

## Prepared and Unafraid

Gwyn stepped into the Hall of Magical Studies, marveling at the ornate architecture, and yet surprised to see it relatively empty. Almost immediately, she and her assigned paladins came to a stop as she was greeted by a poised high elf woman with a warm smile, who introduced herself as Lead Scholar Lirael. Gwyn couldn't help but notice the air of authority and wisdom that surrounded the high elf, making her feel both excited and slightly intimidated about her new magical studies.

Lirael led Gwyn down a well-lit hallway, speaking to her as they walked, "Welcome to the Hall of Magical Studies, Miss Reinhart. We have heard much about you."

Gwyn smiled. "Good things, I hope?" she asked. "I find that I'm pretty awesome." The question elicited a quiet huff from the younger paladin from behind her, who was immediately hushed by Amari.

The professor smiled. "Of course. We were informed about how you enjoy using magic in your other classes," the woman said with a bit of mirth. "We hope that you will channel that enthusiasm and energy into your classes here."

"Classes?" Gwyn clarified. "I thought we were just taking one?"

"As part of the Advanced Class, you will move around to multiple classes within the department," Professor Lirael explained. "This is a new field for us at the Royal Academy, this will allow us all to learn the most optimal way to help you and others to hone these new abilities."

Gwyn nodded. The two walked into a spacious classroom filled with tables and a large open area in the front. The walls were lined with empty bookshelves, which she assumed would soon be populated with books about magic. The room was filled with natural light from a series of large windows, creating a welcoming and cozy atmosphere.

"We are unsure of how many students will be in the class for now, so there may be some changes throughout the week. However, here in the department, we will be assigning an internal rank for the students regardless of class year. Based on consultation with the Church and your title of First Mage, we are confident that you are currently ranked first."

Gwyn's eyes widened. "They told you about me?"

"They simply stated they were certain no other student would match you," the professor replied. "With your title, we concur. In fact, your title is now why we are internally referring to magic users as Mages. Now, while we will not pry upon the results of a student's Ceremony, we will not turn down the opportunity to learn what you experienced. It would assist us—"

“Her Highness’s Excerpt is private, Lead Scholar,” Amari interjected immediately. “My brother in Alos will work with your department to ensure any records regarding her remain private. I hope that was relayed to you.”

Professor Lirael winced slightly but managed to recover quickly. “Of course, Evocati. I meant no disrespect. We will abide by all requirements of the Church. Now, if you excuse me, I must go greet the remaining students.”

The professor directed Gwyn to a spot in the front, before quickly retreating from the classroom. Gwyn raised a brow as she glanced over at Amari. “Really? You scared her away.”

The paladin shrugged. “I am who I am. It’s my job to protect you.”

Gwyn rolled her eyes.

As Gwyn took her seat, she watched as more students began to file into the classroom. Several of them appeared to be older students, probably in their third or fourth years. As the professor had said, it seemed that the Advanced Class was not only for first-year students but for anyone who had demonstrated strong magical potential. Gwyn felt a mixture of pride and anxiety, knowing that she would be studying alongside others potentially like her.

Soon, the door opened again and Roslyn entered with her two paladins, her eyes scanning the room. When she spotted Gwyn, her face immediately brightened, and she rushed over to sit next to her.

“I knew you’d be here when they told me what class I got in!” Roslyn whispered excitedly, trying not to draw too much attention to themselves. “This is going to be amazing! I have to tell you about my Excerpt, later. It’s different from the last time I saw it.”

The princess smiled. “I can’t wait! Did you level?”

Roz nodded quickly, a beaming smile plastered on her face. “I did! Nowhere near what you are though, but I’m proud!”

Gwyn congratulated her bestie, who then turned to retrieve all of her supplies for class. As her friend set things up on their table, Gwyn noticed the conversation happening amongst the paladins before the two younger ones left the room.

As the seats slowly filled with students, the door opened once more, and Adrienne entered, looking slightly uncertain but determined. Quickly scanning the room, she made her way over to Gwyn and Roslyn, then took a seat beside them. Gwyn smiled at her friend, offering her support and encouragement. “Good things?” she asked her.

Adrienne nodded slowly.

Gwyn reached over and squeezed the girl’s hand. “We’re here for ya.”

