

EARTHS G MAGUS 51

51 Supreme Magus

Standing already in the room was a skinny old man attending to the browned-skin, face filled with white stripes was Magus Erica. She was wrapped from neck to toe with a cloth that seemed to glow ever so slightly, leaving her head still visible.

It didn't take long for more people to come in but this entourage had a different aura surrounding them. As they entered the room and stood on the side, they were as still as a rock and seemed ready to welcome a person of great importance. When the last person walked in, all the sitting magi stood up and bowed along with the magi on the side.

He was wearing a slightly different uniform from the rest that had entered and a monocle on the left eye. He brushed his mustache as the magi in the room stood up in attention. The thin old man attending to Magus Erica still had his back facing the respected individual, which the other party didn't mind.

The man with the monocle bowed and politely said to the thin old man, "Grand Magus Yvere, we have just finished our investigation."

"I see, we appreciate your help, Magister Leon. Let us wait a few moments more for Headmaster Altus Dreyden to arrive."

"Thank you, Grand Magus Yvere," said Leon before heading back to the side.

The skinny old man was the Plant Institute's Chief Instructor of this Magus Academy named Yvere, while the man with the monocle was a Magister named Leon sent from this world's government to investigate last night's events. The magus academy normally had their own people to do such things, but matters involving the elves, mankind's mortal enemy, this world's government tended to get involved.

A few moments had passed and the tapping of a stick against the wooden floor entered people's ear sitting in the room. That only meant one thing, the Headmaster had arrived. He was a wrinkled old man with a white beard, spanning beneath his chest, and held a wooden stick as he walked with it. Everyone bowed deeply as soon as Altus Dreyden, Headmaster of the Magus Academy, entered the room except for Yvere.

The aura inside the chamber instantly became serious. Altus Dreyden said with a calm voice, "You may take your seat, everyone."

He went toward Yvere and observed Magus Erica for a moment. "It looks like she'll recover soon. Your plant magic has always been a wonder, Yvere."

"Ahh, it's just a simple new spell," said Yvere while continuously channeling plant healing magic through the cloth.

Altus laughed. He turned his head to the monocle man and said, "Magister Leon, what has your investigation resulted in?"

Altus looked thoughtful before responding, "It seems too much for the elves to come into one of our magus institutes deep in human territory just to chase an unidentified elf, right?"

"We agree, Headmaster Altus. We suspect the elf who had been chased must be a person of importance since the entity that came after was Agis, the Red Demon," answered, Magister Leon.

"Hmm... Interesting... Is Agis the one who fought our instructing magi?" said Altus, looking at Minerva, Darius, as well as others, who appeared to be still injured based on how they had glowing bandages wrapped around on some parts of their bodies like Magus Erica. They appeared embarrassed because they unconsciously couldn't look straight into the Headmaster's eyes, but Altus waved it off by saying, "Well, no need to feel ashamed. Fighting with the Red Demon with no casualty is already a feat by itself."

"About that, Altus, we do have some casualties. A few acolytes had died during the quest Master Grom issues every year," said Yvere, finally stopping his plant healing spell on Magus Erica. He took a seat afterwards.

"Aaahh, poor children."

Magister Leon spoke once more. "We also have a report that one of the surviving acolytes mentioned the elves had taken captive on one of our acolytes."

Altus' brows furrowed and asked, "And why did they do that?"

"We don't have information on that yet. The surviving girl acolyte who had shared this information didn't mention anything else other than finding the elf's corpse and escaping with one of our acolytes, hence, we are dubious of the whole event."

Altus stooped silence for a while seemingly thinking of possibilities. After trying to make sense of things, he sighed and said, "Magister Leon, please update me if you find new information."

Magister Leon bowed and said, "Understood, Headmaster Altus. We will inform you of any updates we find."

After Magister Leon said his piece, his group of men in uniform walked out of the room and left. Headmaster Altus then turned to the magi left and said, "The war has arrived at the academy's front doors even though we are so far behind the warzone. I hope everyone can always remember to be cautious, but remember our main role is to instruct these new young acolytes. They are the future protectors of humankind."

Headmaster Altus thought for a little while and continued "Tomorrow morning, I'd like to see those who are most talented among the first years."

"Yes, Headmaster Altus," they all replied at the same time before leaving Altus and Yvere.

Altus stepped closer to Yvere and said, "We rarely see these days, Yvere. How's your cultivation? Have you had any improvement?"

Yvere laughed to himself and replied, "Not really, Altus."

"That's too bad. We need you on the frontline and if you have gone to the war like the others, you would have improved much faster," said Altus with a low voice.

Yvere simply smiled and replied, "You know everyone has their own purpose, Altus. Mine is here, in Elder's Respite. I've heard that Zenoia has been enlightened today. Is that true?"

Altus nodded and said, "I hope she manages to breakthrough as a Supreme Magus. That'll turn out to be the best for the sake of humanity."

52 Oath

It was already late afternoon when he had returned to their private quarters and the others weren't there with the exception of Julian. Emery sat by the table and waited for Julian to speak who seemed to be in deep thought.

"Hey, welcome back, Emery. Can you tell me what your country is like? I've only heard and read the stories but haven't had a chance to visit there yet," asked Julian, looking at the endless expanse of clouds covered with the orange tint of the setting sun by the window.

"What are the stories you've heard?" said Emery, drinking a glass of water.

"Well, to sum it up, the stories said that Britain is an undeveloped, barbarian country."

Emery thought for a moment then answered, "Not sure about undeveloped, but a barbaric country description seems accurate."

The two talked about Britons and Romans, about their cities, the mountains, culture and the people. Whenever the topic was back to the Britons, Emery couldn't help but think of a certain woman, whom his heart pains every time. The room became silent as he also realized Julian was also deep in thought.

"You know, after all that I have seen the last seven days, I realized our world is nothing compared to this one let alone the other planets, which civilization also thrives. Rome is a huge empire, strong and powerful but even if we put all the greatest minds, advancements, against the other worlds out there, I realized we're just a tiny insignificant dot."

The door hissed open with Klea walking in. She saw the boys talking.

"What are you boys talking about? You look so serious," she said with a cheerful tone.

