

The Math of More

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From set *Secrets of Strixhaven*
06. 04. 2026

Zimone Wola thought her life was supposed to start by now.

When she had imagined graduating, she had assumed it would be simple. After all, she did everything right. She was top of her class, she saved the school, she spent her thesis with the Firemind himself. But now, she is hunched over the icebox rummaging for leftover greens for her noodles.

There's a bundle of kale in the back. *Kale goes with noodles, right?* It does tonight. Zimone grabs the bundle, artfully plucks out the one with the yellowing sides, and scavenges a lone egg and a nub of ginger in the back.

There were proper meals at Strixhaven. She remembers goat curries and lamb pies, crisp layers of croissant, and as much cider as she could guzzle. How many perfect meals did she absentmindedly horf down while researching her thesis? Zimone dumps her noodles and broth into a repurposed coffee mug and douses it in white pepper and red mystery pepper flakes, then cracks an egg in the middle. See? A balanced, hot, perfectly normal dinner. Zimone is *fine*.



Zimone, Infinite Analyst | Art by: Carly Milligan

She takes her sad meal into her cold hands and walks to her partitioned-off bedroom. Ravnican apartments are notoriously expensive. Zimone can perform a thousand miracles, and none will cough up enough zinos for a full-sized room of her own. At least tonight her roommates are absent. She closes the door behind her anyway—a habit, now.

The curtains blow gently over her quilt—after Duskmourn she always leaves a window open, no matter the temperature. Gloves and two wool sweaters are more than enough to make her feel warm and safe, anyway.

A stack of letters is by her bed.

Zimone stares at them, counting four letters in the stack. She grimaces, and her stomach roils with guilt. *You should be happy. You should be proud. What would your parents think if they knew all those letters were just sitting there?*

The thought is quickly banished. Instead, she skims a rougher, more casual letter to the side of the pile and puts on a second sweater.

Friend Zimone,

I send good tidings and gratitude. Your letter finds me well, as always, though I cannot help but notice uncertainty in you after our meeting at Strixhaven. We survived Duskmourn, did we not? You stared evil in its eye and found bravery in your heart. Is that strength not worth seizing with both hands? Anxious concern is a foul and unnatural state to uncover in my heart—it is inward and repulsive. Zimone, cease inducing worry at once.

What if I proposed an adventure? I would relish the chance to share one with you again! There is a connected plane between Ravnica and Kaldheim. Tell me, what do you know of the Gola del Zaffiro in Fiora? Its depths are a brilliant sight, and they say treasure is at its end! And then we shall find joy again! If you are amenable!

Zimone stuffs the letter in her pocket. She can't. The thought of a brief respite with someone as entertaining as Tyvar sounds lovely, but she just can't ... because *this* work is too important.

Certain her roommates are gone, Zimone lifts the glamour on her bedroom.

An immense illusory map overtakes the entirety of the tiny space. Gossamer blue threads weave and interlock, layer and bend, to create a three-dimensional theoretical model of the Multiverse. Spilling from the space over her bed is the spread of Duskmourn, reaching up her bookcase is the World Tree, and from floorboard to ceiling are thousands of pinprick-lights of planes. Zimone shivers and sets her mug of noodles on top of the apprenticeship offers stacked by her bed.

She hasn't left the house in two weeks. Just look at the spread of Duskmourn in the corner—how does she know she won't come across the other door? Just look at the pinpricks of Omenpaths sprinkled as a dusting of flour—what if she overlooked one that led to the worst of places? Just look at her stack of apprenticeship offers—what if she fails to live up to their expectations? What if she works on someone *else's* big idea instead of her own? What if. What if. The what-ifs have become a barricade at her doorframe, a moth in the carpet, potent paradox magic all on their own. The what-ifs have manifested into words of power that keep her safe. Zimone is *fine*.

The model shimmers at her, each strand the result of hours of proofs and tinkering. She had built it off the similar map Niv-Mizzet had commissioned ... but this one, unlike the original, is a superior execution (she thinks to herself with an innocent and prideful smile), a spell rooted in predictive magic. The notion of algorithmic clairvoyance wasn't an absurd one, but building a large-scale spell model on how Tyvar had described the World Tree to her? For once the ridiculous man's ridiculous stories were of use. Cheers, good prince. Zimone watches now as the map revises itself, as the Multiverse turns and shifts. It had proven Duskmourn's spread was largely confined, which was hardly comforting given

the nature of Valgavoth. Zimone inspects it now, sees how the House's tendrils prod at other pinpricks of light.



