

CHAPTER 4: Above the Veil

After Atlas and Janet have gotten their respective fills of research and training...



“We’re baaaaack!” Janet trots back into the airship, chipper as ever.



Rem follows after her, feeling fulfilled.



“Janet!” Atlas heads over to meet them, sketchbook in their arms. “Did you and Rem have a good time in Tsrif?”



“It would’ve been more fun if I’d learned exactly what I needed... I learned a lot, but not how to use this stupid badge!”



“Does sun magic not work the same way moon magic does...?” They blink, tilting their head.



“If I want to use sun magic, I’ve gotta draw a magic circle and all that, so I can’t use the magic directly from the badge! I’m just tapping into what I already have...”



“Ah... I guess that makes sense, if moon magic is metaphysical and sun magic is physical...”



“Except!! There *is* a way to use my badge, but it’s apparently been **forbidden** for hundreds of years! Why do I get the badge that’s all forbidden and crap!?”



“Just...outright *forbidden*...?”



“It’s out of respect for the first oracle, since his ability to use it got sealed during some war... but he’s still alive, so I could just ask him!”



“That is, if he weren’t up in god world...”



Meanwhile, Citopixe waddles onto the scene.



“God...world?”



She clears her throat.



“It’s some kingdom for gods in another plane of existence! Atlas, how am I supposed to use this badge if I have to become a god to even ask about it?!”



She clears her throat again.



“Maybe there’s another way to get in contact...? Did you learn anything else about oracles while you were there?”



“I mean... not really... They all have patron gods that give them future sight, but I dunno about much else...”



Man, these guys are worse listeners than she thought. Welp. Out come the big guns!



“HEY, PUNKS!”



They both look at Citopixe after their hearts get done nearly jumping out of their chests.



“There’s someone hiding in the closet.” She points at the closet in question. “In case either of you were curious.”



...Rem goes to the closet and opens it.



“Rem, wait—!”



Someone is absolutely, not-so-subtly, hiding in the closet, limbs braced against the walls close to the ceiling. They stare down at Rem with an expression akin to *Oh, shit*.



“We’re not going to hurt you.” Blink blink. “Can I ask why you’re here?”



Blink blink.

“...Step away from the closet and I’ll talk.”



...She takes two steps back.



Phi hops down from where phi was braced, landing in front of Rem.



“...So, um.” How does phi start this.



“You’re an oracle, right...?” Atlas hesitantly speaks, looking phir up and down. Phi looked different from the oracles they saw in town from the window... Phir clothes are much more cropped, with no loose fabric or accessories—aside from a gold choker around phir neck.

“Did you sneak onto the ship while Janet and Rem were in Tsrif...?”



“Yeah, let’s start with that.”



“I’m an assassin who was assigned to keep an eye on your party until you left. Tsrif haven’t seen this airship for at least ten years, so my brother wanted to make sure that the people on it were still friendly.”



“Your brother...?” Who was sending *assassins* after them??



“Y’know the guy who was sitting there drinking fancy wine in a library? That guy.”



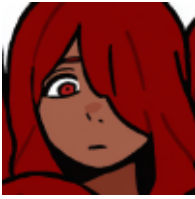
“But he seemed so nice! Why would he send an assassin after us...?”



“First of all, assassin is kind of a misnomer. I also keep an eye on people entering and leaving Tsrif, just to make sure they’re here with good intentions.”



“Secondly...do you really not know who he is?”



“He didn’t tell us his name.” Rem shakes her head. She hadn’t seen him the last time she went to Tsrif...



“That’s *Brook Temple*. Y’know, the current prince of Tsrif?”



“The *prince*??”



“But if he’s the prince, and you’re his sibling, why are you just an assassin?”



Phi crosses phir arms.

“Oh, y’know. Just because I’ve been *exiled* since I was like, 6 years old.”



“You’re exiled, but you’re still expected to do whatever he says? What a load of crap!”



“Janet...!” That’s still royalty she’s talking about!



“No, she’s right! It *is* a load of crap, and I’m glad someone finally said it!”



“...That’s why I hitched a ride on your airship—or I was planning to, anyway. I’m tired to having to do everyone else’s dirty work.”



“Won’t you get in trouble for leaving?” She doesn’t seem especially bothered by phir being here... it’s mostly the consequences of *taking phir along* that concern her.



"I don't care what that guy thinks. He and his dumb patron god advisor were probably waiting for me to die anyhow."



"He probably checked how this was gonna go down before assigning it to me anyway, so if he didn't stop me then, he doesn't give enough of a crap to do it now."



"...Can we at least ask what your name is first...?" They fumble with their hands. "I'm Atlas."



"...It's Ash. Ash Temple."



"Well, I can't make any decisions on who stays myself, but it's nice to meet you, Ash."



“We’re always taking on strays, so long as they can behave themselves!”



