

Lights Templar

Book V

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by
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permission.

Dedicated to

Anna, my one star in the brilliant sky

Adam, Rosamia, Iris and Alexandria for being
strong voices throughout this journey

And finally to all that took the time to read my
stories, thank you as I am very honored that you
did.

Prologue

Iris's Journal

Only two weeks have passed since my last entry and overall not much has changed. Mike and Anna have been pretty much held up in their assigned room for this whole time. They sometimes come out here and there but very rarely. Considering what happened recently it's not much of a surprise that they would want to spend some time together to talk and other things that embarrass me from just thinking about it.

Alexandria is finally done being questioned by the Council on what happened, and overall they are not pleased at all. They even ordered Mike and Anna to show up at one of the meetings to go over the same details that Alex had explained, in hopes that she had been in error. When it was understood that this was not the case, she told me they all received a large scolding from Solanar and a few other Council members on how they dealt with the situation with that plan that they cooked up. While the lecturing by the Council has died down it did little to help with Alexandria's overall confidence level.

I tried to let her know that there was little that could of been done and that the Council is wrong about all this but it did very little and currently she is hold up in her room doing the thing that she does best which would be studying

arcane magic from one of her books. Normally this would have me really worried but seeing as we are currently living in the same house it is allowing me to take care of her on a regular basis and see that she is getting closer to her old self. Heck just yesterday I barely escaped a lecture myself on the lack of studying I was doing from her. It's a good thing that I was able to convince her that I needed to meet with Rosamia and Adam otherwise I'm pretty sure that I would still be locked in her room going over something that had grabbed her attention that she wanted me to know about. In the end I guess time does help to heal certain wounds.

While most of my time was spent with Alex the other part was with Rosa and Adam. Overall there is a lot for us to go over as our powers have drastically diminished. Try as much as I could the only thing I can cast with holy magic is a minor heal spell everything else is gone from my mind. Overall that is an odd feeling, like waking up one day and forgetting how to run. Adam and Rosa are in the same boat. For Adam, his tracking magic is all he has access to. Rosa was the more fortunate one as she still is able to cast minor healing and also has the ability to create a magical shield. Unfortunately this shield is as big as a regular buckler so only good to protect a person torso area and from one direction only, but at least she can cast it which is better than everyone else. While practicing we also tried to play it out and see if something was missed from the actions that we did. I mean is the Council right or was it the right thing to do and not tell the Order about everything when we knew about it. Thing is even after knowing what we know doing things better would have held no better results.

Telling the Order when we knew about it

would have resulted in that being the focus on everything, which would have prevented the help that was provided to everyone during the two years that we were all working together. That would not have been for the better. Also after seeing the results of the fight with Genevieve and Mike having told others of her true target would have resulted in more casualties as more people would have gotten hurt or even killed in the crossfire. Which leaves us with, if we would have acted quicker and ended her life before she was able to tackle me and get to the second floor. If that had been avoided then holy magic would still be inaccessible as no one from the dark would be alive to sustain the spell that allowed for dark energy to be used by others, which was also used as a source for those using holy magic. It's true that if that had happened then the avatar of the lord of light would not have been fully awoken, but at this time we still don't know if that is a good thing or bad. No matter how we look at it we have no clue what we could have done to make things turn out better. Was there a better way? Could we have saved her somehow? ... I don't know, but if there was a way it still eludes me.

During this time we also got the bad news from Julia that she was demoted back down to Commander at Arms from Commander. From what she told us the new Commander has been there for a long time and is not a bad choice but he is very strong on tradition, which has her worried a bit. The news hit Anna harder than Julia as she blames herself for Julia's demotion. In a way if Anna had singled out someone else to be in command of everyone during the attacks, then Julia could have saved face when the idea of asking the orcs for help and agreeing with it came up. But seeing as Julia was the only one she

trusted implicitly if fell to her to make that decision and accept it, giving her no way out when the majority of the new Crimsons felt betrayed by her actions.

Using the pendants magic Julia also told us that when things calmed down that she would come and visit us here and give more details on everything. From the looks of it she seemed a bit worried and very tired but generally fine otherwise. Julia is one of the strongest person I know so her being able to quickly move on from what happened to her would surprise me very little. Still we would like to go over there ourselves and talk in person just to make sure this is truly the case. But unfortunately in a way we are currently under lock down for now, and are forced to stay in Astrum. Visiting other places could cause larger issues depending on the Orders, or should I say the lord of light's next move.

From the news that Adam and Rosa are getting we don't think that we will have to wait for too much longer. A general order was sent to all priest and Crusader to head to the holy city of Missa with the exception of Rosa and Adam. We don't know what's going on over there but that's a lot of people converging on one spot and it's only a matter of time before they are given their new orders, whatever that maybe...

Chapter 1

Catherine was currently tying her light brown hair in a bun as she looked outside; the scenery brought a smile to her face. About little more than two weeks had passed since the return of the lord of light but during that time much had changed in all aspects of the Order and her own.

The fixed teleportation circle was the first indication of a large fundamental change. No longer did the Order need to rely on the Council and its mages when it came to arcane magic as the lord of light knew everything they knew and had a better mastery over the arts than they did. Also no longer would they need to be at the elves mercy when it came to the history of their Order how they received their powers as now they could simply ask the source. A source which had no ulterior motives for them and would speak the truth to them, in a way after such a long time since its creation the Order was finally antonymous.

Catherine smiled again as she felt that finally the Order that she followed body and soul could flourish to what she had always dreamed. A large weight was also lifted from her shoulders as well recently. For all her life she had learned to be as guarded as she could and be wary of who she could trust, early on in life and also when she had joined the Order she had been betrayed by those she thought followed the same path and belief as she did. When she learned of their true motive the consequences always turned badly for her. After finally having enough of being used she had created walls around her. She still conversed and

played her role but she always made it so that people would talk to her and flip things round when the focus was her personal thoughts. This allowed her to know what others were thinking and plan accordingly as best as she could, while still protecting herself from being harmed again. While this required a lot of work from her end she had found that it was a very successful way to survive.

Her smile briefly disappeared the more she thought about it as there was one person that had somehow chipped away at her wall and was also able to undo her plans no matter how much information Catherine collected. That person was Rosamia of the Lights Templar, considering what she had done Catherine no longer considered her a member of the Order's priestess group. Catching the anger and sorrow that she felt as she thought of that person reminded Catherine that this was still an issue that she would have to deal with at one point. As she finished with her hair and started to get ready by donning her official attire of a High Order member she pushed all thoughts of Rosamia out of her head, the next little while would be very important for her and it would need all her focus.

Currently all humans that had the ability to use holy magic had lost it as a consequence of the Lights Templar selfish actions. If not of for the return of the lord of light this would have been a devastating blow to the Order as a whole.

Thankfully this would not come to pass. Currently the lord of light was in the process of retuning their power to them, but this time only those worthy would be able to use it. This process worked in the following way, you would swear allegiance to the lord of light and no other. Once your motivation was confirmed by the lord of light himself then he would make it so that you could

access his power once again through him. In order to make sure that corruption did not occur at a later time, the link created would allow the lord of light to know all that you knew. If you fell from grace or strayed from the path then the link and power would be removed. This is what allowed Catherine to open up once again after so many years of guarding herself. She was devoted to the lord of light and so if another was able to use holy magic then she could trust that person implicitly as the lord of light was watching.

Still change did have its issues. In the past the High Order had a few members and also potential candidates. Now with his return and him fully taking charge there was only need for a few members to stay at the rank of High Order. For those that did their task changed considerably. Before they were in charge figuring out the future actions of the Order and Crusaders and how to deal with current issues, now they were simply people that where in charge of the mundane jobs that were needed in order to keep the day to day activities going. Sometimes they also had the blessed role of being a representative for the lord of light, which Catherine thought was a humongous honor.

A smile returned to Catherine's face as she had been chosen to once again be a part of the few remaining High Order members. The news had come to her as she was on route to the holy city of Missa. Trilled as she was the surprises did not end there for it seems that the other two members chosen would be Rob and Joseph, two people that she had worked with the most. Both of them had already been blessed by the lord of light and had also regained their powers. The only reason Catherine had yet to receive his blessing was because it had taken a bit more time than expected

to return back to Missa.

Catherine could not wait to regain her powers as without it she felt empty, like the light inside of her had been snuffed out. In a way it sadden her a bit to think how reliant she was on holy magic in order to perform the duties of helping others, but how else could you accomplish that goal without it. For a while she stated to wonder if what Rosamia and the other Lights Templar had started would open a new way to do just that, but as it was in Catherine's past people left to their own could not be trusted unless guided by a higher force.

Thoughts of what could have been quickly vanished as she heard a knock on her door. "Is it okay for me to come in?"

The voice was that of the General, she had been told that she would be escorted to where she would received her holy blessing but it never occurred that the General himself would be the one to do so. "It's not a problem."

The General then step inside her room and then closed the door behind him. As she finished preparing he looked around. The room itself was about the same as all the others that where in a position of importance. A large bed, hers had a white drape around it, a large wooden wardrobe and a small desk to work on and a small round table that had a few chairs. The only extra item that he could see was a makeup vanity table that she was currently using. He also noticed that there were still a few travel bags that had been left unattended.

"I see that you have yet to have the time to fully settle in."

There was a brief moment of embarrassment but it quickly disappeared as Catherine quickly glanced his way. "Oh, I apologize

for that. I've been so busy with all the changes happening around here and plus with the delay in getting here, well there was hardly any time to completely unpack yet."

Now having fully finished all the final touches she made her way to the small circular table and sat at one of the chairs. She then motioned for the General to sit with her, there was still a bit of time before they had to go so this allowed her to ask him a few questions and catch up.

"So General..." She then paused really quickly before continuing, "Or should I say Marshal now?"

The General smiled as he took up her offer to sit. While a lot of changes occurred with the High Order the Crusader branch was also heavily affected. All Crusaders had been ordered to return to Missa immediately, while the priest and priestesses had only been told to return when they could. This action caused a lot of momentary concerns as it left all the posts that the Crusaders where stationed empty and defenseless, that said it was hard to argue with orders coming from a being that had created the race in the first place.

Once a large percentage of the Crusaders had arrived a new simplified command structure was put in place. A lot of generals were demoted back to lieutenants as there was very little reason to have that many people in command when the lord of light could just issue you his orders during any battle that occurred anywhere. Really all you needed was someone to execute the commands. The High Order members had been a priority, for those present, to receive the holy blessing and the Crusaders members where the second priority followed by the priest and priestess.

As soon as he had arrived the General had

been escorted to see the Avatar and go through the ceremony. What surprised him was what happened afterward. When the Avatar had finished going over every bit of knowledge in his head he then pointed at him and gave him the news that unlike all the others he was getting a promotion. As of now the General would be in charge of all Crusaders reporting to the Avatar himself or a member of the High Order.

"In theory I suppose that you are correct and that Marshal should be my new name, but then everyone still calls me General out of habit and I'm so used to it as well that I always fail to correct them."

He gave Catherine a light smirk, "So if you are okay with it General is still good, so please continue."

She gave him a quick nod and then continued, "I was going to ask you if your new position is agreeing with you."

The General stroked his beard while he thought about his answer. "Okay I suppose, I'm not a fan of being behind a desk for long times and simply ordering other around. I like to be around the men I command in order to get to know them in order to better order them around."

Catherine was curious about this as for the last few years the General was mostly doing what he was told to do now. While the decision was made as a group rarely did they participate with the people that executed them. To her knowledge the only one that moved back and forth was Alexandria. So why did he seem so unhappy now performing the same tasks? But this line of suspicion bought up a better question.

"Seeing as you are now the person to ask, have you found the traitor yet?"

The General simply shrugged, "So far the

person still eludes us, but with the holy blessings under way it's only a matter of time before the person is found. Because of this I was told by the Avatar to leave the matter in his hands and not spend resources on this task of finding the culprit."

Catherine smirked at that comment. She was very curious to know who the Lights Templar had told their secret to in the Order and even more curious to know why that person told them to keep it a secret. For a while she was wondering if the General had been that person as he would be the most obvious choice, and when he was instantly escorted to meet with the lord of light she had figured that she had been right. But when he came out and had not only received the blessing but a promotion she had to believe that she had been wrong. With the General out of the picture it left very little people, and then a person appeared in her head.

"Do you know if the priestess in charge of Calculus has received the lord of light's blessing? I think her name was Jessica?"

The General shook his head from side to side. "At this time, besides the members of the High Order, only Crusaders are receiving the blessing from the Avatar. So I would assume that she has yet to be looked at, are you thinking that she maybe the one that Rosamia was referring to?"

Catherine thought about it some more for a few seconds and then stopped herself. "No, no, no... I need to stop this." She then smiled at the General, "I'm sorry I should have dropped the matter as soon as you mentioned that the lord of light would look into the matter."

A frown appeared on the General face. He agreed that this priestess was a good potential target and yet Catherine was okay to let that go, it seems that she had changed a bit since last he had

to deal with her. He did not know why he was surprised by her reaction as Catherine was probably the second person most devout to the Avatar, Joseph being the first, but still this blind trust that she had worried him for some reason. Still he saw no reason to not take advantage of this new version of herself.

"If you don't mind me asking what are your thoughts on the Crusaders receiving the blessing over the regular priest and priestess? I must say that I thought that a certain amount of Crusaders would be first in order to send them back to where they were stationed, but this is not at all what happened."

Catherine nodded at that, "Yes you're right I can't say that I expected that as well, but given the new command that you where given it does make sense."

"Yes I suppose that you are correct."

"How are the efforts going on that front, if you don't mind me asking?"

The General gave her a small smile as this was more like the Catherine that he remembered. "The forces should be ready to send out when he orders them. When that time comes teams of Crusaders will be ready to head out to all major cities and large towns. I still wonder on what order will be given when they get there, but that is not something for me to question I suppose."

Sensing his frustration Catherine figured that she would help out the old General with his worry. "You are correct that you should have no worries given that the lord of light will be giving them. Still unless things change, from what I was told from Joseph when I asked you have nothing to fear. The Crusaders are only being sent as peacekeepers and to continue the work that was started with everyone in helping others."

The General gave her a small smile of gratitude, "Thanks for letting me know. I know that I should not worry but given everything that has happened actions like preparing a large army raises many concerns and questions."

Catherine shrugged at that comment, "Maybe I can see where your concerns are coming from given the past as you mentioned but we are entering a new age now. An age where we don't have to fear trust as will finally be unified under the same goal. I'm sure that will take time for some to adjust but this is where we are heading."

He had to agree with her this would be a new age for all human good or bad. He then turned to look out the window to get an estimate at how much time had passed and then slowly stood up. "I supposed that we should head on our way to the ceremony, it's almost time."

Eagerly Catherine stood up, "So it seems, lead the way General."

The city of Missa was a very large and surrounded by a large stonewall in order to provide defense. Most of the city was populated by Crusaders and priests but there was also a large fair share of normal villagers that had long ago decided to make this place their home. One of the driving factors for this was due to its safety and also access to medical help if the need arrived. While large houses for certain noble could be found none where as big or as visually impressive as the main cathedral in the middle of the city. The cathedral was split into three sections. The first being the outer zone that was used for the living quarters for High Order members of the priesthood and also the Crusaders, the more important you where the better the space was. The second inner section was mostly generic rooms used for meetings, training and special councils. In the

middle section that took up most of the cathedral was used for the nave. Rows and rows of pews could be found that eventually lead to the main altar.

Most of the people stood up as the General escorted Catherine to the main altar. The people present were mostly only Crusaders and other members of the priesthood and few special invited guests that had close ties to the Order. Normally the holy blessing would be performed in a much smaller room with far less people present, but given that this was for a High Order member which there were very few of now a special case was made. The General figured that an event like this served a few purposes at the same time. One on which is to clearly show the importance of the person involved and also it helped send the message to many of this person role and rank that everyone would have to obey to.

Waiting on the main altar you had the lord of light himself and also Catherine's other two members of the High Order. As they still slowly made their way the General took a quick look at Catherine, never has he seen her so happy and as radiant as she was now. If he did not know better he could have easily mistaken her reaction as she was getting married and he was escorting her down the aisle. Still given what was about to happen that thought was not that off the mark.

All in all the General was happy for her, over the years of working so closely with her he had learned to respect this person for all the work that she did. And while he was happy that his own blessing ceremony was more closed off he did not begrudge the fanfare that was done for this person as it was well deserved. As they arrived at the edge of the main altar he slowly bowed at Catherine and took his place to the side along the others in the

front pews.

Catherine was in awe, this was the first time that she would see the lord of light with her own eyes. She had to admit that seeing that eleven frame covered in small white slightly glowing scale and red reptilian eye was not had she had imagined him as, but whatever preconceived image she had of him mattered little as she knew that this was in fact him. This was the person that she had prayed to for all her years and this was also the person's ideas that she had followed for most of her life. She could feel the power coming from his being, power which was similar to that of what she used to have and soon should have again.

Catherine kneeled and lowered her head, "My lord."

The lord of light smiled, "Please stand and come closer." As she did as was asked he continued. "Are you prepared to receive my blessing, are you prepared to defend my idea from those that would do them harm, are you prepared to have me walk along side you?"

Catherine's eyes were wide open; finally all her hard work and pain that she had endured would pay off. Finally she would get the reward that she had always wanted, validation from the one that she worshiped. "Yes, I am and I will."

He raised his hand and placed it on her head, "I will now honor the choice that you made."

Catherine felt his hand on her head and it was a bit cold but that thought was interrupted with a large pain that she was now feeling in her head. There was no time to think, the pain was so great that she could not even move or yell. Her mind was assaulted with everything that she had done past and present, she was also seeing deep thoughts that she had shared with no one. Her whole life ripped open in a flash and then she felt

it. A warm cooling wave that started from where he was still touching her that moved throughout her body. The excruciating pain that she had felt was all gone and was replaced with a feeling of having a warm blanket warped around her. It then took only a few moments for Catherine to feel the power that she once had return but this time it was a bit different. It felt like her connection to it was better and its use was clearer somehow. As he removed his hand from her head there was one last thing that she felt and that was a whisper in the back of her mind. A smile then appeared on her face, it was the voice of the lord of light. Catherine knew that while it was a simple whisper she also knew that if need be she could now hear his voice clear as day wherever she was.

The lord of light took a step back and then addressed all the people present. "Catherine has accepted the blessing, she will now join the ranks of my closes one as High Order member. Her voice, like all other members of the High Order, is my voice."

He then looked at Catherine, "You are now one of my vassals and as such I already have a task for you. Things are changing very quickly and with the many turmoil's that have happened in recent history people are now very afraid of change. I want you to go and show the people that I simply want to protect them and mean them no harm."

"It would be an honor, when should I leave?"

He smiled at her, "Soon." Then he lowered his voice so that only those around would hear. "...As before you go there is a matter that I wish for you and your fellow members to deal with."

Catherine turned to both Joseph and Rob to see if they had any clues to what the lord of light

was referring to. Seeing as they showed quick concerned looks themselves of not being aware of this mysterious task, she then turned to the lord of light. "And what matter would you wish for us to deal with?"

Very few words were mentioned from him, "The Lights Templar..."

There was a mix reaction from the three members at the name. Joseph was almost giggling, for a while now that group had caused him issues to his and everyone's structured way of life and soon they would finally see their mistake in doing so. Rob on the other had seemed very pensive he knew what they were capable of and this task would require a lot of planning. As for Catherine, she knew that this time would come. She had been with these people for a few years now and had a pretty good idea on the type of people that they were. She also knew that it was them that hid the lord of lights possible return from all of them, which was a betrayal that she could still not forgive. But she also could not think of a proper punishment for that crime, she looked at her lord's eyes. "If I may ask, how will you deal with the actions that they have committed?"

The lord of light smiled, "I will do what I have always done, and I will give them a choice."

As he stopped his explanation there Catherine took a deep breath and nodded in approval. Those people rarely acted as expected and time and time again Catherine's plans had been derailed by them, but now with the lord of light's return how many options did they really have? She supposed that she would soon find out.

Chapter 2

Anna suddenly woke up. She was still having issues going back to her normal sleeping patterns after everything changing for the last few months. She then felt a hand slowly brush some of the hair that was on her face. She smiled as she looked up to see that Mike was also awake.

Mike returned her smile, "Sorry did I wake you?"

She wrapped her arms around his chest and got closer, "I'm not sure, I've only recently started sleeping normally so it could be that as well. And you, have you been awake long?"

"Only a little while, I guess there are a lot of things bugging me in my head so sleep is not coming easily."

"Hmmm, do tell. Trying to figure out what we should do next?"

He shrugged a bit, "That's just it, there is not much for us to do. I mean, what can we do but wait?"

Anna smiled, "Oh but that's not going to stop you. So how many scenarios are you up to now?"

He chuckled, "A few but they pretty much all lead to the same place."

Seeing as she had opened the can of worms Anna thought about the possibilities as well and ran through some of the scenarios. "Well assuming that they just let it go is off the table..." He interrupted her, "While I agree that it's probably not going to happen in theory if it's up to Chaos

and he has no agenda then I could see it happening."

At that Anna pulled back and then pulled herself in a sitting position next to him with a curious look on her face, "Wait, wait, wait... How do you see that one? There is no way that the Order is simply going to let go that we stayed silent about the fact that there was a way for their god to come back to them."

Mike smile back, "I'm going to be splitting hairs here but in theory we did not know that for sure actually. Remember we were told that the rebirth spell would merge both consciousnesses into a new one, in theory erasing both to become something new. Telling the Order about it we would have had to say there is a way for your god to come back but he may not be the same as his consciousness will be merged with whoever is picked for the spell."

Anna wanted to laugh at that logic, "I think that you are beyond splitting hairs with that one. Anyways I'm pretty sure you came with the conclusion that it would not happen, leaving really unpleasant options only I guess." She thought about it some more and then looked in his eyes, "Do you think that we will have to fight him? If it comes to that should we?"

He chuckled at that one, "Do you want us to?"

She immediately gave him a poke in the ribs, "No cheating, I want to know your opinion and plus I asked first." In his mind it was going to be hard not to cheat as he already knew her answer and he agreed with it. "Considering the situation taking up arms against him would be wrong. If he, and the Order is only after us and they keep to their doctrine of helping others do we have any right to go against him in the first place?"

I don't see that was we did was wrong so much, I mean everyone hides things from others and it's not like we did not ask others as well. And they all said the same things, don't tell anyone. Sure the reason where different but the end results was the same. Because of that I don't see it as we lied to them; we just kept a secret that came out. Still in the end we made that final call so I get that we should also take those consequences that are attached to that."

Anna again has a curious look on her face, "Hmm, I agree with you but at the same time I don't buy it. There is no way that you think that the punishment given will be fair, and I'm pretty sure that all the others think the same as well. And that's the reason I asked the question should we fight him if it's going to come up."

Mike took a deep breath, "You're right I don't believe that it will be fair and that's why I said that all the scenarios lead to the same place, which is that we become fugitives."

Anna thought for a while on that one, "If we are the only targets and we agree that it's not fair that we attack him, but at the same time we are pretty convinced that the punishment will not fit the crime so unless we just give in going on the run is the only option that will be left for us." She then looked up that the ceiling in their private room that had been given to them temporarily during their stay in Astrum. "That will be a very big change for us, still if we know it's coming there should be a way around it."

Mike gave her a mischievous smile, "Initially, I don't see it but in the long term maybe there will be options. It all depends on what they decided to do and also what Chaos plans on doing next."

She turned to look at him again, "So all

that to say that we have to wait and see. Still we should probably discuss this with the others tomorrow, I'm sure that Adam is slowly going mad being on standby like this just waiting for the other shoe to drop."

He laughed at that, "I'm sure he is but he's not the only one, Iris is as concerned. I bummed into her a few days ago when we went to get supplies."

Anna then stretched out and then slipped into a sleeping position again, "Well all the more reason to do this tomorrow. In the meantime I suggest we try and go back to sleep." Mike gave her a small kiss and did just that.

The next day Adam, Rosamia, Iris and Alexandria were all sitting around in Alex and Iris's now very cramped living room. Iris had tried to remove some of the stacks of books that were everywhere but somehow when she cleared the space more books magically found themselves appearing in the place that she had just freed up.

While this disturbed Iris quite a bit as she had no idea how Alex was doing that, she eventually gave up on the idea of having any free space around the house. Her room was the only sanctuary but even then there were still a lot of bookcases, more so than she would have liked. Iris's thought on her minor trauma was then disturbed by Adam.

"Look I'm all for giving them time but considering what is happening we all agree that we need to prepare right?"

Rosamia then sighed, "Adam we still don't know what it means, we still need to wait."

As Adam was about to start his argument they all heard a knock on the main door. Alexandria looked at the door and shouted, "You can come in its opened."

Anna and Mike then stepped in house and closed the door behind them. Alexandria had a large smile on her face, "Hey look who finally came out!"

Iris turned to Alex with a confused look on her face, "Are you sure that you are one to talk considering your last week?" Alexandria was now glancing around the room avoiding eye contact with everyone, "I was preparing this whole time I swear, and I have no clue what you are referring too." She then looked at Anna and Mike and pointed to some empty chairs, "Please have a seat."

As they sat down Iris looked at where Alex had pointed, she could have sworn that there where books there and that the seat was not available just a few seconds ago. She then looked at Alex who had a very mischievous smile on her face. That confirmed it for Iris, she was toying with her. On the positive side to that was that it was confirmation that Alex was feeling better overall otherwise she would not have bothered. Now that she thought about it Iris too was feeling generally better over the events that had happened recently. There was still work to be done on that front but at least she could accept it now.

Mike and Anna got comfortable and then he looked at everyone, "So has there been anything new that happened?"

Adam jumped right in, "Rosamia just learned that this Avatar is currently giving Crusaders their ability to cast holy spells again. My big concern is that it seems that only Crusaders are being given that opportunity. I'm saying we need to do something about that as there is no way that it will turn out good."

Rosamia seemingly already tired of this argument cut him off before he could continue, "And as I mentioned we don't have enough

information to do anything about that." Anna nodded at that comment, "I agree for all we know they are being restored because they need to head back to where they were posted originally, would not having those post empty for too long cause issues?"

Feeling a bit defeated Adam back down, "I guess but it still rubs me the wrong way." Mike nodded, "I'm with you on that one Adam, but Rosamia and Anna are right."

He then looked at Rosa, "Anything else? What about your casting powers?"

Rosamia shrugged, "Nothing new really. Adam still only has the tracking spell, Iris has minor healing. As for me I still only have minor healing and the ability to cast a minor holy shield. On the positive side, we can now cast those spells like before. At the start it was very hard like there was an invisible resistance to our connection to the power, but that seems gone now."

While that was good news it was still a big blow to their overall combat strength, Alexandria then interrupted the silence. "So from what I'm starting to see our goal is to not confront the Chaos then? I'm just wondering because I've been researching on a way that maybe we could have a shot at that."

Iris suddenly looked at her, "What? When did you do that?"

"Look your right I needed time after everything that has happened but I was not kidding I was researching as well. I mean we will need some serious help but..." Mike then interrupted her, "As impressed as I am with that Alexandria, to answer your question the answer is no we currently have no intention of going against this Avatar. After talking about it we figured that this was the best course of action, at least as long

as we are the only targets it's pretty much the only thing we can do."

Adam crossed his arms, "... I don't see it that way..." But then Rosamia cut him off, "I do actually." As he turned to her with a questioning and puzzled look on his face Rosa continued. "Look they are right as long as we are the only targets then we can't do anything. Say we do go against him and somehow manage to beat him then what? We will have the whole Crusader and Order after us, how does that solve anything?"

In Iris's mind that did not leave too many other options, "So then what do we do then, hide and hope it blows off eventually?"

As Anna and Mike where about to confirm her comment another knock could be heard from the door.

"Miss Alexandria a large group of Crusaders are requesting that you and your friends go down to Newport to grant them an audience."

This time Alexandria stood up and went to open the door herself to talk to the Astrum guard. He bowed as soon as she opened the door, "Tell them that we will be down in a moment as I need to gather all the others first." The guard smiled at the obvious lie and performed another quick bow before leaving to deliver the message.

Alexandria then turned to the others, "Okay sure I lied but I figured that we may want a bit of time to prepare and plus they made us wait weeks the least we can do is make them wait a few minutes."

Everyone stood; this was the meeting that was on everyone minds for a while now. Mike quickly looked at Anna and then everyone else, "Seems that we will not be able to give you all the details but Alexandria is right let's go and get ready, and pack heavy in a way that we may not

come back here for a while." He realized that this last command did not give off anything positive but there was little choice in that. As everyone started to leave to get ready, Mike then stopped next to Alex. "I have a special request if you don't mind." Alexandria was all ears while Mike explained his request.

By the time the Lights Templar used the Astrum warp to access Newport little over one hour had passed. When they appeared, it was easy to see that the group of Crusaders where not impressed one bit. Seems that about twenty Crusaders had been sent and already they started circling the group and also took out their weapons of their scabbards. This instantly provoked the Newport guard around the portal; Alexandria quickly motioned for them to stand down not wanting for this to escalate.

The lead Crusader took a step forward and yelled at the Lights Templar, "You are to be escorted to the holy city of Missa where you will meet with the lord of light."

When he stopped Alexandria figured that she would ask the obvious question, "Do you want me to teleport us there using the teleportation circle?" Instantly the Crusader answered her in a very harsh tone, "That will be unnecessary as we have our own mages present to do that." When he finished he quickly looked back and nodded at two mages, that where starting their casting.

Alexandria looked at the two in question, it was nothing new for the Order to employ mages for varied ranges of services but this was different. These mages wore robes with the same color scheme as the Crusaders and the Order. In fact they bended in so well that she had not realized that they were present. She saw that they where human and mumbled to herself, "I think I get it

now."

Iris being the only one that heard her quickly looked at Alex, who then explained her comment but in a low enough voice that only Iris would understand, "Don't you think that getting close to the Avatar would be a great way to learn about arcane magic without having to deal with the Council's rules?"

Iris was a shocked and after a moment realized what Alex was getting at. Most humans have limited access to the advance spells and knowledge. Even Alexandria a member of the Council has limitations, less so now due to everything that has happened but that is an exception that would be hard to repeat. Still while she agreed she did not think that the Avatar would share this knowledge as easily as these mages may hope, assuming that was the intent.

Before she could comment back the spell was finally finished and they all disappeared to reappear on the newly rebuilt teleportation circle of the holy city of Missa.

As the Lights Templar looked around their realized that the welcoming comity was less than pleasant. Adam could only let out a low whistle as he looked at what could be considered a battalion of Crusaders circling the teleportation circle all the way to the main entrance of the cathedral which is where he assumed they were being escorted to.

Rosamia also looked around, behind the army of Crusaders you have many members of the priesthood and generally they all held a look of disgust, anger and in some small cases disappointment. As they made their way to the cathedral she turned back and focused on her friends and tried to hold in her own emotions, "Every time I come here it feels like I'm losing a little part of myself, or maybe I should say losing a

part of the me that used to believe and be a part of all this."

Adam nudged closer to her, "Probably not something you want to admit right now in this particular situation. I mean I thought that they had it in for me when I escaped from their punishment but this seems to be on a whole new level."

Everyone was forced to agree with Adam as they could all feel the negative emotions being directed at them from everyone. Once they finally got in they figured that it would lessen as they were directed to the second section of the cathedral and it did but the only reason why was because there was little room in the corridors to pack in that many people. Still even with the small space the walls were lined with Crusaders standing at attention ready to jump in if they did anything out of the ordinary.

Finally they reach what they assumed was their destination as two large doors opened to let them in. When they stepped inside the doors instantly closed themselves behind them. The Lights Templar positioned themselves with Anna, Mike and Rosamia in the front Alexandria in the middle and Iris and Adam in the back. This was one of their defensive formations that they had when confronted by an enemies and looking around it was safe to say that their reaction was accurate. The room was fairly large but had been emptied in order to make more room for other people to be present. It was little surprise that the extra people where members of the Crusaders order who were also standing in a defensive position with weapons drawn. What was a surprise, were the three desks that had been placed at the other end of the room and who sat behind them.

Rosamia was not sure how she felt about it but right in front of her was Joseph, Rob and Catherine. A wave of nostalgia ran over her as she remembered all those meeting that she had participated in with those same people, those where not good times and it was easy to see that this would not break that pattern. "I thought that..."

Joseph instantly stopped Rosamia from continuing to talk, "*You* are the last person I want to hear from young lady. Over the years we have tried to show you the way and also to teach you but you took all that and in the end spat over all our efforts. Always thinking that you knew better and that our efforts where a waste of time, it's a wonder how you have the gall to wear those robes after everything that you did."

There was a time where Rosamia would have felt very shameful after hearing those words but that time had passed a long time ago. No longer did she worry about the choices that she had made and even after this she still felt the same. The only reason she did not react to his words where because of Catherine woeful expression. She could see that it pained Catherine to be in the same room as Rosa. Rosamia knew that she had hurt her, Catherine had made it very clear the last time they spoke, but it was still sad to see the anger, resentment and pain etched on her face right now.

Seeing as no one was taking the bait Joseph continued on with his duties. "The lord of light is busy with other matters but has given us precise instructions on his wishes." Surprisingly Joseph then stopped and shook his head; it looked like he was forcing himself to continue on. "I must say that I am very displeased and angry with all of you, because of you for the first time I find myself

not agreeing with the path that was laid out for me. But I will take this as a test of my character and march on as it's expected of me, I hope that this will show you that sometimes for the greater good you cannot simply do as you personally wish and that doing so is simply selfish."

He took a small breath and continued, "The lord of light is mercifully and want to grant you a choice in order to redeem yourself from the crime that you have committed. You are to agree and receive the lord of lights blessing and join in the ranks of the Order."

The members of the Lights Templar looked at each other with puzzled looks as this was a bit unexpected. Normally Mike would let Rosamia lead the conversation in this situation but given the comments stated before he did not think that they would let her. "What do you mean by receive his blessing?"

It was Rob that filled in the details, "The blessing is a ceremony where you swear allegiance to the lord of light. In doing so you will be able to use his powers in a way that you could not before, also because of this the lord of light will forever be present with you in order to make sure that this power is used in a manner that befits the Order."

Alexandria was the first to react, "Ah... I don't think that..." But before she could continue Rosamia took a step forward and looked directly at Catherine. Her action caused all Crusaders guarding the room to also take a step forward but she ignored them, she ignored everyone but Catherine. "Please, please tell me that you did not do this."

Catherine felt a bit insulted, "Of course I did. This is what I wanted, why would I not do this?"

Rosamia was suddenly demoralized by her

answer, "I am so sorry, I know that you hate me right now but know that I don't see it that way. I'll admit that at the start I was wary of you but over the years I've come to respect you and because of that I can't help but feel sorry over what's happened to you and wished I could have stopped it somehow."

Now Catherine was visibly mad, "*How dare you!* This was my choice and one I am happy with. Is it like Joseph said and that you cannot see past your own ideas and views?"

She then took a moment to collect herself, there was something about Rosa that got to her and was able to break through and Catherine hated it. More composed she continued, "I don't understand you, I thought that you of all people would be behind this. Think about it, under his guidance we all have a common goal. No longer must we squander our time with meetings such as these and we can now act as you have always wanted, quickly, in order to help who need help. Mistrust is also no longer an issue same goes for hidden agendas. The lord of light is showing us a way that we can live without the walls we created around ourselves in order to protect us from those that would do us harm or abuse our aid. Is that not what you wished for?"

Rosamia slowly shook her head, "This blessing as you so call it I've already experienced it, the good and the bad. It happened when we learned about the spell of rebirth that the lord of light left to the dwarves. At the time I did not know it but the lord of light entered my being as you describe it and tested us. The test and spell was meant to for his return, again at the time that is not what was told. During the journey he looked in my mind and forced me to relive experiences that I did not want to. Also when the time was right took

control of my body; no amount of will could stop him. Sure it allowed me better control over my powers which helped out but I was very glad when he left."

She then again looked at Catherine, "Please be very careful, I understand that this is what you wanted but it may not be all that you think it is."

Before Catherine could respond Joseph stopped her, "Lies, if your memories caused you pain then maybe it's because deep down you know that what you did was wrong. I supposed that this means that there is still hope, if very little." He shook his head in forcing the unpleasant things that he had just heard out of his head. "Still what is your official choice on the matter, we wish to hear it now."

Mike did not really need to ask the others, "If we refuse what is the other option? Your lord of light has a habit of giving people options and not ultimatums."

"You are correct and the other option allowed is that you all be imprisoned for the remained of your lives, which I was told will be a very long time, until you see reason."

Mike turned to his group members, "Not much of a choice..."

As he said it Alexandria closed her eyes. Rob felt that now would be a good time to inform them of a precaution that was taken. "Your options are the blessing or jail only. The lord of light himself has protected this room and the area around it so that you cannot escape. Also as good as you are you cannot take us and the Crusaders down, so an attack is also out of the question. We urge you to listen to reason before you do any rash actions."

Mike looked at Alex, "Is he right?" She then nodded in confirmation; it seemed that the backup

plan had hit a hitch, still giving up so easily was not one of the things they did. "You think you can beat it now?" A mischievous smile appeared on Alexandria's face. "It will take time but cover me."