A short while later, Prince Aran and Princess Elora, along with the Royal Knights that followed them into the class. The twins paused as they surveyed the room, their gazes lingering on Gwyn and Roslyn before they proceeded to take seats at a table on the opposite side of the classroom. The tension in the room seemed to increase slightly with their presence, but Gwyn refused to let it bother her.

Though the terran princess didn't miss her best friend tightly clenching her robes under the table.

Professor Lirael re-entered the class with two other professors and made their way to the front. She looked around at the gathered students and waited until everyone was silent before speaking, "Welcome, students. This will be the Lower School's first Advanced Class. Look around you. Each of you has been acknowledged as having superior potential within you when it comes to magic. In fact, we are quite lucky to have the one whom the gods have named the First Mage within your very ranks," she declared as if it was the greatest honor for all of them.

Surprised murmurs erupted from the students as everyone looked around, wondering who it could be. Prince Aran's eyes fell on Gwyn when it was obvious that she and her two friends were not surprised at the announcement. His sister followed his gaze, narrowing her eyes as Gwyn caught them. Giving the girl a smirk elicited a scoff from the Aviran royal. Getting under her skin was a pleasant experience.

Before their silent battle could continue, the professor returned to her speech. "Now, our curriculum does not have any tomes, no scrolls, no deep history," she explained, a small smile growing on her face. "Everything we will learn here in this department has existed for merely a year and a half. Nevertheless, while the vast majority of this class will focus on practicals, not all of it will. It will be your responsibility to take detailed notes that will be utilized for study."

She swept her gaze over the class, taking them in nearly one by one before settling on Roslyn and smiling. "Miss Tilorai, can you tell us why learning about magic is important?"

Roslyn's head tilted slightly as she considered the question. "Because mana is everywhere. The gods have seen fit to change everything we thought we knew about well... everything. Learning how to cope and work within this new normal is how we ensure we are not left behind and how to honor the wonders the gods have bestowed upon us."

The professor nodded. "Just so. Now, it is also vital to know what we have to teach because as those with magic learn to use it, they need to ensure they do so safely. What we aim to provide is a uniform approach to magic use and establish or even expand this fascinating new field. The Church has graciously provided assistance on all of this and has shared what they have learned thus far. With their collaboration, you will

learn what the various things from your Excerpt means, such as attunements and alignments. Or even cores and qualities.”

She paused and let that sink in, the students hastily scribbling notes or just listening. Gwyn definitely found herself in the latter group, as the professor had yet to mention anything she wasn't aware of.

Professor Lirael continued, her voice steady and authoritative, “Understanding the limits of your abilities and the consequences of your actions is crucial to becoming not just a skilled mage, but also a responsible citizen within our society. You have been granted a gift, and with it comes a responsibility to use it for the betterment of the kingdom. Please do not hesitate to come to any one of our staff that will be assisting you, as we all utilize our own magic, and this is a journey we will undertake together.”

Gwyn narrowed her eyes, and she raised her hand.

The professor took a moment before she called on Gwyn. “Yes, Miss Reinhart?”

“You've mentioned the importance of our magic and how we need to be responsible and safe because of how it will affect society, but are there courses or any focus on those with physical alignments? What about those with hybrid alignments?” she asked, her mind focused on Theran in particular or even Taenya's physical abilities.

One of the other professors caught Lirael's attention and stepped forward. He was a telv man older than her mom, but not overly so if his greying hair was anything to go by. “Currently, the focus is on those with magic as that has the most potential for danger,” he tried explaining. “Physically aligned people do not seem to have changed much at all, unfortunate as that is.”

*That isn't correct...*

“Professor, did the Church not give you information regarding the potential of those physically aligned?” Gwyn asked. She could probably guess the answer, but it was clear they were working with limited information. She'd *seen* what Theran could do, saw what Taenya could do.

Images of the attack on the Strathmore manor filled her thoughts.

The man glanced at the other two before focusing on her once more. “What do you mean the *potential*?”

She took a deep breath, feeling a bit of her enthusiasm about the class slip away.

“Physical people have been changed by mana as well. The difference is that their alignment allows them to use mana *internally*,” she explained with all of the patience in the world. She pointedly ignored the scoff coming from the prince as she continued, “While we magic users gain spells, physical and hybrid aligned people gain access to *abilities*. For example, I saw a knight utilize an ability to pierce plate armor as if it were paper... err, parchment. Not to mention other incredible feats, like a quick burst of

movement that is quite frankly... magical in how impossible it would be for a normal person to do.”

