



The Beginning After the End

Volume 1: Early Years

Author: TurtleMe

ePub by: Yuki (The Emperor)

Table of Contents

[Prologue: Start](#)

[Chapter 1: The Light at the End of the Tunnel](#)

[Chapter 2: The Encyclopedia of Mana Manipulation](#)

[Chapter 3: Head Start](#)

[Chapter 4: My Life Now](#)

[Chapter 5: Let The Journey Begin](#)

[Chapter 6: Up The Mountain](#)

[Chapter 7: How I Wished](#)

[Chapter 8: Questions](#)

[Chapter 9: The Ones Held Dear](#)

[Chapter 10: Road Ahead](#)

[Chapter 11: To and Fro](#)

[Chapter 12: Meeting](#)

[Chapter 13: Q & A](#)

[Chapter 14: What's To Come](#)

[Chapter 14.5: The Other Side](#)

[Chapter 15: Next Step](#)

[Chapter 16: Companion](#)

[Chapter 17: Family](#)

[Chapter 18: Peaceful](#)

[Chapter 19: Proclamation](#)

[Chapter 20: Everybody Wins](#)

[Chapter 21: For Them](#)

Prologue: Start – The Beginning After The End

“The Continent of Dicathen is comprised of three major Kingdoms: The Forest Kingdom of Elenoir in the North, The Underground Kingdom of Darv nearing the southern borders, and The Kingdom of Sapin, located towards the eastern border of the continent. There also exist the Beast Glades, where much remains a mystery. Not much of the Beast Glades is traversed because of the abundance of beasts that are hostile to travelers as well as each other. Yet, every year, countless expeditions are made because of the temptations of the rewards one can reap.....”

“flip”

“.....The Kingdom of Elenoir is the birthplace of the Elf race, located deep in the Forest of Elshire where a layer of mist is naturally produced, deterring all but the elves, who, with their acute senses, can navigate freely...”

“flip”

“.....Kindgom of Darv is a network of underground passages and enormous caves that can span up to several kilometers, whereupon the Dwarvin race reside.”

“flip”

“....The Kingdom of Sapin is easily the most populated region as well as the biggest kingdom in the continent. While this Kingdom is primarily made up of humans, there are many merchants from the Dwarvin race, trading commodities of many...”

“flip”

“...While the Beast Glades contain countless monsters and creatures, it also contains wondrous treasures for those who dare seek them. There are records brought by adventurers and mercenaries of dungeons and lairs of powerful entities that can make even the most generous priest into a greedy..”

“flip”

“...Between the forest of Elshire and the Kingdom of Sapin lies the Grand Mountain range which spans across roughly 90% of the continent, separating the North and East from the West and South ...”

“flip”

“While the Kingdom of Darv and Sapin hold a symbiotic relationship for resources, at most, the Elves seclude and act aggressively towards every other...”

“flip”

Closing the worn covers of what seemed to be an encyclopedia of this world, Arthur rubbed the bridge of his nose with his pudgy fingers, downcast, while emanating a gloom that was almost tangible. He let out a sound half sigh that only seemed appropriate with his toothless mouth...

“PHUUUUUK...”

Chapter 1: The Light at the End of the Tunnel

I never believed in the whole “light at the end of the tunnel” bullshit where people, after experiencing near-death experiences, wake up in cold sweat exclaiming, “I saw the light!”

But here I am currently at this so-called “tunnel” facing towards this bright light, when the last thing I remember, I was sleeping in my room (while others call it the royal chamber).

Did someone assassinate me?

I don't remember wronging anyone. But then again, being a public figure of power can give others all sorts of reasons to want me dead.

Anyways....

Since it doesn't seem like I'm going to wake up anytime soon and I'm slowly gravitating towards this bright light, I might as well go along with it.

Seeming to take an eternity to go towards this light, I half expected some choir of children singing an angelic tune, beckoning me towards heaven.

Instead, my vision of everything around turned into a blur of a bright red while sounds assaulted my ears. When I try to say anything, the only sound that comes out seems to be a cry.

I hear muffled voices becoming clearer and I make out a, “Congratulations Madam, congratulations Sir, he's a healthy boy.”

...Wait

I guess normally, I should be thinking along the lines of “Shit, was I just born? Am I a baby now?”

But strangely, the only thought that seemed to pop up in my mind was “So the bright light at the end of the tunnel is the light coming through into the female vag...”

Haha... lets not think about it anymore.

Assessing my situation like the kingly king I am, I noticed, first of all, that wherever I was born into, I understand the language. That’s good.

Next, after slowly and painfully opening my eyes, my retinas were bombarded with different colors and figures. It took a bit of time for my infant eyes to even start working. The doctor, or so it seems, in front of me had a not so appealing face with long greying hair on both head and chin. I swear his glasses were thick enough to be bulletproof. The strange thing was, he wasn’t wearing a doctor’s gown nor were we even in a hospital room. I seemed to have been born in some satanic summoning ritual room because this room was lit only by a couple of candles and we were on the floor.

I look around and see the female who pushed me out of her tunnel. Calling her mother should be fair. Taking a few more seconds to see what she looks like, I’ll have to admit she’s a beauty, but that might be my half blurry eyes. Rather than a glamorous beauty, I would better describe her as lovely, in a very kind and gentle sense with distinct auburn hair and brown eyes. I can’t help but notice her long eyelashes and perky nose that makes me want to just cling to her. She just permeates this

mother-like feel. Is this how babies are attracted to their mothers?

I peel my face away and turn right to barely make out the person who I assume is my father by the idiotic grin and teary eyes when seeing me. Immediately he says “Hi little Art, I’m your daddy, can you say dada?” I glance around to see both my mother and the house doctor (for all the certification he seems to have), roll their eyes and my mother manages to scoff, “Honey, he was just born.”

I take a closer look at my father and I can see why my lovely mother was attracted to him. Besides the few loose screws he seemed to have by expecting a newborn to articulate a two-syllable word (Where I’m just going to give him the benefit of the doubt and think he said that out of the joy of becoming a father), He was a very charismatic-looking man. With a square jaw line cleanly shaven. His hair, having a very ashy brown color, seemed to be kept short, while his eyebrows were strong and fierce, extending in a sword-like fashion meeting to a V shape. Yet, his eyes had a gentle quality, whether it was from the way his eyes drooped a little at the end or from the deep blue, almost sapphire, color his irises radiated.

By the time I finished checking ou... I mean observing my parents; the wannabe doctor excused himself saying, “Please continue resting for a couple of days Mrs. Leywin, and let me know if anything happens to Arthur, Mr. Leywin.”

The following couple of weeks after my journey out of the tunnel were a new kind of torture for me. I had little to no motor control over my limbs except waving them around and even that got tiring quickly. I realized that babies don’t really get to control their fingers all that much. I don’t know how to

break it to you guys but when you place your fingers on a babies palm, they don't grab it because they like you, they grab it because, like getting hit in the funny bone, it's a reflex.

Forget motor control, I can't even excrete my wastes at my discretion. It just... comes out. Haa...

A positive was that I was breastfed by my mother.

Don't get me wrong, no ulterior motives whatsoever. It's just that breast milk tastes a lot better than baby formula okay and has more nutritional value okay? Er... please believe me.

The Satanic demon-summoning place seems to be my parent's room and from what I figure, this place that I'm stuck in is, hopefully, a place in my world that is the past, where electricity isn't yet invented.

My mother quickly proved my hopes wrong when she one day healed a scratch on my leg when my idiotic father bumped me against a drawer.

No...Not like, band-aid and a kiss heal, but a full blown, shining light with a faint hum from her fucking hands heal.

Where the hell am I.

My mother, named Alice Leywin, and my father, named Reynolds Leywin, at least seem to be good people, hell if not the best. I suspect my mother is an angel because I've never met such a kindhearted, warm person. While being carried on her back by a baby cradle-strap of some sort, I went with her to what she called a town. This town of Ashber is more of a glorified outpost, seeing that there are no roads, no buildings.

We walked on the main dirt trail where there were tents on both sides with various merchants and salesman/woman selling

all sorts of things, from common, everyday needs to things I thought couldn't help but widen my eyes at, like weapons and armor and rocks... shining rocks!

The strangest thing that I can't seem to get used to are the people carrying weapons like it was part of their apparel. I witnessed a man of around 170cm carrying a gigantic war axe larger than him! Anyway, mother keeps talking to me, probably to try to get me to learn the language faster, while shopping for the day's groceries, exchanging pleasantries with various people passing by or working in the booths. Meanwhile, my body is turning against me once again, and I fell asleep... Damn this useless body.

Sitting on the lap of my mother who was caressing me in her bosom, I was intently focused on my dad currently casting a chant for a good minute, which sounded like a prayer to the earth. I leaned in closer and closer, almost falling off my human seat while expecting some magical phenomenon, like an earthquake spitting the ground or a giant stone golem emerging. After what seemed like an eternity (trust me, for an infant who has the attention span of a goldfish, it was.) Three adult, human-sized boulders came out of the ground and slammed against a nearby tree.

What in the name of...that was it?

I flailed my arms up in anger and regret but my idiot father interpreted that into a "WOW" and had a big grin on his face saying, "Your daddy is awesome huh!"

No, my father was a much better warrior. When he put on his two iron gauntlets, even I felt compelled to drop my underwear (or diaper) for him. With agile movements that were surprising for his build, his fists carried the force to break

the sound barrier, but were fluid enough to not leave an opening. In my world, he could be classed as an elite, leading a platoon of a hundred soldiers, but to me, he was my idiot father.

For what I learned about this world, it seemed to be a fairly straightforward world of magic and warriors where power and wealth decided your rank in society. In that sense, it wasn't too different from my world except the lack of technology and the slight difference between magic and Ki here.

In my old world, Wars became an almost obsolete form of settling disputes between countries. Don't get me wrong, of course there were still battles on a smaller scale and armies were still needed for the safety of the citizens. However, disputes concerning the wellbeing of a country were based on either a duel between the rulers of the their country, limited to making use of Ki and close combat weapons, or a mock battle between platoons, where limited firearms were allowed, for the smaller disputes.

Therefore, Kings weren't the typical fat man sitting on throne ignorantly commanding others, but had to be the strongest, smartest man to represent his or her country.

Enough about that though.

The currency in this new world seemed pretty straightforward from the exchanges my mother had with the merchants.

Copper being the lowest form of currency, then Silver, then Gold. While I have yet to see anything costing as much as a Gold coin, normal families seem to be able to live fine off of a couple copper coins a day.

100 Copper = 1 Silver

100 Silver = 1 Gold

Everyday involved honing my new body, mastering the motor functions residing deep within me.

Then one day everything changed...

Chapter 2: The Encyclopedia of Mana Manipulation

I was a King. I could have my country's army assemble at my front feet kneeling down with a snap of a finger. I've out-dueled my competitors from different countries as well as my own to settle disputes and maintain my position. In terms of swordsmanship and controlling Ki, I was second to none, for having personal strength was essential to becoming a ruler in my past world on Earth. Kings weren't born but were raised. Yet, I can't think of a prouder moment than now.

I can crawl baby!

'Till now, I had to make do with the stories mother would tell me while trying to make me fall asleep. I grumbled out noises of complaints when she stopped too soon. My father would sometimes sit me on his lap while idly talking to me about his old days, which gave me some hints as to what kind of world this was and what it was filled with.

Reynolds Leywin, former adventurer, (apparently that's an occupation in this world) had quite a lot of experience in this field. He was in several parties that went on expeditions to search for treasure and fulfill missions they acquired from the Adventurer Guild. He eventually settled down when he met my mother on the borders of the Kingdom in a city called Valden. He proudly told me how my mother was head over heels for him at first sight when he visited the town's Adventurer Guild hall she worked at, but I suspect it was the opposite from how my mother slapped him across the back of the head and told him to stop telling Art lies.

My name is Arthur Leywin now, by the way. Art for short,

which, as a former King, sounds a little too cute, but hey, after getting a glimpse of myself in the metal sheet they use as a mirror in the washroom, I looked freaking adorable. I got my mother's glowing auburn hair while my eyes are a bright azure color, inherited from my father. I don't know how my facial features are going to turn out as I mature but as long as I don't turn out fat, it'll be okay.

Watch out future ladies! Prepare to be heartbroken!

Weeks of attempting to crawl, yet only succeeding in barely scuffling in place, I succeeded in crawling, managing to sneak into the family's library/study room while my mother was hanging the laundry out to dry. Mother rued the day I started to become mobile, sighing, "I swear, you're going to become as hard to manage as your father."

I closed the encyclopedia down and situated myself more comfortably on the ground, which meant I just laid back on my tummy because crawling and sitting upright is damn tiring.

Pondering what I just read, this world seemed pretty underdeveloped. From what I can infer, there doesn't seem to be much technology. The only source of transportation seems to be horse driven carriages, varying in size for land, and ships with sails for rivers.

Weapons were freely allowed and not really regulated unless you were visiting the royal family or people of that much authority. For God's sake, it continues to baffle me every time I see people carrying weapons while shopping for groceries.

Sure, in my previous world, Earth, there were soldiers and guards who carried concealed weapons, but they weren't for the purpose of killing but to deter crimes from happening.

But here, I witnessed a thief who stole a couple of items from the armory store the other day get chopped in half across the waist by a large, bald mercenary carrying a polearm. Seeing that, the citizens even went as far as to applaud that oversized monk!

A similarity that both this world and my previous world shared is the system of monarchy. This continent of Dicathen has Kingdoms where each Kingdom consists of King and royal family that rules. Unlike Earth though, the King is chosen based on lineage, going from the son of the King, to his son and so on.

After scanning through the encyclopedia, there doesn't seem to be much information on other continents besides the one we're currently in. That's strange, there are ships that carry goods and passengers across the continent through rivers, but maybe the technology on ships haven't been developed enough to sail across oceans.

One thing that was going to be hard getting used to is the whole premise of magic in this world. If we're talking about superhuman powers, sure, the countries on Earth relied on people with them.

On Earth, practitioners learned how to condense and utilize the innate ki that they had in their body. Think of it as a muscle if you will. Breaking the ki center down through overuse and resting it caused the ki center to become stronger, allowing for a bigger pool of ki to access from. Then the ki is channeled through the body at will and utilized for

strengthening of the body.

In this world, instead of ki, it seems to be called mana and the more surprising thing is that it exists in the atmosphere of this world. Thus, Practitioners, or Mages, would use the surrounding mana and draw it into their body and condense it in their mana core. In my old world, Earth, ki only existed and was formed inside the body. Whether ki never existed on Earth in the first place or ceased to exist because of the pollution caused by humans, we didn't know.

On Earth, while practice was incredibly important, your innate ki center size was extremely important because of the limited amount of ki you have in your body is all that you can work with, does that mean one's innate mana core size doesn't matter as much because of the available mana in the atmosphere?

The bigger the cup, the more you can hold right?

While in my old world, even though my ki center wasn't that large, I was considered a prodigy at channeling and utilizing my ki effectively to make up for my not so big ki center. With the way I utilized every bit of my ki, I was able to become the strongest of the elite division of Duelists, earning the right to become King.

Now, if I can still practice the ways ki practitioners use their ki, but do it with mana that is both innate inside the mana core and in the surrounding atmosphere, can't I essentially double? No triple the strength that I had before?

The book that I next managed to pull from the bottom shelf, explained a couple of questions for me.

“Beginner’s Guide for the Privileged Mages”

“While the power to control mana is largely genetic, there are many cases where children of Magi come out as unable to sense the mana around them. A recent census shows that roughly 1 in a 100 children are able to sense mana but can only be tested to show the extent when the mana core first completely develops, which can be anywhere from early adolescence to late teen years. It is apparent when Magi first awaken by the initial repulsion of the surrounding mana around them when the mana core first forms. This results in a translucent barrier formed around the awakened that lasts a couple of minutes.”

Flipping through the pages, I find something that catches my attention.

“...Mana can be used in a couple of ways. The two most common methods of utilizing mana comes through enhancing of the body through mana use (Augmenter), and emission of mana to the outside world (Conjurer)...”

“... Augmenters are most commonly seen among warriors, utilizing mana and channeling it around their body to strengthen their body and attacks.”

“... The practice of Conjuring is seen in Mages, who, after utilizing their mana, can cast spells to give it a certain effect on the surrounding area or directly on the target.”

Weaknesses and Limitation

“While Augmenters can possess incredible strength, defense and agility, their weakness lies in their limited range...”

“Conjurers possess unfathomable powers, being able to bend their surroundings at will. However, such powers come with limits. Unlike Enhancers who utilize most of the mana used from their own mana core, Conjurers need to borrow mana from the outside world in addition to their own mana core to exert mana into the surrounding in a form of a spell.”

“While both types of Mages, or Mana Manipulators for the more scientifically accurate term, depend on and is categorized by their mana core, Augmenters and Conjurers also have different ways of measuring their aptitude.”

“flip”

“An Augmenter’s prowess or talent is measured by the power of mana channels in their body, which measures the speed and efficiency in exerting their mana from their mana core into various parts of the body...”

“...A Conjurer’s power and talent, comparatively, is measured by the power of their mana veins, which indicates the speed and effectiveness of absorbing mana from the outside world to cast a spell.”

“flip”

“...Mages (Mana Manipulators) are typically categorized into one of these two divisions since attempting to be proficient in both is incredibly time consuming and inefficient. Most are born with a skewed difference in their mana channels and mana veins...”

“...Augmenters do not need very strong mana veins because they mostly utilize the mana from their core, while Conjurers do not need very powerful mana channels because they do not

spread their mana into their own body.”

Hmm... So my idiot father seems to be a competent Augmenter and a less than average Conjuror.

That healing light though... What was my mother?

“flip, flip, flip”

AHA!

“There are a few, rare deviants. While there are still some undiscovered, ones that are highly sought after are the Emitters, more commonly known as healers. Healers possess the rare ability to cast their unique restorative mana unto others, directly, recovering injuries and impairments.”

Wow... mother is the best.

Fundamentals of Conjuring

“The proper steps for utilizing the mana for Conjurers is to gather the surrounding mana in the area, drawing it into your body, then, after circulating it into your mana core to stabilize and purify the atmosphere’s diluted mana, you channel it into an appropriate conductor (a staff, wand, ring, of some sort) with the incantations as a mental controller for your will into shaping the mana to whatever spell you want...”

“flip”

“...The more powerful the spell, the longer it takes to draw in from the surrounding mana, store it in your mana core where it condenses and purifies it, and finally channel and release...”

“flip”

“Because Conjuring involves exerting focused mana into a particular spell, Conjurers will notice that they have a special aptitude of certain elements (Air, Water, Fire, Earth). But with proper training, can become adequate in the basics of all elements.

“flip, flip”

Fundamentals of Augmenting

“Unlike Conjuring, much less time can be spent gathering the surrounding mana. Efficient use of Augmenting requires speed and precision in the use of the mana from your core and less from the mana in the atmosphere..”

This is where it clicked.... Augmenting was very close to using your ki except you can also draw mana in from your surroundings. The reason why there weren't any kinds of conjurers in my old world of Earth was because there was no mana in the atmosphere to draw in and create a phenomenon.

My gaze tensed as I read on.

“...Augmenting requires proper distribution of mana into different parts of the body depending on how the user sees fit. While it seems simple at first glance, Augmenting requires much insight into the individual's own body. Being able to utilize the mana channels efficiently requires years of both mental and physical practice.”

“flip”

“Because Augmenting involves extracting the user’s mana core, the purest form of mana, there are no highly notable distinctions in an elemental sense. However, Augmenters are able to control their mana more freely, resulting in vastly different forms of fighting through Augmentation.”

“flip”

“The phenomenon called ‘Backlash’ occurs in both types of practitioners. For Augmenters, it occurs from depletion of the mana core, causing extreme bodily pains depending on how strenuous the damage to the mana core is. For Conjurers, backlash occurs from overfilling of the mana core. This is caused by overuse of spells beyond the practitioner’s capacity or using a spell too powerful for his or her mana core to handle.”

Closing the book, I propped myself up to my butt, digesting the overload of information that I just read.

Because of the uncanny similarities between the ki center from my old world and the mana core in this world, I found it hard to believe that you needed to be a young adolescent to manipulate mana. In my old world, children started meditating and sensing their own ki scattered inside their body. Once the ki migrates into a single place, the ki center forms.

Testing my hypothesis, I began meditating, trying to sense the mana in my 7 month old body when...

“There you are! Art honey, are you having trouble taking a poopy?”

Mother! I’m about to begin my journey to become the greatest Mage in this world! Do not make me out to be a

constipated infant!

Picking me up and gently placing me in her arms, I was forcibly taken away to have my diapers changed, which, surprisingly, were full by the time I noticed.

Chapter 3: Head Start

ALICE LEYWIN'S POV:

Arthur has to be the most adorable baby, and I'm not saying this as a doting mother.

No.

Him and his scruffy little patch of glowing auburn hair and playful eyes that almost radiate a blue light, while his gaze, at times, seem almost... intelligent.

No no, I told you, I'm not a doting mother. I plan to be a strict and just mother. I can't rely on my husband to teach little Art any common sense. For God's sake, he tried to teach my baby how to fight when he can now barely crawl.

I know this little rascal will turn out just like his father if I leave him be. As soon as he started crawling, I was so proud I was on the verge of shedding tears, but I didn't know how much of a handful he'd be as soon as he became mobile.

I swear, there's not a single moment where I can take my eyes off of him before he crawls into the study room. How weird. We made sure to buy him lots of stuffed animals and wooden toys to play with but he always ends up going back to study room. THAT, at least was directly opposite of his father, seeing how Reynolds almost gravitates away from texts longer than the weekly newspaper.

Looking at how excited he gets when we go out to town, I've decided to go shopping for food once every other day

instead of twice a week.

No no, I told you, I'm not a doting mother. This is for his education of the outside world and for fresh food in the house. Yeah haha...that's it.

My son seems to be interested in a lot of things. I can't get enough of his head that seems so disproportional to his little body turning left and right, trying to take in everything around him. He seems particularly intrigued by his father's practices.

Reynolds was a pretty competent adventurer back in the days. Being a B class at the age of 28 is actually pretty fast. Becoming even an E class, the lowest rank, required taking a test so we don't send eager but ignorant adolescents to their deaths. As for the higher ranks, I've only seen a couple of A class adventurers in my years of working there and I've yet to see a S class adventurer, assuming that they actually exist.

Working at the Adventurer Guild, or what we just called Guild Hall, back then in Valden, I got to see too many eager teens. I swear, I was surprised they didn't float off from their ego inflating their heads.

At least they were ambitious.

One time, I was assigned to proctor a basic practical exam where the examinee just had to demonstrate fundamental competency in their mana manipulation, but before even the test began, the kid crashed straight on his back because the sword he was carrying was too heavy for him.

Talking about airheads, Reynolds back then sure came off as one. The moment he saw me in the Guild Hall, his jaw literally dropped and he just stood there until the guy behind

him in line elbowed him to hurry up. He wiped his drool and managed to mumble a "... h.. hi... can I trade in th...the stuff for the mission?" I just giggled as he turned beet red from embarrassment.

He managed to gather up the courage to ask me out for dinner and we just hit it off from there. Even now, I can't help but smile when I see his droopy blue puppy eyes looking at me.

Art somehow wound up with both our redeeming traits, making him that much more adorable. You should see him when I have to change his diapers. I don't know why, but he starts turning red in his cheeks and he covers his face with his tiny little fingers.

Can babies his age even get embarrassed?

The next landmark that made it to my baby journal, which is purely for educational purposes by the way and not because I am a doting mother, was when he first said mama.

HE SAID MAMA!

I told him to say "mama" again and again just to make sure I didn't hear wrong. Reynolds sulked for the day because Art said "mama" before "dada."

Haha, I won!

The rest of the year went by pleasantly with my son sticking by me wherever I went and oftentimes looking out the window to see his father practice after dinner. I'm glad Reynolds gave up being an adventurer and took a post as a guard nearby for our town. Being an adventurer may bring more money but not knowing when or rather if my husband

comes home is not worth any amount of extra money.

To our relief, Little Art never got sick, but oftentimes, I would find him sitting still on his butt while closing his eyes. At first, I thought he was having trouble relieving himself but after checking the first couple of times, that didn't seem to be the case.

How strange, I didn't know how to really make it out. I thought babies his age were supposed to be energetic but after his episodes of escaping to the study room, he seems spend a lot of time sitting still, almost meditating.

I was worried at first but although it happens a couple times a day, it only lasts for a couple of minutes and Art seems strangely happy afterwards. The way he holds his arms up and looks up at me makes me just want to gobble him up.

Ahem Not a doting mother.

ARTHUR LEYWIN'S POV:

About two years has passed since I made my difficult journey to the study room.

Since then, I've been constantly trying to gather the little bits of mana spread out in my body and focus it to try and form a mana core. Let me tell you, it is a slow and arduous task. I would find myself having an easier time trying to learn how to walk on my hands and eat with my feet in this damnable body than trying to will my mana together.

I can see why the book says that it'll take until at least the adolescent age for a person to 'awaken.' If I let the mana particles in my body move by themselves, it'll take at least a

decade for them to gravitate towards each other to form anything remotely close to a mana core.

Instead... A perk in having the mental capacity of an adult means I have the cognitive ability to consciously will my mana particles together. This was something I did as a child in my past life, where they teach you from youth in schools to learn how to control ki. Essentially, it's being able to sense the ki, or mana now, in your own body and force them together near the solar plexus. If left alone, the particles will eventually slowly float towards each other anyway, but I'm just grabbing the feathers and shoving it down to the ground instead of waiting for them to float down by themselves, figuratively speaking of course.

Daily rituals consisted of trying to spend as much of my limited energy into gathering my mana while avoiding suspicion from my mother and father. My father seemed to think that throwing a child into the air would be quite enjoyable. While I understand there is a kind of adrenaline effect that may excite some people, when mana is used to reinforce his arms, and I am thrown into the air like a high-speed projectile, the only feeling I get is nausea and a traumatic fear of heights.

Fortunately, my mother has a pretty firm handle on my father, but my mother scares me as well sometimes. I oftentimes catch her staring at me, half drooling, looking at me like I'm some kind of premium meat.

I tried to adapt myself to my body by only talking in very simple sentences. After I first said "mama" to let her know I wanted more food, she almost burst into tears of joy. It's been a long time since I received this sort of motherly affection. Since then, I limited myself to just trying to talk enough to get

the point across, no grammar necessary.

Besides that, the pace of my training was strenuous and slow, but I was getting a pretty big head start from everybody so I wasn't complaining.

I was in the middle of gathering the mana particles. These past two years, have not gone to waste for I finally gathered all of my mana into my solar plexus and was in the middle of condensing it into a mana core when... BOOM!

Chapter 4: My Life Now

REYNOLDS LEYWIN'S POV:

My baby boy!

I was so happy we had a son. When can babies start training? When did I start training again? Man, I can't wait to teach my baby boy all about magic. I hope he turns out to be an Augmenter like his old pops. I may know the basics of Conjuring, but I can't do anything practical with it except use it as a form of mental exercise.

Alice, on the other hand, is one of the most talented people I've ever seen. Even as an Emitter, she's exceptional. Back then, after she agreed to date me, she joined my party and we went on missions together. Her restorative powers were amazing in it of itself, but what shocked me the most was when she used an area of effect spell which healed allies inside. Talk about one of a kind! And I'm her husband!

Hehe... I still don't get tired of saying that.

Back in the good old days before Alice wanted to settle down, we would go into Beast Glades and hunt for mana beasts.

Mana beasts were various unique animals and creatures that were born with the ability to absorb mana into their body and create their own mana core, which we call beast cores.

Beast cores had an unlimited amount of uses, making them very valuable and highly sought after. Of course, the higher the classes of beast cores were, the more valuable they are.

Mana beasts are classified anywhere from E class (the

domesticated fanged bull used for meat and leather), to your SS class monster. I can't tell you much about those simply because I've never seen nor heard of one, but supposedly they do exist.

Rule of thumb, you should assume that the mana beasts are stronger than humans of the same class. This is simply because, even if we take mana out of the picture, a beast's physical body is much stronger than the average human.

While the Beast Glades were dangerous, as long as you were cautious and don't get lost, it was pretty easy to keep yourself out of trouble. The stronger beasts tend to be further down in dungeon-like caves underground or farther away. The first few tens of kilometers of the Beast Glades are pretty well mapped and as long as you were at least a C class adventurer, you'd be fine.

Once in awhile, there are missions posted up that requires a couple parties of adventurers. Those are usually for trying to clear and map the harder dungeons that aren't fully explored. If a mana beast has the power to create its own lair and have other mana beasts serving him, then you can bet there are treasures to be gained.

I tell my son Art all about this life, telling him this and much more so I can brainwa... I mean nudge him to at least have some experience as an adventurer when he gets older.

I don't know what I'll do if little Art never awakens. Oh God, it doesn't matter how long it takes, as long as he can train to become any kind of mage, I'll be a proud and happy father.

It's pretty easy to tell what type of mage someone will be when they awaken because, while Augmenters, Conjurers, and

deviants form a translucent barrier, the mana behaves differently around them during this time.

Augmenters, when they first awaken, form a sort of pushing force around the barrier, signifying that they have dominant mana channels in their body. Conjurers, on the other hand, form a vacuum of mana around them, which means that their mana veins are much more dominant. Of course the degrees of the pushing force and vacuuming force depends on their talent in either type.

I don't mean to brag, but when I first awakened, at the early age of twelve by the way, I was sleeping and the pushing force made me float for a good couple of minutes! Enough force to lift a human body?

Sheesh, Alice should be grateful I stopped being an adventurer and settled down, not making full use of my talent... Okay don't tell your mother this.

Anyways, as soon as he awakens, I'm going to train him. If he ends up becoming a conjurer, I think I can get him a tutor from the main town since Alice and I aren't adept enough to be teaching him...

...Is what I said but...

BOOM!

Currently, 3/4th of the house is gone...

What happened?

Luckily I was with Alice in the front yard for a bit after dinner but... Art... Little Art is still in the house...

“ARTHUR!!”

Alice’s face drains of all blood as I see her go pale, eyes wide in disbelief and worry. I nudge my wife down while covering her with a temporary shield that will last for a couple minutes.

I rush into the direction of the explosion, shielding my body with a layer of mana over my skin. The debris from what’s left of my house is constantly thrown towards me as I reach deeper into the source of the explosion. After fighting myself through the scraps of what is left of my house and several pieces of rocks, I see it.

My son had the all but noticeable translucent barrier around him. Better yet, the pushing force of his awakened powers is what caused this explosion. He was floating in the center of a crater that cleared 3/4th of our house as well as our entire backyard.

Haha...

My legs gave out and I just landed on my knees while I continued to gape at this sight. My son is almost 3 years old and he awakened. Only 3...

“I didn’t know whether to laugh or cry”

“Reynolds! Honey!”

I glanced back at my wife with my mouth still hanging from shock. She managed to slowly make her way towards me, after there was no more debris to be thrown out.

She was making half-steps towards me, covering her face with her arms to shield what she could from the strong pushing force still emanating out of Art.

“Reynolds! What happened? What’s going on? Where’s Art?”

I still couldn’t find my voice so I just pointed my finger towards the direction of our son.

While confused, she looked at the direction I was pointing at and all she could manage to whisper was, “Oh my...”

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

Wow I feel great!

Feeling refreshed at my breakthrough, I closed my eyes to sense my newly formed mana core. My sweet little mana core!