Planar Engineering | Art by: Liiga Smilshkalne

But Zimone sees something else. Just above Arcavios.

A shadow.

She narrows her eyes. It is curling like clouds, more of a trick of the eye than anything else. If she focuses, eases the spell's formula a bit, she can sort of make out the spread. What *is* that thing? She climbs on her bed and tries to get close; but the shadow has no form. Just the suggestion of distortion.

"What *is* that?" she sneers aloud, annoyance at the mystery overriding all else.

Her bed squishes beneath her as she clammers down, the spell's nodes erupting in light between her hands as she twists magic to fix the error.

A shadow? No, stupid. Maybe it's a fault in the spell? A new phenomena of the Multiverse? What the *hell* is it? Zimone furiously fiddles with her spell, accepting that finding the source of this shadow is now her entire personality.

The door to the flat opens beyond her bedroom, and a voice barks, "Close the damn window, Zimone!"

Zimone ignores her roommate and puts gloves on.

She had tooled it to track the spread of Duskmourn like a disease, but is Duskmourn causing that shadow? Is the shadow forming without direct contact to the original plane? *If so, what does that mean about the spread of Duskmourn from one plane to the other ... and if it isn't Duskmourn ... then what is it?*

Her bedroom door opens.

She snuffs the model back under the glamour.

Her roommate, Abatha, is at the door, still in her wool coat. She's frowning, the tip of her nose rosy. Her brown hair is tied back in stylish twin loops, her eye makeup two tasteful dots below her eyes.

Zimone had grown jealous of Abatha. Aesthemancy jobs in the high-end shops of Tin Street were hard to come by.

“You got a letter.”

Zimone takes it. The mark on it catches her eye—it is from Niv-Mizzet.

“Congratulations, you can pay rent after all,” Abatha says. “Now close your stupid window.”

She leaves. Zimone opens the letter.

Zimone Wola,

The Omenpath Project awaits your response to the offer of apprenticeship. You will work under Lumia Voj testing methods of transplanar proximate disarticulation. Respond within twenty-four hours. The Firemind and Guildmaster Zarek have recommended you for this program. Do not disappoint them.

Respectfully,

Chamberlain Maree

Zimone’s anxiety spikes.

Twenty-four hours to say yes; she’ll do someone else’s work. Twenty-four hours because she has dallied too long in responding. The cold air is comfort that she is safe from the House, but the letter is a reminder that she cannot remain on her own forever. Zimone is safe. Zimone’s status is unstable. She feels like she has vertigo and, in her uncertainty, releases the glamour on the room. Her map, *her* map, the miracle.

And the shadow she sees above it.

She ... can’t. She can’t take on the apprenticeship right now. Not when she still needs answers. But what if ... what if she could do both?

The idea straightens her shoulders and widens her eyes. What if she could do both? Multiverse-saving research and a day job to pay the bills? The idea scratches at a memory, a Shandalaran paper she read at Strixhaven. There was a mage, Riku, a man who copied himself to learn two fields at once. Zimone’s mind darts, thinks through options, realizes she has the skillset to pull a spell like this off. Hot damn, maybe she can actually do this. She leaps from her bed all of two steps toward her bookshelves to pull out what she can find. What class of magic would this be, any overlap with her studies in Quandrix ... clearly, yes. Duplication would fit with praestigial theory; visions, doubles, tricks of the eye. Specifically, mirageal manifestation; illusions made real. She needs two of her. The magic is preposterous, but praestigial theory is preposterous; she’s only ever read of a handful of mages who can even attempt the level of telepathy and illusion magic required, and all of them are warlords.

She grazes her fingers past her familiar texts before landing on one praestigial book she was lent by Dean Kianne before ... before everything. The book is still fresh, not a crease or mark on its pages. Zimone is pleased—all she wants is to get *some* version of her to cover what she doesn’t want to do while the rest of her focuses on solving the mystery in her model.

How to achieve both goals at once, Zimone frames for herself. She reads.

The first way, creation of a person, makes her gasp; a marathon of spellwork without food, water, or stopping, and ending with a nightmarish trade. The cost of the spell makes her squirm. No, too elaborate, she doesn't need to make an entire person, it would not be worth it.

