

CHAPTER 3: The Sun and the Moon, in Harmony(?)

Later on, after Atlas and Janet have gotten some food and rest...



“Holy cow...!”

Atlas’s dorm seems to have already been decorated, just how they like it. It’s themed in a soft pink and yellow, with plenty of cutely shaped pillows and a weighted blanket on the bed. There’s a desk towards the wall with a variety of pens and markers lined up in the drawers, as well as a cushioned rolling chair tucked into the space underneath the desk.



“Pretty cool, huh?” Citopixe bounds in, making herself comfortable on Atlas’s bed. “All of the rooms are catered to their owner’s unique wants and needs!”



“I’m not sure if that’s cool or creepy... but it *is* a really nice bedroom...” What else did the ship already know about them...?



“Atlaaaas!” Janet comes bounding in, peeking at their room. “Your room is so cute...! Wanna see mine?”



“Sure!” Atlas follows Janet to her room (with Citopixe on both of their tails).



“Check it out! Isn’t it cool?” She darts to the middle of the room and puts her arms out excitedly.

While Atlas’s room is made for comfort, Janet’s is much more catered towards her gadgets. There’s a spacious worktable, as well as a variety of tools—some Atlas doesn’t even know the name of—with a crate full of parts set off to the side. On the other end of her room is a large bed with a single blanket and a body pillow. The whole room is made of a nice, warm wood.



“Oooohh...! This is perfect for you, Janet!”



“Isn’t it!? I’m so excited!” She bounces on her heels. “Y’know, maybe staying here isn’t as bad as I thought it’d be!”



“I’d still like to go back to Setune and make sure everyone’s okay, but it *does* seem like we’ve got a pretty good setup here...” Honestly, this is more than they could ever ask for.



“Of course! We’ll get all good at magic ‘n’ stuff, we’ll go beat up the Aerumna in Setune, and then we’re free to explore!”



“Yeah...!” They nod. “In that case, I should probably go find Lariat, since they’re the one teaching me moon magic.” They said they’d be in the library...



“Of course!” She reaches over to pat Atlas on the shoulder. “You go do that, and I’ll come up with some cool gadgets to show you by the time you’re done! Cooler than the auto-lockpick!”



“Okay...!” With that, they’re off to the library!



For a giant flying airship, it’s pretty easy to navigate. Atlas hasn’t even felt any. Air...sickness...? That’s probably what that’s called. They haven’t even felt any airsickness since they came aboard. The ship doesn’t sway at all, and it doesn’t feel like they’re in motion, even though they know the ship’s on its way to the Oracle Desert...hm.



“Lariat?” They walk into the library, looking around... It’s not *gigantic*, but Atlas would hazard that there’s about a thousand books in here. It seems cozy, too. There’s a cute little reading nook with a window that proudly displays the outside world as it passes by.



“Atlas.” They close their book, tone flat. “I assume you’re here to learn about moon magic?”



“Oh, um, yeah! Robin said you’d teach me about moon magic.” They gently touch the moon badge, now affixed to their hoodie.



“Good. Then let’s begin.” They stand from their seat and walk over to Atlas, looking them over.



...It’s here that Atlas realizes Lariat is quite a bit taller than them. Huh.



They don’t seem perturbed by Atlas’s realization.

“How well can you visualize things in your mind?”



“Um... I can kind of see things in a weird black space at the back of my mind...?”



“Sufficient.” Lariat nods. “To put it simply, moon magic is the magic of the mind. Your proficiency in moon magic depends almost solely on your ability to imagine it in action. The stronger your visualization is, the stronger your moon magic becomes.”



“So it’s...whatever I can imagine, basically?” Blink blink.



