

## Chapter 1

Time to Toss the Dice

Where: Inari's personal dimension

When: Time is meaningless

Lysanias appeared outside Inari's cabin as usual, and she was humming softly to herself while she watered the flowers that sat in wooden boxes outside her windows.

"I'm back," he announced. She gave a shriek and tossed the watering can up, spinning to face him. He figured he would get a face full of water and was about to dodge but the can simply went spinning up, and up, and up above the tree line.

"Now you owe me a watering can," Inari announced, hands on her hips. "Look what you made me do. That was my best can."

"I'll see what I can do," he told her, somewhat sarcastically.

"You better. Now, you look like a man with questions. You want to see?" She was holding a mirror and stepped towards him.

"No I don't!" he quickly insisted, closing his eyes. He remembered the last time he looked in one of her mirrors.

### POW

He staggered as something smacked him in the head with a thunk, and water splashed into him.

"Hey, it came back!" she exclaimed, and he opened his eyes woozily. There was the can, laying on the grass beside him. "I guess you don't owe me anything."

"Have we progressed to purely physical humor, then?" he asked dryly, rubbing his head. He felt quite a bump and sent healing energy into it.

"Oh, I see. You sneak up on me assuming I would know you were coming because I'm all powerful or whatnot, but when I don't say 'look out there's a falling watering can' to you because I figure with all your powers you can easily sense it and somehow it becomes my fault when really, you were the one that closed your eyes to avoid looking into my innocent little mirror here?"

He traced a finger through the air trying to parse that sentence. "Yes?"

"Oh." At least she had the decency to look somewhat confused herself. "But you do look like you have questions."

"A few. Take a look at this." He pulled the wooden shape from the pocket and she gestured, floating it over to herself. He could feel magical energies surrounding it, and she grimaced.

"An interesting object. I presume this is Hades?"

"It's what was left after I hit him with the sword, yes. Apparently if you kill someone with it, they change?"

"That's what I hoped for. You have to kill the avatar anyway, you might as well get something out of it. And it's a nice sword in any case. But this..."

"What is it? We played around with it, and it doesn't seem to need ink, but just pressing it down on paper makes a circle with a slash through it. Nothing else. That can't be all there is to it, given the lengths I had to go to get it."

"You're on the right track. You have to actually stamp a living thing with it. Then the 'magic' so to speak happens."

"What magic? What does it do?"

"You know Hades could control the undead, right?"

"He seemed to in our fight, sure."

"Handy power to have, for a guy living where he lived. He didn't need to have any fancy powers because he could just command anyone with fancy powers to do whatever, and they did it."

"What's that got to do with the stamp?"

"When you stamp someone, until the mark comes off, they will basically be transformed into an undead creature that is under your complete control. Well, the control of whoever put the stamp on, anyway."

"Er, you're telling me I could build an undead army in minutes just by walking down the street and stamping people?"

"And why would you want to do that?" She glared at him.

"I don't, I'm just saying! If it was lost, or whatever, that could happen."

"To answer your question, yes, that could happen."

"Great. Don't know how I feel about that. Will all the items I get be that 'useful?'"

"That even I cannot predict. Use this carefully." She handed it back.

*Like I need you to tell me that.* "How long does the mark last normally? Can you tell?"

"Until removed. Your cleaning magic would do it. So would most powerful cleaners you would run into with a little effort. Just getting it wet, like in the rain, wouldn't."

"And then they become alive again?"

"If they haven't taken enough damage to kill them, yes."

"Okay." He stared down at it and then shoved it, wondering if he should wash his hands. "And then there's this, when I killed Jason." He got out the "rare" candy and handed it over.

"About that..."

"Yes?"

"Well, in a minute. This is really interesting!" She held it up and looked it over.

"What, it's a candy. Is that really on the same level as the stamp?"

She shook her head. "Oh, you poor fool. Still have no idea, do you? Let me give you a little background. You know what 'levels' are, right?"

"Sure, Terra was always trying to raise hers by slaughtering endless enemies in 'random encounters.' What about them?"

"There's another world where they have levels. But imagine if the people didn't go around killing those animals and whatnot they encountered, but instead captured them?"

"That makes a lot more sense, actually."

"I know, right? And then they pitted them against each other in a *fight to the death!!!!!!*"

"What?"

"Or just until they were knocked out, they're fine, it's fine. Trust me. Anyway, those creatures have levels too. The more they fight, the more their levels rise. But this," she held the candy by one end of the wrapper, "can give a creature a level without any fighting. At least, the original can. This one is a little different."

"How so?"

"You don't have levels, and neither did Jason. Thankfully. Remind me to tell you about 'the gamer' sometime. You think Jason was overpowered? Sheesh! Anyway, instead you have skills. This can 'level up' one of your skills."

"I don't get it."

"I'll give you an example. Say you decide to level up your fire bending. It would probably become *plasma* bending. You could shoot plasma beams instead of boring old *fire*."

"Wait, isn't my light saber a plasma beam?"

She nodded.

"I see." His mind started to spin with possibility. She went on.

"Or maybe you wanted a bit more pep to your Aura reading, and could just see auras all the time without concentrating. Premonition? Always knowing a few seconds into the future. Spirit Bending? You could summon up spirits with the snap of a finger, not a ten minute or more ritual. Do you see what I'm getting at here?"

"I think I do. He really did turn into something powerful. I'll have to carefully consider what I want to use it on."

"Oh no, I've got what you should use it on in mind already. And believe me, you're going to need it."

"What's that?"

"Dream Step."

"Uh..." He wracked his brain. "I don't think I know any skill like that."

"Of course not, you haven't learned it yet!"

"I'm confused."

She laughed. "That's no big surprise though, is it?"

"Just tell me," he sighed.

"See, the assumption you made is, you killed Jason back there. Reality check: you didn't."

"What? Of course I did! How would he have become the rare candy if I hadn't killed him? Ragnarok admitted I had to kill someone, a fact he only explained to me after I killed someone, because honestly I don't think even it knew."

"Easy. You forget his power. What did Jason do, even while still fighting his way out of his own personal Hell?"

"Make a bunch of-" His shoulders fell as he remembered that shadowy form in the forest. "You've got to be kidding me!"

"I'm afraid not. Jason proper, or J.Propo as I call him, actually got out hours before your battle took place. He looked the terrain over, found a good place to hide, and waited. When you got there what you believed was him tearing free of his prison was simply him making a duplicate of himself. He then put armor around his double, and both of them proceeded to fight you. He made the dream stuff happen so you thought it was him all along, but it wasn't."

"I have to get back there! He could be tearing the place-"

She held up a hand and shook her head. "With his master gone, he has no use for the place. He won't act out of spite, a curious condition in a 'bad guy' but there it is. At least, not against a world."

His blood went cold. "But against me?"

She nodded. "E-Yup. You I'm sure he doesn't like too much, and his master the avatar will send him after you. You need to learn to defend yourself. In your dreams. Because given a little time he can find you anywhere. You'll learn the world of dreams isn't like the natural world, it touches all worlds. All people that exist. He can search it until he finds you, and if he attacks you in dreams, rather than physically, he could drive you mad."

"I see." *Wait, is that how realities know of other realities, how shadowhunters know about Darth Vader and the like? A leakage of dreams that become stories in other worlds?* "And there's a place I can go to learn that?"

She brightened. "There is! It's even a world we've already driven the avatar off of, and there's an agent based there already too. They've been practicing dream walking there for thousands of years, so with some incentive they'll teach you, too. That's when you take this." She shook the candy. "When you can step from *your* dreams into the *world of dreams*, this will level it up and let you step from the world of dreams to the real world."

"I could fight Jason on his own terms. Or do what he could do, and make things out of nothing."

"That's right. That's why I suggest holding off on eating this." She handed it back.

He held it in his palm. "And once I get access to the hub, I could study technology like the lantern rings, or that armor of his, and make my own."

"That's true, you could. In fact you should. When you're dreaming like that, any powers your body has stay with it. So you'll have dream skills, but not, for example, bending."

"I'll have to learn a whole different way of fighting. Creating things and manipulating the world around me. No bending... Who knows what else?" He sighed. "Fine, one problem at a time." *He made a ton of ice, and that explosion, and that portal I wouldn't mind duplicating. I wouldn't lack for power once I get some practice in, right?* "So my trial for Hub access is on hold while I learn these dream skills?"

She nodded. "You need to learn to defend yourself right away. His master will want you stopped, especially now that you know how to use the sword. You'll turn part of their power against them with each world you free, they won't want that. Jason won't be given any other orders but to hunt you down, and right now you're totally vulnerable."

"How much time until he catches up?"

"There's never enough time. But you can at least show him you won't lay down and take it. Get it, lay down? Because you're asleep?"

"I get it."

"You're not laughing, I don't think you got it. Here, I can provide a diagram." She turned to the chalkboard that was now somehow behind her. "Now first we have to-

"I got it."

"If you're sure." The chalkboard vanished. "Why do you ask?"

"I'd like to look into a few things. A skill to sever a supernatural bond between people, and a way to be in more than one place at once. Also I'm going to work on two new wards, to help someone see the unseen, and to maintain a power put on someone. For example if I give someone wings, a ward to keep those wings around, like I would put a ward on a summoned creature to not have it drain my energy."

"The wards you can make there, you can really only practice the dream stuff overnight, you'll have plenty of time during the day. Of course there will be some lectures to attend on various things, but you'll still have time."

"Very well. And the other stuff?"

She appeared to consider it. "I suppose a short lived viewing window into *that* reality would not go amiss. In fact you could leave a clone behind to work on wards, while you went to class. It would be a good use of the skill." She tapped her chin, thinking it over.

"That reality? What reality? Can't I just stop in there? Why only a viewing?"

She sighed. "Not every evil person is allied with the shadow avatar, Lysanias. We don't like bringing things out of there, it's actually the place your eyes came from. I had to argue long and hard to Silverstreak to get them. I haven't regretted my decision, by the way. We aren't sure what drove Sakura to the lengths she went to, but she didn't make much use of this technique so it should be safe enough."

"Sakura? Jenny mentioned that name as well."

"Most wanderers hear her story eventually. The essential points, anyway. Basically she learned other worlds existed, and she figured, you know, if other versions of people exist then I can kill who I want because there's always those people elsewhere, right?"

"That's horrible!"

"Hence our treating that reality very carefully. People from there tend to become *extremely* powerful, and she was no exception. She's contained there again now, but if she got out again..."

"So you're saying there's a lot of techniques I could use from there, but because one person from there went nuts, I get nothing."

"Pretty much. Sorry. It's not a disease in the classical sense, but anything from that reality has become suspect. Even if it was just her own personal reaction to learning about the multiverse."

"No, I understand. No wonder he wants me to go through extra hoops, despite my proving myself by saving several realities so far. He's worried if I go bad, and basically have unlimited time to learn stuff and make things and study technology and whatever, how would anyone stop me?"

"By tipping them upside down into their own gravity trap?"

He snorted. "There's always a bigger fish, is that it?"

"Pretty much. So, do you want this skill or what? I'll open a short lived window to the first time he used the ability, you can steal it from that."

"Right. I should only be blind an hour or so, let's do it."

"Fine. Here we go."

He put power into his eyes and she gestured, a hole in the air opening up. Before him was some little kid with yellow hair, with his hands in the shape of a cross before him. He looked hurt, blood spattered his face. "I'll return the pain a thousand times over," he promised. "Shadow Cone Technique!" Suddenly there were dozens of copies of him in the picture, and the window closed along with his eyes. Lysanias got the impression there were many more outside the frame, given what he had just seen.

