

Supreme M 91

Chapter 91 An Old Friend

Lith never expected for Selia Fastarrow to get all sentimental, and in fact she didn't. Her eyes had barely the opportunity to get watery before she steeled up, replying with a giant grin.

"Now that you mention it, I really deserve this trinket." She said retrieving the hand from his grasp and using it to ruffle his short black hair. Selia was moved, but didn't like to show her emotions in front of others.

"It's only thanks to the secret stash of meat that I hid and tenderized for you that you managed to grow so big and strong. In a way, I'm part of your family as well." She said playfully, trying to lighten the mood.

"In a way? You are part of my family. Almost like an aunt" Lith replied, hoping to achieve a critical hit and make her tough mask crumble. He didn't really care much, otherwise he would have kept tabs on her health too during all those years.

But Lith's debt was real. Without her help and contacts, hunting beasts would have provided meat, but not money or clothing from the pelts and hides. Everything would have gone to waste, making his family's life much harder.

Lith wasn't willing to keep any tab open, nor he was enough of a scum to forget about someone just because she had apparently outlived her usefulness. Relations were important in such small community.

It was unlikely that whenever his family would need help, he would always be able to promptly return. Also, he had no idea how long the Court would protect them in his stead.

Between Nana and Selia, they would have the two most important local figures by their side, leaving the need to call for the Count or the Marchioness only in case it was absolutely necessary.

Selia hugged him tight enough to squeeze the air from his lungs.

"If I end up marrying and having children of my own it would be all your fault." She said sobbing a little.

"Who would ever guessed that rude little jerks could become so cute?"

- "Guess I exaggerated a bit. I didn't mean to crank the drama to eleven, just wanted her to feel indebted!"

"You monster!" Solus scolded him harshly. "Stop playing with the feelings of those close to you. I understand when you do it to complete strangers, since there is no trust between you. But that was just cruel." –

Feeling guilty, Lith consoled Selia for a while, and gave her the same treatment his parents had received that morning, removing all the accumulated damage and knots that over a decade of hunting incidents had inflicted to her body.

It only made her more grateful and loving, which in turn made Solus even more angry, scolding him all the way back home.

Later that evening, he gave one ring to each family member. Needless to say, the dinner got delayed half an hour because they would not stop making things appear and disappear, like kids with a new toy.

Nana had to wait until the next morning to get her own.

"I know is not much, compared to what you lost, Master. But it's all I can do at the moment."

Mindful about what had happened the previous night, Lith avoided stirring the heart of his mentor.

"Not much? Stop being stupid, young spirit. You have no idea what does it mean for me." She looked at it like it was a lost son.

"No Forgemaster ever accepted to sell me one of these, no matter the sum I offered. They were too scared sully their reputation. I hope that once you graduate, you'll not change your mind and take me as your first client.

There is so much I still want to get back."

"It would be my honour."

Nana hugged him, holding back her tears.

- "What's wrong with these people? I got more hugs by strangers in these two days than in twelve frigging years!" He thought.

"Shut up and get hugged!" Solus commanded. –

After leaving Nana and Tista to their patients, it was time to deliver the last one.

Count Lark was very happy to see him, Lith could almost see stars in his eyes while he was staring at the present.

"Thank you so much, Lith. Having one of my proteges joining one of the six great academies is already a dream that comes true. But you managing to make one of these after just one month, goes beyond my wildest expectations."

"I just wanted to show you my gratitude. Without your help and perseverance, I would have stubbornly continued with the home-schooling, missing so many opportunities."

Lark patted Lith's shoulder, adjusting his monocle.

"There no need to dig up past mistakes. There are more recent events that I would like to share with you. For example, recently the Court and the Mage Association have finally deliberated about Headmistress Linnea's decision about you and Nana."

He made a dramatic pause, wanting to keep his guest on edge.

"And?" Lith prompted him to continue, taking bait, line and sinker.

"They deemed her decision reckless, overstepping the boundaries of a Headmaster's authority. Her rulings have been revoked, and being the one that presented the appeal, I was bestowed the title of Knight of the Griffon as a reward."

"What is it?"

"It's just an honorific title, thanks the gods, with no lands attached. Basically, I'm not considered a local nuisance anymore but a benefactor of the Kingdom. The most important benefit, is that when I request a hearing from the Court, it takes much less time now."

"How recently, exactly?"

"About two weeks ago. Why?"

- "Good to know." Lith sighed in relief. "If it all happened after the mock exam, it would mean that I'm overdoing things. I absolutely need to avoid standing out too much. So far so good." –

"No reason, just curious. What about Linnea? What happened to her?"

"Glad you asked." Lark had a smug grin, cleaning invisible dust from his monocle with a handkerchief.

"At first, she was just reprimanded. It doesn't seem much, but believe me, for someone with an oversized ego is huge hit.

Then she suffered the same fate from the previous Headmaster from the White Griffon. She has been relieved from her duty, and replaced by someone younger and more open minded."

"Is that a big thing?" Lith asked, being completely ignorant about mages' internal affairs.

"It's enormous. Headmaster is supposed to be like a noble title, lifelong. Being forcefully removed like that is the equivalent of marking her as a failure. She will never hold an important position again.

Is not as bad as what happened to Nana, but it's the next worst thing."

"Aren't they afraid she could defect the kingdom?"

"And go where?" Lark scoffed. "Sure, she can sell her academy's secrets, but that's it. No one would want someone deemed detrimental by her own country. She could get riches, but she has no need for money.