The second way seems promising; division. She could divide up parts of herself by cutting out aspects of personality, then manifest them in a physical form. Doable but risky ... What kind of intensive talent would be required to reintegrate them? How much of her would be left on its own?

The third way feels best: duplication. A shallow double made in the inverse; someone who can do what she cannot but not be an entire person at the end of the day. *This must have been Riku's method!*

Zimone remembers her noodles exist, and after downing cold broth and a colder egg she puts on a third sweater and gets to work.

She isn't sure what time it is anymore, but after several hours of attempting Riku's spell, she's ready to call it quits.

The initial cut appears to be the most difficult. She keeps trying, again and again, visualizing the metaphor the spell describes (cut out a slice of yourself as an orange, press that slice to paper, breathe life into the impression it creates). *It's a fruit metaphor! It's easy! So why is this hard?* Zimone growls with frustration and ditches her outer sweater as she opens her window further.

A thin yellow line silhouettes the horizon. It's morning.

Zimone grimaces. Niv-Mizzet will expect an answer to his offer. And, simultaneously, a notion of *expectation* butts up against her fear. Suddenly, a crease forms within her mind, and Zimone seizes it —*there!*

She takes hold of the two feelings, the two parts of herself, the part that wants the answers from her map and the part that hates to disappoint, and pulls.

Zimone realizes instantaneously that she is a monumental dumbass. Of course the fruit one was actually the hard one. This isn't the work to create a duplicate, a simple copy, no, she's her, which means she has overcommitted in the stupidest way possible, and by nature of her dumbassery has instinctually made a double the difficult way. Duplication is Riku's method, the easy way. *This* can only be option two: division.

The most overwhelming headache of her life sends her to the floor. Zimone howls, can see flashes of blue from behind her eyelids, and the more she uses the spell to tear in twain the more she feels something *of* herself *outside* herself build matter and take form. It feels like surgery, it feels like vomiting, and as soon as she coughs out a breath of life she hears an entire body collide with the floorboards.

Zimone opens her eyes. Her double, dressed in white, wisps of blue magic still encircling her like morning fog, blinks back in surprise.

The two of them stare. Investigate one another.

"Which part of me are you?" asks Original Zimone.

"The one that isn't going to let you ignore another letter."

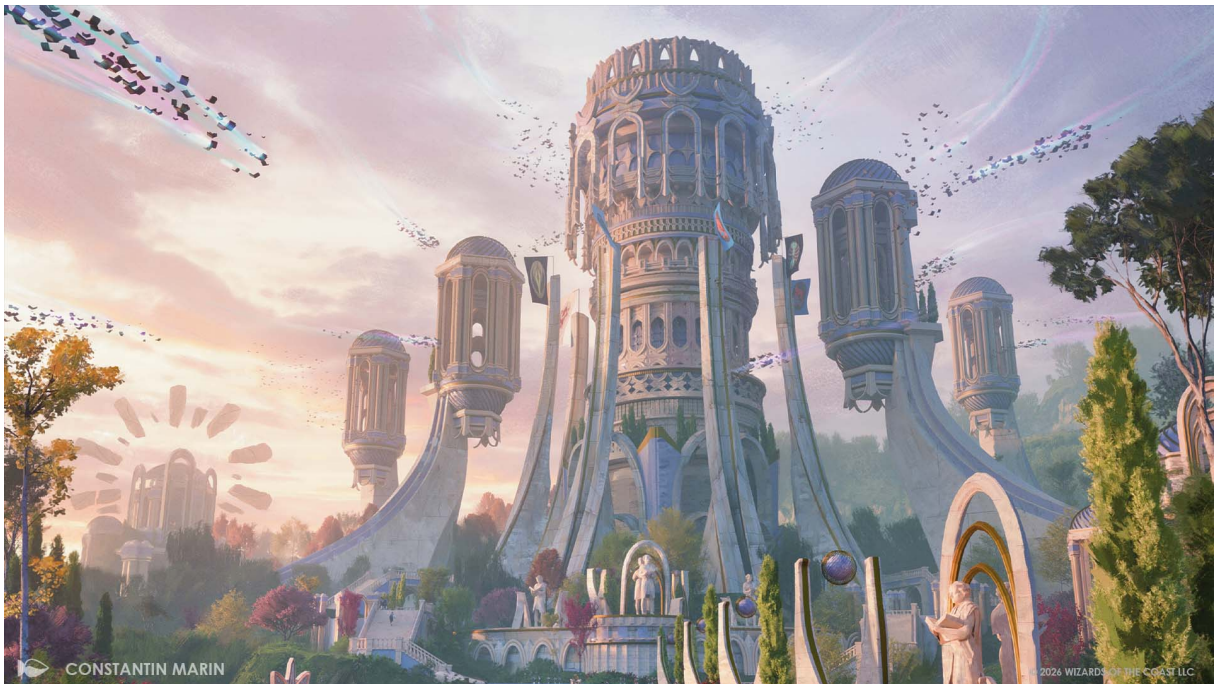
"What do I call you?"