Chumo and Thrax soon followed. Chumo gave Emery a smile while Thrax said, "Hey, good job, Emery. I just heard the news."

"Of course he'd succeeded. Never doubted him for a second," said Klea before finally noticing the new uniform Emery was wearing. She looked at him from head to toe. "Is that the apprentice uniform from the path of crafting? Wow, it looks good on you!"

"Hear, hear!" the rest shouted. The atmosphere instantly became infectious with excitement.

In the back of Emery's mind, he didn't like being assigned the support role, he had always wanted to be like his father, fighting on the frontline. Considering his current skills set though, he couldn't help but agree to what Julian had claimed. A support role would be the next best thing for him.

Emery stared at Julian, deep inside him, he also wished to be like him. Reliable, enthusiastic, and a passionate radiating person. The way Julian spoke his mind on top of being charismatic somehow made Emery want to have a talent like Julian.

He took a step back and observed this small gathering of people. Julian, Klea, Chumo and even Thrax, the crudest of them all, were extraordinary individuals. He felt little of himself thinking these friends of his were high and above him; however, was that a reason to shy away and lurk in the corner? Was that a reason to feel small and insignificant? No, it wasn't. Emery's heart began to pump harder as he joined the joyous atmosphere. He smiled and determinedly to strive, improve and prove himself he was no longer that little boy hiding behind a cupboard. He swore to himself he'd be strong!

"Everyone! This is perfect timing!" exclaimed Klea. "Let's create a pact and treasure this moment!"

She grabbed a cup that had a thin stem and a v-shaped container; she poured wine into it and raised it up before taking a small knife and gently cut on her palm. The moment her palm bled, she made her blood drip into the cup and lay down the knife on the table.

"A blood oath? Haha! You are more interesting than I thought!" Julian whipped the knife and did the same thing. He laid down on the table and said to Thrax, "What about you, uncultured barbarian?"

"Hmpf, a cup with a pig's blood in it. I guess that doesn't sound too bad," said Thrax.

"Oh you better enjoy it, that's the only blood you'll get from me," Julian said after Thrax did the same thing.

The two were back again arguing but joyous air remained the same. Chumo silently followed suit as well as Emery, the last.

"Let's make an oath to friendship!" said Klea.

Julian raised the cup and added, "I would like to add strength to protect our world. What do you think?"

Everyone nodded. Klea then continued, "I have opened up every path which is in the sky and which is on earth. I am noble, I am a spirit, I am equipped; 'O all you gods and all you spirits, prepare a path for us."

Klea sipped from the cup and passed it onto Emery who also drank and then to next. The cup traveled from one hand to the other and when they were all done, Emery promised to himself to never forget this moment forever. He now had brothers and a sister in bonds.

They finished the rest of the night with jokes and laughter until Emery's body and mind finally forced him to rest.

Tomorrow morning was the last day they all would meet at the Magus Academy until next time.

53 Just a Number

Ten thousand acolytes filled the ground in front of the purple glowing tower. It was crowded with various youngsters, some were taller by more than a head and some were smaller half the size of an average teenager; some even have horns and tails, however, they were all in fact humans.

In the middle of the crowd, Emery scouted the surrounding and found a particular woman with pale skin, long hair reaching just below her bottom and snake-like eyes. He approached her and said, "Hey Silva, good to see you here."

Emery was quite sure he had seen her smiling at first glance but instantly returned to her usual demeanor.

"Of course I am here. What kind of a question is that?" she said, looking away from him.

"Haha, sorry I'd like to introduce you to my friends," he replied.

"Friends?" she asked, tilting her head.

He looked behind him only to realize he had gotten separated with the others.

"I wonder if anyone would like to be friends with you. You will become a problem to them."

"Haha, I probably am," Emery answered, scratching his head.

Silva appeared as if she couldn't believe what she had just heard. She shook her head and said, "Please don't stand near me too much. I don't want to get your bad luck rubbing off me again."

Before Emery could answer, a soft hand grabbed his arm and the beautiful black haired, bronze-skinned beauty was there.

"There you are, what are you doing here?" asked Klea.

"Oh, perfect timing. Let me introduce you to a friend I met the other day. This is a fellow acolyte from our class, Silva is her name. I was with her during the incident I told you yesterday morning," Emery replied.

"Ahh so it's you. Thank you for helping Emery. My name's Klea."

Surprisingly, Silva only gave a nod and didn't reply. The air between the three suddenly became awkward, so he knew he had to do something. Before he could break the ice, however, Klea started dragging him back to his group.

"Okay, nice to know you, Silva. Let's go, Emery. The others are waiting for us. Chumo found a place where we can see the podium better."

Klea pulled Emery away from Silva who now had her back facing them. They arrived at a slightly elevated ground and reunited with Julian, Chumo and Thrax.

"Good, you're here. It's going to start soon," said Julian, pointing with his chin at the numerous magi standing on the podium above a giant row of stairs.

Just like the first day, an old man with a white beard and walking stick stood in front with his eyes seemingly close.

Headmaster Altus opened his eyes and the whole area became surrounded with an overbearing pressure. The chattering of the first year acolytes stopped at once, and they all twisted their necks in the direction of the old man.

Headmaster Altus struck the floor he was standing on, and his booming voice entered everyone's mind. "I would like to congratulate everyone who has finished their first year in our Magus Academy."

After speaking, a large crystal-like object floated above the podium and listed names of people that had a corresponding number on the said ranking from 1 to 100.

"These are the rankings of the top 100 acolytes based on the information provided by the symbol on your palms. It showed us the growth of each individual in the past seven days," Headmaster Altus said.

Klea gasped as her field of view showed a notification of her ranking. "Oh my, I'm ranked 91!"

[Congratulation to become top 100 acolyte - you receive 1000 contribution points]

"Rank 91 gets this many contribution points, how much do you think the top 10 gets?" exclaimed Klea.

The giant crystal showed the names as well as the acolyte ranking of the top five people in large writings.

1. Zack - acolyte rank 5
2. Trish - acolyte rank 5
3. Akira - acolyte rank 5
4. Tobias - acolyte rank 5
5. Vida - acolyte rank 4

The headmaster continued "Our Magus Academy not only rewards those who have talent in the elements, but also rewards those who have talent in the path of combat."