“ART! OH MY BABY! Are you okay?”

I see my mother rushing towards me while my father is on the ground kneeling.

What did he do this time that caused him to get punished by mother?

My mother lifts me up and hugs me, almost to the point where my underdeveloped ribs give out.

I managed to squeal out a “Mom, no cry. What’s wrong?”

She didn’t answer me and continued sobbing while cradling me. My father arrived next to her, patting her back and patting my head as well, giving me a weak smile.

After a brief moment of confusion, I peeled my head away from my mother's bosom and I looked around to see that we're standing in the center of a giant crater, with most of our house gone.

...What the fuck?

Who caused this? Who dares have the audacity to destroy the home of a King?! The perpetrators will rue this day! I will hunt them down day and night and not rest until...

"Congrats Art honey. You awakened Champ."

" ... "

" ... "

I did this?

In my old world on Earth, a similar phenomenon happens when a youth awakens. A clear barrier appears around the awakened and a small pushing force surrounds the barrier. I'm guessing, though, that the pushing force in this world is lot stronger because of the mana in the atmosphere, something that wasn't there back on Earth.

As once a King of integrity, I decided on apologizing for this... er.. situation.

"I'm sorry Mom, Dad. Am I in trouble?"

"Haha... No Art honey, you're not in trouble. We were just worried about you. I'm glad you're alright." My mother managed to chuckle through half teared eyes.

My idiot father, on the hand, was a lot more excited.

“My boy is a genius! Awakened at the age of less than three! This is unprecedented! I thought I was fast but jeez!”

So a couple of moments of a picture perfect atmosphere was broken when a neighbor passing by screamed, “What in the world?!”

“Haha, we better clean this mess up” my father grins while rubbing the back of his head.

A couple of weeks have passed since my awakening. We decided to keep my awakening a secret for now. My father managed to contact a couple of his past Adventurer party members to help rebuild the lost part of our house while we stayed in the nearby inn. With conjurers raising the ground for the foundation of the house and augmenters doing the grunt work, the house didn't take too long to finish. The beauty of magic! Surprisingly, none of my father's ex party members seemed to question why our house blew up.

That seems to say a lot about my idiot father.

During the middle of reconstructing our house, my birthday came around (May 29). My parents woke me up that morning with a present and what seemed to be a loaf of...bread? in their hands.

Ahh! It was a cake!... would've been easier to tell if it wasn't black.

Opening the present box to find a carefully carved, wooden

sword, I hugged both my parents, thanking them for the present and cake.

This surprised me because my parents didn't bother to celebrate my past two birthdays so I assumed this world didn't really celebrate it. I later found out that birthdays are celebrated starting at the age of 3 because of a tradition from a long time ago when babies were more susceptible to death before the age of three.

How medieval.

Another thing I took an interest in noticing.

Seeing children as well as teens working in farms with their family and forges as apprentice blacksmiths made me realize there was no mandatory form of a structured education system.

Any sort of rudimentary education was provided by their families (just basics like reading and writing).

As soon as I turned three, my mother began giving me lessons for a set time, teaching me how to read and write. Playing the role of a genius son, I pretended to learn quickly, to her delight, so I can read harder books in the library without drawing suspicion.

These last couple of weeks passed by in a blast. After awakening, my father taught me the basics of mana and how to start training in it as best as he could. He tried to simplify as much as possible so that a toddler can understand I guess, but if it wasn't for my adult comprehensive abilities, I don't think I would've retained much.

The basics go as the following:

An easy way to know where you stand in strength lies in the color of your mana core. When you start off, the mana core is black, due to the body's blood and other impurities mixing with the mana particles as they formed together to be a mana core. As the mana inside the person's body becomes more pure and the impurities are filtered out, it'll turn to a dark red color. From there, the lighter the mana core's color will become; from dark red, to a red, and then to a lighter red.

The order goes as follows: black, red, orange, yellow, silver, and then white.

From the red mana core 'til the yellow mana core, the colors split into three shades of that said color (Dark Orange, Orange, Light Orange). Rule of thumb, the lighter the mana core color, the more pure one's mana core is and the more power they have access to.

While the lessons with my father proved useful, I was getting impatient at the pace. I asked mother a couple days later, "Mom, can I get books on magic?"

Since my mother still had connections in the Guild Hall (Adventurer Guild), She managed to acquire a pretty good collection of books on basic mana manipulation as well as fighting with different weapons. Some of them were just picture books with only simple words and mostly pictures of basics on how mana was condensed, but I ignored those. My mother gave me a strange look because the books that I've been looking at were on a higher level. She assumed I wouldn't even be able to understand most of the words in there and tried to cajole me into some of the simpler books, saying that it'll be easier to understand, but eventually she relented.

A typical day would involve taking reading and writing lessons from mother and Augmenting training with my father.

After he covered the basic theory and application of Augmenting, we started physical training. Seeing how my body is too small to start sparring, we opted to running, and body workouts. I think seeing my three-year-old body trying to do a pushup would be the funniest thing but my father did a good job holding in his laughter.

When I'm not taking either lessons, I usually stay cooped up in the newly improved library, reading and meditating to further condense my mana core.

As the year passed and not much happening outside of my typical day, my father spoke up while we were having dinner one night.

“Honey, I think it's time we get Art a proper mentor.”

Chapter 5: Let The Journey Begin

I hear a *clang* that drowns out the silence as my mother drops her fork onto the plate.

“What?? Reynolds! Arthur isn’t even four yet! No! Besides, you said if our son is an Augmenter, I thought you said you’ll be able to teach him!”

“I also never expected our son to be this much of a prodigy in mana manipulation. Who has ever heard of an awakening at the age of three!

“But that means he’ll have to leave home! He’s only four Reynolds! We can’t have our baby leave home this early!”

“You don’t get it. When I observe his body while he meditates, I can’t help but feeling all of this is natural for him. Alice honey, I’m holding my son back by trying to teach him something he can do in his sleep.”

Thus began my parents’ quarrel.

They went back and forth, basically repeating their initial points; mother saying I’m too young, father saying they needed to let me reach my full potential blah blah.

In the meantime, I was playing a game of war with my food, the peas attacking for the Mother Empire while the carrots of the Father Nation desperately defending their land.

Finally, my parents settled down and my father asked me,

“Art, this is concerning you so you have a say in this as well.

How would you feel going to a big city and having a teacher?”

Fantastic...

I applaud the effort for trying to make this fair but you do realize you're trying to make a 4 year old make a decision that will ultimately change his life right?

Trying to conclude this little argument, I said, “Can I at least try meeting some mentors and have them see if I need to be tutored or not?”

Silence

Did I step on a landmine? Was I not supposed to be this articulate in my sentences at my current age? Are they mad because I didn't choose a side?

Having no confidence in keeping a poker face, I looked down and waited for their response.

Thankfully, none of my fears were on their minds. My mother finally spoke, quietly she muttered, “We'll at least formally have his mana core and channels tested. We can figure out what to do from there.”

As my father nodded in agreement, we began making preparations the next day. When I said what I did last night, I assumed that we'll be going to a nearby town or a city a day away to have me tested by a qualified mage, but boy was I wrong.

We were making preparations for a three-week-long journey. A journey on a carriage pulled by a couple of horses through the fucking Grand Mountains to a city called Xyrus.

A book that I read popped into my mind. I recall reading about a floating city built by an elite organization of Conjurers for the sole purpose of housing the most prestigious Mage Academy. The city was later built around the academy, both the City and the academy named after the leader of the organization, Xyrus.

How is it possible to keep a piece of land, hundreds of kilometers long, afloat? Magnetism? Then the land beneath the city will be affected by it. Does the city have it's own different gravitational field?

Anyway!

This journey was going to be long. It's times like these that I wish modern sources of transportation existed. In order to get to the city, we'll have to enter through one of the designated teleportation gate in the Grand Mountains, otherwise, it'll take months traveling across towns to reach the gate below the actual city which is floating near the border of the Kingdom of Sapin and Darv.

One reason why my father pushed for us to go on this journey now was because his ex party members were here and were on their way to the city of Xyrus. Going now, with them, meant that we had three Augmenters and two Conjurers along with my mother who was a rare Emitter and my father, a B class Augmenter. While the mountain range didn't have any mana beasts, there were still the potential dangers from bandits and wild animals.

While my mother and father took care of packing all of the necessities, I packed my wooden sword and two books (Encyclopedia of Dicathen and Foundations of Mana

Manipulation) for the journey.

By mid morning, we were ready to head out.

Tying my knapsack, with my books and a couple of snacks, to my back and strapping my wooden sword to my waist, I held my mother's hand and followed my parents to meet their ex party members.

Although I've heard about them from time to time from father, I never visited the home while they were helping rebuild it so it would be the first time meeting them.

The information I learned from my father of the party Twin Horns consisted of:

Helen Shard: Female Augmenter specializing in magic archery.

Adam Krensh: Male Augmenter whose main weapon is the spear.

Jasmine Flamesworth: Female Augmenter who specializes in speed with dual daggers.

Angela Rose: Female Conjurer specializing in Wind Magic.

Durden Walker: Male Conjurer specializing in Earth Magic.

We reached the inn they were staying at in Ashber and saw them out in front, near the stables.

My father, hugging his ex party members, exclaimed, "Guys, I want you guys to meet my son Arthur! Go on Art, introduce yourself."

Giving a slight half bow while looking up at them, I introduced myself.

“Hello. My father has told me great things about his fellow Twin Horns members. Thank you for traveling with us to Xyrus. We’ll be in your hands.”

“HAHAHA, what is this? Such manners! Are you sure he’s your son, Rey?”

The one to respond was the Spear wielder, Adam. Taking a closer look at him, he seemed like the energetic, talkative type. While fairly good looking, with bright red hair tied in a messy poof at the end, almost like a flame, and a couple of bangs escaping from the hair tie, he reminded me of some sort of vagabond. His eyes were bright and almost seemed like they were always laughing. The first thing I noticed though was the scar across his nose, reaching both cheeks.

I felt myself getting picked up.

“Awww...Isn’t he just too precious? You should be glad that he doesn’t look like you Reynolds”

Peeling my face away from what felt like a memory foam death trap before she suffocated me in those gigantic breasts, I took a good look at the woman who was trying to kill me. Boy was she pretty. I mean, while not as pretty as mother, she gave off the whole “royal princess” vibe with her long blond hair that came to a curl at the ends and radiant green eyes that curled down and out.

Just as my hands were about to give away and my face about to enter the twin abyssal hills, a strong hand grabs me by my knapsack and takes me away from the well-endowed

woman.

“Angela, you’re hurting him.”

There I hung, like a kitten being carried by his mother from the scruff of his neck, unable to move.

I looked at the giant.

Easily passing two meters in height with a staff strapped to his back, he put me back on the ground and tidied my clothes gently.

A gentle giant!

Can I ride on his shoulders the whole way? I looked up at him, my eyes getting bigger and almost sparkling. I feel so safe in his hands.

He had very narrow eyes and eyebrows that slanted down, giving him an almost innocent face, compared to his gigantic body. The short scruffy black hair on his head completed the shaggy dog look on him.

Dusting my clothes off, I turned to face the woman that looked slightly younger than everyone else. Straight black hair, back half tied up with a ribbon and she had red, half-open eyes and curt-looking lips, making her seem very brusque.

“mhm” she slightly nods and then turns away.

Ah... a woman of few words. How charming.

Looking as she walks away towards the stable, I see two short daggers strapped to her lower back, just above the hips.

The last member of the Twin Horns is Helen Shard. She pats my head lightly and smiles charming smile at me. The word that would describe Miss Helen in one word would be sharp. Sharp eyes, sharp, perky nose, thin red lips, and a flat chest, almost boyish with her shoulder length hair tied tightly in the back. I can't help but get charmed by her charismatic ambience. She seems to exude this "we can do anything if we believe" atmosphere from her pores that makes her almost glow. Clothed in light leather armor covering her ches... I mean breasts, and her bow and arrows strapped to her back, I couldn't help but compare her to an elf, but quickly abandoned that thought after I see her rounded ears.

I hopped onto the back carriage with the help of a little mana reinforcing my legs. Lately, I've gotten the hang of using my mana in reinforcing my body. Although I never got the chance to fully test what I'm capable of, just in case I do too much and give my parents heart attacks, it's getting more natural to direct my mana from my core through my mana channels.

After our party finished loading in all of our travel necessities into the two carriages we were taking, we strapped in what I thought would be horses. It turns out, this world has domesticated mana beasts called Skitters for transportation. These giant lizards with spikes across their backs and powerful claws are D class monsters that are a lot more efficient to use, and more expensive, than horses when travelling mountain terrain.

Let the journey begin!

By nightfall, the once distant mountain range seemed to

have doubled in size. I wonder how big the Grand Mountain range will be when we reach the foot. I'm excited.

We made camp at a small cluster of boulders. Nearby were a lot of scrap wood from fallen branches to use as campfire.

One thing I detest about this body is how much sleep I require. I slept most of the way and I still feel a bit sleepy after being awake for a couple of hours.

After setting up a couple of tents around the fire, my father and mother began talking to the Twin Horns about old times when Helen sits down next to me and says nonchalantly, "I heard your pops say that you're some kind of genius mage... Is it true you already awakened?"

Not knowing how to answer, I just told her the truth. "Yes."

She began asking me how I felt when I awakened and what color my mana core was. By this time, a couple of curious ears perked up and Adam said, "Hey Reynolds, do you mind if I test little Art?"

Both my father and mother seemed a little hesitant at first, but trusting their old comrade, my father just said "Alright, but be careful. I haven't had the chance to teach him how to properly fight yet. We've just been doing light strength and mana exercises 'til now."

Adam gets up from his makeshift log seat and looked around until he found a short stick he felt satisfied with.

"Come here Kid. Haha, let's see what you're made of!"

Chapter 6: Up The Mountain

I don't know if he wanted to beat some sense into the kid he thought had a big ego after hearing I was some sort of genius or he was genuinely trying to test me, but by the smug grin he had on his face while looking down at me (even if it was only natural he would physically look down at me, it still pissed me off), I assumed it might be the former reason.

Picking up the wooden sword I got as a present from my parents, I walked to the edge of the camp where Adam was waiting near a small clearing.

“You know how to reinforce your weapon right genius?”

By this time, my father already sensed that Adam was just trying to put a show of dominance into his little boy, but he just watched, knowing he wouldn't hurt me too much.

Many thanks dear father.

My mother looked a bit more anxious as she kept glancing back and forth between me, Adam and father, keeping a firm hold onto his sleeve.

Well at least mother is here to heal me if I get hurt right?

I focused my gaze on Adam. Images of my past life, dueling other kings with my country and loved ones at stake, popped up in my head. My eyes narrowed. He was the opponent now.

I willed mana into my legs and dashed forward with both my hands gripping the wooden sword on my right...

Keeping his smug look, Adam prepared to block my horizontal swing when I feinted and used a special footwork I developed in my old world that I used for dueling. Almost instantly, I blinked a foot diagonally to his right. Curse this body. I couldn't perfectly execute the skill because of the height and weight difference compared to my old body. I wasn't used to this 40 pound, 110cm. body. While I didn't reach the area I was aiming for, unfortunately for Adam, he already prepared his wooden stick to block my horizontal swing from the other direction so his right side was open.

His smug look all but vanished and was replaced by a look of surprise with his eyes opening wide, realizing what's about to happen.

Swinging my wooden sword to his open ribcage, I reinforced my wooden sword with mana at the last moment to conserve my mana because I knew I was definitely at a disadvantage against a veteran like him.

The look of surprise on Adam all but lasted a split second before he pivoted his right foot with an almost inhuman speed. I squatted in time to dodge his upward swing and switched my stance from a thrust to a spinning swipe and landed a blow on his left ankle using all my momentum. His ankle gave out at that moment, throwing Adam off balance.

Or so I thought.

He actually did a full on splits and did a roundhouse sweep with his legs as soon as he was on the ground.

This body won't be able to take a hit like that so I jumped up to dodge his legs when, from my peripheral view, I saw the

flash of brown from his wooden stick.

With no time to use the blade to block the swing, I thrust the pommel of my sword, timing it so Adam's wooden stick and the end of my handle would clash.

Newton's Third Law of Motion suddenly came into mind.

For every action, there is an equal and opposite re-action

And boy was the opposite re-action painful. While I did block the blow successfully, my 4-year-old body couldn't withstand the force of the blow and I flew before gracefully skidding on the ground like a flat rock on a lake.

Thankfully, I reinforced my whole body before I took the blow or I would've seriously gotten hurt.

Groaning, I sat myself up and rubbed my throbbing head. I look up, only to see seven stupefied faces staring at me.

My mother recovered first, shaking her head. She rushed towards me and immediately mumbled a healing spell around my body.

"Art honey, are you okay? How do you feel?"

"I'm fine Mom, don't worry."

Adam's voice cuts in, "Haven't taught him how to fight my ass! How the hell did you train this little monster?"

"I didn't teach him that," my father managed to mutter.

He shook himself out of the stupor and came next to me and asked if I was okay. I just nodded my head.

He picked me up and gently put me back down where I was sitting before and squatted down in front of me so he was eye level.

“Art, where did you learn to fight like that?”

Deciding to feign ignorance, I said, putting on my most innocent face, “I learned by reading books and watching you dad.”

I don’t think saying, “Hey dad, I was the King Duelist representing my country from a world where diplomatic and international issues are settled in battles. I just happened to be reincarnated as your son... Surprise,” would get a great reaction from him.

“Sorry for roughing you up there little buddy. I didn’t expect I would need to use that much strength to get you off me.”

Seeing Adam apologize gave me a better impression of him. I guess he wasn’t a total jerk.

I hear a faint voice from my side. “Your fighting style is... unique. How did you do that step after the feint?”

Wow! Two complete sentences! That was the longest thing Jasmine said this whole trip by far.

I feel so honored.

“Thank you?”

I reorganized my thoughts before trying to explain in steps

what I did.

“It’s a simple technique really. Since I was feinting to Mr. Krensh’s right side, I place my right foot forward as the last step before the feint. There I instantly focus my mana into the right foot, pushing myself back, and at the same time I bring my left leg behind right, aimed towards where I want to go, and focus mana unto my left foot this time, but with more power than when I used mana on my right so that I don’t propel myself backwards instead of the direction I want to actually go to.”

That was a mouthful.

I looked around to see Adam, Helen, and even my father head towards the clearing, trying to test out what I just explained.

When I turned back to face Jasmine, I only saw her back as she rushed to the clearing as well.

Mother sat next to me, patting my head with a gentle smile on her face that seemed to say, “you did well.” Angela came up to me too, burying my face, or rather my whole head, in her bosom cheerfully exclaiming, “Cute AND talented aren’t you? Why couldn’t you have been born earlier so that this sister could snatch you up herself!”

Blushing, I willed myself away from those breasts that I suspected to have their own gravitational pull. Those...weapons are dangerous.

My guardian angel, Durden, was a lot calmer about all of this and just gave me a thumbs up. He’s so cool.

The night passed as the four idiots spent most of the time trying to master the feint step while I slept in the tent with mother.

A couple of days passed as we finally managed to make it to the foot of the Grand Mountains, which sure lived up to its name.

Along the way, only Helen managed to lay down her pride as she asked me for some clarification on the feint step. I went over it slowly, explaining what the timing of the interval between the last right foot and the left foot should be and how to properly balance the output of mana into both feet so you can go the way you're aiming. The whole time, I could almost see the ears of the other three idiots getting bigger as they tried to suck in the information that I gave her, nodding while taking mental notes.

The first one to succeed was Jasmine. She seemed like the cold, genius type. I guess it was true.

She pulled me aside one day, blushing, while I was taking reading and writing lessons on the back of the carriage with mother and asked me to watch.

We had to take a small stop so the carriages wouldn't leave us behind. After successfully demonstrating the feint step to me, I applauded saying "Amazing! You learned it so quickly!"

It's one of the most basic techniques I developed, but I'm not going to tell her that.

She responded curtly saying, "It was nothing" but the

upward curvature of her lips and the slight, proud twitch of her nose showed otherwise.

Haha, she's happy.

By the time we arrived at the foot of the Grand Mountains, all four of the idiots managed to learn the technique, changing it slightly to fit their own fighting style.

The next step of the journey was going up the mountains. Luckily, there was a path that was around two carriages wide that circled around the mountain, eventually leading to the teleportation gate at the top.

The front carriage included Durden, holding the reins in the front, with father besides him keeping him company. This carriage carried most of our luggage. Helen was currently seated on the top of the second carriage, the one I was riding in, scouting for any abnormalities. Angela sat in the back carriage with my mom and me, Adam walking at the back, keeping guard. While Jasmine was steering the carriage, I keep noticing how she turns back her head and stares at me in, almost making *jiii* sounds. Is she expecting me to show her other techniques or something? Every time I match her gaze, she quickly turns her head back to the front.

Kukuku...is she five?

Speaking of age, I turned 4 on the front leg of our journey to the foot of the Grand Mountains. I don't know when Mother prepared a cake or where she even put it (or if it's even edible!), but I didn't complain, put on a big smile and thanked her and everyone else. While everyone gave me a hug or a pat on the back, Jasmine surprised me then when she handed me a short knife, simply saying, "present."

Aww she cares! I'm tearing up.

Our journey up the mountain was pretty uneventful. I spent a lot of my time reading my book on mana manipulation, trying to find any discrepancies between mana and ki. So far, it seemed pretty similar except that, in rare cases, an Augmenter's mana usage can take on the property of elements. Reading on, I noticed that for beginners able to dabble in this, it wasn't as distinct as what you may see Conjurers casting but more like the quality of each distinct element.

For example, an Augmenter, assuming he has an innate compatibility with fire, would have mana that showed an explosive quality when used. Water would have a smooth, flexible quality. Earth would have a firm and rigid quality. Finally, Wind would have the quality of a sharp blade.

That's strange. Back in my old world, these kinds of qualities in ki had nothing to do with elements but how you utilized your ki. Shaping the ki into points and edges will give it the so called "wind element," while storing up your mana into a single point and bursting it at the last moment would give it the "fire element" and so on. Sure, practitioners had preferences and were better at practicing one style more than the other but I wouldn't go as far as to say it was rare. Only the most basic use of ki involved reinforcing the body and weapons.

I'll have to test this with mana in the future. Being stuck in a 4 year old body with constant supervision by suspicious adults made practicing really hard.

I kept reading on when suddenly I hear Helen's voice.

“BANDITS! PREPARE TO ENGAGE!” she shouted, followed by a rumble of footsteps coming from to our right and our back.

“Submit, O wind and follow my will. I command and gather you around in protection. Wind Barrier!” Instantly I feel a gust of wind forming a tornado around mother, Angela and I. Then the gust shapes into a sphere around us.

Angela is holding out her wand and was concentrating on keeping the barrier active while arrows constantly hit the barrier, only to get redirected into a different direction.

My mother pulls me in close, trying to shield me using her body from whatever might get through. The barrier seems to be holding strong thanks to Angela.

In a matter of seconds, the tarp covering the carriage is torn to shreds and I get a better view of what’s going on.

We were surrounded.

Chapter 7: How I Wished

There were at least 30 bandits from what I could see. Our current situation seemed to be pretty bad, as both our front and back were surrounded by bandits with swords, spears and other close range weapons. On the mountainside to our right, there were archers positioned to shoot down at us and to our left was only the edge of the mountain with the looming fog beckoning to us.

Jasmine, Durden and my father seemed to be fine with no visible injuries but Helen had a slightly pale face as she had an arrow jutting out of her right calf.

A bald man with multiple scars deforming his face and a body that reminded me of a bear (but carrying a giant axe) spoke out.

“Look what we have here. Pretty good catch boys. Leave only the girls and kid alive. Try not to scar them too much. Damaged goods will only sell for less.”

Goods? Sell?

I felt my body heating up; tensing from a burning rage I haven't felt in a while.

The audacity of this swine! How dare he!

I was ready to rush towards this brute, almost forgetting that I was now in 4 year old child when...

“There are only 4 mages and none of them seem to be Conjurers! The rest are normal fighters!” This time my father

shouted out.

Looking for slight mana fluctuations around a person's body makes mages distinguishable compared to normal humans but only if you focused well enough. Whether they're an Augmenter or Conjurer, making an inference based on physical structure and the weapon they're holding gives a pretty solid guess.

Quickly reverting back to his former adventurer days he when once led the Twin Horns; he put on his gauntlets, yelling, "Safeguard formation!"

Adam quickly arrived next us, facing the back of the road, spear pointed, while Jasmine and Helen came to our left with both their weapons unsheathed, facing the front of the road.

My father and Durden faced the mountainside, positioning themselves to shield us from the archers overhead. Angela maintained her position, but stood up, preparing another spell while she kept the wind barrier active.

"Gather and guard my allies O benevolent earth; do not let them be harmed. Earth Wall!"

The ground rumbled as a 4 meter earthen wall transmuted up from the ground curving up in front of Durden.

At that instant, my father burst forward with his gauntlets raised in a guard against arrows, towards the enemy archers.

Moments later, Angela finished chanting her spell and unleashed a torrent of wind blades aimed at the front and back of the road. With that as the cue, Adam and Jasmine followed up behind the wind spell, arriving to face their enemies that were in distraught, trying to block the flurry of blades. Helen

stayed behind, arrow knocked and bow drawn and anchored with the tip of the arrow shining in a bluish light.

This position was ideal for protecting valuable goods or people, with two layers of protection from the conjurers and an archer mage ready to fire at anyone who manages to cross the assaults of Adam, Jasmine and Father into the defense line.

“Fighter coming your way Helen!” Shouted Adam as he dodged a mace crashing down at the ground where he was at before promptly giving a quick swipe to the jugular of the unfortunate fighter. His eyes widened as he desperately dropped his weapon and tried to seal the fatal wound with his hands, blood spurting out through the gap between his fingers.

Meanwhile, a scruff, middle-aged man wielding a machete lunged towards Angela, trying to disrupt the spell. Although the wind blade spell wasn't that powerful, it provided a distraction that needed to be stopped.

I tried to free myself to block the man before he gets in range of Angela but before I could pull myself apart of Mother and grab my wooden sword, it was already over.

Followed by a powerful “Fwoosh!” The arrow unleashed by Helen carried a force strong enough to pierce through the armored chest of that said fighter and lift him up and back a couple meters, impaling him on the ground.

Mental note. Never piss off Helen.

Nocking and drawing another arrow, Helen narrowed her eyes. I can faintly see the mana gathering into her right eye as she closed the other one. After another “Fwoosh!” The reinforced arrow streaked through, ignoring all opposing air

resistance before arriving in front of another enemy fighter.

This man reminded me of a smaller Durden, except with more muscle and a much more sinister face. He furrowed his eyes in concentration and met the arrow with his giantsword that was the same height as him. With a sound that reminded me of a bullet hitting metal, the enemy fighter was blown back a meter but wasn't really harmed as he stabbed his greatsword into the ground, gaining enough balance to stop on his feet. However, before he even had the chance to do anything else, another arrow flew into his forehead, draining the light out of his eyes.

Meanwhile, Jasmine was engaged in a pretty serious duel against an Augmenter who used a long chain whip. Jasmine was in a disadvantage because of the short range her two daggers had, using all of her concentration dodging the erratic movements of the whip. The enemy seemed to catch on that she was having a hard time, adding in a few provocative comments while licking his cracked lips. "I'll make sure to treat you real well before we sell you off as a slave little missy. Don't worry, by the time I'm done training you, you'll be begging to stay with me." Followed by another lick to his lips.

I shuddered and clenched my fists from the frustration of not being able to do anything. Against a fighter, I might be able to win, but against an adult augmenter? I didn't have the confidence in being able to win.

Was I to just stay in the protection of everyone while they risked their lives? Could I not do anything? I could only grit my teeth and endure.

The earth wall was holding strong with none of the arrows able to penetrate through. With his left hand directed at the

earth wall, he willed a constant flow of mana into it to keep it from collapsing. Durden then created a small slit in the middle of the wall so he can get vision on my father and the archers scattering, trying to run away.

“Take heed Mother Earth and answer my call. Pierce my enemies. Let none of them live. Rupture Spike!”

Almost instantly, a dozen spikes strutted out from the ground, aimed at the archers. While a couple of them managed to dodge the earth spikes, many of them were impaled in place, their screams only lasting a couple of moments before their lives faded.

Durden seemed pretty strained from that spell; I could see some cold sweat rolling down his face.

My mother brought me back into her arms and held onto me tighter. There was no one from our side injured after Helen bound the wound on her calf. Fortunately the arrow wasn't in deep thanks to Helen's mana reinforcement; by the time she wound it, the bleeding stopped. But throughout this whole time, my mother had a constant look of paranoia, her face pale with worry, her head never staying in one place, always turning left and right, trying to look out for anything that can harm us.

While a little confused at first, I dismissed it; mentally concluding that, since she wasn't an adventurer for too long, unlike my father, she's probably just not used to situations like this and is just worried about us.

The battle was coming to its climax. The bandit group didn't suspect that every one of our group members would be a capable mage (excluding me). All of the melee fighters were

dead, the only ones alive being the four mages and a couple of scattered archers on the run.

Jasmine was still having trouble with that sick chain user, but he wasn't nearly so arrogant anymore, with a couple of nicks and cuts on his body, blood oozing out.

Adam was engaged with a dual sword Augmenter. Adam's fighting style reminded me of a snake, with his flexible body and sudden movements. He should be considered one of the rare elemental augmenters with a water-attribute style. Reinforcing the body of his spear to be flexible, his attacks were a mirage of multiple thrusts and swipes. He seemed to be winning the battle against his opponent as the dual wielder was profusely bleeding from wounds all over, desperately parrying the onslaught of attacks.

A thundering crash shocks my attention away from Adam's battle. My father was sprawled down on the debris of what is now left of the Earth Wall spell and is struggling to get himself up, blood dribbling down from the side of his lips.

“Dad!!”

I rush out of the wind barrier and kneel in front of Father.

“Honey!”

My mother soon follows and begins chanting a healing spell.

“Cough! Alice, listen to me. Don't heal me right now. If you use a healing spell right now, they'll find out what you are and try that much harder to go after you. They'll be willing to sacrifice a lot more if they know!”

My mom wasn't listening and kept chanting, desperately shaking her head. She was stubborn all right.

Father turned to me after giving up trying to persuade his wife.

"Art, listen carefully. After the healing spell activates, they're going to try to capture your mother at all costs. After I'm healed enough, I'm going back to engage the leader and try to buy enough time. I think I can beat him, but not if I have to worry about protecting you guys. Take your mother back down the road and don't stop; Adam will open up a path for you."

"No dad! I'm staying with you. I can fight! You saw me! I can help!" Fuck being mature. It seemed like at this moment I was really acting like the 4 year old I was on the outside, but I didn't care. I'm not going to leave behind my family whom I've grown to love and friends who I've bonded with so much this past week and a half.

"LISTEN TO ME ARTHUR LEYWIN!" Father agonizingly roared. This was the first time hearing his voice like this; the kind of voice that one would only use in a desperate situation.

"I know you can fight! That's why I'm entrusting your mother to you. Protect her and protect the baby inside her. I'll catch up to you after this is over."

Boom...

Protect her and protect the baby inside her...

Everything clicked. Why she was acting so paranoid. Why

she was clutching me and making sure nothing got even close to us. Why both Durden and Angela were guarding us with defensive spells instead of just one of them.