No one will give her status and power back."

Lith almost felt bad for her. Being rejected by her academy was the best present that any mage of commoner origins may ask. Without Linjos and his policy, even a Ballot would have been of limited use.

People like him or Quylla would have been likely forced to quit.

"And when did this happen?"

"About two days ago. Seems someone aced his mock exam." Lark winked at him.

- "Dammit, I opened my mind-mouth too soon! The Queen is too decisive, couldn't have let her resign by her own will with an excuse? What if she tries to get back at Nana? Or me?" – Lith inwardly cursed.

Lark seemed to read his mind, promptly easing his worries.

"Rest assured, they would not take unnecessary risks. If the Court and the Association shamed her like that, was to set an example.

I wouldn't be surprised if in a few months, when the investigations are finished, she would choose to disappear from the public scene. As in forever." Another wink.

- "That's a nice way to say she will be killed because deemed more dangerous than useful. I must be really careful not suffering the same fate. Being part of the political system is a double-edged sword. If I get involved too deep, they will not let me go.

They'll use my family to turn me in a dog on a leash." –

"Thank you very much, Lark." They knew each other long enough to avoid honorifics when alone.

"Sorry if I keep bothering you but, any news about my lost brother?" Lith had been true to his word, and made the Count keep tabs on Orpal, preparing to deal with him in case he ever decided to return.

"There is not much to add." Lark shook his head. "After getting into the orphanage, he was renamed Meln. As per your request, I moved him in an institution at the edges of the County, to make harder for him to get back in case of escape.

He had quite a hard life, from what I know. As soon as he became sixteen, he joined the military. Has been honourably discharged after two years. After that, he left Lustria County and never came back."

- "Two years of military service." Lith thought. "Enough to earn merits, get rid of the disowned brand and start a new life from scratch as a free man." –

"I'll keep an eye out for him. What do you want me to do, in case he returns?"

"If he has no ill will, then just contact me as soon as you can. Otherwise, I must ask you to do the same thing you would for your own family."

"Worry not!" Lark offered him his hand, and Lith promptly shook it.

"If I smell the slightest sign of trouble, I'll make sure he will never bother you ever again!"

Chapter 92 Solus' Surprise 2

After a bit of chit-chat, the Count was forced to return to his daily routine. He had to manage both his and the fief that once belonged to her late wife's family. Even with the help of his children, it was still a mammoth task.

He knew very little of the neighbouring Milla County, and most of the old retainers where either corrupt or untrustworthy, resenting the Lark household for what had happened to their previous Lord.

Even after four years, there was still a lot to do and a lack of loyal personnel.

Lark had resolved to split the Counties, giving Lustria to his son, and the Ghishal's lands to his daughter. That way, both had the opportunity to make their spouses marry in the Lark household, allowing them a much ample choice.

Lith could not believe that both the Count's children would have an arranged marriage, while Rena had been able to spend her life with the man she loved. Nobles had an easier life, but even that came with a price tag.

Their personal life had to be sacrificed in the name of the responsibilities that their title involved.

Having still a couple of hours before having to return home, at Solus' insistence Lith went back to the withered zone, allowing Solus to take once more her proto tower form.

"That was mean on your side, you know?"

"What did I do wrong this time?" He sighed.

"I said that we have two labs, yet you didn't even glance at the alchemic one. Not even once."

"Maybe because I have no idea how a Master Alchemist works? It could be a room filled gold bars or candy canes, I could not make head or tails anyway."

This time, Lith entered the second door, right in the alchemic lab.

It was different from the Forgemaster room; it was full of stills and small bottles. There were a lot of glass jars, each with its own tag, marking the ingredient they were supposed to hold.

Yet just like the day before, everyone of them was empty. Lith walked among the jars, some were for trivial things like wood shavings or metal beads, while others were labelled with exotic monsters or magical creatures body parts.

Fur, claws, horns, everything seemed to have a use for Alchemists.

"Impressive." Lith admitted after examining what seemed like a production line.

"But I still don't get it!"

"Fine! Let me give you a recap of the first lesson."

Suddenly Lith found himself in Solus' memories, surrounded by ghost-like shapes that he supposed were students attending the lesson. It seemed Solus hadn't paid them much attention, they were so blurred to be unrecognizable.

The Professor, instead, appeared so real that Lith would have not be surprised if he turned towards him and asked what the heck he was doing there.

"Hello, my dear students. My name is Peln Reflaar, and I'll teach you everything you'll ever need to know about the art of alchemy."

He was a man in his early thirties, about 1.75 meters (5'9") high, with short blond hair and grey eyes. He also had perfect teeth, white enough that Lith almost expected him to shoot laser beams every time he smiled.

The tight-fitting clothes revealed a fit muscular body, full of vigour and energy. He was by far the most handsome man Lith had ever seen.

"Some of you, may have heard that an Alchemist is the cheap copy of a Forgemaster.

Alas, that's not entirely false, but it's not true either. The reason because the two classes are scheduled together, is because I am not going to lie to you. I won't sugarcoat any aspect of this job.

So, if at any time you want to leave and join the Forgemastering course, you can do it."

After a second, since no one was moving, Reflaar continued talking.

"First of all, you have to know that I am new to this job. The old Professor, like his Forgemaster colleague, had almost managed to make this class die. Alchemists already have a poor reputation, couple that with a belligerent fool, and you get a recipe for a disaster.