As if on cue Iris casted an ice spell, that created two large walls on their sides, leaving only the possibility of attack from the front. Alexandria then moved to the doors and worked to try and break the barrier spell that had been created and Adam took her spot in the middle and engaged his tracking ability with Iris moving next to him. Rosamia then moved to the front with Mike and Anna to her side in order to block the only entrance.

The Crusaders all used their magical enhancing magic but speed would help very little with a wall of ice blocking their way. Some started hacking at the wall with their sword helped with strength enhancing magic while other started climbing it. With the High Order members in the front Joseph casted a holy bolt spell that would shock and stun at the same time, they were told to try and catch the Light Templar alive so he would follow those orders and with their inability to block the spell the bolt should be enough. Still just in case, he put more energy in it just to be safe and truly knock them out.

As the bolt made its way to Rosamia she casted a holy shield spell to block it. When the protection spell did its job it left the High Order members slack jawed. Catherine rose from her chair, "Impossible!?! You don't have the blessing you should not be able to do anything."

Rosa turned to her, "I told you back then that you did not know the whole story, now we are able to tell you everything and we can. But you need to stand down, if you do so we will as well. Please Catherine I beg you to do this if you still

can."

Joseph did not give anyone a chance to think about answering, "Crusaders take them down." As he said it he casted another holy bolt spell but this time with even more power. Rosamia blocked it again and Catherine wondered on what was going on and how she could still do that given what had happen to all of them. Clearly with the size of the protection spell there were limitation but it should not even be possible at all.

Some of the Crusader were finally making their way to the top of the ice wall and Adam saw it all with his tracking spell. He pointed at the first target, "Iris, to your left up top there." Without question Iris prepared a lighting spell and aimed it as soon as she saw the Crusader where Adam had mentioned. She let the spell go and the only two options was to let go and fall or to get hit by the spell which would leave him in a worse situation.

"Iris, two this time to the right over there." Following his next orders, two more lightning spells where casted and thrown.

"Next up is the wall, one of them is almost through it. You need to reinforce it." She did so by using an ice spell and causing it to trap the Crusader half inside and half outside of it. This series of command continued in order to keep them all at bay.

While Rosamia was busy stopping the spells from the High Order members Mike and Anna moved in to stop some the Crusaders that tried to get through the entrance that was created.

The Crusaders were quick to realize that their speed enhancing holy magic would help them very little as there was little room to move. Because of this they moved on to strength in order to make every hit count but hitting them was the real problem. Anna played the decoy and dodged the

high powered attack being quicker than Mike. As the blow from the Crusader missed her, Mike retaliated by using the sword enchantment and with a glowing pink slash he aimed at the Crusader's weapon breaking it. Once disarmed Anna powered her own sword enchantment and sent a low green bolt at the now opened Crusader.

Alexandria was now kneeling on the floor with one of her hands touching the stone floor. This was the same spell that had been used in the Impregnable Tower's second floor, which she now realized was a spell in the same family of the one used in the first floor of the same tower. The bonus now was that she had recently tinkered with that first floor's spell in order to stop Genevieve from destroying it. She was pretty positive that the same thing could be applied for this spell as well in order to disrupt it, at least that's what she thought.

Rob had been worried for a while when he saw Rosamia cast holy magic as that should not have been possible but so far from the way he saw it, it would make very little difference to his overall plan to capture them. "I'm impressed that you have been able to hold out as long as you did but you have to see that there is no escape and that all this is futile..."

He was then interrupted by Alexandria, "Impressive, if all we could do is muster impressive then we would all have been dead a long time ago.

So this is for thinking that you could trap us..." Glowing blue runes pulsed from her hand that was touching the ground and made its way around the room. Suddenly red runes appeared all over the room and then pulsed before they shattered. The barrier spell had been broken and the High Order members were once again speechless.

Alexandria took that time to take a few

quick breaths and then she stood and made her way to where Adam and Iris were. "And this is for all the bad things you said to my dear friend. Tell your lord of light that his cheap spells will not stop us and while you are at it tell him that he better leave us alone and follow this doctrine that you preach so much about for helping others... Otherwise we will come after him and if you take count Avatars versus Lights Templar we are two for oh."

Mike quickly glanced at Alex who had effectively threatened the Order and Chaos, which had not been part of the plan. Alex shrugged and pointed at Joseph, "After what he said there is now way I was going to let that go. Rosa was being polite for Catherine's sake, and don't tell me that you did not want to do something about it too." Anna chuckle as she pushed away a Crusader.

Adam then grabbed on to Alex, knowing what was coming next. "I personally agree and fully back Alex's statement."

Alex was mildly stunned, "See even Adam agrees with me and that's happened what... once only before? Iris, block the entrance and let's get out of here."

Suddenly a dome of ice covered the Lights Templar, as Alexandria was casting her teleportation spell she could hear Joseph screaming. Shortly after a section of the ice wall was burned off by a holy fire pillar, with Iris unable to reconstructed it more Crusaders rushed in for the attack but it was all too late as Alexandria finished her spell and the Lights Templar members disappeared.

When the spell finished Adam opened his eyes, "So Alex where did you teleport us after all..." He paused for a little while as he realized where they were. "The Portal Tower!?! , and here I thought

that we were finally on the same page you and I, so why here of all places?"

Alexandria shrugged, "This time it's not personal at all, after being here for so long I don't have to think about these coordinates and I figured that we wanted to be out of there as soon as possible."

Adam slowly shook his head, "Whatever... Wait, this time it's not personal? Does that mean that I was right and the other times...?"

Alexandria quickly cut him off and changed the subject, "Moving on, I'm sorry about what I said back there Mike but I just could not let it go." Mike shrugged, "It's alright Alexandria, in the end I guess it changes very little." Anna was curious about that, "How so? Have you changed your mind on what was discussed?"

"No, now we are essentially on the run so we need to find a good place to lay low for a while. We can't use the normal places as well as we will only bring them issues so that will be the hard part. In a way Alexandria comment may help out in the end as it may make them or him trip up."

Rosamia had a doubtful look on her face, "You are expecting the lord of light to trip up? How? I mean considering all he knows he should be ahead of us."

Mike nodded, "Very true, but he has been out of touch for a while now and things have change. Who is to say that he can keep it all in line while not outwardly showing his hand. And now with the added comment of we will be watching and if he can't get to us it may help us out. Truth is there is no real plan on my part for this, all I know is that getting captured and asking for help from those around us is not the way to go."

Adam moved away to head to the edge of the tower to get a better view outside, "Well that's

all well and good but we can't stay here. I mean this will be on the first places that will be looked at for us." Iris nodded, "He's right, but where can we go. The only place I can think of is the orcs and well..."

Anna thought about that, "The orcs would be a good place that we could get to but would limit our ability to see what is going on over here." She thought about it some more and then something occurred to her. "Alex? Do you think that they are done building it now? Or did they stop when the threat of Genevieve stopped?"

It took a moment for Alex to figure out what she was getting at but then she figured it out. "Yea, the dwarves. We asked them to build a marker in order to help now they told us they would do it but they would not make it in time. I don't think that they stopped but last time I spoke to Kilor that was not the topic at hand at all."

The more she thought about it the better that idea sounded, the dwarves would be hard to get too and somehow they had a way to get some information on what was happening on the surface so it would be a great place to hide. She picked up the pendant that had been made to reach them. "Kilor? Are you there?"

It took a moment but the dwarven face of Kilor suddenly showed up. "Alexandria I was about to contact you soon actually."

Alex and the other where trilled at that as it could mean good news, "I hope that the news has to do about that marker that you where building for us." The face of Kilor nodded, "Yes it should be done in a few days."

Instantly he saw disappointment in Alexandria's face. "Do you need it sooner? Has something happened?"

Alexandria explained the current situation

and all that was seen was a troubled expression on Kilor's face. "Hmm, this makes no sense. He should not be acting this way." He paused for a bit to think, "Well I can see about getting the marker completed sometime tomorrow. I'll contact you when it's finished to give you the details of the spell that you will need to use."

Mike then got closer to Alexandria in order for the pendant's magic to pick him up. "Not that I want to jinx this good news but keep in mind that you will essentially be giving us sanctuary and I'm not exaggerating that."

They saw the image of Kilor nod, "I understand but we need to talk about this anyways and not just with me. I don't know how long I can guaranty this sanctuary, as it will not be my decision alone, but you shall have it for a while."

Mike smiled, "Thanks Kilor, it's appreciated."

"Considering what you did for us, it's the least that we can do. Anyways I will need to go in order to get that marker done. Alexandria, please rest up as much as you can. We will make it so that the process will not drain you as much as the last time but at the same time you will be more people so the cost will still be great."

Alexandria took a deep breath, "Yea, I figured." She then gave him a smile, "Still thank you very much for this. I'll wait for your communication then." She then closed off the pendant spell and his blue floating head disappeared.

Adam was happy about the news but there was still one big problem, "Okay so we know where we are going but we still need a place in the mean time, here is still bad. I'm actually stunned that there is not a band of Crusaders at our doorstep

already." Rosamia wondered about that, "Could the Impregnable Tower not be used? There is no teleportation circle there and it's off most travel routes."

Iris shook her head at that one, "I don't think that will work, correct me if I'm wrong Alex but that towers lost all it's magic right?" Alex gave her a small smile, "Yep you are correct. In theory this tower, or should I say my old room in this tower, is probably the best place to ward off magical detection due to all the defensive spells I put there and when I left I did not see a point to remove them. As for the circle outside it can be destroyed that will buy us time."

Mike looked at Anna to confirm, "I'm okay with that plan, destroy the circle to buy time and tomorrow we warp to the dwarves."

Adam then cut him off, "It's sounds good but no offence to Alex here as even I'll admit to her level of magic, but I don't see it being good enough to stop the lord of light if he truly wants to find us." Before Alex who was partially insulted by the comment could answer Mike cut in, "It does not matter as that will not happen."

This puzzled everyone as Rosa turned to him, "How can you be so sure?"

"Oh sure I agree with Adam, sorry Alexandria, but it will not happen because I don't see him teleporting to our location to kill us. Simply making us disappear is not his plan for some reason otherwise why everything that just happened. Will he let a battalion know where we are to get us, I would think so, but with the circle destroyed it will take them a while to get here with all of them ordered back at Missa."

Adam was still not convinced but at the same time could not argue it. "I hope it's that easy."

Iris then reach out to Adam, "Have faith, and in the mean time come help me destroy that circle." Adam smiled, "Me help you destroy a piece of this place that I do oh so love? Oh please lead the way." Rosa smiled at his sarcastic response, "I'll join too and help."

As they left, Alex made her way to her old and now empty room. "I guess I'll go verify that those spells are working fine, even if everyone seems to think that they will be meaningless."

Mike sighed, "Alexandria, please don't think that I see it that way." She wave one of her hands in the air, "I know, I'm just poking fun back at you don't worry as well. Still just in case I'll probably put in some extra wards seeing as they now have some full time mages in their corners."

Anna gave Mike a small smile, "Not exactly as planned but then when does anything go exactly as planned anyways." He shrugged, "True. In the meantime why not see if anything was left off to make our night more comfortable." Anna nodded and followed as once again they were in pattern of waiting for the lord of light's next move.

The General entered the meeting room where the failed capture of the Lights Templar occurred, right behind him the lord of light also joined. Most of the other Crusaders had already gone back to their preparation that had been ordered by the Avatar after being checked out for wounds and also after a quick debrief. The way the General looked at it overall the operation had been a total failure.

Their numbers had been overwhelming but they had countered that very successfully. They also had holy magic on their side and the Avatar's own magic, but that too had proven unsuccessful

due to the effort of Rosamia and Alexandria. The General had to admit that he was very surprised that they were able to escape. When High Order Rob told him to add his comments to the plan that he had come up with, the General figured that hiccups would probably happen as they always do but nothing like this.

Joseph immediately kneeled in front of the lord of light, "I am so sorry my lord we must have gone too easy on them. While that ex-priestess having the ability to cast was unexpected it still would have made little difference in the long run as the real surprise was that Council member mage being able to break your powerful barrier." He then looked up at the lord of light with a look of concern. "How could a mere human be able to break one of your spells?"

Not that he would admit it but Chaos also wondered about that. Being a dwarf he could believe, and elf could also have been possible but a human with their so short life span being able to even tinker with such a spell was unthinkable, and yet she had somehow done it. Clearly even he was falling under the trap of underestimating this group.

He then saw Catherine approach him, her mind was full of turmoil due to all the questions she had but also she was filled with concern as the last thing she wanted to do was to question him. "While what Alexandria did was impressive I don't think that we should just overlook what Rosamia was able to do. Is it possible that others can cast too, I find it hard to believe but also now wonder if it's possible."

Chaos liked Catherine as she had great potential to help him out for his own goals, unfortunately she was also very curious and perceptive which was something he hoped would

dull overtime. "That should be of no concern. Remember when I told you how they used some of my energy to regain their lost life and extent it. Doing so it seems also gave them the same innate link that I have to the vast magical energy that exists. Considering how much they took this link is limited from the looks of it, but still present."

Joseph was outraged, "*How dare they!* Is there no way to remove this link and get back what was stolen from you?"

The lord of light slowly nodded, "At this time no there is none. Both life energies are so comingled that the only way to take it back would be to steal all of it and kill them in the process. There is no way to remove it and keep them alive."

Rob then joined the rest of the group around the lord of light, "Tactically would it not be easier to get rid of them?"

While Joseph seemed happy about the idea, Catherine seemed to have mix feelings about that action and so did the General who spoke up before the idea took place. "Before we figure out what to, do should we not figure out where they are first?" He then turned to the Avatar, "Should I send men to find them and then report back?"

In all honestly Chaos already knew where they where and had already thought of going over there and destroying them this time with himself present if needed. The issue with that is that the group was still favored among the people for all the help that had been provided. Their sudden disappearance with little reason or time for a reason to spread was problematic in the long run.

What he needed was to discredit them first before he could make an open move like that, but how to do that? Then a plan formed in his head, "General are the troupes ready as I order them to be?"

With mild concern the General answered him, "As you already know the men are ready to depart."

The lord of light then smiled, "Excellent then here are your orders. You are to send groups to all major cities and towns. Inform them that as they arrive, they are to inform the locals that each group will be staying at that location in order to protect them from the Lights Templar as they have turned against the Order and are now considered dangerous to all. Also if any help or information on the people that help them is given, that it will be rewarded. If certain towns or cities offer any resistance in our efforts to find them, please inform me and new instructions will be given."

This is the type of order that the General had not wanted to hear, but he would perform his duty as ordered. Quickly he saluted the Avatar and then glanced at Catherine with a look of concern and sadness. When she met his gaze Catherine quickly turned away and tried to bury the emotions that she was feeling. But it was too late as deep down inside she started to have concerns over the current orders given and if they would lead them to the Order that she had envisioned for so long.

Chapter 3

"*I* can't believe she did it again after I told her not to, Anna I like you to death but you can be very frustrating sometimes." Julia then slammed her fist, still holding the communication pendant that she was given, on the wooden table. News of them being wanted by the Order had finally reached her and she had tried to contact them in order to figure out their plan or at least their next steps.

Unfortunately even if Julia yelled Anna's name the magic device would not connect, for the heck of it she tried the others and the same thing happened. She could think of two possibilities as to why she was having issues, one that they had destroyed their pendants. The pendants made it easy for them to be track by magical means and considering they are on the run then Julia could understand them destroying them or simply leaving them somewhere. But considering how Anna's pendant had been built, using their original wedding band, she thought that this possibility was very unlikely. Which left that they were out of range. While Julia understood that, she also had no clue what the maximum range was so that was of little help.

She tried to calm down, and look at things a bit more objectively. With the Lights Templar being wanted, a manhunt had been organized by the Order. All towns and cities were being searched and that was the best-case scenario. If the place had good relations or strong ties with them then it would be in lockdown. Meaning that they still left

control to whoever was in charge but everything was constantly watched and questioned. The gates were also controlled by the Crusaders and if they thought something was fishy then you would not get out or not get in if that was your goal.

Already the city of Calculus and the town of Denuo had been locked down. News had made it that the next place the Crusaders were heading was here, at the old town where the Crimsones had made their homes for centuries. Given that this was the origin of the two main members of the group there was no way that this place would also not be lockdown. In a way Julia had to chuckle a bit at that one, if she had not convinced the old Commander to open their doors to others then maybe they would still be hidden from everyone. She quickly threw away that thought as the Order had the Avatar leading them and there was no hiding from him.

This made her wonder if that is why she was kept in the dark with the Lights Templar current plans. While they would be lockdown, it would have been much worse for them if they actually knew where they were and what their plan was. Heck it would not surprise Julia one bit that if they did find a person like that, that they would be brought in front of the Avatar himself. Plus given her resent demotion she could see why they would side to try and protect her. As much as she was convinced that this was the reason why, Julia would have still preferred that they had not protected her and that she would know.

She let out a large sigh and then stood from her desk. Once again she had taken the home of the Commander at Arms as this was her position once again after the demotion from Commander. It was odd living here again but at the same time comforting in a way, Julia was okay with leading

people in battle, preparing the training regiment and thinking of possible attack and defensive plans. But after the few years as Commander she realized that the next position up meant lot of political talks and also bargaining with others for resources and other need items. While she was confident that she could do the job she had to admit that it was not one that she enjoyed. The thought of meetings and things she did not enjoy reminded Julia that she would need to leave soon if she did not want to be late for a meeting with the new Commander of the Crimsons.

As she left people saluted her and treated her with respect but it was clear to see that she had lost a lot of faith with the men. They would listen to her every command in a battle and do what needed to be done, but it was clear that they had doubts when she would tell them what battle they should go into. While it was a fine line it was there. In the grand scheme of things it caused little issues as they were not at war and time would help to heal the wounds that she had inflicted by her decision to approve the help of the orcs. Also she did have a say in who would take the position of Commander and everyone knew it and accepted it so her situation was far from being kick out completely of command.

When she arrived at the Commanders house they immediately let her in with no questions. She went passed the training hall and smirked a bit remembering a pivotal moment that had occurred here with the new Commander and a certain member of the Lights Templar a long time ago, and then she made her way to the only meeting room in the house. Julia had calm down a bit but she was still a bit agitated as she sat down on the ground at the low table with the Commander and also the old ex-Commander that

was present to offer guidance.

The reasons for her feelings of annoyance that were still present was because she knew that this would not go her way, as she knew the Commander well. His name was Theseus, and he had been with the Crimson's a few years earlier then when she had been able to join. By the time she did he was already on the top of the charts in combat and in leadership. As for his battle record he was officially undefeated, unofficially he had been defeated once. He was the one chosen to battle Anna during her final test in order to become a Crimson member. While the battle did take place and she won it was unofficial and only Mike bore witness. If you asked Theseus about it he would admit that he had lost, but only if asked.

He had also survived the massacre that had happened when they had been attacked but had been wounded. He would have been chosen for the Commander at Arms position if not for the fact that Julia was standing in while he recuperated and was the one that had been contacted by Alexandria's father, a Council member of Astrum, in order to help rebuild. With what had happened, rebuilding was the main focus and the Commander of the time did not want to rattle the already existing connection with this new person especially when Julia was just as competent.

Eventually Julia took over as Commander and Theseus was appointed to replace her now vacant position of Commander at Arms. In the end it was an easy decision to simply flip their roles as Theseus was just as qualified for that position as well, and in a way possibly better suited as he did not mind the politics that the position came with as much as Julia did.

Theseus nodded his head and smiled a bit, "Julia why do I get the feeling that after this you

will be making me out to be the enemy in your eyes?"

Calming down a bit more Julia shrugged, "It's not my intent but I'm pretty sure that we are not going to see eye to eye with this."

Theseus nodded, "I'm assuming you mean the Crusaders that will be heading to us soon." When Julia nodded to confirm he continued, "I've already made up my mind on this particular topic but I'm curious, if it was your choice and your choice only what would you do?"

Julia did not need time to think as she had already thought about it, "It's simple we don't let them."

Theseus laughed at that while the ex-Commander stared at Julia, "Please explain as I don't see that you would encourage us to fight against the Order especially after spending all this time rebuilding."

She nodded, "No I don't think that we should take up arms against them, I agree with that, but I also don't agree that we should simply invite them in. We will be lockdown due to our association..." Theseus then interrupted her, "We simply need to explain that we don't know where they are nor do we have any plan on helping them. From there they should have no reason, will they simply trust us probably not and they will probably put up this blockade of theirs anyways. But they can't enforce it if we do nothing to contradict our statement."

Julia sighed as this was going as she figured it would. "They will not see it that way and they will enforce it, well maybe not them but the Avatar will. All Avatars have caused us nothing but problems there is no reason to think that this one will not as well."

The ex-Commander smiled, "But there is

also equally no reason to believe that he will."

Theseus then added, "Plus there it's not like we can stop them from coming without the possibility of the fight to break out, we are a far cry from being hidden anymore."

Finally something Julia could work with, "True but they don't know of our full forces, we have time to separate our troops. Let a portion stay here doing the day to day and take another large portion out of the town. That way we can be prepared if something happens."

Thinking it through Theseus smirked a bit, "While that would be prudent it also invites the thoughts in people minds that they will eventually do something and taking that stand may force them into action. Why are you so intent that they will act rashly, is it the Avatar only or is there something else that you know?"

Julia nodded, "No I don't know of anything but I have worked with the Order for a while now and know how hard it is to turn them once they have made up their minds on something. Word is that they are doing this for the overall peace of everyone and also to capture the Lights Templar that are now considered dangerous. Thing is right there, to me, they are lying as the Lights Templar would never be a danger to us."

Theseus chuckled, "And that I disagree with..."

Julia was stunned, "Why would you ever think that?"

"I don't think that the Lights Templar would attack us and I don't see them as a danger as you say but that's only for our eyes. Can you say for sure that they have not seen something, and if they did that they would not attack the Order if they felt that it would harm others?" Julia could not answer that, as she knew that they would act if

something like that occurred. Taking her silence as a confirmation he continued, "And that is the issue with them. If the Order wants to spend all their manpower to alienate the people in order to find these people that is their business. Now if they start attacking others because of their inability to find them, then we are in measure to step in, as that is what the Crimson's are for. But if a town is helping them out and it gets attacked because of it, our hands are still tied. In the end they are invading our privacy not preventing our freedom and until they cross that line we can't act."

Julia felt defeated he was right but at the same time she knew that he was wrong as well.

Theseus felt sorry for her displeasure but still wondered on what was driving her to go against the Order even with the answer that she had given, "Can I ask a personal question? Are you truly doing this because you have this feeling that they will falter or because they are attacking one of your friends?"

Julia was visibly furious, "Are you implying that I would purposely put people in harm's way only because Anna was in danger."

Theseus raised both hands in calming manner, "No that is not what I'm implying at all. What I am implying is that maybe your judgment is a bit clouded because of who is involved and your need to help her at your own personal cost." He sighed as well realizing that he had crossed a line he had not wanted to and slowly nodded his head, "I'm sorry Julia but as it stands the Crimson's cannot move on this, nor are we going to help the Lights Templar if they ask if things stay the way they are with the Order."

Julia sighed again; she knew that things would turn out bad, as you don't send only soldiers for a manhunt. There is another part to

this, there had to be and she also knew that she needed to be prepared for that. Still it seems that there would be no way to convince the current or ex-Commander of this and when the time came to act they would be unprepared. There was only one way around the issue but she did not know if it would be enough and the cost would be very great to her, almost impossible really. "...Fine, I understand." She then stood up and started to walk away.

This was not the type of response that encouraged Theseus, "Wait, are you going to follow our plan or are you going to do something rash."

Julia stop and chuckled, "If I'm about to do something rash why would I tell you in advance? In any case you don't have to worry about that or me and my actions anymore as I'll be leaving the Crimsons."

Both ex and current Commander looked at each other with surprised looks. Theseus then stood up and grabbed Julia's arm, "Please Julia wait, why? Why do something like that. This is not what we or anyone wants you to do so why go to those lengths?"

Julia gave him a small smile and shrugged, "Because it's something I need to do, it's what I believe I must do even if it's just me. I could ignore this feeling but I promised myself a long time ago that I would never turn away from something like this again. I'm sorry, Theseus, I really am because you are right it's not what I want to do but feel that it's something I must do."

He let go of her arm and rubbed the bridge of his nose. "Ahhh, you do so love to punish yourself for that. Look fine, I simply can't change my mind even with this action. But that said don't quit the Crimsons." He took a moment to think about it. "Tell you what, go and take even a few

others is you wish." He then gave her a stern look, "And by few I mean no more than three. Also you don't know of any of this as this meeting topic never took place. We discussed the possibility of asking Astrum if a teleportation circle could be created to cut down on the travel time for supplies they give us and training we give their guards. Seeing as you are the main contact with Lithius I sent you over there and ordered you to leave post haste."

Julia smiled at the Commander, "Are you sure, I mean they will ask where I am and it would be lying in a way."

He shrugged, "Not really as it was on my mind and plus it has nothing to do with the Lights Templar, and I do want you to ask but if you get delayed on the way back..."

Julia bowed at both of them, "Thanks for understanding and giving the chance to follow this. I'll be off as soon as I'm ready and well before they arrive."

As she started to leave Theseus let go of a heavy sigh and turned to the old ex-Commander, "Part of me hope that she is wrong but if she is than it may mean trouble for her. On the other hand if she is right than it will be trouble for all of us."

Julia raced to the small market and got some supplies, it took a bit more time then she had wanted but there where little options. She would eventually get the Astrum but if somehow she could reach them before hand then a detour could happen and there was no way to know how long that would be.

Finally with everything she thought she needed Julia returned to her small house to properly prepare and head on out. As she was double checking everything she heard a knock on

her door. When she opened it about four other Crimsones were standing in front of her. "Word is from the Commander that you are heading to Astrum, we would be honored to accompany you."

She smiled at the four in front of her. It would be just like him to already let the news go to help create the cover story. Still because of the mission she had no intension of brining anyone with her even if he had given her permission. There was a great possibility that whoever followed her could be considered a traitor to the Order depending on what happened and without knowing the details she did not want to put Theseus in that position especially after being clear about the position he wanted to take. Still it did not mean that she would outright refuse their help, she motioned for them to come in and then closed the door.

Explaining what she could to the other Crimsones without giving away the real reason why took a lot more time then Julia had wanted. Still she had been given an out and now with these four she had created a possible in if it became needed in the near future. Grabbing her things and then a horse from the stables she left for Astrum. Along the way she tried the pendant again but there was still no luck at being able to reach them. That was another good reason to head to Astrum as there should be someone present that will be able to locate them and depending on what happened then Julia would figure out her next move. Still she needed to act fast, currently the Crusaders were heading for the Crimsones. But really Newport the place that gives access to Astrum should have been targeted before hand, but that had not been on any reports that she had gotten. Meaning that the Order had purposely left that one alone for now, which was good but also temporary.

Having traveled for a few hours away from the main road Julia stopped and dismounted. She tied her horse and then got closer to the main road on foot. After a while and still with some distance from the main road she waited. Around twenty minutes after she could hear them and feel them from the stomping on the ground, which made her wonder on their numbers. In her head she had expected a fair number of them to show up but when she saw it with her own eye she had to focus not to react.

Close to two hundred Crusaders were marching on the main road in the direction of the Crimson town. Those numbers were way more than the scouts had reported, so when and how did they get extra men. Those questions would have to wait she figured, still there was one that was finally answered. The Order was up to something, as you don't send two hundred men for something like this, and as soon as they arrived even Theseus would know and things would start to change once again.

When Julia was confident that she could go back to her horse without being spotted she did and then raced to her destination.

The trip had taken close to two days, as fast as Julia wanted to get there she also did not want to run into straggler on the main road so she had kept to using a route in the woods that she knew, which added to her time. Finally getting to Newport she stabled her horse and made her way to the center teleportation circle of the town and requested access to Astrum.

Normally this was not something anyone could do, if you were not already a member of that floating city, and typically if you were supposed to meet someone they would come to Newport and talks would occur there. In Julia's case she was

not a resident nor did she have an appointment but she moved towards the guard protecting the circle none the less. "Please contact Lithius or someone that works with him as I need to meet him as soon as possible."

The guard chuckled at her request due to how outrageous it was had it been anyone else. He singled the other to contact someone from the city in order to arrange transport. "Please wait here and someone will be with you shortly I'm sure." Julia nodded and waited.

It only took what felt like a few minutes for someone to show up but when the elven mage appeared both guard instantly went at attention. It took a while but Julia eventually recognized him as a Council member, well she assumed that he was a member as he had been present at all the meeting that she had been invited to. Julia took his outstretched hand and stepped into the circle, barely hearing a spell incantation they then both disappeared to reappeared on the circle on Astrum.

The elf ignored the guards there as well and started to move in the direction of the school or large library, it was hard for Julia to tell as she had not seen any places where classes were held but that large building did seem to house a lot of empty rooms and also plenty of books. He then quickly verified if she was following him, "Lithius is currently talking with Solanar but I have been instructed to lead you to one of his private rooms. You are to wait there until he can see you."

Julia nodded, "Sound good. If I can ask what is your position on everything that is happening?"

The elf had an odd look on his face that was a cross of mild annoyance and bleakness, "Once again we are put into a position that action is required that was outside of our control. I really

wish that Miss Alexandria was more attentive of her Council responsibilities as it could save us all this running around at the last minute."

The answer was more than Julia had expected but in a way it had her worried, while she knew that things would probably get out of hand she did not see it as they had little time left to act. It made her wonder if there was something else going on that she did not know or if this was one of the main differences between how elves and humans looked at time.

The reset of the trek was spent in silence and then Julia was left in what looked like a private study. She had plenty of time to look around and while she did Julia had the same odd feeling as the last time that she had been here. The room itself was plain looking with white walls, for what was visible, and a standard gray brick colored floor. What was odd was the furniture type, as it hardly seemed to match what was assumed as décor for an elf. There were two heavy large wooden chairs and an equally large wooden desk. The walls were also covered wooden bookshelves with a neatly arranged set of books in them. In the back you also had a small window, as she looked she realized that she must have lost track of time as the sun was going down.

It's then that Lithius entered his study. "Sorry for the wait miss Julia, there was a lot to go over with Solanar and some of the others." He then invited her to take a seat and also took one himself behind his desk. "I'm assuming that you are here due to the trouble that our common friends have gotten themselves and indirectly ourselves in." As she sat down she nodded her head, "Yes but I also have a request from our new Commander."

A curious look appeared on Lithius, "Oh?"

"He wanted to know if a teleportation circle

could be created in order to help with goods and services exchange."

Lithius now had a dumbfounded look on his face; Julia figured that the request was not at all what he had expected so she further elaborated. "I'm not supposed to be here given the current standing that the Crimsons are taking, in order to let me go he sent me over to discuss this official request. Other discussions and actions are on my time and are my responsibility."

Now understanding Lithius nodded, "I see that the Crimsons have taken the same decision as us in a way. Still would they move in action if the Order started to attack?"

Julia nodded, "Yes but only if the attack is provoked by the Order only for no reason." He smiled at that, "Ah, that makes sense. I wonder how our actions will be taken then."

Now it was Julia that was puzzled, "What actions are you talking about? Have you been in contact with them, as I was unable to reach them."

Lithius quickly raised his hand in order to mention for her to stop, and when she did he explained. "No we have not been in contact with them nor have we tried. Also it seems that you were fortunate when you were unable to reach them, I urge you not to try unless they contact you." Julia was now confused, "Why do you say that?"

"Currently the Order is on a witch hunt for them, we are assuming that the Lights Templar figured that something like this would happen. In order to help us they gave us the shield of ignorance. What I mean by that is that we don't know where they are nor do we know what their next steps are, this helps us defend ourselves against the Order. In a perfect situation where none of us knows, then this forces the Order to

pull back from their current tactic or it forces them to take more drastic measures which may help rally others."

Julia was disappointed by this, "Essentially you are then waiting for them to trip up. The Commander was saying the same thing, my issue with that is I think that when he does trip up that we will not be ready for it and will miss our chance."

Lithius smiled, "This is why I mentioned that the idea was similar. While we will cooperate with the Order we will not stand for this foolish invasion of privacy that they are implementing."

She then interrupted, "Correct me if I'm wrong but if they are not allowed to be on the premises I'm pretty sure that they will simply assume that you are in fact hiding them here, how does that help with your plan of waiting on them?"

He then nodded, "Yes true but here is the issue that Solanar came up with, why the intrusion in the first place? Can the Avatar not simply detect where they are now? Do they seriously think that we have a shield in place that can hide them from his detection? Does this reasoning not follow for all other places? We understand leaving a small regiment in order to try and trap them depending on where they show up but this is excessive and very intrusive."

This line of thinking had not occurred to Julia and in a way it was of little surprise to her as magic and its intricacies were not the Crimsons specialty. "Now I understand why you asked how this action would be looked from the Crimson point of view and if they would act." She thought about it more and then continued, "I think that the Commander would rise up at that point but he would need proof that they did attack needlessly. If that was given then this would be a show of

excessive force used for no reason and that is one of the mandates of the Crimson to rally against."

Lithius gave her a small smile, "Excellent than that follows our plans then."

"That's good to hear from my point of view as well but should we not do something in the mean time?"

He looked up for a moment and was lost in thought, after a while he turned and looked at her again. "Well if you so insist on doing something there may be a part for you to play that would be beneficial considering your own natural lack of magic."

Julia chuckled, "I'm probably the most magic dead person in this whole city and I'm also in no rush to return home so what do you need of me?"

While Lithius explained what he needed her to do, Julia started to feel validated. It seems that it was not only her that thought the same way she did and taking the measures to get here had been worth it. Deep down she hoped that all this was for nothing, as much as there would be repercussions for her and her current actions, this would be better than going against the Order and the Avatar's will. The cost of a battle like that could be something they all could not afford. At the same time the cost of losing all they had worked and sacrificed for would be worse.

Chapter 4

A few weeks had passed after the order to send the Crusaders to every town and city was given. Things were going pretty good and so far there was no resistance to their actions, unfortunately no clues to the Lights Templar whereabouts had been found as well.

Catherine was in her room in Missa focusing on a world map unrolled on the small desk. Her task had officially started, she needed to go to certain towns and cities in order to communicate the message of the lord of light to those that still may have questions. The current issue that she had was where she should head first in order to further the lord of lights goals.

A knock on her door broke her concentration, "May I come in?"

Catherine was surprised to hear the General voice as she would assume that he would be the busiest of all at this particular time. She got up and opened the door and invited him in, "Please have a seat, I must say that I did not expect to see you before I left."

As they both sat down on chairs around the table the General shrugged, "I was told that you would be leaving soon and was wondering if you needed an escort on your trip."

Puzzled Catherine looked at the General, "Are you asking to tag along?" The general chuckled at her comment and reaction, "No, no, I cannot. I have been ordered to stay near the Avatar as much as I can and lead the Crusaders from

Missa. I was wondering if you wanted me to find you some people as an escort in case something comes up."

Catherine smiled, "I must say General that I am very impressed, the lord of light must hold you in very high regards to trust only you to lead his soldiers and to request that you stay near his side." The General face suddenly turned somber, "I suppose that is one way to look at it. I do see the honor in it but as I mentioned before leading from afar like this does not sit well for me."

When he stopped for a while Catherine figured that this is all that she would get from the old warrior, being who he was she was only partly surprise at his lack of enthusiasm at his new role. The General was a person who spent his time on the field for most of his career and was a warrior first and a believer second, so she could understand his view point somewhat. What she was curious about was the difference between his roles during the last two year and now, sadly it seems that she would still not get an answer to this. Catherine supposed that she could ask him directly but that could cause issues, and right now she wanted to focus more on her task then her own idle curiosities.

So in order to get back on that topic she figured that she would answer his question, "Moving the topic of new responsibilities aside, I will not require an escort for my travels. One of the mages that has joined us will be joining me in order to facilitate transport but that is all that I will require. If something would come to pass I'm sure that with my new level of control over holy magic I should be able to handle it, at worst I'm sure that the lord of light would provide assistance." She smirked and then continued, "Mind you I would hate to bother him for help if that ever would come

to pass."

The General could hardly argue her point, "I suppose you have a good point, still if just to please this old soldier and his old ways, could you let me know on your destinations just in case."

Catherine smiled, "I don't mind but at this time I'm still trying to figure that out." She then pointed at the map on the table. The General then took the map and looked at it for a while and then pointed at a three places, "I think that you may want to start at these places first."

Catherine let a small chuckle escape as he gave his recommendation, "Calculus, Denuo and the Crimsons home town. Quite the challenge you have setup for me there General." He shrugged, "I was merely suggesting the places that I think may need your help sooner than later, and also places that would be strategically more advantageous for us if we could confirm if they are on our side or the Lights Templar sooner than later."

She could not disagree with most of his options and she had herself thought of most of them as well. Calculus was a main trade city and having it on lockdown served very little, plus there was someone there that she wanted to talk to about another of her personal curiosities. As for the Crimsons, well that was an obvious one as a large number of Crusaders had been sent there and the sooner they could leave the better. Plus having the confirmation that they would stay neutral in this would be very beneficial. Meeting with Julia could be problematic knowing her history with the Lights Templar but fortunately the Crimsons were being lead by a new person that may have less of an attachment to them then she did. While these two made sense the last one did not. "I do wonder what advantage do you see in me going to Denuo now rather than later?"