The names in the crystal shifted to the side while another set of names on the opposite side. Some names overlapped, indicating that person both had talent in the elements and physical combat.

1. Damien - acolyte rank 4
2. Tori - acolyte rank 4
3. Fixten - acolyte rank 3
4. Vida - acolyte rank 4
5. Zurui - acolyte rank 3

Emery read the names and was impressed at those who had managed to breakthrough rank 5 and rank 4 on both lists. As far as he knew, all youths here were of the same age, and they were all talented unlike how he had struggled to break through to rank 2.

It wasn't only Emery who shared the sentiment, but the other students too. They were in particular staring at the sole name that reached the top five, Vida.

"Yes! I got it," Thrax roared, lifting his fists in the air.

[Congratulations on becoming one of the top 100 fighters - you receive 500 contribution points]

"Good for you! What's your rank?" Klea asked while searching for Thrax's name.

"99," Thrax proudly said.

"Hah! You just barely passed, that's all," said Julian smirking.

"Oh yeah? Then what rank are you, roman? Probably at the bottom 100, I presume." Thrax laughed as he placed his fists on his hip.

"No way... I—never mind." Julian didn't continue after that and decided to stay quiet after checking his rank through the symbol on his hand. From the looks of it, his ranking was probably not that great.

The acolytes that managed to reach the top ten were then called to the podium and given a special reward. After that, the giant floating crystal again shifted its list and showed a couple of names. This time, they were names of people who failed the first test. Emery read the name Fatty.

"It is, however, sad to see some of you didn't make it. As for those who have passed, I hope all of you will work even harder than you have this year. We are looking forward to having you back."

Emery's mind was on a different topic though. Fatty being in the mouth of that monster and Topper's melting face. From the way Headmaster Altus had spoken of them, it seemed like dying in the world of magi was a more common occurrence than his world. If so, then he had to make sure he wouldn't be just a number in the years he would be here.

"Hey, aren't the names of the people you worked with are listed there?" a voice said next to him. He turned around and saw Silva walking toward him.

"Silva? Oh, uh... yes. Fatty is a first year like me. He's on the list."

Emery confusedly stared at Silva.

"What are you looking at? I-I only came here because this spot has a better view!" Silva said.

He tried to remember the view from where Silva was and this. For Emery, there were no differences, they all served the same purpose anyway. The four people finally noticed Silva's presence as she talked to Emery.

"Aren't you the person who had the highest battle and spirit power in the class examination?" said Thrax, scanning Silva from head to toe.

"Right, Silva, these are my friends that I wanted to introduce to you. We're all from the same world."

Emery presented them one by one and mentioned the same thing he had mentioned to Klea earlier to the others. Julian appeared friendly as usual, Chumo still silent as ever, Klea though didn't seem to be herself as she joined Chumo in silence.

Thrax, however, approached Silva and said, "I wish to challenge you to battle sometime."

Silva crossed her arms and said, "All of you came from a lower world. You should worry about surviving there before wishing to fight me."

Thrax answered confidently, "Hah! With the strength that I have right now, no one in my country can defeat me!"

Silva placed a palm on her forehead before sighing. "You people don't know anything..."

"Care to enlighten us with your wisdom then?" said Klea.

"Just watch. You'll soon see," Silva said.

After hearing Silva's mysterious remarks, Emery instinctively felt things wouldn't be good for them. And at the moment he thought of that, Headmaster Altus raised his staff and an energy glowed brightly. Almost every youth's palm burned but it didn't last long. Emery focused on the symbol on his hand and read over his status.

[Emery Ambrose]

[Battle power: 16 (11)]

[Spirit power: 30 (20)]

[Restriction spells has been placed]

54 Restriction

Emery's field of view was hijacked with a large notification that said the following:

[Restriction spells has been placed]

Confused, he looked at the others only to find out they had the same expression.

"Emery... are you seeing this too? Restriction has been placed," asked Julian, dumbfounded.

Emery nodded as well as Chumo, Thrax and Klea. They all allowed the same information to be shown to each other.

[Thrax]

[Battle power: 25 (16)]

[Spirit power: 33 (23)]

[Julian]

[Battle power: 15 (11)]

[Spirit power:34 (24)]

[Chumo]

[Battle power: 16 (11)]

[Spirit power 35 (26)]

[Klea]

[Battle power: 11 (8)]

[Spirit power:42 (37)]

Both their spirit and battle power had been drastically reduced.

"What is going on?" a youth from the crowd asked.

"What is this? I can't even cast a spell!" cried Klea, waving her hand and repeatedly reciting the names of her spells.

Silva, on the other hand, looked unperturbed.

"What is going on, Silva?" Emery asked.

Silva sighed, seemingly not interested in explaining at all, but did so anyway. "Acolytes that arrive here from a lower world have always been given a powerful restriction spell upon their return."

"Why? What for?" Emery pressed the question.

"I don't know nor care enough to know the whole reason behind it. But from what I've heard, it's to ensure balance of the acolyte's world once they return. After all, they don't want a civilization to advance too rapidly with the help of other world civilizations."

Silva lifted her hand and was able to make roots grow like the one from her entangle spell.

"How are you-"

Silva cut off Klea mid sentence and said, "Since I come from a higher realm, I am not affected by the restriction spells. As for you all, the rules are different. From what I've heard though, you may still cast the spell, at least part of it, as long as you have full mastery over it."

Julian raised his voice from his otherwise calm demeanor. "Bullshit! Everything here is beyond our world! If that is the case, ours will be a lower world for who knows how long!"

"Watch your tongue!" Silva said, her cold stare brought goosebumps to everyone in her surrounding.

"If you don't like what you're hearing, take it upon the headmaster yourself!" she added.

Emery was surprised just as everyone. This was a first for them to see Julian lash out like that.

"So-sorry about that, Silva. Can you tell us more about what you know?" Emery interjected.

Emery and his friends did gain some items during the past seven days in the magus academy and these items would surely be beneficial to bring back. He had the six green essence potions left in his bag but since he had convinced himself it wasn't his anyway, it would be best for him not to carry it around. Emery wanted to ask a few more questions when Headmaster Altus Dreyden tapped his wooden stick once again.