The other Zimone looks to the rising sun, then grabs the Niv-Mizzet offer from the bed to wiggle the paper in the air. "Apprentice?"

The Original smiles, looking up to that strange shadow in her model of the Multiverse. “Divide and conquer.”

After Duskmourn, Zimone returned to Strixhaven.

Even though she was flanked by both Niko and Tyvar, she couldn't help but feel unsettled. Exposed. Strixhaven stretched high above, and the three of them walked with purpose (with Niko and Tyvar both craning their necks toward the Mage Tower stadium as they passed). Dean Nev was waiting in Torus Hall for their arrival.



Command Tower | Art by: Constantin Marin

But the closer they got, the more Zimone grew antsy. She found her eyes searching the frame of every door for a moth, checking every hallway for unnatural movement ...

“Friend Zimone,” a voice assures from above, “you are safe.”

She glances up. Tyvar is looking down, smiling encouragingly. Zimone realizes her face must betray her discomfort.

“Good, you arrived,” croaks a voice down the hall. Dean Nev approaches, the fins at his jawline flared in greeting, his robes brushing the gray stone. “Come to my office, tell me what you observed.”

Zimone feels how sweaty her palms are. Is it being back here, at Strixhaven? Is it seeing her professor like this again? No, it's something else. A ghost. Like the House walks with her.

Professor Nev's office is more of a book-repair facility than anything else. There are still a few boxes in the corner, as if three years wasn't enough time to move into the office. Half-torn books, heaps of clamps, open pots of glue, bookcases stuffed not just with books but slips of paper to mark what stage of repair they're at.

“Have a seat,” he says, and the three survivors follow suit.

He asks them about Duskmourn; what they observed, what they felt, the rules of the House, and how the rules of physics twisted to match.

Zimone watched Niko share their story about Nashi and Tyvar theatrically share the story of taking on the House as his own skin, and when it came her time to speak she fell into the easy familiarity of academic conversation.

“This is most concerning,” the professor concludes, stirring the ice in his drink. “Ms. Wola, thank you for bringing it to my attention.”

“Is there anything you can do?”

“I have already received word from your Izzet advisor that the Firemind does not recommend pursuing study at the moment. Their models do not predict any further virality—that is, *intrusions* into other planes.”

Zimone almost feels the ringing in her ear. “But we saw them. There have been other reports.”

Niko leans far enough forward in their chair to intrude on Dean Nev’s space. “Respectfully, Sir, that doesn’t make any sense.”

The merfolk frowns, “Believe me, I know! I implored them to reconsider, but the Firemind wants to retain focus on the Omenpath network.” There’s a flinch to his expression, a hint of his awareness that three years as Dean is not enough time to sow confidence.

“Cowardice!” yells Tyvar. He draws a finger pointed straight at Zimone, who finds herself frozen to her chair, “How dare the dragonlord ignore a tale of such peril?”

“I am sorry, Prince, but this is the reality of our work. Sometimes one area of focus is not as pressing as another. This is the reality of research.”

He says it so simply, as if there aren’t people still trapped inside the House, as if all of Zimone’s research wasn’t carefully collected and truthfully told. Her breath quickens. The air feels close. Zimone’s chest hurts, and she needs to be home, she needs to be safe, she needs to never look Niv-Mizzet in the eye again. Her panic is so intense she doesn’t even notice the prince next to her place a hand of ice to her forehead.

Zimone’s first two weeks of duplication are *spectacular*.

She’s been able to stabilize her model, clarify the shadow growing within it, avoid her roommates, *shower*. It is an hour past dinner, and she managed to make something other than eggs or noodles for the first time in months. The sun has been down for hours, and by the time she’s heading back to her freezing cold bedroom for round six of spell calibration, her double finally arrives home.