She glanced over at Amari who was staring at her with a strong look of pride. Gwyn felt her chest fill with warmth. Impressing a paladin was no easy feat.

The professors all narrowed their eyes and then huddled together, their quiet murmurs creating a silence in the students as each of them tried to listen in.

Gwyn smirked as she used her ‘cheat’ and **[Focused]**, her spell helping her process the hushed argument happening at the front of the class.

“...you heard anything about that? Is what she is saying true?” the second professor, a blonde high elf woman who was focused intently on Professor Lirael.

The Lead Scholar shook her head. “*The primer given by the Church only included information regarding magic. We didn’t request anything else, as the kingdom’s studies with physically aligned citizens did not find any definitive changes other than increased strength or speed.*”

The man from before glanced at Gwyn before asking, “*She could be incorrect. She is just a child.*”

“*She is the First Mage, Harik,*” Professor Lirael hissed quietly. “*Clearly, we focused on only the magic when we should have been looking in other directions, as well.*”

The blonde shook her head slowly. “*The Headmaster is going to want to know,*” she warned. “*She will not be happy, but if we come up with a plan, first...*”

“*I will think of something, perhaps suggest an expansion of the Combat Foundations course to provide additional classes for those with physical or... hybrid alignments,*” Lirael said with a sigh. “*I’ll inform the Headmaster.*”

The conversation quickly died after that, with the three returning their focus to the students. Gwyn quickly dismissed her spell, but the blonde high elf narrowed her eyes as if she noticed what the princess was doing.

The Lead Scholar smiled as she brought the class back to the main focus of the course. “Thank you, Miss Reinhart, for your insight,” she said, giving Gwyn a firm nod. “Does anyone have any other questions before we proceed?”

“I presume that there are different types of magic users, or *mag*es as you call them,” Prince Aran said. “I know that the Blighter in the class can *heal*. How will you teach someone like me at the same time as someone like her?”

Gwyn had to admit, it was a decent question, even if the way he referred to Adrienne made her want to punch him in the face.

For her part, Professor Lirael beamed. “That is a fantastic question,” she said. “While this is indeed the Advanced Class, that simply means that all of you have

multiple alignments. We had hoped there would be more students here with more than one, but the Church has informed us that the number is quite within expectations. Now, there are multiple time slots scheduled for each class dedicated to the alignments. For the foundational instruction, you will each split up into classes that match your alignments. This neatly transitions into the first thing we would like to do.”

The professor walked to the front of the room and moved a curtain, and underneath was an elaborate painting of a circle. It was split into five sections, and each one represented a color of mana. Within each color was a series of words. Gwyn peered closer and noticed they were concepts.

Gwyn narrowed her eyes, wanting to speak up about the *White* mana that was clearly missing, but decided it wasn't the time.

Professor Lirael pointed at the circle. “Collaboration with the Church has uncovered that each color of mana is based on key *concepts*. Each is one that neatly lines up with the Family and their domains.

“The Church suspects, and we agree, that all magic used with a color of mana must utilize one of these concepts in order to function. You must align your magic with a concept in order for it to function. We will explore this more as we go, but I will go over what we are calling the *core* and *prime* concepts. First, Red. It is the realm of Alos, the core concept that aligns with His domain of Day. The prime concepts are *Justice* and *Righteousness*,” she explained before moving her hand to green on the right side. “Next we have *Green*, Eona's realm with the core concept of Life, and the prime concepts of *Nature* and *Primalism*.”

The woman continued, moving to *Yellow* and explaining how it was associated with Relena, the Goddess of Death with *Redemption* and *Peace* being its primes. Then the focus shifted to the *Black*, represented by the Goddess of Night, Tenera and her prime concepts of *Change* and *Manipulation*.

Finally, the professor pointed to *Blue*. “Blue mana is the concept of Self, and its two primes are Logic and Imagination. We will get into the Domains that each of us are aligned to and their descriptions later, but for now, let us go around the room and introduce ourselves.” She walked over toward the table closest to the entrance where the twins resided. “Now, there are twenty-five of you, so please keep it brief. Just your name, alignments, and attunements that you were told in your Excerpts,” she added with a chuckle.