“Not quite.” They shake their head. “Moon magic has its own limitations. To make it easier to understand what it is and isn’t capable of, there are a set number of subtypes for you to keep in mind.” With this, they hold up one hand with their fingers splayed out, pointing to each one from their thumb to their pinky:



“These are common mnemonic devices used to remember the five types of moon magic. Time magic is the thumb. Energy magic is the index. Memory magic is the middle. Dream magic is the ring, as it is said that dreams circle our minds like a ring. Sensory magic is the pinky, as it affects one’s *perceived* reality. The palm is spacial magic, as it affects the whole of our world.”



"I... think that makes sense..." Time, energy, memory, dream, sensory, spacial... Today Ends My Drastic...Supper Surprise...? They'll figure something out.



"Is there any particular type of moon magic that stands out to you?"



"Um..." They think for a moment... "...What does energy magic do?"



"Energy magic alters one's life force and their ability to use magic. When used on others, this could inhibit their ability to use any one or more types of magic for a duration of time, depending on the user's own moon magic and visualization."



"That one sounds... dangerous."



“It can be, yes.” They nod. “Energy magic is also commonly used in order to create weaponry from one’s own essence, or to amplify one’s own magic. Anything that adds up to who or what a person is—their memories, a certain emotion, their ability to use magic—can be used as fodder. However, if that weapon is destroyed, or the spell is botched, the sacrifice the user chose will also be destroyed. That is why it is called *sacrificial magic* when used in this way.”



“Ohh...” That also sounds scary! “Well...what kind of moon magic do you think I could do with the moon badge?”



Lariat tilts their head at the badge, thoughtful...

“...From what I can tell, that badge has a wealth of moon magic stored inside of it. I cannot tell how much, but it is more than enough to partition of a small amount in order to form a weapon.”



“D...didn’t you just say that was really dangerous??”



“You misunderstand.” They shake their head, unreactive. “The danger of sacrificial magic depends on how much you sacrifice. It’s a gamble, so to say. The more you put in, the more risk there is.” They gently reach over to tap the surface of the moon badge.

“With the amount of magic stored within that badge, alongside the fact that you would not be using your *own* magic, you could create a weak weapon to start without risking much damage to you or the badge itself. Many types of moon magic require complex visualization, so this would be a simple place to start.”



“If you’re sure... How would I start, then?” Sure, they could just imagine a dagger, but that doesn’t seem like the right answer.



“What you will be doing is pulling a dagger from the badge itself. You will need to imagine the intended effect as you are performing the action. You may go as slowly as you need.”



“As slowly as I need...”



They close their eyes, making a loose fist with their hand and pressing it to the moon badge. Their shut eyes scrunch a bit as they focus, slowly and carefully drawing their hand outward, imagining a small dagger being drawn from the badge...



And just like that, they open their eyes to a pure white dagger in their hand, glowing softly with the magic they had just called upon.



They don't seem to react at first, but as they stare at the blade...

"...You're a natural."



"Oh! Um, thank you..." Lariat's expression didn't even change...



"What do I do with it now that I have it, though...?" They gently poke the blade. It's sharp, just like a real blade...



“Now that you have an idea of what is required of you, you may dispel it however you wish.”



“So I can just...”



They close their eyes again and slide the dagger back into the badge, imagining it being absorbed back into the badge...



And just like that, it's gone.



“Perfect.” Another nod in approval. “While you are safe to close your eyes while practicing, there may come a time where closing your eyes will put you in danger. As we study further, please keep this in mind and focus on being able to impose your imagination over reality.”



“That’s a good point... I’ll see what I can do.” Even if Lariat doesn’t seem to emote much, they’re easy to work with, so Atlas doesn’t feel *too* unsure of themself...



Lariat nods, looking thoughtful for a moment.



“I noticed that your dorm came with art supplies. Do you consider yourself an artist?”



“Oh! Um, I do. I actually left my sketchbook in Setune, so I was happy to see that the airship gave me a bunch of art supplies...” Did Lariat go in their room...?



“Art is a useful way to practice both sun and moon magic, as it deals in many forms of expression that would otherwise not be practical. Would you like to try that?”



“Oh! That makes sense... Sure! Let me just go get my sketchbook...”