My mother was pregnant.

“I was planning on telling you when we arrived in Xyrus but...” Not finishing his sentence, father just looked at me sheepishly; still pale from the blow he received from the bald, axe-wielding boss.

“Okay, I’ll protect Mom.”

“Atta boy. That’s my son.”

My mother finished her chant at this time and both she and my father glowed in a bright golden white light.

“There’s a Healer! Don’t let her get away!”

I quickly grabbed my mother’s arm with both hands and tugged her to move while reinforcing myself with mana.

We reached the area Adam and the dual-wielder was battling a little down the road.

“Art, hurry down, I got him!”

The dual-wielder was obviously frustrated by the inability to neither reach me nor mother because of Adam. We hurried down the slope when I heard a faint *wizz* sound to our left.

Acting on instinct, I jumped up, bringing my wooden sword up and reinforcing my whole body and the sword to withstand the blow of incoming arrow.

*Paa! *

As the arrow met the wooden sword, my body flew back. Fortunately, the arrow wasn't reinforced with mana so after throwing my body into a backflip to disperse the force, I landed awkwardly on my feet, using my hands to make myself come to a stop, throwing away what was left of my wooden sword.

“Wha... Ugh!”

...Was all I heard from the assailant before he was promptly impaled by an arrow fired by Helen.

“GO!” She exclaimed, nocking in another arrow and firing at the leader of the bandits to support my father.

That's weird.

Currently, Jasmine, Adam, and my father (with Helen) were each fighting a Mage.

Wasn't there four?

“Damien! Forget the plan, don't let them live!” The Boss suddenly shouted.

“Who was he commanding?”

“... Respond to my call and wash away all! Water Cannon!”

From the mountainside, one of the scattered “archers” had his hands brought together, aimed at me and mother. We were tricked. He camouflaged himself during the chaos. He wasn't an archer or even an Augmenter. He was a Conjuror!”

Shit!

I didn't have much time to react before an incoming ball of pressurized water, a couple meters wide was nearing.

What can I do?

To my immediate right was my mother and to my left were Adam and his opponent not far off; and behind me, of course, was the edge of the mountain. Even if I can dodge this, mother won't be able to and she'll be forced off the ledge of the mountain.

What should I do?

“Dammit!” I roared!

Willing all of the remaining mana left in this cursed body, I tackled my mother, propelling both of us out of the way.

I quickly realized my 40-pound body couldn't carry enough momentum to push both of out of range of the water cannon.

No choice!

If I'm going down, I'm taking that bastard mage down with me!

I focused mana into my arms and pushed my mother farther down out of range. In that moment, everything seemed to be in slow motion as my mother gazed at me in panic and disbelief. She might get a pretty bad bruise from the push. She was going to be fine, but that's only if I can get rid of this conjurer.

I unsheathed the knife Jasmine gave me from my waist and willed mana into it. What I'm trying to do, I've done with ki in my old world but never with mana.

After willing mana into the knife, I threw it like a boomerang, aiming it at the conjurer still focusing his attention on the water cannon. Curving around the edge of the ball of water, the knife landed straight into the leg of the mage.

Crap! I didn't kill him. Plan B.

Plan B was just in case my initial throw couldn't kill him. I managed in succeeding in the gamble of Plan B, and that was creating a thin string of mana attaching the knife, currently engorged into the Conjurer's leg, to my hand.

"What the!" shouted the mage in pain as the knife embedded itself deep into his leg.

Losing concentration, the water cannon lost shape, but unfortunately, there was still a surge of water strong enough to push me off the cliff.

I tugged back on the mana string hard. The mage was hauled towards me from the combination of my pulling and the remnants of the water cannon pushing me back.

This is it. I couldn't help but look around at the battle that was still ensuing. Father and Helen managed to kill the leader. Angela providing back up for Jasmine allowed for them to put the whip-user on his last stand while Durden was rushing towards mother.

Thanks Durden. She'll be safe in his hands. Everyone will

be okay.

The only thing I'll regret is not being able to see my baby sibling.

With that, everything faded to a black; the last thing I see is the enemy conjurer desperately trying to pull the knife out of him while falling off the mountain, into the abyss along with me.

Damn. I always wanted to be a big brother.

Chapter 8: Questions

I opened my eyes and blinked a couple of times to process what I'm looking at. I'm back in my old body from the looks of it. I get up from the couch I was sitting on and open the door, walking out of my room in The Castle. A maid who was waiting for me outside of my room greets me immediately on sight.

“G-good morning King Grey.”

Not even glancing towards her direction, I keep walking as she follows a couple meters away.

Reaching the courtyard where all of the trainees were lined up with swords held in front of them; I see the instructors yelling at them about proper stance and breathing. When one of them sees me, he immediately turned and gave a firm bow, with the other instructors and trainees following suit.

I motioned for them to continue before walking to where I was headed. Pushing the double doors open, I arrive in front of an aged man with pearl white hair that matched his long beard, and emerald eyes that shined a sense of wisdom and knowledge. His name was Marlorn and was the head of The Council.

While I hold the position of “King” I can't help but think of myself as a glorified soldier. The one's who actually governed the country, managing the politics and economy, was The Council.

So what was my job?

The title of King means I'm actually more of a one-man army. Due to the decreasing numbers of children born and limited amount of resources, The Councils of each country gathered and came to a conclusion to replace war into a different form of combat. Getting rid of war meant two big things: decreasing the death count, leading to a population growth, and less land destroyed from the result of nuclear arms.

What replaced wars became known as The Duels. Whenever there was an international dispute, a duel would take place, each country sending in a representative that they deemed as the strongest.

Looking up, Marlorn exclaims with the standard fake, picturesque smile that seemed to be an inborn trait amongst politicians, "King Grey! What brings you to my humble dwelling?"

"I'm retiring."

Without even giving him the chance to react, I unclip my badge and walk out the door.

What have I been living for all these years? I was an orphan who was brought up in a camp designed to raise future Kings. I'm twenty-eight but I've never dated, never loved. I've spent my whole life so far for the sake of being the strongest.

For what?

Admiration? Money? Glory?

I had all of that but never in a million years would I choose

to have that over what I had in the town of Ashber.

I miss Alice. I miss Reynolds. I miss Durden. I miss Jasmine. I miss Helen. I miss Angela. I even miss Adam.

...Mother...

...Father...

“COUGH!! COUGH!”

I open my eyes again, but this time, the excruciating pain that I'm welcomed by tells me I'm not dreaming. I'm lying on my back looking straight up, trees and vines filling my vision.

Where am I?

How am I alive?

I try to get up but my body doesn't respond. The only thing I manage to do is turn my head and even that involved a series of throbbing pain in my neck.

Looking to my right, I spot my knapsack. I slowly turn my head to my left, gritting through the pain.

My eyes widen at the sight and I immediately vomit. To my left was what was left of the Conjurer I dragged down with me. A pool of blood surrounded the corpse, whose body probably had more broken than ones still intact. I see his ribs jutting out of his chest and some of his innards leaking out. His limbs lay at unnatural angles. The mage's skull was shattered in the back, with some brain matter oozing out, his face showed an expression of surprise and disbelief, except his eyes were completely red, a trail of dried blood still visible from his eye

sockets. I can't turn my head away fast enough. I puke what was left in my stomach until all I'm left with are dry heaves. A decomposing corpse like that was different from a clean killed opponent. With the pungent stench and insects feasting on the gore, I can't help but feel sick. With parts of my face and neck covered in my own regurgitation, I finally manage to turn my head rid my sight of the mage's grotesque remains.

How am I still alive?

I couldn't help wondering what happened while I was unconscious. Clearly, the mage was awake the whole time up until the landing... so what happened to me?

No. That's not important.

Why I fell asleep wasn't the issue. I should look very similar to that corpse right about now, maybe even worse, but not only am I okay, I don't even seem to have any broken bones.

I pondered over the possible answers until I was interrupted by a strong grumble from my stomach.

Again, I tried getting up, fighting through my body's protests. The only parts of my body that seem to be listening to me as of now is my right arm and my neck up. I will mana into my right arm and use my fingers to claw my way, dragging my body, to my knapsack. It couldn't have been more than two meters away but it took over what felt like an hour until I finally managed to reach it. Pulling it closer to me, I rummage through it with my only able hand until I find what I'm looking for. Mother's dried berries and nuts!

I succeed in pouring a mouthful of the snack that I brought

only because Mother nagged me to. I choke on some of it and I start coughing again. This leads to another round of agony in my body. Fumbling for the water sack inside my knapsack, I slowly pour a little of the water into my mouth before I place another handful of the snack into my mouth. Tears rolling down the sides of my face and into my ears, I continue chewing on the dried rations until I pass out again.

My eyes fluttered open as I stirred awake from the cold. I look around and notice that it's dawn, with only the first rays of light peaking through the mountains.

This time, I'm able to get up, but only with the help of mana. I carefully inspect all of my body, making sure everything is in place before I relax just a little.

First thing's first. I make my way to the corpse of the mage while trying to avoid looking at the heinous injuries that caused his demise. Spotting the knife I was looking for, I quickly jerk it out of his thigh.

I'm not sure how long I'll be here so having a weapon will be necessary.

“Oh, you're awake”

I instantly get into a fighting stance, knife in hand, turning to face the carcass.

I swear to God if this corpse is the one that's talking...

Chuckle

“No. You won't have to worry about that corpse reanimating.”

This voice that seemed to come out of nowhere had quality that seemed almost divine. It was powerful and resonant, yet silky and soothing sound that made you want to trust it.

Still on guard, I manage to respond with a less than elegant reply.

“Who are you? Are you the one that saved me?”

“Yes, to your second question. As for the first, you will find out when you arrive to my dwelling.”

This voice seemed awfully sure that I would try and find it.

Almost as if reading my thoughts, she continues, “I am the only one that will be able to get you home from this place so I advise you to make haste.”

That jerked some sense into me. That’s right! I had to get back home! Mother! Father! The Twin Horns! My baby sibling! Are they all right? Did they reach Xyrus safely?

If the voice can really take me back home, I have no choice but to find it.

Ahem

“Dear uhh... Mr. Voice. May I ask for the directions to your location so that you may bless me with your presence?”

Chuckle

“Don’t you think it’s a little rude to call a lady ‘Mister’? And yes, I’ll show you the way.”

Ahh... so it was a lady.

Immediately, my vision shifted into a bird's-eye view. Zooming out, a location that was roughly around a day's trip to the east came into sight and lighted up before my vision turned back.

"I recommend departing immediately. It will be a lot safer traveling in the day than when it gets dark." Gently chides the voice.

"Yes Ma'am!" I quickly picked up my knapsack before trotting towards my destination.

It was a little less painful with each step and by midmorning I was only left with a couple of aches here and there. Whatever that lady did was powerful stuff. I've never heard or read of casting a spell with that much of a distance. Or maybe she left after casting the spell right before I landed? Then how could she have known that we were falling and why did she only save me? The more I tried to solve the mystery, the more questions I seemed to end up with.

Hearing a faint gurgling sound, I walked towards the direction to see a stream.

"Yes!" I exclaimed.

I was absolutely filthy. My face and neck still had the stench of stomach acid, while my clothes were torn and caked with grime. Almost sprinting, I cannonballed into the stream, vigorously scrubbing my face and body. I took off my clothes and after briefly washing them; I laid them down on a nearby rock to dry. After finishing the refreshing bath, I walked towards my still damp clothes when...

“Kukuku... How cute.”

Reflexively, both my hands cover my precious area and I curl my back, trying to make my body as small as possible.

Laugh

“Don’t worry, there wasn’t much to see.” I shuddered as I almost felt The Voice wink at me.

How rude! My pride...

Grumbling, I chose to ignore The Voice and put on my clothes.

“Aww... don’t pout. I apologize.” *Chuckle*

GRR!!! I must persevere!

After I put on my clothes, the perverted voice seemed to go silent. Not minding too much, I rummaged through my bag and dug out the last of my dried rations. Water wasn’t going to be a problem for a bit since I refilled my water sack, but I will need food soon; hopefully the voice would provide me with something.

Looking around, I begin wondering where I was. Since I fell off the mountain towards the east, I must be near the elves’ domain. I don’t think I’m in the Forest of Elshire because I’m not surrounded by fog. Am I in the Beast Glades? No. There weren’t any mana beasts... I see a few rabbits and birds, but I’ve yet to see anything else. Something even stranger that I noticed a bit before was the abundance of mana in this place. It was mostly due to the richness of mana that I was able to

recover from my initial state so quickly. Although that still doesn't explain how I survived in the first place, I'm guessing that voice will tell me anyways.

I better hurry.

Aside from the fact that there was no road, it turned out to be a pretty uneventful trip, with minimal obstacles and terrains I had to go around. As I drew near the location of the voice, the density in mana was getting thicker and thicker. Ignoring the temptation to stop and absorb the surrounding mana, I ventured on. Training wasn't important right now. I needed to get home.

Everyone probably assumed that I'm dead. I'm worried about Mother and Father. Not so much physically but for their mental health. I'm concerned Mother and Father won't forgive themselves for my death. The only thought that comforted me was the fact that my mother was pregnant. Yes. At least for the sake of my unborn brother or sister, they'll keep strong.

I reached the area where The Voice directed me towards, but I don't really see anything besides a cluster of rocks surrounded by a cluster of trees.

"I'm glad you made it~" the voice echoed.

"Nice to meet you uhh... Ma'am? Miss. Rocks?"

Snicker

"I'm not a rock, nor a cluster of them. There is a crevice between the back of the adjacent rocks. That's where I'll be"

Looking around, I manage to spot the small gap that was

the width of an adult, between two of the bigger rocks that were leaning against each other. I knew I found it after I felt a slight breeze coming out from the crevice. If it wasn't for the voice directing me to this exact location, I would never have even noticed the small fissure.

“Child. Go on and enter through the crevice but strengthen yourself with mana before you do.”

I can finally meet Mother and Father soon!

Without a second's hesitation, I slipped in through the gap easily while willing the mana to strengthen my body.

“AAAAHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHHH” *CRASH*

The voice failed to warn me that I was going to be doing a vertical fall. I guess that's why she mentioned using mana to me.

Rubbing my butt, I groaned as I slowly supported myself up.

“We finally meet child.”

I felt the color drain from my face as my mouth gaped open and eyes bulged. Feeling lightheaded and my legs failing to support me, I crumbled back to my aching butt as I just stared at the one who's been helping me this whole time.

Chapter 9: The Ones Held Dear

“W...what are you?” I managed to stammer out.

What my eyes saw, my brain didn't want to believe. A monster, for a lack of a better word, which easily towered over 10 meters tall, was seated cross-legged, on a crudely carved platform of stone with an arm lazily supporting its head. With beaming red eyes that gazed down at me, while menacing, carried an oddly tranquil quality. Two massive horns protruded out the of sides of its head, arched down and around it's skull, curving up to a point near the front, reminding me of something almost akin to a crown. With a mouth that had two fangs peeking out of its lips. Its body from the neck down was adorned in a sleek black armor with no decorations or embellishments, yet still emitting a presence of priceless treasure.

Although I was once a King, this being made me embarrassed of even having the nerve to call myself one. No. The one sitting on that giant platform was a being that would make even the most unfaithful heretic bow down in submission.

Yet here it was... with its head being supported by its arm, the other hand nonchalantly scratching its nose.

What I failed to notice until now though, because of how dark the cave was and him being in all black, was that this being had a gaping hole in the side of it's chest, blood faintly oozing out.

“*We finally meet .*” It repeated with a lazy half smile showing

more of its sharp teeth.

I try getting up but fail halfway and end up back on my butt, my face still slack from the shock of what my eyes are seeing.

“Bugs will fly into your mouth if you keep it open that wide.”

Great. At least it has a sense of humor.

“As for what I am, I won’t say anything more than what you can see from looking.” The horned humanoid monster says with its eyes seeming to look straight through me.

“ ... ”

**Sigh* ... “It is going to take to a while for me to open a dimensional rift that will transport you to your house, so until then, just be patient and wait here. There are special roots that grow here. You will be able to live off those until I finish .”*

That’s right. That’s what I’m here to do. I manage to regain a bit of my composure and I stand up, walking a little closer to the being.

Giving a deep bow, I say, “Thank you for everything you’ve done for me and what you will do. If there is any way I can repay you, I will do for you whatever is in my power.”

“HAHAHAHA, such good manners for a child. Don’t worry; I am neither expecting a favor nor your gratitude. I am simply doing this for my own amusement. Come! Sit here closer to me and keep me company. I haven’t talked to anyone in a while.”

I climbed up the platform rather awkwardly, forgetting to

use mana to just jump up, and I propped myself in front of the being.

“Uhh... excuse me for being rude, but you don’t exactly look like a lady. How should I exactly address you as?” I said while looking straight up to make eye contact with the being.

**Chuckle* “You’re right. I don’t exactly look like a lady, now do I? I wonder why I said that. Kukuku my name is Sylvia .”*

This giant demon lord-like monster looked like anything but a Sylvia to me.

“Elder Sylvia, do you mind if I ask a few questions?”

“Go ahead young one, although I may not be able to answer everything .”

I suddenly rattled on all of the questions that have been on my mind ever since waking up and after meeting Sylvia.
“Where is this place? Why are you here all alone? Where did you come from? Why do you have that huge wound? ... Why did you save me?”

Chuckle

“You must have had a lot on your mind. The first question is easy to answer. This place is a narrow zone that is between the Beast Glades and the Forest of Elshire. No one knows of this place because I’ve been warding off anyone who comes close, although the cases are rare in the first place. You, young child, are the first to enter into this domain. ”

“Please call me Art! My name is Arthur Leywin but everyone calls me Art! You can too!” I interrupt before shutting

my mouth with my tiny hands. Why am I acting like an excited child? Control yourself!

“Kukuku... Very well child, I will call you Art!” Her red eyes glazed, looking afar while answering my next questions.

“Continuing on to your second question. I am here alone simply because I have no one left to be with. While I do not think telling you everything would be wise, I will tell you that I have many enemies that desperately wish for something that I have; my last battle with my enemies left this wound. As for where I come from... very far away haha.”

There was a moment of pause before Sylvia continued on, this time her eyes looking straight at me, almost studying me.

“As for why I saved you...even I do not fully know the answer to that question. Perhaps I have been alone for far too long and I simply wished to have someone to talk to. I first noticed you when your party was engaged in battle with the bandits. When you fell off the cliff to save your mother, I felt compelled to save you, thinking it was a waste for such a good child to die. You are very brave. It is rare for even an adult to be able to do that.”

I shook my head. “I was scared too and I didn’t know what to do. I just wanted to save my mother and my baby sibling inside her.” I don’t know if it’s from the gentle way she talked or because of how big and powerful she seems but in front of her, I seemed to turn into a child. No, I was a child in front of her.

“I see... Your mother was pregnant. You must miss them dearly. Rest assure, your family and party are safe. As for where they have gone, my senses cannot reach far enough to tell anymore.”

“ ... ”

I felt my cheeks get warm as tears unconsciously rolled down. I see. They're safe. This new life that I've been given has allowed me to express emotions I thought I never would in my previous life.

Sniff “Thank God” *Sniff* “Th...they're alive...they're okay...” I say half mumbled through my hands that covered my face.

Sylvia's giant hand reached down and she softly patted my head with a finger.

The day passed on with me conversing with Sylvia, picking up some roots that looked and tasted very similarly to potatoes but were black in color in between to eat, before conversing again.

We talked about all sorts of things to pass the time as she prepared to open a portal. She asked me how I was able to use mana so well at my age.

“I was under the impression that amongst humans, the earliest mage to have awakened so far was the age of 10, and even then, because the child couldn't grasp how to use it, there was very little he could do. Yet, not only have you already formed your mana core, but, by the way you use your mana, you seem to be more efficient than most adults.”

I just shrugged, feeling oddly proud by her compliment. “My parents say I'm a genius or something. I can read really well and I get what the pictures and words in the books are saying.”

A few more days went by quickly as Sylvia continued preparing the portal.

In a regretful tone, she says one day, *“The spell will take some time in order for it to be completely safe. I do not wish for you to land in a destination you are not familiar with. Even one inconsistency can lead to you being transported a couple hundred meters off the ground. Please be patient; you will be able to see your loved ones soon .”*

I nodded and said that as long as I know they’re alive, I am fine with waiting. It beats trying to climb back up the mountain.

These past couple of days, while I trained my mana core and chatted with Sylvia, I noticed a few things.

Sylvia really made me think of the cliché, “Don’t judge a book by its cover.” Unlike her less than friendly appearance, she was kind, gentle, patient, and warm. She reminded me of mother, in the way that they both scolded me while being tender when I did something wrong. I was mentioning about how the mage that I fought, as well as the other bandits, deserved worse deaths than they had when she suddenly flicked my forehead!

Even though she was gentle, a flick of a finger from someone over 10 meters high was nothing to make light of. I rolled a little bit before angrily shouting, “What was THAT for?!”

Picking me up and setting me on her armored knee, she said in a soft but pained tone. *“Art. Perhaps you are not wrong in that those bandits did deserve death. Even I chose not to save that mage you fell with because of the same reasons. However, do not let*

your heart be clouded with continuous thoughts of hatred and the sort. Continue on proudly with your life and gain the strength to protect your loved ones from harm. Along the way, you will come to face situations like before, maybe even worse, but don't let the grief and rage corrode your heart but move on and learn to better yourself from those experiences so it won't happen again. ”

I blinked, stunned at the fact that I was getting lectured on my morals from someone that looked like the epitome of evil herself. Strangely, it stuck with me and I just nodded blankly.

Another thing I noticed was that her wound seemed to be getting bigger. I found it somewhat odd at first that she could still be alive with a gaping hole in the side of her chest, but I got used to it until a couple days after I met her, the wound seemed to be bleeding a lot more. Sylvia tried to hide it at first with her hand, but it was growing more and more obvious.

Noticing my concerned gaze towards the wound, Sylvia gave me a weak smile, saying *“Do not worry little one, this wound festers from time to time .”*

One day, while I was meditating and using various exercises to better control my mana, Sylvia suddenly spoke, saying, *“Art. Try absorbing mana while you are making movements. Ideally you should be able to absorb at least a fraction of the mana you would during meditation while you are fighting. Although you would be spending mana faster than you can absorb mana, you will be able to prolong the usage of your mana .”*

That's right! I totally forgot about testing that hypothesis. I was so used to having absorption of mana and the manipulation of mana as two separate things that I didn't stop to think about the possibilities in this new world.

“Okay! I’ll try!”

“Kuku, humans have a very linear mindset in regards to mana and find it hard to deviate from anything that already works. Practice hard now though, because you can only learn this skill while both your body and mana core are immature. Mana beasts learn to do this naturally, but because humans awaken too late and in most cases, their bodies are not adept for this ability when they first awaken. Considering you are so young, there shouldn’t be a problem if you practice .” Continues Sylvia with a proud puff from her nose.

I have to admit it was extremely confusing at first. Have you ever tried those exercises where you try to make each of your arms do something different? Think of it as that but multiple times harder. You had to be able to fight well while still trying to focus your mind on absorbing mana. I’ve never tripped over my own body so many times in this and my previous life put together.

This seemed to get a couple of laughs of amusement from Sylvia.

Two months passed by keeping Sylvia company with stories of my family and the town I was born in, with me getting better and better at the technique thanks to Sylvia giving me a couple of pointers along the way.

I proudly named this technique Mana Rotation.

Over this period of time, it would be an understatement to say I’ve gotten close to Sylvia. She treated me like her blood grandson and I’ve grown attached to this demon lord grandmother. It was because of our growing relationship that I couldn’t ignore what was happening.

The wound was getting worse as the portal that was supposed to bring me home, was becoming clearer.

“Elder Sylvia. What’s happening to your wound? Why is it getting worse? It wasn’t like this before! I thought you said it was just festered every now and then! That it was going to go away! Why is it getting worse?” I said one especially bad night when she was coughing blood.

I paused for a second...

I’m so stupid.

Why didn’t I notice this earlier?

She was getting worse while making the portal. She’s dying in order to send me home. She’s sacrificing her life so I can meet my family.

Sylvia’s eyes dimmed, knowing that I had realized what was going on. Managing a sheepish smile, Sylvia whispered, “*Art. Yes I am dying. But I will get angry if you blame yourself, thinking that you are causing this. I have been dying for quite a while now. You are doing me a favor by allowing me to leave this forsaken cave a little faster.*”

As soon as she finished talking, a bright golden glow radiated out of her body. Shielding my eyes from going blind, I try to focus on the shape appearing from where Sylvia once sat. In place of the 10 meter titan-like figure was a dragon even bigger. From her snout to the end of her tail, she was clad in pure white shimmering scales. Around her purple eyes were glowing golden markings that went down her neck and spread out around her body and tail like a tattoo. These markings reminded me of a very elegant, almost celestial, tribal pattern,

fanning out in different directions like vines and leaves. The dragon's wings were pure white adorned with white bladed feathers that put swords made by master smiths to shame.

The golden light dimmed until the dragon fully replaced the once titan-shaped being.

“There now... Do I look a little more like a Sylvia?”

“Elder Sylvia?? Y..you're a dragon?” I said.

“Now That I am in this form, we do not have much time. Yes I am a dragon, a very powerful one at that. The reason I am dying is because of a battle I fought with many enemies. They will come for me soon, which is why I will only explain what is necessary. I am giving you this to take care of from now on.”

One of her bladed wings unfolds and what's revealed is a translucent rainbow colored stone the size of two fists. With a myriad of colors and shades, this stone resonated an aura that made me hesitate in holding it, as if I'm not worthy.

Continuing on, she explains *“Everything will reveal itself when the time comes so just hold unto this and do not let anyone know that you have this. Most will not know what it is but everyone will be attracted by the aura it emits.”*

Sylvia then plucks a bladed feather off her wings and hands it to me. *“Wrap the stone in this to conceal it.”*

After doing so, the once divine radiant stone turned into a smooth white rock, pretty, but ordinary.

While I was studying the stone wrapped in the feather, I suddenly feel Sylvia's snout gently touching the middle of my

chest, exactly where my mana core was.

Surprised, I look up to see Sylvia's purple eyes and the gold markings glow brighter than they did when she first transformed and then fade away. With a flick of her tongue, she pierces through and into my mana core and breathes out a golden smoke that crackled in purple.

“AHH!”

Confusion and surprise fills my mind and I just stare at her from the ground with my eyes and mouth wide open, chest slightly bleeding.

I couldn't form any words in my mouth and my mind was a jumble of questions and thoughts.

Sylvia's expression seemed pained and weak, even for a mighty dragon that was even bigger than her previous illusion. What caught my attention though was that her eyes were now just a dim yellow color and the beautiful markings that once flowed across her face and body were now gone.

Before I could ask what happened, a giant crash interrupted me.

I look up to see that the ceiling of the cave was gone and what came into vision was a figure that made me think of Sylvia's previous form.

Clad in sleek black armor and a blood red cape that matched its eyes. The figure's pale grey skin matched the clouded sky in the background. The horns were different though. This entity had two horns that curled and under around its ears, lining its chin.

“SYLVIA! I advise you to hand over the gem and make it easy for us before you die! You’ve already caused us quite the trouble after hiding yourself!” The entity roared.

Not even looking at the figure in the sky, Sylvia’s wings covered me from the entity’s view.

“I’ll open the portal now. I didn’t have the time to make it go directly to your home but it should take you to a place with humans around. Do not let him see you and do not look back.” She whispered, her eyes solemn.

“Sylvia! What about you? A-aren’t you come with me? *Sniffle* What’s going to happen to you??”

I can’t control myself anymore and I’m crying, tears freely flowing down my face as I fight the sniffing.

“Unfortunately I cannot go with you. Even if I can, he will be able to find me. No. I need to stay here .”

“Y-you can’t! No! I won’t let you die here. Please! Come with me!”

Sylvia gently wipes my cheeks with a claw and says, her draconic eyes lined with tears,

“You asked me once, why I chose to save you. The truth was to satisfy my own greed. I wanted to keep you as my own child even for just a little bit. I intentionally prolonged the transportation spell because I wished to spend more time with you but it seems I don’t even have the chance to finish it. I’m sorry Arthur for my selfishness but I have a favor to ask... Can you call me grandmother just this once ?”

“NOO! I don’t care about all of that! I’ll say it as much as you want if you come with me! Grandma! Grandma! You can’t! Not like this!”

And before I had the chance to grab ahold of Sylvia for the last time, she pushes me into the portal that formed beside her.

I can barely make out what she says before she disappears from sight.

“Thank you my child .”

Chapter 10: Road Ahead

The trip through the dimensional rift was a strange sensation. It felt like I was in the middle of a movie set in fast forward. The background around me was moving in an indistinct blur of colors while I was kneeled down, still sobbing.

I landed on grass, still on my knees, my head buried in my arms in a bowing manner.

She was gone.

I'll never see her again.

Those two thoughts triggered another wave of emotions and I started weeping again.

I recalled the little over 3 months we spent together. How caring she was, treating me like her own blood. I didn't care that she prolonged sending me home so that I would stay with her. Through the short time I was with Sylvia, she had taught me so much, given me something that I would never be able to find by myself.

Lost in grief, I roll to my side in a fetal position, my brows furrowed and eyes shut.

Suddenly, a burning sensation comes from my mana core and a voice echoes in my head.

"Ahem! Testing, testing... Ah good! Hello Art~ this is Sylvia."

My heart fluttering, I instantly respond to the voice. "Sylvia! I'm here! Can you hear..."

“If you’re listening to this right now, it means I have shown you what I actually am...”

Ah. It’s some kind of recording that she infused into me when she gouged that small hole into my mana core.

“... You’re nowhere near ready right now to know the whole truth. Knowing you, if I tell you whom that figure in the sky was, you will just brashly try and charge through. Art... You are barely passed the age of 4. Upon looking at your mana core, you have a rare talent seeing that your mana core is already dark red in color. What I will tell you is this. I have infused with you my unique will. This is something that no one else but I can do. Your future progress as a Mage depends on how well you will be able to use my will that is embedded into your mana core...”

That’s why the purple in her eyes and golden patterns disappeared!

“The moment your mana core reaches a level past the white stage is when you will hear my voice again. At that time, I will explain everything and what you do from there is your choice.”

There was a stage past white?

“Lastly, Art... I know you may be in grief as of now, but remember, you have your family to look out for and the stone I entrusted you with. My only wish is for you to embrace the joys and innocence of childhood, train hard, and make your parents and I proud. Do not go chasing after a shadow out of rage. Killing the ones that are responsible for my death will neither bring me back to life nor make you feel better. There was a reason for everything and I do not regret what has happened. With this, I bid you farewell for now. Remember, protect your family and the stone, study what I have left you, and

enjoy this life King Grey. ”

“ ... ”

That name and title was from my old world. She knew the entire time! Did she discover something in my mana core? Was she able to look into my memories? So many questions but the only one who can answer them is gone.

I don't move for a while, staying in the fetal position, my eyes glazed over, deep in thought.

Sylvia was right. She said all of this knowing what my life back in my old world was like. I won't make the same mistake of living for the sake of training. I will be strong, but I'll also live my life without regret. I want to live a life that Sylvia would be proud of. I don't think she'll be happy even if I reach whatever stage was after white while living a life of only training. No. I need to hurry up and reach my family. But before that, where am I?

Looking around, I'm surrounded by trees that tower over my head. There's a thick fog that covers anything a couple centimeters off the ground

Trees and an unnaturally thick fog...