The purple tower behind the old man glowed magnificently while he said, "In lieu of the rules given by the government to the academy, all acolytes from the lower worlds have been given restriction. Be wary of the restriction that has been placed for you since there are punishments if you decide not to follow the rules in place. This is for your own good, the world and humankind."

Emery felt an unusual trust toward the speaking headmaster. He wasn't sure if it was due to a spell or the old man's powerful aura; the moment this old man said a single word, all complaints from the fuming acolytes came to a halt and all was silent once more.

The headmaster continued speaking, "Remember to always be diligent in improving your understanding of the elements. You will all be sent back in a short while and I will see you all back next year."

Julian appeared to have calmed down now but the way he had his fist clenched said otherwise. He asked, "Silva, how can we end this restriction?"

She ignored Julian, which made Emery butt in, making her finally answer Julian's inquiry. "Didn't you hear me and the headmaster earlier? Sigh... if you really are determined, then it'll be after you reach a certain rank in the academy or until your realm is stronger than the spell itself."

Julian deeply breathed out and released his fist. Both he and Emery thank Silva for providing valuable knowledge.

"Huh! Just make sure you return next year and return the favor," she said to Emery just before her body glowed and a blinding beam of light struck her directly from the sky. Emery opened his eyes, and Silva was no longer there.

It didn't take long for the same thing to occur at the other acolytes around them. Some appeared scared but some relaxed. This must be the transportation method, so Emery thought this was the time to say goodbye.

He stared at his four friends; Julian, Thrax, Chumo and Klea. He said as he waved his hand, "Take care guys. We will see each other next year."

The same ray of light first struck his hand, a buzzing sound rang in his ears, he felt his whole body floating and then the large beam of light struck his whole being. Shortly after, Emery opened his eyes. The blue sky entered his vision as the musky smell of the grass and earth entered his nostrils. The rustling of the trees, the rushing river current beside him all welcomed him back.

"I have finally returned," he said.

55 Return

It was a refreshing feeling as some birds overhead flew down and landed on Emery's shoulder. The past seven days indeed was just surreal to consider, however, the almost transparent circle with a vertical strike-through line on his palm told him otherwise. He focused his thoughts on the symbol and what happened next confirmed everything had indeed happened.

[Emery Ambrose]

[Battle power: 16 (11)]

[Spirit power: 30 (20)]

[Restriction spells added]

He remembered Gwen's coming of age was in the early summer and the fateful night was the next day. After returning though, it seemed like a couple of months already passed or maybe a year? He didn't know but he would surely have to ask someone later. Emery finally noticed his clothes, it was still the same clothing he had worn before he had been transported. Oddly enough though, it was squeaky clean.

Taking his mind off irrelevant questions, he followed the river upstream, passed through the grove of trees and arrived at whatever was left of the burned down Ambrose estate. There were some structures barely standing, but all that was left were rubble, and soot and ashes. The whole place was deserted except for the black crows and burned corpses of the peasants who were being consumed by terrible insects.

Emery didn't cover his nose nor hide his face. He vowed to remember all of this and paint it deep in his mind. He walked past where the smithy, the bakery, the inn, and the stable should've been. Finally, he arrived at the elevated portion where the Ambrose estate had stood proudly. And like the others, it was burned to the ground.

The rubble were everywhere; Emery passed by the burnt and rotting corpses of his family's servants, guards, and knights totaling twelve people. At the section of the house where the cellar was, a burnt pillar blocked his way. That didn't stop him though from putting all of his strength and successfully moving it to the side enough for two people to fit. There, he saw it. The remains of his father surrounded by a couple marauder's corpses.

In silence, Emery picked up a cloth from the cupboard where he had hid and wrapped his father's rigid body with it. It took Emery a couple of minutes before being able to successfully make sure every part of the body was covered. Then, Emery carried him with his back, taking small little steps and making sure his father's head wouldn't hit the pillar he had moved earlier. He got out of the cellar but was already sweating big droplets from his forehead. Emery didn't care though as he continued heading toward the yard not far from where the house was.

In that quiet place, a headstone already stood. It read:

Dearest wife, Mother of Ambrose

Emery slowly put down his father's corpse before the headstone. He said, "Mother, I believe father is by your side now... He had missed you a lot. Whenever he talked about you, his eyes glowed. I remember him telling me you were the most beautiful woman he had ever seen and when your eyes met for the first, he had known it was you he wanted to be with forever. He loved you so dearly and the result of your love for each other bore fruit through me. I — don't blame you. Here I am right now, before you, wishing both of you eternal happiness with your reunion."

He hadn't noticed it but tears were rolling down on his way here. Emery lifted the shovel he had dragged from the cellar and started digging a hole beside his mother's headstone. He went into the hole first before pulling his father's body and making it fall on him. He crawled out of the way and climbed back up careful not to step any part of his deceased father. Slowly, Emery filled the hole and buried his father.

"Father... I will make you proud. You and mother are watching over me from the beyond and I hope both of you will see that I am not that weak boy anymore."

Emery then placed a pile of smooth rock he had found by the river on top of his father's burial ground. After that he again dug twelve more holes in the side yard and began burying the bodies of the residents of the Ambrose estate. Even though they might be just servants, in Emery's eyes, they were like his uncles and aunts, and friends and teachers.

The sky on the horizon was turning orange when he had finished. He knew he couldn't stay in this place, but he looked for whatever was left in the burnt mansion and found a small axe and a knife. Nothing of value remained in the rubble, otherwise.

Emery was getting ready to leave when the hooves of horses started getting nearer. He didn't move on the spot though and waited for it to arrive.

Two horsemen approached him and one of them said, "Ha! That's the boy all right!"

"I told you he's still alive!" the other said.

Emery had his back facing them but he could recognize these two were the marauders chasing him that night.

"So, little boy, care to tell us where you've been? Prolly hiding with the damned chrutins, weren't you?"

"Kekeke, we've waited too long but the boss will be happy."

"Come on, let's not waste more time. My crotch is itching for the newly arrived whores."

Emery turned to face them and took out a wooden axe from his waist. His eyes, cold.

