
Never Stop Learning

“Happy Birthday, Your Highness!”

The chorus of voices made Gwyn jump in fright, her heart pounding in her chest as she walked into the dining hall of her House’s residence. The room was filled with friends and members of the House who all stood excitedly while beaming at her with delight while the princess, her two House Paladins, and Sabina walked in.

Turning around, she immediately zeroed in on Sabina, her trusted knight who now sported a playful smirk on her face.

“You traitor,” Gwyn muttered good-naturedly under her breath, a small smile appearing on her face despite the surprise.

‘Don’t say you don’t enjoy it’ Sabina sent, the mental tone thick with amusement. Gwyn responded with an exaggerated roll of her eyes but couldn’t quite suppress the warm feeling bubbling inside of her.

Before she could retort, Roslyn and Adrienne rushed her, crushing her in a group hug—or at least they would have if Gwyn wasn’t so much stronger than them. Luckily, she managed to maintain her balance as their laughter rang through the hall. Behind them, she saw several other classmates, such as her roommate Daria, Roslyn’s classmate and their study partner Salla—the rank two student in their school year, along with several other students she’d gotten to know throughout the year.

Yet, amidst this sea of smiling faces, Gwyn found herself focusing on two of the more important people in the room: Roslyn and Adrienne.

Well, and her adopted aunts, Friedrich, her ladies-in-waiting, and...

Everyone’s important. But Roz and Adrienne are just a bit different.

The air was filled with the scent of sweet pastries and the sound of soft music that had begun playing in the background by a small group of musicians with string instruments.

As if on cue, the Crew advanced toward her.

Lore, Ilyana, and Nora all stepped forward and offered their own well wishes, and she found herself smiling at the group. They’d all come so far since she first met them back in Strathmore. Lorrena was likely going to finish the year in Class Eight, which was impressive for a girl who thought she wouldn’t be able to do well. Nora had been working with Friedrich to help maintain the estate

while her two knights managed the House from the townhouse; she was ready to join Ilyana at the Upper School in the following school year.

Then there was Ilyana.

Gwyn found her gaze lingering on the young woman, now seventeen and ready to start her second year at the Upper School ahead of Nora, and already giving the girl tips. She was a baroness, the highest ranking of her ladies-in-waiting, but instead of giving off an air of nobility, she looked like a warrior in her outfit that she used to train with the guards, and her two swords she wore on her waist.

She gets to wear pants...

But the part that was the most striking, and largest change since getting to know her... were the toned muscles of the slightly shorter elf. The young woman gave her a smile as she crossed her arms and assumed a stance that radiated determination and strength, and accentuated her arms...

Gwyn felt her cheeks heat up and quickly jerked her head away.

Ilyana had found a true path in life, and Gwyn couldn't be happier for her.

As the three moved away, Gwyn's eyes were drawn next to Taenya, her loyal Knight-Captain, who was approaching her with a welcoming smile. Her adopted aunt stretched her arms wide, and Gwyn smiled as she stepped into the embrace. As the woman leaned her head against Gwyn's it startled her to realize she was almost at the same height as Taenya with her current height of one-hundred seventy-three *and a half* centimeters.

Only about five or so to go!

She glanced back at Sabina and squinted.

She's only a smidge shorter than Taenya, which means I'm almost caught up to her!

Gwyn smirked. She was still far off from her mom though, now *she* was tall.

'What are you thinking about?' Sabina sent, her eyebrows raised with an amused expression.

'Just how I'm almost as tall as you and Taenya,' Gwyn replied. ***'Well, you and I are basically the same height now.'***

Sabina snorted, followed shortly by Taenya's own huff of amusement. The telv blonde pulled away from her and playfully pushed her shoulder while giving Gwyn a look. "Really? You're still a scrawny thing even if you are sprouting up like a tree."

Gwyn's eyes widened. "She told you?" she asked in mock outrage. "I'll have you know that I am *not* scrawny."

Oxylus

Her knight visibly tried to hold in laughter but managed to only contain it for... three seconds before it burst forth and had the woman doubling over.

Gwyn was not amused as she narrowed her eyes, but the crowd was quickly redirected to the table where silver goblets were served to those gathered by the servants.