The General nodded, "Yes I would normally agree as there is very little there for us and it would make a poor hiding spot for them as well, but for some reason the Avatar ordered it to be in lockdown and I don't understand why. Also when asked directly he simply stated that it was because of the town strong ties to the group, which is true but it feels hardly enough for some reason."

Catherine felt suddenly very defensive, the old her would have wondered if the General was trying to imply something with his comment. Currently she still wondered if that was the case but pushed it aside as if he was thinking or planning something then the lord of light would intervene, as currently while they were physically just the two of them in her room so too was the lord of light present and listening. Still old habit did die hard she thought to herself as she gave him a stern questioning look. "So I'm to assume simple curiosity then even if you have your confirmation?"

The General nodded, "Again blame it on an old soldier's habits."

She thought about it more but could not see any hidden reason why he would want her to go there and also there was no real reason to refuse. In the end she figured that she would let it go, especially after having her own old habits kick in. "Well seeing as Calculus is on the list it not like Denuo is a large detour by any means." She then paused and thought about the last destination mentioned, "I'm guessing that using the teleportation circle of Newport will be out of the question for heading over to the Crimsons?"

The General nodded, "I would advise against it. By that time the Crusaders headed there will be at that location and while the other places had little issues, we do expect that Newport or should I say Astrum will be different."

Catherine wondered on that as well, "You think that Council will order to attack?"

Again the General nodded, "No I don't, but I do expect the order to come in from the Avatar to lock the place down. In doing so access to Astrum will be required and I don't see the Council allowing that, especially after all these years of being in control of who is able to go up there. From that point I'm not really sure how things will end up, will the Avatar request to push or will he be okay with the situation. Because I don't know the answer to that I don't recommend that you go there until we get a better understanding of how the situation will turn out."

With Newport out of the way it left very little way for Catherine to get to her destination. "I suppose that my only option will be to take the alternated route. Meaning that I'll return here, take the ferry across and from there take the less traveled route from below."

"That would be a wise decision, if you wish to let me know I can make the ferry preparation when you are ready."

Catherine nodded, "Thanks that would be helpful." She then rolled up the map, "I guess I'll start with those and from there I'll figure out my next destinations. Plus depending on how things go after Newport my task or targets may change very rapidly." She then looked at the General, "Thanks for your recommendation, all that is left now is to go discuss it with that mage and start the journey."

Seeing as the discussion was going to a close the General stood from his chair, made a quick bow and then started to proceed to the door. It's then that Catherine stopped him, "If I may ask a personal question?" He stopped and then turned around to face her, with the assumption that this

was a confirmation she continued. "I know that you are not a fan of the task that the Crusaders are currently performing, but I have to wonder how do you see our direction as a whole now?"

It was an odd question that the General had not expected, about his displeasure sure, but not his viewpoint on the Order direction as a whole. He took a moment to carefully think on how to answer, "I think that I'm not qualified to judge if we are going in the right direction or not. In theory we are there to help the people so should they not be the ones to judge if we are taking the proper steps to do so?"

She smiled at that response, as it was a very typical and safe one. "Sure and I supposed that it will be my duty to ask them as I visit but I'm still wondering on your own point of view. If you don't mind that is."

Again the General could not understand why she was asking; still he shrugged off his worry and answered her question. "I worry that the next steps may take us down a path that we may not want to go down on but at the same time I'm not sure on what the final big picture looks like anymore and the only one that does is the Avatar. But as long as he follows the plan set out a long time ago then there should be no reason to worry about such things."

Catherine smiled, "You are correct, thanks for telling me General and thank you again for the recommendations." The General bowed again and then left her room.

On a different floor in a much different room the lord of light sat on his large chair looking at the city of Missa through the large center window of

the cathedral. Currently he was smiling as his plan to direct Catherine had been successful, he could have ordered her to do so but as devout as she consciously believed she was there was a level of subconscious in her that doubted due to the life that she had lead. Ordering her could have fuelled that part of her which was not something that he wanted nor had time for.

His main concern was still the Lights Templar and removing their influence on the people in order for him to step in. In order to properly do that he needed to talk to those closest to them, and they would never open up to him as much as they possibly would to Catherine. She had a better chance to get the information he needed, so the General had been used to push her in that direction. Depending on the information she gathered he would modify his next steps accordingly.

Catherine and her mage companion appeared inside the teleportation circle on Calculus. Due to the issues and attacks that the city has had to deal with the circle had been moved to the back of the city. While these circles where useless without someone that could use arcane magic it was still decided that having its new location behind a heavier fortified wall to be a more prudent decision. The back doors to the city in front of Catherine where very large and also guarded by Crusaders and also the city guards. While the Crusaders recognized her and instantly moved away the city guards did not. One of them purposely moved closer to her to stop her from moving forward.

"Look I realize that a few more of you is not really a big thing for all the others but we still need

to know who you are and what your business here is."

While the Crusaders where on high alert, Catherine was hardly fazed by the guard reaction. "I'm Catherine member of the High Order." She then pointed to her companion, "He is only here as an escort during my travels to facilitate them. As for my business, I will be seeing the priestess Jessica and also the Guild Leaders as I need to speak to them."

The soldier held back the laughter, "Ah, well Jessica is no problems but there may be an issue to meet the Guild Leaders. Because of all the issues that your group is causing they are a bit busier than normal and may not have time for you." The soldier saw the glare that quickly showed itself on Catherine's face and shrugged. "Look I'm just the messenger, we were told to relay this message to all that was seeking an audience with the Guild Leaders. If you have an issue with that or if it's truly important then I suggest that you go see our captain, Kyle, as he is probably the only one that is allowed to communicate with them on a regular basis."

Catherine smirked at the guard, "You do realize that we are doing this to protect all of you right? The Lights Templar are dangerous and our help to stop them will be needed." The guard shrugged and then banged on large doors. "So we keep getting told."

Once he moved out of the way a smaller inner door that was part of the larger one was visible and was being opened in order to let them in. As she walked through she heard the guard ask another question, "Oh I forgot to ask, will you need an escort to Jessica's location? Assuming this is your first time here."

"That will not be necessary, thank you."

While she did answer him she did not stop and kept going through the door in order to make it inside the city. The Crusaders had already looked and marked all the location of this city, and that information had been relayed to the lord of light who was able to guide her on where she needed to go so the guards help would be useless.

Once inside she turned to her companion. "This meeting with Jessica will be personal, and your services will not be needed. Is there someplace that you can go that I can meet up with you, the mages tower perhaps?"

The mage seemed uncomfortable with what she had just said. He then pulled out a few glass spheres from his pocket and handed it to her. "I would rather stay away from that tower if possible. Take these, if you need of me simply smash one and that will alert me. I'll use my magic to detect the others and then will be able to move to your location. Assuming that is okay with you that is." Catherine nodded and took the spheres, "That will be fine, thanks." She then placed them in one of her pockets in her robes and left her companion alone while she made her way to Jessica.

As she made her way there Catherine looked around, the last time she had been here had been a very long time and while a lot of the structures had not changed much a lot more decoration had been added to the empty stone walls of back then. While the art that was engraved was very pretty, the stone to stone feeling that this city had felt empty to her for some reason. It's not that she hated it but it was not for her. While taking interest in the surrounding the people around where also taking an interest in her. The people of the city where courteous to her and smiled and waved back when she smiled and nodded at then as she passed by, that said they

also kept their distance from her and courteous as they where it was clear to see that none had any interested in having a conversation with her.

After arriving at the tower that Jessica and the other member of the Order took as a residence, Catherine started to wonder how she would be able to change the people's minds on the current situation. Putting those concerns aside she reached to the door in order to knock as it suddenly opened.

"Don't forget to say hi to Anton and Helena for me, okay."

"I will don't worry about it and take care of yourself as well..."

The young lady then turned as she was already walking through the door to find that Catherine was standing right there. She stopped immediately with a look of surprise on her face, and then the look turned to wide eyed shock as she recognized who was in front of her. "Oh my! I'm so sorry that I almost bumped into you *High Order priestess Catherine*, Please I hope that you can forgive me." As she said the words she bowed and moved to the side.

The difference in tone at the mention of her name was not lost to Catherine and made her wonder. "That's alright no harm done at all, but why did you raise your voice at the mention of my name? Was there someone that you wanted to inform indirectly of my presence?" The young priestess was not sure what to say and was now very embarrass which was very obvious from her face that had turned red.

Having been close, as Jessica was escorting her guest out, she reached out to clam the young priestess down and then looked at Catherine. "Don't worry Maria was just simply surprised that's all. It's not every day that we get to see someone of

your status from the Order around here." She then looked at Maria, "You can go now, and please visit again when you can."

Maria quickly ran out as fast as she could to try and get away, while Catherine was skeptical she moved to get out of the way and let Maria go. Jessica was the true person that she had come over to talk too; still she would make a note of this young priestess for later.

Jessica invited Catherine in; she had to admit that she was nervous about this encounter. Last time that she had seen this person, her and the other High Order members had practically accused her of conspiring against the Order by holding information from them. Had it not been for Rosamia she would have had a much harder time and would probably not have been able to return.

Things felt a little bit different now and less stressful, maybe it was the home advantage and the fact that Catherine was alone or maybe because of all the times that she had spoken to Rosamia who had helped show her that even the High Order member were very human.

They made their way to the top of the tower where Jessica's room was in order to have a more private conversation and also show Catherine that they really had nothing to hide as she gave her the tour of each floor and introduced her to the other priest and priestesses that were still at the tower.

They entered Jessica's room and sat at the circular small table in the middle of the room. As she sat down Catherine looked around, seeing as the place was a tower the room was circular and had two small windows that were currently ajar. To one side you had a private desk for personal work, and to the other a normal looking bed. The room was pretty normal looking but it did have an extra wardrobe and the bed was sized for two people,

which made Catherine think that this room was in fact shared with someone else. Once they both had sat down Jessica turned to Catherine, "What do we owe the pleasure of this visit, as I mentioned before it's rare for someone of your status to come visit like this."

"I am simply here to see how things are going and also reinforce the fact that we are here to help and hope that the measures that we have taken have not been too much of a toll on the people around."

"Hmm, I see."

Jessica's reaction baffled Catherine. "Not really the reaction I was expecting from the priestess that in charge of the functions of the Order in this city."

Jessica gave her a small smile, "I'm sorry I was just hopeful that the reason you were here was to give us more information on this blockade and possibly a time when it would be removed."

Catherine blinked and tried hard to swallow the emotions that were rushing at her as she heard her comment. More calmly then she thought capable Catherine clarified, "The reason for the blockade is for your overall protection. The Lights Templar are dangerous and have done treasonous acts against the Order. Now that they are on the run they easily could show up at cities and towns that are close to them and so extra defensive measures have been taken for those places. I don't think I need to remind anyone of what they are capable of."

Jessica had a sad look on her face, "Hmm, and see this is where the issue starts. Almost no one believes that they would hurt anyone here. So these measures seem excessive..."

Catherine cut her off, now was possibly a good time to see if her early hunch was right. "It is

not excessive at all, do you realize that they knew about the location of the lord of light and did nothing for years. Plus they also have the gall to say that they talked about it to one of our own that mentioned to keep it a secret." Catherine was paying as much attention to Jessica's facial and body expressions as she told her all of this. While it was apparent that she was surprised and shocked, there seemed to be nothing related to shame, guilt or worry. This meant that chances are that she had not known about any of this and was not the one that Rosamia had mentioned.

Jessica thought about what had been mentioned for a little while, "Hmm, I think that I understand a bit more now on what Rosamia was trying to tell me without telling me." Surprised at the comment Catherine asked to know more.

"For a while now Rosamia has been telling me things about our power and also about the Order and how it really works."

Catherine was now enraged, "You mean to tell me that Rosamia was conspiring against us all this time?!?" Very quickly Jessica tried to calm the High Order priestess, "No, no, no, not at all actually. She spent her time explaining that the people in charge of the Order all worked very hard in order to do what they needed to do. But at the same time where not guided and where people just like anyone and because of that we should excuse them when mistakes occurred. She also talked about the fact that our powers are not as limited as we think it is. While I still had powers she tried to teach me things in order to better understand. While what she said may not have been the common message, she was by no means going against the Order."

Having calmed down a bit but still feeling uneasy about Rosamia's actions this made

Catherine wonder about something. "Well in any case, now we are guided by the lord of light himself and any questions on our powers can simply be asked to him. Also speaking of powers why are some of your priest and priestess still here? Why are you not at Missa waiting to receive the holy blessing?"

Jessica knew that this was going to be tricky to answer, "Given our current situation we are trying to see what we are capable of for ourselves. Yes we could head back and get our powers again, but this is also a good opportunity to see what we are capable of without them."

Catherine was unable to hide her reaction, "Hahaha, I'm sorry but I find your statement preposterous. How can you heal someone without healing magic, or protect them from arrows, or help cure other deceases."

Jessica had a small smile on her face, "Your right, it's much easier to do those things with magic I will not argue that, but at the same time is the Order defined only by its use of holy magic? Could there be another way to be there for the people and help when magic is not available. All this time we took our powers for granted always thinking that it would be there. Thankfully, now that we have lost it, there is a way to get it back but does that not mean that it could be lost again? Back then Rosamia fought hard to find a new way and she found it, I want to try and follow her example and see if there is another way to still follow the Order's teachings without power."

Dumbfounded Catherine just sat there unable to answer her. First she was angry for not knowing that Rosamia was talking about this, I mean what could possibly be her goal in doing so? At the same time she could not believe what she had just heard, why turn away from this power

only to go back to bandages and bed manners? When people are in pain they just want a quick fix, and who can blame them, this will not help them at all.

Then she stopped and looked away, '*How many others think this way?*' In this tower alone she had seen a good twenty people in theory they should not be here but in or on their way to Missa. Does that mean that they all think the same way as well and would they even take the blessing if offered? This is not what she had expected at all, she needed to get more information on what was going on here. She turned to look at Jessica, "I need to see the Guild Leaders now."

It was a bit unexpected considering what Jessica had just told her but in a way it was easy to see that Catherine had not taken it well. "I can lead you to where Kyle is, the Captain of the guards, he is the only one now that can arrange a meeting with them."

"... Fine, lead the way."

It had taken little time to get there but Catherine would have not noticed it as she was lost in her own head still processing what Jessica had told her about her new future goals. As Jessica knocked and was told to come in Catherine snapped out of it and followed her inside the captain's office.

The office was not very tidy. You had stacks of paper everywhere, weapons simply being tossed in a corner with other pieces of armor. The desk that was used was also filled to the brim with loose papers and tones of letters, some of which had yet to even be opened. The captain looked very annoyed and tired as well. "What can I do for you... that I have not already?"

Catherine gave him a stern look, "I need to talk to the Guild Leaders as soon as possible."

The Captain chuckled, "Suuure that can be arranged." He looked around the lose papers and took a quick glance once it seems that he had found what he was looking for, and with a mocking tone answered her request. "It seems that I can pen you in sometime next week."

Outraged Catherine stood, "That is unacceptable, need I remind you that complete cooperation is needed at this time..."

Kyle raised his hand in order to cut her off, "Actually the wait time is in part due to that. Currently everything documented need to be done in double as copies need to be sent to you people. You people have caused us a load of trouble with this ridiculous man hunt of yours and we are cooperating but this is still our city and if that is the time it will take for a meeting to take place then that is the time it will take."

"How many time must I say it, these measure are for the peoples protection. Can you really tell me that you could stop the Lights Templar without our help if they attacked? Also we need the information that you are providing us in order to make sure that provisions are not making their way to them via other means. They are the ones that escaped our trial and the ones that did wrong and yet I sense a lot of bottled frustration directed as us when all we are trying to do is fix this."

Kyle gave Catherine a sad smile, "But at the same time that group has done nothing wrong by us and has spent a great deal of effort in order to save this city more than a few times already and everyone here knows this so we find it hard to believe your words that they are dangerous to us. Their actions so far have been..."

Suddenly Catherine felt a great pain in her head and all she could hear was the lord of light's

voice talking to her, '*Enough!* It seems that I have been away for far too long and now the people have more faith in that group actions than mine, the one that created them. Head to the next planned location I need to know if this is a common idea among the people.'

Before she could answer him his voice was back to a low whisper in the back of her head. Suddenly she realized that she had lost her footing and that Jessica had been holding her during his message in order for her not to have fallen down.

Jessica had a grave look of concern on her face, "Are you alright?"

Catherine having fully regained her senses slowly pushed her away, "I'm fine, thanks for what you did." She then looked at the Captain who also had a worried look on his face, "Seems that I will not need that meeting after all, but I will need transport to Denuo for me and my mage companion, as he simply cannot take me there himself."

The captain nodded, "That can be arranged immediately if you wish." Before she could answer Jessica turned to Kyle, "I'll take care of it, I can use the horses from the city guards?" he simply nodded. She smiled back and then looked at Catherine who now seemed to have regained her composure. "I'll take you there now if you wish." She too simply nodded.

As they had arrived to the guards stables, Catherine broke one of the glass spheres that she had been given. Like he had promised the mage appeared about a minute after, it was clear that he was surprised that he was being told that they were leaving already but he never bothered to ask why, nor did he during the trip to the town of Denuo which pleased Catherine as she had a lot on her mind.

Jessica's idea that seems to be shared caused her many worries, so too did learning about the current standing of the Lights Templar with the people compared to the Order. But most of all what also worried and scared her, even if she did not want to fully admit it to herself, was the pain that she had felt when the lord of light had given her his command. "This will lead us to where we need to be, it will."

Using enhancing magic on the horses they got to the town fairly quick but it was still getting pretty late as the sun was going down. Normally approaching a town this late unannounced could cause issues but with the Crusader's blockade that was not a worry. As soon as the Crusaders saw who it was they let her in with no issues or question.

They made their way to the stables with their horses and then from the corner of Catherine's eye she spotted someone. Taking a closer look she realized that she was right, it was in fact the young priestess that she had bumped into at Jessica's. Catherine recalled that she had called her Maria, now the real issue is how she had gotten here faster than Catherine. The talks had not taken that long and with the enhancing magic it would have made more sense for them to bump into each other on the road, was it possible that she had magic as well like Rosa but that made little sense. Catherine turned and made her way to the young priestess, "Maria, can you wait a moment?"

Automatically Maria turned to see who was calling her and then she froze. It took no time for Catherine and her companion with the two horses still in tow to reach her. Maria bowed, "How... How can I help you?" A small smirked appeared on Catherine's face; maybe she could get valuable

information from this one. "I just want to talk to you that should be fine right? Is there a more private place that we can go to do that in this town?"

That was the last thing that Maria wanted and there was also no way that she wanted to escort this High Order priestess to her home. Obviously nervous she tried to look for an escape, anything and then she spotted it as she was doing her last rounds of the day. "Ah sure I can think of a place for that." Maria suddenly waved at this new person who approached them. When she was close enough to hear Maria then turned back to Catherine. "This is the leader of this town, Helena. Her home has a very big meeting table and with the exception of her there would be no one else around." She then looked at Helena, "This is High Order priestess Catherine, and she has come over to visit."

The attempt on Maria's part was obvious but also fortunate for Catherine as she greeted Helena with a handshake. "It's good to see you Helena, I've heard your names mentioned here and there when I was living at the Portal Tower with the others but never had the pleasure of meeting you. As Maria mentioned would it be possible to use your home to have a private conversation with the both of you?"

While Helena smiled she was also wary of this new visitor, after all there were a few people in this town that did not want to be found by the Order. The Crusader occupation had made things very hard with that and now with this new person she did not think that things would get easier. "It's nice to meet you as well, let stable your horses and then you can join me at my home."

On the way there Catherine turned to her companion, "I'm sorry to say but this will be the

same as the last time." He shrugged, "That's alright, I had time to pick up something in Calculus that I want to read up on. I'll be in the small inn and reserve us two rooms for the night at the same time." Catherine nodded in approval.

The town leaders house was oddly furnished any spare room was mostly taken by this very large meeting room table with a lot of available chairs. Odd as it was it mattered very little to Catherine, she looked at Maria as Helena served them both a warm cup a tea. "I must ask you, how did you get here faster than I did? I've been wondering ever since I realized that it was you."

Maria nodded her head, "That's because I was able to use the help of the mage Bernard at Calculus. He was able to use magic to teleport me back."

Catherine cared very little for arcane magic, it's process of learning was very intensive and also it was less practical then holy magic in her opinion, but still what Maria had mentioned was odd. "Wait how can that be? I thought that you needed a beacon of sorts to teleport to a location that you could not see. There is no circle here is there?"

Helena smiled, "No there is not, maybe one day mind you. Currently we used these." She pulled out a glass sphere that resembled exactly what Catherine's mage companion had given her. "I know of these devices, but still why would you need to travel from Calculus to here so quickly?"

Again Helena answered in place of Maria, "Actually she lives here with a few others of the Order. She was sent to Calculus as a favor to me, I needed to talk about the next food shipment that will be ready soon. Over the last few years the available farming grounds has grown quite a bit and now we produce way more then we need. As

such, seeing as the Portal Tower is once again empty I figured that I would ask Calculus on some information for this issue. At the same time Maria wanted to talk to Jessica so I saw no issues in her going."

Catherine nodded as Helena explained. While at the tower she had been told of this place farmland. All large lands were found only in Ager so finding another was very unexpected. When the talk of creating an agreement with them was mentioned it was Rosamia that volunteered for it. At time Catherine had thought nothing of it but now she wondered, especially after being told that priest and priestesses are also living here. "I see... thank you for clearing that up." She then looked at Maria, "Still why are you living here and why have you not returned to Missa?"

It was clear that both of them did not know how to answer that one right away as they quickly looked at each other. Eventually Maria answered the question in a very nervous tone, "I... have family here and after getting Jessica's approval to relocate I did not think that it would be an issue with the Order."

This made little sense the Catherine; this town had been recreated only a few years ago after being abandoned. How could she have family here or was it something else? A part of the people here came from the few survivors from the reborns, others were refugees from the city of Capio and there was also another few that had joined and that's when Catherine understood both their nervousness. "Is this family related to the ex-Crusaders there were secretly living here after their deaths had been fakes by the Lights Templar with that daemon incident?"

Both their dumbfounded looks confirmed it for her, "During those few years I learned about

those people and if that is what you are worried about then don't anymore. Actually what should be done is that they should be rounded up with the others and you should all head to Missa in order to receive the holy blessing. If deemed favorable by the lord of light they can be reintegrated back into the Crusaders with their past problem forgiven."

Maria squirmed a bit in her seat, "It's great news to hear that Anton is safe now and does not need to stay hidden from the Order anymore." she then broke eye contact, "But if it's alright and we have a choice about it I think that we would both rather stay here. As for me I'm interested in what Jessica is trying out and would like to help her out if I can for all the good that..."

Catherine help up her hand, "Wait, stop, I've heard it before from Jessica herself and I don't think that I can stomach hearing it again. It is your choice to decline but in doing so you will probably be kick out of the Order. I say probably as I have yet to receive word on what will be done from the lord of light and he is probably still thinking about it or he still wants to give people a choice to reconsider. In any case I strongly suggest that you think hard about this, also what about the Crusader? I don't see any of them dropping their training to try and be nurse maids."

Helena held back a chuckle as that was a funny thing to imagine, "No I don't see it as well, but I do see them choosing another trade altogether. When they came here they were told that they needed to help with defense but there where options for that. They could do it themselves or they could train someone and be trained themselves to do other work. Due to the growth of the farmlands, a few turned to help there. Another became our blacksmith, so not all of them kept up with their training. Still given what you have just

said I will pass along the message to all of them and then it will be their choice again."

A sigh escaped Catherine as in her mind all of them were probably going to be considered lost to the Order as she did not think that they would ever decide to come back. "I thank you for that. On another matter, as I have to ask seeing how close you are to them, have you heard anything on the Lights..." Instantly Helena cut her off and responded, "No we have not."

Catherine wondered if they actually knew something, "That was a very quick response, would you mind elaborating?"

Helena nodded, "We have heard nothing of the Lights Templar, and we will cooperate with you with no resistance but at the same time we also want to know nothing of the Lights Templar as well." Catherine then interrupted her and tried to finish her sentence, "Because they are now considered dangerous and could be a threat to your people?"

Slowly Helena shook her head, "No because we would hate to have any part in bringing them harm directly or indirectly."

Catherine let out a large sigh and at the same time she could feel a sudden pain in the back of her head as she heard a scream. This was not what any of them had wanted to hear. So far pretty much both places that were lockdown had both essentially said the same thing. Sure they would cooperate with the Order now, but what if the Lights Templar came back and actually attacked them was it so far fetch to believe that they too would rise up. Denuo had little resources but did have food to supply, Calculus was the main hub for trade and any minerals, the last thing they needed was trained people. She then sighed again, she needed to reach the Crimson as soon as she

could and convince them to side with the Order or at the very least to make sure that they would not side with the Lights Templar.

Catherine looked at both of them as she stood up, "Thank you for the hospitality and Maria, I urge you to reconsider your choice, you and all the others. It seems that I will be staying in the inn tonight but will need to leave as soon as morning comes." They both bowed as she started to way to the main door, "Also it seems that there is much that I need to think about."

So far the lord of light was happy with his decision to have sent Catherine. While the Crusaders where there, no one wanted to open up to a soldier like that. Still as happy as he was that it was the right move he was still furious about what she had learned. The people trusted that group over the person that had created them; truly he had been away for far too long. While this was somewhat expected from the common people never had he imagined betrayal from the people that followed his old teachings and wanted to continue in some fashion.

Originally he had figured that time was on his side and that he could convince them that he was right but now he wondered if that was the case. He knew where they had been hiding for a while now, the issue was that if he confronted them there as it would mean nothing to the people here and might spark something with the dwarves, which was something that he wanted to avoid for now.

Also there was no way that he would allow a group of people that was able to band with others and possibly create a force that could kill him to

exist. Not after all this waiting and planning and certain not after having won over his old enemy. What he needed was something to draw them out in order to make it blatantly obvious for everyone to see that they were in fact against the Order for no good reason. But so far every place had passively aggressively cooperated which prevented him from doing anything.

Frustrated by still having his hands tied, the Avatar sat in his large chair overlooking the city of Missa. He looked through the minds of everyone that had taken the blessing trying to find something, anything that would help advance his plans for their destruction. Finally his reptilian eyes went wide and a smile appeared on his face, one of his Crusaders had just learned something that he could use.

The trip to the Crimson's home town would have been simpler for Catherine if she could have taken the road from Newport but from what she had heard, when she had made it back to Missa as originally planned, was that Newport was officially lockdown as well. Currently the Crusaders where in the process of taking the defense over and also making sure that they would be instructed on the information's of the day to day. As she arrived with her companion on the front doors of the Crimson's town, also surrounded by Crusaders, she wondered how Astrum would be handled. As she stabled her horse she shook those thoughts away. That would be for the lord of light to figure out, who was someone that she could trust, and she had to focus on her own task of making sure that the Crimsons had no intensions of joining with the Lights Templar in some fashion. And given that

Julia should be here, Catherine figured that it would take all her focus had to do just that. She figured that if she focused her efforts on this new Commander, and maybe win him over that she could out-rule anything that Julia would come up with.

Walking deeper into the town she looked at her companion and instantly he smiled and pointed at a row of benches in front of what looked like a training ground. "I know, you want to be alone when you meet the Commander. I suppose that I'll wait for you there, as this town does not have anything for visitors. Also please keep that in mind if this takes a while as there are no inn's here."

Catherine smiled, "It will take the time it takes, but I do get the point that you are trying to make. If it looks like we will be here a while I will ask about accommodation for both of us."

She then turned and made her way to the Commanders home. This was her first time here and she had to admit that it was pretty empty as towns went. The front section had looked more like she had imagined but the back section was more like a large training ground. Everywhere you looked you had Crimsons training or doing some sort of maintenance on their weapon or armor. The houses also all looked the same with the exception of two of them, as she continued to walk she got more information. One of them was for the Commander and the other the Commanders at Arm, it's then that she also got extra information from the lord of light that she had not expected. It seems that Julia was away, which should simplify things for Catherine but at the same time added an extra task of trying to figure out if the reason given was the actual reason.

Finally arriving at the front doors to the

Commander house one of the Crimsons stopped her, "Only invited people can enter this house."

Catherine had a weak smile on her face, telling the Crusaders that she was coming ahead of time would help with this issue in particular but would also remove the element of surprise. "I'm Catherine of the High Order, and I'm here to talk to your Commander on the current state of things. Does he have time for me? Also I'm not leaving without talking to him at least once."

The guard grumbled, "I'll see if he can see you at this time. Wait here."

Then the guard disappeared inside leaving her with three more Crimsons and as had been agreed two extra Crusaders to keep track of who would be visiting the Commander. Considering whom she was meeting and also that it was short notice, Catherine barley had to wait but it had still taken quite a while before she was allowed to be escorted inside.

Once inside she marched passed what look like a large personal training room and then was shown to a room with a very low table and an older man sitting on one side of it and a much younger one standing at the other end of it offering his greetings. "Welcome, please sit." As he sat on the floor next to the low table, he continued. "I'm Theseus the current Commander of the Crimsons and this is the ex-Commander before Julia took over, I've asked him here as an advisor due to his years of experience I hope that this is okay."

Catherine looks at the ex-Commander. He was very old, probably the eldest person she had ever seen. She had always thought that Joseph had been up there in age but compared to him he simply looked aged. "That's not an issue on my end." The Commander then smiled, "Good, so what brings you here? A spot check so quickly after the

blockade was implemented seems a bit odd."

Catherine nodded and smiled, "Yes I suppose it does. Currently I've been asked to visit certain places given all that has happened and we have learned some troubling news and because of it figured that I should stop by here and get some clarification on your current position." The Commander had a puzzled look on his face but said nothing, because of that she continued to talk. "As you know the Lights Templar are wanted fugitives of the Order and are also considered dangerous. Now after visiting the other places that have been given extra security due to their close ties to the group it was seen that while they are cooperating they could also flip on that on a moment's notice if asked by them. If this happens it puts us in a complicated position and we would like to know where you stand in all this."

Theseus smirked, "We are a neutral army, we have to be. And while we do have close ties to some of their members, on the record, those two where never really made full fledge Crimson. Also we are not their private army. In the past it was decided to help them in their task but in all those instances it was for the gather good and to fight against a evil force." He then looked at Catherine in her eyes, "And this obviously does not describe this lord of light that the Order follows correct?"

She chuckled, "Of course not, the lord of light is here to help us all not to enslave or attack us." And with that the Commander shrugged, "Then there should be no problems. I will tell you what I told your Crusaders. As long as no town or city gets attacked by a large power for personal gain then we will stay here no matter who asks for our help."

Catherine was very pleased by his comments and this was going very well so she

figured that she would push a bit more. "Would this be the case for all Crimsons?"

The Commander smirked, "I take it that you are referring to our current Commander at Arms and her pension for jumping in to help them out." He seems to think about it for a while and then continued, "I would hope that what was mentioned also applies to her, but at the same time people can disobey. If she does and is still considering herself a Crimson then we will step in to stop her and hand her to the proper authorities. That said she could still quit and join up with them, at that time we would still offer our help to stop her but there is only so much that would be done."

This was pretty much the same position that the Order took with ex-Crusaders. They would try and nip them in the butt as soon as they could by sending in a special squad but if their target was lost or disassociated themselves with the Crusader or Order there was little that they did if they caused no harm. She looked at the Commander, "By the way where is Julia?"

Again Theseus shrugged, "It's like I mentioned, before this started their where talks of creating a teleportation circle between us and Newport. She was sent there to start those talks and it's around that time where places started to get lockdown. So far we have received no news from her and if she is still in Astrum given its current condition she could be there for a while."

That news was less encouraging still Julia without the backing of the Crimsons was of very little threat or at least that's what Catherine hoped for. It's then that one of the Crimson guards barged into the room, he quickly bowed. "I'm terribly sorry Commander but you told me to notify you no matter what if there was a change in the situation."

Theseus looked at the ex-Commander and then turned to the soldier. "Who struck first?"

"The Order, they are attacking Astrum."

Immediately Catherine stood up and reached out to the Commander that was already sporting a dour look on his face, "There has to be a good reason for this I'm sure that it it's not..." Unable to finish Catherine suddenly lost control of her body. It was like her very self was ripped and thrown in the back so that someone else could take her place. She fought as much as she could but nothing happened and then she stopped as she heard his voice.

To the others Catherine was now standing straight with golden glowing eyes and the voice that she was using was not her own. "Astrum is hiding something important from us and we must get to the bottom of it at any means. Once we get through we will prove to everyone that these attacks were warranted." The glowing eye then turned to the Commander, "I suggest that you do as you keep saying and stand down and not enter in this conflict. Simply be patient and I will show you all the right way."

As soon as he stopped Catherine started to fall. She was caught by the soldier that was still in the room. It took a little while but once she regained control Catherine once again stood and turned to the soldier, "Thanks." She then looked at the Commander, "Please listen to what he said, I would hate for all this to escalate even more."

Theseus shook his head, "That will not be my doing, but still I cannot simply take his word for it. I will send three Crimsons immediately and they will determine if this attack is justified." As he started to leave he took a quick look at Catherine who still looked a bit worried. "Why the worry, if what he said was true then the three sent will

confirm that and that will be the end of that for us."

Catherine looked at him leave and did not know what to respond to his last comment. He was right why was she worried? She did not understand it but for some reason she felt it at her core that something was wrong. It's then that a voice bought her out of her own thoughts; it was the ex-Commander that was still sitting at the table. He had been so quite that he had almost forgotten about him. "I do not know the details but from what I have witnessed you have paid a great price for the return of your powers. I do hope that you feel that is was worth it, considering what you have lost."

She was annoyed by what he had said as it was essentially the same thing that Rosamia had told her, and what business was it of theirs to tell her this. She gave him a glare and then stormed out of the room and then out of the Commanders house. Catherine beeline to where her companion was supposed to be waiting for her. Luckily he was there, "You need to teleport me to Missa immediately, I need to speak to the General right away."

The mage then stood next to her, "That's not a problem, but may I ask what is happening?" Catherine gave him a glare, "The Order, or I should say the Crusaders, are attacking Astrum."

The mage's eyes went wide for a second and then he nodded, "Right away then."

He started his casting and as he was finishing and grabbed Catherine's hand she then suddenly froze and her eyes went wide. *'What a fool I've been, he is a mage and we are now at war with Astrum...'* Before she could think anything else the spell committed and they both disappeared.

It was later during the day and Theseus entered the home of the Commander at Arms. Knowing Julia maybe she had left something so that he could contact her somehow. When he entered he suddenly closed the door behind him as he saw that he was not alone.

"Lithius how the heck are you here and what the heck is going on?"

Lithius smiled at the Commander, "I'm able to be here due to being told about a certain modification to the teleport spell that we know by a certain often absentee Council member before she broke off communication. The idea was to go to a place that I know would empty and then figure out your exact location, as people such as you and Julia are hard to track from a distance, and when the time came show myself to you in order for us to talk. Still meeting like this is very fortunate."

The Commander shook his head, "Okay fine, then spill it. Are you hiding the Lights Templar? Or do you know of their plans? Is that why they are suddenly attacking?"

Lithius shook his head from side to side, "We have not heard or talked to the Lights Templar for some time now. The last we saw they were being escorted to Missa by the Crusaders. We also have not checked magically to try and figure out their location. The only thing we did is communicate that we would not allow a group as the Crusaders to take residence in Astrum for the duration of this silly blockade as is our right."

A chuckle escaped Theseus, "Fine line you are walking there, but where is the proof that you are in fact not lying and are magically hiding them?"

"I know that you people lack much

knowledge when it comes to magic but ask yourself this, and this is something that everyone should have asked before anyone agreed to their condition. If we would be able to find the Lights Templar with our magic if we tried, why does the Avatar not already know where they are and sent the Crusaders there to apprehend them? Is he not more knowledgeable in magic than we are?"

The Commander was cursing himself, such simple logic but it made a lot of sense. "I find it hard to disagree with you but I still need to be sure. In the end I'm still in a situation of he said she said..."

Lithius then outstretched his hand, "Then come with me, take some others if you wish, I will take you back to Astrum myself and you can look as much as you wish." He then looked in the Commander's eyes, "And when you find nothing..." The Commander nodded slowly, "And if I find nothing then you will have the backing of all the Crimsons at your side."

Theseus then turned and headed to the door, "Show up in my home in a few minutes, I'll go round up some others and I'll take you up on that offer." Lithius simply nodded as the Commander left the house.

Outside Theseus let out a deep sigh, '*Looks like you were right after all Julia and this is going to be one fine mess that we are about to throw ourselves in.*'

Chapter 5

As soon as the next morning had arrived after the Lights Templar escaped from Missa they received the instructions for the spell from Kilor. With the help of Iris, Alexandria was able to pull it off with no other help.