Most students choose their specialization courses based on what their parents want or what their heroes do. Do you remember a story with a valiant Alchemist as a protagonist? Well, me neither.

The crafting department has always been the ugly duckling of magic, and I don't see it changing in the near future. At least legendary rings, weapons and armours had to be enchanted, so albeit with a secondary role, Forgemasters appear in those stories.

That leaves us completely out of the picture, to the point that many don't even know of our existence. At this point, many should be asking themselves: 'what am I doing here?' or 'why should I take this class?'. "

His dramatic pause worked, Lith was eager for an explanation.

"The answer lies here." Reflaar opened his left hand, revealing what it resembled an orange flavoured jelly bean. After letting the students take a good look of it, he backstepped a bit before throwing it against the far end of the wall at his back.

As soon as it hit the wall, the jelly bean exploded, releasing raging flames. Only the class' safety measures allowed the students to remain unscathed by both noise and heat.

"That, my students, was a tier three Fireball." Without letting them recover from the shock, he took out a wand, and with a flicker of his wrist lightnings crashed one after the other against the wall in the same spot the fireball had struck.

"And those were tier three Lightnings, all cast in rapid succession from a magic wand, with no casting time or mana consumption."

Reflaar then took a pause, allowing them to understand what he was saying.

"As I told you before, I'm not going to lie to you. Being an Alchemist is an amazing job. Where Forgemasters are like artists, spending lots of time and energy on every single one of their creations, we Alchemists are like bakers.

The fruits of our endeavours are not made to last, cannot be passed down through generations. They must be prepared quickly, in huge batches and for an affordable price, saving countless lives every single day.

While laymen just sort us crafters based on our products, calling Forgemasters 'permanents' and us 'consumables', I see our jobs in a completely different light. Forgemasters work to build a better future, but Alchemists are the ones nurturing the present.

All that you are going to learn here, makes the difference on every single battlefield, be it a skirmish or a war. Healing potions are vital for soldiers alone on the front lines.

A handful of fireball seeds can turn a battalion into ashes or, if planted by hand, secure a perimeter."

"That's true! They can be used to create a minefield!" Lith exclaimed.

"The great advantage of alchemy over forgemastering, is that anyone, even non magicians can proficiently use the things we create, not to mention the price is much lower.

On the other hand, though, a magical item is forever, an alchemical one cannot be recharged.

Another big difference between the two disciplines, is that alchemical spells require relatively low mana, so each one of you will be able whip up quite a few things before needing to rest.

Questions?"

"What use do ingredients have?" Asked a seemingly female voice.

"Good point! You see, while tier one can be bottled up as they are, from tier two and up, a focus is needed for spells to retain their potency.

For example, the fireball seed I used earlier requires fur of a fire using magical beast, a Phoenix Rose or any other ingredient with a high fire affinity. The most valuable ingredients have all been found with a trial and error process, so feel free to experiment on your own. Next question."

"I've seen in the Prize Hall physical enhancement potions. Why I have never heard about such spells? And why those potions have side effects?" Said a male voice.

"That's an excellent one. The problem with such spells is twofold. First, their cast time is absurdly long. The best Alchemist can cast one of them in around one minute, and their effect lasts only for three minutes."

"One minute?!" Lith was flabbergasted. "Then they are useless!"

"That makes them useless in real battle." Raflaar's memory confirmed Lith's assumption. "That's why it's much better bottle them up and save them for a later use.

Remember, Alchemy is the art of always been prepared. With enough time, one of us can have access to the equivalent of several mages' worth of spells.

As for the side effects, injecting someone else's mana in your body is akin to poison. Even tier one physical enhancement spells require ingredients to mitigate such effects. They are the most expensive and useful potions for a mage.

That's why the Prize Hall only sells the tier one kind. To avoid students wasting points and focusing more on the permanent magical tools. Alchemy is easier to find, and more importantly, to afford.

Those of you that do not belong to really rich noble families, would not be able to afford magical items for a long time, without the points system. Any more questions?"

Students asked for explanations one after the other. Lith wasn't that interested in the finest details, so made Solus fast forward until the Professor gave a demonstration of an alchemic spell.

He stood in front of what looked like a huge separating funnel, connected with several glass flasks in a production line identical to the one in Solus' lab.

After a minute, with just a single spell, he filled the funnel to the brim, revealing several ingredients that had been placed within it, that were now being slowly absorbed by the magic liquid, before it got transferred into the flasks.

"See?" Reflaar said. "Ten speed enhancing potions for barely a minute of work. They would cost one hundred points in the Prize Hall, or one hundred gold coins in a shop. Even deducting the costs for vials and ingredients, the net income would be around eighty gold coins."

Then he proceeded to show how to create Fireball seeds before putting an end to the lesson.

Lith didn't know if to laugh or cry.

"This is all so complicated. Between my two others specializations and true magic, I already have a headache. It will take me years to understand Alchemy, I just do not have time!"

"Maybe, and maybe not." Solus replied. "Even in my ring form, I have access to both labs, and in my free time I have been experimenting with Alchemy during the last month.

When I am not in tower form, I have little mana, so I can only practice for a little before needing to borrow yours. Anyway, if we manage to get our hands on formulas and ingredients, I can prepare the simplest alchemic items on my own.

For the others, I will need your help. And once I learn things, I can teach them to you."