I sank back on my knees, crestfallen at what this could only mean.

I was in the Forest of Elshire

Sigh

Picking myself up, I prepared my mind. Looks like I won't

be meeting my family anytime soon. It's been around 3-4 months since I fell off of the cliff. My family has most likely either gone back to Ashber or decided to stay in Xyrus.

I don't have anything on me except the clothes on my back and the strange stone that was wrapped in Sylvia's feather. This damn fog limited my vision to about a couple meters around me. Reinforcing my eyes with mana helped quite a bit but that didn't solve the problem of which direction I needed to go to get out of this place. I reinforced my body, enabling mana rotation that seems to have become second nature to me now. Right now, I can only absorb about 20% of what I can do while just meditating, but I'm not complaining.

The only downside to mana rotation is that it's not a replacement for strengthening your mana core. In order for me to purify my mana core and get it to the next stages, I need to solely focus on gathering the mana, from both my body and the surrounding area, and use that to get rid of the impurities little by little. One notable thing I felt rather was that after getting my mana core to dark red, the amount of mana I could store inside increased significantly. While the size doesn't increase, I'm guessing the purity allows more mana to be gathered.

I climb a couple meters up the first tree I find and I sat situated on a branch. This time, I concentrated the mana into only my eyes, increasing my vision even further. What I'm looking for isn't a way out but more so for any signs of humans. Sylvia said that I would be teleported near humans so I'm hoping that there may be adventurers travelling through here that knows a way out.

A couple seconds of searching, I find what I'm looking for. Looks like I was right; there are humans here.

I hop from tree branch to tree branch, going towards them. Stopping a couple meters away, I hid myself behind the trunk on a branch facing away from them.

Something's wrong.

I hide myself completely behind the branch and will mana into my ears.

“NOOO!!! HELP! SOMEONE PLEASE HELP! MOMMY! DADDY! NOOO I'M SCARED!!!”

“Someone shut her up! She's going to attract attention!”

THUD

“Quick. Put her in the back of the carriage. We're only a couple days away from the mountain range. We'll be safer then. Don't relax and let's keep moving.”

“Hey boss! How much do ya think she'll sell for? Elf girls go for a lot don't they? Hehe, she's a child too so a virgin at that! I bet she'll fetch us a lot of money huh!”

Slave traders!

I carefully look around to see a small sized carriage, enough to tightly cram in about 5 adults. I turn around just in time to see a middle aged man carrying a little girl into the back of the carriage. She looked to be around 6-7 with silver blond hair with the trademark pointed ears that elves are known for.

What should I do? How do they do know where to go in

the first place? The Elshire Forest's magical fog messes with the senses even while using mana.

What I see next answers my second question.

Attached to leashes are mana beasts that look like a mix between a deer and a dog, with antlers that look branch out, looking like a complicated satellite. I remember reading about those mana beasts in the encyclopedia I carried around.

Apparently, these forest hounds are native to the Forest of Elshire and can navigate even better than the elves can.

How those brutes acquired those rare mana beasts, I have no idea but I needed to think of a plan.

Option one: Steal one of the forest hounds and have it lead me out of the forest.

Option two: Kidnap the kidnapped elf girl to have her help me out.

Option three: Kill all of the slave traders and set the elf girl free while I take the forest hounds and go back home.

Pondering for a couple of minutes, I'm faced with a dilemma. Option one seems to be the easiest, but it didn't sit right with me to leave the elf girl to her doom.

Who knows, maybe she'll get bought by a kind old man who will treat her well and let her visit her home every couple of months!

...Fat chance...

Option two had the obvious flaw that, once I save the elf

kid, she won't lead me out of the forest and will just want to go back home and the slave traders probably won't take it too kindly. Option three had the best outcome but was the hardest, considering that there were 4 of them and only one of me. Because of the fog, I couldn't sense if any of them were mages but I assume at least one is. Being able to capture an elf in the forest meant that they weren't amateurs.

Fuck! Option three it is.

I waited until nightfall to make my move. Those slave traders sure were vigilant. They didn't build a fire and always had two people on guard.

I use the chance when one of the two out on guard went around to the other side of the carriage to quiet the forest hounds that I woke up with a carefully thrown rock.

One was sitting on a fallen log, fiddling something in his hands while the two that were sleeping were inside the tent pitched next to him. Carefully jumping to a branch directly above the carriage, I prepared my attack.

I was going for the one that went to quiet the forest hounds first.

I dropped down with a quiet thud behind one of the slave traders. This man had a very lanky build. While muscles were visible, he didn't seem too strong and was only armed with a knife.

Hearing the soft thud, lanky turns around probably only expecting a curious weasel or rat. His face turned into a

mixture of surprise and amusement when he sees me, a 4-year-old child in torn clothes.

Before he has the chance to say anything, I lunge upward towards his neck. I infuse mana into the blade of my hand, turning it into a sharp edge. This was called the swordless style in my old world but here it would be more accurate to call it a wind attribute technique.

He flinches back reflexively, his hands trying to reach where his face is, to guard against the boy shooting towards him.

It's too late. I take a quick swipe at the jugular, taking his vocal chord out along with the major vein. His neck immediately spurts blood out profusely and I land behind him, supporting his lifeless body and gently placing him down to avoid making noise. Just as expected, the forest hounds that were calmed down by the Mr. Lanky jolted awake at the smell of blood and started barking up a storm.

“Ey Pinky! Can't even calm the hounds...What the?!”

I had already picked up...Pinky's? knife after disposing his body and was waiting for him at the corner of the carriage.

While the other guard's attention was directed at the corpse of Pinky that was being eaten by the forest hounds, I came out from behind and stabbed the side of his neck with the knife.

The hounds quieted down while devouring the two corpses. I was heading towards the tent to kill the two left in their sleep but then something I didn't calculate ruined my plans.

“HELLLLP! MOMMY! SOMEONE! ANYONE! PLEASEE!!”

Jesus Christ child! Why now of all times!

On cue, I hear the rustle of the tent as the two slave traders that were left came out. Half grumbling, I hear a “Pinky! Deuce! The kid is awake! What the hell are you guys...”

Really? Pinky? Deuce? You guys have comrades with the names pinky and poop?

He didn’t finish his sentence as he realized something was wrong.

I quickly hide behind the tree next to the carriage and infuse mana into Pinky’s knife.

The two remaining slave traders came around to the other side of the carriage where their eyes bulged upon witnessing their two former companions being eaten by the forest hounds.

Using this chance, I attack the nearest one when his gaze shoots towards me and I’m met by his blade swung directly at my face.

Quickly ducking, I drop low and accelerate myself faster, getting in the range of my knife. I swing, reinforcing more mana into the knife and slice through his right Achilles’ heel.

“FUCK!!”

With his good leg, the guy who swung at me leaps out of my range before I can further damage.

“Danton, be careful! I think this brat is a mage.” Cries the

fighter whose tendon I just ripped.

I see Danton pulling out his sword from its sheath and get in a defensive stance.

“You see all sorts of crazy things these days! Looks like a huge sack of gold just showed itself in front of us huh George! I bet he’ll get us almost as much as the elf girl. It’s a pity he’s not a girl.”

These bastards don’t even care that I just killed their party members.

Danton reinforces his body with mana and walks towards me, a confident grin etched onto his scarred face.

George is going to be out of the fight with that disabled leg, but this Augmenter is going to be trouble.

The Augmenter named Danton suddenly disappears from my sight and blinks above me, preparing to throw a punch. He seems to not want to use his sword directly at me so I won’t get scarred and be worth less money. That makes it easier for me.

I jump back in time to avoid the blow that left a small hole in the ground and I throw my knife. I use the same trick as I did with the conjurer I dragged down with me off the cliff but this mage is a little more experienced. He disrupts the mana string with his sword and grabs the knife with his free hand.

Shit.

I’m in a pretty bad position right now. Danton doesn’t seem to be too tall for his age but his reach is still a good amount longer than mine. He also has a sword, which further

increases his range.

Danton dashes toward me at this time and throws the knife that I just launched at him. I dodge, but not in time to realize that it was a diversion and he gets a hold of my ankle and flips me upside down.

This is my chance! I reach for the hand that's holding unto me while concentrating mana. I use a fire attribute technique, releasing all of my concentrated mana located in my fist and aim for his wrist.

CRACK

“MOTHER FUCKER!!”

His now broken wrist lets go of my ankle and land on my back. Quickly jumping up to my feet, I pick up Pinky's knife and dash towards the wounded Danton. While he was still preoccupied by the pain from his wrist, he angrily shouts, “You're DEAD now you piece of shit! I don't care if I can't sell you anymore!”

His left wrist is wounded, leaving a gap in his defense. I will more mana into my feet and arrive in range to land a hit to his side, when I see him swinging his sword down.

He fell for it!

I quickly pivot with my left foot in place, spinning to my right. Dodging the swing by a hair's breadth, I enter into my knife's range to his right side, open because of that last desperate swing.

He immediately tries to jump back but I place my right

foot behind his legs so he loses balance. In one quick thrust, I stab my knife right below his armpit, through the gap between his ribs and into his lungs.

He was easy to finish off after his breath was gone from the wound.

I was now left with an immobile George.

I couldn't use Danton's sword because it was too big for my body so I made use of Pinky's knife one last time and swiped George's jugular. The poor fighter couldn't really contest or run away with his useless leg and died with a look of disbelief. Much like his two comrades, fed to the hounds.

I think the elf girl knew that there was fighting going on because it was eerily quiet now.

I climbed up onto the back of the carriage where she was and I spotted her shivering in the corner with only rags minimally covering her. She looks up at me in doubt, her eyes almost saying, "He's the one who saved me?"

I untie her while she remains silent, her turquoise eyes never leaving my face.

Tired and feeling gross, I help her up and simply say, "You should go back home now."

"Hic...hic..."

She probably didn't know whether I was an enemy or friend until now because once I said that, a look of relief washed over her tense face and she broke down.

“Hic! I was so scared! They were going to sell me! Hic! I thought I was never going to see my family again! Hic! WAAAAAA”

Chapter 11: To and Fro

It felt like a good hour before the little elf girl settled down. I don't blame her. Being taken away like that is a traumatic experience even for adults, much less a child.

I just sat there waiting for her to settle down, sitting cross-legged, patting her head every so often.

Sniff *Sniff*

“What happened to those bad guys?” She manages to say.

Not knowing what I should say to a 7-year-old about killing, I just dismissed it by telling her, “Er... I took care of them so we should okay.”

She looks at me with a slightly confused face. Looking closely at her now, I would imagine she would be quite the beauty later on in the future.

This girl, who looks around 7, has long glowing silver hair that gently cascades down past her shoulders parted unevenly to the sides. Looking closer, her hair wasn't exactly pure silver but more of a bright gunmetal grey color. Paired with her unique turquoise eyes that were shaped beautifully like almonds, this elf girl emitted a very mysterious, almost phantasmal feel about her. Her perky nose was slightly red with crying, as were her eyes that still had tears in them, her rose-colored lips that contrasted her fair skin, still quivering.

I shake my head. This is no time to be checking out a child (As if there are times later on when checking out the child is

okay)!

I help her up before talking again.

“Those people that tried to kidnap you aren’t going to chase you anymore. Do you think you can make it to your home by yourself?”

Instantly, her eyes turned wide with panic and the tears welled up came flowing down while both her hands clench tightly unto my shirt.

She doesn’t say anything but her actions speak loudly enough.

Sigh “Look, I need to get home too. Aren’t elves generally safe in this forest?”

She violently shakes her head in disagreement. “Beasts only scared of adults...Parents warned me that children will get eaten by hounds or tree golems.”

I would normally be pretty amazed about something like a tree golem, but it’s pretty hard to find something that surprises you after seeing a demon king turn into a dragon.

I rub the bridge of my nose, trying to think of the solution to all of this.

“How long does it take to get to where you live from here?”

“ ... ”

Still holding unto my badly worn shirt, she looks down and mutters, “... I don’t know.”

Great. I let out a sigh in defeat before telling her that I'll go with her.

The Kingdom of Elenoir is quite a bit north. My only hope is that there will be a teleportation gate there that can send me to Sapin.

I tell the elf girl to wait in the carriage while I gather some necessities. I also don't want her to see the mangled carcasses of the slave traders. Even I found it hard to stomach. Finding a backpack obviously too big for a 4 year old, I carefully fold and stuff the small tent inside, along with a leather water bag and some dried rations. I pick up Pinky's knife from the ground where I fought Danton and George. Before heading back into the carriage, I free the forest hounds.

"Let's head out now."

"En!" She nods after hopping out of the carriage. I make sure she doesn't go to the other side, where all of the bodies are and we head out.

The elf girl's name is Tessia Eralith and she just turned 5, meaning she's about 1 year older than me, physically that is.

From the conversations I had while talking to her while walking, I conclude that she's a pretty reserved, if not shy, girl. She's very polite to me, considering that I'm only 4, and is all in all a very agreeable traveling companion. Perhaps if I weren't traveling in the opposite direction of my home, I would be in a better mood.

It was getting dark so I suggest we stop and pitch the tent

for the night.

There were no rods supporting the tent. Instead, it relied on a long line that had to be tied between two trees and hung over to keep it up, the ends weighed down by rocks. After I finished setting up the tent, I take out a couple of dried rations from out of my oversized bag and hand some to her.

“...Thank you very much.”

“You know. You don’t have to be polite with me. I am younger than you and I’d feel a lot more comfortable if you do.” I say, half chewing with a cheek full of dried food.

“O-okay, I’ll try!”

I scratch my nose in defeat and I go back to stuffing my food. She must have very strict parents. Maybe it’s just an elf thing?

We sat against a tree next to the tent while chatting.

“C-can you tell me about the human kingdom?” She suddenly asks with eyes sparkling in interest.

“What do you want to know?”

“What is a human town like? How are humans? Is it true you male humans are perverts and have more than one wife?”

“Pbbt!”

I spit out a mouthful of the dried fruits I was chewing on. This girl!

Cough

“No, although it isn’t against the law, only nobilities and the royal families tend to have multiple wives.” I say, while wiping my mouth.

“I see now!” Her eyes seem to say, still sparkling.

Do you really?

I go onto explaining a bit about the town of Ashber and my family to pass the time before I ask.

“What is it like living in Elenoir?”

“Mmmm....” She ponders before explaining.

“I don’t think it’s too different, except the children all have to go to school to learn about our history and how to read and write. When we awaken, we get teachers assigned to us and we become their disciple. From there, a lot of it is just training with your master.”

“I see...”

I get up from the ground and I hold my hand out to help her get up as well.

I notice her turning a little red, but I think it’s just my eyes playing with me in the dark.

“Sleep in the tent, I’ll keep guard next to you outside.”

I see her thinking for a little and her eyes look at me, full of resolve.

“I don’t mind sh-sharing the tent, if you’re okay with it.”

“It’s okay. I’m not that sleepy right now anyway.” I instantly shut her down.

Did her ears just droop a little?

“...Okay”

She goes into the tent and I lean against it and begin meditating.

I start inspecting my mana core. Sylvia left me with something she calls her “will” but how does that affect my mana core? Inspecting even closer, I notice, ever so faintly, some markings in my mana core when,

“A-Arthur?”

I see Tessia’s head poking out of the tent.

“Is there something wrong?” I asked, turning my head to face her.

“W-well! You see... beasts will more likely appear if they notice you because they will see that you are a child. Therefore, I propose that for our safety, that it would be better for you to c-come inside the tent.” At this point, Tessia covers her face with the tent’s opening flap, showing only one eye.

“Pft~ Tessia, are you scared to sleep by yourself in the tent?” I chuckle.

“A-absolutely not! I am just suggesting, for both of our safety, what the best choice would be to do!” She pops her head out.

I decide to continue teasing her, “If that’s the case, then I’ll hide up in the tree and continue to be on the lookout. You know... for ‘our safety’” I wink.

“Uu...”

By this time, she covers herself completely inside the tent before muttering softly,

“...I’m scared to sleep by myself.”

Ahh I should stop teasing her now.

I open the flap and go inside the tent.

“Eeep!”

She immediately lies down, turning her back to me, but I see clearly that her ears are bright red. I should avoid the habit of teasing her so much before I get addicted to it.

A couple moments later, she peeks behind her back and turns around.

“Can I hold onto your shirt?”

I forget that she’s just a child. How hard it must have been for her; getting kidnapped, separated from her family and carried off, not knowing if she’ll ever see them again.

Scooting closer to her, I pat her head softly and nod.

Her eye close in content and she grabs the end of my shirt. A couple minutes later, I hear her breathing get rhythmic, and I start drifting off to sleep too, still sitting up.

I open my eyes awake and I look around. I look down to see Tessia's head on my lap, her body curled up.

I gently shake her awake, "Tessia, we should head out now."

She slowly stirs awake, but when she realizes the position we're in, she shoots up with a surprised shriek. "I'm sorry! I didn't mean to... was I heavy?"

"Haha... don't worry about it. Let's fold up the tent."

Her cheeks slightly pink, she nods and we pack everything up before heading back out.

A few more days pass by pretty uneventfully. A couple of forest hounds tried to get close once, but I threw my mana-reinforced knife at one of them and they all ran away scared. Nights were spent with me sleeping in the tent with Tessia and her getting more comfortable around me. Fortunately, we didn't run into any tree golems or stronger mana beasts.

"Can you tell how far we are from Elenoir now Tessia?" I ask on the 4th day of our journey?

She looks around her eyes seeming to glow and her ears slightly twitching.

"Yes! We're not too far anymore! I think that if we quicken our pace a little bit, we'll be able to make it by tonight!"

"Sounds good." The faster I drop her off, the faster I can make my plans to somehow get home. Although I admit I'll probably miss her after this.

"Arthur? You said your family and the people close to you

call you Art. D-do you mind if I call you Art as well?” Tessia suddenly asks while we cross a log bridge across a stream.

“Hmm? Yeah I don’t mind.” I flash her a wide smile.

“Hehe okay! Umm please call me Tess as well...” She says while her head was slanted down, her eyes looking at me in an upward fashion, shyly.

This girl is going to be dangerous when she grows up.

We continued on the rest of the day, with only a couple of quick stops to rest ourselves and replenish our stomachs. I wasn’t too tired because I was constantly using mana rotation, but it was obvious that Tess was getting exhausted.

After our last quick stop, we continued forward for the last stretch. Tess and I got a lot closer on this journey. The once shy and reserved elf girl showed bright smiles that made even my heart thump. She would tease me too at times, saying that I should call her older sister since she was 2 years older than I was. I teased her back, imitating her when she was crying, rubbing my eyes and yelling, “WAAA~ MOMMY, I’M SCARED!” This seemed to turn her bright red and she hit my arm before pouting with her arms crossed and lower lip protruding. “HMPH! Meanie!”

Ah! Endure this need to hug her, Arthur!

It’s dusk now and the fog around us seems to get thicker and thicker. My sense of direction is all but useless here. If I were to get separated from Tess, I can end up travelling in circles without even realizing it.

She suddenly turns to me, her face a mixture of happiness

and hesitation. “We’re here.”

Looking around, the only things I see are clusters of trees and fog. Confused, I was about to ask where we were, but I stopped when I saw Tess placing both her palms on a tree and chanting softly.

Suddenly, the fog around us was sucked into that same tree and what came into vision was a giant wooden door that seemed to just stand on by itself on the ground.

Tess takes my hand pulls me towards the door. When she opens it, I’m reminded of the portal that Sylvia sent me through.

Experiencing the same feeling of being in a fast-forwarded film, we softly land on our feet, arriving at our destination, my eyes wide with awe at the sight before me.

Chapter 12: Meeting

Pristine

That was the word that popped up in my head, upon gazing at the elven city. It appears we directly teleported right past the gates. What I see before me are buildings that seem to be made of a jade like material. These jade buildings each seemed to be carved from a single, huge stone. The structures were void of cracks or any other blemishes that would normally come through time.

Making this place look even more awe-inspiring were the huge trees that intertwined with the buildings, giving this whole city a more magnificent, natural look. Looking up at the immensely thick branches, that extended out of the thick trunks even thicker than the buildings, seemed to be many houses with smoke coming out of their chimneys.

The floor of this city was covered in lush grass, with only the narrow sidewalks and the main road made out of a smooth stone. Most of the city was covered in shade because of the thick branches that fanned out from the trees but the city itself gave off a warm luminescent glow from what looked to be floating orbs of light dotted across the city. Whether it was my previous world or this world, I could only describe it as perfect.

While I stood still, slack-faced, a blur in front of me suddenly jolted me awake.

Tess was still holding onto my hand when a group of what seemed like guards arrived almost out of nowhere. These elven warriors emanated a majestic air around them, all

dressed in coordinated black suits with green trimmings and a golden shoulder guard on their left shoulder. These 5 guards all had with them a rapier strapped to their waist and what surprised me the most was that there was no aura coming out of them.

Augmenters and Conjurers both emit a faint aura unconsciously but this is only because of their lack of control over mana, which causes it to leak out of their body. One of the main reasons I was able to beat the slave traders was because I'm able to control my mana to not leak out, which I was able to use to catch them by surprise.

By the speed that the guards arrived in front of, they were clearly Augmenters but if they're not leaking out even a hint of mana, that means these guys are no joke.

These 5 guards suddenly kneeled down on one knee, their face bowed down and right arm across their chests.

In unison, the guards saluted, "We welcome back the royal princess."

" ... "

Holy shit.

Tessia is the princess of this whole fucking Kingdom?

While I tried to let go of Tessia's hand, she suddenly grasps it harder and says in a voice that was so cold and apathetic, it brought shivers down my spine.

"You may rise." She says with her peering down on the kneeled knights.

They stand up, their clenched right fist still crossing their chest, and the knight in front speaks, “Princess, we arrived as soon as we saw that the royal teleportation gate was used. Please, tell us what happened...”

Before he could finish speaking, I hear a cry not too far away.

“My baby! Tessia, you’re okay! Oh my baby!”

Running towards us was a middle aged man and woman. From the crown on the man’s head and the tiara encircling the woman’s forehead, I assumed that they were the King and Queen.

The King’s tall, built body was uniformed in a loose, decorated robe. His emerald eyes were pointed upwards and his thin lips were tensed, matching his short, military style hair.

While the King had a dignified but somewhat reserved appearance, the Queen was breathtaking. Although she was a bit past her youthful stage, her age couldn’t mask the beauty she was. Her round eyes were a light blue color and her lips full and a deep pink color. Her silver hair was curled down past her back as she was running towards us with a figure that could make anyone doubt that this woman was a mother.

They’re both running over here, the mother’s cheeks lined with tears and the father’s eyes straining to keep his tears in.

I turn to see Tessia’s face visibly soften as she herself starts tearing up. I let go of her hand and gently push her towards her parents, feeling a little emotional myself.

Tessia lands in the arms of both her parents who start sobbing at this point on their knees, burying their face in their daughter.

The last to arrive is an old man, well past his prime. His facial features are all sharp, with a gaze that can kill someone. His hair was pure white and was tied in the back, face cleanly shaven. This grandpa didn't say anything, but his eyes did warm up a little when he saw Tessia.

It took a couple of minutes for Tessia and her parents to settle down, while the guards were looking at me with daggers in their eyes the whole time.

The King gets up, eyes a little red but not being able to mask the air of nobility that surrounded him.

“As the King of Elenoir and the father of Tessia, I apologize for this unsightly appearance of mine and more importantly, I thank you for escorting my daughter back home.” He says.

Continuing on, he adds, “Please accompany us to our home so we can hear what happened.”

I just nod in consent and was about to follow them when Tessia comes to me and holds my hand again, making the surrounding people give us weird and surprised gazes. I just uncomfortably chuckle and scratch the side of my head, not knowing what to really say in this situation.

Arriving at the castle, I observe that, rather than a castle; it was actually a huge tree. This tree, that probably needed at least a couple hundred people, locking arms, to encircle it, was made of a white stone that I guessed was petrified somehow.

Stepping inside the tree, I was pleasantly surprised to see how magnificent the interior of this castle was. There were two curved staircases that created a circle, with a gigantic chandelier floating in the middle of it. This chandelier seemed to be made of the same orbs of light that were dotted throughout the city.

Not even washing up, the welcoming crew was all situated around the rectangular dining table downstairs. Tessia's father was on the far end of the table with me directly opposite of him. Tessia's mother sat perpendicular to her husband, with Tessia seated right next to her. The grandpa was sitting across from the mother and daughter, leaving a pretty big gap between them and me, while the five guards standing off to the side behind the King.

With both his elbows on the table, fingers intertwined, the King was the first to speak.

“Child. What did you say your name was?”

“Forgive me for the late introduction. My name is Arthur Leywin from a remote town in the Kingdom of Sapin. A pleasure to make your acquaintance King, Queen, Elder, and gentlemen.” I stand up and bow slightly at each of them individually before sitting back down.

Discussion wasn't going to get anywhere if they were going to treat me like a kid.

Both the King and Queen and the guards in the back showed evident looks of shock from my mature behavior, while even the grandpa had an amused grin on his face; Tessia giving me a shy smile.

Regaining composure, the King continues on.

“It seems you are much more intelligent than your appearance. Forgive me for my preconception. My name is Alduin Eralith and this is my wife, Merial Eralith and my father Virion Eralith. As for what happened, please tell us. We would like to hear your side of this.”

Waving off the apology, I begin telling my story. I made sure to be very vague in telling them how I got inside the Forest of Elshire in the first place; just mentioning that I got separated from my family after running into bandits, only managing to survive from a stroke of luck.

From there on, I had to tell them I was a mage. This was followed by another wave of utterly surprised looks from everyone, even Tessia. Because of the lack of obstacles we ran into on our journey back, I never really had the need to use mana so I didn't bother explaining.

What surprised me was that grandpa suddenly clasped his hands together on the table and looked at me with a renewed, eerie interest.

I quickly moved on, telling them how I spotted a carriage from a branch I was sitting on and I observed them carrying a tied up child into the back before going off.

At this, the King slammed both of his hands onto the table, his eyes a menacing glare.

“I should've known it was humans...”

Woah woah! Do I sense a hint of racism?

I correct him, saying, “They were slave traders. Them and bandits alike prey on, not just elves, but humans as well, speaking as a victim myself.”

This caused the King to shut his mouth before sitting back down, letting out a soft cough.

“I didn’t ask Tess... *ahem* the Princess this, but I am curious as to how a couple of slave traders even got their hands on the princess of this kingdom.” I ask, almost calling Tessia by her nickname. I don’t think calling her something so informal as Tess would sit right with everyone here.

At this, the King almost looks embarrassed before saying, “My wife and I had a bit of a disagreement with Tessia and she decided to rebel by running away. We decided to let her cool off a bit before fetching her back because we know where she usually stays when she pouts, but unfortunately, she ran into some hu... slave traders.”

Ah... runaway princess. I sneak in a small grin at Tess and she responds with her tongue sticking out, face flushed.

I glaze over the fight with the slave traders.

“Luckily, I caught the slave traders by surprise and managed to dispose of them before untying the princess and escorting her here.”

“So a 4-year-old managed to ‘luckily’ kill off four adults, one being an Augmenter at that, and you simply wave it off like it’s no big deal.” Chimes in the elder seated across from Tessia, leaning back on the chair so only two of the legs are touching the ground.

“Yes. Half of them were asleep and the two were simply not on guard so disposing of them was not too challenging.” I refute.

The elder just responds with a lazy shrug of his shoulder.

After finishing the events, I clear my throat before asking what I came here for.

Ahem “As I have mentioned, it has been almost two months since I have seen my parents. I do not plan to intrude on your kingdom for long as I wish to meet them quickly, so I was wondering if you guys have a teleportation gate that could take me to the City of Xyrus or any teleportation gate inside Sapin. “

“!!”

“You’re going to leave already Art?!” Tessia bolts up from her seat, face stricken with panic.

Both her mother and father give a baffled look as they mouth “Art”.

The elder just gives shoots snide grin at this and chuckles.

“I don’t think it’s appropriate for a human such as me to be inside this Kingdom for too long princess. Besides, I wish to make sure that my family is safe and tell them I’m okay as well.” I respond, giving a sheepish smile.

Cough

The King responds back for Tessia, “It has been a couple hundred years since the last human has stepped foot into the

Kingdom of Elenoir and you, Arthur, are the first human to be in the capital of this Kingdom, the City of Zestier. However, saving our daughter and taking the trouble to accompany her all the way back to us entitles you with a proper reward...”

I take a quick peek at Tessia and see her head down, her gunmetal silver hair covering her face.

“...Unfortunately, the teleportation gate linked with the Kingdom of Sapin opens only once every 7 years, for the Summit Conference between the three races. Since the last Summit was 2 years ago, it’ll be another 5 years until the gate will function.” The King continues on.

So much for an easy way back...

“However, we are more than willing to send a group of guards to escort you back home. You are correct that it may not be wise to stay in this kingdom for too long. While some are tolerant, many hold enmities towards humans because of the war long ago.” He flashes a brief, sorrowful smile at this.

I nod in agreement. At least I’ll be able to safely go back home.

“For now, please make yourself at home here. We will have your escorts prepared by tomorrow morning. I do advise you not to wander around outside in the city though, for the reasons mentioned earlier.”

The King snaps his finger and a pretty elf lady in a maid uniform rushes out and leads me to my room.

There’s a lot I don’t get about this city. For one thing, the shower continues to baffle me. It was a simple waterfall that

seemed to naturally flow from the roof and drain back out in the floor. However, the constant flow of water that didn't seem to ever turn off was a surprisingly pleasant temperature, just warm enough to relax my body and pores.

As I finished dressing into a very silky robe just for your top and short pants, I placed the stone Sylvia left me inside the chest pocket inside my robe and once again, tried to study my mana core.

About thirty minutes in and not really getting anywhere, I was about to just call it a night when I hear a knock on my door.

“Coming!”

Opening the door, I'm greeted by a pouting Tessia who throws a light punch at my chest.

“You dummy! Why did you act all unfriendly when you were with my family back there.” Going past me and sitting on my bed.

“Well first of all, you didn't mention to me that you happened to be the princess of this entire Kingdom!” Shaking my head, I grip Tessia's hand and drag her out of my room. Kids or not, I don't think her parents are going to like her being in a boy's room.

“Come on, show me around the castle! I won't get the chance to visit this place ever again.”

Ah crap. I shouldn't have said that.

Sniff *Sniff*

Tessia breaks down into tears, trying to talk while sobbing.

“Art! I don’t want you to *Sniff* leave...”

“...You’re the first *Sniff* person I’ve gotten ever close to...”

“ ... ”

I just gently pat her head while she’s rubbing her eyes with the arm not holding unto my hand.

We’re outside now, in the courtyard at the back of the castle. The floating orbs are giving off a dim, luminescent glow, lighting up the well-kept garden in a gentle atmosphere.

Man... If we were at least 10 years older...

Before I even got to finish my thought, I sense a blatantly clear killing intent. Milliseconds later a faint shine gives off the position of a projectile aimed at Tessia. I push the still crying princess out of the way and I prepare to parry the projectile with a mana infused hand.

“Fwish!”

At that instant, a figure in black is facing my back, in a stance to attack. Grabbing the projectile, I immediately spin myself to block the assassin with whatever was thrown at me when...

Ting

I’m face to face with the grandpa from earlier!

I jump back out of range from before angrily shouting,

“What the hell! Why are you trying to kill us?”