When Gwyn took a sip, her eyes widened as she tasted the fruity drink she'd enjoyed at the royal twins' birthday. She looked up and Roslyn gave her a wink before leaning close. "I told Ser Taenya that you loved it!"

Gwyn chuckled. "Thanks, Roz," she said before taking another sip, her eyes closing as she savored the sweet fruity flavor.

Her eyes shot open.

Roslyn stared at her in concern. "What's wrong?"

Gwyn looked down at the goblet and smirked. She channeled mana through her and used **[Cryomancy]** to slowly create ice inside of the goblet, then with a bit of **[Telekinesis]** she mixed it all together and held it in so it wouldn't spill out, effectively turning it into a slushy.

This. This is why magic is so awesome.

Strawberry slushy on command!

She looked up to see the amused or awed expressions on nearly everyone around her. Roslyn looked down at the drink and Gwyn took a small sip, shivering as the frozen drink hit her throat.

It was delicious.

Gwyn looked at Roz and held it out. "Want to try?"

She wasn't sure if the girl could have yanked it from her hands quicker if she'd tried.

With a slow hesitant sip, the girl's eyes shot wide open and she made a small moan of delight as she savored the drink. Without even looking at Gwyn, her bestie handed her own goblet of fruity drink and kept drinking Gwyn's.

Gwyn chuckled, repeating the process on her new cup of drink, soon enjoying it herself.

She looked up to a sea of disappointed faces who looked longingly at her cup. She narrowed her eyes and pulled her drink closer to herself protectively.

Taenya laughed. "Alright, alright. Gwyn, since this is an informal affair, we'll have you sit at the head of the table for gifts."

Gwyn nodded. "Okay!"

Manabound - Equilibrium

Her heart was pounding with excitement as she took her seat at the head of the table, her eyes sparkling with joy while all of her friends, guests, and members of her House sat down with her in what was clearly prearranged seating either at the table itself or at the sides of the room.

The first gift was presented by Roslyn.

“Happy birthday, Gwyn,” Roslyn said, her pretty violet eyes sparkling with mana as the girl used her magic to enhance her eyes. She handed Gwyn a beautifully wrapped package that revealed an elaborate journal with a silver clasp that held the Reinhart seal on it, next to it was a gorgeous pen set made from silver with designs of dragons adorning it.

Gwyn’s eyes widened in delight as she traced the intricate patterns with her fingers. “Thank you, Roslyn,” she said. She loved it, and the little dragons were absolutely stunning. “I can’t wait to write in this.”

Roslyn beamed at her. “I thought you’d like it. You can use it as a way to express your thoughts and feelings, a way to help you through the tough times.”

Gwyn smiled and held out a hand to her friend, giving Roslyn a squeeze as the girl placed hers in Gwyn’s.

“Thanks,” she repeated, her voice filled with warmth and gratitude.

As the polite applause for Gwyn’s gift subsided, Friedrich stepped forward holding a velvet box in his hands. “For you, Princess,” he said with respect. “I wanted to give you something that held a proper Austrian style.”

She opened the box to reveal a beautiful handheld mirror.

Gwyn pulled out and held the silver handheld mirror with a delicate hand, her eyes entranced by the elaborate designs and gemstones that graced its handle. The mirror’s surface shone with a brilliant luster, set inside a frame that showed a deep reverence for sleek lines and intricate patterns that gifted the mirror with a sophisticated and captivating allure.

“Friedrich, this is beautiful,” she said with awe. “I can’t wait to show my mom. I know we talked about my home, she used to love seeing things like this in museums.”

The Austrian knight chuckled, his eyes twinkling. “Are you calling me old?” he asked, his hand lifting up and absently twirling his mustache.

She giggled. “You know what I mean!”

“I do, I do.”

The gift-giving continued on, and soon Ilyana approached. Her lady-in-waiting gave her a beautiful dagger, its hilt embedded with shimmering gems and the blade etched with what looked slightly more crude versions of the runes her ring held.

That mom helped make.

She smiled as her fingers gently traced the softly glowing glyphs, pulsing her own mana so she could feel the blade's residual magic held inside of them.