56 Marauders

Emery listened intently to every word they said but all he had gotten was that their master was male, the rest were about women and money. He needed to find out who and why they had massacred everyone in the place he had called home. Picking up a stone from the ground, Emery threw it to the noisy marauder and hit straight the forehead.

The companion laughed and said, "Wahaha, you got hit by a boy! Look at you bleeding, hahaha!"

The first marauder punched the other and said, "I'll kill you for laughing at me."

"Huh? Do you want to fight here n—"

"Hey! Are the two of you just going to stand there or what?" Emery exclaimed.

The two stopped what they were doing and watched Emery before looking back at themselves and started laughing again.

"Wow! Look, look! The boy is raring for a fight! Are you sure this is the boy we are looking for? The boy I knew ran away crying so fast like a headless chicken, hahaha!"

"True, true! Well, it don't matter though. I'd rather bring back a wrong head than going back empty."

Emery stayed silent, waiting for the marauders to make a move. He already had them riled up, the initiative was his, and he was no longer the same person he was seven days ago. It was better that they

underestimated him. And even though these two brutes were surely nothing compared to the orcs, when he held up his axe, only then he noticed his grip was trembling.

The two people saw how Emery's axe was shaking and laughed even louder.

The bleeding marauder stepped forward and grasped a butcher's knife from the horse. He said, "I'll take care of the boy, you just stay there and make sure he doesn't run."

"Whatever, make it quick," said the other one.

"Come here, boy. I'll make you wish you were never born."

Emery's whole body was now shaking. He held the axe's handle with both hands and took a deep breath. After breathing out, the trembling stopped and he came to a realization. He made a wicked smile along with the heavy pounding of his heart against his chest. He wasn't afraid, rather he was too excited to get revenge for the people he had just buried.

"Smiling, are you now? Then let's see if you'll smile after this!"

The marauder dashed forward but so did Emery. Surprised by Emery's speed, the marauder barely dodged the incoming axe, causing him to stagger.

The marauder's face was full of shock. Emery's speed, arm strength, seemed no less than him, in fact the boy was even slightly faster and stronger than him! An adult, full-grown man! "Boy, how—"

"Hey, stop playing around! It's getting dark soon, I want them whores."

The marauder facing Emery simply stayed silent. Of course, he'd be too ashamed to ask for help against a 15-year-old scrawny boy. His expression now turned serious and used two hands to push with all his strength against Emery's axe, making them jump back at the same time. He charged once more and put his full weight behind the butcher's knife but the boy was able to parry every slash he made.

"Since you're taking your sweet time, I'll just take a piss. Be back in a bit, just shout when you're finished playing with the kid," the marauder's companion said, heading toward a tree.

The marauder, whose forehead now stopped bleeding, popped a vein and bled again, looking more pissed than earlier.

Emery noticed how this man opened his mouth but refused to say anything again. The man in front of him was no stronger than a level two training puppet by the combat institution. Even though he could tell there were many gaps in the marauder's attack and he could end this farce earlier, unfortunately, he was holding an axe wherein he had no experience unlike using a sword.

When this marauder's companion went behind the tree, Emery knew he had to end this now than later. After all, there were two threats and Emery already had his hands full with just one, if the other one finally realized how his friend was actually having a hard time against him, it would be the end of Emery.

Emery calmed himself and recalled the level three swordsmanship along with the lessons from his father. Fully focused, Emery could see each movement and predict his opponent's next step. He dodged out of the way and then—blood splattered on the ground. The marauder shouted for his swordhand was cut off by a boy.

"So, you're finished having fun, are you?" the marauder's companion returned; his whole attention was solely on adjusting his pants.

"You, shitter! Help me, damn it!" the marauder roared while gripping his handless arm with the other.

Emery swiftly picked up the fallen sword and thrust it in between the man's chest and shoulder.

"Asshole! Get over here and kill this son of a—ahhh!"

Emery twisted the blade. He said, "Stay there, or I'll end his life."

The marauder's companion finally realized what was going on as he stared in disbelief at the situation. The surprise didn't last though as he responded with a smile, "So, the boy got lucky. I can't believe you lost against a milk drinker, brother."

"I'm telling you, he's—"

"Stop i Say!?or I'll cut his head off!."

"Kid! I don't believe you!. You ain't have the guts."

57 First Kill

"Asshole! Get over here and kill this son of a—ahhh!"

He twisted the pierced blade in between the marauder's chest and shoulder. Emery said with a cold voice to the marauder's companion who was withdrawing a sword from the horse, "Stay there, or I'll kill him."

"So, the boy got lucky. I can't believe you lost against a milk drinker, brother," said the marauder, not even hesitating to walk closer.

"Stop, I said or I'll cut his head off!"

"Kid! I don't believe you. You ain't have the guts," said the marauder's companion with a wicked smile.

"You fucker! I'll get you for this! Graaahhh! Stop, please! No more!" begged the kneeling marauder.

"Come on, I dare you," the marauder's companion again challenged Emery.

As Emery heard how the other continued pleading, he became hesitant. Emery convinced himself he needed to know who was the person that ordered the massacre on the Ambrose estate. He had to be ruthless, he had to be strong to keep inflicting pain and kill this man but in the back of his head, he knew that was just an excuse. Even though he had killed an orc, it was akin to slaying an animal in self-defense. But this—this was killing a helpless human.

He stopped twisting the blade. "Tell me who sent you!" he demanded the kneeling marauder.

"Just as I thought. A kid acting tough. Let me show you how to cut a head." He then threw a knife, which Emery barely dodged, and a sword at his friend who was kneeling. "Pick it up, you moron!"

Emery turned over the axe's blunt side and struck marauder's helmet, rendering him unconscious. Fighting with two adult marauders was something he wouldn't be able to deal with right now. He pulled out the sword and got ready to parry the incoming blow from the charging marauder.

"Your kind don't belong in this world, chrutin! Die!"

Emery blocked the attack and started clashing with the marauder. His fighting capability had indeed doubled using a sword, however, this man was actually more adept in sword fight than the previous man.

After exchanging blows several times, both jumped back and the marauder's companion expression turned serious. "How is this possible?"

The disbelief on his face, however, was immediately replaced with a mad smile. "Don't matter though. A kid who won't take a life doesn't worry me one bit."

He charged again and this time his slashes were getting wilder.