With that, she gestured to the Princess of Avira, who stood and smiled at the class. “I am Princess—” The professor cleared her throat and the high elf rolled her eyes. “Sorry, I mean, Elora Moreth. My alignments are Conjuration and Artifice with attunements to black and blue mana.”

The prince stood as his sister was finishing, a look of pure satisfaction on his face. “Aran Moreth. Conjuration, Alteration, *and* Evocation. Blue and black mana.”

The professors all seemed quite impressed. “You are one of our Exceptional quality students. That is fascinating, Mister Moreth,” Professor Lirael said. “I look forward to seeing what you accomplish.”

The prince gazed around the room with a smug expression before nodding to the professor and sitting down.

What followed was a series of brief introductions, each student standing to share their alignments and attunements. The variety was astounding, and Gwyn couldn't help but be intrigued by the vast array of magical potential within the room. There were students who specialized in Alteration and Artifice, their alignments allowing them to manipulate and create with a precision that was awe-inspiring. Others had affinities for Abjuration and Illusion, their gifts allowing them to protect and deceive in equal measure. Across the board, the students exhibited attunements to various combinations of the five mana types.

One particular student, an older boy who seemed a little out of place amongst the other attendees, stood out. He introduced himself with a calm confidence, revealing his alignments as Conjunction, Abjuration, and Divination, and his attunements to red and yellow mana. The room fell silent for a moment as the professors exchanged impressed glances. This was the other student with an Exceptional quality core, someone capable of an incredible range of magic, just like Gwyn, Aran, and Roslyn.

As they went, the more common alignments of the group became known, like Evocation or Conjunction. The students listened attentively to each other, sharing nods of understanding or gasps of surprise at what they had started to assume were rare alignments or attunements—like black.

Some even began to speculate on potential magical combinations and collaborations, their imaginations sparked by the diverse array of abilities within their ranks. As the introductions concluded, a sense of anticipation filled the room, and Gwyn could tell that each student was eager to begin their journey into the study of magic.

*As they should, magic is awesome!*

Finally, the professor reached their table. Gwyn's best friend stood up to introduce herself. With a confident, reassuring smile that Gwyn had come to associate with her, she spoke, “I'm Roslyn Tilorai. My alignments are Evocation, Alteration, and Conjunction, and my attunements are to Green, Yellow, and Black mana.” A few gasps echoed around the room, and Gwyn couldn't help but beam with pride. Roslyn's magic was amazing and so was her best friend. As Roslyn took her seat, Gwyn could sense the excitement in the room as another Exceptional student was introduced.

That was until she noticed the twins scowling at the corner of her eye.

*Yeah, that's right. My friend's a badass too.*

Next to stand was Adrienne. Her blue eyes sparkled with determination as she introduced herself, "I'm Adrienne Devereux, and my alignments are with Abjuration and Evocation. My attunements are Green and Yellow mana." Her introduction was met with an appreciative nod from the professors, and some polite greetings from the students around them. Adrienne's stoic demeanor softened as she met Gwyn's supportive gaze before settling back into her seat.

Gwyn was the last to go, almost as if deliberately set up that way. *Of course it is.* As she stood, the room fell into a hush, all eyes drawn to the girl who was known as the First Mage. "I am Gwyn Reinhart," she began, her voice steady. "My alignments are currently Evocation, Alteration, and Abjuration. My attunements are to Red, Blue, Black, and Yellow mana."

A gasp rippled through the room at her revelation. Even the professors seemed taken aback by the breadth of her revelation. Professor Lirael's eyes widened in surprise as she turned to her colleagues, whispering hurriedly. "Renowned," she murmured, her voice carrying a tone of awe and disbelief. "She's the only one known by the church."

Gwyn settled back into her seat to the quiet stares of disbelief from those around her. Roslyn gave her arm a gentle squeeze and smiled at her.

The professor lightly cleared her throat and regained the class's attention. "Now, as part of our introduction, we will proceed to the testing and dueling area for each of you to demonstrate your magical ability for the class," Professor Lirael said with a gesture toward the door.



Gwyn walked between Adrienne and Roslyn as the class made their way into a large open area. There, they found themselves in a vast courtyard that had tall walls made from thick blocks of stone. As they entered, the four paladins spread themselves out, while it seemed the twins' royal knights were content to wait by the entrance.

