruse."]

M'Rook had used an air spell, to keep contact with its partners, no matter how distant.

["Copy that, M'Rook."] Sentar replied. ["I'll give you all the covering fire you need, let's kick their a*s and go home. I'm bored already."]

- "Phew! I'm glad I get to switch target with M'Rook." Termyn thought.

"I don't like the pup with the mean eyes, he gives me an eerie feeling. I can't put my knuckles on it, but he has a vibe that reminds me of Boss Scarlett." -

Termyn wasn't stupid, quite the contrary. M'Rook knew it, and that was the reason it had lashed at the Cingy's eagerness. Termyn had the sharpest instinct among the three, but this time was too embarrassed for sharing its readings.

Both the magical beasts charged at their opponents, M'Rook in a zig-zag pattern to not offer an easy target, while Termyn could only advance in a straight line.

- "Well, well. Look at that." Lith thought. "Seems that when not chasing us, they are not allowed to use fusion magic. First the Cron, and now the Ry aren't using air fusion speed boost to overwhelm us.

If I'm right, this is a rare occasion to go mano a mano with a magical beast. If I'm wrong, meh. I'll fall valiantly protecting the team and get the heck out of here." –

Visen had yet to finish his second spell, he needed more time. There were only so much Lith could do, with all the restrictions that the presence of witnesses burdened him with.

But having already drank another set of three fake potions and activating air, fire and earth fusion, he was still quite confident after discovering that his opponents had restrictions too.

Lith flew toward the Ry, manoeuvring in all three dimensions, forcing it to a stop.

["Not this again!"] M'Rook growled in frustration. Suddenly, switching targets didn't seem such a good idea anymore.

["Ah, M'Rook, my stubborn apprentice. Seems like yesterday when a man-pup gave you a good beating and I once again pressed you to learn how to fly. Any creature that controls air magic should do it. Refusing to, is a sign of either pride or stupidity.

Which one is your case, apprentice?"] Boss Scarlett's voice resounded in its ears.

["It doesn't seem like, it was yesterday! And you repeated that a hundred times already, I get it! Now shut the f*ck up! This pup is troublesome."]

Scarlett guffawed at the Ry trying to hide its shame and embarrassment behind an angry façade.

Meanwhile, Termyn had almost reached the girls. When the Cingy was about thirty meters (33 yards) from them, they both launched toward it two yellow wisps of air magic, one from the left, one from the right, in a X pattern that left Termyn no way to dodge.

- "Oh, sh*t! Not this again!" – Termyn thought.

Having learned its lesson, the Cingy dived nose first toward the ground, that opened under the girl's astonished eyes and turned softer than cotton, allowing the beast to burrow through like a hot knife

against butter.

That move had caught them unprepared, but Phloria training kicked in. She kept following the tunnelling effect with her eyes, while casting a Mage Knight spell with her free hand.

Belia's armour was almost complete, and several full formed ice weapons were circling around her, waiting for a command. Like Phloria, she was readying another spell, cursing herself for not having bought any potion.

They had asked Lith if he could share them, but the imprint system made it impossible. From opening the stopper, to drinking the liquid, only the owner was allowed to do it.

There were only two possible options. Lith could drink and spit them into another bottle, but not only that was disgusting, it was also useless. Outside the flask, the magical properties would quickly disappear.

The second one, was to pass the liquid mouth to mouth. Everyone had dismissed the idea without a second thought. In the heat of the battle it would have been suicidal.

When Termyn came out of the ground, right under the girls' feet, like a shark from a horror movie, it met Phloria's tower shield reinforced by the Tower Guard spell.

It enhanced the conjured shield density, raising its weight and hardness to that of a rock weighing several hundred kilos.

Despite Tower Guard, Termyn came out dazed but unscathed, while the tower shield shattered on impact, forcing Phloria to cast for a new one.

Lith too was having a hard time. Once the initial surprise was over, the Ry had decided to ignore him and take down the weakest link. The other pup was doing nothing but casting non-stop, with no apparent effect.

Much to Lith's disappointment, even with the potion-like boost from fusion magic, his physical attacks had almost no effect. The thick fur was like a cushion, taking the blunt of the hits and dispersing most of the kinetic energy.

- "Dammit! If only I could go all out with fusion magic, this would go differently." -

"Not on my watch!" Lith yelled, releasing his tier three spell Checkmate Spears to stall some more. But this time M'Rook had its legs on the ground, and had already experienced the spell's effect.

So, it used compact and high-density air shields to deflect all the spears it wasn't able to dodge while moving at high speed with air fusion.

- "F*ck me sideways!" Lith thought. "Their restrictions only apply when attacking, not defending."
-

It took only a couple of seconds for Lith's spell effects to wear off, leaving the Ry with nothing more than a few bruises. Visen had yet to finish.

"How long does it take?" Lith yelled in frustration.