When they reappear below ground in the dwarven tunnels Alexandria was feeling a bit lightheaded. "I love the range of that spell but boy does it leave me drained..." Before she could continue a chuckle could be heard, they all looked around to see that Kilor and Helram were standing not too far from where they had appeared. While Helram looked very angry and annoyed Kilor was still smiling at Alex's comment. "In theory that spell was never really meant to be used by humans, the fact that you have the stamina to cast it at all is very impressive."

Alexandria was all smiles after receiving a compliment on her skills from one of the original race that was first created. Its then that Adam chuckled a bit as well, "Well look at that she's speechless, I'll have to remember that one." Alex turned to Adam with a smirk on her face, "Oh don't worry there is no need for you to remember that as I can't think of anything that you would say that I would hold in such high levels as what Kilor just said."

Ignoring the ongoing banter Mike turned to Kilor and Helram, "Thanks again for having us, I mean considering the danger that we could be..." Kilor eyes instantly went wide and he raised his

hand to inform Mike to stop. "Not here. Not a mention of any of it or anything related to it." Mike then had a puzzled look on his face, "Alright, then whenever we can talk about it then."

Helram then grumbled, "Yea and I can't wait until that time come." He then turned and started to make his way down the tunnel. "Now follow us, Adar said to escort you directly to him when you got here. Plus it seems that I'll finally know what's going on."

As the group followed, Mike looked at Kilor, "Any reason why Helram was kept in the dark?"

Kilor sighed, "Because of the subject matter at hand. When I told Adar about it he instantly reacted and removed Helram's access to the dwarven network that allows us to know more or less what is happening on the surface. As you can tell Helram did not take it well, nor do I blame him. If not for the fact that Alexandria contacted me I would be in the dark as well."

Alexandria had a worried look on her face, "I did not cause you any issues in telling you about this did I?" Kilor shrugged, "I'm sure I would rather know then not."

Alex then tough about the situation a bit more, "I guess this means that not too many of you where told about this then?" Kilor smiled, "Only Adar and me."

Helram then gave them all a sarcastic laugh, "Oh no fears I'm sure that all the Oracles under Adar also know about all of this." He then quickly turned to the others, "Now if you don't mind stop talking about it, unless you plan on telling me all you're doing is angering me more and at this point I don't care on who I take it out on."

The rest of the march to the dwarven city was spent in silence. When they arrived other dwarves greeted the Lights Templar with a warm

smile and a few of them still bowed to show their appreciation for what they had done to them. While their two escorts where quick to remind them that they could not stop and had to head to Adar immediately it was still a nice feeling for the Lights Templar considering all the angry and guilty looks that they had received the day before.

Now away from everyone their escorts lead them to the same large dome coliseum structure that they had been in the last time, this time they took the side entrance and where lead to a much less larger room that was under the rafters. Inside was a large marble table with chairs, on one of those chairs Adar was sitting and waiting with a concerned look on his face.

Adar pointed at the chairs, "Please everyone sit, we have much to discuss it seems."

Helram slammed his butt down on the chair and crossed his arms, "So what the heck is going on and I really hope that it's good for all the annoyance this caused me."

Seeing as none of the other dwarves or others from his group spoke up Mike took the lead. "Well we are currently hiding from the Avatar..."

Helram interrupted him, "What?! That's impossible after what happened the last time when another Avatar showed up we made sure to check if the same thing had happened and this time the lord of darkness is truly gone. Don't tell me that we missed something again?"

Mike gave him a small smile, "No we can confirm as well that the lord of darkness is truly dead now, the problem is the lord of light."

Helram was stunned, small weird noises were coming out of his mouth but none of them formed any words. Mike continued with his explanation in detail of what had happened during the fight with Genevieve and afterword. He

explained the loss of holy magic and how that affected their people and also how the lord of light was returning them.

It's at that point that Helram stopped him again. "Are you sure this is the same lord of light, I mean it could be a trick because what you are saying it's not like him at all." Adar nodded, "And that is what has been worrying me the most. If he were the same as when we knew him back then, then this would be cause for a large celebration. But now I fear that if we told everyone it would simply cause confusion among the dwarves."

Rosamia then shook her head, "I'm sorry to confirm that it is him fact him. It's the same voice that was inside of me after reading that book that he had given you. The magic that surrounds him is holy magic as well. This is no trick from the lord of darkness this is Chaos himself. The fact that he is different may mean that now he is acting like his true self now that he can."

Kilor wondered about that, "If what you say is true then why the interest in you six?" Helram shrugged at that one, "Makes sense to me for that. Are they not the ones that rallied forth and destroyed darkness? Who's to say the same thing can't happen again?"

Mike nodded, "That's what we are thinking as well..." He then quickly turned to Alexandria and then looked at the dwarves again, "Plus one of us did give him a stern warning that he should not act out of line."

Helram held back his laughter as Kilor and Adar questioned the wisdom of the six in front of them. Alexandria then felt embarrassed, "His people was insulting one of ours I had to do something. Plus I meant what I said, if he goes too far we will come knocking on his door and I don't care who he think he is as it does not give him the

right to treat us like that."

Adar was still surprised at what he had heard, "I'm not so sure that any of us would have done the same but that does not matter as now it's done and if I understand correctly you seek shelter here correct?" Mike nodded, "Correct, we can't stay anywhere on the surface as it will simply attract the Crusaders to that location and cause no end of trouble for those trying to help us. At the same time, here is a hard place to get too so we figured that we would ask, but there is still a risk."

Adar smiled, "No there is no risk."

This confident answer confused everyone. Helram was again visibly angry, "What are you not telling us. Your Oracles saw something didn't they?" Adar nodded, "Yes they did, and we saw lots of things concerning this event. When Kilor came to see me about it we knew that what we feared was starting. We had hoped that it could have been avoided but that does not seem to be the case and because of that we figured that we would close off as many routes as we could that would lead to a lot of death amongst our people."

Mike figured that he already knew the answer but asked anyways, "Any chances that you can share in what you saw, it could possibly help us greatly." While Helram laugh at that Adar nodded his head and smiled, "I'm sorry to say but I cannot."

"Can we know why?"

Adar smiled at Mike, "Reasons that is all that I will say." Mike signed, "That in itself is not much of one but that is all I will get I suppose."

Helram nodded, "That's all I've been able to get out of him and trust me when I tell you that I've been trying for much longer." He then turned to Adar, "So what next? Do we prepare to fight or do we stand by?"

Adar thought about it for a while, "The explanation that you gave us about how he is given back your people access to your powers confirms that he is not the same person that we knew. Which while removes options also opens some bad ones as well." This peaked Rosamia interest, "Wait so you know of the process that he is using, this holy blessing? Is there a way to stop it or to get out of it once done?"

Kilor shook his head, "Yes we know of it because it was a process that was used by the lord of darkness. In a way those that take the blessing are under his control as much as a dark cleric would be, essentially taking the blessing as you say means that you become his thrall. You feel like you are in control but really it's an illusion as he can take it away at his whim. As for ways to get out of it, the lord of light can decide at anytime to cut the link and then the person goes back to normal."

Rosamia was not encouraged by that answer, "Is there any other way?" Kilor looked at Adar and then faced Rosa once again, "There is but it takes a certain mental state as the person needs to completely reject him to the very core of their being and then with a lot of mental effort they can break out of it." Rosamia eyes went wide, there was no way that she could convince Catherine could she?

With the explanation out of the way Adar continued with the plan such as it was. "As I was saying to answer Helram's question of what we do next, we wait." He then turned to Mike, "I agree with your decision, and while I do not approve of his ways currently we need to wait and see what he plans before we do anything. In the mean time you are free to stay here."

Alexandria then slowly raised her hand, "So

if we are able to stay here does that mean that I can still have the same access as before?" Kilor smiled, "Yes you can still visit the main library if you wish but I do have a request mind you. While you cleaned up after yourself the last time you where there you caused a lot of worry for others when you, how to put this, camped there. Would it be possible to not do that?"

Alexandria had a large smile on her face and nodded, "I cannot make that promise but I will try my best." Kilor silently nodded thinking that this was the best that he would get out of this young lady.

Helram then got out of his chair and started to make his way to the door, "Well if we are done then I'll be taking my leave, there is a lot that I need to think about." Mike then stopped him, "Wait, I know this will sound greedy from us but would it be alright if you let us know if something happens on the surface while we are here?"

Helram turned to Adar, "Well assuming that I have control again now that I know what is happening..." As Adar nodded in approval Helram then looked back at Mike and the others, "Then in that case if anything changes I'll let you know." And with that he left while mumbling a few things to himself.

Adar also then stood, "Kilor if you can take care of our guest, I will take my leave as well."

Kilor nodded and turned to the Lights Templar, "We have prepared the same accommodations that you used the last time and if you need anything else please let me know."

Iris nodded and let out a low sign, "Well, I guess this is it for me. It may be a while before I can see you all but try not to forget where I will be." Adam and the others looked at each other with puzzled looks, "What are you talking about Iris?"

Suddenly arms wrapped around Iris waist and Alexandria was standing right behind her. Iris lowered her head, "There is no way that I'm getting out of helping you in that library again is there?" With a large smile Alex answered, "Nope."

"Do you promise to take breaks this time?"

Alexandria looked up and pretended to think about it, "Hmm, nope, not making that promise as well."

Rosamia felt sorry for Iris's predicament but really wondered how much she wanted to get out of it herself with the lack of fighting she was putting up. "Before you head off, I would like to say something." When she had their attention she continued, "I've been thinking about what Joseph said to me..."

Adam then interrupted her, "This will sound weird still, but I still agree with Alex in that you should not worry about what that old-stuck-in-his-ways man said to you."

Rosamia gave him a warm smile, "I agree as well but there is something that he said that was right." She then looked at herself, or more accurately what she was wearing. "I have no regret for having joined the Order, nor do I think badly of them but at the same time I'm now in a position that I know I never want to join them again. So when he pointed it out it made me wonder, why am I still wearing their robes?" She tapped her half place chest piece, "Sure I've long ago modified the look because I was traveling but it's still their robes underneath."

Anna smiled, "I think that maybe Rosa may not be the only person that is in that situation." She then turned to Mike, "You think that it would be okay now?" Mike wondered what Anna was getting at but then recalled a long time ago when this had been mentioned when it was only the two

of them. "Back in Capio it was not a problem because it was going to be temporary and if you are referring to that time... Well that was a very long time ago."

He then had a concern look on his face, "Still if we do this too, are you sure that Julia will be okay with it?" Anna gave him a half smile, "I love Julia to death and will be by her side if she needs anything, and I believe that she would also do the same. Still deep down she know that I will never join the Crimsons, while this change would confirm that it would change nothing else."

A curious look was then shared by all the other members. Rosa then turned to Anna, "Ah I was only saying that I was going to change and giving you the reason why in case you all worried. You don't have to do this as well."

Anna smiled, "Actually I think we do. Both of us are not Crimsons, we never where but we still wear their colors. It's like you said why do we do that still? Especially now, we don't know how long we will be hunted down by the Order, would not changing the way we look help others disassociate with us from them when we do head back?"

Adam shrugged, "Well I'm fine with it, it makes sense and I'm in the same boat as Rosa as I have no intention of joining the Crusaders ever again. So stopping to look like them is a step in the right direction for that."

Alexandria then smiled, "Oh so are we talking like some sort of group look for the Lights Templar? I love that..." Then the smile disappeared for a bit as she looked at the others, she then tapped on Iris half plate chest piece. "Well while I love that I supposed that I'll be the exception a bit as there is no way that I can run around with that on my chest."

Anna smiled at Rosamia, "Don't worry Alex

I'm sure that the both of us can come up with something."

Bored with where this was going Adam made his way to the door, "Well I'm sure I don't have to mention it but do remember that we have to fight in these new armor. Anyways while you figure that out I want to go and talk to a few dwarves at their training circle, see if I can learn anything about fighting people with magic when I have none myself." Mike turned to Anna, "That's not a bad idea I think that I will join him on that."

Alexandria then started to pull Iris out the door with her, "Well when you figure it out come let us know as we can probably help with its construction if you need it. In the mean time there are books with our names on it waiting to be read and understood."

Anna smiled, "Well I guess that leave us, I take it that you did not have something in mind when you mentioned it correct?" Rosamia simply nodded. "Yea I thought so, well anyways let go and grab something to eat while we think about it. It will be a nice change of pace to focus on something like this considering everything else that has happen in the last little while."

Close to two weeks had passed and the Light Templar were having breakfast together which was an odd occurrence as Iris had finally convinced Alexandria to get out of the library for a while.

While the breakfast was more or less scrambled eggs, potatoes and beans, Iris was enjoying every mouthful. Alexandria looked at her enjoying her meal, "You do realize that I don't plan on taking breaks like this too often, it's not that I want to be cruel or anything but given just the last two weeks and what we have looked at and how much we have learned due to having access to the

library it's not something that I can pass up on."

Iris swallowed her last bite, "Yea I know and I understand that but the library has strict rules on food that you can bring in, and while I don't know how you do it but I can just eat the same things all the time. I need breaks and something different once in a while otherwise I'm going to go insane." Alex wagged her finger and had a lecturing tone, "When there is a task to be done then one must focus all their energies on it, everything else is simply a distraction."

Wanting to change the subject Iris then turned to Rosa, "Speaking of task have you figured out the new groups look?"

While Alex pouted for being ignored Rosa turned to Anna, "We think we have something but we are not sure on how to implement it."

Adam was confused by this, "It's just armor, it needs to be functional that's pretty much it right? I think that maybe you two are overlooking the obvious." Both Rosa and Anna slowly shook their heads at his comment. "I'm not going to argue your point Adam but what we wear also needs to make a statement as that's what others will see when they first see us."

Iris then nodded at that, "I agree with that, took me a while myself when the time came." Anna then turned to her, "How did you go about it by the way." Iris then turned a shade of red, "Ah come on saying out loud will only embarrass me." Rosamia then chuckled, "Then if you don't mind now I'm curious too, I did not think that there was a story behind it."

Iris shrugged, "It's not much of a story..." she let out a large sigh, "Fine, obviously the armor is modeled after the Crimsons." She then pointed at Mike and Anna, "I did that because of you two. Then the color was taken from Rosa, and I already

had the two weapons style from Adam. My goal was to have something from each of you as I wanted to honor what each of you has done for me." Her face was now fully red, "There, happy..."

While the others gave her a warm smile Alex was a bit mad, "Hey what about me? Don't I get anything?" Iris smiled, "I figured that I would do that every time I used any arcane magic, as everything I learned came from you." This calmed Alex down, "... Yea... I guess I'm okay with that."

Anna then looked more at Iris as after what both Iris and Adam had said an idea came to her. "You know maybe Adam is right and we have been over thinking this."

Adam turned to Mike, "I heard correctly right?" He only chuckled and nodded while Anna continued, "I think that our new look is right in front of us. I mean it represents all of our background and would we all not want to honor some part of where we came from as well to give thanks in a way?"

Rosamia smiled, "I like it, I really do... I think that we should do just that." While Adam, Rosa, Mike and Anna seemed to be all agreeing with the idea, Iris was a little hesitant. "I'm honored that you wish for the team to go with what I came up with but are you sure?"

Before anyone could answer the door to the temporary home opened and Helram barged in. "Sorry to intrude like this but something is happening on the surface, get ready and meet us in the same room as the last time."

Mike turned to Anna, "Looks like the vacation and the friendly discussion are done." As she and the others got up, she nodded. "Let's just hope it's not as bad as we thought it would be."

It only took a little while to get there, as they all took a seat Mike turned to Helram. "So

what is the news?" Helram had a dire look on his face, "It seems that the Avatar has ordered his army to attack Astrum. The small town next to it is already under his control."

Alexandria was wide-eyed, "What do you mean by Newport having been taken over? Also why Astrum? Why did they attack there? It's not like they are hiding anything that concerns us, we made sure of that."

Helram shrugged, "We don't have the answers to those questions, sorry."

Alexandria was all nervous and looked at Mike, "We can't just sit here anymore we have to help Astrum, I have to help them..." Mike turned to her, "Don't think that you will be helping them alone Alexandria, we will all join you because you are right we need to do something. My worry right now is that if we show up there, maybe that's exactly what the Avatar wants us to do."

Anna gave him a concerned look, "Even so, do we have a choice?"

Before he could answer Alexandria reached for the pendant that she had to communicate with the Council. "No we don't." Before anyone could say anything she activated its magic, "Lithius are you there... are you safe?"

Now that the damage was done everyone in the room simply waited to see if someone would appear from the other end, it felt like an agonizing long time but the reality was that it only took less than a minute before the blue floating head of Lithius showed up in front of them. "I am fine thank you for asking, and I'm also happy that you acted as I figured that you would."

Alexandria was still worried but grateful that he was still okay, "What do you mean by that and what is going on? The only thing that we know is that the Avatar controls Newport and that he is

attacking you why did that happen?"

Lithius explained most of the details that had happened in the last two weeks for them.

Helram was surprised that the elves would be so bold, "You're taking a lot of risks with all this." Lithius nodded his head, "I may seem like it but the reality is that we are simply trying to show the others what happens when you say no to this creature. The way the Council sees it is if we do nothing now then eventually we will have little options, as once he controls us sure we will be able to do as we wish just as long as we don't go against him or threaten his plans. That is not what we have spent all of our years working towards."

Mike turned to Anna and they both gave themselves a quick nod, "Alright we are at your disposal, but we do have a question before that. How far do you want to take this? Are we talking freeing the places that are blocked and attacked and that's it or do you plan on going further?"

Lithius nodded, "Fair question, the Avatar will not give up of this we are sure, so the end goal is him."

Mike took a deep breath, "Okay, so do you have a plan at this time?" Lithius bobbed his head from side to side, "We have something of a plan, more like goals that need to be achieved but sadly at this time we can think of no way to actually stop him. We are currently looking at anything we can in the forbidden tombs in the library of Astrum but so far there is very little."

Anna turned to Alexandria, "When you threaten him back Missa did you have an idea or was that something that you said in hopes that we would figure it out later?" Alex had a somber look on her face, "No I had a plan, or should I say an idea. Remember that spell I talked to you about when we were going to go fight against Genevieve

where it would take a few of us to do together and that would result in a sort of a beam that would hit the target." Anna nodded, "Yes I remember is that the spell you had in mind that we would use? I mean was that not a life energy type spell?"

Kilor answered for Alex, "I also know of what spell she is talking about and yes it is, but Alexandria I think you know as much as I do that the spell was not enough to kill the avatar of darkness when we used it on him and that is with our infinite life energy being used if you humans plan on casting it..." Alexandria shrugged, "I know it will probably not be enough but at the same time it's the only spell that really worked against him right, and if I read correctly it's the only time where you were able to make him retreat. So I figured that it would be our best shot."

Kilor understood their situation and also her logic but he knew that it would not be enough he then turned to Adar. "Is there nothing that we can do to help them this time?"

Adar simply shook his head and as he did then Helram slammed his fist on the marble table. "I call bull on that Adar, you practically told us that you and your Oracles know something about what's going on..." Kilor then interrupted Helram, "Wait your right he did, but that can only happen if this affect the dwarves somehow otherwise the spell would give you nothing about this."

He then stopped and thought about something before he turned to the Lights Templar having made up his mind. "When you return I will be going with you, I can't help much in combat but I'm sure that I can help out somehow."

Helram then stood, "Wait! What are you saying?" he then looked at Adar, "You're going to allow this?" When Adar did not answer, the dwarf frantically scratched the back of his head, "Arrg,

FINE! I'm coming with you as well. Someone has got to make sure you don't get killed." He then turned to Adar again, "And I'm bringing some others with me."

While everyone else was surprised but thankful for the help Adar smiled. "I see that you have finally chosen your path, now I can tell you a bit more of what I know."

Still resentful Helram shook his head, "I knew you knew something, why not simply tell us?" Adar took a deep breath, "As you know it's not that simple, first it needed to be your choice as the path that you have chosen can lead all of us in a great conflict if you are not successful. As a leader I must try and choose the safest path for our people and sadly this path was once again that we stay here and do nothing. While I did not agree with this completely the safety of everyone takes priority over this, as once one of us dies there is no one or no means for another to take over." He then paused before continuing, "That said I do not want to be the leader that stops those that feel the need strongly within themselves to help others especially those others that have been a great help to us, but would you have committed to this if I said that your actions could lead to all of our destruction?" When none answered he continued, "I wanted you two to make a decision based on what you wanted and not be burdened the knowledge of a possible consequence."

Ador then turned to the Lights Templar and to the floating head of Lithius with a gloomy look, "That said, what you are planning and the path that you are taking even with the help of the dwarves that will join you will lead you to defeat."

While this had dampened the mood of all the others Anna shook her head, "No, I simply refuse to believe that. There has to be a way, you

must have seen something else no matter how small."

All eye were on Ador as he shrugged, "There is the possibility of victory you are correct, but I cannot help guide you to it." he then quickly turned to Helram, "And the reason why is because I simply don't know. The spell has limits and while it does tell me of a possible victory it does not tell me of how to get there."

Lithius was amazed and curious, "So this spell allows you to see possible outcomes, but what is this limit you speak of?" Alexandria smirked at being the one teaching something spell related to Lithius, "Basically the normal spell is linked to the viewpoint of the person casting it. So as I understand it this means that he will see possibilities where Helram and Kilor join us and some there they don't. He could also see that we win somehow as we would let him know if we did, but how we did it is where the spell will give him a blank." She gave Adar a satisfied smile, "I take it I got it right?"

He nodded in confirmation as Lithius was still mulling over the information given. "Could we then not cast the same spell?" Alexandria chuckled at that, "Sure if you have a few years then maybe you could cast the original spell. It's one of the most complex ones I have seen."

While Lithius pondered this some more, Mike smiled at Anna and then turned at the others. "Well seeing as Anna was right and there is a way to do this, let's focus on what we can do so far. Fighting the Avatar is one thing but we will also have to deal with the Crusader and the other members of the Order. In order to do that we need more people so where are we going to get them?"

It's then that Lithius face disappeared and was replaced by another. "My name is Theseus and

I am the Commander of the Crimson." Anna could not help but cringe a bit at the mention of the title, which was something that the Commander picked up on. "In spite of how I got my position I would like it if we could join forces and if you would follow my lead as you have done so in the past with Julia." Mike grabbed Anna's hand, "Of course Commander, that's not going to be a problem. Have you figured out a first step?"

The Commander nodded, "It seems that my Commander at Arms has already started on that. The first step would be to free Newport, support for this would only be coming from Astrum, which will mean that the brunt of the work of freeing the place will be on your end. Once done the next step is to free the Crimson army, at that point we will have a good deal of numbers to deal with melee and magical attacks."

During the time the others thought about the plan a thought occurred to Rosamia, "I'm not sure on how much help it will but maybe we want to consider helping Calculus as well, they could have people that are willing to help us there."

Mike thought about that, "While I agree, the issue with that is that everything we do will be monitored by the Avatar. If we go to Newport and free the Crimson's it's safe to assume that he will bolster the forces at Calculus and that is not where we want to have a large fight on our hands. Still if we can think of a way to stall the Crusaders then it could be possible." He then turned to Helram, "Do you still have those things that you used to destroy the markers?"

Helram nodded, "Of course, why?"

Anna then chuckled, "I see now, Alex could those be used to destroy our own teleportation circles in a quick and easy manner?" A smile appeared on Alex's face as she too was catching

on, "Sure that should work. We teleport in and place the bead that destroys the circle and then moves to the other and so on, without those circle it will be hard for them to move the Crusaders quickly. There is a snag with that, while I don't see the Avatar doing mass teleportation back and forth I can't say for sure that he has not given the knowledge of teleporting without them to one of the mages that has joined up with them."

"I can guaranty that this did not happen."

Everyone looked at Lithius including Alex, "How can you be so sure?"

"When we realized that some of the mages were joining up with the Avatar with the promise of access to higher spells, the Council decided to send in some of its own mages in order to report back any information they could find. So far none of them were required to take the holy blessing as that privilege has gone to the Crusaders mostly, these mages have yet to be detected and one of them is fairly close to other important members of the Order."

Helram was again impressed during his time the elves spent more time thinking then doing, it seems that things had changes a bit during the years. "Well played, so you get me to those circles and I'll destroy them cutting out their ability to move around quickly over long distances."

Overall Mike like where this was heading, "Okay so we cut them off and free as many as we can. The next step would be to figure out ahead of time where we want to try and fight the Avatar so that maybe we can try to lead him there." He then turned to Lithius, "Any way that we can use those mages that are working on the inside?"

Lithius nodded, "That will not be necessary as a location has already been planned out and is

currently being prepared for the fight in question by the Crimson's Commander at Arms."

Anna had to chuckle, "Leave it to Julia to still try and prepared ahead even if she did not know that preparation would be needed." Lithius smiled, "Well this time she had help from Astrum but yes she did come to us on her own. As I was saying, once we get everyone we will head to the target location and simply wait."

Helram looked at the others that seem to share his concern. "Well I was impressed there but now I'm just disappointed. If we take all our forces and pile them up in one spot will that make us big fat easy target? Should we not attack at his weak spots and make use of our ability to travel fast over long distance?"

"Yes that was an option but doing so leave us with no main base of operation and keeps us fluidly moving making it harder for him to attack back. While this sounds like a good plan it all leads to us needing to attack the city of Missa eventually, which we would rather avoid. Also I would rather use a tactic that has worked wonders in the past against these Avatars, which means I plan on taking advantage of his ego and also his impatience."

A wicked smile appeared on Mike's face, "I get it now, so the idea is the make us look like a big fat target that he can't resist and by attacking Astrum he has already shown that he want this to end quickly. Okay so where is this target location then?"

"The Portal Tower." As soon as Lithius said the words a groan could be heard from Adam, "Why is it always that place? What's the reason it was picked this time?"

"While the defensive spells are no match for the Avatar they are for the other mages. The Avatar

was looking for you and was not as interested in our movements as much, which allowed us to send people that are harder to track magically to that place in order to make the preparations to build a base of operation located away for civilians that was not Astrum."

That made a lot of sense to Mike, "So we have people, a location and a way to lure him out, the only thing left is to figure out a plan to take him out."

Alexandria then sighed deeply, "I'll take care of that part." Curiously Mike turned in her direction, "I'm okay with that but are you sure? It does not all have to be on you for this." She slowly nodded, "I know but let's face it if we are to win this it will be by the use of arcane spells somehow... and well that's my specialty right?"

Iris then turned to her, "Ha, if you think that after all that time you dragged me to the libraries here and in Astrum only to cut me off you have another thing coming."

Kilor also nodded at that, "Last time we made a very good team for the amount of time we had when you needed to look for your missing team member, so I would also like to assist."

Lithius then chimed in, "You can expect help from the Council as well, and while you have learned a lot of new things in your travels and battles we still have a lot of piece that you don't that could help out."

Alexandria smiled, "Thanks everyone the help will be appreciated." She then looked at Adar, "If I may ask this time, there is something else I would like to take with me from the library. I would copy it of course, but I think that it will be helpful in our fight."

Adar was suspicious about this request, "It depends on the tomb of knowledge you wish to

take as some of them even you are not ready for." Alexandria nodded and gave him a mischievous smile, "In due time I'm sure, but in this case it's the book on anti magic fields. The last time I was able to disrupt the one he had created but honestly I think that may have been a fluke and I'm pretty sure that next time he will take extra precautions. If I can be ready for those it would be a big help I'm sure." Adar nodded, "That should be fine."

Alexandria then nodded and stood up, "Well on that note, assuming that we are done and assuming that we will be leaving as soon as we can, I think that I should head to the library and make that copy."

Iris then stood as well, "I'll go help out."

Lithius nodded, "Sound like a good idea, we can continue the detail plans when you get here. Ideally you should head as close to the Portal Tower as you can, there you will meet with Julia who will get you ready to head to Newport as soon as you arrive. While the Portal Tower is where we want him to end up if you stay there for too long he will know and that could cause issues if he heads there ahead of time."

Mike nodded, "Understood Lithius see you soon then." With a quick nod Lithius terminated the communication. Alex and Iris then quickly left to head to the Library, "Once we are done we will meet up with you guy back at the house."

Helram then was next to leave, "I need to get in touch with my men and prepare, it's been a long time since we left these tunnels and I don't want to leave anything behind that might be useful. Kilor, I suggest that you do the same thing." He then turned to Adar, "It may be a while before we come back."

Kilor then nodded, "Yes I agree. Adar, would it be possible to for you and the others to prepare

the transportation runes while we all get ready?" Adar smiled, "It shall be done."

As they left Adam turned to the others, "Well I guess Rosa and me will get things ready for the group. I suggest that you two do what you typically do and try and pull another rabbit out of your hats." He then started walking towards the door and then stopped momentarily. "I do believe that Alex will find a way but I also know that she will need help from some other source then she already has and I think that is where you two will have to come in."

When they both left Mike turned to Anna, "Funny I think he's right and wrong at the same time. I think she will need help as well, but I don't think it will come from us."

Anna shrugged, "Maybe you never know, let put our heads together and see what we can come up with while we have some time." Mike nodded and they both left leaving Adar alone still trying to see if he could figure out the missing piece to what the spell had told them.

Overall it took a few hours in order for everyone to meet back up at the temporary home that they have been given. Iris took a quick glance at everyone, "So are we all ready?"

Mike nodded, "Mostly we are simply waiting for the teleportation runes preparation to be finished. Alexandria I take it that you got what you needed?" She happily nodded, "Yep all done and I also may have taken a few extra pages for later."

Adam could not believe it, "You are so going to be in trouble one of these days." Alex simply shrugged it off, "I'm sure they will understand greater good and all that."

She then paused, "Hmm, you know seeing as we have time let's do this now. Now if you could all stand still."

They all did as they were told and then Alexandria touched Anna and Mike's breastplate and then magic enveloped their bodies transforming their gear ever so slightly. Their brown and green shirt and pants were replaced by a white. The blue on their armor turned light blue and finally their red capes were now royal blue.

Understanding what Alex was up to she turned to Adam and Rosamia and proceeded to do the same thing. While doing Rosamia's, Iris put in some extra modifications to the armor piece below the waist as Rosamia only had her priest robes before and the original design would have hampered her movements. In the case of Adam, no extra modification was needed. Once done he quickly moved around, "Odd how it feels really similar."

Lastly Alexandria, in a bit of a show, twirled around and as she did magically changed her light pink and purple colors to match the others. While she was at it she also made some other small changes to her hard leader chest piece. When she was done she turned to the others with a smile, "Now we are ready."

Mike chuckled at her comment, "I suppose we are, let's head out and see if the others are as well."

The teleportation runes were done outside of the city in order to not attract too much attention. Adar and his group were finishing up the preparation, which gave the Lights Templar time to see who would be joining them.

Kilor had a large traveling bag with him that seemed very full, he had also brought with him two female dwarves who were similarly traveling heavily. Seeing as they were scholars, they still wore simple cloths and had no weapon that could be seen.

The same could not be said for Helram's group. He had with him twenty other dwarves, and they were all equipped to the brim with full armor and weaponry from axes, to swords, to spears. Helram was the only one that had some fiery red color on his armor on certain pieces; he also had this very big two headed battleaxe with him. If you looked closely it seems like a seam could be also seen at the handle.

When Helram noticed the Lights Templar he waved them over, "Looks like your timing is perfect, seems that everything is finished here." He then pointed at the three circular runes that had been made on the ground that already some dwarves were moving into its center. "I think that you know what to do by now."

They all nodded and walked passed and made their way to the center of one the circles that was free and waited for the spell casting to begin. As they passed by he made a grin and let slip a comment, "Not my favorite colors but I suppose."

He then walked over to Adar and grabbed his hand with both of his, "Well until we next meet I guess. Take care of everyone here while I'm gone." Adar nodded, "Until we next meet, and I will... and also good luck."

Kilor moved next to Adar and did the same thing, as he took his hand he also handed him a small pendant. "It could come in handy and until we next meet." Adar accepted the item and nodded, "Until we next meet, and take care to teach them well while you are there." Kilor nodded, "I will."

When they both had moved in one of the circles, Adar ordered the other dwarves to start the casting. It only took a little while and all of them fell in the hole that was magically created in the ground that they were standing on inside the runes that had been placed.

When they were all gone Adar took a deep breath, "Good luck to all of you indeed as your success or failure will greatly impact us all."

Chapter 6

The group reappeared only a few minutes away from the portal tower. Alexandria and the others shook the effects of the spell off by moving around a bit and then they noticed that all the dwarves were acting like they were frozen in place. While Rosamia moved closer to them to see if they had been injured somehow during the transportation spell, Alexandria chose a more direct manner. "Hey Kilor, what's the matter?"

At her words he forced a small smile on his face, by the looks of it him and a few others looked like they were on the verge from starting to cry. "Oh... Well, this blue sky and white clouds may seem like nothing to all of you but for us..." He moved his head around and looked up at the sky, "We have not seen this sight in such a long time that I supposed that we simply forgot that we missed it." He then stopped, squinted and chuckled as he looked at the ground. "Oiy, looking at the sun, what a painful idea but one filled with interesting memories." He turned to others, "It has been far far too long."

Helram and all others nodded at that statement, "It has and it's too bad that we are returning under these circumstances as I would love to take the time to fully enjoy this feeling but I suppose that there is work to do."

Mike simply nodded as they started to all make their way to the tower. He was sad for the dwarves as he did not fully realize the effects that it would have on them and wished that he could

tell them to take all the time they wanted to appreciate the moment but unfortunately that was not something that he could happen.

As they made their way a woman with fiery red hair showed up. Instantly Anna started to run in her direction arm outstretch, "Julia..." She then stopped as she realized that Julia had a very serious expression on her face, "What's wrong?"

Julia pointed her index finger at Anna, "More than once I told you to let me know and you promised that you would but didn't, Anna your one of the best friends I have but you have to stop cutting me out."

Anna nodded, "Your right and I'm sorry about that... It's just that I did not want to put you on the spot again, look what happened the last time and I know how much the Crimsons mean to you so we figured that it would be for the best." She looked at Julia with a very apologetic look on her face, "I truly am sorry that I hurt you again."

Julia let out a large sigh, "Look I get it but you don't always know how things will turn out, there was a point where I was almost forced to quit the Crimsons and that's even with you trying to protect me." This time it was Julia that reached out to Anna, "Next time, please?" As Anna accepted the hug she nodded. Very quietly so that only Anna could hear Julia whispered, "Also don't think that this talk is over, I noticed what you are wearing..." Anna chuckled, "Just as soon as this crisis is over I promise."

Julia then broke off the hug and then turned to the dwarves and bowed, "It's an honor to finally see you, they have told me about your people but I never thought I would get to actually meet any of you in person." Anna made the introductions with Helram assisting for those that she did not know about.

Once the introductions were done Julia turned and lead the way back to the portal tower. "Everything is mostly prepared, I was told that you would bring help but I was not sure on the numbers so I'm missing a few horses in order for us to make our way to Newport."

Mike then interrupted her. "There has been a small change in the plans on that actually." Everyone save for Anna where all surprised by this, Mike then turned to Julia. "Are there anyone that can open a gate or transport people to Astrum at the portal tower?"

She nodded, "There are only two mages there but they should be able to do that, who's going to Astrum?"

Mike then turned to the dwarves and instantly Helram objected, "Hey now, we did not come all the way here to be put to the side. Also we said we were going to help and we plan on doing everything that we can."

He smiled and nodded, "Let me explain, as much as your help would be appreciated with freeing the people of the towns and city I don't think that it would be worth the trade of the Avatar knowing ahead of time that you are here in the flesh helping us. I'm assuming that when the time comes he will obviously think that you helped us in some way but I don't think that he will see that you would actually be there with us especially after all the other times that it did not happen."

Helram nodded, "I understand where you are coming from and I can see why you want us to pull back for now. But what do you want us to do in the mean time?"

"First we still need those teleportation circles to be destroyed. Ideally ask a mage to teleport you to them as planned but also make sure you tell him to make you as invisible as he

possibly can. Also there is that spell to prepare for, I'm guess that will take some time to setup and there is also the unfortunate task of figuring out who will power it."

Kilor moved forward, "It was already figured that we would be the ones to power the spell. We are ageless so spells like that does not affect us the way it does for you or the elves. That said once casted the dwarves that participated will no longer be able to do anything for the duration of the battle. The spell will leave us drained and tired for quite a few days to come. Also you are correct that the preparations for it do take some time."

Alexandria did a quick bow at Kilor and the other dwarves, "Thanks, even if you will recover I'm sure the effects are not that easy to deal with. Also I'm sure that I can say this on behalf of everyone, thanks for doing this it really mean a lot." The dwarves all nodded and smiled accepting the gratitude given.

Helram then once again turned to Mike, "Anything else? Because this will still leave some dwarves with idle hands I'm thinking."

Again Mike nodded, "Impart whatever knowledge you can to the Council. Keep in mind that while in a way we have killed more Avatars then anyone, only you people have fought an Avatar at full power and full knowledge so really I think the question is more turned to you. Given what we will be fighting what do you recommend? You know the enemy and you can now see the location that we will be fighting at." Helram turned in the direction of the Portal Tower and nodded, "Sound fair and makes a lot of sense." He then turned to the other dwarves, "Alright, lets head out seems that there is now a lot of work for us to do."

