

Entoma took a look around when she arrived at the campus of the Magic Academy of the once independent Baharuth Empire. A sprawling place much larger than the necessarily smaller schools intended to train only priests of the faith, this educated magic casters of all kinds. It was the model for all the magic schools established from the Beastman Province in the southeast to the Northern Roble Holy Kingdom in the far southwest.

Unlike in its prior years, it now played host to dark elves, dwarves, orcs, goblins, minotaurs, and other races including a curious student that made Entoma think of a literal worm with the way it oozed itself forward.

Around her there were many trees and abundant grass, a red-eyed vampire with long dark hair was chatting idly with a curiously white haired dark elf, and the bustling area was filled with the buzz of chatter. '*Faculty?*' Entoma immediately thought, vampires were long lived, and white hair on elves was exceptionally rare unless they were very, very old. She approached the pair, the dark elf was holding a folder, the vampire was leaning with one arm against a slender pale barked tree with many leaves providing shade, at his side was a messenger style bag. As she drew closer, Entoma heard more of what they were saying.

"...So then the student says to me, 'this sucks'. And of course being the ass I am, I had to retort with my fangs out, 'I thought I was the only vampire in this room.' He turned redder than my lunch, but stopped complaining."

The dark elf laughed at the joke, "That's funny, very funny. My students never set me up for lines like those."

"Excuse me," Entoma said when she approached, they glanced down at her and flashed friendly smiles her way.

"Yes, can we help you, are you a student?" The long haired dark elf woman asked.

"No, I'm actually a new professor, I could use some help finding my way around." Entoma said and pulled out the letter of introduction from Keeno and handed it over.

The vampire took it and as he unrolled it to read, the dark elf asked, "What will you be teaching?"

"Entomancy." Entoma said, straightening up with pride.

"Ohhh..." The vampire professor replied, "Welcome to the academy." He said and glanced at the dark elf woman, "I'll show her the way, join me for dinner tonight?"

"One day you'll slip up and ask me to 'be dinner tonight', Inta." She gave a playful punch to his arm before nodding, "See you tonight."

Entoma watched with quiet fascination at the interplay between the two, it seemed so natural, it was almost hard to watch. *'I want that too.'* She realized in an instant, and envy sprang up that her mask concealed.

"See you." He winked at her and then gave his full attention to Entoma.

"Sorry, now your letter is good, I know Keeno, we go back a ways, this is definitely her hand, even without the seal I'd recognize it." He gave a snort, "You'd think at *some* point she'd stop writing like a child..."

"You know her?" Entoma asked with sudden interest.

"Not closely, but," Inta pointed to his eyes, "vampire." He explained, "I used to live in the Draconic Kingdom before the war, and I'm quite old by most reckonings. Live long enough, travel enough, and you get to know others of your kind, especially back then when we all had to hide our identities. Funny, I actually served in the war... I was... my sister and I... we served with Gustav Montagne in the Southern Holy Kingdom."

"It's fine, don't give it a second thought, but... you were going to take me somewhere?" She pointed out.

"Yes, of course! This way." The words came out in a hasty fashion and he pointed toward the double doors of the entrance.

"So what brings you here?" He asked with an interested look down at the young woman who on the surface appeared to be just a young purple haired girl in a flowing maid outfit.

"That's what I want to find out." Entoma gave the cryptic answer and let that hang in silence until they reached the doors after ascending the short brown stone steps. She then elaborated, "I wanted a change of scenery, to do something *different*. Meet new people, see new things... a lot of my sisters got to do that, but I never did. I do have one very good friend, and she actually advised me to get 'out there' in a manner of speaking. Various things happened, and Keeno suggested this."

"Well, if you want to meet new people and try new things, the Academy is a great place to do just that. Baharuth is bustling all over, and nowhere is that more true than here in Arwintar." He replied as he guided her toward a new set of stairs.

"Professors all get free tickets to the arena matches, plus you've got the merchant district which has everything shy of state secrets for sale. The restaurants... well *I* have particular tastes." He flashed his fangs for effect. "But I'm told it is very good food."

A bold impulse came over Entoma when he bared his fangs, an impulse she had not entirely expected and was unprepared to guard herself against. *'Everyone else goes around being what they are, why can't I?!'* The question was asked inside her mind and before she could answer it, she began to remove her bug mask to bare her arachnid face with its many eyes and the little insect leg-like guides that would draw food into her mouth. "Me too." She said, and his red eyes widened as soon as he saw her mouth.

"Excuse me. That was rude." Entoma said, shame immediately came over her, and she snapped her arm down to fix the mask back into place so that no more of her face could be exposed after having given him barely a peek.