"Thank you, Ilyana," she said quietly as she tried to not get emotional over the reminder of her mom. Her sword-wielding lady-in-waiting smiled, clearly thinking that Gwyn's response was due to her gift.

"These runes aren't permanent like the ones on your ring, and the man I got them from has no clue how that was done," she explained. "So, we'll need to take it to him or someone else every now and then to get them refreshed with magic."

Gwyn nodded. Maybe her mom could make the ones on the dagger permanent too, but she didn't say that aloud. Ilyana was too happy about the gift.

The first surprise of the evening came when Sabina directed Gwyn to the window.

When she got there, the sight that met her took her breath away.

"You got me a horse?!" Gwyn gasped, her eyes wide with surprise.

Her focus was entirely on the stunning horse that stood with a noble bearing and was flanked by two of Sabina's Wynvers. The mare's coat, a mesmerizing blend of blue and silver, shimmered under the fading sunlight and was reminiscent of a tranquil twilight sky while her flowing mane and tail were both as dark as the starlit night.

She was beautiful.

Sabina glanced at Taenya with a smug expression and smiled. "Not just any horse. She's a Jarincían."

Nearby, the telv Knight-Captain let out a strangled sound.

Roslyn's eyes widened. "How did you get her, and a blue roan at that?! My grandfather has been trying to get any color Jarincían for ages... and you go and find one of the rarer ones."

Her bestie sounded a bit miffed. Gwyn smirked. Her horse was amazing and her coat fit her House colors perfectly.

The black-haired mind mage shrugged, her smile never wavering. "It's easier when you mention it's for a princess's thirteenth birthday. Still... she was..." she winced. "*Expensive.*"

In the crowd of people that were all staring out of the window, Friedrich huffed a laugh. "She's a beautiful creature, but I don't think it's proper to speak of expense for a gift."

Sabina's face scrunched up into another wince. "Point well taken, Sir Friedrich."

Gwyn was almost speechless. Almost.

Manabound - Equilibrium

“What’s her name?” Gwyn asked with barely contained glee.

Sabina smiled as she stepped closer. “She doesn’t have a name, you get to name her.”

Gwyn’s eyes widened. “Oh, oh. Ah! I’m so bad at names... Cappuccino. Wait, no... she’s not brown. I don’t know!”

The high elf woman chuckled, her blue eyes crinkling with mirth. “You don’t have to name her right now, silly. You have time.”

The princess nodded. “She’s gorgeous, Sabina. Thank you.”

She hugged her second adopted aunt and turned to return to the table, but not before taking one last glance at her new horse. Her eyes widened.

‘I don’t know how to ride a horse,’ she thought toward Sabina.

A mental chuckle sounded in her head. *‘Don’t worry. I’ll teach you. Taenya and I also got you a dress that will allow you to ride a horse properly and with dignity.’*

‘But. But. But... Pants?’ she pleaded.

The mental image of an eye roll was the only response.

Gwyn’s next gift was from her House’s newest members, the paladins. Evocati Amari and Vicori Rollo presented her with a large tapestry that featured a radiant sunburst design at its center, representing Alos, with intricate details depicting Eona, the goddess of life, and their daughters encircling it. Amari explained that they would have it put up in the House chapel once it was completed in the spring.

The final gift was from Taenya, whose Drakyyd team members brought out wrapped in silk.

When they unveiled the gift, Gwyn’s eyes widened as a mage’s staff was revealed.

It was beautifully crafted from an ebony wood that was adorned with metal insets and engravings and held the large red core that they had retrieved from the drakyyd mother that seemed so long ago.

As they held up the staff, Gwyn noticed that it was as tall as her eye level and she squinted at Taenya in confusion, causing the telv woman to smile. “You didn’t think I realized how tall you’re getting? I’m guessing here, but I think this will be the perfect height when you’re done growing.”

Gwyn hummed as she grabbed the long metal grip that took up the entire center third of the staff, feeling the blue fabric under her fingers and the gentle thrum of mana coursing from her core and through the staff to the core.

“Taenya, this is... amazing,” Gwyn said in awe. “I can *feel* the mana pulsing within it.”