Chuckle

“Kid. It may hurt a little but I doubt that toy you’re holding can kill anyone.”

I look down at my hand and see a pencil sized projectile with both ends blunted and coated in a layer of something close to rubber.

I was tricked!

“Haha! Nice reaction, nice reaction! I didn’t think you’d catch my little present and use it to block my next attack! Truly marvelous! However, your usage of mana is mediocre at best!”

He then proceeds to throw me a wooden sword fit for my size and takes out a wooden sword of his own, just a bit bigger.

“Here I come!” Not even giving me the time to get in a stance, he dashes towards me.

This crazy old bat!

“HAA!” I thrust myself low and accelerate my speed, throwing off the timing of his swing. Aiming for the fingers gripping his sword, I swing up, reinforcing my whole body.

Right before my sword comes into contact with his hands, I’m met with only air as he disappears from my sight.

Looking back, I see him a couple meters apart from where I’m standing.

What the fuck?

“You’re a scary little brat aren’t you? Looks like I’ll have to go a bit more serious!” The grandpa smirks.

His speed increased even more. With my previous life being a life of only training and battles, I’m able to keep him in my sight, but being able to see him and being able to respond to his attacks are two different things.

This damn body! I feel like a sandbag!

I’m able to block one move of his out of every three he lands on my body.

Screw technique, this old bat is messing with me using just pure speed. The only reason I’m able to somewhat keep up is by using sword techniques and footwork to minimize my movement.

After about 10 minutes of being treated like a wooden training post, I started noticing some patterns in the grandpa’s attacks.

As he flashed behind me about to do a horizontal sweep to my legs, I put all of my strength into my legs and jump back with my sword tucked into my armpit pointing at his head.

Thump

With a solid sound coming from the connection, the old bat stumbles a little before gaining balance.

“HAHAHAHA! I guess I deserved that one!” rubbing his swollen forehead.

Tessia was surprised at first but after realizing it was just a spar, she settled down. At this point though, she jumps up and walks towards the elder.

“Grandpa! You hurt Art too much! You should’ve gone easier on him!” Pinching the elder’s side.

“AHH! That hurts little one. Haha I’m afraid if I went easier on Arthur, he’d be the one bullying me!” He says while picking up his granddaughter.

He flashes in front of me and suddenly places his right palm into my sternum.

“Just as I thought. The usage of mana is terrible. Your body is a mess!”

I just stare blankly at him. Whether it was ki or mana, I was utilizing it to the fullest extent. Although the limits of this premature body makes it impossible utilize my full strength, I shouldn’t be hearing that my mana usage is terrible.

The grandpa, noticing my doubtful gaze, takes my hand and places it onto his own sternum. Closing my eyes, I focus on the mana in his body.

T-this... how come I’ve never thought of using mana like this?

“Haha! You humans have such a narrow perspective on mana manipulation. Your sword techniques and fighting experience is frightening though. What kind of life did you have to learn all of this?”

“I just read a lot of books and learned a bit from my

father.” I say while scratching my cheek.

“Books eh? Mmm... I’ve decided. Brat! Become my disciple!”

Chapter 13: Q & A

I just stare at him, dumbfounded.

What was this old bat saying?

“What? You can’t be serious right?” I manage to blurt out.

He just tilts his head, “Why not?”

“F-for one thing! I’m a human! Is it even allowed to have humans in this kingdom? Also, I need to make sure my family is okay and tell them I’m still alive.” I refute.

At this, the grandpa ponders a little bit before talking again.

“Living here isn’t a problem as long as you’re under my name. As for your parents... Brat, is it an absolute necessity to meet them in person?”

It was my turn to ponder this time.

“I mean, I guess it isn’t strictly a necessity for me to meet my parents in person. Although I miss them, the most important thing is finding out how they’re doing and letting them know that I’m fine if they are as well.” I answer.

“Then come with me tomorrow morning. I will be outside the manor by 6 A.M.”

Before he turns to leave, I ask, “Wait! I don’t get why you want me as your disciple. Also, you sound awfully hurried. Isn’t it possible for me to go back home and spend a bit of time with my parents before coming back here to train under you?”

“I want you to be my disciple because I want to see your potential. Kid. An uncountable amount of people has asked me to take them in as their disciple. But do you know how many I’ve taken in so far? None! These new generation brats bore me. Just because some of the wealthy nobles’ brats have a little potential, they think they’re qualified to ask me as their teacher...”

I just furrow my brows, not knowing where the grandpa is going with this.

“... You’re different. I know you have exceptional talent in mana manipulation and only God knows how but you possess better technique than even I but that isn’t the reason why I decided on teaching you. Brat...I need to ask you. How are you a Beast Tamer?” Any sort of amusement that was previously on his face was all but gone and his sharp facial feature emitted a deathly gaze.

“Beast Tamer? What are you talking about?” I was really confused. Although it was getting well into the night and the elder already sent Tessia in to sleep, it didn’t seem like this conversation was going to end soon.

“Let’s go back inside and talk.” He says, leading me to a living room with couches and a roaring fireplace.

Sitting down on the couch, he continues on. “Let’s start from the beginning. I assume you know that mana beasts possess mana cores just like humans, elves and dwarves right?”

I nod at this.

“Right. Among the humans, elves and dwarves, each race

possesses qualities in their mana core that are distinct to their own race.”

He picks up a piece of paper and begins drawing a chart.

Water – Ice

Plant

Earth – Gravity

Magma, Metal

Fire – Lightning

Wind – Sound

“These are the 4 basic elements and their higher forms. The higher forms (Ice, Metal, Lightning, Sound) can only be controlled by mages especially adept at a particular basic element, i.e. a deviant. This is where the distinct racial qualities lie...”

He writes a couple of brief description under each race

Humans

Human mages possess the ability to manipulate all 4 basic elements and are the only race capable of having deviants that can control the higher form of their adept element. They also have deviants that can even transcend the 4 basic elements like healers (emitters), making their mana cores the most diverse.

Elves

Elf mages can only manipulate water, wind, and earth but

with much higher affinity. We also have a special trait distinct to our race that allows very pureblooded elf mages to control plants. However, elves don't have deviants that can manipulate water, wind, and earth into their higher forms.

Dwarves

Dwarf mages can only manipulate earth and fire but, like elves, they possess a much higher affinity to those two elements. Their distinct trait is that all dwarves are able to manipulate a special form of earth, metal and also possess the special ability to manipulate both earth and fire into magma, something even human deviants are not able to do, much less elves. However, they can only manipulate those two basic elements and, like elves, do not possess the ability to control the higher form of the basic elements.

“Wait I'm not getting all of this. Why can't humans manipulate plants and magma?” I ask after reading his handy info chart.

“Good question. Only elves can manipulate plant, which is the only form of nature that is alive, because of our lineage being highly affinitive to the nurturing elements. Only the Dwarf race can manipulate magma and metal because, like us elves, their lineage makes them highly adept to the constructing elements.”

I start subconsciously rubbing the bridge of my nose while thinking harder than I have ever before.

“Okay. I get the differences between the 3 three races, but what does that have to do with me being a Beast Tamer? What does that even mean anyway?”

“I’m getting to that brat!” He growls.

“Mana beasts are different from the three humanoid races because each species have their own special characteristics. Listing all of them would be endless so I’ll give you a simple example. Mages, adventurers or not, are classified: E, D, C, B, A, AA, S, SS class. This classification is the same for mana beasts as well. Take the Sonic Hawk. They are B Class beasts that possess incredible speed while in flight. They all have to affinity for wind and sound. These attributes are innate in their mana cores. If these mana cores are taken out and given to a human or elf mage that specialize in the wind element, their training will go by much faster than just cultivating mana from their surroundings but that’s it.”

I impatiently wait as Elder Virion gulps down a glass of water.

“...However! When a mana beast reaches A class or higher, they have the ability to pass on their ‘will’, or ability to be more precise, to one person. I called you a Beast Tamer earlier because you have a mana beast’s will in your mana core and from my estimation, not just any will but an S class mana beast’s will if not an SS class will. I’m only able to sense this because I’m a Beast Tamer as well, although the beast’s will that I tamed was the Shadow Panther, an AA class beast.”

So that’s how he was able to be so fucking fast earlier.

Noticing the look of revelation on my face, Elder Virion just chuckles. “Yes brat, I was able to bully you that badly by utilizing my Shadow Panther’s will. But I only used around 50% of my speed.” He gives me wink.

He can go even faster?

Everything was beginning to make sense; the strange, faint markings that appeared on my mana core after Sylvia gouged through it and how she said my future progress would depend on understanding her power.

My eyes welled up with tears and I couldn't help but quietly cry.

"You must have been through a lot child. I'm not going to push you for an answer, but the reason why it is urgent for me to guide you is because you don't have much time." He says in a warm but stern voice.

"Sniff." "What do you mean?" I look up at him.

"The power from your mana core is too strong for your immature body to handle. It hasn't been that long so you may not feel it, but if you don't learn to control your new mana core, it'll destroy your body." His eyes looking straight at me, dissolving any doubt I may have once had.

"..."

"I understand. It seems I have no choice but to be under your guidance. However, I don't think I can just train without making sure that my family is all right and they know I'm safe too. You mentioned something about that earlier?" I say, trying to put my emotions under control.

"Haha! Just call me Grandpa from now on. My first disciple should at least be able to call me that. And who knows, maybe I'll become your grandpa-in-law." He throws me a wink.

UGH! Bringing up Tessia into this isn't right!

Continuing, he says, “We’ll go see an old friend of mine tomorrow that’ll take care of your worries. What I need from you starting now is your upmost diligence. Even I’m not sure how long it’ll take for you to master the basics of your beast’s will. In my two hundred years of living, I’ve never seen such a young mage, let alone a beast tamer at that. You’re going to bring big changes into this world brat. I just know it.”

I just scratch my cheek, a little red from embarrassment.

“Go to sleep now brat! Tomorrow is going to be a long day. You’ll need the rest.”

I get up and bow before wishing him goodnight. “Goodnight...Grandpa.”

He chuckles and waves me off and I plop into my bed, too tired to even get under the covers.

I rouse from my sleep, grunting, feeling a heavy sensation weighing down on my body.

Is it my worries? My burdens? The expectations placed on me? Are these weighing down on me even as I sleep?

“G’ morning Art! Wake up!”

I open my eyes and see that my burdens have taken the form of a lovely young lady very similar in appearance to my friend Tess.

“Come on sleepyhead! You need to meet grandpa soon! H-

hey! Don't go back to sleep!" She jumps up and down while still straddled on top of me.

Does she know how indecent this may look to others? Haa... the innocence of youth.

"I get it! I'm up Tess! Please get down from my stomach so I can get up." I mumble out, still half asleep.

"Hehe~ Art, your hair looks funny. Hey hey, is it true you're going to be staying here for a while? Grandpa told me this morning! I'm so happy! You're really staying right? Right?" Tess exclaims with a wide smile pasted on her cute face.

How the hell is she so energetic this early in the morning?

Trying to tame my bed hair, I respond, "We'll know for sure after my trip with Elder Virion, but most likely, it seems I'll be bothering you for a bit longer princess."

She stabs my side with her hand, "Not princess! Tess! T.E.S.S.! I'm going to get upset if you don't treat me better."

Dammit, she looks so cute with her pouting face.

"All right all right! I have to shower and get ready so unless you want to see me naked, I think you should leave the room Tess." I waggle my eyebrows lewdly.

"Eek! I'm leaving you pervert!" I can see her ears turn bright scarlet as she runs out of the room.

I didn't think that'd work so well. My 4-year-old body hasn't even matured any of its "manly parts" anyhow.

I just shrug and hop into the shower and get ready, making sure to keep the feather-wrapped stone in my robe.

The butler opens the front door for me and I see a small carriage with Grandpa Virion and Tess inside.

“Father! It is not appropriate for a human to be residing within this kingdom!”

“Alduin is right Elder Virion. Although saving Tessia is something I will be grateful for, having a human stay here goes against all traditions.”

I hear The King and Queen talking to Grandpa Virion as he is lazily leaning back in the carriage.

“BAH! Screw traditions! I’ve taken a liking to that brat and so has Tessia, haven’t you child.” He says.

“G-grandpa! It’s not like that! He’s just...” She mumbles at the end, face red.

“Hahaha! Anyways! He’s going to be under my direct guidance from now on so make sure to let everyone know that he is not to be trifled with!”

“F-father...”

“ENOUGH! This is not a discussion! Oh brat! You’re here! Come! We should hurry!” His expression changes into a smile upon seeing me.

I nod and hop into the carriage, avoiding the frowns that the King and Queen are giving me.

A little into the journey, I ask Grandpa Virion. “Hey Gramps, where are we headed anyhow. You said we were meeting a friend of yours right?”

“Haha! Gramps eh? Well aren’t you awfully comfortable with me now. Good good! As for where we’re going, it’s a surprise.” He throws in a wink.

Tessia has fallen asleep and her head is leaning against my shoulder. She must have been tired from waking up so early.

“Take good care of her Art. She grew up in a very lonely environment.” He suddenly says, a look of compassion in his eyes as he looks at his sleeping granddaughter.

“What do you mean?”

“Growing up as the only princess of an entire kingdom is very stressful, too much for a child to handle. Growing up with no close friends, it was hard on her. She has gotten hurt too many times by people pretending to befriend her, only to be using her for their personal gains. This has made Tessia into someone cold and distant to those around her. Imagine how surprised we all were when we saw you two holding hands.” He continues.

“Yeah, I noticed when I heard her talk to the guards.” I add.

“Arthur. Tessia has shown more expression, more smiles now than she ever has growing up, around you, she finally seems more like a child. For that, I thank you.” He pats my shoulder.

This was the first time Grandpa Virion ever patted me, catching me by surprise.

The carriage stops before the driver opens our carriage door and says we've arrived.

"Hey Tess, we're here." I gently nudge her.

"Mmm..." She eventually stirs awake and we get out of the carriage, arriving at what seems like a small hut.

"Hey you old witch! Come out!" Grandpa Virion suddenly yells while knocking on the door.

Suddenly the door swishes open and what we see is a hunched elder lady with grey hair that seems like it was struck by lightning and wrinkled eyes that was strangely a mixture of multiple colors, all blending together. Dressed in a simple brown robe, she looks at me with a studying eye.

"Took you long enough to get here!" She scowls!

"Hahaha! Arthur! Let me introduce you to Rinia Darcassan. She's a very special deviant amongst us elves." Grandpa Virion announces.

"It's good seeing you again Virion. Charming as always little Tessia." She says patting Tess's head.

Looking at me, she smiles, "We finally meet young Arthur. I am Rinia. A Diviner."

Chapter 14: What's To Come

Grandpa Virion, Tessia, the Diviner Rinia and I were currently all situated around a circular table with a jar of water in the middle.

“Umm... Elder Rinia? You said that you were a diviner correct? I’m a little lost as to what it is you can do. Gramps said that I’d be able to find out if my parents are okay by seeing you.” I ask, staring curiously at the jar of water.

“Kekeke! Gramps huh? Virion, you’ve really let yourself go if you’re letting youngsters like him call you that.” She snickers.

“Bah! He’s an exception! An exception! If any other brat dares to call me Gramps, I’ll have them hung upside down and beaten with a cactus!” He grins back, looking at me.

Ouch. How descriptive.

Glaring at me, she shoots, “Brat! You don’t even know where your parents are but you want to travel all over Sapin, find them and then come back to train? You’d be already dead by the time you make yourself back here.”

I look at Grandpa Virion. Did he tell her? Almost as if he knew what I was thinking, he chuckles and says, “I didn’t tell Rinia any of this. There isn’t much you can hide from her, but usually she doesn’t bother looking into a person. What made you so nosy Rinia?” Directing his gaze towards the elderly lady.

“You and I both know he’s special. So special, in fact, that there are parts of his life that even I can’t see. Arthur, whatever

the beast that passed its will unto you is, it's not an ordinary beast. Limiting it to an SS class wouldn't give it justice." She ponders for a bit before continuing.

"Enough about that though. Arthur, you're here to see your parents so that's what I'll do. Close your eyes for a moment and picture your parents. Focus on their appearance and their mana. I'll take care of the rest."

I close my eyes and imagine the last scene I had of them both together. My father badly wounded and my mother healing him.

"Okay, you can open your eyes now."

I look at her to see the color of her eyes swirling. The water was floating out of the jar and was swirling around, forming a spiraling disk. Suddenly, I see my parents in the water.

Thud

The chair I was sitting on is flipped back as I stand up and leaning closer into the table. I see my mother and father together, sitting around a dining table. It doesn't seem to be our home in Ashber. My mother's face is a bit paler and she's saying something to my father. I can see she's lost a bit of weight but otherwise looks pretty healthy. Her stomach! It's pretty evident now that she's pregnant by the fairly noticeable bulge on her belly. My father looks the same! He's wearing some kind of uniform now though and has grown a beard!

Tears stream uncontrollably down my face at this point, as I don't dare to peel my eyes off of the image of my parents.

They're alive! They're doing okay! They're fine.

“Sniff.” “T-thank you Elder Rinia. Thank you truly for showing me this.” I stammered.

She looks a little uncomfortable at my sincerity and just waves it off.

“Ahem! Let me see where they are now.”

The image zooms out and I can see the outside of where they're living and it is definitely not our home in Ashber. Zooming out even more, I can see the layout of the city that they're staying in.

“It seems like they've made their home in Xyrus. That makes things simpler for us.” She says, a content look on her face.

Tess, obviously worried about me crying, is patting my back but her eyes don't leave the swirling water.

“Art's parents...” I faintly hear her mumble.

Grandpa Virion claps his hands together and stands up.

“Okay! Arthur! Let's let your parents know that you're alive!”

According to Grandpa Virion, strict regulations controlled communications between the Kingdom of Elenoir and Sapin.

However, Rinia, being a Diviner not discovered by the Kingdom of Sapin, allows us a certain bit of unregulated freedom in a sense.

“How this process will work is that I will pour some of my innate mana into you, establishing a temporary link. When I give you the signal, start speaking as if you’re talking to your parents. It’s important to know that they will hear your voice inside their heads so they may not believe what you’re saying at first. Make sure to get them to believe that it really is you that’s speaking to them and that they’re not going crazy. Remember, we’re just doing this to let them know you’re still alive. I’m going to emit your voice directly into both your parents’ minds. I can’t keep the connection up for long so say what you need to within 2 minutes.” She asserted, a serious gaze from her eyes.

I nod at this, my face turning serious as well.

“Begin... NOW!”

Her whole body starts glowing the same color as her eyes and I see the same glow spreading unto me as well.

I breathe a deep breath and start.

Hi Mom, hi Dad. It’s me, your son Arthur. You’re probably really surprised that you’re hearing my voice inside your head huh? Well there’s a reason for that. Before that though, I want you to know that I’m alive and safe. Again, I’m alive and well mom, dad. I managed to survive the fall off the cliff and I’m currently living in the Kingdom of Elenoir with the elves. Please don’t tell anyone else this. I don’t have much time so I’ll only say the things most crucial. A friend of mine is a deviant like you mom, except she’s a diviner so I was able to see how you guys are doing just now too. She is also the one that is allowing you guys to be able to hear my voice. I want to go back to you guys as soon as possible but I can’t right now. No, I’m safe and alive right now but I have a sort of er... illness inside my body that I need to get rid of before I am able to go back. Don’t worry, as long as I stay here

*and have the elves treat me, I'm 100% okay. So please, don't worry. I don't know when I'll be able to talk to you guys like this again but what's important is that I'm alive and I know you guys are as well. Dad, Mom, both of you guys should be hearing my voice right now so confirm it with each other if you still can't believe this. Remember; don't tell anyone where I am right now. Better yet, just keep it as if I was still dead to make things simpler. It may take a couple of months or even years for me to be able to go back but just be sure that I WILL be going back home. I love you guys *sniff* so much and I miss you. Stay safe, and dad, make sure to keep mom and my baby sibling safe. Mom *sniff*, please make sure dad doesn't get into trouble. Your son, Art."*

I have trouble keeping my eyes open from the tears and I just keep rubbing my eyes, staying silent, holding it in. The glow fades around both of us and Elder Rinia looks visibly worn out. She's sweating and her face pale.

"Elder Rinia, I don't know how to thank you for this." I manage to croak out.

"Train well and continue to cherish those close to your brat. That's how you'll thank me. Also! Don't forget to drop in once in a while. This grandma here gets lonely kekeke~!" She says with a weak smile.

I give her a tight hug, which makes her almost jump, and she scratches her cheek before shooing all of us away.

While we're walking out, I notice Tess pouting a little, looking at my chest.

Was she jealous?

By the time we arrived back at the castle, it was already dark. A maid greeted us on arrival, but before I had the chance to go back into my room, I see the King and Queen.

The King comes up to me first.

“Arthur, I know you overheard what we were saying earlier today and I apologize for that. Years of being a King has made me a bit old fashioned and I was unreasonably stubborn on you not belonging here.”

The Queen continues for her husband, holding my hands in hers.

“You are now Elder Virion’s first disciple. This gives you more than enough reason for all of us to accept you. Even if that fact didn’t exist, you still saved our daughter. Please consider this place your home. I know you miss your parents dearly but if I can be of any consolation, don’t hesitate and treat me as you would your own mother.” She says, giving me a sincere smile.

“Papa! Mama! ...” Tess says with her hands covering her mouth.

She then runs up to them and hugs them both.

I smile back and I thank them as well. They were good people. They were simply looking out for their kingdom.

Smiling behind us, Grandpa Virion nods in approval before exclaiming, “Brat! Training starts tomorrow so sleep early!”

I wake up from an immense pain covering my body. I wake up in cold sweat as the feeling of my body burning intensifies.

“AARGH!” I clutch my body tight and just simply try to endure, when Grandpa Virion suddenly appears next to me.

“I didn’t think it would this fast...”

He places both hands on my sternum, where my mana core is located, and starts emitting his own mana into me.

Slowly, the pain subsides and I’m left panting and clothes drenched in sweat.

“T-thank you.” I manage to wheeze out.

He nods before saying, “It’s a bit early, but lets start training now.”

Looking out the window, I notice that the sun has yet to come out. I probably wasn’t going to be able to fall asleep again so I nod and follow him out into the courtyard.

Sitting cross-legged, he looks at me before explaining, “Until now, you’ve been purifying your mana core and manipulating your mana using your mana channels. While for normal mages, this method is efficient, for Beast Tamers, we can’t rely on this approach. Instead, we do something called assimilation.”

I sit down facing him, blank eyed, an eyebrow raised.

“Haha! Don’t worry, you’ll get the hang of it soon enough. What it essentially is, is integrating the mana from your core

directly into your body's bones and muscles, hence the method, assimilation. Brat, throughout the period of assimilating, your mana core won't develop at all, but that isn't the point of this. Once the mana from your new core is absorbed throughout your body, you'll be able to start utilizing whatever power your beast's will had."

So this is what Sylvia meant! Throughout this whole journey through the Forest of Elshire and meeting the royal family and Grandpa Virion, I can't help but think that Sylvia planned out all of this. I quickly shake my head in dismissal though and pay attention to gramps.

"Will your mana out of your core and don't be tempted to use your mana channels. Instead, let it seep out into your body and slowly have all of your muscles and bones absorb the mana. This will take time and effort but throughout this process, your mana core should reject your body less and less." He says.

There isn't much I can help you with for the first part of your training except making sure your mana is distributed evenly throughout your body and relieving you when your body spasms like earlier.

Training continued on with me just meditating, dispersing the mana out of my core and into my body. I got the hang of it after a few days but I realized how long of a journey this would be. Directing my mana to form a core when I was an infant took a couple of years but this was doing the exact opposite except with more mana and an extra step further of assimilating the mana directly into the muscles and bones.

I didn't leave the castle during this time because I wouldn't know when my body would act up again. I was really grateful

for Grandpa Virion for sticking by me throughout this time. Unfortunately for Tess, this left her very little time to play with me. The times I wasn't meditating, I was resting in my room, where she would just barge in at this point and chatter on about her day.

After a couple of weeks of assimilation, my body acted up less frequently and I was allowed to go out into the city. So after promising Tess that I'd go touring around the city of Zestier, I went to sleep.

Waiting outside my room was an adorably dressed Tess. She was wearing a white sleeveless sundress and a white see-through cardigan over it. The light pink colored sun hat she wore over her head was decorated with a white flower, giving her a very fresh and innocent look.

"Took you long enough! Hurry, let's hurry!" She takes my hand, half dragging me as I fight to keep up with her pace.

I'm astounded by the view of the city again as we make our way to the heart of Zestier. We get off the carriage and start walking, visiting the numerous stalls and stores that the city has to offer. We're met with a lot of stares from the fact that a human child is holding hands with their kingdom's only princess. While most of these gazes only hold curiosity in them, some stares are filled with hostility.

Coming out of the armor shop, I'm bumped by an elf child that seems to be a little over 7 years old.

"Hmph! Well if it isn't the human brat that Elder Virion has taken under. I've heard all about you. Gross, I got human

germs on my clothes.” He snidely says with a pompous look on his face.

It is fairly obvious by the clothes and attendants behind him and his little group of friends that he’s a noble.

Wow. So this is how a spoiled 7-year-old child acts. I almost forgot how immature children are after only spending time with Tess.

He then flashes a smile at the princess and takes out his hand, palm up.

“Princess, it is below your level to be with this human brat. Allow me to escort you around.” He urged, expecting Tess to receive his hand.

Not even looking in his direction, Tess just links my arm with hers and coldly says, “Art, let’s go. There seems to be a bug that I don’t want to accidentally step on.”

Ouch! Even I feel the burn. Tess can be awfully cruel. I think her words are a more effective weapon than mana to be honest.

I glance back to see the noble boy’s forehead crease in anger and veins pop out.

“Hold it brat! I’m not done with you!” He shouts, gripping my shoulder.

“I heard you’re pretty talented for a human mage. Around here, I happen to be a pretty well known genius myself. My mana core has already reached red stage and aside from water AND earth manipulation, I’ve been begun showing signs of

being able to manipulate plants!”

His ego must be inflating ‘cause I swear his nose is getting longer.

I just put on a nice surprised expression and innocently exclaim, “Oh my word! Princess Tessia! It seems we are in the presence of pure genius here. I am not worthy!”

No point in getting angry with a 7-year-old.

Tess just giggles at my sarcasm, trying to hide her face under her sunhat.

“I’ll be sure to give you proper respect Lord Genius of the Elves. So if you’ll excuse me...”

I lead Tess out back into the main road while I see the attendants and his little posse trying to control their giggles. Mr. Lord Genius of the Elves himself turning bright red.

I wasn’t going to fight him like he wanted. I may win, but this isn’t my kingdom and it’s not right of me to do anything excessive. I was representing Grandpa Virion as his disciple.

The days that followed consisted of training with Grandpa Virion in the morning, spending time with Tessia in the afternoon and training by myself at night. During this time, I’ve sent messages to my parents every once in a while to let them know I’m still alive and that I miss them dearly. I tried keeping out of trouble from the elves and they did the same.

Like this, 3 years has come to pass.

Chapter 14.5: The Other Side

Reynolds Leywin's POV:

I couldn't believe it.

My son. My son was gone.

“NOOOO!” “NO, NO, NO, NO, NO, NO.”

Durden had to hold me back before I jumped off the cliff myself to save my son.

I knew it was too late. I knew what could've happened had already happened but I couldn't just stand still and not do anything.

“Let me go! My son! He could still be alive. Let me save my son! Please.”

Durden wasn't budging and Adam came to hold me back too.

“Please Rey. You have to hold it together. There's no easy way to tell you this but it's not possible for him to survive that fall.” The always playful and lax Adam had a solemn look on his face and couldn't even meet my eyes.

“Adam is right. Pull yourself together. Your wife needs you Rey.” Durden also mutters.

They're right. They're absolutely right. Yet. Why is my body not listening to me? Why can't I go comfort my wife.

“AAAAHHHHHHH!!!” I break down before everything goes black.

I wake up to see Helen holding a wet towel over my head.

“You’re finally awake.” She says, with a sympathetic smile that lacks emotion.

I just get up and bury my face in my hands.

“This isn’t a dream is it? Please tell me I’m going to wake up to see my boy playing with Jasmine and Adam.”

“ ... ”

“I’m sorry...” is the only thing she manages to say before she starts sniffing as well.

Durden comes into the tent and faces me.

“Reynolds. I can’t begin to imagine how much it must hurt for you, but right now, your wife needs you. She’s blaming herself Rey. She thinks you hate her for losing your child.” He says, his red eyes evident that he himself was having a hard time.

“ ... ”

SMACK

“Reynolds! We had to stop Alice from killing herself! This isn’t the time to be fucking moping! Get off your sorry ass and take care of the one that’s alive!” He growls.

This is the first time I’ve seen the composed Durden this angry.

I nod, a little stunned, and go to the tent my wife is.

I see my wife curled up under a blanket with Angela by her side, patting her gently.

I give a meaningful gaze at Angela. She just nods, excusing herself out of the tent.

“...Alice”

“ ... ”

“Honey. Can I see my wife’s beautiful face?”

“...child” I faintly hear her mumble.

“What was that honey?” I say, patting her back.

“I killed our child!” She bolts up and turns to face me.

“I killed our son Reynolds. It was my fault! I-if I wasn’t there, he could’ve dodged that. He could’ve lived. He sacrificed himself to save me *sniff* it was my fault.”

I grab my wife and hold her tight, softly kissing the top of her head over and over.

I shut my eyes tighter, keeping myself from crying as she continues sobbing in my chest.

We just sat like this for a while until her sobs turned into whimpers.

Hic

“You don’t hate me?” I barely hear her whisper.

“How could I ever hate you? Alice. I love you and I always will.”

Hic *Hic*

“...I miss him so much Rey.” She sobs again at this point.

I clench my jaws, willing myself to stay strong in front of my wife.

“I-I know honey. I miss him too.”

The rest of the journey was a slow and arduous one. Not physically. No. I feel like even the wild animals knew of our emotional torment as they steered clear of us. Our group just went on in silence. Any of Adam’s attempts at trying to lighten up the mood all but failed. Even the cheerful Angela kept a solemn face throughout the rest of the journey.

Alice and I fell asleep together last night together in each other’s arms. I managed to console her and it helped me as well. I needed an excuse. I was the one that sent Arthur to protect Alice. I keep trying to find people to blame but the ones that are actually at fault are already dead. Revenge was already taken. Now all I’m left with is this feeling of emptiness and regret. The only thing keeping me going is our unborn child. For that child, my child, I had to endure. I won’t make the same mistake I did with Arthur. He was only a child but I sent him off to protect my wife against fighters and even a mage. I had no one to blame but myself.

We arrived in Xyrus through the teleportation gate with no further complications; as though God was mocking us by

saying we've been through enough. The Twin Horns were supposed to separate from my wife and I from here.

"You guys sure you'll be okay?" Adam gives a helpless look.

Durden adds in, saying, "We don't mind staying with you guys for a couple more days. I know you originally came to this city for Arthur but..." He never finished the sentence.

"It's okay. You guys have your agenda. Alice and I have all of our basic necessities and money too live off of for a couple of weeks. Keep your guys' positions updated in Guild Hall." I wave them off.

"Will do. Take care guys. We'll see each other soon." Durden replies.

The girls all give Alice a warm hug before saying their goodbyes to her. After they leave, I turn to my wife and give her a serious look.