The courtyard itself reminded Gwyn of the training grounds for Combat Foundations, except the ground wasn't *only* dirt. There was a small pool of water in the center of the courtyard that was surrounded on one side by just earth, while the other was made of stone slabs that had huge cut stone blocks that were *tall* and set up like an archery range.

Professor Lirael led them to the center of the stone side and waited until the students all gathered together.

She smiled as she gazed around the crowd. "Welcome to the practice arena. It is here that you will test your magic, and as you can see is large enough to accommodate all one hundred and forty students that have exhibited a capacity for magic use. Now,



you can see these large blocks, they are where those of you with destructive magic may practice. There are a wide array of areas and we are still expanding the environments to ensure anyone with magic can find somewhere to practice their craft.”

The blonde high elf stepped forward. “Now, we will be splitting everyone up so that we can have three students demonstrate their magic at a time. We will be taking notes, but please do not be alarmed. It is not graded, this is simply for our awareness so we know where to best assist you. When you hear your name called, please move to the area indicated.”

The woman started listing the names of students and directing them toward the telv professor who was moving to the opposite side of the area. When eight students had been called, she moved onto the next list, which were students that would join her. Roslyn and Gwyn waved at Adrienne as her name was called and wished her luck. Although, after recalling what the orkun girl had done to demonstrate her healing at the townhouse... Gwyn realized her friend probably didn't need it.

Unfortunately, the elf princess was called out shortly after and walked to join them.

Professor Lirael stood in front of Gwyn, Roslyn, and the other remaining students, which included Aran and the older boy with an Exceptional core.

“Alright students, is there a volunteer who would like to go first?” the woman asked.

Prince Aran stepped forward. “Professor, as you introduced yourself before class, you stated we are each ranked. Does a victory in a duel qualify us for increased rank?”

The professor tilted her head and looked at the two other professors, speaking in hushed tones, before turning back toward the class. “It does... however, we will not have any dueling classes until—”

“I, Prince Aran, challenge *Miss Reinhart* to a duel,” he stated confidently. “To show the others a demonstration of proper magic, of course.”

*This kid...*

It seemed that no matter what she did, or how she tried to avoid them, the twins and the prince, in particular, were going to cause her problems. She had no idea why he thought so sure of himself, but the only thing she could even think would qualify as if he knew about his magic well before the class.

*Which makes sense, I guess. But man, kid...*

Professor Lirael narrowed her eyes. “Mister Moreth, now is not—”

Gwyn sighed again as she stepped forward. Roslyn quickly tried reaching for her, but her hand just missed. “Gwyn, no. He's just...” her best friend whispered. Gwyn ignored her pleas. It appeared that the prince still needed to be taught a lesson.

“I, *Princess* Gwyneth, accept,” she replied with a scowl. “I will happily give you a demonstration of skill, Mister Moreth.”

The professor looked between the two, and then her eyes widened slightly as her head jerked up. The Royal Knights were approaching, the one Gwyn remembered from the first time she met the twins led the way.

“His Highness has issued a request for duel and the terran has accepted,” he stated seriously. “We hereby witness it.”

“That is close enough, ser,” Amari called out as the four red armored paladins arrived. “If the prince wants to be humiliated again, it will be done under proper dueling procedure.”

“Stay your tongue, paladin,” one of the other knights sneered. “He is the prince.”

Amari laughed. “Good for him.”

Professor Lirael’s eyes were wide as she struggled to keep up with what was happening, but finally, her shoulders sagged in defeat. “Very well... Please proceed over here to the dueling rings.”

Gwyn turned to Roslyn. “Can you get Adrienne and make sure she’s ready?”

Her best friend nodded. “Of course.”

With a determined look, she pulled mana into herself and started following the professor, ready to duel the prince, yet again.

*I’m starting to think he might actually enjoy losing.*



Gwyn stood in a large rectangle field somewhere between ten and fifteen meters long and half that wide. There were two such areas marked off in the dirt half of the practice area. Across from her, at the opposite side of the dueling field was the prince.

On all four sides of the field were one paladin and one royal knight, with Amari standing out of the field directly behind Gwyn.