"Wait, can I really make that many? That seemed... excessive."

"You've just stumbled upon the mantra of that reality. That kid, with no training in the skill whatsoever, simply reading about it from a scroll moments before that, nonetheless managed to make hundreds of copies of himself. Given the technique divides your energy equally among all the clones... can you finish that sentence?"

“He must have at least hundreds of people’s worth of energy! Any less and each clone would only have a sliver apiece left. That’s no good.”

“Exactly. He couldn’t master simple techniques in class, but somehow learned a forbidden technique in moments? That’s the level of ridiculousness that came out of that reality. We could have used those fighters, but we couldn’t trust any one of them because of Sakura.”

“I see. My energy is really low, so I might just stick to one or two.”

“Good plan.”

“And the severing skill?”

She hummed a bit. “Don’t know of any reality I could easily let you see anything like that be done.”

“It’s fine, the hubPad details the technique, I can maybe practice it on my own? Somehow?”

“You could put a light spell on a coin, then try severing that connection between the magic and yourself,” she suggested. “That would do it.”

“I’ll do that, then. Thanks. For the technique and the tip.”

“Sure. Don’t go crazy, all right?”

“A difficult request, but I shall attempt it!”

“That’s the spirit.”

An hour or so later Lysanias showed he had mastered the technique by making a clone, and Inari told him how best to use them. All his equipment would be duplicated, and he could learn something with the clone and when it went away, he would know it. It couldn’t take much damage though, and his spirit couldn’t be out when he did it because it wouldn’t “know” which “him” it was connected to and would vanish. She said doing it to release Rosalina and then making a clone would be fine though. The clone couldn’t access his sub-space pocket, so he had to do that and hand anything to the clone he wanted it to use. She said that would pretty much cover it, anything else he could learn for himself. With that he was ready to go.

“Who should I be expecting wherever I’m going?”

“Her name is el’Nynaeve ti al’Meara Mandragoran.”

“The... what? Say that again?”

“Just call her Nynaeve. She’s one of the most powerful magic users in the world there, I’ll give her your picture so she knows you. She can show you around, introduce you to the dreamwalkers there. Their magic is very different than anything you know, and she’s been an agent for a while. She’s a good person, just be nice to her and you’ll do fine.”

*And if she’s that powerful, maybe I can get another type of magic under my belt. I haven’t used my eyes in some time, after all.* “Very well. I’ll keep an eye out. You’re not sending me to her bathing chamber or anything, right?” He leaned over, trying to loom over her.

“What? Lysanias, I’m shocked that you would even suggest such a thing!”

“You put me in a bedroom with two people who were-”

She held up a hand. “I don’t mean that, I mean re-using a joke. That would just be... crass.”

He rolled his eyes. “I’m ready to go, let’s do this.”

“As you command.” She gestured, and he vanished.

## Chapter 2

Give her a trinket next time

Where: ??

When: Just after

The wind blew across the barren landscape, hot and dry like it had never known moisture. Unimpeded it blew, ruffling sand and the occasional spindly plant below, before it bent around the tall tops of the buildings that met its path. Finally the wind hit something green, a massive tree that rose from the rocky soil below as if to challenge the notion that this was a desert. But the wind cannot stop, cannot turn aside, and the leaves of the great tree rustled and swayed. The wind passed on. The wind was not a beginning, for there are no beginnings and no ends to the wheel of time. But it was a beginning.

Lysanias stood, marveling at the great tree before him. Even at the distance he was from it, the great trunk, rising high into the air, towered over the people he could just make out in the distance crowded around it. The leaves gently swayed in the hot, dry breeze that pervaded this place, and his eyes darted from place to place. The tree was the only green thing in view, not that he had eyes for anything else. The tree called to him, not just as an example of its kind unlike any he had ever seen, but spiritually, as the energy radiating from it could be felt even there.

*The number of ley lines coming from that one place must be unreal! Am I looking at the source of all spiritual energy in this reality? After I meet with my guide I'll have to see if I can make my way closer. I won't lack for power around here, that's for sure. But what's with this area? It looks so...*

Lysanias had been so caught up in looking at the tree, and so overwhelmed by sensing the energy it was giving off, he totally neglected his immediate surroundings. Especially the person that was behind him, looking in the opposite direction at the great city that radiated away from the tree. As she turned to see what was behind her he turned to see what was behind him. Sadly, his sword was right between her legs so when both turned, they overbalanced and went crashing down against each other.

"Sorry! I'm really sorry!" he managed, trying to untangle himself.

"Oy, what's the big idea here?" said a sassy female voice. "Ya trying to start something? I'll kick your arse so hard you'll kiss the moons!"

"No, I'm..." He looked down at the young woman who was tangled up with him, and found a rather attractive young girl looking up at him. She had blue eyes, yellow hair that was in a braid, and a small nose.

"Oh my," she exclaimed. "What fascinating eyes. Are they common in these parts?"

"I can't really say. Here, let me help you up." He finally managed to untangle his sword and stand, offering her a hand, which she took.

"Cor, you're a strong one, ain't cha?" she asked, seeming impressed as he hauled her up. She brushed herself off. "Guess that was partially my fault, no hard feelings, eh? What did I get tangled up in, anyway?" She looked him over, but of course the sword was hidden behind a ward so while she had sort of felt something, she still wasn't sure what had tripped her.

He looked her over at the same time, squinting against the glare her outfit was producing. She was wearing a breastplate that shimmered and sparkled, splintering light and throwing a rainbow of color around her. Her legs were covered by shaped plates of the stuff, and a dagger was hung at her waist. She looked down at herself.

"My apologies, it's not my intent to blind you. It certainly is sunny here, isn't it? Not a cloud in the sky. This armor may be the most durable thing my world can produce, but it's not subtle. I'll have to change soon, as another thing it isn't is cool." She wiped her face off, clearly hot.

*Whatever it's made of, I want it.*

"You aren't hurt, are you? I really didn't mean to trip you up like that, I don't know how that happened. Are you all right? Say something, you're not one of those silent protagonist types, are you?"

He shook his head and said nothing.

She burst out laughing. "Yer funny! Call me Kid, or I guess Schala at this point. Still ain't too sure who I really am now, tell you the truth. What's yer name?"

"I'm Lysanias, nice to meet you, Kid."

"Likewise, it is good to see a friendly face so quickly after my arrival here." She raised her hand to shake. "Do you know the city well? I'll need to find a place to stay, as you might have guessed I'm a bit of a traveler and I've just arrived here."

"I've actually just arrived here myself," he admitted. "But someone from the area is supposed to be meeting me fairly soon. We can ask them."

"Holy Toledo, look at the size 'o that tree! No wonder you was distracted!" She whistled. "Ain't never seen a thing like that before. Maybe we can wait out of the sun? Though we don't seem to be obstructing traffic here..." She looked around, and while well tanned people of all ages wandered past them, no one seemed to do much more than stare and then avert their eyes. Many carried *spears* of all things, making Lysanias wonder what sort of technology this area had. He didn't hear any cars or see planes in the sky, though various fountains bubbled water nearby so they must have pumps of some kind. "What a strange dichotomy," she breathed. "A tree like that surrounded by desert, but yet water flows in abundance. Was there a war here?"

"Er..."

"It's fine if it's a state secret or something," she told him. "I was just curious. I'm actually here looking for someone, a man named Serge. I don't suppose you've heard of anyone with that name? About my age, dark blue hair, wears baggy clothes, has sort of violet eyes but sometimes they go amber for no apparent reason?"

"I'm afraid not."

"Pity. I figured not, given how unlike, er, where I come from this place is. Still, best to check, I'll need to look for the next weakness in the... Oh, there's a bench in the shade, we could go sit here!" She started off.

*Wait a second...* Lysanias concentrated on the girl, not because she was walking away and had a nice sway but to feel her out. *Those little hints she's dropping, and that armor that looks unlike anything I see people wearing around here.* "Just how far have you traveled, if you don't mind my asking?"

She laughed, giving a little skip and turning back to face him. "You wouldn't believe me if I told you."

"Then what about I tell you? You came from another world, didn't you?"

She suddenly became serious, yanking the dagger out of her sheath. Lysanias idly noted it too was made of that strange material that splintered light. "Who are ya? How can ya possibly know that?"

Suddenly a large man gripping a spear and wearing what looked like some sort of uniform in browns and tans ran over and stepped between them. "Hey, no violence here! Put that... what in the world is that made of?" He looked between them. "Neither of you is Aiel. How did you get here?"

"Are you expecting me?" Lysanias asked. "I've been told to expect someone but not who."

"No. Now answer the question!"

"What's he saying?" asked the woman.

Lysanias could finally hear those words without groaning, though it wasn't easy. "He wants to know what we're doing here."

"He won't understand me any better than I do him!"

*Oh language, you rear your ugly head once again.* "Look, slap this against yourself and will yourself to understand him." He pulled a translation ward out from nowhere.

"Oh, you've got an inventory too? Looks like we're more alike than I thought." She leaned over, the man now wondering what he had gotten himself into, and took it. She slapped it on and it stuck.

"She can understand you now."

"Because of a piece of- if this is some sort of joke..."

"Hey, I *can* understand him! You wanted to know how I got here, right?" He nodded. "I came through what scholars on my world call Angelus Errare," Kid explained, lowering the knife. "You might call them cracks between worlds that might be."

"Whereas I was sent here by a being that lives 'above' these worlds to get training in Dreaming," Lysanias explained. "I don't want to fight her."

"Cracks between worlds?" He looked from one to the other, then settled on Lysanias' eyes. "I've heard of people with gold eyes, but not red like that. I guess it's fine but put that away."

The girl was looking at Lysanias like she didn't believe him, but she did, taking her hand off the hilt. "You believe us?" She didn't seem to believe it.

He shrugged, raising his spear. "Even before the last battle the walls of our world seemed to be thinning. After, with balefire being shot left and right? We were lucky to not unravel the pattern. I've heard stories about other worlds, reached through the portal stones, so it's not totally unbelievable. You'll have to talk to an Aes Sadai to help get you back through, unless you can channel yourself? I can't help you there. Didn't know there was one near here..." he remarked to himself.

She shook her head sadly. "I must go forward, not back. Without Serge, returning to my world holds no appeal."

Lysanias felt resignation from her, as well as a deep sadness. *Must be someone special to her.*

The man nodded. "I understand, and wish you good luck. Keep that knife sheathed though. May you find water and shade this day."

"You as well," both answered, and he nodded and walked off again.

"Did you get any of what he was saying?" she asked. "Balefire and the pattern?"

"Not a word," he admitted. "But for some random person on the street to buy our story? What happened around here?"

"More than a gleeman could tell in a week," said a new voice behind them. Both turned and standing there was another young woman, flanked by a hard faced man glaring at them but still managing to watch all around himself. She raised a picture and compared it to Lysanias. "Lysanias, right? I was told to expect you. Welcome to Randland."

He missed a beat. "I'm sorry, Randland?"

She laughed. "Our little joke. I'm Nynaeve, this is my husband, Lan. Let's get out of the sun and I can get some more details. Silverstreak didn't say exactly why he was sending you here." He looked her over. She was wearing a long skirt, which seemed much too hot for the weather here but she didn't seem to be sweating all that much. Both her skirt and blouse looked well made, but not machine made, and various rings and a belt of what looked like rubies adorned her. She also was wearing her long brown hair in a braid, and it hung over her shoulder just in case it should need a good tug. A red dot adorned for forehead. The man on the other hand was stone faced, dressed in a rough looking shirt and pants, and had a sword at his hip.