"Well, yeah, our mind link would speed up studying it, but I would still require practice and comprehension for... Wait a minute! You had access to the labs? That means you practiced the whole magic circle thingy. Right off the bat my a*s!"

"Ops." Solus mind shrugged. "You got me. Guilty as charged."

"And why all those students were so faded in your memories? It's like you never focused one any of them. Even the floor was pictured in more detail. Your perspective never moved from Reflaar..."

Thanks to their mind link, despite she had not a physical body, he could feel anxiety and embarrassment leaking from the surface of her mind.

"Solus, don't tell me that you have reached puberty too or something?"

"Absolutely not!" She yelled in a non-convincing tone, her voice gone up an octave.

"That would explain a lot. The constant pestering me about girls, the nagging about the lack of romance..."

"I don't nag!" She replied offended.

"Then I don't glare!" He scoffed.

Lith was about to mention the possibility of her having the hots for the teacher, but preferred to back down. If he was right, prodding her further would escalate the joke, leading to an argument.

He really hoped to be wrong, though. Solus having such feelings was one of the things Scarlett had warned him from. Whatever was her nature, longing for intimacy but lacking any means of even feeling human contact, was something too cruel to bear.

Chapter 93 There and Back Again

Lith spent his last free days studying Alchemy and Forgemastering.

Both the crafting disciplines were very hard to convert into true magic.

Alchemy was a weak subject for him.

He barely managed to understand the basics, leaving most of the work to Solus, while he studied his clothes, amulet and magic storing rings, hoping to understand how to replicate and enhance their pseudo cores with true Forgemastering.

Before leaving, Lith managed to pay a social visit to Protector, Reaper and Lifebringer. He wanted to be updated about the situation in the Trawn woods, but more importantly he was fishing for Alchemic ingredients.

During spring, animals would change their coats, and deer would shed their antlers. What for him was a treasure for them was garbage, so they had no reason to deny his request.

By simply grooming them for a few minutes, he had enough to stuff several pillows.

After returning to the Academy, life once again resumed its routine, with only a couple of changes. Lith obtained from Phloria and Friya training in sword arts, and in exchange Phloria would take part in his silent magic private lessons.

Adjusting their schedule proved to be a bit hard, but thanks to Soluspedia, Lith didn't need to study much. Worst case scenario he would not sleep and Invigorate himself to cram through the night and leave the afternoons free.

That, coupled with Phloria attending to only one specialization course, allowed him to practice often.

Months passed, and so the end of the first trimester came.

Many students were afraid of the finals, and started to compile a list of all the possible trials that could be required for them to perform.

Lith couldn't care less. If it was a written exam, with Soluspedia it would be a walk in the park. If the test was of practical nature, he was quite confident to be able to screw it up just enough to be in the top 10, but avoiding the top spots.

The day of the finals, they were all assembled in the compulsory courses' class, the only one that could accommodate all the fourth-year students, waiting for Professor Trasque to arrive.

Yet the one that entered the room was Headmaster Linjos.

"Good morning, my precious students. This time, I bring you only good news.

There will be no finals, because you have already taken all of them."

Most of those present went into panic, thinking that the mock exam had actually been a real one. All those that reached this conclusion, cursed the Headmaster inwardly, for the unfairness of crushing their grades after only a month of preparation.

"This is one of the changes that I have made to White Griffon system, that no one was aware of. You have been judged daily for three months, based on your preparation and the effort you put into the lessons.

I want you to know that rather than failure or success, special importance has been attached to your progress. To how you learned about your weak points and worked on fixing them.

After such prolonged and careful evaluation, any further test would be useless, especially written exams. They would only serve to see who is better at cheating, like often happened in the previous years.

The only way to get good grades with my system, is through hard work and perseverance, not by goofing off a whole term and hoping for a mad rush to be enough."

His tone became harsh during the last sentence, looking straight to some students that cowered behind their desks.

"Also, there will be no ranking, not until the end of the year. It's another toxic relic of the past, that only managed to sour relationships and turned friends into enemies. I will now give you your report card, but it's for your eyes only."

In front of each student appeared a blank piece of paper.

"To read its content, just imprint it with your mana. To those who have passed all their courses, you have my congratulations. For those who have failed one or more classes, you'll have to retake them entirely in the second trimester.

If you have problems with your timetable, I suggest you to drop a specialization, if you are taking more than one. Is better to achieve less than failing entirely."

Scared murmuring filled the air.

"To those that find such judgement unfair, feel free to bring the matter up to the Professors or to me, if you prefer. We'll give you impromptu make-up tests.

In case you succeed, the votes will be changed accordingly. There will be no punishment in case of failure. Dismissed. Take the rest of the day to plan your future properly. You have only until the end of today to ask for a second evaluation."

Linjos had yet to reach the door that everyone was picking his own report card, infusing it with magic.

Lith's one was as following:

Theory of Combat Magic: A; Principles of Advanced Magic: A; Forgemastering: A; Healing: S-.
School points gained from daily evaluation: 3,365.

- "F*ck! What did I do wrong to get that S?"

"Do you mean aside from sharing your spell, proposing brilliant ideas on daily basis and removing the Clacker's venom from your body and weaponizing it in front of the whole staff?" Solus sneered.

"Dammit, Linjos keeps screwing up my plans. I can't ruin my average score during the finals if there are no finals. That man is diabolical."