"Alice, what do you say about living here from now on?"

Giving me a confused look, she replies, "What about our home in Ashber? We just got it all fixed up. A lot of our stuff is still there."

I shake my head at this. "I think it'll be better for us to have a fresh new surrounding. Our home in Ashber has too many memories of Art. I don't think we'll be able to get over it if we stay there. We'll hire some merchants to deliver some of our stuff from Ashber here to us."

She looks down and thinks for a little bit before nodding. Then she adds, "What about a job? How will we afford to live

here? This is a very expensive neighborhood Rey.”

I throw in a smile that just seems so rare these days. “I know an old friend that lives here. He’s asked me to be his guard a couple of times a few years back and we still keep in touch. He’s a fairly renown noble in this area and his manor is huge. I’m sure he’ll have a place for us to stay. They’re good people Alice.”

She looks a little doubtful at first but after getting a ride to the manor and hugging my old friend, her uncertainty vanishes.

“Rey! My old pal! What brings you to this little city?” A thin bespectacled man in a suit exclaims as he lets go of me.

Vincent Helstea. Around 1.7 meters in height with a thin frame for a body, he was a man of brains, not brawn. Vincent was a normal human but a very successful one at that. The Helstea House had been in the trading business for centuries. While their family was on the decline for a few generations, Vincent single-handedly brought his family’s asset to its new high after building the first Helstea Auction House in Xyrus and later building several auction houses within neighboring cities. We met when he was on one of his trips to a more remote city to build an Auction House when he ran into trouble with bandits. I was there with him at that time, fulfilling the escort mission that the Guild assigned me. After saving him, we hit it off pretty well.

The maid that answered the door left after she saw Vincent hugging me. Soon after, his wife and daughter came out as well, curious as to what all the commotion is about.

“Tabitha! Meet my dear friend Reynolds and his wife Alice!

Alice, Reynolds, this is my wife Tabitha and this here is my lovely daughter, Lilia.” Vincent exclaims while picking up her daughter. She seems to be the around the same age as Art was, with lovely hazel eyes that remind me of a kitten and long brown hair, braided. She’ll grow up to be a beautiful young lady.

I greet myself, “Tabitha! It’s great to finally meet you. Vince has told me so many great things about you during our trip together to Eksire City. What a cute daughter you guys have.”

After my wife introduced herself and exchanged pleasantries with Tabitha, Vincent urged us into the living room to get comfortable.

“So what brings you here Rey. Last time you sent me a letter, you said you got yourself settled all the way up in Ashber.” He says, handing Alice and me a glass of wine.

I took a deep breath out and told them the story.

Clank

“I had no idea. I’m so sorry for your loss.” Vincent manages to mutter. His wife has her mouth covered with her hands. “I wouldn’t know what to do if I lost Lilia. Is there anything I can do for you?”

I scratch my cheek and ask, “You asked me a couple times to teach your Auction House’s guards a thing or two about magic. Is that offer still up in the air? I don’t want to stay here for free Vince, but I don’t my wife to go back to the old house in Ashber where Arthur was born and raised in.”

At that, a big grin appeared on Vincent. “You know, we

could actually really use someone like you right now! We just renovated our Heltea Auction House so it can accommodate three times as many people. With that, we got a fresh new batch of Augmenter recruits that need some guidance. I think you'll be perfect for it. Can you handle it?" He winks at me.

I just chuckle and nod, shaking the hand that he put out, sealing the deal.

I didn't start working for the first couple of days. Alice and I got ourselves situated in the left wing of the manor. Vincent was pretty lenient, saying we could have a couple of rooms, in case we want any more future babies. I just slapped his butt at that and he runs off grinning. Alice and Tabitha hit it off really well. I was worried she'd be lonely when I started working but Tabitha has a lot of free time as well and just takes care of Lilia so having Alice around really brightened up her day. Once work started, I was busy training the new recruits. These mages were not the most talented, but they were willing to work hard. After pounding the essentials into their head, I feel like they'll make a pretty solid team of guards. Of course, all of the elite mages, both Conjurers and Augmenters, are attending school at Xyrus Academy. So the ones that don't want to be Adventurers end up being hired by rich nobles, like Vincent, as guards, which is much safer.

It's been a couple of months now since Alice and I settled down in Xyrus. We've grown accustomed to the city life. Alice's belly seems to be getting bigger by the day and, while she still has nightmares about losing Arthur, having Tabitha around really helped. Just getting back home, I'm welcomed by the delicious smell of beef stew. Vincent and Tabitha have gone out on a date while Alice promised to watch over Lilia with the maids, so it was just the two of us having dinner tonight.

“This beef stew looks amazing Alice. What’s the special occasion today?” I grin at her.

She smiles softly and just replies, “It’s been a while since I’ve cooked for you. I hope you enjoy it. This used to be Art’s favorite dish.”

Her face turns downcast and before I get the chance to console her...

Hi Mom, hi Dad. It’s me, your son Arthur ...

My mind blanks. This is Art’s voice. No. I’m hearing things. I look at Alice while the voice continues to talk in my head. Her face is in distraught as she’s looking around. Is she hearing voices too?

...Again, I’m alive and well mom, dad. I managed to survive the fall off the cliff...

What is going on? My son is alive? Kingdom of Elenoir? Illness?

*...It may take a couple of months or even years for me to be able to go back but just be sure that I WILL be going back home. I love you guys *sniff* so much and I miss you. Stay safe, and dad, make sure to keep mom and my baby sibling safe. Mom *sniff*, please make sure dad doesn’t get into trouble. Your son, Art.*

I look at my wife again.

“You just heard the voice now too right Rey?” She manages to cry out.

“Y-yeah. I just heard Art’s voice.” I reply, still dazed.

Crash

“He’s alive! Honey! Our baby is alive! Oh my goodness!” Alice falls on her knees and just weeps, a smile that tells me her tears are from joy.

Hell, I’m crying right now. My son is alive. “Our son is alive!!!” I madly laugh.

Chapter 15: Next Step

“Hey Art! Hurry up! We’re going to be late!”

“AAAGGHHHH!! Tess! Stop! I give! I GIVE!” I cry out.

Tess gets off me, letting go of the leg lock she had in a firm grip.

“Can’t there a gentler way of waking me up Tess?” I grumble, rubbing the feeling back into my leg.

“It’s getting harder and harder to wake you up in the morning! I have to do something right? Besides, you should be grateful such a pretty lady is waking you up every morning.” She throws in a wink.

“I find the maids here plenty pretty thank you very much.” I softly mutter.

She must’ve heard because that earned me a firm squeeze to the side.

Where did the shy Tess that was too scared to sleep alone in the tent go; the sweet Tess that begged me not to go? Bring her back! I liked her better!

Something I realized in my three years of living in Elenoir was that elves awaken earlier than humans do. Where as the average age for a human is around 13-14 years old, elves awaken around 10-11.

Tess awakened a little early last year and boy did she awaken with a bang. It wasn’t as big as when I first awakened

but she did manage to destroy her room upstairs and fall down and create a small crater from the implosion in the kitchen right below. Since then, she's been joining me in training with Gramps. All I can say is, since awakening, she's turned into something akin to the devils incarnate. She knows how strong my body is so she has no hesitation in using me as her sandbag as she tries new spells that she learned from Grandpa Virion and other Conjuror teachers. What she just doesn't seem to get after all my cries is that I still feel pain dammit!

As for me, today is a very special day because after 3 years, I finally finished the assimilation of mana into my body yesterday night. It's almost my birthday so I'll be 8, while Tess has turned 9 a couple months ago. During this time, I wasn't allowed to absorb any mana from my surroundings and only used my innate mana formed from my mana core to spread it into my body. Today is the ceremony that takes place after a Beast Tamer finishes his assimilation.

I skip showering and just change into a more presentable robe, tucking the stone, into my robe before heading out into the courtyard with Tess.

"Finally awake now eh Art? How did your wife wake you up today? Haha~!" Grandpa Virion mused as he was sipping tea on the small table outside.

"Ugh, wife? Where? I didn't know you could marry ogres. You're turning her into a monster Gramps." I groan.

Luckily Tess didn't hear that as she came outside soon after.

Chuckle "She's going to grow up into a fine woman Art. Better sweep her off her feet before it's too late" He throws me

playful smirk.

Tess just blushes at that and kicks my shin.

“AGGH!”

Wha~? Why? What did I do?

“Hahaha! Art! Are you ready? Today is finally the day. After this ceremony, you’ll truly be considered a Beast Tamer.” He says, arms crossed.

I just nod while Tess heads to the table Gramps was sitting on to watch.

It wasn’t really a ceremony. All it consisted of was Gramps exerting a large amount of mana into my core, triggering the will to awaken and spread out into my body.

“Do you remember the basic phases of Beast Tamers, Art?” He quizzes.

I recite the basics that Grandpa Virion pounded into me these past years. “All Beast Tamers have a different number of forms that they can will their bodies into. The number of forms depends on the strength of the Beast’s will that is left in the mana core. The first phase, that all Beast Tamers have, is Acquire. In this phase, the Tamer can utilize a small portion of the inherent ability that their beast has. The second stage is Integrate, where the Tamer’s body wholly infuses with the Beast’s will, allowing a much better control over their beasts’ inherent abilities.”

“Correct! The phases that the Beast Tamers are able to unlock simply shows how much they can utilize their beasts’

will. The stronger the beast, the harder it is, but at the same time, if the tamer can't get insight, then it is also impossible to get past the first phase." He turns serious.

"One thing you should know is the differences in how a Beast Tamer's will is acquired. If the beast is killed and his mana core is extracted with its will still intact, a mage can absorb the will and try to gain insights. That mage would be considered forged tamer. While it is a lot easier and straightforward to be a forged tamer, the probability of gaining insight is very rare. One of the reasons it took me so long for me to be able to break into the second phase was because I am a forged tamer. I consider myself lucky to even be able to break into the second stage though Haha. Arthur, you are one of the extremely rare legacy tamers; where the beast willingly imparted its will unto you."

Continuing on, he says, "Art, my first phase doesn't really make me that much faster, but I'm able to erase a bit of my presence and blend myself into the dark. You haven't seen my second phase right? Watch carefully. It took me over ten years for me to make a breakthrough into this phase."

Feeling a powerful surge of mana surrounding his body, I involuntarily cringe. All of a sudden, the mana around his body seeps back into him and my eyes widen.

Grandpa's skin turns pitch black. Even the whites of his eyes turn black while his irises turn sharp and glow yellow. His tied white hair becomes unbound and is also a shiny black color. The aura that surrounds him makes me shudder and take a step back.

"This is the Integrate phase. I'm going to sneak up behind you. Pay attention." He growls.

Is it really sneaking up if he tells me? ...Is what I was thinking when he just disappears from my vision. I don't feel his presence at all but I look behind me because he told me where he'd be aiming for.

His finger is pointed at my jugular and he's looking down at me with his glowing yellow eyes.

Cold sweat beads down my forehead.

Fast. It seemed like instant teleportation but I knew it wasn't by the skid mark from his initial position. It was speed that even I couldn't keep up with. Not even close. No. The scary part wasn't even his insane speed. It was his lack of presence. Even directly behind me, I couldn't sense where he was.

He turns back to normal, his face slightly flushed.

"Whew! Using that form always takes a toll on me. After training with it for a couple decades, I'm able to keep the form on for about 50 minutes. Do you see the difference in power between the first and second phase Art?"

I nod my head vigorously.

"Good! Let's begin the ceremony." He replies.

We stand face to face, only an arm's length apart. Tess was now leaning forward in excitement, as we're about to start.

"Just let your mana come out freely. Don't try to control anything. I'll restrain you if necessary so it's crucial that you keep a relaxed state of mind." He explains.

He begins exerting mana into my core, making the mana already inside me spill out.

Instantly, I feel a warm sensation as it feels like a hot gust of mana flows out of my body.

“BOOM!”

I open my eyes to see Gramps thrown back 20 meters and I see Tess roll back from the force as well.

I suddenly feel an unbearable pain, like my skeleton is trying to crawl out of my skin. I don't even have the strength to scream and begin to feel myself passing out. I welcome the darkness to relieve me from my pain.

Waking up back in my bed, I sit up feeling rather refreshed. Sitting to the side of me, laying her head down on my legs is Tess. Looking at her sleeping like this, it reminds me of when I was escorting her back home after saving her from the slave traders.

Grandpa walks in soon after and he sits down on the other side of the bed, not bothering to wake up his slumbering granddaughter.

“How do you feel brat?” He gives me a half grin.

I respond in a serious tone. “I should be asking you that Gramps. I saw you getting sent flying and even Tess was knocked back.”

He just chuckled at that before saying, “I have to admit I wasn't expecting that great of a force. I know you probably

have a good reason for not even telling me what kind of beast gave you its will but is it not possible even now for you to talk?”

I think a little before nodding. He had the right to know. If it wasn't for him, I probably wouldn't be alive.

“...It was a dragon that passed her will unto me.”

I hear an audible gasp from Grandpa Virion as his jaw slacks and his eyes widen. The little color he had on his pale face was all but gone and his naturally sharp eyes turned round.

“D-dragon...” He manages to wheeze out, his eyes narrowed.

“Dear lord... a D-dragon Tamer. In my life, I've never thought I'd be able to see the birth of a Dragon Tamer...I-I'm even the one that trained him! HAHAHA! A Dragon Tamer!”

Tess wakes up from the now senile Grandpa Virion and looks at him, confused.

He suddenly grabs both my shoulders and looks at me intently. “You did right in keeping this a secret. Do not tell anyone else. This power of yours has to be kept a secret until you have the strength to protect yourself and those around you.”

“Yeah, I'm beginning to believe that more and more, Gramps.” I nod seriously.

“Good! Although I would like to know the whole story, I am more than satisfied with what you've told me for now.” He smiles.

“What is it Gramps? What did Art tell you? Uu...not fair, keeping secrets from me.” Tess starts pouting at this point.

“Hahaha~ you’ll know when the time is right little one. Arthur! I have good news. The teleportation gate that is supposed to open in two years will be opening early. There is a tournament that will be held in the city of Xyrus in four months. This tournament will be a very important occasion because both the dwarves and the elves are sending in youths as representatives for the tournament. We can sneak you back into Sapin without the humans knowing at that time.” Gramps exclaims with a smile on his sharp face.

“Really Gramps? I can go home soon?” I jump out of bed and hug him.

I can finally see my parents again! I have been sending messages to my parents every once in a while through Elder Rinia but after seeing them through the water divination technique, I wasn’t able to see them again.

“Y-you’re going to be leaving soon, Art?” I see my close friend look crestfallen.

“Yeah. I have to meet my family soon. Don’t worry though! I’ll visit you again! And maybe you can come visit me in Sapin!” I try to cheer her up.

“We still have four months Arthur! Until the day the teleportation gates open, I expect you to train harder than before brat! Your mana core hasn’t developed at all these past three years from the assimilation you had to do. Don’t focus on just training your beast’s will. That should only be used as a trump card. Understand?”

Grandpa turns serious when he declares this. He's right though. I shouldn't use my beast's will if possible.

Continuing, Grandpa slaps my back and says, "Now! Take a bath and then rest. You reek of something rotten brat. Little one, let's leave Arthur alone so he can recuperate."

I see Tess still looking depressed from the fact that I'll be leaving in a couple of months. Growing up and living with her for three years has given us a bond that is close to siblings and while she's only ten years old, the fact that she's showing signs of blossoming into a beautiful woman does make me feel a twinge of regret that I won't be here with her as she grows up.

"Tess! Cheer up okay? I'll still be around for a couple more months and even after I leave, it's not going to be permanent. I hope you can someday come and meet my parents too." I give her a sincere hug.

"Eeep! W-what are you?" I can almost see the steam coming out of her head as she turns bright red. Suddenly, she pushes me away and runs out.

Chuckle

"Ah! Youth! Haha~ Sleep well brat!" He just shakes his head while closing the door.

Was Tess going through puberty already?

I jump back into bed, feeling too lazy to take a shower right now.

"I'll just lay down for a little and then take shower." I mutter to myself.

Rustle *Rustle*

I wonder if it's windy tonight. I usually don't hear the rustling of leaves.

Crack

Okay... that's an unusual sound

I sit up and look around. Trying to locate where the sound is coming from.

Crack *Crack*

I look towards where I left my robe on the chair.

“Kyu~” “Kyu~”

Kyu?

My robe was making “kyu~” sounds? I furrow my brows, trying to assess what's going on.

*Crack! * “Kyu~!”

The stone!

Chapter 16: Companion

I jump out of bed and quickly rummaged through my robe to locate the gem that Sylvia entrusted me with.

“H-haha...Holy shit...” I just fall back on my bum, looking at what used to be the rainbow colored gem.

“Kyu~!”

The stone wasn't a gem. It was an egg. A freaking egg...

And what used to be an egg was now something that I couldn't put into one word.

The first thing that came into my mind was a dragon. It looked sort of like a dragon to me, but at the same time, it wasn't. It was all black. It kind of reminded me of a small kitten but with scales. It was sitting on all fours, studying at me with its head tilted to one side. The sclera that is usually white in the human's eyes is black, like Grandpa Virion when he uses his second form, except its irises are a bright red instead of yellow. The pupils were sharp slits that would normally make it look menacing, but with the body of something akin to a small feline animal, it just looked adorable. The most noticeable difference between a dragon like Sylvia and this little... thing was that it had two horns on its head. The horns looked identical to the illusion that Sylvia was before she revealed to me that she was a dragon. It curved outward around its head and then, sharpening into a point in the front.

Its head was shaped like a cat's but the snout was a just a little bit more pointed, otherwise the same. The tail, though,

looked exactly like Sylvia's tail. It was a reptilian tail that had two red spikes at the end. Along the spine of this hatchling were also small red spikes that matched the color of its eyes. It didn't have wings but where the wings would be located were two small bumps.

I can see that its belly didn't have scales though. It looked sort of leathery.

It yawned, revealing only gums.

Why do I have the sudden urge to hug this monster?

"Kyu?" It looked at me with intelligence in its eyes.

"H-hi there little fella, I'm Arthur." I awkwardly wave at it.

"KYU!" It jumps off of the chair and onto my lap, gazing up at me.

My hands twitched, wanting to cuddle with it. Erg! My manliness! Endure! This monster is dangerous in a different sense.

Unable to hold in the urge, I pet this adorable menace. The scales were surprisingly soft and the red spikes that ran down its back felt like rubber. I guess young animals, whether humans or monsters were all squishy and soft. It started purring, closing its eyes.

Fucking adorable.

It rolls onto its back, and I rub its belly. The belly feels like very soft leather, making it very smooth to rub. I take a closer look at its claws and find it interesting that it looks closer to

paws. The only thing hard was its horns, which were surprisingly sharp.

“Aren’t you just a cute lil fella?” I can’t help but smile while petting this adorable newborn.

After a little bit, I start thinking of what to name it, which makes me realize I don’t even know the gender of this mysterious creature.

“Kyu~!” Suddenly the newborn sticks its tongue out and licks the underside of my left forearm.

“Ah!” I reflexively try to move my arm back from the scorching sensation, but before I see a glowing black light surrounding my arm.

The pain fades so I just wait for the glowing black light to fade. The creature pulls its tongue back, revealing a black marking on my forearm.

It looked a lot like the tribal markings that covered Sylvia before she passed her will unto me but the shape of this pattern was that of a wing. Just one open wing, but it was made up of several dashes and sharp curves that branched out, making it look very complicated and mysterious.

I’m only 8 but I already have a tattoo. How cool.

“...Mama~?”

The creature was looking up at me with its mouth closed.

What? I obviously heard a voice just now.

“Mama?” This time I heard it clearly in my head.

What in the name of...telepathy?

Shaking my head helplessly, I respond, “I guess I’m your mother. But I’m a boy so you should call me papa.”

“Papa!” It suddenly jumped up and licked my nose.

Haha... I’m only eight though.

After communicating with the creature for a bit, I came to realize a couple of things. I guess after the mark appeared on my forearm, a sort telepathic connection was established. The voice I hear in my head from the creature sounds like a girl’s so I’ve decided to name her Sylvie after her real mother.

“Syeevy?” she responds, her head turned.

Picking her up and bringing her close to my face, I smile at her, “That’s right! Your name is Sylvie.”

She nuzzled her nose to mine while closing her round eyes.

Another thing I realized was that Sylvie had a pretty high intelligence for a newborn. She seemed to have the mental capacity of a 2-3 year-old child. While we’re communicating telepathically, I know she’s not necessarily talking to me in English but I just understand it as that. It’s a very weird feeling, not knowing the words she’s actually saying but knowing what she means. Besides simple communications like “papa”, most of the thoughts she sends me come to me as emotions. I get the gist of what she means by how she feels.

“Okay Sylvie! I need to wash now. Do you want to come

with me?” I say while setting her down.

“Kyu?” She tilts her head while she looks up at me. I feel like she’s asking me what “wash” was so I just laugh and pick her up.

Getting into the shower, she seemed to cry out ‘NOOOOOOO’ as she wailed a shrill “KYUU!”

“Hahaha, I guess you don’t like water that much do you, Sylvie?” I say, setting her down out of the shower.

Sylvia shakes herself off like a wet dog and just lays down, her tail wagging, looking at me while I finish washing up.

Her behavior sort of reminds me of a mix between a dog and a cat. Never would I imagine her lineage to be that of a mighty dragon.

That got me thinking though.

Was Sylvie really a dragon? She sure looked kind of like a baby dragon...

Why was she all black though when Sylvia was pure white? What baffled me the most was the fact that Sylvie had horns eerily similar to that horned, demon king illusion that Sylvia was at first.

I get out of the shower and dry myself off. No use thinking about all of this now. How do I explain this to Gramps and Tess though?

As I got out of the bathroom, Sylvie toddled behind me, ‘kyu’ing me to not leave her.

I gathered up the pieces of the shell that Sylvie came out from and set it aside. Then I wrapped the feather that was encasing the stone around my forearm to cover the marking that little Sylvie left.

Four months. In four months, I'll be able to see my parents. I wonder if they'll still recognize me.

Sylvie must've felt the longing emotion of my parents because she cuddled in close to my face and licked my cheek a couple of times.

“Thanks little Sylv.” Petting her horned head, I fell asleep.

“KYAAAAAAA!”

“What is it? What happened? Who's there?” I jump up on my bed, using my pillow as a makeshift sword with bed hair ablaze.

“Omygosh! What is this? It's so CUTE! Kyaa!”

I see Tess holding unto the squirming Sylvie.

“Kyu!!” It cried. ‘Papa help!’

Sigh

I lay back in bed. My beautiful sleep.

“Her name is Sylvie and she just hatched from her shell yesterday. You should let go of her though. It looks like she doesn't like being strangled.” I muffle through the pillow that I

covered my head with.

It's too early in the morning.

Sylvie finally freed herself from Tessia's grasp, glaring at her while she hid herself behind me.

"Grrrrr~" She growled.

"Don't worry Sylv, she's a friend." I say while petting her head.

"She's adorable!" Tess was still drooling over the growling Sylvie. I can see hearts come out of her eyes as she's inching herself closer to us, her hands ready to hug Sylvie to death.

"Okay, now you just look scary Tess. Get out of my room so I can change." I order her while pushing the perverted princess out of my room.

I change into a loose robe and pants. While I'm putting on my shoes, Sylvie jumps onto my head and nestles herself, hitching herself a ride.

"Kyu~!" She sure sounds happy now.

I walk downstairs, saying good morning to the confused and shocked maids that see the creature on my head.

They all end up having the same expression as Tess though and both Sylv and I start fearing for our safety.

"Gramps! We're here!" I shout at Grandpa Virion sipping tea while reading something.

Turning his head, he smiles, "Ah! Art you're here! Why was

Tess fussing about some sort of pet that ...”

He drops his cup and gapes while his eyes are glued to the horned black lump sitting on my head.

“T-that’s...” He continues to stutter something incomprehensible.

“D-dragon!” Finally managing to shout, his eyes never leaving the top of my head.

“Er... Yeah I think that’s what she is. I’m not entirely sure though.” I just scratch my cheek.

“Kyu?” Sylvie just tilts her head in confusion, not knowing what’s going on.

Tess comes through the door into the courtyard now and she’s bouncing up and down.

“It’s a Dragon? But it’s so cute! Art! Can I hold her? Can I? Can I?” She says, eyes sparkling.

“Grrr~” Sylvie just starts hissing at her and her claws start stabbing into my scalp.

“AH Ow ow OWOW! Sylvie your claws!” I try to peel her off my head but she doesn’t budge.

Grandpa Virion is still half dazed by the dragon that’s on my head, finally speaks up.

“H-how did you get a dragon’s egg? How did you get it to hatch?” He was shaking his head now.

“The dragon that left me her will entrusted me with a stone

that I thought was just a valuable gem. I didn't even realize until it hatched that it was an egg. What do you mean by get it to hatch?" I was confused now too.

"Dragon's eggs don't hatch just through the passage of time brat. The dragon inside must feel that something capable of protecting and loving it is close by in order for it to hatch. Even then, there must be a very close bond between them." He described.

Trying to think of what might have triggered the hatching, I instantly came to the conclusion.

"Activating the will! Gramps! I think that's what made her come out!" I exclaim.

He scratches his chin and nods, "I think you're right. But I've never heard of a dragon hatching next to anything outside of its parents. No use thinking about it now though! Brat! Be sure to keep the hatchling close by at all times. Although I knew it was a breed of a dragon immediately, that was because I've witnessed one before. Most people won't know that creature is a dragon, so it should be fine just feigning it off as a sort of rare mana beast."

After that matter was settled, I placed Sylv on the ground beside me while I began training. The next step in my training now, that I would do for the next four months, would be learning to utilize the power of Sylvia's will that she left me as well as condensing my mana core into the next stages.

"Accessing the first phase is pretty simple. While your mana core is only dark red, your body right now should already be beyond that of a dark orange stage mage. After the ceremony, you should feel a small compartment inside your

mana core that holds the will's power. That is where your beast's will is stored. The more drops of will you are able to transfer out from that small compartment into your mana core, the further phases you'll be able to reach. Brat! Try manipulating a drop of will into your core." He instructs.

I follow his orders and I suddenly feel a bright gush of something more powerful than mana come seep out of my core and into my body.

"Good! Let's fight!" He shouts, utilizing the first phase as well.

The days went by training quickly, while I was immersed in training. Accessing first phase seemed to become more natural to me now and I was able to conceal the will so other mages wouldn't be able to notice. After the assimilation, the speed of my mana cultivation went through leaps and bounds.

During this time, there didn't seem to be any changes in Sylvie except that she did get a little more intelligent. Her vocabulary was still limited but it was a lot easier us to understand each other. I went out together with Tess a lot. She dragged me out every free time we had and tried to make as many memories as possible before I left. Like that, the 4 months that seemed so far away has now passed.

Dressed in a simple olive green T-shirt and black pants with the feather wrapped around my forearm, I come out of my room.

"Arthur! Remember to take care! We will contact you somehow and update you. Take this with you so you can navigate through the Forest of Elshire if you're ever in the area. Or maybe you can just find another princess to lead you back."

He winks while handing me a small silver oval compass.

“Uuu... Grandpa!!!”

SMACK “OUCH! Little one! It was a joke!” Grandpa Virion cries while rubbing his side.

“While Alduin and Merial will be going in a separate carriage since they’re the King and Queen, Tess and I won’t be going. This will be the last time we see each other for now. Until next time, Arthur!” He clasps me in a strong hug, almost knocking Sylvie off of my head.

Hic *Hic*

“I’ll miss you Art! Remember to come visit again! Uu~ don’t go chasing after human girls okay? Promise me okay?” She sniffles while tearing up.

I hug my dear friend and pat her head as well. “We’ll see each other again! You better be stronger than me the next time we meet Tess! With Gramps teaching you, you have no excuse!”

She nods, unable to form words because of her constant sniffing.

I wave goodbye to the both of them and go with Merial and Alduin giving me a sympathetic smile. I didn’t really get to spend much time with the King and Queen but we were now more comfortable with each other. I hope that next time, I’ll be able to get the chance to know them a little better.

I got into the carriage that the Elf representatives were taking, while The King and Queen are escorted into a separate

carriage.

“Well look who it is! If it isn’t the human brat! Did the royal family finally kick you out of the Kingdom?” An elf boy dressed in a very decorated purple robe smirks.

“Uh... I’m sorry but do I know you?” I scratch my head while Sylvie is growling, pointing her horns in his direction.

“I’m the noble you dared bump into 4 years ago while you were with the princess!” He stands up now, pointing an accusing finger at me.

Ah! I remember who he is. “You’re the bug!” I say in realization.

Oops, I don’t think it was supposed to come out that way.

“Y-you dare...!?” His face bright pink and ears twitching in anger as a few people behind him start snickering.

“Aha sorry, sorry! I didn’t mean to say that. I never did learn your name though.” I chuckle.

Face still red, trying to preserve as much of the little dignity he had left, he crosses his arms and declares in a pompous voice, “My name is Feyrith Ivsaar III, descendent of the noble Ivsaar family!”

A young elf girl that looked a few years older than Feyrith pipes in, saying, “We just all call him Feyfey!”

“D-don’t tell him that!” Face bright red again, Feyfey just looks defeated now.

Aww poor Feyfey.

We go into the teleportation gate and we're greeted by the now familiar sensation of being in the middle of a fast-forwarded film.

"We have arrived in Xyrus!" The driver announces.

Taking a quick peek out, I notice we're surrounded by a parade of people who are cheering for the representatives. This tournament was supposed to be one of the biggest events in the whole Kingdom of Sapin, gathering all of the potential youths together. Naturally everyone was excited when they found out the Elves and Dwarves would be joining the tournament as well.

The driver pulls the carriage to a remote place after passing through the crowd and whispers to me in the back that this would be the best time to leave without being noticed.

I say bye to Feyfey and the rest of the representatives and wish them luck. Feyfey just turns his head away but I don't mind. Jumping off the carriage with Sylvie still on my head, I sneak through the alleyway to make my way to where my parents should be.

After around 30 minutes of going around, I finally find the huge manor that my parents were supposed to residing.

Wow... I guess not having a child really did wonders on their savings.

"We're home Sylv. We're finally home." I say under my breath.

“Kyu?” she just tilts her head, as if saying ‘I thought we were at home before.’

I walk up the flight of stairs and while taking a deep breath, I knock on the giant double doors.

Chapter 17: Family

I found it strange that I was more nervous now, meeting my family, than when I was a king, meeting the most powerful people in the world.

“Whew~ let’s do this Sylvie.”

“Kyu” She responds, her excitement oozing into my mind.

Knock *Knock*

I hear faint pitter-patter sounds followed by a childish “Coming~!”

A maid opens the door with a little girl holding onto the maid’s uniform, hiding behind her.

The maid looks at me curiously, surprised that an 8 year old was knocking on the door of a noble’s estate.

“Ahem, nice to meet you. My name is Arthur Leywin. I was informed that my family is currently residing in this manor. Do you mind if I speak to them?” I give a slight bow, Sylvie rocking on my head.

Before the confused maid could even respond, I hear an all too familiar sound in the background.

“Eleanor Leywin! There you are! You have got to stop running to the front door every time someone...” My mother stops mid sentence and drops a small bowl of what looks like food for ...my sister?

I look down to see the girl with dazzling brown eyes, looking at me with curiosity and innocence. Her light ashy-brown hair shimmered with a much prettier quality than Father's but I knew where she got the color from. Her hair was tied into two pigtails on the side of her head above her ears.