Apprentice Zimone leaves her coat on as she arrives, bags under her eyes and a smile on her face.

“Hello, *me*,” she says wearily.

“Hey, *me*,” Zimone says back. The Apprentice drops her bag and heads for the fireplace. She doesn’t need to eat (thank goodness; until her first paycheck they can only afford to feed *one* actual body). The Apprentice groans a bit as she sits down and pulls out a leather-bound folder.

“Do you have to work?” Zimone asks.

The Apprentice nods. “We couldn’t have done both. This was the right call.”

The papers drift to either side of her lap. Zimone eyes them, warily, and snugs her outermost sweater around her. The air is getting colder; winter is close.

The Apprentice catches Zimone's eye. "You sure you don't want to come in and see what we're up to?"

A memory; heart pounding, chest tight, the solidity of the ground drawing her downward, some part of Zimone still tenses with the panic she felt back on Strixhaven.

"No," she says quickly. "I'm about to make a breakthrough."

The Apprentice understands, because she was once part of Zimone, and she respectfully turns to the dining room table.

"There's a problem," the Apprentice says in a soft voice. Zimone hates it when she does that—purposefully mute herself when she wants to say something uncomfortable. Spit it out already.

"What?" she asks, aware of the edge in her tone.

"I won't be paid until the next month," the Apprentice says all small and annoying. "What do we do about the rent?"

Zimone ... doesn't know. Her roommates finally moved out (they blamed the open windows, were so apologetic in how they told Zimone it wasn't normal, it wasn't safe, *nobody does this, Zimone*) which was a boon for her peace of mind but painful for her finances. She could call her parents, but the thought of opening that can of dependent worms doesn't feel worth it. Zimone is an adult, more or less. She can sort this out as any adult would.

"We make another copy of ourselves," Zimone concludes.

"Naturally," says her doppelgänger, absent of concern. "You cover the experiment, I cover day job one, she can take a second day job that pays better but is less fulfilling. Should be easier this time."

Zimone doesn't bother to add that this also means the last part of rent can be covered until the second Zimone adds, "And you can remain unemployed."

Annoying—why would the other one say it in that tone?

She hides her eye roll and crosses to the living room. The air is chilled, curtains gently blowing, blazing fire fighting the temperature behind her. Zimone closes her eyes and feels, this time, for a different part of herself. The part that hopes, the part that drives for excellence. It rests in her mind, still and hungry.

Zimone seizes the feeling and pulls with her magic, up out of her chest, rips it through her throat. It's easier this time, the bile is familiar now, the roil in her stomach an expectation rather than a surprise. But this time, her heart aches, like her body knows she's rending part of herself away like a severed limb. The magic in her crawls up, demanding escape, and Zimone feels it pass through her sternum and drop to the floor as she coughs.

The new Zimone sits herself up, violet sweater dangling from one shoulder. She looks around, bleary and new.

"You," Zimone says between wheezing and spitting, "you want a job?"

The second her on the ground wipes her mouth, fumbles with her newly materialized glasses. She takes a moment, blinks, and finally smirks. "I want three."

Zimone's next week is *irritating*.

The two doppelgängers are out in the world, one achieving her dream, the other *aggressively achieving*, and from under two sweaters Zimone is getting annoyed. Is her voice *that* annoying? Does she really *never* relax?

Worst was dinnertime; now that she technically had four jobs, Zimone could finally afford good produce, quality eggs, the *nice bread*. And every time she brought it home, she was irritated by company. Apprentice Zimone would insist on sitting at the table despite not needing food, and Overachiever Zimone (what else was she to call her?) would suggest increasingly indulgent alternatives to whatever she *was* eating. It was annoying. It was rude. It made Zimone increasingly self-conscious ... Did all of her friends notice how she never shuts up about her workday? Did they all secretly hate the way she started every sentence with “look”? Zimone couldn’t help but fixate. Their flaws were hers. And with them on the outside they were now unignorable.

“Look, Niv-Mizzet wants to know my private research,” the Apprentice says with a knowing glance. “I told him he can expect a paper on it when it’s ready.”

Zimone feels herself clench, her instincts sudden and possessive, says *no* she will not share, not when it’s getting interesting. And it *is* getting interesting—all this time at home has allowed her to begin tracking the spread. Because the shadow in her model isn’t a shadow. There’s matter there, the most solid version of it mirrored above Arcavios. Is this a second Duskmourn? Her gut says ... no. It bears a thumbprint. A distinct pattern. It made itself, as Duskmourn did, but it does not share the same roots.

