

# Of witches and warlocks

The ride within the carriage was far more superior in comfort compared to that of the wagon even if it was still the same type of seating, that of a wooden bench. Still there were some disappointments; rough substandard coverings, lack of adequate cushioning, stuffy interior and unpleasant scents of old sweat which Alicia regrettably picked up on because of her heightened senses and perhaps most irritating, an exceedingly inquisitive travelmate. The conversations she had to entertain were tiring, primarily due to needing to weave 'No' or 'Perhaps' again and again into the subtext of her answers to the various efforts to recruit her. However bearing with the torturous session bore some value to her. Mainly in learning the societal standing of Mages in general public and in Prynina in specific.

Although she was clueless to many of the topics, fishing for tidbits of information from the merchant's own mind revealed more than she expected allowing her to continue her act of erudite sorcerer who has been out of touch with the outside world. Even unexpected complementation came in the form of Rosalia's recollections about the subject, surfacing onto her mind as the conversation naturally progressed. A person capable of using magic is called sonorant while those who have magic potential but cannot outwardly express it are called the voiceless, the mute ones or sans voix in the more higher echelons of society. Though officially the magic users are termed sonorants, they prefer to be called a Mage, wizard, or sorcerer as it was much easier for the general public to understand. The term sonorant itself seems to be an outdated nomenclature as ancient magic users were often documented as using a song, aria or sometimes even a dance and a ritual to perform what is currently recognized as magic.

A person who has the talent with either the connections or the money can apply to various Akademias throughout the world. Lower classes - unless in extremely rare cases - did not have the resources to develop their magical talents or even knew that they had the ability. And once they are able to use their magic consistently, a sonorant often becomes a mage. One can easily pick out the common mage by their esoteric constructs that they carry around, frequently in the forms of staves, wands and even a walking cane which are usually their instrument to channel their magic and express it. Many sonorants are aligned to one natural element either that of air,

earth, fire and water, though those with more unique elements are seen from time to time. And even though most are quickly sorted into one of the four elements, how their magic is expressed seems to be highly individualized and anyone with even a smidgen of magical power with some form of training are highly prized.

Construction, groundwork and agricultural development jobs are always in high demand, seeking a mage with earth affinity - or a geomancer for short - since their abilities match dozens of workers doing the same work while being perhaps more coordinated and faster than a crew and especially for the commissioner, cheaper as they only have to pay a single person handsomely rather than arguing with wages with a mob of men. Those gifted with water - besides bringing rain down in times of drought - commonly find themselves as an aide to a large group of travellers and or merchants. Having an aquamancer allowed any group to take a direct faster route or a safer alternate path in this monster infested world through the simple action of creating potable water.

Many travellers rely on natural sources of freshwater in their travels in forms of rivers, lakes, springs and wells within villages to slake their thirst and water their horses. This was the reason why there are many villages spread around the dotting countryside, to serve as a supply point for merchants and peddlers. However this limited their options in choosing a course and often forced them to digress off track to reach a nearby village or a safe stream of water or risk dehydration, weakness and other unpleasanties trying to brave the wilderness. Of course one could take the most direct path possible if they had an Aquamancer with them saving merchants precious time in forms of hours or even days sidetracking. Or they could go on a long journey to distant cities with exotic goods in high demand as they are not regularly visited due to their isolation or danger to going to and from.

Fire mages or pyromancers are the most commonly seen among the guild agents in their commissions as they are more directly capable of combat even if they aren't well trained. But those who are can find success pursuing a military career, serving in a well paid position and away from physical tasks. Lastly Aeromancers are rarely seen away from harbors as they could make sure the winds always favor the ship that they were on while warning sailors to incoming storms and typhoons. Even if they didn't

follow their usual professions many mages could be scouted out as a bodyguard to the aristocracy or become an instructor to their new child.

Of course even the monarchy knows the value of mages, primarily in the form of warfare. Pyromancers could bombard enemy ranks with rain of fire, geomancers could instantly create fortified positions in almost any terrain, Aquamancers, while providing fresh water in hostile territory could also be paired with aeromancers to create a thick fog to hide their approach to any lookouts or scouts. Because of these reasons most Mages are treated with respect equalling that of craftsmen and merchants if not that of a knight serving under a nobleman. Wherein lies the sudden change in tone from the Merchant came from, Alicia had just demonstrated herself not just a mage but one capable of defending herself and the merchant's goods with water magic, an element not quite known for its destructive capabilities. Simply put she was a rare talent that's far too valuable to let slip. The reason for the roundabout ways of trying to coax her into a form of employment. In his mind, he already assumed she was in all probability already under nobleman however he still had to try in the off chance that she was not.

*'He doesn't even care that I'm a girl huh...'* In this age, the standing of women was more or less nonexistent, with laws and society itself showing preference towards men and sons, who would either become soldiers for the country or workers for the farms both being vital to the survival of the nation. With the exception being sorceresses. In this world women had very few things favoring them. They had to use cunning, looks, tricks and even their body as a tool to be used just to make it another day. Behind closed curtains and out of sight they wage a bitter fight against their rivals. The gifts of magic were the greatest weapon they had in their arsenal with its versatility. It allowed them to be at least regarded in some respect and an equivalent standing to men even if it is still inferior in certain circumstances. It was the only way for women born in the lower classes to go up to a more favorable social status in the strictly stratified society that they lived in.