"I knew you weren't human, but when you said you were an entomancer, well, I wasn't expecting..." He snapped his lips shut, "No, forgive me, I was just surprised is all." He said with a bowing of his head.

The silence between the two became drawn out for a moment before he forced the conversation forward. "So... what *do* you eat?" He asked.

"Humans, by preference, human *men* by preference. But I can eat other things like beef, pork, and so on. I doubt there is a restaurant that serves my '*preferred*' dining experience." She laughed a little at herself and the tension began to fade.

"No, no definitely not." He said, "And... of course no eating students, though they might offer a limb or two for a better grade if you make it an extra credit offer."

"Really?" Entoma asked, unsure if he was being sarcastic as he kept a straight face the whole time.

"Maybe." He said with a shrug, "Competition is fierce, the top graduates can go into the government or go out on their own and make a small fortune attaching themselves to a noble house. Guilds and explorers are always looking for talent... to open the door to the whole world, what's a limb?"

"Hmmm, well they'd probably frown on me snacking on students and it doesn't seem quite ethical to trade grades for food soooo... too bad." Entoma answered with an equally straight face even from behind her mask.

He pointed ahead of them to another door, "Your office. You 'are' the entomancy department now." He said and when they reached the entrance, he bowed and gestured within.

"I should have asked this before but, what do you teach?" She asked him, cocking her head a little.

"Wild Magic Theory." He said with a little smile, "Not many people know much about the subject, there are only a handful of us qualified to teach it."

"Oh, does your sister teach here too? Or does she do something else?" Entoma asked.

He closed his eyes, "My... sister, she passed away. Died on an exploratory mission across the sea."

"Oh!" Entoma said and brought the tip of her arm up to the mouth of her mask. "I'm sorry, I shouldn't have asked, I didn't know..."

"It's... alright, as you said, you didn't know." Inta replied, "It was a few years ago, one of the early arrivals, she was killed by a people called 'Ongeku' that we now trade with."

"Oh... well it was still insensitive of me to ask. Let me make it up to you... I don't really know anyone here, so would you join me for lunch tomorrow?" Entoma asked.

"I'd be happy to." Inta answered, "I have a class to teach in a bit, so I should get going, but in the meantime, your office was left in a ready state, though it may need a maid's touch as it's been left empty for so long."

"Oh, *I* can handle that myself." Entoma said with a cocky smirk in her voice, if not on her face.

"You're sure, the maid and janitorial services are free." He said to her, but she nodded.

"Oh yes, they won't do nearly as good of a job as I will, I promise you. I'd rather do it myself anyway, it helps me relax." Entoma replied, and he gave that a casual shrug.

"Well, that's up to you of course." He said and then went on to explain, "The main office downstairs on the second floor will give you a permanent key, and issue you a permanent room, establish your pay, and set your classes on the board for signup in the next semester in a few weeks. Just follow the black signs and you can't miss it."

He stepped back away from the door, closer to the center of the long wide hallway, "Till then, your time is yours. I'll come by your office tomorrow afternoon and I'll show you to one of my favorite places to go in the city. They have dining halls here on campus grounds but..." He made a face, "Students aren't picky eaters, but they *should* be, at least a little."

"I'll take your word for it, and I look forward to lunch." Entoma replied to the vampire and walked past him into her office.

It was a simple space, nothing dramatic about it, a single dark wooden desk with ink and quill, the wall had a large window that opened out into a view of the grounds. She glanced out, the sun was shining and she could hear birds chirping outside her window.

She slid the window open to one side, allowing the air of the outdoors to fill the room. It was a cool breeze under a warm sun, pleasant in all respects, and the human aspect of her loved it. The chatter outside and chirping of birds made ample noise that passed into her workspace, and she set her back to it. She drew a feather duster out of her pocket dimension and gave a stern maid look around her. The dust was thick. Professionally offensive in fact. She set to work instantly, wiggling the duster about faster than a human eye could follow.

She drew out a spray bottle from her pocket dimension, along with a rag, and set to wiping down the wood and polishing everything to a shine that would make Lord Ainz proud to have her service, even if he never saw this himself.

*'My maker would be proud of me now.'* She thought with contentment and all her mind went 'empty' in tranquility and total peace as she performed the task for which she was made first and foremost. Utterly at ease with herself and all the world, she made her office a paradise of cleanliness and shining, gleaming perfection.

When she was done, she put her things away in their pocket dimension again and set the tips of her arms on her hips and gave herself an approving nod of satisfaction.

Already looking forward to tomorrow, she then stepped back, removed her mask, set it on the table, then casually darted her arm out and snatched away a bird in mid flight and shoved it into her mouth. As she crunched down on it, cutting off the panicked squawk and swallowing it, she said to herself, "I think I'm going to like it here."