

School

“Tell me again why we’re going to school on a world that doesn’t have any magic?” Max groused.

“It’s simple sweetie,” I replied easily while driving us to the campus in our new, blue convertible. It was a powerful car with a powerful engine and could move very fast down the well-maintained roads of this world. For the moment Max might prefer magic, but technology had a lot to offer... far beyond the reasons we were here. “I need to learn more about mending people. If I learn about this in an environment where there is no magic, then I won’t be tempted to cheat. Kephlon is such a place. These people know a great deal about how the human body works. They’ve practically turned healing people into an art form. An art incorporating diagnosis, various non-invasive treatments, and incredibly delicate surgeries.

“And,” I continued, “You need to learn much more about how technology works. Magic doesn’t function at all in a big portion of the Maze. Therefore, you need a solid understanding of the basics precepts of technology.”

“When I said I wanted to learn more about the worlds out there,” Max began with a frown, “I meant learn more about magic.”

“Oh, believe me, as you learn more about how technology works, you’ll be thinking of many, many more applications for the magic you already know. Then, when we get around to picking up more magical training, you’ll have an even wider basis of knowledge upon which to apply those learnings.”

“Huh,” was her only reply.

As I pulled up into a shaded parking space, she changed the subject and said, “We should build a Dyle factory here. Maybe some stores as well. I guess since there’s no magic here, it would be a Dyle Pharmaceutical versus Alchemical.”

“That a good idea,” I agreed with a smile. “When you get a chance, call Darby and set him on it.”

“Oh, he’s going to love me for adding to his already full schedule,” Max grinned.

“If he’s too busy, tell him to delegate it to someone else,” I replied with a smile of my own.

“He’d never do that and you know it,” she replied, looking decidedly mischievous. “He’d sooner tear off his right arm than even be perceived as having let you down. Or me either apparently.” A new thought seemed to strike her.

“What do we get when we finish school here?” she asked, changing the subject presumably to what she’d thought of. “I got a nice casting wand when I graduated from the Chateau Arcanorum. Do they have something similar technology wise? A staff of technology or something?”

“No sweetie. You get a piece of paper saying you successfully completed the courses within your degree plan. It’s called a diploma.”

“A piece of paper? What good is that going to be?”

“It’s a symbol. Most of the employees that we’ll be hiring when our new factory is ready will have one of these pieces of paper. It shows they’ve been through a great many classes. Theoretically, some of what was taught has stuck with them.” I glanced down at my time bracelet. “Speaking of classes, I need to get to mine. See you at lunch in the student union building.”

“Okay,” she replied with a puzzled frown. “I’ll see you then.”

Walking across the campus towards the student union building after my classes had let out, a man fell into step beside me. I was more than a little surprised to find it was my great grandfather, Titus.

“I find it most interesting,” he began with a grin, “That one of the first things you chose to do after finally getting ‘the book’ is turn around and go traipsing halfway across the Maze to go to school. I take it this is Raphael’s doing?”

“I’ve tried to follow in her steps for years now. She suggested that if I really wanted to learn about healing, I get off my butt and do so. Of course, I’m paraphrasing a bit.”

“Yes, I know. So why come here?” he asked as we stopped close to a fountain. “Why not study the magic of healing until it’s ingrained into your bones and blood? Once that happens, you can take the power of healing everywhere. Just as you brought a number of ingrained powers with you to this world that’s otherwise devoid of magic.”

“That’s certainly true,” I agreed. “And I may do that later. But I wouldn’t be able to teach that to someone here, would I? No. Part of what I want is to be able to pass on what I learn. And to be honest, a greater part of what I’m doing is learning everything I possibly can on the subject.”

“Sometimes it’s good to pass on knowledge and sometime it’s better to let them learn it themselves,” he replied with a peculiar look and intonation to his voice.

“True enough,” I replied, searching his face in vain for a clue to what was going through his mind.

“I suppose it’s also occurred to you that the more you know about healing, the more you also know about killing?”

“I admit the thought crossed my mind once or twice. But that’s not the real reason why I’m here,” I told him with a frown.

“Yes, yes. Learning about healing and bringing Maxine up to speed on technology.”

“Right,” I acknowledged, still frowning. “And just why are you suddenly back from being ascended?”

“Oh, I’m still ascended,” he said with a grin. “I just dabble a bit more in the destiny of the worlds now. And I do still care about my family. Here soon, I’m going to get a job working in the Castellum Regillia. I’m not sure if you’ll recognize me or not. If you do, don’t let on. I’ll tell who I want about my real identity when I’m ready.”

“Alright,” I agreed. “What you do is your business. And speaking of business, what are you planning to do about your brother and your niece? Tullis is raising an army in the Possibility Vortex. Presumably with the intention of invading the Maze. And Talia is still blaming Granpa Lawrence for Numitine’s death. You’re one of the few people who could explain how things really are that they’d listen to.”

“No,” he replied, shaking his head and looking perhaps a little sad. “We each have our problems to work out. We all must either grow or wither at our own pace. Inasmuch at least as our brothers and sisters allow. Tullis must come to understand why the Machine was not left to him... and he must figure it out on his own. Talia... Well, Talia is a special case. She has become a tool of fate. Sometime fairly soon, she’s going to push someone. Someone special. And because of this push, this someone will learn a great deal about themselves that they might not otherwise learn. Talia walks this path thinking she’s on the road to glory and power. She’ll gain both, and find them

fleeting. In winning what she wants, she'll lose everything she holds dear. For some, understanding simply comes too late. Despite her genius, I believe Talia will be one of these people."