While the boon of magic showed no preference being equally rare in both genders, women were more likely to become a mage to improve their standing, whereas men had more venues of choice such as; soldiering, pursuing commerce, peddling. And those who do follow the path of magic are either children of nobility who almost always chose it to avoid being

drafted into the military as a knight, risking their lives or those of lower classes unfortunate enough to be born frail and weak. Those lower class men generally became clerics or priests if they're lucky enough to show promise in thaumaturgy, sometimes called holy magic which seemed to be a school of magic similar to Anima magic or soulbourne magic.

Although being born into a noble house might seem like a great stroke of luck, children who are incapable of using magic or unable to express it are oftentimes disowned in a cruel mockery of fate. And that is considered the best outcome... according to Rosalia's recollection. Innate magical ability seems to be strongly hereditary being able to be passed down, especially in the bloodlines of the aristocracy. A child without it is a stain on the house's name, and yes while they're typically disavowed and thrown out of the family, many head of houses opt to instead avoid the humiliation altogether by 'dealing' with the hapless child before the news has a chance to leak. Rosalia had heard many gossips of such claims, too many for all of them to be true... but gossips don't just crop up out of nowhere... meaning some portion of those allegations had grounds to be true. Similarly Rosalia herself was thankful to her own modest magical capabilities in tune with the wind. Though new or smaller noble families seem to not care all too much of the practice, renouncing the tradition.

- *'I didn't know eugenics existed this far back in history... I mean I was expecting some problems related to inbreeding but this is something else... Wait if parents are magically capable... how come it's not inherited as a given?'*

>Possible theory... Accuracy 89.1%...

- *'Go on.'*

>Genetic region responsible for the ability to harness magical energy subject to genetic variability. Offspring possible to receive receptive genetic information. Ability to use Magical energy is present in a dormant state. Solution: exposure to Epigenetic trigger to active related genetic expression.

- *'Hold up. You're saying many of these nobles are possibly euthanizing their children because they lost a goddamn genetic lottery? How could they be responsible for what cards nature deals them...'*

There were more conventional alternatives such as a lesser spirit's blessing or a contracted spirit. When a lesser spirit decides to give their blessing and inhabit a child, the host either gains the ability to use magic matching the spirit's harmonized element or their natural ability is enhanced. In the case

of greater spirits like Dryssia or Llynbel were a step above the others, as a contract with them would turn a third rate akademia reject into a first rate sorcerer.

The reason why was that a contract with a spirit, that has the elemental affinity same as the contractor's, bolsters the mage's own magical talents to a far greater heights than before. Alternatively if the spirit possesses an affinity different from that of the host, they simply gain a new element of magic, turning them into a duo. Whichever the outcome, they have something to gain. As a consequence spirits were aggressively sought after resulting in their numbers plummeting. Without greater spirit to stabilize the flow of energy by their very presence, the rampant energies and lesser spirits coalesce into raging elementals that wreak havoc on settlements that are in its path of rampage.

Mages themselves become a first line of defense against those elementals as weapons of men fail to repel magical beings. However finding a mage who can tame a maddened elemental safely can only be found once in a blue moon. It's not strange for some to run away swallowing their pride but with their homes and dignity on the line, many step up to the challenge. Furthermore there is an incentive that the elemental could actually be a strong spirit who could be forced into contract. An individual who can achieve such a feat is not only regarded as a distinguished duet but also a hero to the town or city. Still that is a wish coveted by many and achieved by few. The outcomes are predictably tragic, destroyed and abandoned settlements, strewn bodies of failed challengers...

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After an uneventful stop at a small village the convoy was closing in on the outskirts of the town of Viveria, its fortifications in the form walls peeking from the distance. Atop the carriages few privileged Araneae, notably Alicia's eldest conjured Araneae were riding along, unseen and unknown spare one exception. As they arrived at the outlying villages that surround the town the merchant offered to let them into the town and invited her to accompany him to the guild. Although initially Alicia was wary it soon became clear it wasn't another blandishing offer to recruit her, rather the man wished to express his gratitude by writing her a letter of reference which would aid their travel by allowing easier passage into town and cities. But his ulterior motive came to light under Cold reader.

If she were to use the letter anywhere it would more or less announce to anyone that can read between the lines that she was already sort of picked up by him, a kind of a warning against anyone else that might try to cozy up to her. Still, it was a harmless gift as far as Alicia was concerned so she reluctantly accepted the offer... The first offer she accepted out of many other proposals... The sun was leaning towards the horizons and they had to start searching for lodging thus the letter would certainly come in handy as there is virtually no night time traffic to their next destination... With a plan in mind their carriage passed through the gates with minimal inspection to the town of Viveria.