"What is done is done." Solus mind-shrugged. "Let's see how the others fared." –

Looking around the class, watching the student's faces was enough to get an idea of their grades. Those who cried or cursed loudly had clearly failed at one or more classes.

Lith didn't have to go far, his four "friends" had taken the habit to sit next to him as soon they had returned from the four days break.

"What's with the sour face?" Yurial asked looking worried.

"Did something go wrong?"

"Let's get out of here." Lith replied with a whisper.

"To not betray Linjos' expectations, is better to talk somewhere private." He pointed with his thumb to the heart broken students.

Everyone nodded, then they got up and exited the room unnoticed. Yurial's place was the closest one, so they headed there

After closing the door behind them, Lith activated his Hush spell. He was almost certain that all the rooms were soundproof, considering the philandering style they were built for. But he wasn't the type to take chances.

"Well? How did it go?" Phloria prompted him.

"Mine is: Theory of Combat Magic: B+; Principles of Advanced Magic: B; Mage Knight: A+. School points gained from daily evaluation: 2,254."

Everyone gave her a short round of applause.

"Thanks, but I bet I have less points than you lot, since I got only a specialization."

"Yeah, we are almost the same." Quylla stood straight as an arrow.

"I got Theory of Combat Magic: B-; Principles of Advanced Magic: B+; Healing: A++. School points gained from daily evaluation: 2,382. Sadly, I still suck at the combat part of magic."

Another short round of applauses, with a side of whistles.

"Sigh, seems I'm not in the running for the top spot as a healer anymore." Yurial said with an apologetic voice.

"I got only Theory of Combat Magic: B; Principles of Advanced Magic: B; Warden: A; Healing: A. School points gained from daily evaluation: 2,530. At least I can console myself with the extra points."

He seemed really dejected. Taking out a specialization, the archmage's heir had scored two plusses less than a starving commoner.

"Don't beat yourself up, man." Lith said patting Yurial on his back.

"Quylla and Phloria performed outstandingly, but you are no worse in any way. Managing to score two As in both your specializations of choice is no easy feat."

Yurial humbly accepted the compliment, and so did the girls.

- "Now my only hope is that I didn't just shoot me in the foot unknowingly insulting Friya." – Lith though, trying to play both sides of the fence.

Luckily, she didn't seem upset.

"Yeah, you have done good. Mine is Theory of Combat Magic: B; Principles of Advanced Magic: B; Mage Knight: B+; Healing: A. School points gained from daily evaluation: 2,420."

"That's an excellent result for someone who's the first in her family to become a magician, with no legacy or training to speak of, except a second-rate mentor." Lith said to lift her spirit, while winking at Quylla.

It meant "I know that you and I got a worse start than her, but please follow my lead."

But instead of winking back, she blushed and looked away, leaving Lith in a daze.

"You have yet to answer my question, though." Yurial said with an inquisitive look.

Lith sighed, pondering if to tell them the truth or tune down his votes.

- "After all, I am their combat magic teacher and the fastest learner in advance magic. I doubt they will actually be surprised." –

And they weren't. There was no awkward pause before they started clapping and complementing him. Yurial even took out a laurel wreath from his dimensional amulet.

"I hereby crown you king of the hill."

"That was to be expected." Friya said. "Without you, I doubt I would have got a B in combat magic. Maybe a C, if not fail it entirely."

"I would have failed for sure." Quylla wasn't dejected at all, while saying it. On the contrary she was proud of her achievement.

"I never fought in my life, and never did much with magic beside healing."

"I would have surely achieved a solid C, maybe C+, but that's it." Phloria shrugged. "I learned a lot in these two months. Who knew that first magic was so useful?"

"I'm the same as Quylla, but for different reasons." Yurial said.

"I was so eager to please my father that I only focused on tier three magic. I always considered first magic a tool for servants. I knew nothing about it."

"If what you all said it's true, then you should go and report it to Trasque." Lith said returning the wreath to its owner.

Seeing their confused expressions at his words, he proceeded to explain.

"You heard Linjos, he is trying to change the system. New things are bound to have flaws, and need a proper feedback to be fixed. If you share with him your doubts and struggling with the course, you'll help the system, and as a result all other students.

He won't be angry at you for being honest, more likely you'll gain extra points."

"How do we know this is not a ruse for you to get even more merits at our expenses?" Doubt had reduced Quylla's eyes to slits. She didn't want to believe Lith making her look bad for his own profit, but she had learned to look out for herself.

"Easy, don't mention my name." He shrugged. "One of you can take credit for the lessons, for all I care. I'm not proposing this for points, but because I care for you and the academy.

Without Linjos, my life here would be much harder, and I think the same stand for most of us. Another thing, try to remember what he said about accepting your limits and working to fix them. I really think it would do you some good."

Lith left the room, letting them decide without him interfering.

After discussing it for a while, his words actually made a lot of sense.

"I really can't make head or tails about Lith." Yurial confessed.

"Sometimes he acts normal, but when it comes down to magic and responsibilities, it seems I am talking to my father instead of a friend. Always worrying about my future, me eating properly and learning my lessons."

"Agreed." Friya said. "At some point I started doubting he was only twelve, so I had a background check made on him. He is really twelve, and it's supposed to be the youngest child of his family. Then why do I get the impression he is..."

She struggled finding the right word.

"Raising us?"

Later, they decided to follow Lith's advice, and report everything to Trasque.