Emery blocked and attacked in return, taking advantage of wide gaps he could see in the timing of the marauder's swings. He managed to wound the man in several body parts, however, the raging slashes didn't stop and finally Emery was starting to get pushed back.

Emery hastily twisted his body but blood still splashed onto the ground.

"Did you have a wonderful dream, brother?" said the marauder.

The burning pain on Emery's lower back was starting to throb as he stared at the now conscious marauder. If he still hesitated and wouldn't strike a decisive blow soon, then his life would be over. Emery breathed out again and steeled himself.

It was his turn to throw the small axe in his other hand at the skillful marauder and charge at the same time. He ran past the still dazed marauder and issued a feint slash, which the other one fell for, before letting out a spinning technique and stabbed with the knife he had been keeping on his waist.

The skillful marauder weakly raised his sword and tried to hack Emery one more time, but he obviously missed while grabbing his bleeding neck. He started convulsing, blood dripping from his mouth, when Emery tilted the knife one last time. The marauder coughed blood on Emery's before falling on the ground.

Emery wiped his face and heard the remaining marauder fastening steps. Emery quickly parried and then counter slash that heavily wounded the man. This attack makes Emery's wound become worse and emery's cough up blood. Emery walked to the man in a hunched manner and pointed the sword at him. He said, "Speak, or I'll slay you right now."

"Please, please. I don't know anything!" cried the marauder.

"You're lying! Tell the truth and I'll let you live! Was it the Fantumar!" Emery roared. This was the only explanation he could come up with. Everything pointed to the pig noble but Emery needed proof.

"I swear on my life, my lord. I truly don't know! We were just following the order of our chief! If anyone knows, it's him!"

"Then who is your chief? Where is he?"

".The chief's name is Padraig! Please, let me go, I've told you all I know. I'll work an honest trade and leave this kingdom," the marauder said as he started crawling.

Emery raised his sword when a shock of pain erupted from his lower back, making him drop the sword. He watched the marauder, who was now a couple of feet away, heading toward one of the horses.

The marauder got up, grabbed one of the harnesses, when his back was slashed before dropping dead on the earth. Emery made his second kill.

He inherently didn't want to but did he really have a choice? Was there really any assurance that this marauder would live an honorable life, not return to his chief, and tell him he was still alive? Emery had no answer. All he knew was that there were still people looking for him and wanted him dead.

Emery first wrapped his lower back with a cloth he had taken from the bag the horse was carrying. There was nothing much of value inside it. Emery then rode the horse and proceeded to leave the area. He then realized his wounds are deeper than he thought, His vision was blurring and he was starting to feel cold. If Emery can get past this, He was determined next time not to hesitate to kill his opponent.

58 Druid

"Tsk, tsk, tsk. Stupid. Stupid beyond help. You are naive, kid," whispered a familiar voice in Emery's mind.

Emery wanted to lift his head but it felt like his world was spinning. He responded, "I feel like I know you. Please, help me."

"I have helped you once but not this time. You need to learn. Whether you die right now, it's all up to chance," replied the voice.

"W-who are you?" Emery asked but the voice was silent until he fell from the horse's back and hit the ground. In the back of his mind, he thought to himself that this was the end for him; that he would have died for nothing and returned to nothingness. The thought however was subverted as he could someone's arm lifting him up. He tried to open his eyes but all was a blur, vaguely seeing a silhouette of a man.

There was another voice, "H... ther... a per... here..."

That was all Emery could hear before he finally lost consciousness. Someone had found him.

He fell into darkness once more. He couldn't move but could feel someone rubbing his arm with—with a lukewarm cloth? Emery couldn't tell how much time had passed and when he awoke, he first saw the rounded ceiling. Moving his eyes around, he realized he was in a house made with straw and wood. He then smelled a strong medicinal herb entering his nostrils. He tried to sit up but a stinging pain reverberated throughout all his body, making him groan.

"Granny, he is awake," said a young man entering the room.

"Indeed he has. It seems the ancestral gods still have plans for him," said the old wrinkled woman while stirring a cauldron presumably where the scent of herbs came from.

"What's your name?" the young man asked. However, Emery didn't speak. "Looks like he's still confused, granny."

"Leave him be for now, Lanzo. He needs more rest," said the old woman as she placed down a green paste on the side. She patted Emery's head before gently saying, "There, there. You're going to be fine."

The old woman then had Lanzo lift Emery to the side. She examined Emery's wound and rubbed the green paste on it. Emery groaned once more.

"The ancestral gods seemed to have favored you with a healthy and strong body for your age. You should be better in a few days," said the granny. "Now, lay him back down gently, Lanzo."

After Emery had been laid down on his back, he opened his parched throat and roughly said, "T-Thank you."

On Emery's fourth day, he was able to move but still not as lively as before. He limply got out of the hut with a walking stick and breathed in the fresh air of the settlement filled with similar rounded huts made with straw and wood.

Emery walked around, hoping to get his energy back soon. According to Lanzo, there were about twenty adults living here aside from the small children. Lanzo mentioned that the name of this settlement was Mitshire, which somewhat rang a bell in Emery's memory. It should be one of the few hundreds small settlements south of Lioness Kingdom's near the Ambrose estate.

Emery continued strolling in the settlements and talked with the locals doing some crafts outside their huts. He asked various stuff, trying to make small talk, and surprisingly no one asked for his origins. When afternoon arrived, he finally understood why.

A crowd was gathering in front of Granny's house because the local hunters had brought another injured person they had found in the woods. Based on how the injured man's clothes appeared, he wasn't a local and like Emery, the wrinkled old woman took the person in.

As it turned out, Granny was also called a healer, a druid. Quite often the residents of the neighboring settlements or the hunters in the woods would bring an injured or sick person to her, so the locals of this settlement were used to not asking many questions since the person being healed would usually leave anyway after they had fully recovered.

Emery entered Granny's residence. She was preparing a new batch of medicine when Emery remembered that Lanzo went away this morning to gather more herbs in the forest.

"Is there anything I can do to help, Granny?" asked Emery.

"Ahh, yes dear. Could you kindly find me a couple of purple leaves from the herb garden? It's just a few walk beyond the large tree behind the hut. The dried ones here won't work for this man."