Meanwhile...



“Janet?” Robin walks down the dorm hall, looking for Janet’s door...



Janet opens her dorm door and peeks out.

“Robin? What’s up?”



“We’ve arrived at the Oracle Desert. Are you ready to go?”



“Sure am! I can just leave this project for later.” She shuts the door for a moment, leaving Robin with some bangs and clatters...



Before popping back out, raring to go!



“Good.” He nods. “You’ll be going with Rem.”



She blinks, suddenly hesitant.

“Will it...just be the two of us?”



“I need to be ready to take off quickly in the event of an emergency. Citopixe can detect strong magic sources, including mages, which makes her valuable as a way to detect intruders on the ship. Nianory is busy with nir maps, and Atlas is still studying with Lariat.”



“...What about Cornet?”



“Cornet is grounded for today because she ate too many snacks before dinner last night.”



“Ah... I see.”



“If you feel uncertain, you’re always free to come back to the airship.” He tries his best to be reassuring. “Tsrif is a friendly clan. The people there are always happy to meet strangers, so don’t worry about overstepping. Rem knows the area well, too.”



“It’s fine! I’m just...worried about whether or not I’ll be able to find someone, I guess...”



“Don’t be worried about whether or not you’ll fail or succeed. If no one’s willing to teach you, I can. This is just a good opportunity for you to get to know the world outside of Setune.”



“If you’re sure...” She doesn’t seem entirely convinced, but she doesn’t want to keep arguing with him, either.



“You’ll do just fine. I promise.” He gently pats her on the shoulder. “Rem’s waiting in the lounge.”



“Dad behavior...” She heads off past him, mumbling to herself.



Dad behavior, she says...



Janet walks off to the lounge, still looking uncertain. It'd been a long time since she'd done anything without Atlas at her side, and while Rem seemed nice, she still felt very out of place... Would Rem even like her?



Nonetheless, Rem sits waiting in the lounge.

"Are you ready to go, Janet?" She tilts her head slightly.



"Ready as I'll ever be!" She puts on a happy face, regardless of her inner turmoil. It's Fine.



"Okay." She stands up and heads out the door without much fanfare...



Oh! She's just. Going. Okay. Janet follows after her, feeling all the more like a fish out of water.



As soon as she heads outside, however, what she sees amazes her.

Tsrif is a circular kingdom full of life and sunlight. Its streets are bathed in colorful fabrics that billow in the wind as they hang from balconies and lampposts, gems fastened to tassels glittering in the light. There's plenty of vendors peddling their goods, food and charms and clothing alike, children running free and happy with their treats, adults moving this way and that with their groceries... Music can be heard playing in the town square, a large fountain with a statue of a woman cradling the sun in its center. The buildings and structures seem to be made of sandstone, with various symbols and circles carved onto their surface and inlaid with what appears to be copper. A large palace can be seen all the way at the north end of the town, overseeing everything around it.

It's also very, very hot out.



"Where do you want to go first?" Rem stands beside Janet, waiting for her answer.



"I—I'm not sure..." She looks very uncertain, glancing between Rem and the rest of Tsrif. "Are you. Hot? I felt really hot and sweaty for a second, but now I feel fine..."



"Oh." She shakes her head. "When you step into Tsrif, it sees how well your body is handling the heat and changes your body temperature to make sure you're comfortable. It makes sense that you'd feel really hot and then fine."



"It can...do all that the moment I step foot on the sand...? The town itself??"



"The Oracle Desert is the hottest place on the planet, so they wanted to make it easy for visitors to handle. It's nice."



“Huh... At least I don’t have to bring my own air conditioning, then...” She looks around, trying to spot something that seems useful...



“Maybe...the vendors would know someone who could teach me sun magic...?”



“Okay.” Rem nods. “I wanna get a sunflat wrap while we’re here.” She trots off to the vendor’s row, humming a little tune under her breath.