He asked them a few questions about what they had found particularly hard and challenging, and how they had overcome their respective bottlenecks.

"Seems a single Professor is really not enough." Trasque sighed. "Combat Magic has the highest rate of failure among all courses. We need to fix this ASAP. Thank you for your sincerity guys." He said snapping his fingers.

"I just raised your grade in my class by one notch. I'm really proud of your growth."

Meanwhile, Lith was in his room, taking a nap to catch up on his sleep.

A sudden knocking woke him up, prompting many curses. He was having one of his rare good dreams.

Seeing his frown, the academy's clerk apologized for the inconvenience and delivered him the new books.

The first one's title was: "Get out of my face. A comprehensive guide of all you need to know about dimensional magic."

The author's name was Khavos Rudd.

Chapter 94 Dimensional Magic

The following morning, Lith and Phloria were taking a small walk before picking up the rest of the team for breakfast.

Descending from a long line of Mage Knights, Phloria had more experience with swords, and since she had to attend only one specialization course, she was his main teacher between the two girls.

That allowed them to spend quite some time together, since both of them had free afternoons to practice swordsmanship. Actually, Phloria sometimes needed to cram at night, to catch up with her studies, but it was something she gladly did.

She would have not given up the weekend lessons about first magic for the world. Besides, once she managed to get to know him better, she really enjoyed his company. The same went for Lith, up to that point, she was his favourite.

Phloria was mature and level headed, speaking her mind so often that sometimes she came out rude. She also had various interests and hobbies, making her able to talk about almost every topic, not only about magic or Court life.

Lith enjoyed their talks, learning about the new world mentality and non-written society rules. Having lived most of his new life in a small village, Lith could learn more from one of her anecdotes than from an entire book.

That day Phloria wore her long black hair down, making them dance in his face every time she turned her head suddenly.

"Why are you still growing your hair?" Lith asked. "I thought that having them short was more convenient for a fighter."

"Yeah, you got that right. But during the last break, my mother kept nagging about me not being feminine enough. She said that if I cut them even shorter, people would mistake me for a boy. What a load of sh*t!" She grumbled.

Lith could only keep silent, inwardly agreeing with her mother. Phloria was very tall, even more than most Professors, and she still had plenty of time to grow further. She also had wide shoulders and enough strength to easily lift him, like during the mock exam.

"What do you think about it?" She abruptly asked.

"That I hope she didn't phrase it so cruelly. But I have to give it to her that you are prettier this way." Lith dodged the question with a compliment.

"Of course not, my mother is of noble origins, she would never be so straightforward. She just pointed out how hard it is to find suitors from me, adding how scared she is at the idea that our bloodline would die with me and all that cr*p."

"I thought you had siblings." Lith raised an eyebrow at such arguments. He clearly remembered that her parents had three children.

"I do. And when I pointed it out, she replied with the bogus theory that women are more likely to pass down a greater degree of magic. At that point I gave up. You know parents, you are always on the losing side of any discussion."

Lith nodded, not knowing what to say. No one had ever tried to control that aspect of his life.

"While we are at it, you do know that Quylla has it bad for you, right?"

"Yes." He actually suspected that Quylla was developing a crush, but he hoped that with time and not giving her special attentions, it would pass. He did not want to openly reject her and hurt her feelings.

"Yet I don't understand why."

"Well, she's an orphan. She clearly has daddy issues, and between your big brother and drill sergeant vibes, I'd say you make the ideal candidate."

"But why me and not one of the Professors or something? I mean, I'm nothing special, just..."

"Tall, good-looking, talented and caring?" Phloria cut him short. "You are right, is a complete mystery."

Lith glared at her in annoyance.

"That's not funny. Stop ruffling my feathers."

"Well, right now I have to take back the good-looking and caring part. With that face, you are creepy."

Lith's expression returned to normal.

"Much better. By the way, I would keep an eye on Friya too. It would not surprise me if her family sent her after you. Talented magicians with no family name are much sought-after."

"Please, I'm just a fourth-year student." Lith scoffed. "It's too soon for that kind of shenanigans."

"Nah, you are still too naïve. It's the perfect moment to start an approach to develop in the future without seeming too desperate or interested. During the fifth year it would be too late, one needs an edge over the competition."

"It's not like they are going to make you marry after all. If you do not live up to their expectations, they can always back off at any moment."

"That makes sense." Lith furrowed his brow, thinking about the unexpected problem.

"Thanks for the heads up."

"You're welcome. But to be honest, you should thank my father. It's only when he asked me if I would mind a younger spouse that I realized what was happening."

Lith was afraid to ask the question, but he did anyway.

"What did you reply to him?"

"After stressing out that I don't mind a 'small' age gap, don't get me wrong, I don't want to end up marrying someone much older than me, I said that I would consider it. No reply was the only reply."

"If I said yes, he would have sent my mother to make me change my mind. If I said no, he would have probably started arranging our marriage. He is kinda bull-headed."

"I see." Lith tried to keep his poker face, but unconsciously took a step away from her.

"Don't overestimate yourself, short stuff." She laughed at his move.

"I'm my own woman, I may bend on many things for my parents' sake, but love is not one of those. If they try to force me, I'm ready to become independent after the graduation. If I keep my grades as they are, people will line up to hire me."

From that point, they walked in silence, until they knocked on Quylla's door. During breakfast, everyone expressed their curiosity about the new lessons and their Professors, making bets about their looks.