Emery nodded.

"Bring me the purple back leaves. It should be easy to spot with its large green leaves in the front, but its stem and back are colored purple. Get me dozens of them, will you dear?"

"I understand, Granny," replied Emery as he walked out of the hut, limping with his walking stick. Repay kindness with kindness, one of the lessons his father had instilled in him. Emery went behind the hut and not long after, he found the large tree in question. Behind the tree, was a small garden filled with various types of plants.

Granny said it would be easy to spot, but Emery hadn't seen one before. He looked around, spending a good few minutes, until he found a plant with a purple stem. He turned it over and to confirm its back was also purple when the symbol on his palm slightly glowed, sending a notification in his mind.

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Heart Flower - medicinal herb level 1]

A list of the plant's properties, functions and how to use it appeared in Emery's field of view.

59 Herbs

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Heart Flower - medicinal herb level 1]

His field of view was filled with a list of the herbs' properties. Emery hadn't expected that a spell from the magus world would be activated here. Even though he hadn't practiced this spell, Emery guessed it was probably due to this spell being exclusive to the Apothecary Institute and full understanding of it wasn't necessary. He looked over the list and became astounded. With this knowledge and spell, Emery could find out the characteristics of a plant and the possible combination of recipes by finding some common ground.

Emery wanted to use this more but as of the moment, he had a more urgent priority. He carefully plucked a dozen of purple back leaves(heart flower) and carried it back to Granny who was stirring the boiling cauldron. She asked him to grind the leaves in between two rocks until it was like a paste.

Once Emery was done, he watched Granny scoop the paste, mixed it with the hot water and applied it on the injured man. She said to Emery, "Thank you, dear. That's it for now. The rest are up to the gods."

Emery took his leave, went back to the garden and started examining the plants one by one. He touched a small black berry but the symbol didn't react. He plucked it from the stem, still nothing. Trying to remember what he had done, he realized had been focusing intently while looking for the plant. This time, Emery cleared his thoughts and put his full attention on the plant. The symbol glowed and it said:

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Elderberry- medicinal herb level 1]

[Suitable for increasing resistance to poison.]

Emery then tried to examine the orange mushroom growing on a tree bark on the ground.

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Reisi Mushroom - medicinal herb level 1]

[Suitable for increasing endurance and stamina.]

There was another mushroom that was all white.

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Unidentified medicinal herb]

[Unknown properties]

There appeared to be some plants despite how advanced the world where the Magus Academy was. But at the same time, Emery tried to understand how large the worlds were. There were other civilizations aside from theirs. So, it was half-expected.

The following information that emerged from the tattoo took Emery by surprise.

[Register to database for one contribution point?]

Getting excited at the prospect of how many contribution points he could possibly get and the prospect of learning alchemy while not at the Magus Academy, Emery continued examining more plants. He believed that if he explored, he could get more contribution points and these points could be used as capital to compete with other students at Magus Academy.

A couple of minutes had passed and so far, he had found at least ten plants that were not on the so-called database. He also learned more about the plants and began to have ideas which ones were possibly compatible. After all the herbs had been examined, Emery went deeper into the woods and kept on touching whatever his hands could get on.

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Grass - no medicinal property]

[Insignificant for the database]

[Universal Flora Level 1 - activated - analyzing flora...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Weed - no medicinal property]

[Insignificant for the database]

Emery spent the entire afternoon and evening circling the forest and examining the trees and plants but didn't make any more contribution points. It seemed that all the plants of value were already being grown in the garden. Not going to lie, he was indeed a bit disappointed, however, not discouraged. Britannia was so big that Emery believed there were still so many undiscovered plants, how many more would that be if he traveled further, for example Rome. The possibilities were close to endless.

The following day, the old lady mentioned he was recovering at an amazing pace. So, to return her kindness, Emery spent most of his time helping the old woman. It felt like he was back in his childhood days, wandering the forest, sowing and growing plants in the herb garden, and doing some alchemy. It was tiring and exciting for him.

Emery though didn't forget to be more mindful this time. There were still people searching for him. Pdraig, the chief of the marauders that attacked his home. Hence, if he didn't have to, he liked to keep to himself and not interact too much with the locals other than Lanzo and Granny.

He continued learning alchemy from the old lady, understanding the spell and cultivating his understanding of the elements, specifically the plant element. Based on the last battle, he realized the battle power he had still wasn't sufficient to protect him, rather it was highly lacking. He needed spells to give him more of an advantage in case a fight breaks out even if only a part of it would be available.

Day after day of doing activities related to plants, somehow deepened his understanding of the plant element. A week had passed when Emery finally had a breakthrough.

[Plant spirit - Initial stage - mastered]

[Spirit power has increased by one]

After that break through, Emery began to see the plants differently. Whenever he interacted with them, a faint energy seemed to flow in different parts of the plants. Finally Emery can start to experience magic. At this moment he wondered about his four friends from the academy.

60 Chumo

On the night of a full moon, hundreds of maids and thousands of warriors had been gathered in a wide field of the Royal Palace. A ceremony was about to be held before a pagoda shrine. The drums started beating and then a number of armored men wielding thin swords along with veiled women started a dance in front of the shrine.

On the left side, there was a row of stairs leading to a balcony filled with cascading decorated chairs as well as lit lanterns. The Royal Family and ministers sat in accordance to their ranks and some of the chairs were still empty, in particular the grandest chair that had the design of a golden dragon. On the opposite side of them, was another balcony where dozens of shrine maidens as well as several eunuchs wearing white silk robes.

The drum beat its last and the dancing stopped when the booming bell was struck with the hanging log held by another eunuch. A woman dressed in a beautiful, silky white dress wearing a large veil came before the shrine that looked like a three-story pagoda and kneeled. The moment she kneeled, the two large pots sitting on the sides of the shrine burst out a large flame.

She got up and walked to the right to make way for a man wearing a black and gold overextended hat. He wore a red and gold robe that strikingly more grandeur than anyone present.

When the man arrived before the shrine, he put his hands together in a palm and fist before kneeling down. He raised his arms wide open and said, "Gods of the heavens, earth, wind and water. I, the ruler of the prosperous kingdom of Dongbuyou, give thanks for the four seasons, the fertility of the crops and the people! We owe you our blessed lands and offer a humble sacrifice to show our gratitude! Please give us another bountiful and protect Dongbuyou's people for years to come!"