As they left Adam moved in closer so that only those close around could hear him, "Okay

sure I get most of what you said but while they do have tones of experience with fighting the Avatar they also have tones of experience losing against it. I mean they never won correct? Also sure the Avatar could be surprised but can he not do that future spell as well and see it coming?"

Anna let out a large sigh, "Must you also bring these things up at these times?" Mike nodded at her comment, "Yes Adam, why do you do that?"

Before Adam could answer Mike cut him off. "Joking aside you actually raised some good questions but I have a better one, so we gather all these people here to fight him. What's to stop him from just blowing us up to kingdom come? I mean I had a fraction of the powers of an Avatar and I disintegrated a part of a mountain so it's something that could happen right?"

Everyone save for Anna was all wide eyed and somewhat depressed as what he had just said sunk in. Rosamia then looked at Mike and then Alex, "Okay well I agree that it could happen but can we not stop it somehow using a shield of some sort?" Alex then started scratching her head, "...Maybe, I mean if we take into account the magical powers of the Council members combine but I wonder if that would do it."

It's then that Anna smile and shook her head, "Don't bother thinking about it."

When the others except for Mike turned to her with a bewildered look on their face she continued. "Yes we could plan for that but we think it will be a wasted effort on our part. It's the same as why he did not come to kill us himself all this time as we all know that he could of. Whatever reason he has he wants a fight so we need to give him one. Also the dwarves have fought him and have lost but they did turn the lord of darkness away and they were able to come out of their fights

alive so that count for a lot in my book." She then stopped and looked at Mike and then turned to the others, "But yes you're right we will need something else, we can't just follow their battle plan. We thought of something but at best it will only serve to help Alex with whatever she can come up with." Alexandria simply silently nodded at that comment.

Julia then looked up at the sky to try and determine how much time had passed, "Look I'm not going to argue that talking about these things is not a good idea, but we need to get you guys as far away from this tower otherwise there maybe something else we will need to deal with." She then started to move away, "Let head to the horses that are already prepared and we can talk more about this on the way to Newport."

Everyone else but Alexandria followed her, "Ah sorry to say but horses, is that really going to cut it? Why not just teleport close to Newport and deal with that situation and then magically move where the Crimsons are? I mean part of the plan was for us to travel quick, let bombard all three places as quick as we can and at the same time cut their way of transportation... I mean that should send a message."

Mike then stopped, "I'm okay with that if you are, I was thinking that you may want to conserve your power as much as possible."

Alexandria smiled, "Bahhhh, let me worry about that." She then picked up her pendant that allowed her to talk to the Council, "Lithius..."

Suddenly his face appeared but before he could say anything Alexandria continued. "We are sending the dwarves to your location, assuming you are in Astrum, they will explain when they get there. Also you mentioned that you would be able to help a bit with Newport, we are heading there

now via teleportation. Who should I contact when we get there?"

Lithius nodded, "Yes, Theseus and a Council member are standing by now with a few other mages. Simply use the pendant and contact, Taeral."

Alexandria grinded a bit at the name "Can... Someone else be picked?" Lithius then had a stern look on his face, "Miss Alexandria, I know that you don't see eye to eye with Taeral but that's mostly in part because of the effort you put into your Council duties and really who's more at fault for that one." He then took a deep breath and continued, "He will be fine and will be of good assistance, now I need to go and prepare for the dwarves arrival, is there anything else?" Alexandria suddenly felt very small, "...No... I guess not. I'll contact him when we get there."

As she put down the pendant Adam was laughing, "Oh man, I can't wait to meet this Taeral person."

Alexandria reached out with her hands, "I'm ignoring you, as for everyone else grab on to each other and form a circle, I'll have us in the area of Newport in no time." Once contact was made with everyone, Adam included, Alexandria casted the spell.

As soon as they reappeared about ten minutes from Newport they hid as best they could in the nearby trees. Mike then moved closer to Alexandria, "Time to contact Taeral and figure out if he can give us some information on the current situation at Newport."

Slowly Alexandria nodded and reached for the pendant, it's at that point that Adam piped in, "What, no comments for him about it?"

Alexandria smirked, "Because he is not taking amusement from it... Taeral, can you talk?"

Then a blue floating head of an elf showed up, most of them recognized him as a face that they had seen during Council meetings that they had participated in but other than that they had no information on the person's face in front of them. "We are in a private room in an inn called the 'Blue Fountain Inn' talking should be no issues."

Alexandria nodded, it's not that she hated Taeral it's just that even after everything that she had done and experienced she still felt that this person treated her like they were in a student teacher relationship and part of her hated that. "What is the situation over there?"

"Currently there are about near two hundred Crusaders, it seems that more arrived recently from some other place. Most of the civilians are barricaded in their homes with Crusader guards in front of their doors and the streets are filled with them all over the place. There are also small patrols but we don't know their routes at this time."

Alexandria was expecting Mike or Anna, or even Julia to then jump in but for some reason when she turned to look at them quickly they simply gave her a small nod and said nothing. Look like they were allowing her to take charge of this one, which meant more questions and a possible plan. "Okay ah, so is it only Crusaders? Or are their priests as well?"

"No priests have shown up as of yet but there are a few mages in the mix."

She nodded, a plan of sort had formed in her head but the mages would be a real issue for it. "Can you take care of the mages for us?"

Taeral looked to his side, nodded and looked at Alex again, "Seems like we can yes. When do you want us to take action?" Alexandria thought

about it, "Hmm, I guess get into position now and wait for our signal. Wait better yet, when they all head in our direction make your move."

"Okay, we shall do as you have asked."

The communication then terminated and Alexandria was a bit surprised that he had not asked anything else. She then turned to the other and made her way to them and kneeled in order to touch their boots. "I'll explain the plan on the way but before that I need to make a small modification to all your boots." Once she was done small cleats had appeared at the soles.

Seeing as their where so close, it took no time for them to get in position. After Alexandria had explained the plan they had picked a small slope that could be found next to the Newport. Alexandria looked to Iris, "Okay so in order for this to work I'm going to need for you to stay next to me at the top of the slope. Your job is to lower the weather around here and make it as cold as you can."

Iris nodded and proceeded to start with the spell. Alexandria then moved to Adam and Julia and enchanted his blades and her spear with electricity. "This should help you out, seeing as you will need to get close to them."

Julia looked at her spear tip now with an electrical current moving around it, "How long will it last?" Alex thought about it quickly, "Hmm, longer that this fight. That is if you don't discharge the spell."

She then moved to Anna and Mike, "I'll need you to stay around us. Your enchantments provide you with range attacks and if any get close we will need people to defend us." They both nodded in agreement.

Last Alex looked at Rosa who was already preparing her now physical bow. She had two

quivers strapped to her side, which seem to allow for about forty arrows. Rosamia looked at Alex, "I'll stay around here and take as many shots as I can." She then turned to Adam, "Shall we try it out like we practiced back at the dwarves training grounds?" He nodded, "Sound good."

Alexandria started to feel a chill which meant that Iris was doing what she needed to do, so it was high time for herself to get next to her and be ready.

Already she could see the Crusaders storming out of the town in small groups. In the back some of them launched a volley of arrows, in the past this would have been meaningless but now this cloud of arrows would be very deadly. Quickly as she could Alex created a large gust of wind with her magic, sending all of the arrows harmlessly away.

After the first volley a group of fifty Crusaders magically enhanced themselves and changed forward. This was the moment where the plan had to work, the Crusaders magic speed in this wide open area was deadly and because of the potential of civilians getting hurt the Lights Templar needed to fight outside of the town.

Alexandria took a large breath and summoned all the magic that she could in her next spell. As she let the magic go she could see that the Crusaders would be on top of them in less than a few seconds, but then suddenly they all dropped on the ground. Alexandria smiled as now a sheet of ice covered the ground, removing the benefit of the Crusaders speed.

Seeing as a large amount of Crusaders where prone on the ground they made easy targets for Rosamia. She let lose a few arrows in a cluster of Crusaders aiming for their legs, where they were less protected by their armor. While the damage

was minimal and could easily be healed by even Crusader magic the time it would take to do so would give Adam and Julia the opening they needed to charged in and attacked. With the modification that Alexandria had made to their boots both of them could move somewhat normally on the ice and all they needed to do was tag the enemy with their weapons and the electrical enchantment would make sure that they stayed down for some time.

Alexandria focused on launching attack spells at large groups and also summoning the wind in order to deflect the arrows that were still being sent their way. Iris focused on keeping the climate cold and also repairing some of the ice that was getting damaged.

During this time Anna turned to Mike, "I'm very proud of the plan she came up with, this is working better than expected in shrinking their numbers." Mike nodded, "Agreed."

He then pointed to a group of Crusaders making their way up in a chain. "Still looks like Adam was right. Using their strength they can stomp on the ice and break it in order to make their way to our location."

Anna shrugged and gave him a half smile, "Nothing we can't handle and while they have strength they still don't have speed." They both powered their enchantment and let it lose at the chain of Crusaders. As the first green glowing orb struck the Crusaders, a mini fireball effect was felt by the Crusaders in the front. As they fell, a red one this time struck the ones behind them with the same amount of power.

After a while Alexandria was very happy by her plans outcome, but now an issue was starting to arise. They had nearly taken out a third of their numbers in a quick amount of time due to the

surprise, but now the Crusaders where reorganizing and staying mostly away. There was also still a constant stream of arrows but no one was advancing anymore. This made it harder for Julia and Adam to also get close as attacking the Crusaders with them being fully on the defensive would be suicide. The worst part was that they had fallen back close enough to the town making it also very tricky to launch large destructive spells at them.

Its then that Iris turned to Alex, "I'm not sure why but it's getting easier to drop the temperature, like I'm getting help somehow."

Alexandria wondered about why that would happen, but she did not have to wonder for too long. Pretty quickly a large sheet of ice appeared where the Crusaders where all standing, it then continued until it reached the one that was created by Alex. Then suddenly all the Crusaders where pushed by this massive invisible force, this caused them all to fall on the icy ground momentarily a few feet away from where they were standing. Then as if on cue a large yell could be heard coming from their backs.

With the signature red cloak Theseus charged into battle with his large one handed sword who was also enchanted with electrical magic. He took not time to move around the fallen Crusaders and tag them with his blade. Some of the more experienced Crusaders where able to get up and tried to put up a defense but the current Commander of the Crimson's slashed through it like it was child play by moving around them and stunning them with his blade or kicking them back down again with an attack to the back of their legs.

Julia and Adam used Theseus's opening and changed in as well. When they reached each other Julia smiled at the Commander, "I was

wondering if you were going to sit this battle out."

He chuckled at her comment while he dispatched a few Crusaders that there close to him. "With a plan like this I hardly call this a battle, but the mage and I saw an opening where we could help so we figured that we would."

Mike looked from afar at the damage that the Crimson Commander was causing on the Crusaders ranks. "Hmm, that is the same person right?"

Anna nodded, "Yea, looks like he got better as well." She gave Mike a quick smirk, "Do you think that I would still win against him like I did before?" Mike saw the trap for what it was, "I would never bet against you, you know that. Still nothing wrong a bit more training to be on the safe side."

Anna simply laughed, he was being polite but she knew very well that even after all that she had learned from what she was seeing from the Commander the gap difference was still there.

Now being attacked from the front and also the back the Crusaders had difficulty staying in formation. Small clusters of groups formed only to be attacked by one of the Lights Templar small groups or the Crimson Commander. To make matters worse for the Crusaders, extra mages where also now showing up from Astrum dwindling their numbers even more. About half an hour of battle after and the town of Newport was free once more.

After everything was done Taerel moved next to Alexandria. "That was a very good plan. It nullified the enemy's main weapon while conserving a lot of magic energy as only simple spells where used. I am very proud Alexandria." She could only nod in thanks. Suddenly Alexandria wondered if the grudge between the two was only one sided as Lithius had somewhat

eluded.

Not too far away the Commander of the Crimson and Julia made their way to Anna and Mike. The Commander reached out his hand to Anna in order to shake it. As she accepted he gave her an odd smile. "It has been a while Anna, I noticed that you relied more on the magic of your weapon during this fight." Still with her hand being shook she shrugged a bit, "Well Theseus, we can't always be in the front, sometime the plan needs us to stand back."

Suddenly Mike and Julia chuckled, as they could not hold it in anymore. Theseus ignored them as he finally let go of Anna's hand, but he still had an odd look in his eyes. Anna glared at both Mike and Julia now trying to hold back the laughter. It was clear Theseus wanted a rematch, not now of course but sometime in the future. This was not something Anna was looking forward to.

After the uncomfortable exchange, the rest of the Lights Templar had made their way to the group with the added members of Julia, Theseus, Taeral and a few other mages. Julia looked around. "Alex I take it that we will teleport again in order to get to our town?"

Alexandria looked around herself and started some calculation; she was then stopped by Iris. "It's getting to be a lot of people now, let's split up and I'll take the other half just let me know of your coordinates so I can aim around." Alex closed her eyes, "Not a problem and thanks. Just give me a minute and..."

Julia then interrupted her, "Actually can you aim about twenty minutes from the town and also in the back of it?"

Alexandria and Iris briefly looked at each other, that section was right in the thick of the forest. "Suuure.... I guess we can. Any reason

why?"

As they all started to grab hold of each other Julia nodded, "Don't worry it's a good one that I'll explain when we get there." Theseus finally understood what those four had been up to now, but before he could not say or do anything they all disappeared in the spells effect.

When they appeared in the forest both Alexandria and Iris turned and looked around to make sure that everyone had also arrived with no issues.

As Alexandria was secretly thanking whoever Taeral moved in closer to her and whispered so only she could hear, "I'm assuming that by your reaction that this new version of the spell needs more testing for difficult target locations? Still this is something that would have been impossible before, will this knowledge be shared with the other members of the Council?"

Alexandria chuckled, that was more the Taeral that she remembered, "Actually it already has been shared, but I only had time to show Lithius after that well I'm not sure." Taeral then moved away suddenly lost in thought, Alexandria was not a fan of shifting the blame over to Lithius but saying anything else would have been a discussion that she did not want right now. What she did want to know was why they had to aim for such a difficult position in the first place.

Before Alexandria could ask anything Julia started walking towards town while addressing everyone else, "Assuming everything is ready it should just be a short distance to our way into the town, the main issue that we will have is that we don't know the exact numbers of Crusaders currently there so there maybe surprises."

Rosamia then looked at Alexandria, "In the past Alex was able to use a spell to..." Instantly

Julia cut her off, "No magic at all until the time is right, please."

Alex was puzzled about that comment, "Why the heck can't we use magic, I mean a lot of us are casters here." Julia nodded, "I know but after the massacre that occurred many years ago and after most of the main army had moved to the Portal Tower while that was our secondary base, I had the people of Astrum put in place certain defenses. Basically if any magic is detected being used around the town or in it an alarm will be heard by everyone."

Iris thought of the time that she had spent there a while ago, "I know that I was the odd person out but what about if magic is used during training like I sometimes did?"

It was then that Taeral took over for Julia, "Yes I remember that one now, it was asked if the training grounds could be excluded from the main spell. I thought that it would be an interesting challenge at the time so I got involved in it when Lithius told me about it."

Alex tried to think about how you could even do that, "Obviously you succeeded, but I can't see how you did?" He smirked back, "Maybe I can explain it to you, or we can always ask Lithius why he did not share the information to you. It seems that he has a lot of issues with that lately."

Alexandria simply glared at the elf, "Fine I get your point, still changing the subject a bit, is the goal of this attack not to use magic?"

Mike then cut in with another question before Julia could answer Alex, "Also won't the alarm go off anyways when the Crusaders start attacking?"

Julia nodded, "It should and my idea is not to avoid the alarm but to use it to help us out."

Theseus was starting to catch on, "I see,

you plan on using the alarm to make sure that no civilians in the town get hurt during the attack." When Julia nodded to confirm he explained in more details, "Part of the reason why we asked for the spell was for defense, but really the main goal was to warn the people in the town that have no combat training that something is happening and that they should seek shelter as quick as they possibly could. Before when we were attacked we realized it when it happened but had no way to warn the others so the worst happened." Anna simply looked at Mike as that was not exactly why so many innocent had died that day but there was no reason to bring that up at this time, plus at least things had clearly changed since then.

After the Commanders explanation Julia continued going over the details of her plan, "Ideally I want us to get in position and when the time comes, someone, will trip the alarm."

No names were mentioned but instantly Alexandria looked at Iris, who then looked back at her with a questioning look and then realized that Alex was not the only one looking at her. "Hey what gives? Why am I the bait in this plan? I'll do it, but can I know why I was nominated?"

Alexandria chuckled, "Depending on how quick the Crusaders react and their numbers you may be stuck dealing with them in melee combat." She then pointed at her staff and lack of armor and then turned to the other mages that only had robes. "You think any of us would make a better candidate?" Iris shrugged, "Fine, fine, I said I was going to do it."

She then looked at Julia, "That said is there any part in this plan to help out nullify their magical speed? No matter how better equipped I am I'm going to need help with that one." Julia let out a little sigh, "Actually no I don't have a plan for

that, and I'm still learning how to properly combat against magic. One on one I'm fine with but this will be far from that."

She turned to the mages, "I was hoping that you may have an idea on how to stop them somehow." It was clear to see that Taeral, Alexandria and all the others started thinking hard about the request. Alexandria seemed like she was trying to convince herself, "I may have an idea but I was hoping not to use it due to its cost..."

It's then that she felt a hand on her shoulder. "Before you share this plan to drain yourself, I may have come up with an idea." Puzzled Alex waited for Iris to continue.

Iris then looked at Adam, "Your holy spell to track people, I'm assuming give you the same information as before but what's its range now?" Adam thought about it, "Hmm, I think it would cover about a bit more than half the town why?"

Iris seemed pleased by that answer, "Great that should work. I came up with the idea from the tactic that you used back at Missa, essentially you will join me as bait and use your tracking ability to give me the information on all the Crusaders that try to move quickly. Once I have it I'll zap them with a bolt of lightning."

Before anyone could comment Alexandria was already waving her arms all around, "Wait, wait, wait... how the heck is that going to work. There is no way that he can tell you the information quick enough for you to focus a spell on the person if they are moving that fast."

Iris then had a mischievous smile on her face, "You're right but then I don't plan on him telling me that information by voice." As serious as she could she looked at Adam, "I want to use the telepathy spell, the way Alex used it before she purposely prevented stray thoughts from leaving

your head. I don't want to do that, your spell will give you the information to your brain and as soon as you have it my spell will make it so that you will give it to me so that I can use it. That should make it so it's like I was using the tracking spell and should give me enough time for a low level bolt... Assuming you are alright with that Adam as anything you think of will be shared."

Adam shrugged, "I don't really see an issue with it, especially if it's just the information that I'm currently thinking about."

While Alex was trying to digest the information that she had heard, Taeral saw a flaw in the plan. "While this could work and I don't doubt your abilities, I don't see how you will be able to defend yourself while you are using all that focus."

Iris nodded, "Initially I was planning on casting a wall of ice around us, which would help but it would be very temporary help if there is a mage in the mix or even if they start climbing up it." One of the mages that had joined then stepped forward, "I specialize in optical magic, I can use that to hide myself from anyone and recast the wall if need be or make sure that no one is able to climb up it. You would be on your own for a while mind you but as soon as the alarm hit I can provide support."

Iris happily nodded, "That sounds great, looks like we have a plan against their speed Julia."

"Seems like it, so now the main enemy will be their strength which we should be able to handle." Anna shrugged and smiled, "Bah, just don't get hit it's as easy as that. Still what should the rest of us do?"

"We will head to the back wall; there if my request was done we should have ropes that are

hidden for us to climb up the wall." Theseus then interrupted her, "Ah, I figured that's why you ordered the ones I sent to you to stay. I was told about the ropes and from when I left the Crusaders had not seen them so if luck hold they should still be there."

Julia was happy for the new, "Good, they should lead to behind the Commander's main house. From the updated that Theseus told me a lot of the Crusaders stay guard there as its close the main barracks where the Crimsons are. So when we are in position, Iris attracts their attentions and we wait a bit and then strike at them with magic. Once the main troops in front the barracks are dealt with we will then have a lot more Crimsons bolstering our forces and then we take the fight to them. With Iris giving them a large incentive to not speed up we should have a good shot at this."

Seeing as no one had any objections to the plan Iris then grabbed Adam's hand and started to lead him in the opposite direction, "Well with that we will take a different way. I'll head back outside of the magical detection spell and fly up, Alex once you are all in position send me a message. Then I'll fly down, triggering the alarm, and land in the middle of the town. That should make it so Adam's tracking spell covers most of the combat area." She then smiled, "Plus I'm sure it will make one heck of an entrance so that the Crusaders can't ignore it." Alex nodded in agreement and then everyone continued out in the direction of the town's back wall.

They arrived at the wall and where quickly able to find the two sets of ropes on their side to help them scale upwards. While it was easy to find if you knew what you where looking for, that was not the case for someone that was simply passing

by.

Mike and Anna went up first on one side and on the other Julia and Theseus. Rosamia was getting ready as Alexandria who was going to be next after her looked up. "You know scaling wall like this is not really in the curriculum in Astrum." She then took the rope in her hands as Rosamia had started the climb, "It might be easier if..." She then stopped as she turned to the other side and saw that elven mages had already started the climb up with no issues at all. Somewhat frustrated Alexandria never finished her sentence and did the best that she could.

When she arrived on the top she then realized that she needed to switch to another rope that would be used to repel downward. Alex knew that she could not stay where she was on top of the wall for too long as she tried to grab hold of the rope but missed. Rosamia's hand then grabbed her and she helped guide her down as quick as she could. When she landed Alex looked a bit out of breath and turned to Rosa, "... Thanks, please don't say anything to Adam about this, or Iris for that matter as well." Rosamia simply gave her a small smile, as Rosa moved out to the rear of the Commanders house where the others where Alexandria was confused by her answer. *'Does that mean will or won't?'*

Now that the group had all arrived Julia quickly came back after a quick scout to the side of the house. She quickly drew a few squares on the sandy ground to denote the building and then pointed at the Commanders home and also the main barracks. "In front of the Commanders home you have what seems like a team of six. Around the barracks is a hole other matter, it was a quick count but I think it was near thirty."

Taeral nodded, "We will get into position

and cast a lightning spell that will disable them. We have enough casters to hit them at once before they are able to react to us, once done then you can jump in."

As they got into position Alexandria then took a few steps back and still mostly covered by the house raised both hands in the air with two thumbs up. She repeated the process a few times and then headed back to where the others were, when she saw that others were looking at her with curious looks she shrugged at them. "How else was I supposed to notify her without magic?" Theseus was somewhat not convinced by her tactic, "Are you sure that she saw that?"

Alex happily and confidently smiled, "Of course, she asked me to tell her somehow so I'm guessing that she was keeping an eye on me the whole time..." She then instantly frowned, "Wait if that's the case then she also saw me... ah crap."

High in the sky with Adam next to her Iris chuckled. Adam stopped looking down and turned to her, "What's up are we a go?"

Iris nodded, "Almost there I'm just seeing something that I don't think Alex would want to share." Adam then squinted as best as he could but saw very little, "You know using magic to see down and not telling what is going on is not very sporting."

She smiled, "I guess not but it's probably for the best..." She then paused for a second and then nodded at him, "Okay looks like we are good to go, so are you ready?"

"Yes just cast the spell." Once she did he felt no difference at all and wondered if she had done anything. Iris smiled, "Don't worry I can hear your thoughts loud and clear. During the process I'll keep holding your hand as it helps the spell." She then stopped and smiled again, "Yes your right

it is odd how many spell require contact to work better."

This annoyed Adam a bit, "Yea don't answer questions that I did not ask please it's a bit odd and uncomfortable." Next he then used his own magic and casted the tracking spell for as wide of an area as he could. Seeing as humans was chosen as a target he only picked up Iris at this time. "I'm good if you are now, do you need me to do anything other than keep the spell going?"

She started casting a lighting spell that would generate many small bolts and the sky started to turn very dark, "I guess to make it simple for me you can in your head flag my targets from the information you will get from your tracking spell. That should allow me to focus more on my own spells" He did not even have to acknowledge anything as she already knew his answer before he said it. Iris then used her flying spell and aimed downward guiding Adam down with her.

As she got closer a large alarm sounded where the magical barrier had detected her, she ignored it and continued down until she reached the ground in the middle of the town. As soon as she landed she quickly casted an ice wall around them leaving the top clear in order to have Adam spell be able to still function. Already she had some targets from Adam, six of them seemed to have reacted quicker than the other probably due to the dark clouds suddenly showing up, Iris then tapped into the semi-self contained lightning spell that was now fully active and called down six small bolts at the targets knocking them out in the process.

Another group of Crusaders looked at each other two of which nodded and speed up only to get hit by bolts themselves. The rest of the group

moved normally at their target and where ignored, as they got closer to the ice wall they boosted their strength and started to swing at the wall to crush it down. After one swing large cracks appeared but before they could take another they heard screams and saw more lightning bolts, but this time not from the sky but from the rear.

It's then that a figure appeared with a large one handed sword, he raised it on top of his head and screamed, "*CRIMSONS TO ARMS!!*" from there hell broke loose as waves of Crimsons soldiers charged in on the Crusaders.

Figuring that the Crimsons could take care of themselves for the most part Anna and Mike charged forward as much as they could to try and make it to where Iris and Adam where. The back of the town was still mostly soldiers and the front civilians, while they should have taken refuge by now due to the alarm they still did not want to take any chances. From the middle they should be able to react quickly enough in case they saw something.

In order to do that they still needed to take care of a few Crusaders that where in the way. The first one was running at them with his weapon high, Anna being the fastest was going to be his first target. As he swung from above, she dodged to the opposite side. As his sword arced away Mike took the opportunity to stab him with his own blade on his leg that was now open.

When the Crusader reacted and started to counter with a horizontal swing at Mike, Anna then kick him in the back of his other leg forcing him to fall to the ground. From there she tapped him on the head with the back of her magically enchanted blade. The light green glow would help pack an extra punch to knock him out without using too much strength for the blow itself. The idea was

that they could hurt the Crusaders but killing them would be taking it too far.

This was not shared by the Crusaders it seems as two of them then charged at Anna, one of them using magical speed and the other one normally.

Mike focused on the one normally charging knowing full well that the other would be taken care of from the aid of his partners. As the Crusader did a forward charge at Anna's head Mike timed his upward swing of his own blade to make sure that it would hit the Crusaders. Anna had been right in saying that their main defense against their strength was to avoid the blows but there was another strategy where you could deflect the blow using their momentum against them.

When the blade passed harmlessly above Anna's head due to Mike intervention, Anna quickly flipped her blade to go hilt first and then took a step forward and hit the incoming Crusader in the throat with her hilt.

When she repositioned herself while the Crusader fell to the ground gasping for air, both her and Mike saw that a group of six were preparing a defense against them.

With both of them rushing at the six they launched their enchantment at the edges. With the low power it was hard to predict the results but three of the six fell.

The other three had braced themselves in order to defend from the magical blast leaving their sides opened. Mike and Anna split up and each attacked the ones on each side as they continued their charge. Their re-enchanted blades cut through whatever armor they had like butter opening a large wound to their sides. As they fell the left over guard spun around and attacked Mike but before he could hit he himself was rendered

unconscious courtesy of a blow to the side of the head from Anna.

Theseus looked on ahead as he dispatched a Crusader of his own and was already attacking another. He was impressed by the two's teamwork and their ability to go in so deep so quickly and still keep a strong defense. As he barreled his way onto two other Crusaders knocking them down he waves a quick salute their way.

Anna could not believe what she had just seen, "Seems that the Commander is taking an interest in us."

Mike chuckled as he dodged an incoming attack, "I think he's taking an interest in you more than me. I mean you do know that there is a rematch coming your way soon right?"

Anna stabbed a Crusader in the leg, creating an opening for her to move around him and knock him out from behind. "Oh yea, and I also know that you are currently getting as much information on his fighting style so that I can get extra practice before hand right?"

He smiled, "Well I was doing it because I was curious actually but sure we can do that too."

Anna sighed, "Let's just hope that he forgets about it and moves on." Mike simply laughed at her wishful optimism as they both charged at another group of Crusaders together.

The mages that they had with them first focused on the other mages that had joined up with the Order. But when the attack started a few of them turned on the other as their deception was no longer needed, which resulted in the enemy mages being taken care very quickly. The focus then shifted to all the groups of Crusaders that tried to form up any formation. As soon as they tried they would be bombarded with low level attack spells, this forced the Crusaders to stay in

smaller groups giving them a great disadvantage against the larger Crimson groups that proceeded to attack them.

Alexandria had joined Rosamia tactic and was mostly taking a defensive role during this battle. Now able to use her magic she had positioned herself on the top of a roof and used wind magic to deflect most of the arrows that were being fired by some Crusaders. While she could she also empowered the lighting spell that Iris had created to take off some of the burden. Overall Iris was doing an excellent job of targeting any Crusaders that took one step using magically enhanced speed as had been planned.

Rosamia mostly focused on the wounded on either side of the battle. While everyone tried not to give any fatal wounds to the Crusaders they still did not have to attack them with kid gloves as the Crusaders themselves could heal wounds.

Still this was a battle and such a plan would not be foolproof. Rosa made her way to the Crimsones that had been downed and tried to heal their wounds and make them regain consciousness. Due to her healing not being what it was, she did what she could and then ordered some lesser experienced Crimsones to pull the wounded backwards. For the Crusaders that she helped, she made sure to heal them enough to stop them from dying and then moved on to the next. It would serve them very little if they regain enough strength to once again rejoin the battle, at the same time it would be as worse if they died as it would send a different message to others as to what was really happening here and what their true motives where.

The fighting lasted for quite some time but eventually the Crusaders had been beaten down. Mike looked around as Rosamia, now joined by

Iris, where still helping with the wounded. "I probably should have asked this back at Newport but is there a plan for all these Crusaders? I mean we can't just leave them here?"

He turned to Theseus figuring that the answer would come from him but it was Taeral that spoke up in his place. "The Council indirectly will take care of them. One of our mages will be staying over to help but eventually a few more will come over and create this stasis like cube prison that we can keep them in. Unless repowered the spell will self terminate so no harm will come to the ones trapped inside if something happens."

Theseus then continued the explanation, "Ideally some Crimsones will also stand and watch this prison to make sure that no one comes to tamper with it. So there should be no need to worry that these people will be rejoining the fight." He then looked in Alexandria's direction, who was now coming back to rejoin the others, "Now do you have a plan for the next place, are we going to teleport there again and if so how many can I bring with me?"

Alexandria was starting to answer as Mike cut her off, "About that the Lights Templar only will be going to the next location."

Taeral thought this odd, "How can you six take care of all the Crusaders? Especially now that it's safe to assume that there should be more of them after what we have done here and at Newport."

Anna nodded and explained the reasoning further, "That's mostly the reason why we want to change the tactic. Our goal is to get as many people as we can quickly and be ready when the time comes. Now for Newport it was obvious that he was not going to keep that one, same could be said with here. Sure maybe he could have

overpowered you Crimsons and forced you not to intervene but the cost of doing that would be too great in our opinions. That said for Calculus it's a different story as he can't afford for us to get full access to that place. I mean if we are able to get our hands on near unlimited resources and also have access to the mages that can quickly built anything with those resources, well that's too much power on our side."

Alexandria tried to follow the logic, "Okay but at the same time maybe that's the missing link, I mean your right that having access to that would be a big help for us and it would explain why the dwarf magic did not see it as it would only be an us thing."

Mike sighed, "I agree with that but Calculus is a city, there is a big difference in laying siege to that then a small town. The efforts would be more like days then hours and do we have that time? Maybe we do but Anna and I agreed that if we take it that it would be more detrimental for us then beneficial, as it would create an alternate plan where we change our main point to Calculus and then we do both at the same time. This would work better time and effort wise but during that fight the city could be leveled and that's not something we can afford."

Rosamia was a bit discouraged by this news, "Sound like you plan on giving up on the idea of getting help from there."

Mike nodded, "Not really but in a way yes. The new plan would be for us to head to Denuo. We think that there will be only a few Crusaders guarding that place. Once those are taken care of we contact Bernard and ask what the situation is. Ideally I would like it if we could sneak the resources and people from Calculus to Denuo without attracting the attention of the Crusaders in

the city."

Alexandria smiled, "Okay so for this one we use the stealth approach to get what we need. I'm okay with that this time around." Theseus also nodded, "That seems to make sense, so what should we do while you are doing that?"

Anna looked around at the many Crimsons. "I think that the priority should be getting all these people to the target location before the Crusaders get there."

Taeral suddenly looked at Alexandria, "Because you mentioned teleportation I assumed that you had a plan prepared in order to move all these people?" A large grin appeared on her face, "As I was about to say before this change was mentioned, I was planning on using a gate spell to move them."

Taeral scoff at the idea, "You know full well that the distance is too far."

"Hahaha, yes you're right. But what if you daisy chained the gates? Basically you go to the max distance and then from there you open another to the next place. Normally this would be impractical as you need a mage on both ends to cast a stable gate spell so getting one at the middle point takes too much time or energy if you use a flight spell. But now with the new version of the teleport spell we go there and leave a small marker and then you can take it from there." Alex was now smiling with a proud smile on her face, "Perfectly safe, quick and again perfect for large groups."

It was clear that Taeral was not fond of the plan and was still thinking about it, after a while with still no complaints on the plan Alexandria took out two glass spheres from her pocket and enchanted both of them. When the spell was done she gave one to Taeral, "I'll go drop the other at the location and from that one you should be able to

go directly there in order to cast the gate spell." She then turned to Mike and Anna, "So you mentioned Denuo are we going there now?"

They quickly looked at each other and then Mike answered, "Sooner would be better than later." Alexandria then understood, "Okay well then Iris can take you there while I drop this off? Just wait for me as it should not take too long." Iris confirmed with a nod and Alexandria then shortly after disappeared.

The Lights Templar then formed a circle and Iris started to cast the spell, while she did that Anna turned to her side as Julia had invited herself in the group. Julia gave her a puzzling glare, "Are you seriously going to tell me to sit this out?" Anna held back a smile, "Nope not at all, I'm good if you're good." And with that the spell was completed.

Showing up in the far corners of the farmable land next to Denuo Adam looked around to see if there was anyone around, he spotted a few but they were pretty far and had yet to noticed them. He immediately got as low as he could and motioned for the others to do the same. "Looks like we are good for now, should I scout ahead and see how many we are dealing with?"

Mike did not think that there would be that many Crusaders here but that did not mean that they could still not wait in ambush somewhere and if they got picked off then they could actually be in trouble. Sensing his hesitation Anna came up with another plan, "Let do something else while we wait for Alex. Iris can you use that spell that Alex used to scout using animals?"

Iris's eyes went wide, "Oh, ah, yea I can do that. Let me see if I can use anything that is close." After focusing for a bit she found a bird that had made its home in the mountains behind them. "I

guess that will do, I'm sending the scout in now."

While focusing Alexandria appeared in a flashy manner, Adam quickly pushed her down between him and Iris. Taken aback Alex moved away but still staid low, "What the heck are you doing?!" Looking around herself she saw people far away and figured it out. "Ah...fine I get it we are hiding but really look at where we are."

She tried to move around a bit to show all the mud they were stuck in, "Who knew that the edges of farm land could be so muddy..." She then paused for a bit and then instantly got excited. She then turned to Iris that was still focusing on her spell and slapped her shoulder over and over in a playful manner, "Iris, Iris I have this cool idea that I have to try."

Somewhat annoyed as she was trying to focus, "Yea yea, just give me a minute will you."

Her lack of enthusiasm did nothing to stop Alex's excitement, "Anna, Mike this idea would work wonders for the final battle, can we test it out here... I mean there are Crusaders here too right Iris?" With a deep sigh Iris terminated her spell, "There are twenty of them and one mage actually, what is odd is they are all grouped together like they are expecting us or moving out?"

Moving out made little sense to Mike, "I'm going to vote on they are expecting an attack." He then turned to Alex, "Now this idea you have is it a really good one?"

Alexandria joyfully nodded, "Yes, it's so simple too I mean it really is. It will not stop their speed completely but it will hamper it considerably."

Mike smiled, "That's great news; let's not use it here then." Alexandria suddenly deflated, "...but, but." Anna chuckled, "If we use it here they will know of it in advance if it's that good." It

looked like Alexandria understood but it was clear to see that she was still hurting inside.

Mike was mildly chuckling at her reaction, "If it's only twenty standing around lets use the standard methods against them. Iris, Alexandria can you make the initial blow to stun them while the rest of use finish them off?" Still bummed out Alex answered him while Iris was already enchanting the others weapons with lighting. "I guess..."

The fight opened up with a large thunder bolt from the sky from Alexandria, which was surprisingly defected by a shield that the mage had put up. That said even a spell from Alex at normal power was enough to shatter the magic protection opening it up for Iris's attack spell. Her bolt took out the mage and about five around him leaving about fifteen Crusaders who were somewhat caught off guard from both bolts and then attacked from a distance from Mike and Anna's enchantments attack and Rosamia's arrows.

By the time everyone got into melee range only nine were left still standing, which dwindled by another four as Julia, Adam, Anna and Mike each reached their targets.

The five left when back to back in a fully defensive position only to then be attacked from above by another bolt from Iris. The fight was over in less than a few minutes.