*They travel pretty light I guess?*

"There's a place we can get a cool drink just a few streets over," Nynaeve told them. "Or so I've been told. Follow me." She turned the picture over, looked around at what must have been directions, and started off.

Lysanias looked over at Kid who shrugged, giving a "what do I care?" look, and both started to follow her.

"We were only told to expect you," grumbled Lan, who hadn't moved. "Who's the girl?"

"The name's Kid, ya starting something?" she sneered.

"Kid?" He raised an eyebrow.

"If you prefer, my more proper name is Schala. It's a rather long story. But I got a nose for this kinda thing, I'm sticking with Lysanias here. He seems like the type who could help out a poor, innocent, defenseless girl out of the goodness of his heart."

"Hardly defenseless." He glanced at her dagger.

She barked a laugh. "You should see my element grid! What do you say, partner?"

*Element what?* “She is who she said, at least in part,” he told them. “She’s not from around here, and as long as the shadow avatar can’t take someone over here, she’s safe. I haven’t felt any deception from her.”

Nynaeve looked her over. “I agree, she’s out of place here. From what you said, you traveled here on your own? You’re not with either of the admins?”

“One of the whats?”

“I see not. Extraordinary. How did you manage it?”

She indicated the strange pendant at her throat, which looked like large pink balls in a row, with a sort of large seed on the end at the front. “This allows me to go between worlds. But only at specific weak points.”

“Not the craziest thing I’ve ever heard of. And you’re looking for someone?”

She nodded. “A friend of mine, who died on my world but lived on a world nearby. We met but got separated. I’m hoping I can find him again, as I can’t seem to get back to that world now on my own.”

She considered. “I can definitely put you in touch with someone who can make that way easier. Very well. She can come, Lan. Perhaps her coming here is part of the pattern, Light knows we have enough problems to go around even in victory. She may be able to help with some problem we don’t even know we have yet!”

“Very well.” He didn’t seem to relax a hair though. “I suppose her coming just as Lysanias did means something. These admins of yours would have found her passing between worlds and could have nudged her into this place and time.”

“Exactly. Follow me!”

The group trailed along behind her, and Nynaeve played the tour guide, telling them about the city as they walked. The buildings were tall but many looked unfinished, there was not a lot of greenery to be seen as he expected. Finally they stopped in front of a building with a large tarp hanging off the front of it and sat down. There were several mismatched tables and chairs here, so Kid and Lysanias joined her, while Lan took up position behind her. His eyes didn’t stop moving both sweeping past them and eyeing up and down the street.

*Not a trusting fellow, our Lan, is he?*

A serving girl came out and took her order, dressed more like Nynaeve than the women on the street, in a skirt and blouse. “She’s not Aiel,” Nynaeve explained as she went back inside again. “They see this sort of thing, serving people, as beneath them. But they’ll let outsiders in to be servants. Populations being what they are now, it’ll be some time before this city is full, of Aiel or anyone else.”

“What happened? Was there a war? Was this place nicer once?” Kid asked.

“Maybe before the breaking,” she admitted. “But not for thousands of years. As for the war... yes. I take it you’re familiar with the dark one?”

“If the dark one is what you call the shadow avatar, then yes.”

Kid shook her head. The girl came back with their drinks and handed them out, it was some kind of fruit juice that Lysanias found pleasant. Nynaeve continued once she moved away again.

“Probably, we all call them something different. You’ll run into them sooner or later, moving across worlds,” she told Kid. “Basically they want us all dead, for one reason or another.”

“That does sound familiar, actually,” Kid mused.

“You know how they can act more directly in some places than others?”

“I’ve got some idea about that, yes. Mostly I’ve just dealt with them taking people over and acting through avatars.”

“Suffice to say, the dark one was quite compatible with this world. Nearly destroyed it, there was a pretty big battle not that long ago.” She shook her head sadly. “Many were lost, from all corners of the world. Some were friends of mine.”

“Sorry to hear that,” Kid told her.

“Thank you. They’ve been driven off, I got noticed as a potential agent, and passed my tests to join The Hub. None of that explanation comes close to detailing what we’ve been going through these past few years, believe me. Or the issues we still have now.”

"I understand."

"But at least we *did* win. We have a chance to rebuild, to rediscover what was lost, and make our world green and full of life again."

"Is that why I see so many pregnant women walking around?" Kid asked shrewdly. She pointed, and yes, the woman passing by was clearly pregnant.

Nynaeve colored. "Yes, everyone is rushing to, uh, rebuild their individual nations. So there's going to be a lot of young people running around all over the place before long."

"Ain't a bad thing!"

*If you can feed them after a war of that magnitude I suppose.*

"No, I wouldn't say it was. So what can I do for you, Lysanias? Like I said the boss wasn't forthcoming as to why you were here."

"I'm more with Inari at the moment," he explained. "He was just acting as a messenger for her?" *She said she would tell the agent, but must have passed that duty off. Strange, if she's a magic user you would think she would be in her 'camp' but maybe her little pranks wear thin for most. I've never seen this hub, maybe once I do I'll never go back and see her either.* "I still have half my test to go for Hub access. The reason I'm here is for training. Specifically for controlling my dreams."

"You're a Dreamer? No wonder he had us come here. This is the best place to find a teacher for that, but there's a problem. I doubt they would train a man."

"Why wouldn't they?"

"Eh, Aiel are sticklers for tradition and honor and all that. One of Rand's schools was opened here, but not by the Aiel, by someone else that came here. As I understand it they're starting to see the benefit of it, but you'll have an uphill battle. They've only trained woman for generations. It'll be a hard tradition to get them to break, even if you can convince them you're from another world."

"What would help? Mountains of gold? Objects of power? I could provide either."

"You can make Ter'angreal? What I call Ter'angreal, anyway, magical objects? Neither would hurt, but I suppose it depends on who we find teaching the class, I guess. There are so few Dreamers usually it's one on one. But technically anyone that comes to the school with an idea or a desire to learn can't be turned away, so it's not hopeless. So you just need me to show you around a bit? As a world traveler I don't need to hold your hand or anything, right? If my husband would even let you." She elbowed him, and he rolled his eyes.

*Perhaps I can trade knowledge. These people have probably never heard of chi-blocking. Maybe if I teach a class in that, someone will teach me a class in Dreaming.*

"I can take care of myself once we get settled, yes. Kid, I can give you a bunch of the translation wards if you don't want to stick around. I know you'll probably want to move on and find your friend."

"I'll leave when you do," she told them. "Like Nynaeve said, my coming at this place and time may have been no accident."

"That's up to you. I'm told you have a hubPad?"

He nodded. *One of the first ones, actually.*

"You can always call me on it. Now, I have to admit I'm not exactly the best person to get you what you need. I'm not that familiar with the city. I was told where this place was, but nothing else." She looked up. "I can remedy that fairly easily. Take those glasses off the table, won't you? And try not to fall though, I mean unless you can fly..." The two looked puzzled but picked their cups up. Nynaeve called the serving girl over again and concentrated.

"Er, why are you glowing?" Lysanias asked, jumping back from her.

"The what now?" she asked, eyes going wide. Lan's hand went to his sword.

*What did I say?*

### Chapter 3

It is better to be the hammer than the anvil.

When: No time has passed

Where: Street cafe

Lysanias stared at the wide eyed Nynaeve who was looking back at him like he had just sprouted wings, which as we all know wasn't outside the realm of possibility for him. Kid and the waitress just seemed confused, and Lan was tense, hand wrapped around his sword hilt and ready to draw.

Meanwhile, thousands of miles away a woman stopped in to buy a bolt of cloth from a merchant, an ordinary act that would send ripples across the empire as she saw someone that shouldn't be anywhere near there. But we won't figure out how that resolves for months, maybe years, so just forget it. Not even sure why it was brought up, honestly.

Back at the table Nynaeve looked like she wanted to tug her braid, or perhaps smooth her skirt, but instead she simply demanded again "What do you mean I'm glowing?"

"What do you mean, what do I mean? You're glowing, aren't you? Why is that such a big deal?"

"She's not, mate," Kid told him. "This desert air getting to you, maybe?"

"You can't see that? How can you not see that? And she's not glowing anymore."

Thanks, thanks a lot."

"She never was!"

"She was!"

"Was not!"

"He does come from another world," Lan spoke up, taking his hand off his sword.

"Perhaps it's different for him."

"It's never been different for anyone else," she protested. "You know how many places we've been."

"And we've met every sort of person there is, have we?"

She looked a bit embarrassed. "Fine, no, I suppose not. Wait, you are, uh, male, right?" She looked him up and down. "Maybe I was just totally wrong..."

"I'm a man," Lysanias insisted. "Though I have no idea what that has to do with anything."

"With those arms?" Kid scoffed. "I could break you in half meself!"

*Think so, do you?*

"It has everything to do with it," she insisted. "Look, tell me when I start glowing again."

"Okay?"

The group sat in silence for a moment. "Er, do you still need me? I need to get back to work," said the serving girl.

Nynaeve held up a hand. "Just one second, all right?"

"Yes, Aes Sadai," she squeaked.

"That ring isn't a bludgeon you know," Lan dryly remarked. She glared at him.

"You're glowing again," Lysanias said. And she was, the light sprang up around her as she was looking at Lan.

"You really can see me embrace the Source, *how* is that possible?" Nynaeve demanded.

"Why shouldn't it be? He didn't tell you anything about me, did he? I guess I should reintroduce myself. I'm Lysanias, and I can learn to do anything that can be taught. If this 'glow' of yours has to do with the way you do magic I can learn it too. Kid probably can't do magic so she can't see the glow, but I already can do several kinds of magic so I could learn this one. It's not a big deal."

"It *is* a big deal," she insisted. "Learning things is one thing, but only a woman should be able to see me embrace Saidar. Males use Saidin. It's like you learning to give birth or something, you just shouldn't be able to do it!"

"Oh." He considered. *What, do females here have something inside their bodies that let them use this power? That doesn't make sense. And really, if I refreshed a transformation into a female form or used a ward to keep me there, have to work on that soon, why couldn't I*

*give birth?* “I don’t know what to tell you. Maybe my nature as a progenitor supersedes this gender based power you’re using, or maybe my eyes came from a woman.” He tapped the side of his face. “I didn’t really ask.”

“You’re using someone else’s eyes?” Kid asked, looking a bit disgusted.

“It relates to my powers, Inari gave them to me. Look, what are you about to do? Let’s just do it so she can get back to work and I can explain things properly after that.”

“Fine. I’m going to open a gateway above the table here. It’ll open in the air high above us.” She pointed. “That way we can see the city and I can get directions where to go.”

“Wait, you can use magic to open a hole in the air and just step through to someplace else?” *I can get an ability to do what I saw Jason do without being in a dream state? Not having to teleport blind, even now that I can carry most anything through it because of the equipment I got, would be very useful!*

“We don’t actually call it magic around here, but essentially, yes.”

He resisted the urge to rub his hands together and cackle. “Please, demonstrate! Er, from the beginning when you start to glow, if that’s possible?”

“I suppose, if it makes any difference.”

*Oh, it does.*

The glow winked out and Lysanias sent power into his eyes, leaning forward in anticipation. The glow surrounded her again and lines of energy shot out of her body, forming a complex pattern there on the table. A “window” seemed to rotate into existence and there was the city from above, looking like a miniature version of itself. With a wince his eyes closed.

“Now that’s bloody convenient!” he heard Kid saying. “Wish I could do that! My element grid is looking more and more limited by the... well, world I guess you would say.”

“Er, you can open your eyes,” Nynaeve told him. “You’re safe, just don’t jump up on the table. I know it can be a little disconcerting, but you won’t get sucked through or anything.”