I struggle to peel my eyes away from my little sister and I turn to face my mother. Tear welling up; my vision goes blurry as my lips curl upwards, trembling.

"H-hi mom. Long time no see." I give a small awkward wave, not knowing what to do if she didn't recognize me.

Fortunately, my fear doesn't come true and she raced towards me at a speed I swear was faster than Grandpa Virion's, but that might just be because my vision was blurry.

"OH MY BABY! ARTHUR!!" She arrived in front of me and collapsed on her knees, her arms around my waist, gripping with all her strength, afraid that I might disappear again if she lets go.

"You are alive! The Voice... I knew it was you! *sniff* You're back now! Arthur. My baby!" And that was all she could spew before she got broke down into a bawl.

I was worse. I managed to tremble, "I-I'm back Mom..." before I started sobbing as well.

That's the funny thing about love. You can be an all powerful, immortal tyrant but when you're in front of your loved ones, the ability to control emotions betrays you.

I just kept repeating that I was back and that I was home,

that I'm not leaving, all the while crying. My mother was a flurry of emotions. She was happy that I was back and alive, she was mad that I couldn't come back sooner, she was sad that I had to be away from them and how hard it must have been for me all at the same time.

At one point, Eleanor walked to us and started patting Mother's back. "Mama. There, there. Don't cry." But after a bit of unsuccessfully comforting Mother, she starts crying too.

"MY SON!" I turn my head, face still wet with tears to see outside the sprinting figure of my father drenched in sweat. I guess the maid told him I was back.

He doesn't stop as he reaches us and just slides on his knee, hugging all of us.

"Arthur! My son! Look how big you are. Oh my God! You're back you're back!" My father was cupping my head in his hands to get a better look at my face. He broke down while placing his large hand on the back of my head, bringing my forehead to touch his.

Our little family reunion continued on. My mother sobbing uncontrollably, embracing me, and my oblivious little sister crying with her, as my father and I just looked at each other with tears in our eyes, all of us glad that we're here together.

Eventually, we all managed to settle down.

We were sitting on a couch, my mother right beside me with Eleanor on her lap. Father was sitting on a chair he pulled up, facing me, his elbows on his knee as he leaned forward. Mother is holding my hands and still tearing up every time she

gets a look at my face.

“Are you okay now? Did you at least eat three meals a day? You slept while dressing warmly everyday right? Oh my baby. Look how big you are now.” Tears escaped her eyes as she squinted and smiled. Leave it to mother to worry about those things.

She was stroking my hair now and she placed a kiss on the crown of my head. “Thank God you’re back. I’m so happy,” she whispered.

Eleanor was looking curiously at both Sylvie and I while the baby dragon was sitting up next me attentively observing the three unfamiliar humans.

My father is looking at Sylvie with a curious look as well but he doesn’t mention her yet. Turning his gaze to me, his eyes softened and he keeps shaking his head, saying how big I am now. It must be a pretty fulfilling yet miserable feeling for a parent to see how big his son has gotten but not being there with him the whole time to witness it.

“Ellie, say hi to your big brother. He was away for a while but he’ll live together with us from now on. Come on, say ‘hello’.” My mother says to my sister.

“Brother?” She tilts her head, reminding me of a confused Sylvie.

She cups her hands over my mother’s ear and she whispers something.

“Haha yes, that big brother. The one I always tell stories about. He’s the one.”

My sister's eyes start sparkling as she looks back at me. I wonder what stories Mother has told her.

“Hai Brother~!” She waves both of her little hands at me.

Chuckle

“Hello Eleanor. It's nice to meet you... sister.” I laugh as I pat her head.

Father speaks up now. “Arthur, we were devastated after that incident, and we barely believed it when you communicated to us through our heads. Tell me, how'd you survive the fall?”

It took a while for me to explain everything from the beginning. I withheld some information that I thought might not be good to tell them just yet. I explained to them that I subconsciously wrapped myself in a protective layer of mana and I hit a bunch of branches on the cliff before landing in a stream. From there on, I told them about meeting Tess and how she was almost kidnapped. After saving her, she led me to her Kingdom and I stayed there.

“You said something about an illness that kept you from coming back sooner. What was all that about? Are you cured now?” My mother chimes in, a look of concern on her face.

Shaking my head, I explain, “You don't need to worry about that anymore. I guess there was a sort of instability in my mana core that made it so I had episodes of body aches. It was really bad at first but luckily there was an elf elder that knew how to cure it. The process was slow but he assured me it wasn't threatening if treated consistently.”

Relief replaces the prior look of worry and she just pats my head again.

“So what’s the story with this little pet of yours?” My dad just chuckles, finally bringing up Sylvie.

“Haha, while I was travelling, I stumbled into a mana beast’s den. It was only the mother and she was badly injured. A little bit after I was there, she died. While I was looking around, it seemed like she was guarding something so I picked it up thinking it was something valuable but I didn’t know it was an egg. She hatched only a couple of months ago so she’s still a baby. Say hi to Sylvie.”

I pick her up, holding her body so her limbs dangled like a kitten’s.

“Kyu~!” She purred, as if saying hi to everyone.

I didn’t exactly tell my family a lie when I said this but I’ll tell them everything when I’m older.

I then ask them to update me on what’s happened to them after we separated. The only thing I was able to tell from seeing them through the water divination the first time was that they lived here in Xyrus, but nothing more so I was exceptionally curious.

After Father explained what happened since then, my mother chimed in. “That’s right! The Helstea family went on a trip but they should be arriving back today. They’re going to be so surprised when they see you Art!”

I turn to face my mother. She hasn’t changed much since I

last saw her. The only thing that I did notice was that she's lost a bit of weight and was slightly paler in complexion. My heart ached as I figured it was caused from stress and depression after losing me. Father was actually better now, with a trimmed beard. I guess working as an instructor for the Helstea Auction House guards has gotten him in shape as well.

"Dad. What color is your mana core now?" I ask, while Sylvie made her place back on top of my head, tail swishing in content.

A confident grin emerges from his face as my father proudly replies, "Your old man broke through from the light red stage a couple years back and is a dark orange now."

I raise my eyebrows in surprise. At the age of early thirties, my father was doing pretty well for himself. The average mage that doesn't attend school stagnates at light red stage, maybe dark orange if they're lucky. Of course it's different for the elites who have a much purer mage lineage and have access to better resources, but for a standard mage, my father was strong.

He then asks me, leaning closer, "What stage are you at now?"

Scratching my cheek, I mumble, "...dark orange."

Crash

My father stumbles forward off his chair. Even my mother gasps in surprise.

"Holy shit!" My father exclaims.

“Shet!” Eleanor echoes, laughing at my father falling.

“Honey! What did I say about cursing in front of Ellie?” My mother reprimands while blocking my sister’s ears.

“Haha Sorry. Sorry! Ellie don’t listen to what your father is saying.” He then turns back to me.

“My son is still the same genius he used to be. Come on. Have a quick spar with your old man.” My father grins menacingly while clasp my shoulders.

“Dear! He just got home! Let him rest.” Mother was holding onto my hand.

“It’s fine Mom haha.” I gently place my hand on top of hers and she lets go.

“Men! Always trying to fight! Isn’t that right Ellie?” My mother shakes his head.

“Papa and Brother are men!” Echoes Ellie.

Both father and me laugh this time. I’m glad to be back.

We all get up to move to the backyard when I hear the door open.

“Rey! I heard your son was alive? What the hell is going on?” I see a thin proper man with glasses and parted hair in a suit sweating, with what I assumed to be his wife and daughter running behind him.

“Vincent, everyone! I would like you to meet my son, Arthur! He’s back Vince~ Haha!”

My father wraps his arm around the man's shoulder.

“Arthur, this is Vincent, my old friend and the person I work for. This is his house so introduce yourself before we start wrecking it.” He grins broadly.

Bowing to a ninety-degree angle, I introduce myself. “It is a pleasure to meet you. My name is Arthur Leywin. I’m not sure what my family has told you about me, but I was in contact with them for a while back. I was also the one that told them to not tell anyone until I got back, so I apologize for the confusion. Thank you for taking care of my family all of this time.” This man was the one that housed my family in their toughest time. As far as I was concerned, I owed him and his family dearly.

“Y-yeah, It’s really no problem. I’m glad that you’re alive and back.” He just scratched his head, still confused. “Meet my wife Tabitha and my daughter Lilia.” He continues, pushing them forward so they were in front of him.

“It’s a pleasure to meet you ma’am, Lilia” I bow again at them. Sylvie introduces herself too with a “Kyu!”

Tabitha bows slightly with a warm smile, saying, “Great to have you in the house Arthur. Say hi Lilia! Arthur is your age so don’t be shy.”

The girl named Lilia speaks up now, pointing at the creature on my head. “W-what’s that! It’s so cute.”

“This is an infant mana beast that I’m contracted with. Her name is Sylvie. Sylvie, get down and say hi.”

Sylvie jumps down and mews at Lilia.

“Oh my gosh!” Lilia squeals.

“Rey, what did you mean by wrecking my house?” Vincent asks curiously while my father’s arm was still around his shoulders.

“We were just on our way to the backyard. Arthur and I are going to have a little spar. Want to come?” He chuckles.

Vincent sputters incredulously, “W-what? Are you serious? Your son can’t be older than eight. What are you going to spar with him for?”

“HAHA! Don’t let my son’s appearance fool you! He’s already a dark orange stage Augmenter!” My father harrumphs proudly.

Vincent just shakes his head. “Don’t be ridiculous Rey. Your 8-year-old son is already in the orange stage? Even the snobby genius brats that get admitted into Xyrus academy are barely at the dark red stage, and they’re usually 11-12!”

My father just laughs louder and leads us all to the backyard.

“Ready when you are Dad!” I smile, setting Sylvie off to the side, next to the audience, which were the Helstea family and my mother and sister.

“Be careful Art! Your old man got better since the last time!” He pounds his two fists together, smiling.

Vince was still shaking his head in disbelief.

“GO!” My father announces, getting in an offensive stance.

Let’s see how much my training with Grandpa Virion paid off.

I explode a burst of mana from my feet as I dash towards him.

“What in the...” I faintly hear from Vincent along with several gasps.

“HAHA!” My father wills mana into his body and narrows his eyes.

After attributing my mana into my bones and muscles, my body may look like a normal fit 8-year-old child’s but my strength and agility was several times greater.

My right kick is met with my father’s left arm as he guards his head.

Shaping his right hand into a chop, he swings it towards my body.

Using the force from the kick, I change direction and twist my body midair to dodge the chop and I land next to his feet.

I feint a punch to his side so he curls up in defense, but I pivot at an incredible speed thanks to my enhanced body and throw a spinning back elbow using the momentum.

At that moment, my father brings up his right leg and my elbow clashes with his knee.

I dashed back to get out of range.

“Good good! Your old man’s going to get serious now! Be careful.” He smiles.

The thing about mana in the earlier stages is that it’s very different depending on how Augmenters and Conjurers use it.

While both types of mages can be tested using a special device to see what element that they’re adept at, a Conjurer’s attribute is very noticeable depending on what type of elements they have an easier time casting.

For Augmenters, it is a lot less obvious because most of their attacks are focused on using mana to enhance their bodies. That’s only the basics though.

While it differs per person, after a certain threshold, the mana core becomes pure enough to actually pertain to the user’s attribute. For Conjurers, this means that they’re able to slowly get away from the training wheels of chanting, and start shortening their verses in the element that they’re adept at.

For Augmenters, it is a lot more noticeable because at this stage, their mana can now manifest into their element attribute.

For example, before breaking through, a fire attribute Augmenters attacks just had a more powerful burst that seemed like it exploded, while wind attribute made their attacks faster and sharper.

However, after the orange stage, an Augmenter’s element attribute actually influences their attacks physically. Earth Augmenters can learn to produce a gauntlet of earth and can even learn to create small seismic shocks by stomping their foot, while Wind Augmenters can be taught to release small

blades of wind and create a vacuum effect in their punches, and so on. All of these are essentially techniques in controlling the type of mana that you channel.

Of course, Conjurers still had the major advantage of being able to influence a lot more of their surroundings. Their range was also a lot farther, but their weakness is still the vulnerability that they have in the process of chanting as well as their bodies that aren't protected by mana.

Because of these differences, both types of mages that can break the threshold are much stronger than mages that can't, and ultimately determines the talent and future accomplishments they can achieve.

While Conjurers can innately control elements because of how proficient they are at absorbing nature's mana with their mana veins, Augmenters are different.

For every one attribute Augmenters there are, there are ten that aren't. There are cases of attribute Augmenters that never break the threshold and become fully-fledged Elemental attribute Augmenters but usually they still have better talent than those who don't have any attributes.

I learned early on that my father was a fire attribute mage, but after reaching a bottleneck for years while being busy as a father, he finally reached the orange stage and also his own threshold, dubbing him now as an official Elemental Augmenter, or Elemental for short.

His two fists start glowing and are ignited into a glowing red flame. His whole body is steaming a little as the fire attribute mana is flowing throughout his body.

I grin and turn serious as well.

“Try not to be too surprised Dad!”

Chapter 18: Peaceful

In the world I came from, Elemental Augmenters were just practitioners of different Sects. The Earth, Fire, Water, and Wind Sects consisted of their own techniques that utilized their element.

What allowed me to become King in my old world was by knowing how to fight in all 4 different practices of the elements. Translate that here and I'd be a sort of Quadra Elemental, if that even existed. Of course I did have my preferences. My weakest was Earth and Wind and my strongest was Fire and Water. I hardly used Earth and Wind except for slight support. No. I was feared in battle because of my mastery in the two complete opposite elements of Water and Fire.

While I was training with Gramps, I tested out a bunch of different theories. One thing I learned very quickly was that I had absolutely no talent for conjuring. Grandpa brought over an elf Conjurer one day when I asked him to get someone to teach me the basics and I ended up nearly killing myself.

Augmenting and Conjuring are very different. I just regret that I had to learn that the hard way. Another thing I tested out was my ability as a potential deviant. Grandpa Virion and Tess were both already nearly shocked to death when they found out I could manipulate all 4 elements but after the four months of trying to see if I can control any of the higher elements, I got mixed results.

“Try not to be too surprised Dad!”

Crackle *ZiiiiZiiii*

My hair stood on its end by the electric current coursing through me. There were crackles of yellow lightning popping around me as I prepared to attack.

“What the...” My father almost stopped his attack from his concentration wavering. Before giving him the chance to recover, I dash towards him, leaving a trail of charred grass and earth behind me. I flash behind him and concentrate the lightning into the blade of my hand and I chop at his sides.

*BOOM!! *

My father managed to block my attack with his burning fist but the recoil made him crash into a nearby tree.

Whew I will the lightning current to settle down but my hair still looks a little crazy from the static. During the 4 months of training after the affirmation stage, I was able to start controlling Lightning and Ice. Of course, I’m still a beginner at both though. I can probably keep up my Lightning form for about a minute or two, which was why I wanted to end it quick. For Ice, it’s even harder for me.

The reason why only very few mages are able to transcend the basic element that they’re adept at and into its higher form is that the higher form is completely different and incomparably more difficult. Of course, me being able to learn both Lightning and Ice within 4 months probably doesn’t back up this point, but trust me, I’m a complete beginner in these higher forms of elements. My old world experiences didn’t prepare me in becoming a deviant after all.

As for Sound and Gravity, I've yet to produce any favorable results. In order to even take the first step, a mage needs to understand the link between the basic elements into its higher form. After that, your body needs to be able to naturally understand this link and harmonize the structure of the mana from the basic element to its higher form. For Wind and Earth, even if I somehow become able to feel the link between the basic to its higher form, my body wouldn't be able to change the structure.

My theory held true in that I wasn't compatible to Wind and Earth both in my old world and here.

The energy from my body is drained and I collapse on my behind, sweating profusely. I notice the dead silence so I look around.

My father is already up and his face is in utter disbelief. The only one that seems fascinated is my sister, but that's only because she doesn't really get what's going on. She was probably used to seeing Father fight so nothing outside of that really registered. Vincent and Tabitha's faces are all in sync, faces pale, jaws slack, eyes wide. My mother has her hands covering her mouth in surprise while even Lilia knew that what I did isn't normal.

This reaction was within my expectations.

"Haha... Surprise!" I throw up my arms, laughing weakly.

"Kuu~!" Sylvie scampers towards me and gives me a concerned gaze, as if asking, 'are you okay Papa?'

Vincent is the first to speak up.

“D-deviant!” He spews.

“My god...” Tabitha just sighs in astonishment.

“Art, Holy cr... when did you learn to do that?” My father shakes his head while making his way towards me.

“Not too long ago Dad. I can barely control it though.” I say sheepishly.

We made our way back into the living room and we were all situated around the dining table.

“Rey, y-your son. Do you realize the kind of future he has? He’s only 8 but he’s already stronger than a veteran B rank Adventurer.” Vincent says, hardly able to contain his excitement.

My father scratched his head, “This is crazy. I thought that him awakening at the age of three was already terrifying but to think he was deviant as well.”

“What? He awakened at the age of three?!” Tabitha cried while standing up.

My mother just nods at this, saying, “Arthur managed to blow up most of our house in the process.”

Both my father and Vincent lean back, sinking in their chair, just sighing.

“Papa? Are yoo okay?” Eleanor pokes her father in the cheek.

Laughing, Father picks her up off of Mother’s lap, “Haha

yeah I'm okay princess."

Vincent gets up from his chair now and looks seriously at us, but arms stretched out on the table.

"Rey, how about enrolling your son in Xyrus Academy?"

"What? You can't be serious right Vince? He's only eight!" My father sits up now.

Tabitha chimes in now, "Rey, Alice, I think your child is more than capable of exceeding at Xyrus."

"I thought that only noble geniuses were allowed to attend Xyrus Academy?" Alice responds with concern etched into her face.

Excitedly, Vincent chimes in, "I can handle that! I do a lot of business with the Director of Xyrus Academy so he'll be lenient in the enrollment process."

"B-but the school fees are much too extravagant for us to handle." Rebuts Mother, still not certain about this.

"Alice. That should be the least of your worries. We will be glad to pay for the fees. Arthur's talent is immeasurable. Who knows what he can accomplish. Even if we don't pay, I'm sure he'll be able to find nobles who'd beg to sponsor him." Tabitha grabs Alice's hands in comfort.

"Ahem! Do you mind if I have a say in this?" People seem to forget that the person that they're talking about is right here with them.

"I have just arrived back home today. Can I spend a bit of

time with my family before I decide whether to go to school or not?" I fix my gaze on Vincent.

"O-of course. I apologize. Haha. I guess I was too excited there for a moment."

He just laughs weakly before sitting back down.

"Thank you." I give the Helstea family a smile.

I turn my head to face my mother. "Mom, where do I sleep?"

"Oh yes! I almost forgot! You'll have your room next to Eleanor's in the left wing. Come on, let's all go up now, it's getting late."

Sylvie was already sleeping on my head and my baby sister was nodding in and out of dream world while we were discussing my future.

Today was a long day.

Mother and Father lead me to the room I'll be living in from today onwards. It was a lot larger than my room in Ashber but still minimally decorated. This sat fine with me. I needed some space to train anyway.

As I settled Sylvie down on the bed, Mother and Father sat down next to me.

"We'll go shopping together tomorrow. We need to get you some clothes." My mother pets my head.

My father squats down in front of me and grabs my arm.

“Arthur, whether you’re a genius or not, you’re still my son and I’ll be proud of you and love you regardless of circumstances.” His face was serious.

I quietly nod. I think telling them that about the extent of my abilities can be put off until next time.

Before he gets up, he pats me cheek and gives me an evil smile. “Besides, you only caught me by surprise with your lightning magic today. Don’t think you’ll be able to win so easily next time!”

My mother just chortles at this, “I swear. All you guys think about is fighting.”

She looks at me with a comforting smile in her eyes, “Your father is right though. No matter what kind of genius you are, you’ll still be my baby boy.”

“Haha. Can’t I be your adolescent boy now? I’m eight and a half now Mom!” I just grin at her.

“Nope! You can’t!” She just retorts before the both of them leave my room.

“Get some rest now. Let’s go shopping with your sister tomorrow. It’ll be a great chance for you guys to bond.” My mother says before closing the door to my room.

I don’t even have the energy to wash up. I just plop into bed, bouncing the slumbering Sylvie, who whines at me before nodding off to sleep.

Today was a long day. It was a good, long day.

With a smile plastered on my face, I follow Sylvie into dreamland.

I woke up from my baby dragon licking my face.

“Haha I’m up Sylv, I’m up!”

“Kyu~!” She was hopping up and down on top of me, a feeling of excitement radiating from her.

I thought of Tess. I never thought I would miss being woken up by her Spartan methods. I wonder how she’s doing?

Tess has become my closest friend growing up, and while she has turned a bit fierce, she was still the same kindhearted Tess that worried about me and took care of me while I was in Elenoir.

I took a quick shower, dragging the smelly dragon with me. She cried in distress at the warm water drenching her but I didn’t relent and soon after, we were both sparkling clean.

“...kyu” Sylvie moaned, laying down on my bed, exhausted from struggling.

“Don’t complain! Both of us were filthy and we didn’t wash yesterday either.”

Knock *Knock*

“Coming!” I say, while my shirt was still over my head.

Opening the door, I look down to spot a shy Eleanor, looking down, with her foot rubbing something on the ground.

“Well hello there, Ellie.” I squat down so I’m eye level with her, giving her a smile.

“G-g’morning Brother. Mama told me to w-wake you up.” She mutters, her head still down.

“Haha I see! Thank you very much little sister.” I say while patting her head. This seemed to get a good response out of her and she started giggling.

“Can you take me down to the kitchen?” I ask, holding out my hand.

“En!” She nods excitedly and while she hesitates for a second, she grabs my hand pulls me along.

Sylvie follows behind us, trotting while taking a look around her surroundings.

I’m met with a pleasant smell of something similar to bacon as we enter the kitchen. Inside, I spot Tabitha and Alice cooking something while they were chatting. Lilia was sitting down at the table already, her legs swinging, obviously waiting for breakfast.

“Good morning Mom, Ma’am, Lilia!” I announce.

“G’morning!” “Kyu!” Both Ellie and Sylvie echo.

“Ah! Ellie managed to wake you up! I remember having the hardest time waking you up Art. I swear you sleep like a log.” My mother chuckles as she places the eggs she was cooking into a big plate.

“Did you sleep well?” Smiles Tabitha as she mixes the bowl of greens she had in her hands.

I nod, “I slept great Ma’am.”

“Hi Ellie! G-good morning Arthur.” I see Lilia softly speak as she shies away from my gaze.

I smile and return the greeting.

Breakfast was great! Mother mentioned that usually the maids are the ones to cook but she wanted to cook today for me. It’s been a while since I tried mother’s cooking and I dearly missed it. I made sure to give some of the meat to Sylvie who didn’t hesitate to gobble whatever entered her mouth, including my finger. Eventually, Ellie and Lilia both wanted to try feeding her so I told them to go ahead. Needless to say, Sylvie warmed up to both of them a bit more after being fed by them.

“The carriage is waiting out front so just leave the dishes in the sink and let’s head out!” Announces Tabitha.

Xyrus was an amazing city. I couldn’t help but gawk at the different sights as we travelled down the main road. I could see magic shops, armories, spell books, and even beast core shops! There was everything mages could ask for. Adults all dressed extravagantly while luxurious carriages drove on by. Some buildings were several stories making this city seem a lot bigger than Ashber. I could also see children a couple years older than me all wearing similar uniforms, some black while some grey and red. I assume that they’re students at Xyrus. Uniforms seemed to be a tradition even at the noble geniuses’ academy, so that there were no discrimination based on how rich and affluent your family was.

We eventually reached a section of the city where they sold clothes.

I have to say, shopping for clothes with females takes a harder toll on my body than training with Grandpa Virion, and even at the thought of his training regimen left me in cold sweat.

I was used as a mannequin for each of the girl's own preferences in style. My mother wanted to dress me in simple clothes, while Tabitha wanted to transform me into some sort of prince. Even Lilia and Ellie made me try on some clothes.

“You need to look good since you're my brother!” She announces, her hands on her hips.

Sylvie feels the exhaustion from me and coos comfortingly while perched on my head.

I ended up with 10 different sets of clothes, half from Mother and the other half from Tabitha. Both Mother and I tried to stop Tabitha from buying me anything but she scolded us, playfully saying, “It's an investment. Besides, I've always wanted a son.” while winking.

We looked around more after towing the bags of clothes into the carriage. I was excited to see the armory. I really wanted a decent sword to start practicing swordsmanship again; I was really getting rusty. The girls didn't want that though and I was forced to go into different jewelry and gem stores instead. I guess I'll have to visit the armory with Father next time.

Eventually, we got back home, my physical and mental

strength depleted and father came in soon after.

“How was your day son?” He chuckled, noticing my exhausted face.

“I never thought shopping could be so utterly tiring.” I reply.

Vincent and Tabitha arrive to the kitchen table at this time with Lilia following behind.

“HAHA! I heard you got beat up by a bunch of women today Arthur!” Vincent exclaims.

I just feebly nod while Tabitha just smirks at looks at Mother, “The little prodigy of yours isn’t as big of a deal as I though he was.” Lilia and Ellie giggle at this.

“I swear. A woman’s endurance can’t be matched when they’re out shopping.” I just wryly refute.

My father and Vincent laugh harder at this and nod their head in agreement.

Ding

I hear a bell followed by a couple of knocks.

“Ah! Looks like she’s here!” Vincent perks up.

The look on everyone else’s face notified me that only Vincent knew what was going on.

Vincent comes back, leading an elderly woman into the table we were at.

“Rey, Alice, Arthur, I know you guys said that you want to put off school for later but I just couldn’t hold it in. Everyone. Meet Cynthia Goodsky! She’s the Director of Xyrus Academy.”

Noticing the slight twinge of annoyance on my face, Vincent immediately says, “Don’t worry, I didn’t bring her here to make you go to school right away. I just wanted her to meet you.”

The Director gives me a smile that I can’t quite comprehend and holds out her hand. “Nice to finally meet you Arthur.”

Chapter 19: Proclamation

Xyrus Academy, an Academy hailed as the most exalted Sanctuary for any of the would-be-mages privileged enough to have both the background and talent to enter. There are a couple more academies scattered throughout the Kingdom of Sapin, but needless to say, the level between those second-rate schools and Xyrus is insurmountable.

That was the kind of titan Xyrus Academy was. Those who qualify to graduate from this academy were guaranteed a prosperous future and life. It was rumored that the top graduates can even become honored guards, instructors or military leaders for the Royal Family, for the King of the entire race of humans on this continent. Of course, some chose to go the more humble route and may focus on research by joining one of the mage guilds. However, it is an understatement to say that students of Xyrus Academy are hailed as the true elites, even among nobles.

Now, here I am, standing in front of said Academy's Director. Normally, any eight-year-old, hell, any person would be ecstatic to be in the presence of someone so affluent, but I just scratch my head in annoyance at the unexpected guest.

She was a very tall lady, standing around 1.7 meters, well above the average for the females here. She held herself in a very upright, noble manner. She wore a simple, yet elegant robe that was navy blue, laced with gold threading. She sported a conjurer's hat, an accessory that looked like an oversized witch hat that amplified the absorption rate of the surrounding mana but oftentimes came with other functions.

Strapped to the side of her robe was a wand that was a

crystalline white color with a fluorescent gem attached. Even my ignorant eyes could tell that this wand was extremely valuable. Surprisingly, her face had very soft features that reminded me more of a friendly grandmother next door than an all-important figure of power but the aura she had around her made her seem fairy-like. Her wrinkles couldn't mask the attractive face that she had. The crow's feet etched on the outer ends of her brown eyes actually amplified the attractiveness of her smile when she introduced herself.

“Nice to finally meet you Arthur.” She said, with her hand held out.

What was I supposed to do in this situation? Do I just shake it or is someone of power like her expecting me to kiss her hand or something?

I just go with the safe route and shake it.

“Err... Nice to meet you too Director.”

The Director seemed a little surprised at my introduction.

“Arthur! You're being rude! I'm so sorry for my son Director Goodsky. He just returned home and is ignorant about formal customs.” My mother pushes my head down with her hand while bowing herself, getting on one knee.

Apparently, when meeting someone of high standing, it is customary to get on one knee and shake the hand, while bowing.

How stupid.

“Kukuku, no it is quite all right. No offense taken at all.

And please, Arthur, call me Cynthia.” She just laughs with her free hand covering her mouth.

“I’m sorry to intrude on you at such a late time but unfortunately, the only free time I could make was after my meeting tonight. I hope you don’t mind.” She said, looking at my parents.

“Nonono~ we’re thankful that you’d be willing to take the time out just to visit our son.” My father is the one to speak this time.

By the amount of complimenting I start wondering if this granny can compare to Grandpa Virion.

Director Cynthia nods at this. “True, it isn’t very often that I take a house trip to visit a potential student. Otherwise, even with a hundred bodies, I wouldn’t be able to fit the time hoho.”

“However, Vincent is a good friend and a very reliable business partner that I couldn’t refuse when he excitedly came up to me about a prodigy that is living in his home. I must say that my curiosity got the best of me. Do you mind leading me to an open space so I can see a demonstration?” She continues on, her gaze fixed at me in an assessing manner.

“Can I at least eat din...Ouch!” My mother slaps me in the butt before I could finish my sentence.

“Of course! Please follow us Director Cynthia.” My mother ushers me, leading Director Cynthia while the rest followed.

My dinner...

Sylvie, who was hiding underneath the dinner table from

the unfamiliar human, trots behind me causing Director Cynthia to raise an eyebrow.

“Oh my... What a lovely mana beast. I assume it is your contracted beast right Arthur?” She asks me inquisitively while kneeling down to get a closer view at Sylvie.

“Yeah, she hatched a couple of months ago. Her name is Sylvie.” I just respond, with my mother’s hand still grabbing onto the back of my shirt to keep me from escaping.

“I have to say, while it is common for nobles to buy beasts to contract, I have never seen a mana beast like yours.”

Shrugging my shoulders, I just respond, “I’m not exactly sure what she is either. Her mother seemed to be some sort of scaled wolf like creature. She was already gravely wounded when I stumbled into her nest. She was protecting her egg.”

She reaches to pet Sylvie but she scampers away and climbs unto the top of my head.

“Sorry, she’s a bit shy around strangers.”

“I see. Well enough about her. Let us see if what Vincent wasn’t just exaggeration. He didn’t tell me much except that you’re an Augmenter, saying it was a surprise.” She just shakes her head.

We arrived at the backyard and everyone was seated a couple meters away, Sylvie struggling to escape the grasp of my little sister, whom I entrusted her with.

“You’re not going to use your wand?” I start stretching.

“It isn’t very fair of me to be using a weapon when you yourself are empty handed as well, right?” She gives me a wink.

I guess she’s right.

I stomp my right foot into the ground and a piece of the ground, the size of my body thrusts up. My hands are lazily in my pocket so I kick the rock at Director Cynthia’s direction.

A wind wall that appeared instantly in front of her knocked up the rock I just kicked.

Whistle Oh. Insta-casting.

I guess she’s not the Director for nothing.

I see her face visibly shocked by the sudden attack I threw at her. She wasn’t expecting an elemental attack from a child, even if she knew was an Augmenter.