This is going to amplify my magic nicely.

Taenya nodded, her eyes serious. “Maybe your mother can add her magical runes to it, as well. Just like your ring.”

Gwyn felt the tears well up quickly with that thought.

It was a good birthday.

I'm a teenager now.

...

I feel so old.



The bright, clear sky and colorful leaves of Autumn outside the window seemed especially inviting as Gwyn absently listened to her professor drone on while she sat in her Class Three homeroom with the last week of school stretching out before her. The room itself was filled with a sense of anticipation of relief—at least for those around her—as the students had just completed the last of their final examinations for the year.

The professor, a high elf man who she had come to know as a stern teacher with high expectations from his students, was explaining what was to come for the end-of-year.

“Your initial rank for Year Two will be posted after the welcoming speech,” he informed them, his voice almost echoing in the silent room. “Just like at the beginning of the year, so please do not ask me,” he said while looking at a terran girl across the room.

That girl was nice, but being from what Gwyn knew as Renaissance England didn't really allow either of them to connect with each other. In fact, the brunette girl who apparently came from a well-off merchant family found herself relating more with the Loreni than Gwyn or any of the other terrans in the school.

Well, there is that one boy... but he ended up quitting and leaving...

I never got to meet that one.

Over time as Gwyn met more and more of the terrans, she realized that just being the same people didn't mean she would immediately find a friend in them, and she had other priorities.

Although, there were a boy and girl in Class Five with Adrienne that she wanted to meet who were apparently from a time almost like Gwyn's. Unfortunately, her orkun friend had told her they like to keep to themselves and rarely spoke with anyone outside of necessity.

Maybe after the break.

Manabound - Equilibrium

“Additionally,” the professor continued. “You are to clean your dorms and move into your new rooms based on schedules that will be posted today in your dorm hallways. Lastly, I would like to take a moment to congratulate all of you on completing Year One in the Lower School. You have each done exceptional work this year.” He swept his gaze over the class before settling on Gwyn, his lips curling into a small smile. “Miss Reinhart, you in particular have astounded myself and many of your professors this year,” he confessed before turning his attention back to everyone else. “Some of you may be aware, but Miss Reinhart began this year as the lowest ranked student in the class. To have come so far with such dedication is, quite simply, inspiring. Before this year, no other student who started in Class Fourteen had managed to get within the top three classes. Well done.”

As he finished, he gave a small clap which was soon followed by almost everyone else in the class. Gwyn glanced over at Calanis, whose rank had fallen enough for her to drop from Class Two to Three after the mid-terms. The high elf girl scowled at Gwyn, her eyes filled with resentment, but Gwyn simply rolled her eyes in response, unbothered by her soon-to-be former roommate’s attitude.

It’s really just quite petty at this point. Mean girls... shaking my head.

The distant chime of bells signaled the end of the class, and a man entered the classroom, quietly moving to the front as the professor addressed the students.

“Remember,” the professor called out as the students began to gather their belongings. “You start your three week break after this week, those of you who were supplied with books by the Academy will have crates outside of your new rooms with your names on them. Please place all books within it, you will no longer need them.”

As Gwyn stood up to leave, the professor who was looking down at a note called out her name. She waited as the messenger and other students filed out and made her way to the front of the room where the man stood. “Miss Reinhart, you are to report to the Hall of Magical Studies next period. I’ve been informed that you’re to skip your next class.”

Gwyn frowned, her eyebrows knitting together in confusion. “What about my Art class?” she asked. “It’s my final one of the year...”

Art was one of her favorite classes, and she thoroughly enjoyed her teacher Professor Pohl was one of her favorites this year, and someone who genuinely seemed as if Gwyn was a valued member of her class.

It made her feel welcome, and thus made art her sanctuary—as long as she ignored Princess Elora, which was easy to do once she really immersed herself in her paintings.

In front of her, the professor shook his head. “Unfortunately, you will miss that class this week. The department head for the magical studies requested your time so that you may assist with something.”

Gwyn sighed, a small frown tugging at the corners of her mouth.