"That's terrible," I breathed.

"Indeed. But she chose her own way. If it doesn't lead where she thought it would, it's no one's fault but her own."

"But you could help her," I insisted.

"I could," he agreed sadly but determinedly, "But I won't. She has the right to live her life as she chooses. Up to the point where it interferes with other people's lives anyway. At that point, matters become a bit more complicated. Still, I will not interfere with her free will. And she is so single-minded that she would not listen to my advice were I to offer it. Therefore, I will make no such offer."

"But you're cheating her of the chance to make that choice knowing the consequences," I told him.

"That's one way of looking at it. Another is that I'm keeping her in the dark as to my return to the worlds of the Maze."

I was silent a moment as I considered that. "Talia was one of your students before you ascended," I muttered, thinking aloud.

"Yes. Dayfid was my first student but he didn't make the investment of time and effort true training in the magical arts required. He has some talent but his potential remains unfulfilled. Oneta and Foster were my next students. Both had talent but wanderlust took hold on both at a young age. They spent their youth traveling and so I directed my efforts elsewhere.

"Talia spent a great deal of her early years out in the Maze. During that time she became strong and independent. It was later in her life that she found me. On that fateful day, my two greatest apprentices came to me. For you see, Linden arrived that very same day. Both walked the Machine for the first time that evening. And the following morning I began teaching them about what it meant to be a Diamond. Showing them how to utilize the magics that the worlds of the Maze held. That they held. Both of them were geniuses in their own way. Linden had an intuitive understanding of why magic worked the way it did. Talia had the ability to soak up knowledge like a sponge. In all the years I worked with her, I never had to repeat a single thing to her." He fell silent then, looking at things only he could see.

"What happened then?" I asked.

"Well," he began, turning a surprisingly paternal look upon me. "One night I was studying down in my lab and several of my theories all came together to me at once in a great epiphany of understanding. I summoned up my power, let everyone know what I was doing, and ascended."

"What's it like?" I asked. "Being ascended?"

"Find out for yourself," he grinned.

"Right," I replied with a frown. "Maybe later. At the moment, I'm late for lunch with Max."

"Just remember something," he told me seriously. "While you're here learning about healing, you're still connected to worlds of magic through the interworld gates. That's something to remember. Magic and technology are connected throughout the worlds of Maze even when they're kept separated. Just because you're in a technological world, doesn't mean you can't learn more about magic while you're here." And with that he was simply gone. I looked around just to be sure but there was no trace of him. Whether he'd used some sort of imbedded magic or triggered some technological gadget was unknown to me. Sometimes it was hard to tell magic from technology. And sometimes there was actually almost no difference between the two. And perhaps that was the

point he'd been trying to make.

Considering everything he'd said, I continued on to my lunch appointment with Max.

In the basement of the mansion Max and I lived in while going to college, I now had a great deal of high tech equipment. And as I plugged in the last of the machines, I was finally ready to start using them.

"Okay," Max said with an expectant look at me as she wiped sweat from her forehead. "That's the last of it. Now what does all this stuff do?"

"I'm going to take some readings and then study the results," I replied, taking a drink of water from my tumbler.

"And what will these readings tell you?" she asked, taking a pull from her own drink.

"I'm not sure. It's something that a recent conversation brought up. I'm wondering now if maybe when this world was built if magic and technology both existed. Then, the apprentice who built the place somehow suppressed the magical part of the world. If that's the case, then I want to know how was done."

"So you can copy it?" Max asked.

"Or maybe undo it."

"Sounds like a big project," she suggested thoughtfully. "The Creator's apprentice or apprentices who built this place, and all the worlds of the Maze in general, really knew what they were doing. I suspect undoing their work won't be easy."

"And I would hope not. Easy change is one of the hallmarks of the Possibility Vortex. We wouldn't want that here. No, I'm not looking for easy answers. Just answers." Naturally, I could have looked up what I wanted to know in the Book of Knowledge. However, if I kept pulling important answers to how our worlds were built out of thin air, people would become suspicious. Curious people would begin focusing attention on me. More than was already turned my way. If my experiments failed, I could always check the book. Would probably check the book to verify what I'd found regardless. To keep the curiosity directed my way relatively low, my information needed a credible source. A source that wasn't the Book of Knowledge. In this particular case, that source would be the machines gathered in this basement.

"This stuff is over my head," Max sighed. "Way beyond the levers and pulleys stuff the tutor's been explaining."

Smiling, I put an arm around her shoulders, "Don't you worry. We'll have you up to speed soon enough. This isn't going to be a quick little project. This is going to take time. Might as well since we've both got a lot yet to learn while we're on this world and quite some time allotted to doing it."

"When's the next holiday here?" she asked, rather than reply to my statement.

"Hmm? I'm not sure. I think it's Angel's Day. Why?"

"Learning about all this has been very eye opening," she admitted. "However, if I don't fly or throw a flame bolt soon, I'm going to go crazy. This lack of magic in the world is fine, but the fact that something in this world suppresses the magic within me is bothersome. It's like an itch I can't scratch. A small itch but after a while the need to scratch it builds up."

"I understand completely," I told her with a smile, leading the way back upstairs. "I like to go out and let my magical hair down from time to time as well. As I recall, Angel's Day is at week's

end. We'll head out the prior evening and find a world where we can let our magics run wild.”
“Yes!” she declared with a huge smile.

While we enjoyed our Angel's Day vacation a great deal, we weren't done with the world of Kephlon. We had a lot of schooling left. And quite a lot of it would take place outside of school.