He waved a hand. “It’s not that, just go on with the directions like I’m not even here.”

“Okay...” The two ladies spoke about where to find a place to stay and where the school was, while Lysanias resisted the urge to bounce up and down in his chair. *Another type of magic at my disposal. What were those ‘lines’ she was working with? They seemed to be elemental, somehow, but I’ll know more once my brain processes everything I saw. It looked very different from the ways I can already do magic, but if it works, fine. I have a feeling there was a lot going on in just that simple use of it, I hope my current ‘potential’ can handle it. I may as well use it up again, I’m going to have to learn about this Dreaming the hard way, after all. Can’t exactly use my eyes while I’m asleep, it’s just going to waste otherwise. Besides, if it’s going to be a hassle getting them to teach me Dreaming because I’m a man, would anyone teach me this magic that seemingly only women can use here? I doubt it. But now I should have at least some of her skill and can work on it on my own.*

“It’s gone, you can open your eyes again.”

“Oh no, I’m totally blind for the duration. An hour or two at least.”

“Why do you sound so pleased about that?” Kid asked.

“Yeah, what exactly did you do?” Nynaeve agreed.

“Just made a copy of how you opened that doorway inside my brain. I thought it might come in handy. It overloads my eyes for a little while afterwards though. That’s why Inari gave them to me, as a shortcut to learning. Because I can learn anything, but don’t want to spend years on each reality to accomplish that learning.”

“You did what?” both asked.

With a grin Lysanias started from the beginning; how his parents had been created, then killed, and how he came to learn what he really was. Then briefly about the worlds he had seen and the abilities he already had from them all.

“And so now you can use Saidar?” Nynaeve asked, still sounding as if she didn’t believe any of it.

“Most likely. Can it be taught?”

“Yes,” she grudgingly admitted. “Though most that learn aren’t as strong as those that start doing it on their own. Some that learn can hardly channel at all, in fact, so it’s somewhat

useless they even try. But the white tower accepts anyone that wishes to learn and is happy to train them to their ability.”

“You must be fairly strong, to have been chosen to wander.”

“Oh, fairly,” she said with heaps and heaps of modesty. “I’m a wilder myself. My goodness, if you really can channel Saidar and then learn from a man to channel Saidin, you could be the only person alive that could use both.”

“Can they do different things?”

“Not really, we can do the same things, just in a different way. Would you be in a circle with yourself, so you would be twice as strong? I have so many questions.”

“I don’t know how much I’ll be able to cheat at this point, my ‘potential’ gets used up doing it the quick way. I have a feeling most of it is gone.” *So I hope there isn’t much more I need to learn the quick way around here.*

“I see. I suppose it doesn’t matter, you’re an anomaly that won’t happen again. I guess I should know by now that anything’s possible. So are we stuck here until you can see again?”

“I’m not helpless, if that’s what you’re asking. I can follow you around. Show Kid where we can stay and where the school is, if she’s going to stick with me she can show me later. I hate to waste your time otherwise.”

“Then let’s see about finding this place.” She rose and the other two followed, Lan at the back to watch them.

*Fine with me, I can feel both of them so as long as I stay between them, I won’t bump into anything.*

“Oh, who are they?” Kid asked as they walked. “They’re huge!”

“Those are called Ogier,” she explained. “Apparently they’re originally from another world too, came here some time ago. They usually work as stonemasons, see the tools? This city was never actually finished from what I understand, before it was abandoned. There, see how that one building doesn’t have a roof? They’re probably here to make plans on how to finish various sections rather than work on something themselves. If you want amazing detail work done, find an Ogier. They’re wasted on just putting walls up or whatever.”

“I see it. It’s an interesting city, it seems fairly empty though.”

She snorted. “Aiel were never city dwellers, especially before the water was discovered here by Rand. This was originally some kind of sacred place to them. But after he left it opened up. Add to that the losses we took during the last battle, and it’ll be some time before this place, or really *any* place, feels crowded again. Still, with the school here and the gateway system being set up, outsiders will be a more and more common sight.”

The two continued to chat about what they were seeing, and they soon reached a place they could stay. Kit went up to the room to change, making Nynaeve puzzled for a moment.

“Change into what? You don’t have any bags.”

“I got plenty of clothes in my inventory, along with lots of other stuff. I assure you I won’t be long.”

“Inventory? You’re from one of *those* worlds, aren’t you?”

“You dissing my world?”

“Doing what? I’m just saying, you get attacked by random stuff wandering around don’t you?”

“How else would I get more HP or gold?”

“Thought so. Go on. Inventory, sheesh,” she muttered. “Probably have *levels* too.”

*I know what she’s talking about. She’s like Terra! Odd though, she has spirit energy not MP, unlike people where Terra was from. But I guess every world is different. Wonder if she could have learned magic if I had taken some Magicite with me?*

Moments later she came down again, presumably dressed differently, Lysanias was still in darkness, and the group was off. “Just let me make some notes,” she said. “I don’t want to get lost around here going between this place and this school.”

“Notes? We can do better than notes. Hey Belladonna, can I get a composite printout from the last four images I took? Make it ledger sized, I guess?”

“Of course,” said a voice Lysanias knew well.

“Here you go.” Paper crinkled. “We can just mark the buildings on this.”

“The bloody heck you pull that from? I know it can’t be an inventory, you were just making fun of mine a second ago!”

Nynaeve just laughed.

*Did she just call the hub for something? Maybe she took pictures of the area after I closed my eyes with her hubPad? I guess she named hers Belladonna? I need to name mine.*

The group made it to a building (presumably) and went inside, Nynaeve asking around for who she should see about getting instruction in Dreaming. All around Lysanias he heard the noises of activity, pounding on things, people discussing ideas, and he felt there were a lot of people in the room with him.

“Busy place,” Kid remarked.

“There has been a resurgence in learning since Rand ordered these schools open,” Lan told them. “He wanted to leave behind a legacy that was more than just destruction. That opened the floodgates. It turns out, lots of people have lots of good ideas, but without the money or technical expertise to do anything, it goes nowhere. Now that’s changing. The wheel turns,” he added cryptically.

“And of course Nynaeve has been exposed to lots of other technology as an agent of Silverstreak.”

“True. However she will do no more than encourage or offer slight adjustments to anything invented here. She wants these people to know their own success, not provide them a technological revolution overnight.”

*“A sensible precaution.” After all, what if I had introduced guns to Korra’s world and the equalists got hold of them? Bad enough they had chi-blocking and those gloves. Let them figure stuff out on their own. Says the guy who gave them all those energy based skills...*

“She’s just started her next class,” Nynaeve said, coming back over. “There’s a waiting area we can go to. Anyone that has an old book or has an idea they figure they can’t develop but someone here can wait there for someone in that field to be free. We can head there.”

“Right behindCHA!” Kid joked, though no one got it.

Once seated in the waiting area Nynaeve announced she was heading out again. “I have my own students to teach, after all. As I’m back here and time is moving, I’ll have to actually teach a class.”

“How horrible for you,” Lan deadpanned.

“I’m sure we can take it from here anyway. Thanks for your help,” Lysanias told her.

“I’m coming back,” she told them. “For one thing if you really can channel now there’s a few things I’ll need to make clear before you try. Do. Not. Channel. Until I get back. Understand?”

“Okay?”

“I’m serious, it’s dangerous, don’t do it.”

*“I get it, it’s dangerous.” Is there some kind of backfire I need to worry about, like with my original way of casting magic?*

“So long as you understand. I’ll be back in an hour or so.”

“See you then.” She must have stepped through another hole in the air as her energy signature suddenly vanished.

“So now what?” asked Kid. “Hey, ever play eye spy?”

“Very funny. Hey can I see your dagger for a second? And then stand *realllllly* close to me?”

“Not when ya ask like that!”

“Like what?”

“You can’t see it anyway, why would you need it right now?”

“I don’t need to see it. One of your armor pieces then, just something made of that odd material the knife is made of. I want to analyze it.”

"It's called Rainbow Shell. It's pretty rare on my world, and I've never seen it on another. Of course, I've just been looking for Surge."

"I get it."

"Are ya gonna take this or not?" He felt a breeze by his face. He held out a hand. "Well, take it! Go on, it's right there!"

"You're just a laugh a minute aren't you?"

"I try. Here you go."

He sat for a moment feeling it out, then nodded and handed it back. "Follow up question. Is there something of yours not that material that you would prefer to be that material?"

"You're not suggesting that material transmutation is possible, are you?" she asked after a second's pause.

"In my experience, most things are possible. Though usually the people of a reality have only one means at their disposal, be it a form of magic or supernatural power. However if their style of magic doesn't allow certain things to be done, you can bet another does. For example, my wand style magic can't make food. But my paragon style," *at least that's what Susan called it*, "of magic can. Best thing about being me is, I can take the best of every world with me and cover those gaps."

"Now this I gotta see." She pressed a dagger into his hand.

"Another weapon?"

"It's my second best knife, may as well have one for each hand."

"Very well." He turned his senses towards it, and was impressed. "This knife was very well made, there's hardly any impurities." *Given I can't really sense it through earth bending. But it's clearly metal.*

"It was made of a special material. Not as rare as Rainbow Shell but still fairly annoying to get a hold of."

"Let's see, it's not been used for some time, but it was present when two very similar looking smiths forged the blade that replaced it. It shall know combat again in the future, facing a shadowy form so maybe the avatar? Now for the metal itself." He touched the blade.

"Wait, is this metal at all?"

"You can tell all that? I guess you weren't kidding. And no, it's not."

"I would never kid, Kid."

"Ha ha. Now who's the laugh a minute?"

He felt out the material, a necessity because he couldn't see it, and thus identify it enough to work on it. It *was* stone, some kind of rock that had been forged into a blade. *What a strange thing to build a weapon out of.* "What was the stone called this was made of?"

"Denadorite."

"Interesting. Well, let's see what this does for us." He sent power into it, turning it into rainbow shell, and Kid whistled. "Less dense I see, it got fatter. I can fix it." He reshaped it, thinning the blade and making sure it was sharp. The weight stayed the same of course, the blade would just be a bit harder to break now, if this Rainbow stuff even *could* be broken, which he doubted. In normal use, anyway. *Is it actually a natural material like a shell, or is it just called that?* "There, done."

"How about that?" she asked, taking it back. "You really did it. You turned it into Rainbow Shell."

"Any other odd substances from your world? Until I can see again I may as well practice analyzing things."

"All right, let's see what you make of this." Kid handed him something else and he couldn't quite grasp the shape of what it was. He turned it over and over (he thought) in his hands, trying to work out if it was a square, a ball, a cone, an ooze, but he just couldn't define it. Finally he sat and put his senses to work, but all of them threw up a big old shrug.

"*What the heck is this?!*"

## Chapter 4

You can never know everything, and part of what you know is always wrong. A portion of wisdom lies in knowing that. A portion of courage lies in going on anyway.

When: No time has passed

Where: Waiting area

“This,” Kid announced proudly, “is an element. I put it on my element grid and it’s how I can do magic in combat.”

“You mean like a materia? You’re not magical yourself but you can do magic?”

“Never heard of a materia, but that’s right. See, long time ago on my world lots of people could do magic on their own. For whatever reason that ability was lost, but there was still magic in the world. The element grid and individual elements came from that. Don’t ask me where they come from or how they’re made, I have no idea. That one there causes a column of lava to burst forth under someone. They can do all sorts of things, heal, control gravity, even summon creatures out of nowhere.”

“Interesting. But what is it? I can’t even tell what shape it is!”