"And don't you dare answering until everything's ready!"

- "Perfection requires time!" – Visen inwardly grumbled, completing the second spell and starting the third one.

- "I swear that as soon I get back to the academy, I'll stockpile speed potions like there's no tomorrow. How could I be so stupid? I'd really deserve a good beating." –

Once again, Visen and the gods seemed to be perfectly in tune.

Sentar had finally completed the dark air array in the sky, making flying above the trees impossible for the four students, while thunderbolts and black arrows rained from the enormous magic circle the Cron had materialized.

The fast lightnings and the slower arrows coordinated their trajectories, leaving Phloria's team no way out but defeat.

Chapter 80 Day Two's Aftermath

While Termyn was still in a daze, Belia didn't miss the opportunity to strike with her most powerful lightning spell. The Cingy was incapable of using fusion magic, so it took a clean hit, its whole body going into a spasm, keeping it an easy target.

- "Dammit!" Belia thought. "I was so scared when those things attacked, that's only thanks to Phloria's instructions that I didn't freeze again.

And to add insult to the injury, I was in such a rush that I ended using the Bladed Battle Armour instead of the Bashing one. Edged weapons are useless against such thick protections. F*ck my life. Here goes everything!" –

As soon as the lightning struck, Belia rearranged the ice shards that composed her armour, turning the gloves in war hammers, that she slammed with the combined strength of her arms and flight spell between the Cingy's eyes.

The impact was strong enough to make the beast take a few steps back, while shaking its head trying to regain focus. The several blades conjured from the ice armour, started to spin on their axis, turning into buzz saws.

Following Belia's will, they encircled the enemy attacking from all sides, managing thanks to their high-speed rotation to cut through the rock-hard skin.

Termyn scoffed at the girl's efforts.

- "Please! The first hit is for free, the next ones you have to earn them." -

Just like the day of their first encounter, the Cingy activated Mountain Body, its strongest defensive spell. Every inch of Termyn's body turned to a shiny black, its density raised to the extreme thanks to a massive flow of earth magic.

A short charge forward was enough to send Belia crashing against tree, stopping the blade swarm in its tracks. Phloria had no idea how to stop something so strong and heavy, yet she had to try.

It was in that moment that the situation turned for the worse, with lightning and dark projectiles raining from the sky.

- "That's a game two can play!" Visen inwardly screamed. "Gods, why in the heroes' tales they are never caught in the middle of a spell? Talking should be a free action!" –

It was his time to shine, yet he was forced to keep chanting the third Warden formation, while with his foot he activated the magic symbol he had engraved in the ground.

All he could do was use first magic to create a bang noise, alerting his companions.

Instantly, the entire area of the fight was surrounded by magnetite enriched stone pillars, that acted like powerful lighting rods and intercepted every single electricity magic-based attack.

- "Sh*t! I wanted to complete all three to maximize their effect, but we are losing ground every second. – Gritting his teeth, Visen activated the second array, creating a ten meters (11 yards) radius low gravity field.

The four mages had all stored a flight spell in their rings or were already flying, so they could instantly cope with the sudden change. Gravity or not, it made no difference to them.

But when Termyn tried to take on Phloria's shield, she only had to give it a strong push upwards to send it in the air, like the Cingy was just a balloon.

Belia's armour had already reformed, and she was ready to intercept the enemy.

According to the plan, she should have kept it in the air, exploiting the Cingy's weakness to wear it down with physical and magical attacks, giving Phloria the time to take care of the Ry.

But avoiding the sudden hail of dark bullets and foiling all Termyn's attempts to reach the ground, required all of her focus, leaving Belia no time to attack.

Termyn was conjuring tendrils of earth to get back down, generating at the same time thick ice shields to intercept Belia's spells and ice bullets to keep her away.

The Cingy couldn't allow to be hit by a Lift again, it would have been too humiliating failing twice for the same trick. Termyn was giving its all, swimming towards the tendrils.

All Belia could do was use her conjured weapons to cut the tendrils as soon as they arose from the ground, while dodging the combined attacks the magical beasts were raining on her.

Lith could only curse their bad luck.

- "Who would have thought that magical beast can use arrays too? Based on what I have seen, if I could use true magic, I could fight on par with one of them. But as a fake magic user, we need two of us to make one of them.

Even if Mirna was still with us, we would still be at disadvantage.

We have only until Visen's formations run out of juice before the wipe out. Got to take care of that Cron, and fast!" –

As soon as the second Warden array was activated, Lith circled around the flabbergasted M'Rook, whose legs were now a few centimetres floating above the ground, grabbing it by the tail and throwing it toward Phloria.

According to the plan, it was up to her to get rid of the Ry with the ace in the hole Lith had kindly provided. But even without the lightnings, Sentar's control on the array was on another level, compared to Visen's.