I wonder who’s better at controlling wind.

I will a gust of wind underneath my feet and propel myself to her.

“D-dual Elemental...” Before she even had the chance to finish her sentence, I jump up three meters into the air with the help of my wind attribute skill and focus a condensed whirlwind into my right fist that starts glowing a faint silver color. Using the piece of earth that was knocked up by the Director, I use it as a foothold to lunge myself into her.

FWISH

The collision of her wind wall and my whirlwind fist

creates chaotic streams of wind that forces the audience to cover their faces.

The collision blows me back as she also takes a few steps to steady herself. Before I get the chance to balance myself, I see four twisters the size of small trees form around her and she wills it towards my direction.

I gather the wind element around my body as well, making a small cyclone form around me spinning the opposite direction of Director Goodsky's. Using the centrifugal force generated by my cyclone, I start spinning along with it, using my hands to create blades of wind.

The clash between the four twisters and my cyclone creates a small crater but otherwise doesn't do me any harm besides me being a bit dizzy.

PANG

Instantly I'm knocked back, my ears ringing and my vision unsteady.

A Sound user! She was a deviant!

I steady myself, taking a glance at my opponent and she's staring at me with an awestruck face that makes her seem like a tacky tourist in a foreign country, her right arm still raised from the last attack.

I sit back down. Damn. Couldn't win.

"That should be enough for a demonstration right Director?" I rub my temples.

“Y-yes... That is quite sufficient.” Her voice doesn’t sound like the voice of the winner’s but someone who was thoroughly beaten.

She regains her composure and starts walking towards me when I hear my father’s voice.

“A-Arthur... You know how to use Earth and Wind attribute skills as well?”

“What do you mean, ‘as well’” Director Cynthia’s composed look turns into a look of confusion.

My mother continues on for my baffled father.

“H-he, my son, we thought he was a Fire Elemental. He’s a deviant as well that can use Lightning!”

I can hear Director Cynthia’s breath turn short as she’s still trying to take in what my mother has told her.

“S-surely you jest... you can not mean to say that he is capable of controlling three elements...”

“Four actually. I can control all four.” I interrupt. Everyone was going to find out anyway. This wasn’t something that I could, nor wanted to hide.

“Earth and Wind are my weakest elements. I’m a lot more adept in controlling Fire and Water. I also happen to be deviants in both those elements, although I just started training in them.” I get up now, recovering from the previous attack. I wasn’t expecting a Sound user so I didn’t bother to enhance my ears.

No one responded back to what I said and the only thing I hear are the clichéd sounds of crickets chirping. I hope that this is the last time that they get surprised like this.

The noble figure that controls the most prominent school in the continent falls to her behind in a less than elegant fashion, and she's just muttering something to herself.

Finally, facing me, she says, "Arthur, you mean to tell me that you are a Quadra Elemental capable of controlling two higher elements?"

I'm also a Dragon Tamer, but that's about it. I wonder how they would react if I told them that.

"Correct. This is probably all a big surprise to everyone because this is the first time I'm revealing this fact, but yeah." I scratch my head.

"Please demonstrate." Director Cynthia's eyes grew menacing and the once friendly grandmother now had the look of a veteran killer as she raised her hand, the mana around her fluctuating.

Suddenly, a vacuum of wind sucked me in towards her as her other hand was preparing a visible ball of wind.

This woman...

I will water into my right palm and a condensed ball of fire in my left palm. She wanted to see so badly; I'll just have to show her.

I combine the two opposing skills together and a massive cloud of steam was produced, completely enshrouding the

both of us from everyone else's sight.

Moments passed and everyone outside of the cloud had no idea what was happening, only sounds of battle being heard until a strong torrent of wind completely blows away the cloud. I was in a lot worse shape than her, but I did manage to wound her a bit, even drawing blood.

“Whew! I must say that I'm thoroughly convinced! You pass Arthur Leywin.” She pats my shoulder but it felt more like my shoulder was sucked into her palm.

The scarce wounds that I did manage to draw on her were already disappearing and so were mine, leaving the audience dumbfounded at what just happened.

“Sorry Mom, sorry Dad for hiding this from you guys.” I became a little worried that my parents might be angry that I had so many secrets from them, but fortunately, my father took it pretty well.

“BAHAHAHA My son is the first ever Quadra Elemental!” He picks me up by my armpits and swings me around like he did when I was an infant.

Ooh, the traumatic memories are popping back up.

“Please Art, no more secrets.” My mother just wryly smiled, concern still etched onto her face.

I couldn't promise her that, but I'd like to believe it was for her protection, not my benefit.

“Forget a Quadra Elemental, in this continent, there aren't even any Tri Elementals but you Art...” She doesn't finish her

sentence, just shaking her head again.

“Is Brother strong?” My sister chimes in, still clutching unto Sylvie.

Patting her head, the Director nods, “Your brother is very strong little one.”

“Heehee!” She has a proud look on her face, as if she’s the one getting complimented.

Vincent’s face is still a picture of disbelief as he’s still processing everything, as Lilia is making sure he’s all right. She’s looking towards my direction with a mixture of astonishment and a little fear in her face.

I don’t blame her.

My father sets me down and I turn to Director Cynthia, giving her a stern gaze, a gaze that doesn’t fit an eight-year-old.

“Director Goodsky. There’s actually a reason I didn’t hide my capabilities today.”

Picking up on the seriousness in my voice, she nods in understanding. “I had a hunch that you weren’t just brazenly showing off your skills Arthur. You seem too sharp for that.”

Agreeing with her, I respond, “There are only a few benefits I can gain from attending your school. One is learning how to utilize my Lightning and Ice elements. However, that is something I can learn on my own with due time. No. The main reason I would attend your academy is for protection.

Right now, I’m not strong enough to protect everyone. However, you hold a position of power and influence that can

provide safety for my family and I, at least until I gain the strength to protect them myself.”

“Arthur! You’re being rude to Director Cynthia! How can you...”

“Kukuku! No it’s fine Alice. I completely agree with Arthur.” The Director interrupts my scolding mother.

“I don’t plan on flaunting my abilities to gain everyone’s attention but I also can’t abide to hide and cower in front of anyone who disrespects me or my family. I also am striving to become someone of great power. For that, I need your protection from those who would do me harm until I accomplish what I aim for. If you can provide that for me, I am more than willing to attend your academy and have you as my benefactor.” I finish off, getting the crying Sylvie from my sister.

“Hahaha! I never thought that in my years of being a Director as well as a Silver Stage Conjuror, someone would audaciously propose such a one sided deal to me. There are nobles that beg me for a spot in my academy for their children but you speak as if it would be my honor for you to attend. Kukuku I accept! I accept your proposal 100%!” She continues laughing.

“I apologize for sounding so conceited but this matter is of upmost importance to me so I do not wish to hide anything from you.” I just scratch my cheek.

My parents just shake their head in defeat, as if saying, ‘what are we going to do with our child.’

Giving her a sincere smile, I continue, “Of course, this

matter will not officially start until I choose to enroll at your academy.”

“Oh? Were you not planning on enrolling into my Academy anytime soon?” This time, the Director as well as every other adult had looks of puzzlement on their faces.

“I don’t plan on entering Xyrus Academy until I would be of a normal age to actually attend. No. I’ve decided to enter your academy on my twelfth birthday, a very average age for one to enter your Academy. I assume that would be no problem?” I just tilt my head.

“Goodness! That’s in a little over three years. Arthur, do you have any plans on what to do until then?” I figured Director Goodsky wouldn’t be so accepting on prolonging my education for over three years.

I turn to face my parents this time, since it was up to them to allow me or not.

I look up at the night sky, stars shining. Unlike my old world, the lack of bright lights truly makes the nighttime beautiful. Turning my gaze back to where my family was, I answer.

“I’d like to become an Adventurer.”

Chapter 20: Everybody Wins

“No! Absolutely no way! Arthur! Do you know how dangerous it is to become an Adventurer? You’ve just gotten back after we all thought you were dead and now you’re saying you want to go get yourself killed out there? No way! Absolutely not.”

My mother was on the verge of tears while saying this. She’s never been good at controlling her emotions. Eleanor is besides her, clutching onto her leg.

“Mama, don’t be angry. Brother not bad a person! Uuu... Mama, don’t cry.”

Director Goodsky left the manor after my announcement. I could tell she still wanted to ask me a lot of questions but we excused ourselves to have a family talk. We were currently inside my parent’s room with my mother standing up in front of me, forbidding me to even think about doing anything remotely dangerous.

Father was a bit more rational. I could tell he didn’t like the idea as well, but he couldn’t really see any reason for me not to be an Adventurer besides my age.

I wasn’t going to debate with my mother. She was saying all of this because she was worried and I don’t blame her. It was something I expected and I wanted to slowly ease her into the idea but I guess that plans out of the bag now.

After being silent the whole time, my father finally speaks up. “Honey, let’s hear Arthur out at least. I’m not saying I

agree to him becoming an Adventurer but don't you think we should at least listen to what he has to say?"

Hic

My mother stops her protest and just quietly sniffles.

I grab my mother's hands. "Mom. I wasn't planning on leaving tomorrow. I was looking forward to spending a couple of months at home with you guys anyhow."

Her face softened at that and I just gave her a warm smile, Sylvie following suit and licking her hand.

"What I meant by becoming an Adventurer was so that I can get some experience. After being in the Elf Kingdom for three years, I missed a lot about what I should know about this world of ours. I just thought that becoming an Adventurer would be the best way to gain some practical experience." I say, not letting go of Mother's hands.

"I understand where you're coming from Arthur. Although I was a bit older, I was also itching to get some real life experience in fighting as soon as I awakened as a mage." He reminisced. "But your mother is also right in that it is dangerous."

My mother nods her head vigorously at this.

I think for a little bit.

"Dad. Mom. What if I were to have some sort of guard or supervisor with me? Would that make you feel a bit more at ease with this whole idea?"

“ ... ”

“Hmm... You know, that’s not a bad idea.” My father’s head winds as he starts thinking of different ideas.

“B-but... I still won’t be able to see you for months!” My mother begins to protest again.

Shaking my head, I say to her. “Mom, I’m not going to go on long trips or go on dangerous missions to faraway places. I’ll try to come back every so often, maybe even more frequently than that, depending on what I do.”

“Brother, are you leaving?” My sister looks at me as if she was just told that Santa didn’t exist.

I start to panic. “Nono Ellie I’m staying here. You’ll be seeing your brother a lot from now on okay?”

Apparently, both my mother and father have told Eleanor a lot of stories about me and how strong and smart I am. One of Ellie’s favorite bedtime stories was how I saved her from a bunch of bad guys on top of a cliff and that I got hurt so it’ll take me some time to come back home. Eventually, I became a sort of hero figure to my sister.

I look back at my mother. Her face was considerably more at ease after talking about this. I guess she just assumed the worst-case scenario and thought I wanted to slay the world’s strongest evil at the age of eight or something.

“Why did you want to be an Adventurer before even going to school anyways? Isn’t it usually the opposite?” My mother softly mutters.

“Dad’s reason was a part of it in that, I want to test my skills out in real life situations. Also, Mom, I want to at least try to fit in with everyone when I go to school. It will be a lot harder to fit in if I begin school at the age of eight. I don’t think I’ll be able to make much friends with such a big age difference.”

For once, Mother gives me a look of approval. A mother’s worst nightmare is her child becoming a loner.

I say this while thinking of Sylvia’s dying wish. She wanted me to enjoy life and have a life not just of training. This was a promise that I planned on keeping no matter what.

“Besides, I’m going to be here for a couple of months anyway. Who know, maybe you’ll get sick of me by then and throw me out before I even get the chance to leave.” I wink at Mother.

That earns me a thump on the head but she chuckles as well. “You! You’re just like your father at times like these. Thank God you at least have my intelligence.” She gives me a big hug, leaving me with a warm feeling inside.

“Hey! What about my intelligence! He was gifted with my adept abilities in fire too!” My father protests.

“Hmph! MY son got his deviant powers from me.” Mother just turns me away from my father and just sticks her tongue out at him.

“Ellie too! Bleh!” My sister copies my mother and sticks her tongue out at my devastated father.

“Sniff! No ones on my side.” He just playfully cries, trying to hug his my daughter.

This leaves us all in a fit of laughter.

The next day is a Sunday, leaving my father with the day off. Both the Leywin and Helstea family are dining together for breakfast.

“So did you guys settle on what to do about Arthur?” Asks Vincent, half chewing on his omelet.

Tabitha shakes her head; “I swear. Sometimes, I have such a hard time believing you’re a noble with your horrible dining habits, dear.

“Kukuku, don’t worry. At least your husband’s better than mine. Remember that one dinner party where Rey spit out his food from laughing so hard? I had to use Ellie as an excuse to leave the table because I was so embarrassed.” My mother just sighs.

“Cough! Anyways! Yes, after talking about it yesterday night, we agreed to let him become an Adventurer under some conditions, Vince.” My father just lightly blushes as he tries to switch back the topic.

“Oh? What conditions?” Responds the curious Tabitha as she’s cutting the omelet into smaller pieces for Lilia.

“He’s not going to become an Adventurer until after his birthday, which is in 3 months. We also decided on having a guard with him on his missions. Besides that, I feel like he’ll be smart enough to manage the rest on his own. Of course, the last condition is that he’ll be visiting as often as possible.” My father explained, working on the rest of roast beef.

“Do you have anyone in mind for who his guard is going to be? Heck, is there even a guard that is capable of guarding him? I feel like Arthur is going to be the one protecting the guard!” He just chuckles at the ridiculousness of an eight year old protecting a grown, veteran Adventurer.

My mother answers him, looking at my father, “We haven’t really thought of a person that fits the criteria. Rey and I thought we could use one of the Helstea Auction guards, but we couldn’t really come up with anyone right?”

“Can I have more omelet please?” My sister chimes in with her fork raised in the air.

“I got it!” My father stands up from his sudden revelation, making me almost choke on the piece of meat that was in my mouth.

“The Twin Horns will be coming back from an expedition in a dungeon soon. I received a letter from the Adventurer Guild Hall that says they should be back within two months! It’s perfect! Why did it take so long for me to think of this? We can just have one of the Twin Horns to look after you. Arthur! You still remember them right?” My father’s eyes shine in excitement.

“Hey! That’s not a bad idea!” My mother says from the kitchen, her voice implying the rarity in my father having a good idea.

Handing a piece of meat to Sylvie who’s perched on my lap with her front two paws on the table, I respond too. “Of course I remember them. That sounds like a great idea Dad. Do they know I’m back?”

“No, unfortunately, I haven’t had the chance to send a mail to them yet. I was planning on doing that today.” My father sits back down, scratching his head.

Vincent chimes in on the conversation after finishing off his breakfast.

“Arthur, you said to Director Cynthia yesterday about not showing your powers to anyone until you enroll into Xyrus Academy right? How are you planning on doing that while you’re an Adventurer?”

“Ah yes. I’ve been meaning to get to that.” I say while I pick up a strawberry with my fork. “I plan on keeping my identity hidden as an Adventurer. I’ve read that there are many members of the Adventurer’s Guild that go by aliases, not revealing their identities to the public.” Unfortunately, since there is no way of masking the appearance of Sylvie, I’ll just have to do a good job of hiding her. Thankfully, she’s small enough to fit inside a cloak if the pocket is big enough.

“Mmm... I see.” Both Vincent and Tabitha nod at this.

With that, breakfast ended and we all separated.

Father went to the Guild Hall to send a letter to his old party members while my mother and Tabitha went shopping, taking Ellie and Lilia along with them. They asked me to come as well but I politely declined the offer to endure the suffering they call a pastime event.

I washed up and headed towards the right wing of the manor, where Vincent’s office was.

Knock *Knock*

“Yes?”

“It’s Arthur.” I respond.

The door opens and I see a curious look on Vincent’s face. “Ah come in! What brings you here Arthur? You’ve never really come into my office before.”

“Ah yes. There is a certain matter I wish to talk to you about today, which is why I visited.” I said while looking around. He had piles of documents on the floor and on his desk.

VINCENT HELSTEA’S POV:

Is this child really only eight years old?

Shivers ran down my spine at the tone of his voice. Why am I nervous at the mention of a ‘certain matter’ he wants to talk to me about?

“What sort of matter is it?” I just ask, my face turning a bit more serious.

“I would like your help in obtaining a few items that might be hard to find elsewhere.” Continuing, he sits down and says with his eyes looking straight at me. “I need a sturdy hooded cloak or robe and a mask that can cover my entire face. It’s imperative that the mask has the function of changing my voice.”

It wasn’t hard to figure out why he wanted these items. As the owner of the famous Helstea Auction House that attracts even the highest of nobles and even the Royal Family, it

shouldn't be too hard to get these items. The mask might be a little tricky because a Sound Elemental Artificer would need to be the one to make this but it could be done.

Yet... why is there such a heavy feeling in this room?

I couldn't quite place my finger on it...

That's it!

Why is this eight-year-old child giving off the same aura as the time I was next to the King of Sapin himself?

No. The atmosphere now is even heavier than that.

He was clearly asking me for a favor. But it feels as though he is gauging me, almost as if he's trying to evaluate where to put me on his list of 'people to keep alive'.

I've never felt this from him, but that was probably because I've only ever seen him with his family.

I quickly reply, wanting to get it over with. "Sure, it shouldn't be a problem getting those things. The mask might take a bit of time but I'm sure we'll have it before you become an Adventurer."

His slight nod actually fills me with relief. I have nobles that wait in line to introduce themselves to me but this kid...

"Is there anything you would need my help in for in exchange? I would feel bad just asking for this without any compensation." He responds.

I feel a little sweat forming above my brows. "I-it's fine

really. I owe your father a lot actually. He may be working for me but the way he trains my guards have really lessened the number of problems that happen during the auctions.”

This was the truth actually. Rey has become an irreplaceable part of the Helstea Auction Houses. His leadership and charisma amongst the guards he trains is first class. I owed him when he saved my life and I owe him and his family now. With the generous salary that is well above the average and letting his family stay in our house, I feel, is actually a bargain on my part. Both Tabitha and Lilia have been happier now than ever after Rey moved in with Alice and had Ellie. I was always filled with guilt for not being able to spend as much time with my family as they wanted but things are now a lot better.

“Hmm, speaking of training, that actually gives me an idea.” He says while looking down.

I’ve noticed quite a while ago that, when Arthur starts thinking, he has this look... this look where his gaze focuses afar and his brows furrow, the subtle crease near his lips and the slight twitch on his nose that make him appear to be thinking of something above what normal human intelligence is capable of; the look of a true intellectual. Sigh. It’s hard to believe that he’s the same age as my little Lilia.

“Allow me to start training your daughter to become a mage.” He puts down this landmine as if he was just talking about the weather.

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

“I’ve been meaning to start teaching my baby sister in

mana manipulation soon. It wouldn't be too much trouble to include Lilia in these lessons. I noticed that both you and Lady Tabitha are not mages so it might be impossible for her to awaken by herself, but if we start now, I think she'd be able to awaken around the average age." I say.

My statement is met with silence. I look up to see Vincent drop the stack of papers he was fumbling his finger with nervously. His face is frozen in place and I hear his heart beating faster.

"C-can I truly believe what you just said? Can you really allow my daughter to become a m-mage?" He says after a seemingly long moment of silence.

"Sure. It'll be a long process but it's definitely possible. Er... I will have to ask you to keep the lessons on a low profile though. I would hate to be bombarded with doting parents asking to make their children into mages." I just chuckle.

He nods furiously, not finding the correct words to answer verbally.

"Sincerely... there would be no greater happiness than seeing my daughter become a mage." He manages to stammer out, tears on the verge falling down.

"Great! Then I'll leave the items we discussed to you! Now, allow me to excuse myself out. Sorry for intruding in on your work."

I leave, picking up the sleeping Sylvie from my lap.

I'm glad that worked out well.

Chapter 21: For Them

LILIA HELSTEA'S POV:

I'm shopping with Mommy and Lady Alice and Ellie. Ellie seems a little bit disappointed that her brother didn't want to join us so I'm holding her hand to comfort her.

"Hey Ellie. Do you like your big brother that much?"

"En! But he's a meanie for not shopping with us. I wanted to dress him up more." She just pouts.

"Do you like me better or your big brother?"

She just says, "Umm...I like both!"

"Kukuku. Lilia, what are you asking Ellie?" My mom asks, pulling my other hand.

She continues, "Lilia, what do you think of Arthur?"

"Uuu he's a little scary. How is he so strong Mommy? I thought kids like us couldn't be mages until we're all grown up?" It wasn't fair. I've always dreamt of becoming a mage and making Mommy and Papa happy.

My mom looks at Lady Alice, "I guess it's because he's a very gifted child. But Alice, do you really have no problems with everything he told you? I don't mean to butt in on your parenting but doesn't it just seem a little too weird? How did he get so powerful during this time? You've told me that he was pretty good at fighting even before the bandit attack."

I see Lady Alice just shake her head. “Of course I know he’s hiding a lot of things. He probably doesn’t know but it’s pretty obvious when he’s lying. He tends to focus his gaze on one point and his voice turns monotone when he lies. It’s pretty cute how he thinks he’s being sneaky actually. ‘Sigh’, Tabitha, I know he’s keeping things from us and so does Rey, but we agreed on giving him some space until he’s comfortable enough to tell us himself. I guess that’s just what it means to be a parent. I know he doesn’t mean any harm so all we can do is just support him until he’s ready.”

“Lying is bad!” Little Ellie declares.

I just agree with her on that. “Yeah Ellie! Lying is bad!”

ARTHUR LEYWIN’S POV:

I start concentrating on my mana core. I’m getting too impatient with my training. I want to hurry up and get to the previous level in my past life but that isn’t happening as fast as I want it to.

The little fight with Director Goodsky made it all too real for me. I’m too inexperienced and weak. It didn’t really affect me until now, but I’m not used to fighting Conjurers. The fact that there were nothing like Conjurers in my previous world makes fighting one now a lot more difficult.

My concentration wavers while my mind flashes back to my past life. The scene on that foggy night when the orphanage’s head caretaker, the closest thing to a mother figure I had, was shot. I was still young at that time, but if I think back

now, that was probably the reason I started training like a madman. Head mother was the one that picked me off the streets, giving me a steamed bun. After that, she took care of me, taught me how to read and write, scolded me and taught me manners.

I didn't want to become a King; I just wanted vengeance. I just wanted to be strong enough to kill the ones responsible for the death of the person that took care of me... that loved me. It's never as simple as that though. It turned out that the ones responsible for killing the orphanage head caretaker, along with other leader figures of the various orphanages, was the military from another country.

I realized that no matter how powerful an individual is he's still just one person. I needed authority along with my power. Becoming a King then served its purpose. The first thing I did when I was appointed King was destroying that country. I bloodied my hands with the corpses of hundreds of thousands of soldiers and millions all together. The cruel thing, though, is that no matter what kind of revenge is taken, it doesn't change what happened to her. She still died an unjust death.

This life was going to be different. I'm not going to let the ones I treasure suffer.

Sylvie nudges her wet nose at me, a concerned gaze fixed on my eyes. 'I'm here, feel better' is what she seemed to say to me.

Petting her head, I stir myself out of those damnable memories.

I wash myself off, laughing at the crying Sylvie who still hates getting wet. I'm glad I had her by my side. It's not

healthy for me to be alone thinking by myself for too long.

Just on time, the girls get back from their shopping trip by the time I finished dressing up. I hop down the stairs to greet them.

“Hmph! Brother is a meanie!” My sister just puckers her lower lip with her arms crossed.

“Is it because I didn’t go shopping with you Ellie? I’m sorry.” I pat her turned head, which makes her tense her face as she forces herself to keep from smiling.

“How was shopping Mom, Lady Tabitha? Did you guys buy a lot of stuff?” I ask, my hand still on my sister’s head.

“We didn’t buy much, just a couple of new outfits for Ellie and Lilia.” My mother responds.

At this time, I hear footsteps storm into our direction. Vincent arrives next to us with an excited look on his face. His eyes are a little red and he has an uncontainable smile on his face.

“You guys are finally here!” He says picking up his daughter and kissing her cheek.

“Honey, why are you so flustered? Have you been crying? “What is going on?” Tabitha has a bewildered look on her face from confusion and worry. Vince does look a little crazy right now.

“You didn’t tell them yet Arthur?” He faces me, a smile still on his face.

Shaking my head, I chuckle, “I just got down as well. I was about to tell them.”

“Tell us what baby?” My mother has a look of concern as well. Mothers never liked not knowing what’s going on.

“I discussed with Mr. Vincent about teaching Ellie and Lilia mana manipulation starting today. Of course, only if Lady Tabitha is okay with it.”

“ .. ”

Tabitha just shakes her head, looking at her husband. “W-wait, hold on. Is this some sort of prank? If it is, it’s not funny.”

“No ma’am. I know both you and Sir Vincent aren’t mages but it is possible for Lilia to become one.” I give her a stern gaze, indicating that I’m not joking.

“N-no way. I’ve never heard of a method for teaching someone mana manipulation. I’ve been taught that it’s up to the child’s innate talent to awaken by herself. Why haven’t I heard anyone else teaching kids then?”

Tabitha had a lot harder time believing that Lilia could become a mage than her husband. I don’t blame her though. Vincent didn’t even question me, which was surprising. I’m sure the biggest worry for a mother from a noble family is the future of her children and in a society where mages are the elites; the Helstea’s lineage, no matter how rich they were, would get more than a few looks of pity.

“Yeah I’ve never heard of anything like teaching a child mana manipulation either Art. How do you plan on doing this?” My mother quizzes.

“Mom, you guys all know how I awakened at the age of 3 right? I still remember what happened and why it did. I’m going to do what I did on myself to them. I’ll have to test them before I can even start but for Ellie, I’m 100% sure she’ll be able to awaken and for Lilia, around 70%.” I say. The probability was higher than what I said for Lilia but I didn’t want to get their hopes up too much. There was still a chance she wouldn’t be able to awaken.

“Heavens. T-this is. Give me a minute. I need to sit down.” I see Tabitha’s knees wobble as she’s making herself to the couch.

“This isn’t going to be an instant thing. It’ll take a couple of years for them to awaken on their own after I teach them.”

The Helstea parents just nod at this and I turn to face the confused Lilia and Ellie.

“Ellie, Lilia, can you guys sit down on the floor over by the fireplace?” I say, guiding them into the living room.

“I want you guys to sit in your most comfortable position back to back. Leave some space between you guys so I can sit in between.” I calmly instruct.

Ellie is still a little clueless as to what’s going on but Lilia has gotten the gist of what is happening and I can see a determined look on her face. Ellie sits down with her legs stuck out in front of her while Lilia sits in a more ladylike position with both her legs tucked in to her left side.

“Okay. Before I do anything, I want you guys to close your eyes and concentrate. If you try really hard, you’ll be able to see

some spots of light. Do you see it?” I place myself between them now as Tabitha, Vincent, and my mother are staring intently as to what was going on.

“ ... ”

“N-no... I don’t really see anything.” I hear a murmur from Lilia. I expected much but I turn to see everyone have looks of panic on them. Ignoring them, I turn to face my sister and ask her the same thing. I was less afraid of her seeing the light, but not recognizing what to actually spot.

Thankfully, she responds, “Brother, I think I see a small pretty light!”

The next step involved doing something that only I was capable of doing. I had to will mana of all four elemental attributes at the same time into their bodies. Doing this, they’ll be able to see a lot more clearly the specks of mana that are scattered in their body.

“Okay I’m going to start now. You guys will feel a little bit feverish but I want you guys to endure it and just focus on the specks of light.” As soon as I say that, I will my Quadra Elemental mana into them.

The reason that all four elements had to be exerted unto them was because the mana that have yet to gather and form a mana core is at its purest form, meaning that all four elements need to be exerted at the same power into their bodies to trigger any sort of responses from the dormant mana all over the insides of their bodies.

Whoosh

“Eep!” “Hng” I hear Lilia and Ellie yelp out a little in surprise.

“I-I think I see some of the lights! They’re so pretty!” Exclaims Lilia.

“Wow! So many!” Echoes my little sister.

“Okay, this part is important, I’m going to help you guys with this part but your job is to try and connect all of the little lights okay? Do you get that Ellie? Pretend that all of the little lights are friends and they need to meet together. Can you do that for me Ellie?” This was the trickiest and longest part and I had to make sure that they understood what to do.

“O-okay! I think I get it!” “The lights are friends? Okay!” I hear from them.

I stay in my position for a couple more minutes to trigger the dormant mana in their body, at least enough so they’ll be a lot more apparent for them to manipulate and gather.

Taking a deep breath, I remove my hands from their back, instructing them to continue gathering the little lights until the lights disappear.

“How is it? D-do you think Lilia will be able to become a mage?” Both the Helstea parents are a mess. They have anxious looks on their faces while Vincent is nervously chewing on a fingernail. I look at my mother and even she has a hint of uneasiness in her eyes.

I give them a wide smile. “Don’t worry, both Lilia and my little sister should awaken as a mage within a few years. My plan is to do this with them every day for the few months that

I'll be home. By a month or two, they should be capable of training on their own to form a mana cor..."

Tabitha doesn't even let me finish as she's already giving me a big hug. "Oh thank you thank you thank you. My baby will be able to learn magic! Oh my goodness I was so worried what her future would be since both of us aren't mages. *sniff* Uuu... thank you so much Arthur."

I see Vincent's face streaming tears as he's silently looking at his daughter meditating. My mother pats my head silently, giving me a proud smile.

It wasn't as big of a deal for Ellie to become a mage since our whole family can use magic. The chances of her never awakening would have been slim to none even if I didn't do anything. I was just speeding up the process. I figure the faster she learns magic, the faster she'll be able to protect herself.

The two girls lasted a couple of hours before the mana I exerted dispersed out of their body. Surprisingly, Lilia actually lasted longer than Ellie. She definitely has more willpower than my four-year-old sister.

My father came a bit after from the Guild Hall and was excited and happy for the Helstea family that they're going to have their first mage in the family.

Picking up Eleanor and rubbing his beard on her cheek, my father just cooed, "Aww, my little baby is going to be strong like her older brother! Promise me you won't be stronger than father okay? Or he'll be very sad."

My mother just laughs at this while my sister just giggles and pushes Father's face away. "Papa! Your beard tickles! St-op

hehe!”

We had a great dinner party that night. Vincent and Tabitha went all out on the delicacies leaving my mouth watering and Sylv drooling right next to me. We ended the night with everyone feeling merry, Vincent going around offering drinks to even the maids and butlers.

The following days consisted of condensing my mana core and my elemental skills along with my Dragon’s will powers. This was a mind-numbingly slow process and I felt myself stagnating because of the lack of stimulation.

I spent a few days out of the week sparring with Father but I can tell he’s afraid of hurting me, always holding back.

Besides my training, I spend a couple of hours everyday watching over my sister and Lilia while they continue to try and form their cores. It was a strenuous process and I can see my sister being a bit more impatient with the training but I try to help her through it by making games out of it.

During this time, I got to talk to my mother about her abilities as an Emitter. I asked how she was able to learn it and train it when there were so few Emitters and she smiled at me mysteriously, saying how a woman needs to have a few secrets of her own.

I guess I’ll have to ask her again when she’s feeling less secretive.

Two weeks before my birthday and the start of my career as an Adventurer, I’m startled by loud obnoxious knocks on the front door. Opening the door, the faces of the all too familiar group makes my lips curl up.