“Thought that might be the case. Here, I’ll have it back.” She took it. “Doesn’t seem to be very compatible with other worlds, so no one I show it to can even figure out what it is. I guess as it’s not a skill that can be learned you can’t work with it any better than anyone else.”

“I guess not. I’d like to see it when I get my eyes back though.”

“Off the grid and not in my inventory they seem to degrade fairly quickly, as I don’t want to lose them I don’t like passing them around. Believe me, you won’t find it any more enlightening to see it that you did trying to feel it.”

“But they’re fine on your world?”

“Oh yeah, no problems!”

“Extraordinary. Something I can’t steal with my eyes, how about that. Some kind of innate magic your people learned to harness. I’d love to see it in action.”

“Don’t worry, we get into a fight somewhere and you’ll see it. The ones I don’t lose when I use them, that is.”

*Yup, a world like Terra’s, magical but people lost the ability. So they gained it back another way, just like the people there will with magicite. How many more ways to use magic will I encounter? It’s wonderful and baffling at the same time, how many different forms it can really take. “Wait, you lose them? Did you buy hundreds before you left home?” Ah, she must have wondered if I could make her more?*

She laughed. “I can use each one on the grid once per combat, they aren’t used up. Their power is expended and they need to rest, that’s all. There are some that get used up, don’t get me wrong. Those I did buy all I could, of course. Mostly healing items, to cure burns or sprains.”

“Ah. And they work on others?”

“Those do! The ones that give back HP not so much, because I guess some people don’t have that?” She shook her head like that was crazy talk.

“Probably would work on those that had it, I’ve met others so they are out there. So it is the element doing the work, not some interaction of the element and your world. Maybe if I see some in action I can sense out the magic and tell enough to make you more. Or at least an equivalent, or something new.” *Though just a regular old talisman would probably be easier.*

“Wouldn’t say no to it! Thanks!”

So the two talked, Kid telling about how they faced the “world eater” and how she became one with her own clone, hence her odd way of going back and forth between the ways she talked. She admitted it sounded an awful lot like the shadow avatar, which now that she thought about it, she had seen other places too. Some time during Lysanias telling her what he had been through his sight returned, and he saw she was wearing a dress with a rather short skirt, layered with a piece of shimmery fabric tied at the side. The dress was fairly complicated, obviously boned to accent her figure (as though she needed the help, she didn’t) and decorated with metal strips, feathers, scales, fur, leather, and even what looked like a

kind of rock. Obviously everyone can just imagine what that looked like so it's no use it being described in greater detail. On her left hand glittered an intricate web of what looked like spider silk, but glowed like solidified magic. Her shoes had little wings on them sticking out the back, and hung at her hip was her knife. She still had on her purple necklace and her ponytail was still tied with a red bow.

"So when you're not in armor you're in the opposite of armor? That outfit is amazing!"

She laughed and spun around. "Thanks. This is the Diva Dress, sort of a stupid name but it still gives me plus ten to attack!"

"Your *dress* augments your *attack*?" Says the man who has a headband that augments his magic. Say, does it augment my channeling?

"What, your clothes don't give you bonuses? It's not as much as the Prism Mail, that's attack plus sixteen. But I'll trade the bonus for not roasting alive." She swished her hips in a very interesting way. "It also increases my hit percentage by twelve percent. The shoes increase my evade by eighteen percent, and the magic seal," she held up her left hand, "increases my magic by plus four." She lifted the edge of the wrap. "Someday I'll show you what this does!" She winked.

*Yeah, they may have some weird ideas like walking from place to place and having to slaughter the wildlife as you go, but you have to admit realities where the people have 'hp' do tend to have amazing equipment. I wonder what her 'attack' is normally? Does sixteen double it or is it hardly worth mentioning?* "As long as it works for you." He looked around now, somewhat confused.

"What's up?"

"There's a light..."

"Light? Of course it's light, the sun is still up ya weirdo."

"Not like that, like a light. I can almost see it out of the corner of my eye, like I could reach out and touch it."

"Think it's got to do with that channeling business Nynaeve said not to do?"

"It must be. What a strange thing." He kept glancing around, trying to catch the "light" he was seeing but gave it up and went on with his story. *She implied it was dangerous so we'll leave it for now.*

Not long after a woman wearing the local fashion of a blouse and skirt both in brown, with a sort of leather slipper on her feet, came over to Kid. She had long red hair, looked to be about sixty with tanned skin, and had several gold necklaces on. "Hello there, are you the one that wants training as a Dreamwalker? I'm Talina."

"Not me, mate. Him." She pointed to Lysanias.

"Him?" she asked, turning. Lysanias gave a little wave. "Oh dear, we don't train men."

"Because you can't?" he asked, getting up from his chair.

"Well, no," she admitted. "It's not like channeling, how people interact with the dream is the same. At least, I would assume so. As I've said we've never trained a man so how would we know?"

"So it's embarrassing?" he went on. "You always enter the dream naked or something?"

She laughed. "It's nothing like that either. You enter the dream wearing whatever you think you should at the time."

"So why then, if it's not rude to ask?"

She considered. "Tradition, I suppose. Those that were slated to become Wise Ones were trained as dream walkers. I was being trained that way myself. But with all the disruption in the world lately and these schools being set up, it was decided that knowledge should be shared, not hoarded. We lost so many people we were worried that the skill would fade from the world altogether if we didn't do something drastic. So we started seeking out anyone that showed talent in this area. But I guess we did leave half the population out of our search."

"So you will train me."

"I didn't say that. You want me to go against hundreds, no thousands of years of tradition?"

“Sure. Someone has to in order to make progress. If a new kind of plow is developed are you going to use the old inferior one just because it happened to come first?”

“Are you saying you’re a plow?”

“If you like. You plant a field the same way every year, you may be missing out on a higher yield if done a different way. In this case you’re planting the same crops year after year. Women Dreamwalkers. So you get people that do everything the same way, you don’t move forward. But with a new perspective...” he trailed off.

“New ideas may ‘take root’ so to speak. I don’t know, a man shows up in my class and my students might rebel.”

“Then they weren’t serious about learning,” Kid surmised. “Tell me about this dream world. Is it predictable? I know my own dreams are somewhat chaotic.”

“It’s anything but. It can be very dangerous especially to those with no training. Anyone that touches the world of dreams and then happens to die there dies here. Mostly untrained people only touch the world of dreams for a moment but the risk is real.”

“So if your students can’t handle something as innocuous as a man showing up to learn, can they be all that prepared for a world of dreams?”

“I’m prepared to offer training in return,” Lysanias told her as she stared at him. “I can probably teach the sword-”

She snorted. “You don’t know us very well if you’re offering that. No Aiel will touch a sword, that much hasn’t changed.”

“Very well. I also know a hand to hand fighting style I doubt anyone here has developed, or there may be other things I could teach if I thought about it.”

“Actually, that could work,” she admitted. “If you agree to beat, say three of my students, they’ll probably accept you into the class.”

“That shouldn’t be a problem.” *After all, I took out those three chi-blockers and they were attacking me in my sleep. This time I get to be awake to start with, at least.*

“Very well. Of course class time is over for today, they’ve gotten their assignments... By the way, how do you know you’re a Dreamwalker? Have you done it? I should have asked that earlier.”

“I’ve dreamed the future many times,” he replied honestly. “Believe me, I can learn what you have to teach.”

“That would seem to be a good indicator. As I was saying, the class is in two parts. The lecture during the day and then meeting in the world of dreams that night. I should have enough people for a new class in a few days, you can join that one. Coming in now to my current class wouldn’t be any good, they’re too advanced.”

“That’s fair. Should I just stop in every few days? Then you can let me know when to attend?”

“Let’s say three days from now, come here two hours after high sun. Signs point to that day being the time my next class will start. Plan for the rest of the afternoon that day, but then two hour classes every day after that. We can discuss when you’ll teach your class at that time.”

*Ah, so I am teaching a class. Good to know. “I’ll be here.”*

“Then I won’t keep you. Didn’t get your name though.”

“I’m Lysanias.”

“Talina. May you find water and shade this day, Lysanias.”

“May you find water and shade.” *I suppose that would be sort of important if you lived in a desert.*

She nodded to Kid and left.

Not half an hour later Nynaeve walked back into the place, and both stood up. Lan of course trailed silently behind her. “So you can see again,” she remarked, looking at Lysanias.

“I sure can, and I’m seeing some kind of ‘light’ now, at least on some level. Hopefully that has to do with channeling, which I haven’t done as you suggested. Met with Talina and she accepted me into the class.”

“If ya can beat up some people,” Kid reminded him.

“Beat up some people?” Nynaeve asked.

"I offered to teach them chi-blocking in exchange for the lessons, given how reluctant she was to train a man. Only three, it should be fine."

"I'd like to see that," Lan remarked.

"You want to watch him beat some people up? Haven't we had enough violence?"

"Much can be told about a man by observing how he fights. Besides, this is just sparing, he's not planning on killing them. Are you?" He glared over.

"Of course not! Chi-blocking is all about knocking someone out, it's the most gentle way of ending a fight there can possibly be!" *I mean short of mind controlling somebody to just go away, I guess.*

"Men!" she said to the ceiling. "Whatever. He didn't channel?" she asked Kid.

"Oh, I see, I'm not believed," Lysanias complained.

"I have no idea what channeling would even look like," Kid told her. "I didn't see any holes in the air, if that's what you're asking."

She harrumphed, but seemed to accept this. "Fine. So sit down, I'll try and give you a brief run down that will hopefully keep you alive as you stole my ability without asking. You're welcome, by the way. No charge."

"Thank you?"

"Not convinced. The most important thing, and I mean the thing you must absolutely keep in mind every time you go to channel is this: the one power is addictive. Drawing it into yourself will make you feel more alive. Colors will be brighter, sounds louder, pain more intense. Every time you channel you could become addicted to the sensations. If you do, you're dead. You'll simply start drawing as much as you can, which best case will simply burn you out but leave you alive, worst case will explode you. This will kill you, and probably everyone around you. So take only as much as you need to do what you need to do it, and no more. Don't go around holding the power, try not to focus on what you're feeling."

"I see!"

"I hope you do. Now, each person can hold a certain amount of the one power safely. The amount varies, you'll probably be able to hold more because you stole my ability as a wilder. I've since discovered some interesting properties about that I can share with you once we start, but for now, know that you'll gradually take the one power into yourself. Just like filling up a teacup, you'll be filled up. The amount of the one power you can hold determines how strong your weaves will be. Many people can't hold enough of the one power to travel, so I hope you can. You'll know you're about to hit your limit because the energy will cause you pain. If you feel that, back off, throw the power away, and be glad you didn't burn yourself out."

"So someone really can be more powerful than another? Not just more skilled?" *That's different from my way of using magic. Skill is everything there, there's no being 'more powerful' than another person.*

"That's right. Next, speaking about weaves, don't mess around with them. If you screw up what you're trying to do, it can fall into something completely different and cause any number of dangerous things to happen. Setting someone on fire or tying them up with air is fine, but if you start just putting streams together at random you'll probably die."

"That's fine." *That's like failing to cast a spell and having a backlash hit you I guess. In this case the power you use has to do something, so it does. But it's 'over there' not really inside you at that point, so it causes something 'over there' rather than just hurting the caster.*

"What else? Right, channeling will tire you out. I'm not sure why, it's a different kind of being tired than say... well, take Lan here. If I for some bizarre reason wanted to learn how to sword fight, how long do you think I would last swinging around some heavy blade?"

"Not long?"

"Exactly. And I'm just talking about attacking, not him cutting me to ribbons. My arms would get tired and I'd be tired."