From the corner of one the houses Helena and a few others moved in after the fight was finished, "One of the people on the land saw you when you started to move in. I grabbed Anton, who was with Maria, and a few other guards in case you needed help but it seems that it was not needed in the end."

Rosamia smiled, "It's probably best that you did nothing, we are here to ask you something and

you can refuse if you wish. If you do this way at least you can tell the Order that you refused when we asked for help and not get into too much trouble with then." Helena chuckled at that one knowing what had been said to Catherine when she had visited, but there was no way that Rosamia knew any of that. "Let's hear this plan of yours and take it from there."

Mike explained the details as to why they were here and what they were planning without giving away the main locations.

Maria was the most troubled from what was said, she looked at Rosamia, "We have been trying to find a different way as you talked about to try and help out. While we are devoted to this idea, going against the Order..." She then stopped not really knowing how to express herself.

Seeing her difficulty Rosamia walked up to her and gave her a hug, "Don't feel pressured to do this, follow your heart and do what you think is right." As she broke the hug Maria nodded, "I'll think about it..." Rosamia smiled and nodded, silently telling her that her answer was good enough.

Helena thought about it some more but came to the same conclusion for herself. "Well it's not like we can offer much help but if you want to use this town in order to see if you can get help from Calculus then I have no objection against that." Mike smiled as that was a good first step, "Alexandria do you want to do the honors and contact Bernard?"

She nodded and closed her eyes and focused for a few minutes. "Okay I sent him a message to contact me when he could, just in case he was around some Crusaders. Knowing him I don't think that this will take long."

As it turns out she had been right, only a

few minutes had passed as a full blue glowing body representation of Bernard magically showed up in front of Alex. "You called Miss Alexandria."

"I did, is it possible to meet up and talk to both Kyle and Jessica... Preferably with only you as an extra considering your current guests in your city"

Bernard nodded, "That can be arranged. They both meet up regularly to see if there is any news from Astrum considering what the Order has done. But there is whispers amongst the Crusaders that thing might have changed, we have yet to get an updated and they are not sharing what they know it seems."

Alexandria chuckled, "Oh we can give you more than an update. If we head at your personal study now will that be a problem." Surprised by this Bernard was suddenly very agitated, "Ah not at all, that's currently where I am but will you need a marker or a gate spell?"

Alex nodded, "No worries Bernard, we will be there shortly just don't move around too much until we show up." He nodded and then the communication terminated. Alex then turned to the others, "So are we ready?"

Mike then stopped her, "Before we go, Anna, Adam, Julia and Iris can I ask you to stay here while the rest of us go and explain the situation. The way I see it with Iris here a gate spell can easily be created if they agree. Also Adam can help scout around with his spell if there are others that got missed." He then smiled at Anna and Julia, "And I'm pretty sure that if that happen you two can take care of it."

As they all agreed with the plan, the two reached out to Alex as she started casting the spell. Julia nudged Anna, "Splitting the party and leaving you behind that happen?"

Anna gave her a half smile, "It does..." Then the smile faded and a bit of worry took over, "Still considering what happened the last time it was those three alone I would have preferred that it not happened so soon."

Julia mentally slapped herself for the stupid jab as that thought that not occurred to her, "Oh... sorry about that." Anna chuckled, "It's all good." As the rest left using Alex's magic she turned to the others, "Let's take care of these guys and also see if there are others that got missed after all."

Bernard instantly bowed as Alexandria and the others appeared in his personal study. Bernard's study was in one of the floors in his tower. Most of the floor was covered with a large dark red carpet with intricate light brown symbols on it. On the walls you have a lot of bookshelves with tones of book filling them, mind you have being with Alexandria for so long his collection seemed a bit small. In the middle you have a round table with four large chairs.

Bernard invited them to sit down. As they did he explain the situation, "I've already asked for Kyle and Jessica to come over for an early visit under the pretext that something had come up and I would not be free during our regular time. This should not arouse too many suspicions if they get questioned by the Crusaders here. Also there should be no interruption during the talks as the tower is mostly empty at this time."

Alexandria was concerned about that, "What happened to them, the Order did not do anything did they?"

Bernard smiled, "No, nothing like that. A little bit before all this started I got a message from the Council telling me to send all able body to Astrum. I was also instructed to stay where I am in

case something happened." Seeing the concern wash away from Alexandria Bernard was going to continue but then an active spell notified him of guests that would be arriving soon. He then stood up, "It seems that Kyle and Jessica will be here much quicker than anticipated, I'll go meet them now and bring them here. Please wait here while I go do that."

It was taking a while before Bernard came back and the silent waiting was broken by a small laugh from Alexandria, "You know I just thought about it, this would be a perfect time for Bernard to sell us out and show up with tones of Crusaders instead of Kyle and Jessica."

She then waved off the idea, "But he would never betray the Council that way so I don't know why that idea popped in my head." Rosamia then turned to Mike who seemed embarrassed about something. She chuckled as she figured that this was exactly what Mike was thinking about, still as much as she wanted to play off the idea as Alex had done she too was wondering why it was taking so long for him to come back.

After a longer time, enough for even Alexandria to start being nervous, Bernard finally opened the door to his study and had with him Jessica and Kyle as promised. "I'm sorry that it took so long. It seems that they were both questioned by the Crusaders and when they gave them the reason they figured that they would come and question me. I took longer than expected to convince them that I knew nothing and also that I was not planning on return to Astrum." He then looked back for a second, "Truthfully I'm pretty sure that they just partially believed me and are still keeping guard on this tower to see if anyone else will be coming and when they will be leaving."

It's then that Kyle stepped in, "We figured

that eventually you would show now do you mind telling us exactly what is going on, we have all been wondering since this all started."

Alexandria then left her seat in order for Kyle and Jessica to both sit down, she moved behind Rosamia and Mike. It was clear that Bernard was troubled by the fact that he was making a Council member stand as he himself took the same position but behind Kyle and Jessica. Alexandria could not help but chuckle as his discomfort as Mike started the very long explanation.

After explaining what they had truly been told about the spell of rebirth and also what had happened at the end with Genevieve and the attack at Missa a few weeks after. It was clear to see that all three members where deep in thought over what had been told and what was being told. Given them a moment Mike then continued to explain the plan and their next steps.

Once he was done Kyle took a large breath, "Well that's certainly something..." He paused to think about it more before continuing, "Hmm, in the end we never really believed that you where dangerous as the Order was saying, nor did we ever believe that you would suddenly attack us. But the thing is that we can't help you with this plan, I hate to say it as you have done nothing but help us when no one else would and I feel bad turning you down but if you lose then this city is done for. The Guild Leaders would never agree to that. Now we can give you resources that can go mysteriously missing but that's the only thing that I can think of that we can do."

It was clear that Kyle was stuck between the decision he wanted to make and the decision he needed to make, it was sad but understandable. Rosamia then looked at Jessica that was wearing

the same look of discomfort as Kyle. "As for us, the ones that stayed behind and did not go back to Missa, well I'm sure I'm safe to say that we all don't agree with what the Order is doing and after hearing what you just told us I can say that I am fully convinced by that. Still knowing that and having to take up arms against the Order and the lord of light is a jump that I'm not sure we are ready for."

Again this was disappointing news but also understandable, still Rosamia did not want to leave things as it was as an idea then popped in her head. "Maria in Denuo mentioned something about trying to find a new path based on what we had talked about, do you mind explaining?"

Jessica did not see anything wrong at all with that, "You kept mentioning about trying to do more but with less. Saying that the Order was about helping but focused solely on what they could do with their magic and that you, with everyone else, were trying to show that there was more than being able to help with magic alone. When the magic went away, it took a while before we got the message to return to Missa. During that time it gave me time to think about what you had said, as a priestess I still wanted to help those around me and could I still do that? I thought of ways that maybe I could and then the word of the Order came down. While I could have just dropped what I had started, I was still curious to where it would lead and it seems that so where some of the others that I was with."

Rosamia smiled at that, "Well than why don't you help us by doing exactly what you just said? Basically I'm offering a third option where you join us but not for fighting but to help save those that will fall during the combat. I'm sure that something can be done to pull them to the side

where you and the others can administer help in order to keep them alive. Don't fight the Avatar, don't help the Crimsons while they are battling the Crusaders. Just help people that fell who are then considered outside the battle."

Jessica was stunned by the idea, "That... would be expectable but we would need protection, is that something that you can spare?" Kyle then turned to her and grabbed her hand, "I'm sure that I can muster some guards to help with that." He then looked at Mike, "Those would only be useful to help Jessica, as we would as well not participate directly in the battle." As Kyle finished Jessica added another stipulation, "You do realizes that we can't just help those on your side, if Crusaders fall we will offer the same help to them. Will that be okay?"

Both Rosamia and Alex turned to Mike for the final call. It was easy to see that Rosamia's idea would be problematic at best and very idealistic. The stipulations for Kyle and Jessica only added to that, but if they wanted to help but stay neutral as best as possible it was one of the way's to go. "That's fine but I do have a request with that. As soon as you take someone in your care be it from their side or ours they are not to return to the battlefield, is that okay with you as well?"

Jessica simply nodded in agreement and so did Kyle, "I would have expected you to say something like that but for their side only." Mike nodded, "That would be ideal actually, but you would not have agreed to it if I would have said it correct?" They both nodded, "So there you have it and plus this helps everyone in a way by adding an extra random element."

Kyle was perplexed by that statement but did not ask for an explanation, "That's an odd fight that you are leading, I'll give you that."

Mike chuckled, "I think you misunderstood us there, this is not our fight." Bernard was suddenly confused, "What do you mean are you not leading an attack on the lord of light?"

Mike nodded, "Sure we are but this fight started with Astrum when they said no to the Order. When we finally contacted them about it, already the Crimson's were onboard with the Council and we simply joined up because we believed that what they were doing needed to be done. This fight would have happened even if we would have stayed hidden."

This stunned the others, always it had been the Lights Templar leading and showing the people what needed to be done. Now while they were still in a leading position it was more the will of the others that they were following than the other way around. This was unexpected for Kyle and what had been discussed and assumed with the other Guild leaders. "I need to quickly update the Guild leaders on this and also then I'll have to rally up some men. Is there a plan to smuggle us out of the city?"

This is where Alexandria stood all proud, "Of course there is a plan. Currently Iris is at Denuo, with her there I can open a gate spell and then everyone that wants can join up for this help relief third group that you have just created."

Bernard was trying to add in something but was uncomfortable about it, Alexandria slowly nodded as it seems that he would never change even after all this time. "Bernard, I'm assuming that you are worried about the Crusaders that are keeping watch?" He simply nodded and then Alex took a moment to think about it before she shrugged it all off, "Meh that should be simple enough. We can just open two gate spells, one in Jessica's tower and the other in guard's barracks."

No one will think twice about guards going to the barracks or priest going to the tower will they?" With the travel plans agreed everyone stood and left to do what needed to be done.

After a few hours back at Denuo, Mike, Anna, Alex and Rosamia looked at the final people crossing the gate spell. All in all about fifty soldiers and twenty priests had walked through.

Rosamia turned to the others with a sad smile, "I'm sorry. I know that this is not the help that you expected, but we could not force them and I did not want to turn down their will to try and help us."

Having been told what had happened Anna gave her a nice half smile and a small shrug, "Don't worry about it Rosa. In the end this could be for the best, as they will be saving people that would probably not have made it and that is worth whatever trouble in the end. This also helps promote a new way of thinking and a different possible path, no there is nothing wrong with this at all."

Rosamia was happy to hear the comment, "Thanks again for the kind words. I think that I'll go share them with Jessica as I help her with the preparations."

As she left Alexandria moved where Rosa was standing a few minutes ago. "Don't get me wrong I also agree with this idea, but given the enemy I wonder if they would have been more help with us then on the sidelines like this."

Mike took a deep breath, "It's hard to argue with that but really against the true enemy in all this, how much help could they have provided? Sure in joining us they could have helped with the inconvenience that is the Crusader army that will also participate in the fight but where they really anything but that, an inconvenience?" He then

slowly shook his head, "This is the right thing for them to do and like Anna and I said it provides another path for others to see and maybe help question their own path."

Alexandria was still looking forward at everyone, "I guess." She then smiled, "Still it's funny hearing you say that the Crusader army is simply an inconvenience considering everything. I'm sure they would not appreciate being called that." Anna laughed at that, "You know your right it is funny in a way. By the way Alex what do you say about filling us in on that plan you had to deal with that inconvenience?"

Alexandria was then all smiles again and that excitement of when she had first figured it out had returned. "Oh yes, again it's brilliant in its simplicity and I don't know why we did not think about it sooner."

Mike smiled as she started going over the details, turns out it was a good plan and would help a lot. Now the only thing needed was for all the right pieces to fall in place and for them to receive a lot of luck on their side.

Chapter 7

*T*he old room that was used to hold the meetings at the Portal Tower was once again full of people. Differences this time was that the only furniture around was a very large table with an equally large map of the surrounding area of the tower, everything else was still bare. It felt weird for Mike as now everything was different and while it felt like this changed happened a long time ago the reality was the opposite.

Around the table you had Theseus and behind him Julia, Helram and Kilor where present around them. All the Lights Templar where present but only Anna, Mike and Alexandria where at the front. Jessica and Kyle where also there even after their neutral actions where explained to everyone and last you have Lithius and Taeral from the Council.

Seeing as all the necessary people where present Lithius started the meeting. "Here is what we know for sure. Currently there are about five hundred Crusaders marching to our location. At present we have a bit more than two hundred Crimsones ready with about fifty mages that will accompany each smaller groups to help out. Plus we have about another twenty other mages but their tasks will be more specific, which will be explained later." He then raised his hand in the direction of Kyle and Jessica, "Added to those numbers are fifty soldiers and a few priests ready to aid any during the battle that get wounded. They will provide a sort of sanctuary during the

battle for anyone that can't continue."

"The main problem with the Crusaders is their magical speed. So far we have been able to find ways to deal with that but this time the area that needs to be covered will be very large. Now an idea was proposed by Alexandria to help with that, basically our mages are currently turning the ground area around the tower to a very thick consistency of mud. While this will not remove their ability to attack at high speeds it will greatly diminish it. The unfortunate part to this plan is that it will also affect our forces."

Theseus then shrugged, "Currently all the Crimsons are practicing their maneuvers in this mud. This will not remove the issue completely but will help out during the battle and should give them an advantage. Plus you added some mages as well to those numbers so it should put us on even footing, well in terms of power anyways."

Kilor then pulled out a small vile with red liquid in it. "Here is something else that should help put a bit more power on our side. These elixirs should help heal wounds, now keep in mind that they are a very far cry from the healing magic that you had access to before but will help still. While you were away gathering the people that we would need for this attack we requested the help of some mages in order to create a few of these. Now there will not be enough for everyone but there should be one for every two, also a fair number of them have been given to Jessica and Kyle forces to help out in their actives to save as much as they can."

Lithius then nodded, "Before I continue I must thank you for sharing this knowledge with us as I can see its application being used for a much longer time after this battle." Alexandria had a bit of a smile as she was also very interested given

how she had already started working on creating elixirs a while back but healing ones had been beyond her.

With the thanks out of the way Lithius continued the plan, "All in all this is what we will have against the main Crusader army, everything else has been assigned to help out with the fight against the Avatar."

It's then that Adam loudly cough, "Sorry about that, it's just that before you talk about that do you even know if the main man will show up at this event?"

Lithius paused for a little while, "Sadly Adam does bring up a good point, and the answer to it is that currently we don't know if he will show up. There is also the issue of only Crusaders have been seen marching to our location; the only soldier of any marking is the Lieutenant to the General, William. The General himself or any of the High Order are not present." Ignoring the downcast mood that was growing, he continued. "That said our undercover agents at Missa have informed us that the Avatar is going to make a large speech for those at Missa. We hope to have some information on his intentions then." He then pointed at Mike, "Assuming that he does show, Mike will now describe what we have planned to deal with the Avatar."

Mike then shrugged, "Actually on that note we currently don't have much of a plan to actually defeat him."

There were a few stunned looks but generally this had been known by most. Kyle suddenly turned to Jessica. "I'm in a way glad that we are trying to stay as neutral as possible after hearing that." She gave him a quick elbow to the ribs as a response as now was really not the time.

Mike ignored the comment and continued,

"What I mean to say is so far we are not really sure if what we have will be enough. Here is what we have, assuming that he does show up the Lights Templar will act as the decoys and start the fight with him. During that fight the twenty mages that Lithius mentioned will try and create a physical magical shield around the area so that Crusaders will not be able to pass through if they try and avoid the Crimson." He then looked at Kilor, "During the fight the dwarves have volunteered, at a personal sacrifice, to power a large spell that should hurt him, the extent is unsure. Once the blow has been done Helram and his team will join in the fight accompanied by the Council that will be done assisting the dwarves with the spell. The idea from that point on is to try and burn him out with as many spells as possible."

Stuck in her head Alexandria was feeling more and more depressed as Mike explained the situation. She had promised that she would find a way but so far nothing had come up. She wondered if she could have missed something and while something did come to mind there where consequences to it.

It's then that she heard her name, as she looked up with mild surprise she wondered how much time had passed. Lithius was glaring at her, "Seems your Council habits follow you Miss Alexandria." Alexandria turned around and saw that all the attention was on her, as she turned red

Iris and Adam could not help themselves from chuckling while Lithius continued. "So to recap what you missed, we will try and see if we can all come up with something new to add against the Avatar while we wait for this message of his later on. In the mean time, I have a message for you from Solanar. He requests your presence right after this." She quickly nodded and waited

impatiently as the seconds of embarrassment ticked by. When the first person started to walk away from the meeting, she quickly took that as a queue to be able to run away.

Seeing as Solanar was helping the dwarves with the spell Alex made her way to the back of the tower, where those preparation were being made. She would have liked to have asked Lithius if he had any ideas with what the highest of elven mages wanted with her, but there was no way to do that after she drifted off during such an important meeting.

Finally she reached her destination and saw that a few Council members and the two dwarves that had joined with Kilor were still at finalizing the spell, from what she remembered of the spell they were very close to finished. As soon as she arrived Solanar dropped what he was doing and went to her, as he got close he pulled her away from the others. This made Alexandria very nervous, "Ah, you wanted to see me?"

Seemingly far enough from the others Solanar stopped and nodded, "Yes I did. After everything that you have been through I hope to see that you are still the same person that I remember." This confused Alex even more, "I'm sorry but what are you talking about?"

Still very clam Solanar answered her, "The dwarves have shown us so much in the last few days, I never dreamed that we had lost so much knowledge ourselves. But at the same time, for all the knowledge that they have they are very stuck in their ways it seems." Not really sure where he was going with this Alexandria nodded simply going along, "Yea, I've noticed that too."

"Good, I figured you would. Now from what I have learned from what they have shown me from the spell there may be a way to boost its power

drastically. I've mentioned it to the dwarves but they don't seem convinced and have now stopped talking about it." He then stopped and chuckled, "I must say that it's an odd feeling for me, I'm used to being the one that knows things and teaches to others and with them the tables have turned and they are the teachers with me the student." He slowly shook his head, "Anyways I digress, I know that I can do this but I'm missing some pieces to the spell to prove it to them. They shared quite a bit but there are also parts that they are keeping to themselves, part that I need and parts that I think you know."

Now Alexandria was starting to understand where this was going, seeing her reaction Solanar smiled. "Now knowing your habits, I'm also guessing that you have more than the knowledge but maybe a copy of the spell was transcribed?"

Suddenly Alexandria was wondering if she was that transparent. "Ah... I may have what you are asking but I was also sworn not to let others know about it... Well in a way I was sworn."

Solanar thought about this for a while, "From what you know, do you think that I will be able to figure out the missing pieces to the spell once they cast it?"

She nodded, "I would think you would, also I realize what you are doing in trying to trick me there." She looked at in the eyes of this wise old elf that she had known her whole life. He was always full of secrets and she hated that about him, but he was powerful and very knowledgeable plus it's not like she had figured out anything to help out with the spell or the Avatar. Alexandria then took a deep breath, feeling somewhat defeated. "Fine, the book is in my room in the tower with my pack. I'll go get it and we can go over what I've noted from the spell then I'm sure you can take it from there."

Happy that she was going to cooperate but at the same time feeling somewhat guilty about putting her in that situation Solanar figured that he would try and reassure her a bit more. "Thanks Alexandria, have no fear that what you are doing will help. And at the same time don't give up yet there is still time before things happen and I know you to be very resourceful." Alexandria gave him a small smile and a nodded before she left to get what he had asked for.

A few hours had passed and Lithius had requested that the same people show up once more at the meeting room. When everyone arrived they noticed that a small orb was now in the middle of the table on top of the map. Lithius proceeded with the explanation, "It seems that the Avatar will be making his speech momentary. Our agent over there will be using magic to send us the information that he sees, keep in mind that this will be one way only so anything said here will not be transmitted back."

Alexandria was already feeling uneasy and this did not help, "Are you sure that is safe? I mean the Avatar could detect the magic and find your mage if he wanted to I'm sure." Lithius nodded, "I agree but he is the one that urged me to allow him to do this and I could not find any fault with his logic." He then stopped as the orb started to glow.

It only took a little while to show a picture of the Avatar standing on top of a balcony addressing everyone. Next to him you had the General and also the High Order Priestess Catherine, they both did not look pleased.

"People of Missa the Lights Templar have finally been found. I am saddened to say that they were not found quickly enough and for that I apologize for not having guided you properly.

Already they have destroyed all our teleportation circles cutting our ability to move and help others. Taking advantage of our inability to move our army they have attacked towns and infiltrated cities and in doing so have attacked your fellow Crusaders that have taken up arms in order to protect you."

The Avatar then turned somber, "I have learned that they are amassing an army in order to prepare to attack us here at Missa. Because of this I have asked the Marshal to bluster the cities defenses, recently this was considered one the safest cities in all your world but somehow attackers were able to pass through. I shall not let that happen also I will not idly sit by and wait for them to make the first move. Already a wave of Crusaders is heading at their current base, where when the time comes I along with the Marshal and Lady Catherine will join them and aid our troops in order to crush them and their plans."

He then took a deep breath to give a pause and let his words sink in for a little while before he continued. "A while back when the time came to help during the attacks that occurred recently my help was not sought out even if they knew how to contact me, something that I am told was not shared with the fellow members of the Order. In the end they had no choice to except my help as the enemy was too strong, but unfortunately they waited too long and the resent issues with the holy magic occurred because of it."

The Avatar then lifted his head high, "I have done all I can to help restore things to how they were now that I can once more, but given the Lights Templar past actions I asked that they come visit me so that we may speak and talk about healing the damage that was done as they have done in the past. When the time came they not only refused my offer for help but also attacked

and threaten to come after me if I did not do as they requested. I could not simply stand back and do nothing even if they have in the past been able to defeat beings such as me, and because of that they are acting on their threat to destroy me. Currently they have been weakened as well by the effects that have affected everyone, and while they have still been able to get help from those that still have not seen their true colors, I believe that now is the time to strike."

Again the lord of light sobered his mood, "It's always sad when hero's get twisted like this due to their lust for power and when their lies start to unravel. Now I know that everyone is tiered of these talks of war, but I hope that you will still lend me and your fellow soldiers your prayers as we go and put an end to their self imposed rein and truly free everyone, as this will be your final war to end this cycle that you have been caught in ever since the orcs have attacked you many years ago." He then raised his arm in the air, "Please lend us your support."

Instant cheers could be heard and after a while the Avatar bowed and left to go back inside followed by the General and Catherine. It's also then that the communication stopped.

It took a while for anyone to say anything but the silence was broken by a low whistle from the Commander of the Crimson. "I must say that I did not expect something like that." He turned to the Lights Templar, "He's really making you guys out to be the big bad villain in all this, he must really hate you all. I'm starting to wonder if you did something that you did not tell us for him to go that far."

Adam shrugged, "Nothing that I know of, but at least on the upside we know that he will be coming over after all."

Lithius nodded, "True, which is good news in a way but now we also have new players to deal with as well."

Adam thought about it of a bit and then turned to the other members of his group, "About that, if possible I would like to lead an attack on the General. We go way back and I don't see him going along with this, I want to know why. Plus with my current abilities I don't think that I can be of much help against the Avatar this time."

Alexandria was stunned, "That's unexpected." Again he shrugged, "It happens."

Julia then took a step forward, "I too will help with your attack, I agree with you that this is not like him and would also like to see if I can help snap him back to the way he was."

Rosamia bit her lip; she wanted to say something but given what was happening did not think that she could risk it considering what was at stake. Anna saw her turmoil and simply whispered to her, "Remember our creed, never give up and follow your heart..."

With that Rosamia smiled, "While Adam and Julia go after the General; I will go and deal with Catherine. In a way I'm best suited to stop her holy spells." She then turned to Mike, "But I fear that doing so will lessen your ability to fight the Avatar."

Mike smiled, "I agree it does but also it opens up an interesting opportunity to cause a lot of chaos amongst the Crusaders if you are able to convince her that what she is doing is wrong." Instantly Rosamia understood and smiled, "I'll make sure to do just that."

Its then that Adam intervened, "Whoa there, if you are going after her alone then I'm joining you." Rosamia slowly nodded, "I understand that you wish to help and defend me

but you know that you need to be the one there with the General."

As he was about to protest Theseus stopped him, "If you are concerned about her defense then allow me to protect Rosamia. Plus this sends a nice message to the troops as Crimson and Light Templar work together to stop the main heads of the Crusader army." Adam wanted to still argue the matter but knew that it was going to lead him nowhere so out of respect for Rosa he dropped the matter and agreed with the plan.

Lithius nodded at everyone, "Good now that the roles have been assigned we all know what we need to do. By our calculations the Crusader army should reach us in about two days." He then turned to Mike, "That is how much time you have left to figure out a better strategy. Mind you this also applied to anyone if they can think of anything that could help against the Avatar."

Mike smiled at everyone, "No worries I'm now confident that we will figure out something." Alexandria once again felt depressed as she heard him say those words.

Later that night Mike and Anna where headed back to their old rooms that was now only housed by a few blankets that helped them not have to sleep directly on the floor. As soon as Anna closed the door behind them she gave him a curious look. "Okay now that we are alone, spill it why are you so confident now?"

It's then that they both got surprised as Alexandria stepped closer in the light, "Yea I would like to know that too." Still wondering how they had not detected her but not really giving it much thought Anna turned to her, "What are you doing here this late?"

Feeling very defeated Alexandria sighed deeply, "I'm so sorry, I just don't know, I can't

think of anything that will help. I can't help but kick myself for not being able to help especially after saying that I would. The only thing that I can think of is casting that modified spell to see the future myself and then maybe I'll get the answer we need. But even then I'm not sure about doing that." She then turned to both of them almost pleading, "I really really don't want to muck this up."

Anna got close to her and gave her a warm hug, "After all this time, after everything that we have done together and all that you have done to help with that. I almost find it comical that you are still saying the same things that you were thinking way back when we first met on that road with the broken caravan. I know this will sound weird to say but don't worry about it, I know we can do this somehow plus it's not like we had this big plan all the other times when we faced those other Avatars."

Alexandria pulled herself from Anna, "I'm sorry Anna but I need more than that. I want to believe, I do but... maybe the future spell is the only way."

Mike then chuckled, "I don't think that it is. While I may not know much about magic as you do here is why I think it's a bad idea. You have done many things in the past that had tones of risks associated with it and every time you have pulled it off. But also every time you where without doubts about it." He paused for a second, "Okay maybe not without complete doubt but you where still confident about it. The way you talk about it the future spell seems like a bad idea."

Alexandria had to agree with him but this also frustrated her, "Then I really don't have any ideas. I mean is arcane magic even the way we should go?"

Anna gave her a small smirk, "You are questioning yourself so much that you are losing track, in a way you are your own enemy right now."

Mike then nodded, "Anna is right and you are also right, arcane magic will be the key to this but maybe not the only one." He turned to Anna and then at Alex, "Look we have about two days, let's figure out a strategy and figure out possible counters based on what we think he will do. In the end, Anna is right mind you. This is a battle and unexpected things are bound to happen no matter how much you prepare so you need to also believe that you will win even if you don't know everything."

Anna smiled at Mike, "I'm glad you finally see it that way." He shrugged, "I have a wonderful person that kept showing me the way, even if I was painfully stubborn about it."

Anna then reached over and gave him a small kiss, "Yes you were very stubborn, and... You still are but I love you none the less." He smiled back, "And I will love you as well 'till the day I die and beyond that."

Alexandria looked at the exchange, "You guys are unbelievable truly. I don't know how you do it."

Anna shrugged, "This is our lives and no matter what happens around us we choose to live it however we can. Letting others affect that, means that we have failed ourselves somehow."

She then gave Alex a warm smile, "That said let try and bring back that confident Alex before this all goes down."

Alex nodded, "I'd like that, I'd like that a lot." She paused for a second and took a serious and honest tone. "Also thanks, thanks for this and for being there for me not just now but all the

other times as well." They both nodded and smiled,
"We feel the same about you Alexandria."

Chapter 8

*T*he preparation time was over, already they could see the army of Crusaders at their doorstep. All in all they totaled around five hundred and fifty, most of those where all Crusaders but there were a few mages in the mix. Because of this the mages that would be accompanying the Crimsons had their orders updated to first attack the enemy mages and then helping the Crimsons. Thankfully no priest or priestess could be seen in their ranks, having to contend with strong healing and protection magic could have easily turned the tables around.

Between the army of Crusaders and the Portal Tower you had the army of Crimsons who were outnumbered two to one. Behind them you had the twenty mages that would help keep that battle separate from the Avatar's and behind them you had the Lights Templar with a few extra guests.

Theseus looked in front of him, "Well this will be a battle for the history books." Julia smirked, "But I wonder how it will be told in the end?" Theseus smiled, "That's easy, it will be told by the view point of the victor as it always is."

Mike then nodded, "Your right, depending on how today goes it seems that we will either be looked at as the evil people that refused the Avatar's holy light or the hero's that stood to defend our future freedom that we all fought so hard to get." He then looked at everyone else, all weapons had been enchanted and each of them

held one healing elixir. While the Avatar, Catherine and the General had yet to show the Crusaders would be attacking momentarily. "I think it would be best if we all get into position." Mike then smiled, "Good luck everyone."

Rosamia nodded as Theseus moved next to her. "I'll succeed in freeing her, once I do I'll return here and help you out any ways I can." Before they both left she turned to Adam, "Take care of yourself out there okay."

Adam nodded, "I will..." He then looked at Theseus with a grave expression, "You better make sure to defend her with your life otherwise you will have me to deal with afterwards." The Commander only nodded and left with Rosamia.

Julia put her hand on Adam's shoulder, "He is one of our best fighters, she is in good hands. That said are you going to be able to keep your head in the game?" Adam had a cold look on his face, "Of course, let go pummel some sense in that General that's keeping me away from Rosa."

After looking back and giving a quick nod at Anna, Julia turned and followed the already angry Lights Templar member into the battle lines. Alex gave a small chuckle, "I think that Julia's going to have a hard time with this one." Iris shrugged, "Only until the battle starts, after that I think it will go okay." She then looked ahead, "Assuming they show up that is, otherwise yes your right it will be very unpleasant."

Anna looked back at the two, "Oh don't worry he will show up, my body is aching so much that I can feel it. There is no way that I'm wrong, just wait for it." Mike also agreed with Anna but for different reasons, with the speech that he had made he had to show and he also had to make his first mistake. "Alright, for us our battle lines are here but let's get ready as well. Alexandria..."

"I know I'm lead, Iris you stay by my side and help however I tell you. Mike and Anna you try and keep him away from us however you can."

They all nodded as they got prepared. Mike and Anna powered their swords, from normal to bright to finally end to the color white with a thin line of color in the middle. From this point on every hit would drain their life force but should be able to pierce through any defenses that the Avatar had. Alexandria casted her instant spells around her, she did not think that they would help as they lacked power but you never knew. Iris simply focused on the battlefield using her arcane magic. "Here we go the Crusaders are charging, also there is a large powerful magic that suddenly came into play... I think that he is about to show."

The Avatar accompanied by the General and Catherine showed up behind the Crusaders lines. He instantly turned to the both of them. "You two deal with the rabbles while I go ahead and put a stop to those that threaten our Order." He then had a stern look his face, "I need not remind you both that failure is not an option here." He then looked far ahead, "I leave you both to it." and then he disappeared.

The General took a moment to look at how the battle was playing out. "As expected arrows are useless still due to the mages but so are theirs with us being protected by magic." He then paused and smirked, "I must say that this heavy mud is a nice play to hinder our speed, it's not a trick that would work twice but it is working here."

He looked at Catherine, "This means that this battle will be determined by numbers and also combat expertise, which the Crimson's excel at."

Still that was then, now that we have spent time with them and their ways of fighting are not that secret anymore."

He then pointed at the middle of the battle lines, "William was instructed to lead the middle, with that I will take the right flank, and I suggest that you take the left. If there are issues then let us know, or the Avatar I suppose."

Catherine nodded, now having finished putting an array of protective holy spells around her. "That sound like a plan." She then started to move out. It was odd, this was in theory only her second real battle so she thought that her head would be focused on that and the task at hand. But unfortunately Catherine could not shake the doubts that she now realized that she had deep inside of her. The last few days had shown her a different side to the lord of light, one that she had never expected. She tried to shake those feelings away, *'It's only because of this fight, once done all will be as it should be.'*

Her thought where broken by the voice of the General, "Lady Catherine, I say again please be careful out there. The Avatar may be unable to help out due to his own battle so you need to stay focused. I can order some Crusaders to guard you..."

She slowly nodded her head, "Your concern is appreciated but unnecessary. I will be fine." She then continued on her way to the left flank, "Take care a well General, you have survived too many battles to fall at this one."

He quickly bowed in her direction, and then ran to the right flank.

"Everyone, here he comes..." As Iris said the words

the body of the Avatar showed up in front of Mike and Anna. His scales still where glowing white and his hands now looked like small dragons claws.

"I hope that you prepared for me as I will be very disappointed if this ends too quickly."

Mike then smiled, "So it's true, in casting us as villains you needed this fight and you also need this fight to be a true fight where it looks like we have a chance of beating you. Anyway you look at it that was your first mistake."

The Avatar was not impressed, "You may think that but really that's exactly how I want you to think. I'll even encourage you more by telling you that even I do not know the outcome of this fight, I figured that knowing would prevent you from being able to do anything of consequence which would not have worked out for me."

Mike smiled again as Alex let out a large breath that she had been holding for a while now. Already two of the main worries had been removed from this battle, now that it was confirmed they actually had a chance at this. With as much bravado as she could muster Alexandria confronted the Avatar, "You really are stupid, but still why do all this in the first place?"

"When I was finally free I learned of your standing in this world, throughout this whole thing I never had any intentions of sharing my rein of everyone, lest of all with my final creation."

Alexandria had no clue how to answer him. The dwarves that currently were hidden in the tower could hear this exchange; Alexandria wondered what they were currently thinking.

Having nothing more to say, Mike then quickly charged at the Avatar with Anna following right next to him. The Avatar responded by moving at them as well. He was very fast; Mike could still track his movements but knew that he would not

have the speed to react to them. The Avatar's first attack targeted Anna chest with his claws, luckily she had enough speed to be able to react but only just barely as the claws tore through her steel half plate chest piece. Having been only a second slower then she would have already suffered what would have probably been a lethal hit.

The attack created a small opening that Mike took advantage of as he tried to plunge his sword at the Avatar's midsection. The hit was blocked by his arm, but it still cut in deep.

The Avatar then twisted and quickly grappled Mike by the throat with his other arm. His claws were already digging in his flesh as he started to squeeze. Then it suddenly stopped as the Avatar lost balance as a large rock projectile had targeted and hit his knee.

Alexandria grabbed as many projectiles as Iris had created and flung them at her target. Most of them hit but even with the force that she was putting behind them it seemed to do very little damage.

While the Avatar was now focused on Alex but was still holding Mike who was trying to break free, Anna charged in with her blade glowing and successfully scored a hit from behind. Then the Avatar looked down and saw the blade of Anna poking from the other side. He then turned and threw Mike at her knocking them both down on the ground.

Alexandria saw him barreling at her, she prepared an attack spell but he was moving very quickly. "...Iris, any time now".

"Got him", the Avatar's charge then stopped as the ground around him grabbed on to his legs. Before he could look up at them, Alex then let her barrage of lightning spell hit him. Five bolts landed on the Avatar's chest, the blow of it was enough to

break him free and topple him on the ground.

As he got up Mike and Anna charged at him again, the Avatar was able to dodge only Anna as Mike's sword cut him across his back. They both pulled back as he was trying to take a swipe at both of them, barely missing them. It's then that two fireballs attacked him and sent him on his knees burning.

Still on his knees the Avatar smiled, "Good good, but let's see how you do without your magic to help you." It took a few seconds but then a shimmering shield appeared around the Avatar.

"This is not like the last one; this is the same version that was used in the Impregnable Tower. Do you think that you can destroy something that no one else has been for so many years little mage?"

Iris turned to Alex, "I can't do much with that and I'm not the only one." Alex took a deep breath, "Iris, go help them out and keep them off me." Iris nodded and charged at the Avatar, following her Anna and Mike did the same in hopes that some of them would be able to score a hit.