She had come to appreciate her magic class, but she also enjoyed the creative freedom her art class provided. Plus, the magic class was mostly about her just showing off the magic she already had, and explaining how she made new spells.

It was really quite boring, and nowhere near as fun as her private training with Roslyn.

“Fine,” she said with resignation. The professor gave her a small smile and dismissed her before returning to his own work.

She gathered her belongings and headed out of the room, Amari falling into step behind her before she even made it through the door. As her other paladin joined them outside, Gwyn wondered what the class could possibly want her help with this time.

As she stepped outside of the building where the homerooms lay, the cool breeze ruffled her hair and made her shiver. The Royal Academy’s grounds were awash with the vibrant hues of Autumn; the once verdant trees were now adorned with leaves in shades of red, orange, and gold, their fiery colors a stark contrast against the clear, azure sky.

Gwyn and her two paladins strolled toward the Hall of Magical Studies, and she pulled her school robes tighter. The air was crisp and cool, carrying with it the distinct scent of fallen leaves and the faint hint of wood smoke from distant chimneys.

The neatly manicured lawns were dotted with piles of leaves, their vibrant colors creating a beautiful tapestry on the dormant grass.

She found herself drawn to one such pile, a mound of red and yellow leaves that seemed to glow in the afternoon sun. A smile tugged at the corners of her mouth as a memory surfaced, one from several years ago.

It transported her back to a fun autumn when she and her mom had flown to Michigan to see their family for Gwyn’s birthday. She was there with her mom, Aunt Katie, and her *nonno* and *nonna*. All of them were engaged in a fun and playful leaf fight, the air filled with their laughter and the rustling of leaves. In a moment that was absolutely *Mom*, her mom had dumped a massive pile of leaves onto Katie’s head.

Mom always liked to pick on her sister. It’s always just been me and Mom since...

She sniffled a bit, forcing her thoughts away from the memory of her mom’s crying. The funeral. And the reason mom found a job and they moved to Italia in the first place.

Gwyn forced her thoughts back to that trip, remembering how the leaf war was unceremoniously ruined when her grandparent’s dog came charging at them and darted around in sheer delight, leaping into the leaf piles and scattering them in all directions.

Manabound - Equilibrium

The sight had sent her into a fit of giggles that erupted into more as her mom scooped her up and spun her around in the air.

Shaking off the thoughts, Gwyn continued her walk when she suddenly had a thought. Turning to Vicori Rollo, the young paladin who was also now a part of her House, she asked, "Would it be possible if you could let Adrienne know that I won't be able to make it to art class? I'll meet her after whatever Lead Scholar Lirael needs."

Rollo looked questioningly at Amari, who simply shrugged. "We're a part of her House now, she makes the rules," she said, her voice filled with a hint of amusement.

As the vicori walked away to deliver the message, Gwyn raised an eyebrow at Amari. "You're still a part of the Church, too. I like to see it as more of an exchange program... just without my House giving anything in return."

Amari chuckled at her words. "That's a good way to look at it, I suppose," she mused then her eyes lit up as she leaned in conspiratorially. "So, what do you think they want your help with this time? The royal enchanters have been busy, maybe they want to see if their enchantments can finally stop your magic?"

Gwyn snorted at the suggestion. "Like that will ever happen..." she said, shaking her head. "But, after I accidentally broke the last project they worked on... I've *tried* to not be so rude and dismissive of their work. I think it may be about my staff."

The sun elf woman smirked, seemingly waiting for Gwyn to catch something.

Which she did.

Eventually.

"Crap! We need to go by the dorm and grab the staff first."

Amari huffed a laugh. "Let's go."

The two of them hurried toward her dorm building, the crunch of gravel and leaves under her boots betraying their rush. The Royal Academy, with its grand buildings and beautiful gardens, was even more enchanting in the autumn, the season adding a touch of magic to what was quickly becoming a magical place.

After retrieving the staff, they made it to the Hall in record time, well, at least for Gwyn. Amari was still super fast.

As she strode through the entrance, Gwyn looked around at the large hall that would one-day teach students the foundations of magic. For now, it acted as sort of a testing ground, a way for everyone to collectively learn what mana was doing to them.