“I guess being called a stray isn’t. Inaccurate...” Phi’s sort of surprised they took phir in so easily, but...



“In that case, it’s nice to meet you guys, too!” Phir attitude lightens significantly, now that phi knows phi’s safe. “I’m no slacker, so if you need help with anything, I’m happy to earn my share.”

Phi pauses.



“Just, um. Know that I can’t really provide *normal* future sight.”



“What’s the difference?”



"You don't—?"



"Well. I guess that's fine. At least it explains why you didn't throw me out the moment you saw me."



"Alright, oracle primer for those who aren't in the know. Basically, there's two primary types of future sight that oracles can get from their patron gods: there's miracle, which shows you a scenario going perfectly and whatever steps you need to get there, and there's unaltered, which just shows you the events that'll go down without any interference."



"...And then there's the third type, that only one oracle god in existence gives: cursed sight. It only shows the worst case scenario, where everything that could possibly go wrong, goes wrong. That's what I've got, and that's the reason why I'm exiled."



"So you were exiled because you got a bad patron god? Can't you just get a new one?"



“It’s considered taboo to sever your ties with your patron god, and even if it weren’t, it’s incredibly painful.” Phi taps the sigil on phir forehead. “ Unfortunately for me, I’m stuck with this freak.”

“Heeeey! I’m not a freak!”

...A very whiny voice comes from the sigil on Ash’s forehead.



...



“...Can your patron god...talk through the sigil on your forehead...?”



Phi sighs.

“Yeah. Patron gods don’t usually snoop and commentate, but that’s all mine likes to do.”

"Yepperoni!" A much more chipper tone comes from the sigil. *"Suoudicconi—Suo for short—at your service! I'm the one who chooses which god goes to which oracle, so there's suuuuper no switching me out!"*



Processing...



"Wait, that means you're an oracle god, right!?" Janet darts up to Ash, clasping her hands and staring directly at phir sigil.



"Could you pleeeaaaaaaase get me an audience with Dysmas Invictus? I need to learn how to use this sun badge, but the only way I can do it is through a type of sun magic only he knows!"



"Hey, gimme some space!" Jeez!

"Hmmm..." Suo hums and ahs. *"Weeeell, that's not really something that happens, generally, but maaaaaybe I can put in a good word for you... Here, gimme a second!"*



“You hear that, Atlas!? They’re gonna *put in a good word* for me!”



“That’s great, Janet!” They feel kind of bad for her, with things being so much more difficult for her and her sun badge...

Unceremoniously, a portal opens in the ceiling.



And out pops a little freak, dropping down and wobbling into the middle of the crowd.



“Hiya, folks! Suoudicconi—Suo for short—at your service, again!”



“Oh! You’re here!”



"Oh. You're here."



"Wowee! I love it when I get mixed reactions!"



"Now, you were talking about a sun badge? Can I take a look at it?" They make grabby hands.



"Oh, sure!" She hands the sun badge to Suo.



"Lemme see here..." Suo takes the badge and looks it over...



“Huh! Yeah, I genuinely have no clue where you got this.” They hand it back. “It kinda looks like a crystal, but it also doesn’t!”



“Those things have a crapton of magic in them, too! More than I’ve ever seen before!”



“See? And I *really* need to learn how to use it, so please, *please* let me see Dysmas...!”



“Hmmm...” Suo ruminates for a moment... “Letting any ol’ shmuck into the High Oracle Kingdom is kind of a no-no... Hrrrmnrmnrmnrm...”



“Maybe Dysmas could come here...?” They’re trying to be helpful.



“Hey, there’s an idea!” They pat Atlas on the head, despite being about the same height as them. “I’ll see if the big guy would be alright heading over here for a chat.”



Headpat...??



“**Yes!!** Thank you, thank you, thank you!” Janet hops in place excitedly!



“Aaaalways happy to help! Just don’t expect it to be right away. He’s a very busy guy, y’know.”



“We can always tell each other what we’ve learned in the meantime.” Atlas is excited to learn more about sun magic.



“Are you both learning about magic for the first time? I could give you some pointers myself, since I use both types together.”



“Ooh...! That would be really helpful!” Even more excited!



“There you go! Get yourselves all saddled with plenty of magic knowledge, and I’ll go see if our good friend Dymmie wants to pay a visit!” With that, Suo waves and turns on their heel, heading back into another portal.



“How do they make those portals?”



“That’s probably a moon magic spell they practiced enough to be able to conjure it up without much thought. Teleportation’s big when you become a god.”



“Eeee! I’m so excited! Magic is so cool...!!” She bounces in place, still full of energy.



“Yay! I’m glad.” It’s nice to see Janet so happy... “Let’s go to the library and share everything we’ve learned so far! I’m sure Lariat will be interested in hearing what happened, too!”



With that, friendships were quickly beginning to form between the ship’s inhabitants, both new and old. With their journey only just beginning, who knows what will unfold next?

END CHAPTER 4