Sentar could freely manipulate the dark bullets aiming only to their enemies, greatly reducing the advantage the low gravity field granted the man-pups. The Cron would also reinforce the barrage adding wind blades, making any attempt to attack her allies even harder.

Despite always having refused to learn how to fly, M'Rook was a natural at air magic. Even just reacting by instinct, the Ry was able to move enough to avoid almost all Phloria half-baked attacks.

Seeing no other way out, Lith decided to resort to a ridiculous plan that had just popped in his head. Termyn was completely focused on Belia and at controlling the tendrils, its back was wide open.

The Cingy had yet to notice that Lith and Phloria had switched opponents.

Lith shoot a fireball at the ground below Termyn, the resulting explosion propelled it in the air, away from the earth tendrils and scattering the defensive shields.

Lith moved below the belly of the beast, pushing it upwards with all the speed and strength he could muster. Visen's array didn't cover that much space, Lith needed to gain momentum fast, before the reduced gravity effect wore off.

He soared the skies, willingly walking into Sentar's trap. Using Termyn as a shield, though, it was the poor Cingy that took all the damage in his stead, grunting at its opponent for using such a dirty tactic.

Sentar was forced to temporarily stop the sky array. Termyn could take lightnings all day and whistle the whole time, but darkness bullets were another story. Every time they hit, they would sap the strength and vitality of the victim.

When all the momentum had dissipated, and the Cingy started to plummet, Sentar hesitated for a moment. The Cron could see its friend had gone limp, its eyes were clouded by the fatigue and pain from all the friendly fire it had endured.

Sentar was worried that falling from that height, Termyn could get seriously wounded if it didn't manage to soften the landing.

Lith exploited their friendship, using that moment to reveal himself, casting his new and hopefully sure kill spell. Despite its name, Checkmate Spears had yet to defeat a single opponent.

"Burning Prison!"

Six fireballs appeared at the same time around Sentar, one above, one below and the others in a square shape, resembling for a moment a giant, flaming eight faced die.

Without giving the enemy the time to react, they all detonated together, inflicting heavy damages despite the air shield Sentar had managed to conjure at the last split second.

Back at the castle, having nothing else to do, the Professors were spectating and commentating their students' performances.

"That's my student!" Professor Vastor was puffing his chest with pride.

"I always told you, Thorman. Healing magic develops calm and foresight. That alone wins half of a battle." He said while actually looking at the Headmaster, trying to get extra funds from him, like everybody else.

"Bullsh*t!" Professor Wanemyre replied. "That's thanks to my classes. Only a Forgemaster can have such a quick casting and precision at timing his spells."

"Bah! You should get a full check-up as soon as possible. Clearly there is something wrong in your head." Vastor scoffed at her remark.

"What if I killed you both at the same time? You are ruining my show!" Manohar yelled throwing salty snacks at them. Unlike the others, he was sitting on a very comfortable looking armchair, surrounded by bowls filled with delicacies.

He was zapping from fight to fight, looking for something interesting. Right now, he was trying to follow Phloria's group from different angles through the surveillance mirrors.

"Man, this stuff is good." He said while eating a pretzel-like snack.

"We should record and sell it. I call dibs on the profits. I need more funds. Okay, Linjos?"

The Headmaster could tolerate the lack of honorifics, but the idea of making a business out the sweat and blood of his students was too much. Those were the lives of young adults, not the entertainment for some rich and bored noble.

Yet the idea had its allure. The academy was a black hole for money, no matter how much the Kingdome invested on it, there were never enough.

"I'm more interested in one student managing to develop a tier four personal spell after a month. Great job, Nalear." Professor Nalear replied with a polite bow, using the hand behind her back to give the finger to her boastful competitors.

Before the smoke dissipated, Lith was already charging full speed ahead.

- "I bet everything I have that the f*cking Cron is still alive and kicking. No matter how much I put in a single spell, it's never enough against a magical beast." –

And he was right. Sentar was injured, but far from being knock out. It had managed to compensate quality with quantity, conjuring a series of concentric air barriers, halving the spell effectiveness.

While the Cron was still dazed by the booms and the blinding flames, Lith appeared through the lingering smoke. Putting the potions finally at use, he punched Sentar multiple times, in the head and body.

Back on the ground, without covering fire, M'Rook was losing ground quickly. The array intercepted every lightning, while Phloria's shield offered protection against any quick spell it could whip up.

Phloria was managing to hit more and more often, her sword was perfect for piercing the thick fur and skin of the Ry, that was now bleeding from multiple points.

After using Blast Guard to throw her opponent off balance, she took out something from her dimensional amulet, using first magic to keep it on the tip of the sword.

At her next stab, M'Rook did its best to dodge, but Phloria still managed to use her superior mobility to stab through, injecting the Clacker's poison Lith had saved from the previous day in the enemy's side.