When Gwyn walked into the open door of Lead Scholar Lirael's office, she saw the woman engrossed in her work behind a large oak desk. The high elf looked up as they entered and her eyes widened in surprise as she caught sight of Gwyn's staff.

"That's beautiful!" she said as she quickly placed her pen onto a tray and the shorter woman stood, her eyes glued to the staff in Gwyn's hand. "May I?" she asked, her voice filled with anticipation and awe.

Gwyn chuckled lightly at the woman's enthusiasm. Despite her much lower steps and weaker magic, there was no denying the woman held a love for magic that was only eclipsed by Gwyn's own.

"How are you today, Professor?" Gwyn asked in a light tone. She was sure that if it wasn't for the opportunity of being the Lead Scholar of the school's magical department provided, the woman would have much preferred not teaching and just sitting somewhere researching all the secrets of magic.

I can respect that.

Lirael recovered from her initial surprise and smiled at Gwyn. "Sorry, Miss Reinhart. I am well, I just got excited to see this beautiful work of art. You've mentioned the possibility of tools like this often, and we've been working on crude versions ourselves... but the core... it's so large. Where did you get it?"

Gwyn's smile fell, her tone turning somber at the question. "From a... friend," she replied simply.

Lirael nodded slowly as if trying to understand as Gwyn handed her the staff. The shield mage's eyes pulsed slightly as she examined the staff, a gasp escaping her lips. "This is utterly fascinating. This feeling, I can only imagine the effect it has on you with your innate connection to red mana."

Gwyn couldn't help but feel a sense of satisfaction at the woman's reaction. She was proud of the staff, not just for its beauty, but for what it represented. *You did well, Taenya.*

"So, what did you need that required me to be unable to attend my last art class, professor?" Gwyn asked, her tone holding a bit more bite than she intended.

Lirael had the courtesy to look guilty. "I apologize for that, but the royal enchanters are leaving soon and we wanted your assistance with something before that. They will not be back until spring."

Gwyn sighed.

She could feel Amari's triumphant gaze on her back, but she simply smiled and refused to turn around.

Thankfully she doesn't have [Telepathy]. Sabina would have made a joke.

Manabound - Equilibrium

“I’ll follow you, Professor,” Gwyn replied with resignation.

The woman smiled and returned Gwyn’s staff. “Right, come along!”

She heard a light chuckle as she walked by the paladin, deliberately keeping her eyes on the back of the professor’s head.

Lirael led Gwyn and Amari through the winding corridors of the Hall of Magical Studies, finally stopping at a classroom that clearly had been taken over by the royal enchanters. As the three of them entered, Gwyn was met with the sight of seven people, all dressed in the same style and colors of the other royal scholars, their faces lit up with anticipation.

A high elven man with dark brown hair stepped forward, his face breaking into a warm smile as he quickly bowed. “Your Highness, thank you for seeing us today,” he said as he straightened, his voice filled with respect.

Gwyn scanned the room, her eyes landing on each scholar in turn. She didn’t recognize any of them, and her confusion must have shown on her face because the professor quickly stepped in to explain.

“This team is working on magical items,” she said with a hint of excitement. “In particular, they are attempting to do some... parallel research to the Church’s Ceremony of Paths.”

The man nodded in agreement, his smile never wavering. “We were working at the Academy’s Upper School, however, when we heard about you we just had to shift the last of our work here. We are hoping you can test something for us.”

Amari moved to stand protectively beside Gwyn. “Is it safe?” the sun elf woman asked as she focused intently on the man.

He nodded quickly, his eyes widening slightly as he took in the serious look on the paladin. “Of course, lady paladin. As the First Mage, and a magic user of the greatest known capability, her assistance will give us a... stress test if you will of our measurement device.”

Gwyn’s confusion deepened. “Measurement device?” she asked with furrowed brows.

A woman stepped forward, her eyes sparkling with excitement. “Yes! We hope to use a specially designed crystal orb that we have engraved with magical runes to measure how much mana one is capable of utilizing. In doing so, we hope to be able to guide and pinpoint tasks better suited to one’s capabilities.”

Gwyn’s eyes widened in surprise. To her, that actually seemed like a great idea.