*In other words your internal energies would be consumed. Like me using an ability of mine over and over.*

"If you're a 'wilder' channeling initially will take some of your internal reserves, but after that, simply channeling will tire you out. Again, if you push it and make a weave, and that knocks you out, you can lose it, it falls into something else, and you die."

"So I'll have to learn my safe limits, in other words."

"Exactly. Usually we explain all this and watch people for ten years at least before we let them channel on their own. You took my skill, but you didn't learn any of this background stuff. I just hope I'm remembering everything. That's just the risk you take, stealing someone's skill at something."

*I wonder if she's a bit upset about that? I can't imagine why. Isn't sharing a skill with someone something to be celebrated?*

"That's about it, I guess. Go ahead, let's see if you can embrace Saidar first, but don't do anything with it for now."

"Very well." He stood up but then paused, looking down. "Er, how would you say that was done? Willing the power into yourself?"

"Women simply open themselves up to it, I assume it'll be the same for you. Men force Saidin to do their bidding, women surrender. I don't know which way you'll have to do it. Why?"

"My sword augments my willpower. As there's a danger of drawing too much and exploding myself, until I know my safe limit let's take it out of the equation."

"What sword?" Lan asked.

"This one." He drew Ragnarock out, then set it nearby on a table.

"That is one ostentatious blade," Lan remarked, leaning over and looking at it. "How do you even swing it around? A sword should be simple, without ornamentation. Like mine." He started to slide his own out.

"Boys, boys, compare them later. Channel now."

"Apologies, wife. May I?" He let his slide back and gestured over to Ragnarock.

"Of course." He nodded. Lan went over and Lysanias took a deep breath, trying to will some of that light into himself. He wasn't sure exactly what he did, but to his eyes he started to glow, and he immediately felt more alive.

*She's right. I almost think I can see better. And colors do seem more vibrant, how about that?*

Nynaeve let out a long breath. "It seems you can channel Saidar after all. I don't believe it. But that isn't all you can hold, is it?"

He carefully felt within himself. "I'm not in any pain. I'll be able to add more to what I've already absorbed?" He looked his hand over, glowing away. *Why a glow anyway?*

"Of course, give it a try."

The world around him came into even sharper focus as he drew more of the one power into himself. The feeling of well being increased as well, and the glow seemed to get about twice as bright. *I can see that this would be addicting. I feel great!*

Nynaeve nodded. "How do you feel?"

"No pain yet. I'll try again."

She hesitated and nodded. "You don't have enough to make a gateway anyway, but be ready to let the power go if you feel any pain. I can hold a lot more, but we still don't know your limits."

"Right." He nodded and drew. The glow got brighter, but not twice as bright again. He started to feel a bit of a pinching, if it could be called that. Not exactly pain, but he felt much more than that might be dangerous. "How about now? I don't think I should take much more in, honestly. It's not pain, but like the echo of pain?"

"For now, that's fine," she agreed. "We'll want to see if you can draw a bit more just to feel the warning sign once while I'm still around. But for now, I think you're holding enough to..." she looked him over, perhaps feeling him out he couldn't tell. "Make a gateway big enough to move a small crowd through."

"That big?!"

"One at a time."

"Aw."

"For now, let's see if you can create the five strands individually. Spirit, air, earth, fire, water. Do you need to see them again?"

He shook his head. "My eyes could tell the difference, and they absorbed how you made them. We'll start with spirit." He easily made a ribbon of elemental energy appear for each, one at a time, and Nynaeve didn't have anything negative to say about that.

"Now let's see if you can make all of them at once, and actually make a gateway. You understand how to split your weaves? You got that from me too?"

"Yes, I think so."

"What about tying them off? I didn't demonstrate that. Or invert them so they can't be sensed?"

He shook his head. "Only what you did."

"I see. So there is still something you need to learn. Not inverting so much, as only people around here would be able to notice. But tying off is useful. You can make me something in repayment I guess."

"Sure! Happy to!"

"Anyway, that's for later. Try putting a gateway right here, opening to right there." She pointed inside the room. "The edges will chop through just about anything so be careful where you put them. Wait, you only saw the weave for laying it vertically, didn't you? That was actually a recent discovery, the weave is a little different for putting it horizontally, let me show you." She embraced the one power and showed in the air how the two weaves looked apart, so he could note the difference. It wasn't so much a different weave as orienting certain parts differently, so he didn't need to "relearn" it.

*"Right. Got it." How do you put the other end someplace someone isn't going to get killed then?* He took a deep breath and willed all five elements out of him at once. Something started to form the air before him.

## Chapter 5

Sing of Manetheren, the sword that would not be broken.

When: No time has passed

Where: Still in the waiting area

Lysanias willed the strands of elemental energy that shot out of him into the pattern he had just seen Nynaeve use, and in the air a vertical line of light appeared. It seemed to rotate, as if a shape at a 90 degree angle to a two dimensional world suddenly snapped to that plane. There in the room were two holes in the air, and Lysanias smiled.

"That's just so wrong," Nynaeve told him, not looking happy at all. "You're a man!"

"You could make it larger?" Kid asked, stepping in front of one and cautiously sticking a finger through it. She craned her neck to see the other one, and there she was, over there, her finger poking through. She was fairly short but even she would have to duck down to fit into it.

"I can put more of the one power into each strand, therefore making it bigger, yes. If I can handle more, that is."

"Still, bloody good work, mate!"

"Thanks. Er, if someone is halfway between them and I closed it... what would happen?"

"They'd get cut in half."

"Won't do that then. Well, let's see about drawing a bit more of the one power to see what my limit is, and we can talk about our next move. You clear?"

Kid stepped back and moved her arms to the side. "Clear."

The gateway winked out.

"Can you sense magic?" Nynaeve asked.

"Sure."

"See if you can tell the gateway was there."

"Okay." He opened up his senses, searching for magic in the area, and once Nynaeve moved off to the side a bit because her jewelry was "magical" he felt he could tell there had been a magical effect there. *I would need to spend some time feeling it out to tell exactly what though.*

"If you get to it soon enough you can read the weave and tell what it was, or at least tell enough to make it yourself. It's a good way to learn a weave you don't know."

*If only I could see magic like I can see spiritual energy.* "Okay."

"Go ahead and pull more of the one power."

"Right, here goes." He pulled in more of the one power and immediately regretted it, as pain flooded through his head. He shoved the power away from himself, and the glow winked out.

"I guess you were basically at your safe limit," Nynaeve told him. "You all right?"

"I think so, I still can 'see' the light I could before. I'm not burned out."

"Good." She didn't sound all that pleased though. "Now, what I was saying earlier. A wilder like me can put effort into their initial drawing of the one power, allowing them to safely hold more. If you can do the same thing, having stolen my ability,"

*Let it go will you?*

"I would only do this in a pinch, at least until you have more experience in telling your limits. Try to remember how strongly you were glowing, and for now don't go above that limit."

"That's reasonable." *So in other words they, and possibly I, can use spirit energy and make 'extra space' inside myself for the one power to go into. Then it won't 'overflow' like it almost did just then. Just like I can convert my inner energies into magic with Skybourne spells and make them more potent. I think this channeling stuff has more in common with other types of magic than she wants to admit.* "But that raises a problem. If that's really all I can hold, that's as large a gateway I can make."

"True," she admitted. "I'll see what I can come up with."

"Fair enough. So what now?"

"I don't know about you, but I'm getting hungry. I'll treat you to dinner. But first let me give you your assignment for this evening."

"Some kind of exercise?"

"Something like that. Here, this is a very simple weave, can you duplicate it?" She put two strands in the air.

*Looks like fire and spirit.* "Let me try." He drew the One Power into himself, feeling he was about halfway to his limit, and duplicated the pattern in the air.

"Now put them together."

Both did, and it created a sphere of light in the air.

"Neat!" *But I can do the same thing easier with fire bending.*

"Tonight I want you to make this weave over and over. That will get you an idea of how much you can channel before you fall over from fatigue."

"Sensible. I can just go to bed afterwards." *Just like using whatever spiritual energy I have left at night to make a spirit battery ward.*

"That's the idea. No drawing as much as you can, just enough to make the two strands."

"Right." Lan handed his sword back, and he slid it home.

"It's lighter than I thought it would be," he remarked.

Lysanias laughed. "No, you're just twice as strong while lifting it. It augments strength as well as my willpower. My reflexes too, now that I think about it."

"Do you know how to use it?"

He grimaced. "Probably not as well as it deserves, honestly. It has the property of hardly ever missing so I tend to rely on that. It informed me, when I kept missing with it lately, that it still takes time for me to get it into position. So I probably should—"

"Wait, *it* told you?"

"Of course! I can't demonstrate it, but here." He pulled his wand out. "This is my wand, for wand-based magic. Let's see if I can get this on the first try." He started to call her out, but then paused. *I'm an idiot. Why don't I just go into my inner soulscape, tell her I want her to come out, and then call her out. She'll be listening and can grab onto my power. I'm so stupid!* He did that, delighting her as she wanted to say hello to everyone, and he opened his eyes and raised her up. "Rosalina, let our spirits work together to protect all people! Bankai!" Energy swirled, and Rosalina was there, wearing her princess outfit. She greeted everyone, looking happy.

"How does... she... relate?" Lan asked.

"Both my wand and my sword have a spirit within them, they're both in a sense alive. Using my energy they can manifest and take on other powers or forms. My wand becomes Rosalina here, a spirit of magic. My sword... becomes the same sword, a spirit of change. Those I kill when it's 'awake' it can turn into a different form." *Still don't know how I feel about that stupid stamp, but I'm looking forward to eating that candy.* "But as it looks the same I can't really demonstrate. Not without killing someone, anyway. So, you get to meet Rosalina instead."

"We haven't even scratched the surface of what you can do, have we?" he decided.

"Not really."

"But you admit to not being very skilled with the blade otherwise."

"Sure, I can admit it. I've muddled through with what I know, but I haven't had a tremendous amount of formal training."

"I see. Perhaps we can do something about that."

"I'm willing to learn. Thank you."

"Of course. With the amount of fighting we went through recently, no one is particularly interested in martial pursuits. Luckily I can wander with my wife, so my skills don't get rusty, but I'd still like to pass on my teachings."

So the group, now including Rosalina who was asking a million questions about everything she saw, headed back to the place they had gotten drinks from. They had dinner, talked about how not to insult any Aiel who were touchy about certain things, and Nynaeve said she would send Lan to them the next day if Lysanias wanted to do sword training.

"I've got three days, I may as well!"

“Fine. This place is part of the transport network of the White Tower, even if hardly anyone wants to come here. He can make his own way back.”

“The what now?” Lysanias asked.

“I’ll show you sometime,” she promised. “It’s basically a large room that Aes Sadi create a bunch of tied off gateways into leading into various cities. That way they don’t have to sit there maintaining them. They don’t last, but once a day isn’t that big an issue. There’s a station here reserved for the other side, so anyone can step through the gateway here, go there, and then step through there to get someplace else. We don’t allow goods, just people, not that the gateways are big enough for anything but a person in any case.”

“Huh. We’ve got something like that back on my home world!” Lysanias told her, somewhat surprised. “It’s actually not super official, the Mage’s guild would never have gone for something like that, but another group thought it important enough so they made their own.”

She shrugged. “I suppose once you can make holes in space, the idea is fairly obvious. Make it as easy as possible for as many as possible to use the gateways you make. It brings in money and the world seems a bit smaller. Harder to attack another nation if you know that restaurant you love going to on weekends might be destroyed.” She grinned.

“I suppose.”