Professor Lirael, having resigned herself to the inevitable duel, addressed the gathered students and participants. “Before we begin, allow me to explain the school’s rules for a magic duel,” she said, her voice firm and commanding. “First and foremost, the safety of the students is paramount. I will be monitoring the duel closely and will intervene with my shield magic should any harm come to either participant. Secondly, a duel ends when one participant either concedes or is unable to continue. Excessive force is strictly prohibited. And finally, respect for your opponent is essential. This is a learning experience, and good sportsmanship should be maintained at all times.”

The moment Professor Lirael signaled the start of the duel, Prince Aran's demeanor shifted. Gwyn quickly used **[Mana Sight]**, watching intently as her opponent's eyes glowed with focus, and the boy began channeling his mana. The air around him shimmered and cooled noticeably as he drew on his attunement to blue and black mana. A thin layer of white fog began to creep across the ground around him, a visible manifestation of his power. His hands moved in precise patterns, an intricate dance that spoke to someone who practiced and trained extensively.

It wouldn't be enough.

Suddenly, the moisture in the air around him began to condense, swirling in a mini vortex that rapidly chilled into a sparkling cloud of frost. The frost particles swirled around him, dancing in a mesmerizing pattern before coalescing into solid ice.

The crowd watched in silent awe as Aran readied himself, the icy aura around him a stark contrast to the warm afternoon sun. The only one not watching him was Roslyn who had an unamused expression on her face as she observed Gwyn's nonchalance.

With a swift flick of his wrist, Prince Aran propelled a shard of ice towards Gwyn. Its trajectory was swift and unerring, hurtling through the air with deadly precision. However, Gwyn was prepared. With a calmness that belied the situation, she summoned an **[Ice Wall]**, a barrier of thick, crystalline ice that rose from the ground in front of her. The shard of ice shattered against it, disintegrating into harmless fragments that tinkled to the ground.

In response, Gwyn initiated her relaxed counterattack. She gathered her mana, weaving it together with precision and control. Then, with a deft wave of her hand, she let the wall crash to the ground in chunks of ice and she unleashed her spell, **[Wave of Frost]**. A surge of cold energy radiated from her, condensing into a wave of frosty mist—which made his look lame in comparison—and rushed towards the prince. As the wave moved, Gwyn carefully manipulated it, ensuring it didn't spill over the edges of the dueling field, a testament to her mastery over the Alteration domain.

Prince Aran's eyes widened as the wave of frost barreled towards him. Desperate, he conjured a stream of ice, aiming to counteract the impending frost. Gwyn, however, permitted him, allowing the prince to stem the tide of her spell. No sooner had he managed that, the prince summoned another trio of ice shards, hurling them towards Gwyn with renewed vigor. But Gwyn was already prepared. She tapped into her **[Cryomancy]** and with a wave of her hand, she connected with the intent of the spells. After a brief mental fight against a weak will, she subsumed the incoming shards of ice, bending them to *her* will and forcing them to orbit her. Then, with a flick of her wrist, she sent them flying back at the prince. Taken by surprise, Prince Aran barely had time to react. He dived to the side, just in time to avoid the retaliated shards of ice. The crowd

gasped as he rolled to his feet, his regal composure slightly tarnished by the unexpected turn of events.

She couldn't help it, she laughed.

“Going to have to try a bit harder there, Aran!” she called out.

Gwyn quickly glanced at her friends and saw the look her bestie was giving her. *Crap, she's gonna scold me for not taking this seriously.*

With a sigh, Gwyn determined to end the duel.

Undeterred by his previous miscalculations, Prince Aran charged towards Gwyn, casting ice shard after ice shard as he closed the distance. Each shard was a shimmering projectile of cold fury, but Gwyn had a different answer for each one.

First came an **[Ice Shard]**, its edges sharp and glinting dangerously in the sunlight. Gwyn countered it with a **[Pillar of Flame]**, a jet of fire that shot up from the ground and melted the ice shard into a harmless cloud of steam. The next shard was met with a **[Blast Wave]**, a pulse of pure force that shattered the ice into a harmless spray of frost. Even when the Prince hurled another shard directly at her, Gwyn didn't flinch. Instead, she let it melt harmlessly against her **[Flame Shield]**, a protective aura of heat that repelled the ice without any effort.

To Prince Aran's growing frustration, Gwyn didn't stand her ground. Instead, she danced around the dueling field, always just a step ahead of his attacks, never letting him close the distance. He launched more shards at her in quick succession, but Gwyn was ready. With a series of **[Fireball]** spells, she intercepted each shard, her fireballs colliding with his ice shards in mid-air, melting them before they could reach her. Each successful interception was a testament to her accuracy and control, and the watching crowd was alive with the show. Meanwhile, the prince's face became more and more flushed with frustration at each thwarted attempt to land a hit.