As he got close Mike saw that surprisingly enough they would all hit but only because the Avatar had made no moves, he was welcoming the blows. It did not take long to understand the cause of his cockiness as the white enchanted glow disappeared as they struck at him. The dwarven blades that had been forged were still good enough to pierce his skin but they did little damage.

They all pulled back as the Avatar mildly chuckled, due to the lack of constant barrage his scales were all glowing white once more and all damage had been healed. While outside magic could not affect him his own internal ones worked just fine. The Avatar was once again standing and

now unharmed just like when the battle had just started.

Julia and Adam battled their way to the front of the defending lines. The fighting was very orderly considering the number of combatants. Each side had clustered into formations and were attacking each other. In some cases the Crusaders won and went out to help another group and in other case the opposite occurred. Julia used the reach of her spear to attack the incoming opponents while Adam covered her against those that would get close. Currently it was taking very little efforts on their part as they were equipped with a lighting enchantment on their weapons which made short work of anyone even if the blow was blocked.

As Julia looked around she wondered if spending all energy and time to create the healing elixirs was the better choice compared to an enchantment one that had been used a long time ago. Julia then rethought that idea as she turned to attack a Crusader that had scored a fatal blow on one of the Crimson. Especially when she saw that another member of his troops was now making him drink the healing elixir.

Adam then tried to get her attention, "Julia, so are you okay with this tactic?"

She quickly nodded as she stabbed at another target, "Seems good." Adam was happy about that, he then charged at two targets making their way towards her.

As they went down quickly due to the enchantment he looked up at her, "Thanks for trusting me with your defense."

Julia then gave him a smirk as she pulled back as one of the Crimson was approaching to

give her an update. "That's alright, I mean worst case you mess up and I know of a certain long brown hair person on your team that will be all over you for it." As Julia listened to what the soldier had to say Adam wondered if that could truly be consider trust.

Julia nodded and then changed her course to move to the right flank of the battle. "Seems that there are reports of the General being spotted in the right section so that's where we going." Adam nodded as he helped create a path, "Someone like him should be easy to spot."

It seems that Adam had been right, it had taken less than a few minutes to spot the old man with his large two-handed sword. When they got close Julia ordered a squad of Crimsons to help deal with the Crusaders that may intervene.

Adam pointed his sword at the General. "You of all people must know that what you are doing is ridiculous, so why are you following this Avatar's command?"

The General commanded his troops as well to pull back and let him deal with these two. "It seems that you still know very little when it comes to a commander's pride *lieutenant*, but coming from a deserter I suppose I was expecting too much there."

As Adam raged at his comment, Julia ignored it. "Out of respect we will give you the option of lowering your weapon and telling your men to fall back. For all our sakes you know this is the right move so please take it General." The General nodded his head in respect, "If only that was an option that was available but it's not, now prepared yourself."

When the General took up an attacking position Adam suddenly charged at him. His first blade aimed for the General's side. To his surprise

the General block the blow plating his large sword on the ground in front of the incoming weapon. The enchantment activated as contact occurred but the General had purposely let go of his weapon so it had no means to travel to him. Adam then spun around and used his other weapon to attack him from behind. The counter this time was to simply move forward out of the way while grabbing his sword. Adam then repositioned himself to get near Julia, he was not surprised that the General had avoided his attacks but there was something odd going on.

Julia took advantage of General advance in order to dodge Adam blows and performed a forward strike. The General swung his weapon at her spear's shaft again avoiding the enchantment. Also not overly surprised by the counter Julia used the momentum to spin the spear overhead and aimed to perform another strike. The General ignored the incoming blow and aimed his weapon overhead as well in order to cut Julia in two. Julia saw the incoming weapon but did not flinch, as the weapon was about to hit her it stopped.

Adam had rushed to her side and braced himself as much as he could as blocking the General's blow would hurt under regular circumstances but with enhanced strength, it would be quite the challenge. But as he crossed both his blades to stop the blow the enhanced strength never came.

Adam intervention had surprised the General and that had cost him as the electric enchantment that was on Adam's sword where already coursing through his body. He had to move away quickly to break it, plus there was also the issue of Julia's spear that was coming right at him. Desperately but successfully he managed to move backwards and avoid the blow and stay conscious.

"So lieutenant after all this time now you learn how to work as a team."

Adam was not taking the bait, "That's because now there is a person worth working with." While the General chuckled at the obvious person that Adam was referring too, Adam shook his head. "What's your game General, Why are you not using your speed? I'm sure you would be able to get around this mud and if not then why not use your strength?"

The General lifted his sword up, "I figured that I would make this a fair fight."

Julia could not believe the reply, "Two against one is fair in your eyes?" With a serious glare he answered, "It is for you two yes."

Adam and Julia could not believe it, and as they looked at each other they realized that they both would not believe it. They quickly nodded at each other and at the same time they discharge their enchantments of their weapons to the ground. "We have no clue what you are playing at, but we are not here to destroy you."

The General chuckled, "Suite yourself." He then charged at both of them.

Theseus and Rosamia where having issues reaching the front line. Word was that the Crusaders where getting the upper hand due to a priestess that had joined their ranks. The Crimson Commander rallied his forces around him and pushed forward, this and with the actions of Rosamia help kept the line.

Eventually Theseus and Rosamia spotted pillars of holy fire which could only come from Catherine. As they pushed forward even more they heard a voice, "Rosamia..."

Instantly Rosa looked below and then shouted, "Everyone away from me *NOW!*"

As everyone moved away, she casted a shield at her feet and then everything around her was engulf in holy flames. When the spell died down some of her cloths where somewhat burned but overall she was perfectly fine. Theseus turned to Rosa, "I take it that she is not your biggest fan?"

Rosamia simply shook her head, "Great well I'll keep everyone around you off you and I'll keep an eye out but I think it may be best if only you mostly focus on her." Rosa nodded, "That's what I was expecting, thanks."

Now able to see each other Rosamia looked in Catherine's eyes. It was hard to tell what she was feeling but Rosa did figure out that this was going to be much harder then she had hoped.

"So Rosa, are you going to tell me that I've made the wrong choice? That I should join with you because you are on the right path?" As she finished she threw a holy bolt at Rosa, which she blocked with another shield. The reality was that now Rosa's magic was purely defensive.

"I was going to but now I'm thinking that maybe a bad idea, so let's do this another way. Explain to me why you feel so justified. Do you really believe that we have gone mad with power? Explain how you can agree with what the Avatar has said."

It was hard to tell but it seemed that Rosa's line of questioning had angered Catherine. "Did you not hide his power from us? Did you not take it for yourself? Is he that wrong?!?" This time it was a pillar a holy fire that was casted at Rosa's feet. She moved forward closer to Catherine having the affect only burn most of her cloak.

"We were afraid that this would happen, we did not have a choice to keep it hidden. Is this

really better? Is this what you want the Order to be, with troops in every city and towns policing everyone?"

Now Catherine was furious, "All that was because of *YOU*! If not for you we would not have had to do that, you are the ones that ran away and because of you this is all twisted."

Rosamia was tired of taking the blame and was now screaming as well, "We ran away, yes because the punishment was unfit. Fine I'll take that one, but don't you dare pin those stupid blockades on our heads. If you do then you are just admitting that your powerful lord that created most of the races did not have the ability to magically find us." She then reached out and grabbed her pendant around her neck, "All this power and he could not use it to cast a stupid location spell on these things, or is it just that he did not try? Or better yet did he know all along where we where and was stringing everyone else believing that he didn't? *WELL*! Which is it Catherine? You have access to him all the time, why not ask him and see what he says?"

Now Catherine was visibly hostile and was also fuming holy energy, whatever spell she was preparing it was going to be big. "You dare question him?!?"

Before she could continue Rosamia cut her off, she was not sure that using a technique of Adam was going to work but it seems that it was the path she had chosen. "Don't you think that someone should? I mean we have all the races behind us..."

It's then that Catherine madly chuckled, "See this is where you make it so hard for others to follow you. Our way is wrong and your way is right, it's what you have been preaching for so long now."

Throughout the back and forth Rosamia

was steadily advancing next to Catherine, at this point they were pretty much at a few feet from each other. With how close there where, it was impossible to not to see the disappointment that was on Rosamia face. "You and all the others keep saying that but it's simply not true. While I may not have agreed with you and your ways I never said that mine was the way everyone should follow. I worked hard and did a lot of soul searching but I found my path and it is the right one for me. That said I simply encourage others to find their paths so that they can feel completely fulfilled by their actions and work."

Seeing as Catherine was not rebutting Rosa continued, "You want another example as there is one on this very battlefield. Jessica and her group are currently out here, not helping us or the Order but doing all they can to help those that have fallen any way that they can. She is out there saving lives without passing judgment on their current actions and is simply doing the right thing with no compensation using her own power. She thinks that this is the path that will fulfill her, it's not my path but I encourage it as it's not for me but it is for her. Now can you stand there and tell me that this." She then spread he arms around, "And that." She then pointed in the back where the Avatar was currently battling the others, "Is what fulfills you? Because I don't believe that Catherine and nor should you as you are better than that."

It was clear that Catherine was beyond furious and all that pent up holy energy was now about to be released. "Whoever can hear me, Crusaders or Crimson I strongly urge that you run away from this place as fast as you can."

Not bothering to check if anyone was listening Rosa casted a shield around her, which was only able to protect most of her chest and face.

As everything around her went white, Rosamia thought that this was one of those times where she missed having her powers that she had before.

Lithius was with some of the other Council members helping the six dwarves that were currently chanting around a large rune shaped circle. The whole area was glowing with magic.

Taeral turned to Lithius, "The spell has reached its full potential; they will only be able to hold it back for so long." Still focusing on the task Lithius answered him, "I know that Taeral, but there is no point in casting this while he has an anti magical shield around him now is there? We simply have to wait until Alexandria can take it down, I'm sure she will do it any minute now."

Taeral smirked, "You seem to believe in that human a lot, both you and Solanar."

"It's hard to argue that. For me maybe I'm following in her late father's footsteps but also now there is another reason why I believe in her so much, and that reason is as simple as she has yet to ever fail in the tasks that any Council member would of had issues with. So please give her time."

Before Taeral could respond one of the female dwarf showed up next to Lithius. She had been with Kilor and had helped build the circle but unlike the other female dwarf that had accompanied him did not have the magic to participate in the spell. Seeing as she was also not a fighter that could join with Helram's team she was currently functioning as a go between for everyone. "Helram is viewing the battle with those mirrors that you gave them. He's getting anxious."

Lithius signed deeply, "Not another one, tell him to wait that's the only thing we can do at this

time." The dwarf seemed uneasy, "That's not going to be so easy at this time." Lithius then cut her off, "Fine then do this for me, go find Solanar and the other Council members it will not be long before we are going to join in as well. He should be here by now." This task she seemed to mind less as she quickly moved away. Lithius nodded his head and continued to focus on the spell, "Please hurry Alex."

Iris had joined in with Mike and Anna but really she had little chances to take a swing at the Avatar. Constantly she had to move back and heal the wounds that Mike and Anna were getting from the Avatar's hits as they successfully hit him in order to unsuccessful caused him any harm that his healing magic would not instantly heal away.

Mike was getting the brunt of the attacks as he was simply too slow to properly dodge the counterattacks, not that Iris blamed him on that as she herself had been unable to do it as well. Already both their armors had been ripped to shreds. The only person that was somehow able to dodge some of the blows was Anna, if she did not know better Iris was sure that she was using magic somehow.

While Anna somehow had the upper hand between the three, her blows had as little affect as all the others. Still assuming that they survived this Iris made it a mental note to ask her about how she was able to react so quickly.

Alexandria was trying very hard to only focus on the spell that the Avatar had cast around himself. She tried to ignore the pressure of the consequences that failure would bring and also more importantly the fact that some of her best friends were being tossed around like they were rag dolls in front of her.

Finally she was close, or at least she felt that she was, she then outstretched her arm and hand in the direction of the Avatar. As if he was sensing what she was about to do the Avatar stopped tossing the others around and ran in her direction. Alex quickly saw that the others were trying to stop him but they could not match his speed. She wondered if there was anything that she could possibly do, she needed to keep her focus on the spell as dodging or getting tackled by him would surely cancel it. A crazy idea popped in her head and Alex simply reacted. She heard her friend scream at her as she ran in the direction of the Avatar; this move had been unexpected as he suddenly stopped while probably wondering if she had simply lost it. Part of Alex wondered if that was in fact the case, and the other part focused on the fact that her outstretched hand was now touching his white glowing scales.

The spell was unleashed and Alexandria simply fell to her knees from the amount of stamina that it had taken from her. Still she had enough energy to look up and see her glowing blue runes appear all around him. Then red ones showed up and suddenly shattered, the spell of the Impregnable Tower had finally been broken after all those years.

The Avatar looked at his body and then at the little human female in front of him. "This is impossible, it should be years from now before any human is able to do what you have done." He then started to reach out to her, "What manner of creature are you now?"

Alexandria had no energy to move but she did manage to smirk at him, "You maybe a lord of whatever, but I'm a princess..."

The Avatar was confused by her statement but before he could react he then sense something

else that was very troubling, he stopped and then looked up and immediately started casting a holy shield.

Iris flew to Alex and grabbed her to move her out of the way. "Seriously, you're a princess?"

"Pfff like you could have thought of a good comeback for that one."

It's then that a large bean of light blue came crashing down on the Avatar. It crumbled his shield like it was not there and landed right in his chest. Once it did it seemed like a glowing blue spear like light had pierced through the Avatar's body that was now arched backwards. Magical energy was bursting from his scales and for the first time during this battle he screamed.

As the spell dissipated he was on his knees breathing heavily. Everyone knew that this would not be enough to kill him but how much had it weakened him, his wounds where healing but slower than before. Still that meant very little.

The Avatar then painfully stood up and yelled, "*DWARVES!* I was going to spare your people for some time for the service that you did for me in the past but now as soon as I'm done with them I will go to your city and show you the true meaning of chaos."

As if on cue Helram and all the others stormed out of the Portal Tower and charged at the Avatar weapons ready, "You are no better than the lord of darkness, I'm just happy that we are the only ones that will see you in this sorry state." Now able to used their enchantments again Anna and Mike joined in weapons glowing white on the attack with the dwarves.

Alexandria turned to Iris, "Back them up with magic, with any luck the other Council members should be here soon. When that happens go help Mike and Anna out." Iris started to conjure

a high level lighting spell, "And what will you be doing?" Alex smirked. "I'll be trying desperately to stay conscious." Both Iris and Alex knew that she was exaggerating her condition but they also both realized that this battle had only just finally begun.

Adam had to give it to the General, both he and Julia had been constantly attacking him for some time now and he was still standing. That said it was only a matter of time, it was clear to see that he was heavily winded. Adam figured that no matter how good you where age still played a defining factor.

Julia went in with a piecing attack to the General, she had been very obvious about her blow so she assumed that it would miss and it did as her target moved away to the side.

While that was going on Adam charged in and aimed his first attack as the General's knee. Predictably the General moved his leg to the side but as he did so, Julia arced her spear from the blow that he had just avoided at his legs as well.

Due to the angle of the spear no wounds would be scored but it would cause the General to lose balance momentary which Adam took advantage of with his second attack. For his second attack Adam flipped and as he did aimed his second sword at the Generals hamstring, with the General losing balance there was no way that he could avoid the blow. The cut was deep but not deep enough to stop him from moving, still if did not heal it there was no way for him to move normally for the remainder of the battle.

Adam and Julia once again moved next to each other and readied another attack. From the corner of Adam's eye he saw that a figure was

about to break through the makeshift barricade that the Crimson's had formed around them at Julia's command, he did not know who but he did notice that the person was a Crusader.

The General tried to take a defensive stand and prepare for the other attack; he then saw that his Lieutenant General, William, was about to intervene in the battle. He knew that it would be a mistake but he took the time to ward him off. At the same time to his left a large explosion occurred, which could only mean Catherine and also to his front a beam of light fell from the sky and then a large scream was heard across the battlefield.

Adam did not even blink, as the General waved whoever was trying to butt in, and charged. As he did the corner of his eye saw the blast to his side, that was where Rosa was and because of that he needed to finish this. Ignoring the scream that was heard from behind, Adam went in with a first attack that he had used a few times already. Due to the distractions the General simply reacted and blocked it as he had all the other times which created an opening that Adam could now exploit having seen it a few times himself. With his second attack Adam was able to pierce through the General side.

Not letting this chance go by Julia also followed Adam, as he scored his hit she aimed for the left pectoral region of the body. Now it was not their intention to kill the General but they did need to wound him heavily, because of this at the last second she twisted her attack a bit. As it hit deep it was now too high for it to hit his heart.

William instantly attacked Julia as she was now opened as the General fell to the ground. As his sword went up it then got knocked away by one of Adam's blades. William tried to recover and

defend himself from his obvious next sword attack but it never came. Instead Adam had decided to kick him behind his knee now forcing to lieutenant to lose complete balance. As he landed on the ground a spear tip appeared in front of his throat. Julia then stood on top of him, "I would not move if I were you."

Adam turned to the General that was still on the muddied ground; he readied another attack as by now he should have been able to magically heal some of his wounds, but then Adam just stood there at a complete loss as the General was still on the ground now bleeding to death. Adam slowly approached him, "What's your deal General, heal yourself already otherwise this will be your last battle."

It was clear to see that the General was in a lot of pain and could barely reply to Adam, "You... would think that you would have... figured it out by now..."

Adam tried to think about what he was talking about and then he did. "That's why you did not used your magic during the battle, it had nothing to do with honor or a fair fight at all. You stupid fool! So I take it that he has finally given you up then?" The General simply coughed.

Julia still looking at William who was more preoccupied with what was happening with the General shouted "What are you talking about Adam?"

Adam took out his healing elixir and forced it down the General mouth. "It's simple he's the one that I talked to about the Avatar being trapped. In other word he's the one that told us not to tell the Order about any of it. Once he took the blessing you think that the Avatar gave him his magic back?"

William went livid, "Lies, there is no way

that the General would be the traitor. It makes no sense why would the lord of light promote him then? You just simply want to tarnish him now that you have brought him near death."

Adam nodded his head as he had little time for this. He turned to Julia, "Let him go." He then looked at William, "Please by all means do try and heal him with *your* power, we both promise that we will not intervene."

Julia moved away and William ran next to the General, "Soon I'll show you that your words are false."

He bent down and called on his healing magic and touched the General on his chest. As he did the magic died out, he tried again and again with the same results.

Adam stood next to him, "Having difficulty? I think it's time you realize that now your magic is not your magic anymore, it's his. I don't know the reason why the Avatar did what he did as he must have known, but I do know that now he does not care about them anymore and he's not about to allow you to save his life."

William was now visibly frustrated, not caring anymore about the two in front of him he closed his eyes and focused inside and asked a question to the lord of light. Adam saw the lieutenant receive what looked like a sharp pain in his head and then the man when limp as he whispered a few words, "It's... all... true..."

Julia could not believe it, "No wonder Rosa didn't want to tell Catherine the name of the person when she asked. Still does that mean that we can't save him?" Adam looked a bit annoyed, "You and Anna are both the same, too much mercy. The only way that I know that we can save him is by bringing him to Rosamia, she should be able to heal his wounds enough. The healing elixir

helped to slow down the bleeding but that's all it did."

Nodding Julia understood, she then commanded the Crimsons that where around to from up on her. "Can you carry him while we make your way there?"

Adam kicked the Generals weapon away and then proceeded to pull the General to his back. "Old and heavy, where is my magical strength where I need it." Julia smiled and then proceeded with making a path with her fellow Crimsons warriors. Adam then grabbed his pendant and started to follow from behind leaving the lieutenant general alone trying to come to grips with the new reality that had just been forced on him.

The relief efforts of Jessica where going better than expected. The Crimsons obviously knew not to attack them and the Crusaders, while still showing their distaste due to them helping the enemy as well, also for the most part ignored them. Kyle and his team, accompanied by Jessica and a few other priests were about to make another run into the battle field to pull out soldiers that had been too wounded; it's then that the two explosions occurred.

Kyle turned to Jessica and pointed at the one that had occurred next to the tower. "Okay so that one was planned, but what was the other one all about?" Jessica had no clue herself, "All I know is that it was a casted with lot of holy energy. What do you say that we go check it out, there are bound to be people that need our help due to that one."

Kyle was unsure but had very little choice in the matter, "Sure let's just try and make sure that we don't become those people that need help

as we are doing that okay." Jessica smirked, "That's always the goal."

It took them a little while but eventually they got to the location in question. In the middle of the place you had Catherine that was still fuming holy energy. Rosamia was on the ground with a lot of bad burns that she was trying to currently heal. And all around them you had fallen soldiers from both camps. Jessica pointed to the fallen, "Target the Crimson's first as most Crusaders seem to already be healing themselves from the blow, if you find some that are not then administer aid right away."

Catherine looked around, it had not been her intention to create such a large blast but something had swelled inside of her from somewhere else, she tried to calm herself in order not to hurt her fellow Crusaders again and wondered if this had been her doing only.

Rosamia had badly burned legs and her right arm had also suffered some very critical wounds. She used her healing magic as much as she could in order to get back on her feet. She looked to her side to find that Theseus had also been badly burned, his only option now was to use his healing elixir and endure the rest as there was no way that he would except Jessica's help and in doing so force him out of this battle.

As Catherine slowly walked to Rosa a blue glowing head of Adam showed up from the pendant's magic, "Rosa are you okay?"

"Not really a good time now Adam..."

"Well I'm coming over and I'm bringing the General, he is on the brink of death and needs your help."

While this surprised Rosa it seems that Catherine was not taking the news in a good way, "More lies, if you truly want to save the General

then simply give him to the Crusaders and they will heal him. Now go away..."

While Adam was hearing Catherine he could not see her and ignoring her comments of terminating the conversation he instead continued to explain the situation, "If it was that simple that's what I would have done, but you see the cat is out of the bag now that the General is what you called the traitor and..." Instantly Catherine screamed at the projection, "You people are *unbelievable*, how dare you say that he was the traitor?"

Before she could continue with her angry rant, Adam cut her off. "Because he is and if you want proof of it why don't you do what the lieutenant did and ask that lord of yours why he could not heal the General. It seems that the answer he got left him so stunned that he is still back there on the ground processing what was told to him."

It was clear that Catherine was losing control again. Rosamia quickly nodded at Adam, "Okay bring him here and assuming Catherine lets me I'll heal him as much as I can, but I need to go now Adam."

She then terminated the magic of the pendant, and using the shaft of her spear stood up as best as she could. "I'm sorry you had to learn it that way, I was hoping that he would tell you himself."

Catherine was lost in a sea of confusion, "But that makes no sense, I would have known after spending so much time with him here and there... Plus the lord of light would have known for sure after he took the blessing. This makes no sense."

Rosamia figured that maybe another tactic should be used instead of the previous one that she had started with. "Then think back, knowing

what you know now was there any hidden or odd comment that he said or did?" Without even thinking why she was listening to her Catherine recalled some of the odd answers that he had given her to some of her questions when he was in her room at Missa. "...But it still does not explain why the lord of light did what he did... he would have known."

Gently as she could Rosamia approached the topic of her question, "I know you keep saying that I keep preaching the same thing, but just for this instance please don't look at him as the lord of light and look at him as he is another member of the Order. In your own experience with everything that was done what's your conclusion?"

It was clear to Catherine that Rosamia was trying to get her to say that somehow the lord of light had lied to her and had hidden this fact. While it would explain why she was told that the matter would be handled by him alone when she had asked the General, she still could not believe it. There was too much confusion and she needed guidance, and then instantly a voice echoed in her head.

'If you wish I can guide you, these people only seek to betray and lead you astray as I was by others that I believed would not have intervened in this conflict. Let me guide you and together we can crush all that stand to destroy our path.'

With a whisper that only those around could hear Catherine answered "...Yes, please show me."

Jessica, Kyle and the Crimson Commanders all looked to each other with wonder. "Any clues on what she meant there Rosa?" Rosamia sighed as she had a pretty good idea as Catherine's eyes now glowed golden, "Yes it means that we should be very careful as Catherine has

made a really bad decision."

Catherine had one again been ripped away from her body, but this time it was a bit different as she could still hear and see what was happening even if she had no control over any of it.

'You're body is still replenishing itself from doing that blow that I help powered up, still there are other ways to attack those that stand in our way.'

Many holy bolts suddenly appeared floating around Catherine and then launched at a few targets all of them Crimsons that where around still fighting Crusaders. Normally these bolts would harm and stun but with this new power level if caught unaware it seems that they where powerful enough to drop their targets with a single hit. As more bolts showed up and fired at more Crimsons and also now at Rosa who simply could only protect herself with her holy shield, Jessica and the other priests grabbed the Crimsons that had fallen and began moving them away. Without anyone else noticing Kyle got into position and protected Jessica from a bolt that was aimed at her with his shield. Even prepared the shock had been enough to bring him to his knees, while still conscious his left area of his body was all numb. "Jessica, I think we need to regroup now. It's not safe anymore."

Inside her head Catherine was screaming again. *'Why target Jessica? Sure she maybe misguided but she is still a priestess in our Order.'*

'A priestess that helps the enemy and ignores my guidance is not a priestess in my Order.'

As more bolts rained down on everyone Catherine could only watch and scream inside her head, *'No, no, no, no, nooooo.'*

Rosamia had no clue if she could save Catherine

anymore let alone stop her now that the Avatar had taken control. While the constant barrage was going on no one could even get close to her. At this time the only person that could do anything probably did not know it. Rosamia yelled as loud as she could, "*Catherine*, I have no clue if you can hear me but you can still take back control but you need to reject him. Please for all our sakes do so, he is using your beliefs to manipulate you please you have to see this..."

Instantly Catherine was pulled back even more, now she could not hear or see anything anymore. He had taken complete control. '*Why did you do this? This is not what I wanted...*'

'When confronted with too many options that you did not care for you ran away and turned to me, when I asked you if you wanted my help you agreed. How can you ask me why I am doing this?'

It saddened Catherine but he was right. As soon as he had appeared she simply stopped making decisions and left it all to him. Simply believing that he could do no wrong she turned a blind eye at everything that she saw and heard. She now realized that she had been a stupid fool and that if she wanted that to stop that she needed to face things head on as she did before. She needed to start believing that this being that had immense power still knew very little of what the organization that humans had built in his honor really wanted, or for that matter what she really wanted deep inside of herself.

'I urge you to stop, if you don't you will only prove to me that I am alone in this battle.'

Catherine suddenly at peace with herself answered him, '*In the end you are alone in this battle because only you wanted this battle. Now LEAVE!*'

Rosamia and all the others looked to see

that the barrage had suddenly stopped and that Catherine was now clutching her head while she kneeled on the ground. Eventually she screamed a loud scream and when it died down she fell to the ground. Rosamia got closed and kneeled next to her, "I take it that he is gone?"

Catherine nodded, "Yes and so are my powers." Rosamia smiled, "I'm happy that you are back and congratulations on doing something no one else ever was able to do on their own." She then stopped for a moment and a sad look appear on her face, "Also I'm so sorry for all the trouble I caused you." Catherine wanted to laugh at that one but instead only a sarcastic response came out, "You had better be." Rosa chuckled as she was now reminding of how the old Catherine acted.

Theseus moved in next to both of them, "So is it over here? In theory we should head back or better yet she could command her troops to pull back." While that was a wonderful idea Rosamia wondered if Catherine would be up for that at this time but before anyone could answer all the Crusaders around them suddenly screamed.

They all looked around to see what was going on save for Catherine that immediately knew, "Now that he believes that he is alone in this fight he will simply control them all by himself."

She then looked up at Theseus, "Seems that I can't help you with your request Commander as currently the whole of the Crusader army is now being controlled by the Avatar."

The more powerful version of the spell had been cast and all the dwarves that had participated where now breathing heavily on the ground. Lithius and the other members of the Council that

were present checked their vitals, their color was very pale and they were all covered in sweat. Also they ignored anything that was said to them and simply kept on breathing.

Taeral turned to Lithius, "They all seem alive but..." Lithius then cut him off and also nodded, "But the toll of the spell seemed to be much more then they had leaded us to believe. Still there is not much that we can do about it now."

He then stood and looked around and then saw a small figure run in his direction, the dwarven female that he had asked to find Solanar and the others seemed distressed. "You need to come with me now, this is extremely important."

Considering the situation that they were currently in saying that something was extremely important over what was going on made Lithius and the others wonder. Still they followed the dwarf that led them further in the back and it took no time at all to figure out what she was talking about.

Lithius starred at the scene with the others not really sure what to say about it. There you had Solanar and some of the older other Council members channeling around a circle with runes that where very similar to the spell that had just been used by the dwarves. The dwarves had shared a lot of their knowledge of the spell but not enough to be able to replicate one so where did Solanar gain that knowledge.

Finally Taeral inspected the spell and its progress, "This is bad, the spell is now complete I'm not even sure that we can terminate it at this point." Lithius took a deep breath, "I'm not sure the goal here is to terminate it."

He got closer to Solanar who was deep in focus, "I know you can't spare to answer me but you are waiting on a signal correct?" As expected

the old elf could not respond but a small smirk did appear on his face.

Taeral could not believe what he was hearing, "Lithius you don't mean to let them go through with this do you? We need to stop this and find another way... Once casted they will not recover like the dwarves."

Lithius gave him a sad smile, "You have more in common with Alexandria then you believe. Ignoring that and to answer your question, we are letting them do this and we will not intervene. This was his and the others courageous choice so we will honor their sacrifice, plus you said it yourself can we even stop it successfully without causing them any harm with what we know of the spell?" Lithius looked at Taeral for a moment wondering if was thinking more about a reason not to let them do this or on what he had just mentioned in its feasibility. After a little time passed, Lithius simply reached out to a pendant that he had.

Alexandria hardly had any time to recover before she had to rejoin the fight. Currently she was doing her best to attack the Avatar with spells that where single target only as much as she could, but at the same time given how many attackers there was on the battlefield most times it was more advantageous to simply lock the Avatar in place by casting something to prevent him from moving. There was another job that she needed to perform and that was related to Iris who was now on the single task of healing everyone she could. Sure there were a lot of attackers but really there was no way for any of them to avoid the blows that came from the Avatar, and those claws seemed to cut through anything. Eventually the Avatar started targeting Iris, if he did so with using physical means then everyone around him would move in his way. If magical means was used then it

was up to Alex to somehow use a counter-spell that was strong enough to do the job.

While all this was well and good the reality of the situation was starting to look pretty bleak for Alex. If you looked closely only Anna and Mike were able to cause serious wounds on him, all the efforts of everyone else including Alex, only managed to keep his level of damage constant due to his magical ability to heal. The other issue that was soon becoming very pressing was that the mages that were maintaining the shield in order to keep the Crusaders out of this fight were losing control. Somehow the Crusaders had double their efforts and were doing all they could to punch through, also if you looked quickly things on that side did not look encouraging at all anymore.

Alexandria knew that this was probably the time where things would flip. This was the turning point that Adar had mentioned where they needed to do something in order to find a way to win, but for the life of her she could not think of anything especially anything that she could do in the midst of battle like this. This brought another thought in her head, *'Where are the other Council members!'*

As if reading her thoughts a blue head of Lithius showed up in front, "Lithius, I understand how doing a dramatic entrance can be cool and all but are you guys not cutting this one a bit too close?" There was no smile or reaction to her lame comment, which only gave concern to Alex. "What's going on?"

"I don't have time to explain but you need to clear the combatants around the Avatar and make sure that no one comes close to him for a while. Do this as soon as you can, I would explain but you will understand soon enough."

Now she was really concerned and had a bad feeling in the pit of her stomach. Still this was

not the time to question things, even if she wanted to. Alexandria looked ahead and took a deep breath to focus a large burst of magic. Once ready she casted a spell that would push everyone around the Avatar away from him, this surprised everyone and a few colorful comments were heard from the dwarves. Ignoring everyone she then used all three of the ice instant spells that she had already prepared and launched them at the Avatar, "...Now Lithius."

The ice spell did very little as he was already breaking out of it, but it succeeded in stopping the others from immediately resuming their attacks as all they would be hitting was the ice around him. When the Avatar's eyes went wide as he looked above so did Alexandria and then she understood as a large light once again made its way from the sky and again implanted itself in the Avatar's chest and burned him from the inside one again. As the Avatar screamed for the second time during this battle Alexandria dropped to her knees as she fully understood what had just happened. "I was such a fool for not seeing this."

Theseus had now rallied all of his Crimsons around him and where now focusing on simple protection. In the middle you had Kyle and his men and then you had Catherine, Jessica, her priests and Rosamia. Kyle just looked at the battle that was in front of him, "This battle has now gone insane." It was hard for anyone to argue. All Crusaders where now fighting with everything that they had ignoring their own live. Sure some of them where falling but now they where brining down the Crimsons that where fighting against them one way or another. With that mentality it

was easy to see that scale would soon tip in the Crusaders favor, the cost mind you would be very high.

As the fighting continued, Kyle and some of his soldiers where now fighting beside the Commander and Rosamia was healing the Crimsons that had swapped with them. Theseus smirked, "And here I was told that you would not help us and try and stay neutral."

"I wish that I could but this is too much even for me to ignore and plus if we don't team up I don't think that we will make it." Theseus nodded as he agreed with him, the way things where now the Crimsons would not be able to hold out for long. Eventually The Commander saw something and directed the flow of battle towards it.

Eventually they saw another group of Crimsons that had banded together, and this group was lead by a red haired spear wielding Crimson. Never had Theseus been so happy to see his Commander at Arms.

When the group linked up Adam immediately moved the General to the middle for Rosa to take care of, he then smiled at her and then moved back to the front where Julia, Theseus and Kyle where still fighting.

Catherine could not believe the condition that he was in, "Given how strong your healing is can you save him?" Rosamia took a deep breath and started casting. It was obvious that one healing spell was not going to cut it so she did another and another and another. Multiple quick healings such as this was a bad idea most of the time, it depleted the caster and sometimes confused the spell to try and heal sections that the previous spell was going to heal but had not yet which in effect wasted the spell. To help with this Rosa casted the spell and targeted certain sections

and hoped. Eventually the General regained some of his color and all his wounds had stopped bleeding. "Jessica can you confirm, but I think he's going to make it."

Jessica poked and prodded, "He's going to be out of it for some time but yes he will make it." They all smiled at the news, especially Catherine. "Now all we need to do is make it out of here somehow."

It's then that another explosion occurred at the tower that was similar to the last one, and again a scream could be heard. This surprised everyone save for Catherine, "Was another hit not part of the plan?"

Rosamia slowly nodded, "No, it could not be due to the spells cost." Now worried she turned to Adam and was then surprised again as the fighting had suddenly stopped. All the Crusaders were now looking at each other trying to place themselves.

Realizing this Catherine instantly moved passed everyone and made sure that she was visible to all Crusaders around them. "Crusaders, this battle is over for us. We need to retreat now."

This command seemed to confuse the Crusaders even more and their reaction simply frustrated Catherine who then took a louder tone, "I Lady Catherine member of the High Order and voice to the Avatar order you all to retreat *NOW!*"

The second time it seems that the message got across as now most of the Crusaders around them started to move and head back to the old cathedral outpost that had served them in the past.

Catherine then looked at Jessica, "We will leave the General in your capable care while we all make our way to the fight at the tower." She then looked at Rosamia, "I'm assuming that this is your

next destination?" Rosamia simply nodded. "Good then while we head there I will command the other Crusaders to retreat in case he takes control of them again." As she started to move forward she then mumbled to no one in particular, "I will see this through with my own eye to the very end this time."

The plan made sense so no one questioned it out loud but Adam still made his way next to Rosa and after seeing that she was okay said what was on others mind, "She... ah, seems to have taken control very quickly there."

Rosamia chuckled, "You expected anything less from the High Order priestess?" He shrugged, "I guess not."

Yet again the Avatar had survived the blow but now things seemed a bit more like a certain other Avatar fight that had happened a long time ago. His wound where still healing but not fast enough to keep up anymore, plus he was a slower and his blows where less strong. Still they needed to keep the pressure on, Mike looked to his side and all he saw was an Alexandria that was on the ground not doing anything. Fearing the worst he turned to Iris who was currently healing a dwarf, "Go to Alexandria, and make sure she is okay as we still need her in this." Iris was hesitant, without her healing the others there could be trouble fast and Rosamia was not around. Still she finished her spell and ran towards Alex while Mike and Anna charged at the Avatar.

When Iris got close Alex looked up and mumbled a line, "...How many did I get killed this time?"

Instantly Iris knew what was happening,

she did not know the details but it was a safe assumption. Iris kneeled in front of Alex and held her by her shoulders, "Alex you need to stop this, you need to stop blaming yourself for the actions of others. These are not kids that you are dealing with but full adults much older then you in most cases, you can try and warn them all you want but in the end you are not responsible for their actions."

Iris understood what Alexandria was going through and she also realized that her words where not reaching her. "Look for a while I blamed myself for what happened with Genevieve, if not for me and being saved then she could have maybe survived and lead some sort of life. Now the situation is not exactly the same but I'm sure that the guilt inside is and sadly the only thing you can do is to let that go. This and all the other times was not your fault so please stop blaming yourself."