“Anyway, if you need anything just let Lan know, and I’ll be around. Let me know how your progress with the One Power goes. There are classes for channelers around here, but I wouldn’t recommend you paying too close attention to them. If someone figured out you were actually looking at the weaves they would freak out.”

*What if I did it as a woman?* “I understand.” *I could always be ignored, that’s probably easier. This “tying off” sounds useful, have to see if I can sit in on a class about that.*

The two left, leaving the three now looking at each other.

“Say, you’re a fighter aren’t you?” Rosalina asked Kid.

“Sure am. Pretty good, if I do say so meself.”

“Lysanias, why don’t you open the dimension and Kid can help me practice my combat skills?”

“Or,” he countered. “We can just go outside town and save me the ten minutes of spell casting.”

“I suppose. Sun is getting pretty low, it won’t be that hot out. And I could make us a pavilion if I had to.”

“Just one minute then, and we can head out.” He made a cross with his fingers.

“Shadow Clone Technique!” There was a burst of energy and two more Lysanias stood there.

Kid licked her lips. “You’re an interesting guy to have around.” She blushed a little, looking between the three of them.

“Thanks?” *What could she be thinking of I wonder.* He pulled the hubPad out, along with the trunk that had his paper and ink supplies in it, then smacked his forehead and handed the stele over as well.

“What, er, are they going to do?” Rosalina asked.

“I’m going to work on a ward to maintain something, like an alchemical transformation,” the clone answered.

The other nodded. “As using the One Power doesn’t seem to use my spirit energy, just drawing it initially, I can split it like this without worry. I’m going to work on a ward to let someone see unseen things.”

“While I,” said the original, “go with you ladies. I’ll work on making that light Nynaevae wanted, see how tired I get. I don’t need to be bothering, uh, me, or me, while I do it.”

“For now ya can all stand in the hall while I get changed!” Kid told them, shoving the three.

“Changed?” asked clone 1.

“Sure. I aint’ about to take someone on without wearing my armor. I do expect your attacks are lethal, right?”

“I can’t really dampen them down, sorry.”

“So I need protection. Out!!”

Lysanias managed to get the stele and hurriedly made two 'ignore me' wards out in the hall before anyone saw, then the group was off to the outskirts of town. Rosalina created two poles that Lysanias jammed into the sand with his great strength, after she created and attached a canvas to it to create some shade for them. Weighed down by rocks it wasn't going anywhere, and after she made some wooden practice daggers for Kid the two went at it. Kid was for the most part a close up fighter, needing to "charge" her element grid by hitting her opponent for "reasons." She could then unleash a powerful magic attack, which of course she didn't do because she didn't want to kill her new friend. But she did use cure and heal magic, when Rosalina got in a lucky hit. It seemed she had plenty of "HP" so she could take even a few hits without being too worried about it.

Rosalina on the other hand was a ranged fighter, only recently having learned martial arts and two slender wands (even as dense as there were) weren't really great for fending off weapons. So she got into a rhythm of shoving her with telekinesis and following up with magical blasts as Kid zigzagged back towards her. Lysanias felt this was excellent training, as she couldn't always count on opponents being at range, or standing around waiting for her to hit them. *Still, I should mention she can learn the method of air bender dodging if she wants to, from me.* Kid was true to her word, being very experienced in combat, so the two worked well together.

Lysanias himself, now a bit dragged down because of the two clones he was maintaining back in the city, worked on making the ball of light as Nynaeve had ordered. He did note that while his spiritual energy reserves didn't get depleted, creating the two strands over and over did get him a bit tired. Putting in the minimum amount of the One Power he was able to create the ball of light sixty times and felt he could probably do that many again before collapsing. So he drew a bit more of the One Power and tried putting more power into each strand. He was pleasantly surprised to find the light was twice as bright, and did ten of them, then drew more and put that in, finding it twice as bright again. He felt he was near his limit with what he was drawing, and as expected could now only create a ball of maximum brightness 12 times before he let the One Power go.

*That's it. I'm exhausted. I have to admit, that was more than I expected, I think my items are enhancing me. Maybe the sash? I know originally it was meant to enhance "stamina" so I must think that would work out for me in this case.*

After resting for maybe an hour he handed his shield over to Kid and asked if she would mind him practicing his spell aim. She didn't, so both lobbed stunner spells at her, aiming for the shield while she dodged back and forth. By the time the sun set all three were tired out and headed back to the inn. Kid got ready first, shoving the two clones out, but Lysanias just dismissed them.

"Oh, I changed my mind it seems," he announced.

"About what?" Rosalina asked.

"I figured I would rather finish one ward today instead of half of two wards, and worked together with myself to get the first one done. I'll do the same tomorrow and finish the one to see unseen things."

"So you put your heads together?"

"That's right."

"Two heads were better than one?"

"Yes?"

"I scratch my back, I scratch mine?"

"Er?"

"Great minds think alike?"

"Isn't it time for you to return to being a wand?"

She laughed. "Thanks for calling me out. Don't forget me tomorrow, okay? As you often do!" She put her hands on her hips and leaned forward, looking stern but trying not to smile more.

"I'll set a reminder."

“You better. See you!” She nodded and vanished, and Lysanias stuck the wand back in holster. He picked up the hubPad and activated it, wanting to look something up before he climbed into bed.

*Spirits, spirits, here we are. I'm sure I remember a spirit- Ah! Horse. Yes, I thought so. When horse is aiding someone they are basically tireless, they accumulate no fatigue from any source. Well, one source is channeling. I put horse on and I can channel all I want and not get tired for doing it. That seems super useful, and maybe I can make some kind of talisman to achieve the same thing as a gift for Nynaeve's help. It is good being me, isn't it?*

## Chapter 6

The more women there are around, the softer a wise man steps...

When: Some time that night

Where: The dream

In the dream, Lysanias was sitting with a group of young woman who were laughing and talking around a table. He couldn't make out their faces, but they were happy and

**flicker**

In the dream, Lysanias stared into the cold, glassy eyes of the young lady he had killed, the hole in her chest

**flicker**

In the dream, Lysanias dodged an energy beam shot at him by an angry

**flicker**

In the dream, Lysanias was slammed back as the woman before

**flicker**

In the dream, Lysanias stared as the woman in front of

**flicker**

In the dream, Lysanias felt his soul being

**flicker**

In the dream Lysanias sank into

**flicker**

The dream

**flicker**

Dream

**flicker**

**flicker**

**flicker**

**flicker**

"No!" Lysanias shouted, coming awake. He was breathing heavily, and Kid was there at his side.

"Are you all right?" she asked, concern plain on her face. "You were thrashing around. I couldn't wake you."

Lysanias sat up, clutching his head. "I don't know. The dream, fragmented, don't know what it means. Never happened before. Horrible. Death. Someone died. Me? I died? Angry, she was so angry. Why?"

"You're going to die?"

"Me? Wait. No. Young girl. Aiel, I think. Not you. Saw the eyes, not your eyes. I killed her? Why? Why would I- couldn't kill someone."

"Slow down, it was just a dream!"

"No, I can dream the future. I think it's the future. It wasn't jumbled, it was cracked. Fragmented. What could do that? Jason? Did he find me already? Was this an attack? Is he here, was it some kind of feedback? But no, I had dreams in the last world, I think he was in one actually. Some kind of barrier?"

"How can I help you?" her voice pleaded.

Lysanias blinked, lowering his hands. "Kid?"

"You remembered! About bloody time. You okay there, mate?"

"Yes. Sorry, did I wake you? What time is it?" He looked out the window, squinting a little, as a hint of sunlight seemed to be peeking through the curtain.

"Are you kidding? I've never seen a clock in this place. Sun is coming up though."

He yawned. "Then I guess I should get up. Normally I'd record that dream, but it was too fragmented. Hey, sorry if I scared you. That really hasn't happened before." *Is it because there are other people with dream powers around here? Some kind of feedback?*

She stood, hands on her hips and looking down at him. "I should hope not. Now, these people either don't have or don't believe in indoor plumbing, which is bloody inconsiderate if

you ask me. I'm off in search of a bathtub or whatever they use. Hopefully they know what that is. When I get back we can have breakfast."

"Sounds good to me. Oh, take a ward or they won't understand you!" He handed one over and she nodded in thanks. *I should make a talisman I can just loan out. Honestly.*

She left the room and Lysanias swung his legs off the bed, sitting a moment longer and trying to piece together the dream he had just had. *It was the same girl, wasn't it? Always that girl. But how did she do all that stuff? It was like she was angry, lashing out at me with whatever she could. But each time it was different. Why was it different?*

Shaking his head he got dressed, used his spell to clean up, and then made food for them both. Kid was back some time later looking refreshed, and the two ate and discussed her plan for the day.

"I figure I'll see the town," she told him. "Then head out to the practice field. That's where you two will be, right?"

"We might have to make some adjustments to keep the sun off, but probably. You remember what happened with you pulling that tiny knife, if someone saw two people going at it with swords there would really be an outcry."

"No doubt. Do try to stay out of trouble, won't you?" She left.

Lysanias got Rosalina out, then made two more copies of himself to begin work on the next ward. The second clone had the bright idea of trying both the ward that kept spirits around and the new ward that could maintain a supernatural power beyond the normal limit and the second one seemed to work. He felt he wasn't being dragged down anymore, so the three got to work. They hadn't finished by the time Lan showed up, carrying two practice blades, and he created a gateway out to the "practice area" they had made. Lan really had to stoop to fit through it, but he didn't complain. The canvas was still there, but the sun was at the other side now, so Rosalina simply made more and used her powers to loop it over the poles that were already there. Rocks were not in short supply there so plopping some down to hold the other end, they had a rather large "tent" to practice under, which was at least a little cooler than it would have been otherwise. Kid was already there, lounging in the shade, but she got up as the two men looked ready to begin. Lysanias put his sword away, got out his shield, and raised his practice blade to Lan.

*Who I see uses a two handed style, apparently. Ah, that's why the long hilt on his sword. Is he going to be able to teach me anything, given how different our base styles are?*

"We'll just see what your current level is," Lan announced, probably thinking along the same lines as he was looking over the shield. "I'm not sure how my style will translate to fighting with a shield."

"I'm sure swinging a sword around can't be that different, one handed or two."

Lan managed to look a little disgusted, a little nauseated, and a little offended all without changing his expression in the slightest, and Lysanias' connection to the force warned him he was about to be attacked. He bounced the strike off his shield with a smirk.

*Maybe being the best doesn't actually mean much around here? Should I really have been able to block that so easily?*

He struck out with his other hand as Lan's blade pinged off the shield, but it was back in position and knocking his blade aside easily. He frowned. *He's fast, I'll give him that.*

The blade darted in again, and Lysanias stepped to the side, feeling like he had never blocked an attack so well in his life. The sword thwacked off again, the impact being transmitted to his arm, so he knew the man wasn't fooling around. *Rabies, I get hit with that and even a practice blade is going to break my arm. What happened to going easy on me?* He kept his sword in motion, trying to come in low this time but again the two swords crashed together. Lan's blade slipped around it, whacking him in the head and making him see spots, and the two exchanged a flurry a blows. He managed to parry the next strike, then took a hit to the body and the right leg, then blocked again.

*Okay, I was wrong apparently. I haven't managed to land a single- what the?*

Lan it seemed had stopped fooling around, and with a sudden series of strikes tapped him on the chest, moved down his right side hitting both his right arm and leg, smacked him in

the chest again, and then somehow came at him from some odd angle and hit his shield arm as well. All while making it look like he was simply making a series of stitches while Lysanias floundered around with his shield like he was a fish out of water.