Janet takes a deep breath, trying to calm her nerves before she follows after Rem.



Rem walks up to one of the vendor stalls, rifling around in a pouch at her belt and pulling out a handful of coins.



“One lamb sunflat wrap, please.” She sets the coins on the counter.



“Sure thing, sweetheart!” A tall woman with a sigil drawn on her forehead in red ink starts working on a wrap for Rem, stamping a circular symbol on the bread before filling it with meat and vegetables and wrapping it in paper.



“What’s that symbol that she stamped on the bread?” It looked too complicated to be a store logo...



“That’s a magic circle. It’s basically a sun magic spell.” She takes the wrap from the vendor and unwraps it a little to show Janet the circle. “That’s what you’ll be learning.”



“Ohhh, is someone learning sun magic for the first time?” The vendor peeks at Janet, tilting her head.



“Oh! Um, yeah. I’m actually looking for someone who can teach me right now...” She’s a little shy, being asked about it so suddenly...



“Lemme think...” The vendor crosses her arms. “If you’re learning from the bottom up, you’d probably have more luck in the Hearthhall, near the center of town. That’s where you’ll find pros and amateurs exchanging tips on how to make each others’ lives easier.”



“That’s a good idea. The Hearthhall is a good place to meet new people, too.” Rem takes a bite out of her sunflat wrap. “D’you wanna hehh dere righ’ now?”



“That sounds like a good idea! Thank you, miss.” Janet nods in thanks to the vendor.



“No problem, kiddo. Good luck out there!”



“The Hearthhall is this way.” Rem trots over towards the town square, munching as she goes.



Janet follows along, looking every which way and taking in the sights. Now that she’s getting more comfortable, it really is a beautiful area... The gem tassels are pretty.

The Hearthhall is a large, dome-shaped building with plenty of stained glass windows, filtering colored light in and giving the hall a sense of vibrancy. There’s different partitioned areas of the hall dedicated to different activities—a communal kitchen stocked with tools and ingredients, a small library and reading area, round tables for discussions and dining... The inside is decorated with various hanging gemstones and chimes in complex shapes, as well as more fabric hangings accented with beads and trinkets.



"Let's head to the learning center." Rem trots over to the open library, looking around...



There's a man in here, happily chatting away with some of the children sitting on the floor. He's taking sips from a deep red drink with gold flakes in it.



"Excuse me, sir." Rem walks up to him without hesitation, tossing the paper remains of her wrap in a nearby trash can. "Could you teach my friend about sun magic?"



"Oh, hello there!" The man turns around to face Rem, giving her an amicable smile. "I'm always happy to teach someone something new! Is your friend one of these children here?"



"No. She's an adult." Rem points at Janet.



...She waves. Ehe.



“Ah! My apologies.” Eheh.



“You do look like you’re not from around here, though... I’d be glad to help you, even if what I’d be teaching is generally taught to children. I hope you can forgive the simplicity.”



“I-it’s alright! I’ve been feeling kind of out of place anyhow, so... explain it to me like I’m 6!”



“Of course! Allow me to begin, in that case...”

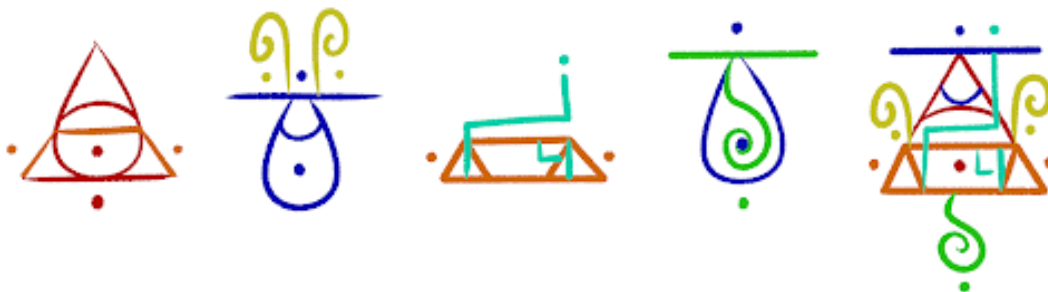


“Sun magic is the magic of the elements. Because it’s based in the material world, it needs to be activated in the same way. That’s why we use *magic circles*.” He walks over to a shelf full of pamphlets and pulls one out, offering it to Janet.