Lith sneaked a look at Friya from time to time, and only when he realized that nothing had changed, he managed to put his paranoia to rest.

Because dimensional magic was a compulsory course, it took place in the fourth-year lecture class.

As soon as the last gong rang, Professor Rudd walked in.

He was a tall man, about 1,78 (5'10") high, with grey streaked black hair, and ice-cold blue eyes. He was in his mid-fifties, wearing the robe open and revealing a slim build.

Aside from Vastor, he was the oldest teacher Lith had ever met.

"Good morning, dear students." He spoke every word like he was spitting poison.

"I'm Professor Khavos Rudd, and I'll teach you dimensional magic. As you can see, I am not one of those hot stuff children that our beloved Headmaster Linjos placed in the academy. I'm one of the remnants of the old guard.

One of those that, allegedly, find a waste of resources to teach magic to those that not belong to mages' bloodline or at least noble families."

At those words, Lith, Quylla and Friya took out their Ballot, placing it on their desk. After one too many "practical joke", Friya had decided to follow Quylla's advice and got her freedom back.

Being noble, that speech wasn't addressed to her, but she still wanted to prove her point. Friya wasn't scared of putting herself on the line for her friends.

Rudd continued like he didn't see anything, despite the three of them were sitting in the front lines.

"Even in such hypothetical scenario, thought, I would still be a professional capable of leaving his prejudices outside that door. I expect you of doing the same."

All the commoner students didn't believe a word he said. Many started regretting not having a Guilty Ballot.

"Dimensional magic is a complex and deep subject, so do not expect of getting rid of me after just three months. My class is where we will separate true mages from simple birds. Even a magico can fly, but only a mage can do this."

After a quick wave of the hand and a hushed word, Rudd disappeared from the back of the class, near the chalkboard, reappearing in front of the first row of students.

His hands never stopped, before they could even gasp, he had already disappeared, materializing with his feet on a second-row desk, making a full round of the class before returning back to the point of origin.

"This spell is called Blink, one of the most common battle uses of dimensional magic. It's particularly useful to Battle Mages and Mage Knights to push forwards, since they use weapons. But everyone can use it to escape in a pinch.

Just to be clear, I didn't use any artifact, just my skills. If you aren't capable of doing this by the end of the course, you will never pass it. The good news is that failing my class will not prevent you from graduating, just mark your failure as mages."

He smirked looking at the student's worried faces.

A hand rose up from the middle row.

"What? I still have to begin explaining and you already have a question? I wonder how you got admitted here. Nonetheless, speak freely."

"Are you going to teach us teleportation?" Asked a red-haired chubby boy.

Professor Rudd broke out in a loud laughter, full of contempt and amazement. Most of the students understood that he wasn't laughing at the question, but at the boy himself.

"Teleportation? I haven't heard that word in years. It's a withered branch of magic, whose only success was to get the world rid of all the idiots that practiced it."

Chapter 95 Dimensional Magic 2

"The idea of teleportation was first born after realizing the limitations of flying. As you all should know, is impossible to move in such a way an army or its supplies.

It's not a matter of mana required, as much that it would take too much time. Not to mention it would offer a perfect target for an ambush, since non mages would be sitting ducks.

The first idea, was to just move a body much faster, but above a certain speed threshold, dust becomes dangerous as an arrow, insects hit like an avalanche. Adding a barrier strong enough to endure such hazards, would make the mana consumption prohibitive, even for a small group of persons.

So, some dumb idiot who read too many fairy tales, had the idea of teleportation, as in convert living matter in something else that could sustain high speed traveling, and reverting it back once arrived to destination."

Rudd laughed loudly, like it was the best joke ever, but when he noticed he was the only one laughing, his upper lip curled in an expression of disgust.

"How can you possibly be that dumb? Do you really not understand?"

He asked, without receiving any answer besides puzzled looks.

"In a fairy tale, it's great. But in reality? Converting living matter into something else, is just a fancy word to say 'killing'. How can you be sure that the thing that arrives on the other side is really you? What if a part of your body, your mind, or soul gets lost?

How do you think you could get it back? And more importantly, would the newborn thing even notice not to be the original? One thing is teleporting a rock, but living beings are much more complicated."

- "Interesting." Lith thought. "Is the same moral conundrum theoretical physicist had about teleportation back on Earth. Someone even made a Hollywood movie about it." –

"And don't let me started about the necessity of having perfect coordinates!" Professor Rudd continued.

"Rematerialize a little too high, too low or too close to a travel companion and bam! Instant death. Not to mention that the aforementioned insects, dust and even animals, are not bound to make space for your arrival. The tiniest hitch, and you have a fly for brains.

The last mage that attempted teleportation, materialized in the sky, hoping to avoid such issues, only for a flock of ducks to cross his path, making him die like the quack he was." This time, part of the class laughed at the dark humour.

"What I'm going to teach you, is the art of manipulating space itself, allowing you to arrive from point A to point B in complete safety in an instant, even if the two places are thousands of miles away."

Professor Rudd waved his hands in a circular manner, and soon two tiny black spots appeared. The first one between his palms, the second one right in front of the girl sitting in the middle of the front row.

With each magic word he spoke, the spots started to enlarge and stretch themselves in a specular manner, one extremity became almost circular, the size of a fist, while the other was so thin and small to be point-like.

They assumed the shape of a funnel, made out of energy, with both ends spinning at unbelievable speed.