A tool that could figure out how much mana one could pull would increase the safety of the user, and hopefully, reduce the chance of burning yourself out as she’d done before.

“That sounds interesting,” she said with a bit of restraint.

The man and woman led Gwyn to a small pedestal set up on a table, the other scholars parting to make way for her. Resting on the pedestal was a crystal orb, its surface covered in glowing blue runes, and on either side of the orb were circles, each with a single large rune set in the center.

Just like the Ceremony.

The man began to explain the process. “All you have to do is place your hands on each circle and draw mana through your core and into the crystal. You want to push as much as you can for as long as you can. The orb will change colors to match your mana type, and there are more orbs built into the pedestal that should allow us to quantify your draw rate.”

Gwyn nodded, handed her staff to Amari, and stepped forward, placing her hands where indicated, and instantly felt a slight pulse from the orb, similar to the cores used by the Church, but not quite the same.

She glanced up at the scholars, several of whom were poised to take notes.

The lead man gave her a nod and said, “Please, after you.”

Drawing in a deep breath, Gwyn began to draw mana through her core and into the orb.

At first, she felt a bit of resistance, so she pushed harder and forced more mana into the device, keeping mindful of her own mental strain.

As she started to get a feel for it, a smirk tugged at the corners of her mouth, and with more confidence, she drew deeply through her core, but with a focus on white mana.

Within moments the orb began to heat up.

But it wasn't more than say a phone after a long video session so she pushed even more mana into it, throwing everything she had into the task.

She heard Amari call out her name, but she was too focused to pay it any mind such was her determination to give the scholars a proper test.

A stress test.

A veritable flood of mana flowed through her and into the orb and suddenly her own concern started to rise as the orb started to radiate an intense amount of heat. She narrowed her eyes as she sent red mana into her hands to protect them, but then a stuttering pulse came from the orb.

Realizing something may be wrong, she cut the draw of mana to the orb, but it was then that she registered one of the women exclaiming in concern.

Before she could react, Gwyn was yanked away from the orb by Amari.

Gwyn gasped in surprise, but before she could react, the orb began to glow brighter and brighter. Amari yelled for everyone to take cover, and the room erupted into chaos.

Manabound - Equilibrium

Without thinking, Gwyn used her [**Telekinesis**] to propel the orb away from them and smash it through the window.

As soon as it was clear of the building, it exploded.

Gwyn threw up a [**Ice Wall**] as a barrier in front of the window just as the explosion blew out the rest of the glass in every other window as well.

The room was filled with the sound of shattering glass and the shocked cries of those present as Amari tried to shield Gwyn with her own body.

Then, as suddenly as it started, it was done.

The room was stunned into silence, and Amari looked over Gwyn for any injuries before giving her a nod and turning around.

“Not dangerous?” the paladin asked, her tone brooking no argument. “I believe it still needs a bit of work.”

Everyone stood dumbfounded as Amari guided Gwyn out of the room.

The two of them soon met up with Rollo, who wisely chose to keep his mouth shut after seeing Amari’s stern face. It wasn’t long until Gwyn was back in her dorm room, and helping Lorrena pack.

When she took a break after finishing with the majority of her belongings, determined to finish before moving to the new room the next day, her mind flitted back to the test with the enchanters. The looks on their faces as she used her magic to both accidentally cause the issue, and to use it to save them.

She... actually enjoyed it. As bad as it sounded.

Despite her earlier conversation with Amari on the walk to the hall, a part of her enjoyed the recognition she was getting. Being the one to push magic forward had been a big part of her vision, and something she had come to love.

Each time she found herself figuring out something she hadn’t considered before too.

Which was great.

After all, in a world of magic, there was always something new to learn.

She looked down at her ring and smiled. This time she learned that her mom was clearly just as good at magic as her.

Perhaps Taenya was the most prescient member of her House, having had the foresight to not even attempt to have someone else enchant Gwyn’s staff. Instead, she wisely left the task to Gwyn’s mom.

Oxylus

After all, the ring Gwyn had was so much better than anything else she'd seen yet.

I can't wait to see what Mom's made when she finally gets here.

She just knew it would be absolutely amazing.