Iris then moved in closer and whispered to Alex, "I need you to still be the strong person that held me all those years ago at night after you guys saved me."

She then moved away and stood and took a look back as things were getting worse, "I need to head back now as they need me, but they also need you." Tears where streaming down Alex's face, Iris hoped that it meant that her word had reached her as she had to return to help the others.

Alexandria watched her friends fight with everything they had against the Avatar. For some reason the Council members had not shown up but for all she knew they may all be dead now due to the spell. She shook her head, Iris was right they had all been right. She always told herself that if this happened again that she would try to be strong and bury the emotions but every time it failed as she just could not do it. It filled Alex with

so much anger, sadness and guilt that it became too much for her. But she knew this time that she could not afford to break down. Her friends needed her and as much as what had happened troubled her, she knew that the guilt of not being able to do anything when she needed too would be much worse. She wiped her tears away and stood up. Alexandria then focused on the ground and pulled out rocks and shaped them in the form of two large spikes and rushed in to help.

Helram took his axe and buried it deep in the Avatars leg, as he pulled it out a gust of magic then threw him backward landing hardly on the ground. The same gust of wind pushed another group of dwarves that were charging at him. It gave the Avatar time to start casting what seemed like a large spell.

Mike was trying to get up as Iris was still healing him but there was no way that he could. From the corner of his eye he saw Anna do a desperate charge at the Avatar and then she stopped as two large spikes made their way through the Avatar's body which knocked him to the ground and canceled his spell. Alexandria moved in close, "Sorry it took me so long."

Mike and Iris smiled, "We are just happy to have you back."

In the back of the tower Lithius was holding Solanar in his arms, it was clear to see that the old elf was dying, all of them that had participated where. "Where did you get the missing pieces of the spell?"

"... Alexandria had the information." Lithius nodded his head, "Of course she did. Do you have any clue what this will do to her?"

"... Tell her that I am sorry that I tricked her..." A weak smile then appeared on his face, "But she is much stronger than you think especially for one her age so I'm sure that she will understand." He then opened his eyes, "Lithius you need to survive this, help stop him, and then rebuilt better than how things were. I think that you know how to now."

Lithius took a deep breath and gently put his soon to be ex-master down on the ground and then stood, "Council members follow me. This is not the last blow from us during this fight."

Alexandria was once again on a support role, the Avatar had renewed casting random fireball and lighting spells while he attacked and defended himself and being the only one that could she once again spent most of her time canceling them out. Even with everything his spells were still very strong and she was getting very weak. It's then that a hand touched her shoulder, quickly she turned and smiled. "Lithius, you're alive."

As he smiled at her she turned to look beside him, there were only three other Council members and Solanar was not among them. Sensing her comment Lithius told her his last words, "He apologizes for what he did, he felt that it was necessary to do it considering the enemy and what was at stake."

Alex cut him off, "It's okay, I'll be okay. I'm sure that once this is over I'll be crying my eyes out for a while, but I'll be okay."

Lithius was happy about her attitude, "Good, now please regain some of your strength as we take over."

The melee attack group suddenly stopped

and moved away as multiple long magical spikes dropped and attacked the Avatar's body all over. The spikes pierced through and attached themselves to the ground making him unable to move. By now everyone had moved away and a giant fireball made its way and hit his body, his white scales were now burning. Still on fire a large stone made its way above his head and suddenly smashed down forcing him on the ground and destroyed some of his internal organs.

Now pinned and still somewhat burning the Avatar reached out and touched the stone that was on top of him. Instantly it then rocked off of him and in the direction of the Council members. All of them except for one where able to avoid the blow.

Lithius then focused all his magic on a single bolt of lightning, the skies turned black and eventually flashed white as the bolt then dropped on the Avatar. It was strong enough to drop the Avatar to his knees once again after recently standing up.

Lithius had expected a shield of sort for that spell and as the sky was now getting darker he then understood why. "That was strong elf but not strong enough."

Two of the remaining Council members got close to each other and combined their energy to shield themselves. Lithius saw that Alex was still close by and was in no condition after all that she had done to be able to block what would soon be coming at them, he then moved as quickly as he could and grabbed her while he poured all he had in a shield of his own. Bolts then rained down from the sky but these bolts where nowhere near what any of them had ever seen. The Council's shields shattered and then everything went white for everyone as they landed at their targets.

While everyone was recovering from the

shock to their eyes from the lighting attack, the Avatar took this time to cast a massive healing spell to help with his wounds.

As Mike and Anna, with everyone else started to regain their sight they saw that the Avatar was preparing another spell. Without hesitation dwarves piled on top of Iris and Anna and Mike both charged at the Avatar with glowing white swords. They had no fear in their eyes as they got close and the Avatar launched his spell. More lighting dropped on everyone, but this time it was weaker as it did not blind those that were still standing of which there were only two. Mike and Anna both managed to pierce the Avatar's mid sections with their sword thru and thru.

"How did you miss the blow?" As they pulled out their blades and readied another attack Mike answered, "Why would you blast yourself, it was only a matter of getting close enough."

Both of them then attacked the left knee successfully slicing through it. For the third time the Avatar screamed and fell to the ground, he then conjured some magic that pushed them away.

As they fell back and charged again he casted another spell, "...Cute but do you think it will work twice?"

Again lighting fell from the sky and while this time it would have hit them the blast had no effect as it hit a magical holy shield that had suddenly appeared on top of their heads. Mike and Anna continued their charge as they sliced across the Avatar's upper torso. Anna smirked as she did, "Never give up hope." When they turned around Rosamia, Adam and all the others had finally arrived.

The Avatar was in a lot of pain now and he was getting tired of it. "More reinforcements... fine..." Still on the ground he turned and focused

his magic on the Portal Tower. Knowing that they had to stop him everyone that could charged at him, but they figured that they were too slow as they heard a giant crack coming from the tower.

Instantly the tower started to collapse and started to fall on top of them. Everyone moved around to avoid the debris, while they did this the Avatar simply stayed where he was and focused.

After a long while it was hard to see who was still standing. Mike looked to his side and Anna was also back on her feet. From a distance they could see that Rosamia was already healing those that had not been so lucky. What they could also see was that Avatar was now standing again after having healed his severed limb. "I did not want to do this, but you leave me no choice as I will survive this eventually but all of you will not."

The ground then started to shake and cracks appeared everywhere. Kyle turned to Jessica and the others, "What the heck is he doing?"

Adam looked as the ground then opened up and swallowed the group of mages that had been busy with keeping everyone away and another that took in some of the Crimson and Crusaders that were still around. "I'm guessing that he's planning on burying us all alive."

The shaking was so bad now that no one could move anymore. Catherine screamed at the Avatar, "You will kill us all, what lies will you tell everyone else once they find out?"

The Avatar laughed, "That you all died protecting your creator from those that wanted to kill him... That you all gave your lives heroically."

Catherine was stunned, "He truly is mad; I can't believe that we all believed in him... That I... It just simply can't end like this."

Due to all the shaking Iris woke up and

moved the dwarves that were still on top of her. They were still alive somehow but given what was happening she did not know for how long that would hold. Unable to move due to the quakes she used a flight spell and flew to Mike and Anna. When she spotted them holding on to each other she went to grab them both but then stopped as Mike waved her away. "Unless you can stop this go to Alexandria or anyone else from the Council." Understanding she continued to where she last saw Alex.

Alexandria opened her eyes and saw that Lithius was still on top of her, she mildly freaked out at what he had done but then put it away as the world around her was literally falling apart.

She looked up as she heard her name and saw Iris. "I was wondering if I would be able to find you in time. Is there anything we can do?"

Alex did not have a lot of time to think or check if she would still have enough power to pull it off. "Pick me up and take me to him, when I'm close enough drop me on him as I'll need to touch him for this one."

Iris did as she asked and flew to the Avatar that was still focusing on his spell. He saw them approach, "You don't have the power to counter this spell, what can you possibly do?"

As she was close enough Iris did as she was told. Alex then fell and reached out to the Avatar and grabbed him around his neck. "I don't need to counter it I just need to stop you from feeding it." Alex suddenly closed her eyes and focused everything she had, glowing blue runes suddenly appeared all over the Avatar's body and then the shaking stopped.

The Avatar gapped onto Alex and threw her away, and started to focus once again. As Iris caught Alex she screamed at the others. "I casted

an anti magic barrier on him, he won't be able to cast anything for a while, it will not last so make it good."

Somewhat understanding Anna and Mike charged at him again, as they figured their enchantments died down when it struck the Avatar's body because of the spell but like before due to the dwarven weapons they were still able to wound him.

Rosamia threw her spear at Julia who joined in on the attack with Adam in toe.

Alexandria was once again on the ground with Iris, "Go do everything that you can. You need to defeat him before he can break the spell, otherwise if he does it again I will not be able to stop him." Understanding Iris joined with the others as well.

During this time Kyle, Jessica and Catherine were using all the healing elixirs that they had and could find to heal the dwarves. The first one to come to was Helram who took a quick look at the situation. "It's down to the wire now right." Theseus who was also close nodded at him, "So it seems."

Helram stood and then unlatched something on his double headed axe, afterward he was able to split them up which created two one handed axes. He handed one to the Commander, "This weapon was made to kill the Avatar, not this one mind you but still why not help me fulfill its destiny." Theseus gladly took it and charged in as well with the dwarf.

The Avatar was trying his best to focus everything he had left, he still had enough power to destroy them all but he first needed to get rid of that spell that that witch had casted on him. The effects of her spell did not in fact stop him from casting but did prevent him from using his magic

on anything else than his own body, which in turn had prevented him from continuing the channeling of his power on the ground in order to bury them all. The cuts that all these ungrateful creatures were giving him were also an issue now, seeing as he was drastically weaker now they were able to cut much deeper than they should have. But all this would matter little very soon.

The attacks continued but then Mike pulled Anna back, "Wait something is wrong."

Red runes then appeared on his body and then blue ones shattered. The Avatar then smiled, "You are all out of time now."

Anna and Mike planted their sword in the ground and held on right before a large magical wind blasted everyone around the Avatar away.

The Avatar then positioned himself and outstretched his hands to the ground and closed his eyes. Before the ground could once again shake as was expected, multiple long magical spikes dropped from the sky and landed on the Avatar once again pinning him where he was. Lithius stood as he continued to generate a few more for extra measure, "You have not destroyed us all."

Reapplying their enchantment that was once again glowing white Mike turned to Anna, "Think he is weak enough now?" She smiled at him, "Only one way to find out."

As the Avatar disenchanted the spikes that were holding him he reached his hand out and started to target a spell at Lithius, suddenly Anna's sword flashed in front of him and his arm fell to the ground. Enraged he pulled his other clawed arm to attack her but then Mike's sword blocked the blow. With his sword now deep in his arm Mike put as much strength as he could and pulled out his sword and severed the other arm of the Avatar. They both then twisted away and as they did

performed a horizontal slash across the back of his legs.

The Avatar was now on his knees and suddenly feared for his life. This was not how he was going to die; he could leave now and regroup for later. He closed his eyes and focused on a teleport spell. His concentration was broken as a large rock that had been shaped as a spike punched through his body. His body then fell to the ground as he saw Lithius, "You will not escape."

Even after all that he was still alive; the Avatar moved his head at Lithius. "I will not be destroyed by my creations..."

Suddenly a large one handed axe imbedded itself in his head, "Oh will you just die already." Helram then twisted his axe which forced the Avatar's head to pop.

A large pain followed by a feeling of emptiness was once again felt by all that had received the holy blessing. Joseph screamed, while Rob endured the pain and assessed the situation. Once the pain had passed Joseph stood and was now suddenly raving like a lunatic, "Impossible!!! Our lord could not be killed by the likes of her. She must have found a way to seal him somehow. Yes that must be it." He then turned to Rob, "I'll go and take a few Crusaders and set him free. This time they will not escape and I will make sure of that myself." He then ran out of the room, "Yes, yes... This time she will pay."

Rob simply ignored him, as he focused inside of himself. There was no more voice, no more magic, no more nothing. The Avatar was dead there could be no denying it. He turned to look

outside and wondered what this now meant for the future of the Order and all the work that they had done all these years and for himself.

Adam with everyone still alive looked at the Avatar's body that was now spewing dark liquid from all his wounds, and eventually black steam rose from his body and the pieces then started to disintegrate. "Hmm, this I did not expect. The lord of light is dying in the same way as the lord of darkness." He then turned to everyone else, "Anyone else find that weird?"

Rosamia then nudged him, "Adam, there are people around that may not like that comment."

Catherine then moved closer and simply looked at the body that had almost all disappeared by now. "Don't worry Rosa let him say whatever. That being may have been our creator but that was not what the Order was praying too. Now that I finally see that, I'll make sure that others see it as well, as I continue to serve the Order as best as I can."

Jessica then turned to her with a smile, "You plan on doing this even without magic?"

Catherine slowly nodded her head, "Yes I do." A sarcastic smile then appeared and she looked at Jessica, "During my recent travels I was told of a priestess in Calculus that was trying the very same thing. I think that I may have to visit her soon and see what that is all about." Jessica smiled, "I'm sure she will be quite thrilled to talk to you about it."

A bit further away from the others Mike looked around and stopped his gaze at where the Avatar's body had fallen, which was now

completely gone. He grabbed Anna's hand, "It's finally over right?"

She smiled, "So it seems." Anna then turned to look at him, "So what's next for us?"

Mike tuned as well and then put his arms around her, "Now we take a long deserved vacation." Anna got closer and whispered, "Sound nice." She then kissed him.

Eventually more and more people started to regain consciousness with the help of Rosamia, Iris and all the other priestess and priest. As they did the slow escort the old cathedral started, the battle was finally over.

Chapter 9

A bit more than two weeks had passed since the fall of the lord of light. Most of that time had been spent returning people to their homes and also mourning for those that did not make it back. Among those that were gone forever were many soldiers and mages, Solanar and four other Council members and also a few dwarves from Helram's team had been wounded beyond saving.

A ceremony for the dead had been held once the other dwarves that had participated in the spell had recovered enough to be on their feet. The ceremony was held in Newport where anyone was invited to pay their respects. Of the Order Catherine, Rob, the General and his lieutenant showed up, representatives from the Guild Leaders of Calculus accompanied by Kyle and Jessica where also present. Most of the proceedings were held by the last four remaining Council members, which included Alexandria. As for the dwarves another type of ceremony was held led by Kilor and Helram. Overall this process had taken a week by itself.

At this time due to all these events both the dwarves and Lights Templar had made temporary homes in Astrum. During one of the nights, when everything had been concluded, Iris was waked by a noise she heard in her room. She did not make a noise or any movement but got ready to act just in case and then she relaxed when she heard a voice. "Psss, Iris... are you awake?"

With the tension gone and now realizing

that she still half asleep Iris mumbled, "Alex...What do you want? I thought we were on break?"

Seeing that she was no longer asleep Alexandria jumped on Iris's bed, "We are but I need your help with something, it's very important."

Iris wondered what would be so important that she needed to deal with in the middle of the night or very early morning depending on how you looked at it. But knowing Alex it would mean that it was in fact important or would be eventually. "Fiiiine, just give me time to get dressed and ready."

Iris was still yawning as Alexandria had teleported her in the middle of the ruins of the Portal Tower. "You know I'm starting to think that Adam is right and you do have an odd fixation on this place... So what are we doing here anyways?"

Alexandria smirked at her, "Har, Har, I do not have a fixation with this place... Well maybe I do a little because it drives Adam nuts but other than that I care very little for it. Anyways we are here because some of my things are still buried here."

Suddenly Iris woke up a bit more due to the curiosity, "What could you possibly still have here, and why would you need to come here during this time to get it?"

As she asked Alexandria was looking around the wreckage, "Why books of course."

Iris shrugged, "But of course it's always books with you..." She then stopped and her eyes suddenly went wide, "Wait you don't mean the dwarven books that you copied right?"

Alexandria then had a childlike fake innocent smile, "Maybe..." Seeing as now Iris was now looking very worried Alex tried to calm her down, "Don't worry those things have so much protection on them that I know at all times where

they are. And it's not like I could have dug them out after the battle, plus then other things came up so yea that's why I'm doing this now."

Iris then calmed down a bit, "Okay well do you know where they are under all of this mess?" Alexandria started to move a bit and then stopped and pointed at a very large piece of tower that was now on the ground. "Under there it seems."

Iris then used the deconstruction magic to break apart the remainder of the wall, as the spell had no effect she turned to Alex with a somewhat angry look, "Hey what gives, the towers magic is still active on these pieces." Alexandria smiled and nodded, "Yes they are, and now you understand why I needed help."

Iris signed, "This will take a long time now. But I don't get it the Avatar broke this place like it was nothing so I assumed that the magic was gone somehow."

Alex then took a lecturing tone, "Tsk, tsks, while the magic of the tower was strong it was nothing compared to his. He never needed to remove the protection before he commanded it to drop on all of us. While it's safe to assume that the magic will be gone from the smaller pieces it's obviously also safe to say that it's still present on the larger ones." She then moved next to her, "Now let do this together otherwise your right this will take way too much time and I would like to be back before anyone notices."

Even with the both of them it had taken many hours but the books had been recovered and were still in an okay shape. Alexandria inspected the content to make sure while Iris lay back on the ground looking at the stars.

Her relaxation was broken when Alexandria pulled out a page from one of the books. "Was it damaged?" Alexandria looked at the page

curiously, "No... It was added by someone."

She looked at the content and her eyes went wide for a second and then tears started to form. Iris was now worried, "What is going on, what does it say?"

Alex turned and gave the page to Iris, "This is the book I gave to Solanar in order for him to understand that spell and do what he did. This page, it was added by him and it has a message on it."

Iris took the page and read it out loud, "Hmm, 'I am sorry that I mislead you but I did not want you to bear this burden. Please don't feel guilty and also keep in mind that no one has to know of your involvement.'"

Iris re-read the page, "Okay I don't get the last part of this, do you?"

Alex nodded, "Those books were given to me, well somewhat anyways, with the assumption that I would not share their knowledge." Iris then understood, "Ah I see, but won't the dwarves find out eventually? I mean he did cast the spell after all there is no hiding that."

Alex agreed, "While that is true at the same time how did he learn about it? He was the most proficient person in arcane magic, well excluding the dwarves, it is possible that he figured it out. Still even if they do think that I helped out somehow, how did I do that? I'm sure that there would be a difference if I told them that I filled in some blanks compared to I gave him the book detailing everything about it."

"Okay, sure, I guess... But is this something that only you and he knew about?" Alex then slowly nodded, "I don't know, I'm guessing no, I mean Lithius was there at his last moments and he would have asked but did he tell him or what did he tell him? That said the dwarves are still asking

about the details and so far all other members have said nothing, so I'm thinking that it's going to stay that way."

Considering the last time they hid something from others and what happened Iris wondered if Solanar's last comment was the right way to go. "Are you sure this is the best way to go about this?"

Alexandria shrugged, "I don't but I don't think I'm going to question it as the decision was already made even before I knew that I had to make it." Seeing Iris's very confused look Alex elaborated. "Remember Adar was unable to tell us how we won with his spell, because he never learned about it. Sure he will learn that there was a second blast but there will be too many questions around it and with a spell like that if nothing is for sure are you willing to trust its information or even believe that its chances of it happening are large?"

Iris started to understand, "I see where you are going now. He saw the victory but could not give us the details of it because he would never have them." She then thought about it more, "Wait does this mean that we had it so hard because of the decision that you just made just now to keep quite?"

Alexandria shrugged, "Meh, maybe and maybe not. I mean I have no clue how far he can see with that spell. If he saw that I would betray them like this, would he have let me copy the books in the first place? And if I did not have those copies then other things would have been even harder, or impossible in some cases? If you start going down that path you never finish. So I'll take a page from Anna and Rosa and go on faith that this is what I should do."

Iris once again lay back down on the

ground and thought about it after a while Alex joined her. Eventually Iris turned to Alex, "Seeing as we are on the topic, do you know what comes next?"

Still looking at the stars she answered, "Hmm, somewhat. I've been dodging the other members of the Council on that matter as they wanted to talk to me about that very thing." Iris chuckled, "Why are you still dodging them, also why are they allowing you to?"

Alex shrugged, "Heck if I know on that last one, but on the first... I'm ignoring them because they are talking about rebuilding the Council once again but different." She then paused to think about her next words, "... I guess I want time to think about that subject."

Iris thought about that, for a while now Alex's membership on the Council had been special at best and this would be a good time to change things again if she wanted too. "Because of that you have no clue on the details then?"

Alex smiled, "Not a clue."

"Well there is still a lot of time before morning, and I'm up now so do you want to go over your options then?" Alex looked over to Iris, "Sure that would be nice." The two stayed there for a few hours more before heading back, but because of it Alex was now more certain about her next steps.

Only a day had passed since the night's outing and as she figured a general meeting with the Council was requested. Alexandria was a bit stunned as she saw Rosamia head to the meeting room as well. "Are you going to the same place I am?"

Rosamia shrugged, "I'm not sure, I mean Council meeting right? But why I'm I being invited to this? Do you know anything about this?" Alexandria shrugged as well, "I have no clue, I

knew this was going to happen but you needing to be there makes me curious now." They arrived at the room and Alexandria reached for the door, "I guess we will both know soon enough."

The meeting room was the more standard type rooms that Astrum held. There were four stone guardian statues at each corner of the room and a large half sphere on the floor in the middle of the room.

What was surprising as the two entered was who was there. As expected, Lithius was present but you also had Kilor and Helram, Theseus and probably the most surprising guest was Catherine, who looked very impatiently at the two. "You know considering that you both live here; you would think that you would be here on time."

Alexandria smirked, "Council meetings don't run like that I will let you know..." A small cough could be heard from Lithius, "Actually they do, it's just we have never reprimanded you for being late as you have never been that late... for a human." Alexandria was just stunned, "Huh, well I am truly sorry about that, I mean you could have told me..." Lithius simply smiled while Catherine just shook her head.

Still smiling Lithius started the meeting as everyone had now arrived. "The Council has taken a blow to its member due to resent actions and I was tasked with the job of rebuilding." He then turned to Alex, "As you know, having a human on the Council was really a test for us. Your late father was the first and then you where allowed to take over his position when the time came." Alexandria interjected, "Well I did have to pass a test of sorts as well." Lithius nodded, "That you did but at the same time you had too in order to make sure that you had the necessary magical

requirements in order to stand amongst the others."

He then turned to everyone else, "And this is what we had agree would be needed at the time. But now new options have opened up and I think that the times for tests and trials are over. Normally there were nine positions for the Council, it was agreed that this would be changed to seven and also another change would be who would be on it. Currently three positions will be held by former Council members so I and another will be a part of it." He then looked at Alexandria, "Seeing as there is only one spot left, Taeral has offered to step down and give the free one to you Alexandria."

This stunned her, clearly Lithius had been right and the issues that she had with Taeral where really mostly felt by her only. Once the initial shock of this died down Alexandria closer her eyes and took a deep breath and then bowed at Lithius, "I am honored but I must decline."

She then raised her head turned to look at Rosamia and smiled and then looked again at Lithius, "I have a new family now, and while I will always be indebted to the Council and be there to help them out with anything they need... It's not my home anymore." She then stopped for a second and slowly nodded, "I think that father would be okay with that as well."

Lithius smiled, "I know that Richard would be happier that you have found your own path then simply following behind his. I will inform Taeral about the change." Alexandria smiled back, "Thanks, also give him my thanks when you do for giving me the options. Even if I did refuse it does mean a lot still."

Lithius nodded and then turned to the dwarves, "Ideally I would wish if both of you would take up two places in this new Council. The

wisdom that both of you have is beyond question, but more than that this would be a way for the races to reconnect. I know that the current decision for the others is to stay in the underground city, but from the looks of it this could change. At least I hope that it will, and because of that I would like it you would continue in the first steps that you have already taken."

Kilor nodded, "I accept your invitation, me and my apprentices want to know more about everything and I agree that this is a good way for us to start."

Helram also nodded, "I don't have an objection against it, especially seeing as we can't go back right now and may not be able to until something can be figured out with the rest of my people with the news and actions that we have learned and done. That said I will add a condition to me participating." Lithius motioned for him to continue and he did, "Again we have no home, now for Kilor and his others Astrum is a fine place to be but for my fighters not so much. So before I join I would like to find a place for my brothers and also make sure that they are properly settled in before I focus on this new Council of yours."

Lithius felt that the request was perfectly reasonable, "I have no issue with your request at all. I do wonder if you have a place in mind already?"

Helram nodded and turned to Theseus, "I do actually. During the fight with the Avatar mirrors were provided for us to get information on the battle as things were happening. While this was handy and informative it was also maddening as we simply sat by and waited." He then shook his head a bit, "Anyways during that we saw fighters very akin to ourselves and now I must say that this is interesting to not only me but a few others as

well. I would like it if we could stay a while and see how things go. There are many things that we can teach you in order for you to be even better then how you already are, plus as I'm sure you saw our ways with metal also produce stronger weapons that can rival some with regular enchantments."

Theseus motioned for him to stop, "Please you don't have to sell me on this at all Helram. We Crimsons would be very happy if you came to join us."

Alexandria chuckled, "I bet Julia is going to love that." Rosamia smiled as well, "Anna will have a fun time with it as well." Theseus simply gave them a glare, seeing as not to long ago the idea of an outsider being with the Crimsons was almost unheard of let alone someone that was from another race.

Lithius nodded as he too like this idea and wonder what it would bring for the future. Finally he turned to Catherine who had been remarkably quite this whole time as Lithius remembered her to be much more vocal at these types of meetings. "Now there have been past conflicts and misunderstandings with the Council and the Order."

Catherine made no added comment so he continued, "But recently with what the Lights Templar had created showed us something interesting. It showed us that now it seems that people where able to discuss and work together given the right people. As I'm sure that it's now obvious I would like to recreate something like that with this new Council but at the same time different. Currently we have elves and dwarves so the last two spots will belong to the humans. The Order has often stood in order to represent human kind and I see no reason to break that, also your previous contributions as a person also make you

a perfect choice. With that will you join the new Council lady Catherine?"

She barely had to think about it, "I accept and I would be honored to continue the work that was started with you and the new members."

Catherine then turned to Rosamia and then Theseus; it seemed the candidates for the next positions were somewhat obvious. Lithius then looked at Rosamia, "As I mentioned to Catherine, your contributions to the previous group was easy to see as are your contributions to your current group. It would please me if you would accept my offer to join Rosamia."

Rosamia slowly shook her head not really believing that she had been picked out of all the others in the group. Still she turned to Alex and gave her a half smile and then bowed at Lithius, "I am very sorry as well as I must decline."

Raising her head and looking at both Lithius and Catherine she further explained, "While, like Alex, I am very honored and while the idea of working again with Catherine seems like a fun and interesting challenge, again like Alex, I also believe that it's not where I should be." She gave Lithius a sad smile, "Again I am sorry."

Lithius nodded, "In all honesty it was expected that you both would refuse and so an alternate was chosen."

Theseus laughed, "I'm not sure that I should be insulted or honored." Before Lithius could explain more the Crimson Commander stopped him. "No worries, I understand the choice and would have probably made the same one in your shoes and take no offence. But now that I've made that clear I must also decline the invitation."

This surprised not only Lithius but everyone else in the room. "Personally I never really agreed with Julia's and the ex-Commander's

decision to participate in whatever you want to call the group that was created back then. Don't get me wrong, a lot of good happened because of it and the Crimson's did benefit from it quite a bit. But in order to stay true to our neutral nature we cannot have a person of command be a part of this as it will be a group of power itself. And if the worst happened and it turns then how can we truly be there to fight for the people oppressed by this power if we are a part of it."

While Lithius was in deep thought about this the Commander continued, "I know I'm bringing a grim thought to the table when you are trying to create something good and it's not my intention to tarnish this. I agree that you should do this with these new steps. I also hope that we can stay as open partners to help out if need be." This time it was Lithius that stopped him, "Say no more as I understand as well. It's unexpected but it is logical considering your group's original mandate."

He then paused, "Hmm, still this does cause an interesting problem on who will be the last to join."

It's then that Catherine took a step forward, "I can think of a possible candidate. There is a certain priestess that I'm sure I can convince to join that currently resides as the head in Calculus. I think that she could be a good addition to this new Council."

Lithius thought about it for a moment, "The priestess you speak about is named Jessica correct?" Catherine smiled and nodded.

"Hmm, she would make an interesting addition as she had been a part of lots of important moments in the recent history of her own free will which speak highly of her character." He thought about it for a little while longer and then nodded at Catherine, "Assuming she agrees than I agree with

the choice." Catherine chuckled and had a bit of a wicked grin on her face, "Oh she will agree no worries."

Rosamia could not hold back the expression of pity on her face as she thought about that conversation. She would have to send her apologies to Jessica at some point in the near future, plus she also wondered what Kyle would think about all this. Oh well, Jessica was soon about to step in the spotlight and there was no better deserving person that she could think of for this task ahead.

While the results had been somewhat unexpected Lithius was happy. "This is good news. Currently we are meeting in Astrum but ideally to make the Council more accessible future meetings will be made in Newport until a better place can be figured out by all of us." He nodded to each of them, "Thank you all again for taking the time to come and for those that have joined more information will be provided to you very shortly, I look forward to working with all of you."

As the others started to leave Rosamia walked over to Catherine, "I hope there are no hard feelings." Catherine shrugged, "About this no, I saw it coming. But I think you are referring to something else." Rosamia hesitated and then nodded in agreement.

Catherine thought about the last little while, "Look I still don't agree with what you did, I don't. But given what happened I can see why you people did what you did. I still wish you would have told me about all of it." Rosamia was about to interrupt but Catherine did not let her, "Spare me it's alright I do really understand. That said while I understand it I still can't except it just yet, you need to give me more time for that one."

Rosamia understood and was also happy

about the answer; it meant hope for forgiveness about hurting her. This left one thing that Rosa was wondering, "If you don't mind me asking what the Orders plans now?"

Catherine chuckled, "Well first your group is no longer wanted by the Order obviously. In all seriousness things are chaotic at this time. Still we will continue to help as we have in the past to the best of our new abilities. Given our addition to this new Council I think that we will be able to move forward in a more positive fashion. Plus working with Jessica will add a new face to all this which will be a good thing. Rob will still stay around but now I suppose that he will mostly be focusing on Missa more than anything. As for Joseph no one seems to know where he is gone. We do need to find him as his last word was very troubling, but that is a matter for another time and something that we shall deal with." Catherine then had a mischievous smile on her face again. "There is also this thing about these healing elixirs that we will need to look into as well, information on those would be a great help."

Rosamia suddenly laughed, "I see what you are asking, but last that I know even Alex does not know how to build those... mind you I'm sure that's only a matter of time. I'll talk to her about it when I get the chance." She then held her hand in front of Catherine, "Best of luck to you." Catherine reached out and shook Rosa's hand, "And to you as well."

Once Catherine let go she made her way to the door and then paused, "By the way, what is next for your group?"

Rosamia shrugged, "I don't know, at this time we are on vacation."

At that Catherine laughed out loud, "Ah that is funny... and unbelievable at the same time."

Goodbye Rosa, and good luck as well."

As Rosa came out of the room she saw that Alex was waiting for her. "Did you close things off?"

Rosamia nodded, "Pretty much, but you did not have to wait." Alexandria smiled, "I had nothing to do, I mean we are on vacation right." Rosamia then laughed, Catherine had been right hearing it did sound unbelievable.

A day had passed after the news had been made; currently it was night time and Mike suddenly woke up to find that Anna was not next to him in bed. He looked around to see that she was standing next to a large window looking outside. Mike stood and made his way to her and put his arms around her, "What are you thinking about at this time?"

Anna grabbed hold of his hands, "I'm just thinking on how much things are changing, the shrinking of the new Council and their plans. Plus the dwarves with the Crimson and there is also the Order."

"Hmm, well if it makes you feel any better I think that Lithius pulled a fast one on everyone as I don't think the number in his head is seven but still nine. It's just that the last two are not ready yet nor are the others I would think." Anna turned to face him, "Your thinking the orcs? I guess that makes sense if you wanted a representation from all races for one common goal." She smiled the more she thought about it, "That is a wonderful idea really."

Mike nodded, "True, but going back to what you were saying about change." A worried look was now on his face, "It's not like you to worry about that." Anna laughed, "No that's more like you." Still smiling she continued, "I was not worried about it, it was more like it got me thinking. They are all changing and finding their

way, so I was also wondering if we were still really needed."

Mike need to think about this before he answered, "Now from my view point that would mean that you are wondering if we are now useless and that we should find some way to contribute but I'm thinking you mean something else."

Anna smiled, "Yes I do. I mean for all this time it seems that we have been trapped on this cycle of needing to be there but now it seems that we have a chance to break out of it. I don't know it's just something that occurred to me and I wanted to think about it."

"Hmm, I think I get it."

Anna was curious, "You do?"

He nodded, "I do, I mean our lives have been one constant fight after another most of the time because of the Avatars ongoing wars. Now that it's all done and that others will be there to clean up that allows us the potential for a new path as well."

Anna smiled and then kissed him, "I point the direction and you think of the plan." Mike then kissed her, "Seems to work well for us."

A few moments later Mike then moved away and got dressed. Anna stared at him, "Now it's my turn to ask, what are you doing?"

Mike chuckled, "Starting a new path, do you want to contact Alexandria and Iris while I contact Rosamia and Adam?" Anna laughed, "Now!? Are you sure?" Mike shrugged, "Why not, it's not like we can't be contacted due to the pendants but if we leave now it also send a message that I think all will understand." Anna nodded, "It's time for everyone else to take the lead, let's do it."

"Aaaalex... oh Aaaalex..." Alexandria suddenly woke up very groggy as a glowing head

showed up from the pendant that had been sitting on top of a pile of books. Suddenly she was thinking that she should not have ignored the comments of the others and built a shut off for those. Not really focusing she looked at the floating head of Anna, which caused her eyes some pain as they were still adjusting, "Whaaaaa..."

"I know this will sound very sudden but get Iris and yourself ready we are all going to go to your place with a request in a little while. We will explain then."

As she terminated the communication Alex looked to the window and it was pitch black. "What the heck time is it? And seriously they want me to wake up Iris, I am so going to hear it for doing that to her again."

A few hours had passed to explain to everyone this new idea, plus it also took a while for everyone to properly wake up. From that point they all went to grab what was handy and met back at Alex who then casted a spell and with that the Lights Templar said their goodbye to Astrum.

Now traveling on one of the main roads that was used to transport goods from and too Newport Adam looked at Alexandria that was leading the way, he then turned back to Anna and Mike. "Okay I know you said it but what are we doing?"

Anna smiled, "We are creating a new path for ourselves."

Adam nodded, "Sure sure but what does that mean?"

It was easy to see that Alexandria was clearly excited about the idea as she answered him, "It means that we do what we want. Explore for treasure, battle ancient monsters for forgotten knowledge, or even deal with some bandits that have been attacking some caravans on a trade route."

Adam was not really sure what to say, "Seriously?"

Iris looked at him and nodded, "Actually there has been an increase due to the resent events with that. That aside this allows us freedom to do anything and also deal with other issues that we have yet to close off." That Adam understood especially coming from Iris, it's then that Rosamia grabbed hold of his hand, "Come on Adam take a leap of faith with all of us."

He simply nodded his head, "Fine fine, whatever... Still should we not have taken some horses along then?" Mike laughed at that, "See it's not just me." Anna poked him, "When you said it way back when it was not a bad idea it was your timing that was horrible and also how you said it." Alexandria then butted in, "Plus horses are a waste, I mean me and Iris can take us anywhere so why horses?"

Adam was still not convinced, "Okay but if that is the case then why are we walking on this road then?"

Alexandria turned to him with an innocent and playful look on her face, "Ahhh I thought you would have figured it out by now, I mean I did give you a big hint and so did Iris." Now with a concerned look Alex turned to Rosa, "You will have to be careful with him, I mean if he's already slipping and considering the amount of years we all still have compared to other humans..."

Adam was not falling for it, "I'm not slipping, I just didn't think that you where serious about the bandits."

As Alexandria continued to tease Adam as she did not believe him, Mike grabbed Anna's hand and then moved in closer to give her a quick kiss. They both smiled, and looked in front to see all their friends around them, and then as the sun

was coming up they turned to the skies and smiled even more, "Simply beautiful."

Epilogue

Iris's journal

Overall this was a very long road for me; at least it feels that way even if only a few years have passed since all this started. Even if all this did not start off well, never could I have imagined that I would have made it this far with all these adventures.

I am so happy to have met everyone as they have helped me in so many ways to better and challenge myself. I constantly hope that I was able to return the favor with everything that I did and also plan to do in the future. I also hope that they will stay with me for those future moments so that they can encourage me again or help me pick myself up when I stumble.

I think that in the end all I even wanted was for them to be proud of me and also for others see them as I see them.

These will be my final words that I write in this journal for a while so I will leave it off with this.

Never give up, no matter the odds.

Follow your heart and your regrets will be few.

And finally fight so others don't have to.

From, Iris, of the Lights Templar