There are six basic elements involved in sun magic.



Elements can be combined in a variety of ways, so long as their components are visible.



Once the element(s) are drawn, a magic circle is used to declare the spell's intent. This can be done by focusing on the spell's desired effect as the circle is drawn, or by using modifiers.



Fire Spell



Fire Curse



Ward Against
Fire Curses

(Modifiers can be designed and used by anyone who knows their intent.)



“Oohh... So I just have to memorize these symbols?” If she could keep the pamphlet, that seemed like a simple enough task...



“That’s the easy part! The hard part is knowing how to combine them and simplify the combinations into easily copied forms.” The man points at the symbols on the pamphlet. “Do you see these dots here in each of the elemental symbols?”



“Uh-huh.” She nods, following his hand as he gestures to each one.



“Let’s say that you wanted a quick and simple circle to heat up some leftover food. Rather than draw the entire fire symbol on the container, you can just draw a teardrop shape and put the two dots in it, then draw your circle and the modifier for warming objects. If you *really* know what you’re doing, and *maybe* have some moon magic under your belt too, you can just draw the dots and the circle with its modifiers.”



“That’s actually pretty cool!” She’ll have to ask Atlas what they learned about moon magic, then! “So I can put these symbols on just about anything?”



“You’ve got the idea! Try not to go too crazy when you’re first learning, though. A magic circle gone wrong can have some pretty nasty side effects.”



“And, as a warning, it’s best not to use sun magic on people or yourself, unless you really know what you’re doing. Using sun magic on a person is called blood magic, and it can mess someone up for life if not used correctly.”



“Blood magic, huh...” She remembers that Robin created Aerumna by using blood magic on himself... “You don’t have to tell me twice. I’m not touching that stuff with a ten foot pole.”



Actually, now that she’s thinking about it... “Do you know how I’d use sun magic with this badge?” She shows the sun badge to the man.



He takes the sun badge and looks it over, tilting his head...

"I've never seen anything like this before. It looks like a sun crystal, but I've never seen someone turn a crystal into a wearable badge like this... Usually, crystals are used to power tools, but this seems to be made specifically to supply a user with magic."



"I'm afraid that there's no way to use this badge yourself. Sun magic has to be applied to something—it can't be directly drawn out like moon magic can."



"Wait, what? That can't be right..." She takes the sun badge back, looking between it and the man. "I specifically came here so I could learn how to use it...! Are you really certain that there's no other way?"



"I'm sorry, but there's nothing I can teach you that will help you with that badge." He shakes his head sadly. "The only thing I can think of is a form of sun magic that's been forbidden for hundreds of years. There's only one oracle left who knows how it works, and he was the very first oracle to be created by Ichorite."



“Well, where is he? Surely he can teach me!”



“Janet, he—”



“The only way you would be able to speak with Dysmas Invictus is by gaining access to the High Oracle Kingdom. The only people who have ever gone there are others who ascended to godhood, in order to become sanctioned Oracle Gods.” He may as well be honest...



“So what you’re saying is that I’d have to become a god to learn it... Great.” Sigh.



“I’m sorry that there isn’t more I can teach you. You’re free to browse the library and speak with the other oracles here, but otherwise, you’d be better off learning it the traditional way.”



“I’m sorry, Janet.” Rem frowns, looking away. “Let’s try seeing what else we can learn before we head back, okay?”



“Alright...” She still seems very deflated...



Regardless, the two continue their research...



...While, unbeknownst to them, an eavesdropper makes their escape.

END CHAPTER 3