“I’m not sharing with him unless he pays me to,” Zimone says stiffly.

“Atta girl,” affirms the Overachiever from the desk in the corner. *Again*, annoying, *why won’t she stop working*—

“The right thing to do is to share,” the Apprentice mumbles. “Look, it’s not ethical to hold back information that *could* help the Multiverse.” Annoying!

“Enough,” Zimone barks, clattering her fork to the side of her plate. “I need to work, you two do whatever you do.”

The Apprentice purses her lips. The Overachiever hollers, “Already did it!” while pulling a fresh sheath of papers from the desk.

Zimone needs a real friend.

She storms to the bathroom and feels for the part of her brain that understands, that will know what she’s feeling. Zimone emerges with bags under her eyes and a duplicate in a red sweater behind her.

Friend Zimone is a real friend. She’ll be good company. She’ll be supportive.

Friend Zimone actually sucks.

She doesn’t know when to stop talking, she critiques but never offers another option, she does this *thing* where she always *laughs*? Like whatever she’s saying always has a half-breathy giggle nestled within the sentence? It’s infuriating, it’s bizarre, she isn’t saying anything *funny*, she’s just always on the edge of making herself laugh—

Friend Zimone huffs twice, a specter of a chuckle, “Look, I was on the way back from the bank, and I was thinking about a way to calculate the spread of the shadow Multiverse.” She lets out air. Is it? Is it a laugh? “And I think if we finish our proof, I should be able to duplicate the model.”

Working on the model is the last thing Zimone wants to do. Shadow be damned. She hugs her coat over her knees and leans back on the bed.

The shadow of the Multiverse is solid now. It looms over her bed, an inverse reflection of the original. The source, however, is still the mass mirroring Strixhaven. Zimone pieces out the duplicate strands, thin hairs stuck to the side of the bathtub, little strands that lead to something gigantic just under the drain.

Original Zimone watches her double look up, a smile tugging on her lips. She posits a hypothesis, the kind she knows she can't ignore.

"Someone is duplicating the Multiverse."

Original Zimone should be excited by her revelation. She ought to be trumpeting her findings, writing inflammatory pamphlets, rousing rabbles, publishing her first paper, but all she can do is pace in her kitchen.

Who could do this? Not in the moral sense, anyone could do most of anything if they had the right motivation, more like who *could* do this. Duplicating the Multiverse would require mastery of a half-dozen forms of spellwork, and even if one could memorize everything, the control needed to wield that without turning one's brains to risotto is immeasurable. A monk, perhaps? Something more than your average sapient? A demon? An angel?

Zimone pauses. She feels wrong.

She feels warm.

She flings herself to the stove—off. Oven? Off. The fire is out in the sitting room. She races to her bedroom, flings open the door.

The window is closed.

She half-gasps, half-sobs, and bruises her knuckles diving over the bed to open it again. Precious sacred *cold* blows in. The outside exists, the sky is real. She can smell her neighbor's dinner, and her heart is beating faster and faster, and she was so close to being captured, so close to death.

She can't breathe.

She can't breathe.

Friend Zimone is next to her telling her she's okay, and Friend Zimone is a *useless doorknob* —

Zimone imagines Tyvar's hand on her forehead, ice cooling her down, the ground firm and solid beneath her. *Who closed the window?* Her doubles wouldn't do that.

"I was cold," Friend Zimone says without joy. "I'm sorry. Don't you want to go out?"

"Of course I do!" Zimone wheezes. "Of course I do. But I can't. I can't."

"Why?" Friend Zimone asks softly.

"Because just me wasn't enough."

There's a knock at her door.

Zimone and Friend Zimone lock eyes. Friend Zimone glances briefly at the door and back, making clear she won't answer, and Zimone wants to strangle her.

“Are you alive?”

It’s Dina.

Zimone bounds out of bed, slamming her bedroom door behind her, racing for the front door. She hurls it open and hugs her friend.

Dina follows her inside. “Why is it freezing in here?”

Zimone can’t answer.

Her friend sighs. “I came to check in ...”

Zimone can’t respond. She knows she is flustered and gaunt.