Everyone shouted and the joyous festivity once more came alive. The drums started beating again, the dancers were back in front of the shrine, and food was coming out of the kitchen to be served at the numerous tables laid down inside and outside of the courtyard.

The man in royal attire made his way up the flight of stairs on the left balcony and sat on the grandest chair. Tonight was a thanksgiving festival in Dongbuyou.

As the feast was occurring, and the man in red finally noticed something amiss, rather someone amiss.

"My Queen, where is Chumo?" he asked the woman wearing a red and gold dress sitting beside him.

"It seems he has left the royal palace once again, Your Majesty. No one can find him," she replied.

"Probably having fun with the commoners again!" He laughed.

The night went on and after everyone had their fill, the king took his leave along with the queen. The handmaidens slid open the royal chambers and the king and queen went inside.

"It's a sacred day. Let us discuss this no further," said the king while two handmaidens were removing his heavy robes.

"But Your Majesty! Chumo is a brat! It's unbecoming of him to act this way!" she replied, also being stripped down, revealing a white dress underneath.

"My Queen, he's still my son, a prince, even if he was born from a concubine. He can do anything he wants. Why are you that displeased with him?" asked the king, now on his casual robes.

"He's rude, spoiled and incompetent. He acts as if he is a commoner."

"Then you shouldn't be worried since he wouldn't pose a threat to Daeso or Youngpo for the crown."

The queen stopped speaking when footsteps neared the royal chambers.

"Your Majesty, Prince Daeso and Prince Youngpo, wish for an audience," said a eunuch behind the sliding door.

"I'll meet them in the royal hall."

"As you wish, Your Majesty" the eunuch replied, walking away.

The king then headed toward the royal hall. As soon as he arrived, he noticed the two princes, along with a number of troops and ministers, and a disheveled looking Chumo.

"Father, he's a disgrace to the crown. After disappearing for more than a week, a servant found him sleeping in the wine room earlier."

Chumo appeared confused. He had indeed been secretly sipping some wine before he had been transported to the Magus Academy. He tried to explain about him being in a different world but no words came out of his mouth.

[Restriction to say any information related to the academy]

He tried to say the same thought again and again, but he looked like a fool. Hence, in the end, Chumo made up a story that made no sense wherein a lot of the ministers started whispering to themselves.

"He's a drunkard, father. Look at him," said Daeso, the crown prince.

"He reeks of alcohol too," said Youngpo, the second prince, covering his nose.

"I am not drunk! Father, I confess that I had been drinking some wine but—"

"Silence!" the king roared. "Bring me my sword!"

The murmuring grew louder while the queen and two princes exchanged knowing glances. The king received a sword and pointed it at Chumo.

"Your Majesty, please calm down!" said Chumo's mother who had arrived barging in.

Chumo couldn't bear the look of disappointment in his father's eyes. He kneeled before the king and bowed his head almost touching the floor. Inside him, he indeed felt guilty as he could also hear the whispering. He knew that a punishment was long due along with other things that he had done before but his father had managed to give some excuse one way or another. Tonight, however, was an important night.

Chumo steeled himself, ready to accept whatever punishment would be given, his life included, when the king threw the sword down beside Chumo and said, "Y-You are banished. Take this sword and never set foot here again until you have brought enough honor to the crown."

"No! Please, Your Majesty, I beg that you reconsider," said Chumo's mother, also kneeling on the ground.

"That is my final decision..." said the king, and Chumo couldn't help but notice the slight shaking of his father's voice at the end.

After hearing the command, the queen and her two sons, the princes, had a big smile on their faces.

Chumo bowed deeper in silence with all his heart, worshipping his father. He then got up and walked out of the palace with his mother. Once they were out of the royal palace's gate, he said to his mother, "I am sorry for bringing shame to you. I'll definitely return and bring back honor for you."

"My dear son, all I care about is your happiness. Don't worry about me. I am worried for you. I didn't allow you to learn martial arts and forbade you from showing off your intelligence so you won't have to be involved in the court's politics. But it seems that I was wrong," said his crying mother.

Chumo understood all of that, but he didn't actually know whether to feel happy or depressed. On one side of his thoughts, this punishment was like a freedom from all of the rules in the royal palace, which made him feel confined. Not being able to see his two stepbrothers and the queen who always found a way to make his life difficult one way or another was also nice. On the other hand, he indeed felt filial piety toward his father but what laid heavy on his heart was his mother. She may be a concubine of the king but without him there, he somewhat feared what the queen and her two sons would do to his mother.

He gave her a salute and a hug before heading out of the palace. This wasn't the first time he stepped outside alone, so he wasn't a bit worried because he had spent seven days at the Magus Academy and had gained some insight in battling. He took one last look at the royal palace while holding the sword his father gave him.

Back in the royal palace, Chumo's father was pacing left and right in his study, half-doubting the decision he had made. Even though he wore the crown, the queen and the two princes' supporters were too influential to excuse Chumo against such solid evidence. He was about to get out of his study when the door slid open and a woman wearing white dress came inside.

"Shrine Priestess Youmiel, what's wrong? Can it not wait for tomorrow?"

"Forgive my rudeness, Your Majesty, but the reason for my arrival is urgent."

"Speak."

"I was praying in the shrine when I received a vision. A vision of a black three-legged bird flying away from the Dongbuyou Kingdom."

"Do you know what it means? Is it a blessing or a curse?"

"Forgive me, Your Majesty, for I do not know the answer. What is certain, however, is that this is a sign of a big change in our kingdom."

After the shrine priestess had left, the king fell into deep thought. The Dongbuyou Kingdom was actually under the control of the Han Dynasty for several decades now even though they had retained the rights to govern themselves. Could the big change be referring to them finally breaking away from their overlord? That was the only thing he could think but after considering it, he thought it impossible. The Han Dynasty was a powerful country that was the overlord of many other nations aside the Dongbuyou Kingdom. He gave it a few more thoughts but couldn't come up with a conclusion. Never it had occurred to him that the prince he had just banished would make waves in the future.