She had to admit, the entire duel was a ton of fun. It was clear that the prince was nowhere near her level, both literally and figuratively. But just being able to practice her magic again was intoxicating.

Finally, the prince couldn't bear it any longer. “Stop running!” he bellowed in frustration. Gwyn only smirked, her amusement clear for all to see. She stopped moving, standing tall and ready in the middle of the dueling field. Then, before anyone could blink, she was gone.

In the next instant, she reappeared right in front of the prince, using her **[Blink]** spell to teleport with a speed that left no room for reaction. Her fist swung in a clean arc, connecting with the prince's face and sending him sprawling to the ground. A gasp echoed around the field as Aran's body hit the dirt. Gwyn stood over him, victorious.

Professor Lirael quickly declared, “The duel is over. The winner is Miss Reinhart.”

Gwyn smirked down at the fallen prince. “Good duel,” she said, her voice dripping with sarcasm before turning to leave. A triumphant yell from Roslyn filled the air, that turned into a panicked shout of Gwyn’s name.

But before the princess could react, a sudden biting cold pierced her shoulder, so sharp it stole her breath away. She cried out, her hand instinctively reaching for the source of the pain. Her fingers met the cold, slick surface of an ice shard embedded deep into her flesh. She turned around slowly to see Aran on his feet, an icy mist of magic fading from his hand.

It was a moment that felt like an eternity, a silent admission of a line crossed.

Ignoring the pain, Gwyn's eyes flared with a fiery wrath, mana surging within her as if begging to be released. Professor Lirael acted quickly, conjuring a shield of blue energy around the prince. But Gwyn was beyond caring. She unleashed a **[Fireball]**, the flaming orb tearing through the shield like paper and hitting Aran in the shoulder, the same place he had hit her. His cry of pain rang out, but she didn't stop there. Using her **[Telekinesis]**, she lifted the prince off the ground and hurled him out of the dueling field, sending him crashing nearly ten meters away.

The prince was still.

The royal knights, watching the scene unfold, drew their blades. But the paladins were quicker, their own weapons gleaming in the sunlight.

“Adrienne! Go heal Aran!” Roslyn called out, her voice strained.

Amari turned to the knights, her voice cold as steel. “Attend to your prince. If you value your lives, you will stay your blades.” The knights threatened Gwyn, their voices filled with anger. But Amari was unyielding. “Blame your stupid boy for his actions,” she retorted. “If you even think of harming Princess Gwyn, you’ll be dead before your blades touch her.” The tension in the air was thick enough to cut as the stand-off continued, a volatile end to what was supposed to be a simple magic duel.

Gwyn looked around before she reached back and yanked out the shard and crushed it in her hand.

Across the field, Princess Elora was screaming, her face twisted into a snarl of rage. Gwyn's gaze met hers, her eyes narrowing. Whatever Elora was promising with her rage-filled expression, Gwyn knew one thing: she was ready for it. She was more than ready.

The field turned into a flurry of activity. The knights hurriedly rushed to aid the two royals, their bodies tense and faces pale. Adrienne, too, was quick to action, her magic washing over Aran in gentle waves to heal his injuries. The sight of the Prince writhing in pain was a stark reminder of the raw power Gwyn had displayed, and it had everyone on edge. Yet, amidst the chaotic scene, Gwyn stood unwavering, her eyes still locked with Elora's until the other princess was out of sight.

Amari and the other paladins swiftly ushered Gwyn and Roslyn away from the field, their expressions taut. Adrienne rushed after them, her own face a picture of conflict and worry. Their departure was abrupt, a necessary escape from the escalating tension.

As soon as they reached the safety of the carriage, Gwyn felt a familiar soothing sensation wash over her. Adrienne's healing magic was gentle but effective, targeting the wound on her shoulder with a precise touch. As the pain receded, Gwyn couldn't help but feel a strange sense of satisfaction. Today had been a display of her power, a statement she hadn't intended to make, but perhaps it was necessary. For now, though, she needed rest. Tomorrow would be another day, and she would face it as she did today: prepared for anything and unafraid.