“I’ve just been working,” she half-lies. “Once I finish my apprenticeship I’m planning on applying for an associate professorship—

“Stop,” Dina says. She leans forward. “What did you *do* ?”

The bedroom door creaks open.

Friend Zimone peeks out. Walks through the door, every muscle tight and awkward, “Look ... I’m going to the library I guess,” she says with a half-laugh, and before Zimone can die of embarrassment her double exits.

Dina sighs.

Zimone explodes, “I can’t *stand* her. She never knows when to shut her mouth, she laughs halfway through sentences, she thinks she’s so quirky and interesting but she isn’t interesting! She just reminds you what her hobbies are all the time! And I can’t even focus on work without her nearby offering *help* and *advice* and—”

“Hey. That’s you.”

Dina is frowning. Zimone closes her mouth.

Shame overtakes her. “Do I never shut up?”

“Of course.”

“How do you put up with me?”

“Because you’re you.”

But “me” isn’t enough. The thought hurts. Zimone finds herself lowering to the couch.

“And you are one of those amazing weirdos who climbs a mountain because they can.”

Zimone feels terrible.

“You need pinesmoke tea,” Dina says knowingly. She walks to the kitchen and futzes with the stove. “The other dryads here keep insisting the twig crap is good for rebalancing, but they try and sneak in a pitch for their weird cult every time.” Dina leans out the kitchen and winks. “You’re not in a cult! At least you’ve got that going alright!”

“Dina, I think I made a mistake,” Zimone says quietly. “All this time with myself is just making me hate myself.”

“Well, I don’t hate you.”

“I don’t hate you, too.”

Dina smiles from the kitchen, small and friendly, like it's no big deal, like there's nothing to be ashamed of.

Zimone is drawn forward and embraces her friend while burying her face in her shoulder. Her lesson learned. "I can't be everything. I think I need to just be me for a while."

The spell is not fun to undo.

It feels like eating. It burns her chest, like reverse heartburn. Reintegration is fast but painful. Their forms turn to vapor, the vapor disappears, and all Zimone feels is a heavy heart and sudden awareness of how small she was without them.

She sends off a letter of resignation to the three jobs the Overachiever took on, an uncomfortable letter to the Office of the Guildpact asking for a leave of absence, then rests as Dina helps her tidy the flat.

Exhausted, mug of noodles in hand, Zimone sighs to her friend. "I'd tell Vess if she were here ... but there's something I found."

Dina narrows her eyes. Zimone grimaces as she rises, crosses to the bedroom, and flicks her model awake. The Multiverse shines, and its shadow solidifies above.

Dina's mouth hangs open.

"You need to tell someone."

"Who?"

Dina shrugs. "An adult?"

They both go silent, realizing who the adults are in the room.

Dina winces. "That's alright, we can do something ... Can you tell who made the duplicate?"

Zimone knows from experience a duplicate carries a trace. "I can, but I won't know who it is."

"Let's find the root together."

They go to work. Zimone finds the closest thing to a theorem that will identify psychic signatures, Dina pulls a textbook from her bag and insists a biological theorem may be applicable to find the root, and both mages pair their spells at once.

"If I do this right, the root will point to someone we know who knows the caster," Dina explains. "Channel through me."



Commander's Insight | Art by: Carly Milligan

Uncertain, Zimone does just that.

The blue of her magic washes over her friend, and Dina pulses her hand.

An image comes to both of their minds at once.

Someone, a woman, bulky goggles and bright red hair. Dina gasps.

“Oh, damn, she’s famous,” she says, pointing at the image. “Chandra Nalaar. She did the race thing?”

Zimone shakes her head. No aspect of her knows anything about sports.

“Okay, yeah, *well*, spell says she knows whoever made the second Multiverse. I know where to find her.”

A purpose. Zimone blinks. She feels cold. Her friend is in the room, a goal is in front of them, and the only adults in the room are them.

She walks to the window and closes it.

Zimone looks at the closed window. Valgavoth was never going to get in here in the first place. She’s always been fine. She’s an adult, she can handle herself on her own.

With a begrudging glance she mourns, “When we get back ... I need a roommate.”

Dina raises an eyebrow and shrugs with an accepting smile. “How opposed are you to guests?” She grins. “Specifically, the kind that stay in my bed and don’t turn the toilet into a boy bathroom.”

“You promise Killian won’t turn our bathroom into a boy bathroom?”

“Not on my watch.”

Zimone feels warmer already.