

An Unwanted Apprentice

Book 1 in the Land of Arade

(Please bear in mind that this is a first draft and will have drastic changes before the final version.)

By Aaron DeMott

Chapter 1

Alenk looked up from his book and sighed. Being an arcmage was boring. Sure, all the stories about Wizards were full of danger, adventure, and excitement. His life so far had consisted of schoolwork, research, and boredom. Perhaps the problem was that at thirty he was too old, and he came from a family of wizards. The heroes in the stories were all teenage farm boys approached by strange old men, and stories of a secret past.

That should have been the first clue. There were wizards in real life, but that's just about where the similarities with the books ended. You just didn't run off with weird old men – especially if they offered you power, or candy, or whatever.

He stood and walked over to the window to gaze out at the courtyard. He could have just taken a class or two in wizardry then taken up a regular apprenticeship. But it wasn't all bad, and he did believe the truths of wizardry.

Alenk's train of thought was interrupted by a growl from his stomach.

"Or perhaps I'm just hungry," he mused aloud.

It was past time for lunch, and he had to get another book from the library anyway. Alenk stepped out of his rooms and absently cast a locking spell before starting down the grand

stairway. Now that was something out of a storybook.

The entire Wizards College was built around the tower that housed the grand staircase. It was ten stories of marble blocks, and wider than most farmhouses. In Alenk's opinion, it was about as well thought out as some of the fantasy elements in the lower quality stories. The entire center of the tower was hollow, with the circular stairway winding up the inside wall.

Oh, it looked marvelous, and impressed new students, visiting monarchs, and anyone else who saw it for the first time. A semester or two of constantly going up and down it, however, was enough to inspire active hatred for the architect who designed it in almost everyone.

Alenk was thankful that he had been assigned a second level suite when he hired on as a research wizard. Back when he had been a student, most of his classes were on the top floors. Naturally, the cafeteria was on the ground level, and the dorms in a separate building across the courtyard.

A few new students were levitating to the top right now. You could tell they were new, because you never did that twice. Someone, somewhere took secret pleasure in making levitating one of the very first things new wizards were taught at the college. They would find out very quickly that it took more energy to lift yourself straight up than it took to walk up the stairs. Alenk smiled and waved to them before turning off into the hallway that led to the library.

The wards guarding the stacks were being difficult this morning. It took a few seconds for them to recognize him as an arcmage and allow him passage. That probably meant someone new to the rank of mage had recently entered. Alenk hoped he didn't run into him. He didn't like distractions when he was working, and most students didn't seem to know that arcmage was a skill level and not another name for professor.

He made it to the aisle for Advanced Secrets unmolested, and started looking for the

particular book he was after. The librarian said they couldn't, but Alenk sometimes swore that some of the more arcane titles moved themselves around. It certainly wasn't where it should be.

Alenk shuffled along further down the shelf, bent over inspecting titles when he bumped heads with someone. He straightened up quickly. The most beautiful girl he'd ever seen was standing in front of him. She had red hair done up in a braid that reached down to her waist, deep green eyes, ivory skin and a curvy figure. He also noticed from her ears that she was an elf.

"Excuse me, arcmage, I wasn't paying attention to where I was going, I'm sorry," she said.

Alenk blinked then glanced at the patch on her shoulder. It was the crest of a fifth level wizard.

"How did you get in here?" he asked her, "You shouldn't be able to get into the stacks until you pass your mage exams at the end of the cycle. What's your name?"

"Kendra," she blushed and glanced down at her feet. "I tampered with the wards to get in sir."

Well, that explained why the wards were cranky. Alenk looked at her again. This could be a problem. A fifth level wizard shouldn't have been able to get past the wards in the first place, and there was a lot of potentially dangerous information in here.

"Kendra, perhaps you should explain, in detail, *why* you are here."

"Yes sir," Kendra looked up at him now. "I've been wondering for a while now why students that are training to become mages are taught so much math. In my calculus class today, one of the formulas looked *very* familiar. I looked into it further, and it seemed to describe levitation. I asked my professor about it, and he told me I needed to stop daydreaming and pay more attention in his class. Next, I asked my telekinesis professor, and he said there was no relation and assigned me more homework. The look in his face was recognition though, I know

it. I know it was wrong to break in here, and I will accept any punishment the council gives me, but I must know why that formula seemed to say what it did, and what everyone is trying to hide."

The girl's eyes sparked with defiance. Alenk thought for a moment and decided to tell her. The alternative was too dangerous. If she was smart enough to find that much out on her own...

"You'll find out next semester in your 'Secrets of Magic' class."

"I don't have that class on my syllabus," she interrupted.

"Of course you don't. You see, math and science are magic. Wizards have the ability to directly affect matter on the sub-atomic level."

"I see." Kendra looked away for a moment. "That explains a lot actually. But why keep it a secret?"

"What happens if you divide by zero?" Alenk asked.