- "Is that an event horizon?!" – Lith was shocked, to the point of standing up to better observe the phenomenon.

After just a second, the energy funnels had collapsed on themselves, leaving in their places two rifts in space. Professor Rudd extended his hand inside the first rift, making it reappear right above the girl's desk, taking the pen away from her fingers.

"Do you understand now? Bending space requires the same amount of energy and focus than teleportation would, but it's infinitely safer. Walking through a Gate is like going through a door. What gets in, gets out. No more and no less.

But do not get fooled by appearances. Even a simple trick like the one I just showed you has many limitations. First of all, it requires a clear line of sight, otherwise one cannot have a clear focus of the entry and exit points.

Secondly, even a small Gate requires at least the ability to triple cast, since you have to mix and control the energies of earth, air and water magic. Those are the most basic elements for a Gate.

Adding more elements allows to create bigger rifts, and it's the only way to make them stable enough to let more than one person walk through it. You will need to develop a deep understanding of these three elements, just for starters.

Despite what you may think, dimensional magic does not require enormous amount of mana, like some specializations do. The most important requirement is sensibility to small fluctuations of energy and space.

It's not something that you can brute force your way through. You must be able to feel the Gate growing, and adapt to its changes. If you don't feed it mana at the right time in the right place, it will never open.

Dimensional magic is not a specialization, it has no strict requirements that cannot be overcome with practice and hard work. On paper, is something that every good mage can do, even those with one specialization or none at all.

Tomorrow, we will start with nothing more than a simple parlour trick."

Rudd opened two small portals, barely the size of a coin, one above the other. Then he dropped a small pebble in the lower portal, and it reappeared from the upper one, falling down in the lower portal in an endless loop.

"Forewarned is forearmed. Better if you start reading your book from today onward, if you don't want to start with the wrong foot. Questions?"

Yurial raised his hand, receiving permission to speak.

"Professor, you said that teleportation does not exist, but what was Blink then? I didn't see any Gate opening."

"Excellent question, young man." For the first time since he had entered the room, Professor Rudd smiled kindly. Many were cursing inwardly, asking themselves if the question was really good, or rather he was appreciating Yurial's father.

"Dimensional magic is not just a matter of logistic and transportation, in the right conditions is also a perfect tool to defend or attack. But in such scenarios, you cannot expect the enemy to be kind enough to wait for you to finish, everything needs to be fast.

Allow me to show you Blink again, this time slowly."

The academy ring at Rudd's finger tapped into the castle's magic, opening two portals, one in front of the Professor and the other in the middle of the class.

But unlike a Warp Steps, where both ends were still, the portal in front of Rudd moved forward, making him arrive to destination without having to take a step.

"That's how Blink works, just much faster. Using dimensional magic in combat is the final test of skill for a mage. Another useful, but even harder application is the following. Please stand up, young man."

Yurial did as instructed, but as soon as he stood up, he found himself watching Professor Rudd standing behind his desk, while he was now in the middle of the room.

"This spell is called Switch. The name is self-explanatory, and requires two sets of portals, that if correctly timed, create the perfect diversion. Sometimes even an opportunity to kill.

Back in my days, I once found myself surrounded by archers using enchanted arrows. Their commander did me the favour of standing still long enough for me to time Switch so that while I was running away, he had become a fine spill cushion."

A cruel smile appeared on Rudd's face, remembering the shocked expression of the soldiers when they realized what had happened.

"But don't get me wrong, Switch is even harder to pull off than Blink. It requires that both targets are still, within a ten meters distance and a clear visual. But I digress. Anything further?"

"Is it really possible for a single mage to open a Gate to a location hundred, if not thousands of miles away?" Asked a petite girl.

"Yes and no. A single mage can open a portal leading to a very further destination, but he needs to have either enough mana to support the task, or a magical item to share its burden. Also, one cannot go in a location he has never been before.

Visualization is a key element, and so is the knowledge of the exact coordinates. Moreover, opening such a gate requires a focus. Something like this."

From his dimensional amulet Professor Rudd took out a small sphere with many arcane red runes engraved on it.

"Dimensional mages usually plant magical beacons in their most common destinations, making the opening of a portal much easier and less mana consuming. As I said at the beginning of the lesson, my subject is really complex.

Is better to avoid filling your heads with useless notions. Focus at the task at hand. One must first learn how to crawl, then to walk, and only then can worry about his running speed. Dismissed."

Almost at the same moment, the gong signalling the end of the lesson resounded. Many students had a worried look on their faces, and Lith was one of them.

- "This is really bad. Not only I have never practiced anything like this, but sensibility is not exactly my strong point.

Whenever I encountered a difficulty, I either cheated my way in with true magic until I understood the true core of the problem, or relied on fake magic's auto pilot to understand the magic flow.

What's the average success rate per year for this course?"

"According to the academy's records, is a little less than 60%." Solus replied.

"How many graduated students managed to score an A despite failing it?" Lith was considering dropping the subject, to avoid it affecting his grades. He could always copy the book and study at his own pace later.

"None." The answer left him dejected. "Turn that frown upside down! Even the most experienced kid here has barely six years of magic practice, you have more than twelve. Not to mention the Hexacasting and true magic."

"I know, but practice is not all. This seems a discipline that requires quite a lot of talent, and we both know I am no genius. Invigoration and true magic cannot help me like they do for Forgemastering and Healing. I'm afraid I have just hit a wall."