"You can't," Kendra looked puzzled.

"What if you try though? You get meaningless numbers, gibberish, and an F on your tests. But what happens in the real world. If math is magic, what happens if you cast a spell based on bad math?"

Kendra pressed her lips together while she thought about it.

"I'm not sure. Nothing good, I imagine?"

"Nothing good at all. Best-case scenario, something explodes. Worst case, a rift in reality splits open, and it takes a hundred arcmages to seal it. If they get there in time. Theoretically."

Alenk leaned up against the bookcase and studied her. She appeared properly horrified, but it was hard to tell with some people. Best to give her the whole picture – well, as much as he could sum up a cycle long course in one conversation anyway.

"But that's not the worst part," he continued. "Just as it is when a wizard tries to create new life, or when someone with power and none of the training of wizardry uses their power, their souls are lost and they become one of the Natas."

She gasped at that, and then her eyes narrowed. "Wait, I thought we got our power from Ard?"

"We do," Alenk smiled. The girl's face was so expressive. "But who made math?"

"Wizard Glarnt, in the fourth dynasty!"

Alenk raised a finger and opened his mouth to correct her when she spoke again.

"Wait. He's credited with discovering it. I suppose Ard made math, and Glarnt merely discovered it. Wizards can't *create* anything."

"Correct," Alenk smiled. So few these days really delved into how something worked completely. Most of them just studied enough to pass a test. "We could talk about this for days, but the council should see you now."

Kendra frowned then looked down to the ground and sighed. "Yes, I suppose so."

The council took forever to do anything, Alenk thought. He'd taken the girl to the council room and briefly explained what had happened, and expected that to be the end of his involvement in the matter. Instead, the council had asked him to wait outside while they interrogated the girl, then they would wish to speak to him again. And he'd thought staring into an old codex could be boring! A page opened the door and indicated that the council wished to speak to him.

The council room was just an ordinary room with white walls and a long table at the front, with chairs for the council members, and a galley setup for observers of the meetings. Most people were disappointed with it the first time they walked in. It seems they expected something more like a throne room from the most important ruling body in the world. The only thing that demonstrated was that most people didn't understand the ways of Ard at all. The council was there to rule, but to rule through serving the people.

The girl wasn't in sight. That didn't surprise Alenk. She was probably being held in a room off to the side until the council was finished discussing her case. He supposed he was mildly curious what was to be done with her. The options ranged from extra service work around the campus, to execution if they found she was a Natas. Alenk knew from talking with her that she wasn't, in which case the worst punishment was banishment. He was very curious to see what else he had to do with the matter.

The Archmage indicated that Alenk should approach the table. Jairlak was a highly respected archmage, and had served as the Archmage for ten cycles now, after serving as a council member for the past fifteen. He was older now, with white hair, and slightly hard of hearing, but his mind was still as sharp and his judgments just as fair as ever.

"Alenk, we wish to hear your opinion of young Kendra," he rasped.

"She is brilliant for her age, the first person I'm aware of to grasp the underpinnings of magic on her own. I'm convinced from talking to her that she isn't lying about her reason for breaking into the restricted section of the library. She seems strong in her faith." Alenk paused to gather his thoughts further. "I think she shows great promise, with the proper supervision."

Jairlak nodded. "That is our assessment as well, which is why you are here."

"I don't understand."

That wasn't a phrase that was heard often in the college, where almost everyone prided themselves on their knowledge. Alenk didn't mind using it. Most of the time, he didn't need to use it, but when he did he often learned more than he would have otherwise.

"Young Kendra does show promise, and she does need supervision. It is the opinion of the council that Ard wished you to encounter her in the library to provide guidance and protection for her when she made her discovery."

Alenk got a sinking feeling in the pit of his stomach. The council was going to saddle him with an apprentice. It was probably divine intervention that he hadn't been stuck with one before. He wasn't a good teacher, and he knew it. He did, however, know enough not to argue with the council. He'd just have to make the best of it and pray for guidance.

Kendra was waiting for him when he left the council chamber. She stood and stared at him, waiting for him to speak first.

"Well," he said without glancing at her, "they gave you the worst punishment I can imagine."

Her eyes widened and her face drained of color. Which wasn't easy, as she had rather fair skin to begin with. "You mean..."

"Yes," he turned to face her now, and couldn't hide a smile. "You've been assigned as my apprentice."

"But... I... What?" Kendra glared at him now. "That's not the worst that could happen!"

"I didn't say it was the worst that could happen. I said it was the worst I could imagine. Give it a week and see if you don't agree with me."

"So what do I do now?"

"I don't know," Alenk shrugged. "I've never had an apprentice before." With that, Alenk

turned and walked away.

"What?" Kendra stood and stared at him for a moment. "How could an arcmage never have had an apprentice? Hey, wait!" she hurried to catch up to him.

End of the sample chapter. I hope you enjoyed it!

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