“Whoa, whoa,” he called, jumping back. “The heck was all that?”

“I stopped holding back,” Lan explained as if this was the most obvious thing in the world. He lowered the sword. “I thought because you blocked me that first time I could step it up a little.”

“Apparently not!” he decided. *What happened to the force warning me? I felt it guiding me, but I still couldn't manage a defense against the man. Have I simply not met a true master until now?*

“He's faster than I am with two daggers, and he's using a bleeding sword!” Kid announced. “Teach me, oh master of the blade!”

“That is somewhat the point of all this,” he agreed dryly. “I was watching you, Lysanias. You went through quite the range of emotions there, especially at the end when you were, uh, flailing around.”

“Flailing!?”

“You were, mate. It was really pitiful. I was wincing from where I was.”

“I'll try to take that as constructive criticism.”

“I mention it for a reason,” Lan continued. “When you are facing another you must be one with your blade. With your opponent. With the fight itself. You cannot allow emotion or stray thoughts to distract you.”

“What exactly are you saying?”

He stared a moment. “What do you know of the flame and the void?”

Lysanias and Kid both shook their heads. “Never heard of it,” Lysanias told him, and Kid agreed with a nod.

“In the simplest of terms you imagine a flame inside yourself, surrounded by a darkness. Into the flame you feed your emotions, your pain, even your very will to survive the battle ahead. No thoughts should intrude as thoughts are a distraction. You simply are. Are the sword. Are your opponent.”

“And that helps?” Kid asked with a frown.

“Those that master it typically rise to become the best at whatever combat form they practice. Any type of combat style can benefit. Archery, swordsmanship, even fighting hand to hand. Believe me, it can turn a sheepherder into a blademaster, I've seen it happen.”

Kid and Lysanias regarded each other. “Personally, I'm always on the lookout for techniques that are in no way supernatural,” he admitted. “Like chi-blocking, so I can teach them to those that don't have their own powers. This sounds like something that would make a good addition. It's not supernatural, simply a mental discipline. I really did think I was good before this, believe me. I mean I've gotten through six other realities somehow, though of course I used no active powers in that fight just a second ago. Had I really been in danger I would have hit him with fire, or simply told him to drop his sword.” *Or Rosalina would have smacked him from the side, or my mountain spirit would have stomped on him. Or any number of things, I guess.*

“That's the problem,” Kid told him. “You rely on those powers.”

“Shouldn't I?”

“Oh, probably. But you never know when they might get cut off.”

*Actually, I do. Stupid Skeletor.* “You're not wrong. Very well, seems like we're both in. How do we begin?”

“We begin,” he began, stabbing his sword into the stand and sitting down cross legged.

“With the flame. Sit before me and let us contemplate the flame that's inside us.”

“Good thing my innate element is red not blue!” Kid joked, but neither man got it. “Never mind.”

Lysanias even conjured up a flame in the beginning, (after healing himself, those blows *stung*) and both stared at it. Soon Lan had them close their eyes and try to envision that fire, but in their minds. He also instructed them in breathing technique, and relaxing.

*Wait, this is just meditation, I learned about this from the elves. And Tenzin, he was big into that, right? So is this a kind of battle meditation, then?*

The rest of the day was spent with Lan going back and forth between the battle meditation, watching Lysanias and Kid fight, offering suggestions to both and even taking them both on at once. They were to try and keep the flame in their minds the whole time, and not let how the fight was going to influence how it might go in the future. "Don't be your own worst enemy," he said to them. "You took a hit, so what? If you are one with your opponent he or she is simply hitting themselves. Deep into the void the pain should be happening to someone else anyway. The next strike will be yours if you let it. You can't change the past, let it go and simply focus on the now."

*Can't change the past... I wonder.*

That evening when Lysanias returned the two clones had finished the next ward and gotten some ideas for turning the shield into a talisman. Everything from simply helping him block better to wild "grade 10" stuff of turning him into a hulking, armored killing machine. He could only do it once, after all, so he wanted it to be good.

"That's not strictly true," clone one said to him.

"Right," agreed the other. "You could have different covers and simply exchange them before a fight, based on what you might need. If you think it's a group, have a speed cover."

"If it's something huge, have the avatar of war cover."

"I suppose that's one way to do it. But couldn't I just wear another ring and have both at the same time?" Lysanias protested. "I'm doing the work, why choose?"

"Good point," one agreed.

"You read my mind," two agreed.

"Later, you two." He dismissed them, then stood a moment as the memories of what they had done that day filtered into him. *And that's another ward completed. At least they had some time to make them, I make too many more wards and that's all I'll be able to do. Sit and make wards. But they are useful.*

The next night Lysanias had no dreams he recalled, and that morning Nynaeve showed up with Lan.

"Got you something," she told him, tossing something glittering into the air. He nearly caught it, but it bounced off his palm and went spinning across the floor. "Nice moves," she praised, rolling her eyes.

"Sorry, didn't expect people to come in here and start throwing stuff at me. What it is?" He reached for it and picked it up. It was a ring, made of gold, of a snake biting its own tail.

"It's the ring Aes Sedai wear," she explained. "And while I might not wear it around here, as it'll certainly cause eyebrows to be raised, I figure as you took my skill you should have one of your own. By all rights you should learn the hundred weaves, go through the testing, and swear on the oath rod but I figure you can be an honorary member, given what you've been through."

"Thanks. It means a lot to me!" He looked it over, the workmanship seemed a bit crude, obviously it had been made by hand but he could easily add detail to it when he resized it.

"I got the largest one I could. I hope it fits."

He waved that off. "If it doesn't it will a minute later. Don't worry about it."

"Fine. The other reason I'm here is to make sure you saw the new notes in the hubPad. As there's a person that can channel that has one of these I figured I should put my mark on things. Read the stuff over, see if it's clear. If not I can see what I can do to make it so."

"Fair enough." He got out the pad and looked in the new "channeling" section, broken up into several categories. Weaves for "spells," what one could do with simple strands, making as many strands as possible, tying off weaves, inverting them, cutting them, it went on and on. "You did this much in a day?"

"A day spent in the hub. If you define 'a day' to mean 'a week or two there.' Yes. You're welcome."

"Wow!" He touched the tab for tying off weaves. It went on for pages so clearly a lot of work had been put in. "You didn't have to do all this for me. How can I repay you?"

"I didn't," she gruffly announced. "I did it for myself. To codify channeling in a way that's never been done before, to help teach my own classes, and perhaps any other agents that come from this world. I'm always on the lookout for some, you know."

*Never been done?* "There are *no* books on channeling in this world at all?" He looked up, aghast. *My friends back home would be disgusted. Even the guild has whole libraries dedicated to magic. Highly guarded, perhaps, but they exist. Anyone with gold can buy a spell, but no channeler can buy a weave? Is that good or bad? I suppose anyone who is Aes Sedai can simply just ask around, and any woman that can channel is supposed to be Aes Sedai. It's like if every magic user back home had to belong to the guild, but spells were free, and practicing magic outside the guild was illegal. An interesting direction both worlds took, if you think about it.*

Nynaeve shook her head. "It's been an oral tradition for thousands of years. The White Tower didn't want anyone who was not an Aes Sedai channeling because of the danger. If you could just go pick up a book and try it out that would defeat the point. I see your face, and I agree. I have no idea how much knowledge has been lost because of this policy. That changes now."

"I guess so. This is going to take me some time, there seems to be a lot here. Tell you what; if you'll loan me your pad I'll make two clones and they can each read different sections and tell you what I think. That way I can do this and still practice the sword with Lan."

"Clones?"

"Yeah, my clone technique." He put his fingers together. "Shadow Clone Technique!" Two copies of him appeared behind him. "Hi!" they both said with a wave.

"I can't even think of a weave that could let me do that!" Nynaeve exclaimed. "You know how useful that would be?"

"I'm getting a sense of it, yes," clone one answered. "Shall we?" He reached for the hubPad.

"Good show, old sport," said the other, reaching a hand out to Nynaeve. She handed hers over.

"Don't drop it, or whatever."

*I'm not so clumsy as to drop something that's just handed to me nicely.*

That evening the clones vanished and Lysanias sat a moment, sorting out the memories of what he had read. His clones had of course questioned Nynaeve, who made corrections to the text. But he now had a vague idea of everything he could do with weaves, but sighed over having even more stuff to practice now. *Inverting is somewhat pointless, only people from this reality would be able to see the strands anyway. Tying off could be somewhat useful, but given the number of weaves I know, one and the ball of light I guess so two? That's probably not worth it either. Making them thicker or thinner? I guess I'll just have to see. Get the basics down like with everything else, and if I find myself wishing I could do it, I can practice it. The problem is it's half bending and half magic. I mean what if the avatar could bend all the elements and make a gateway? These people can manipulate wind or fire in the same way, they're all avatar spellcasters. The overlap is such that channeling almost isn't worth it. That portal though...*

Finally the day had arrived and Lysanias was going to make his way to the school to begin dreamer training. Kid wasn't going to get anything out of it, but asked if she could have a ward that let her see the unseen. Lysanias had no problem with it, slapping that and a communication ward on her, and she announced her plans for the day.

"See if there's anything about this town I didn't see before, and then keep practicing that flame and void technique."

"I'll see you in a few hours, then."

"Have a good class."

Six young girls were hanging around the school as Lysanias arrived, and they looked at him curiously. They were all wearing the typical brown and whites that the Aiel seemed to prefer and had either red or yellow hair, though in different styles. All seemed to be in their

late teens, though of course all carried at least one dagger. One had three spears, and what looked like deep cuts on her arms that were in the late stages of healing up. He stood near them, making them take a step away and glare, lowering their voices. Talina appeared a few moments later and guided them to the room they were going to use.

"Talina, that man is following us!" whispered one girl.

"He's going to be in our class," she announced. She might as well have announced she was going to sacrifice them all to a dark god for how stunned they seemed and how hard they started to protest. She raised a hand. "If he can beat three of you in hand to hand combat before we begin." Six pairs of eyes suddenly affixed his.

*They don't have to seem so eager.*

"Wait, one at a time, or all together?" asked the one with the spears.

"All together," she replied. "I'm surprised you would even have to ask."

"Just making sure. I volunteer."

"I volunteer!" said another.

"I volunteer!" two more said, and looked daggers at each other.

"I volun- crud!" the forth said a step behind them. "Lucky jerks."

*Wait what?*

## Chapter 7

The last embrace of the mother welcome you home

When: Just before the first lesson in Dreaming

Where: The classroom

The “classroom” had no chairs or tables, so there were only some cushions to move out of the way. The two girls that had claimed the honor of beating up Lysanias at the same time were doing a hand game of some kind, and one girl triumphed over the other.

“Yes!” she announced, pumping a fist. “You’re mine, beardman.”

*Beardman?*

The girl with the spears set them against the wall and started doing a series of stretches, looking eager. The others backed against the walls of the room, looking interested.

*Great, looks like I’ve been talked into fighting all three at once. In fairness, I did take three chi-blockers and that was after waking up from a sound sleep. At least in this case I can see them coming. And furthermore...* He took his shoes off, as the floor here was just solid rock, and an awareness of everyone in the room passed into him through earth bending. *I can probably rely on the force, but guess what? I’m stacking the deck in my favor. Sue me.* He went to unbuckle the sword, but paused. *Why not try everything? I can move like an air bender, even though I’m not fighting with the sword. It just means don’t stand there like a lump, move around and get into the best position. This meditation technique too, the sword augments my willpower and it’s just starting the technique that requires a strong will, maintaining it does not.* He imagined the flame within him, a light in the darkness he could feed all his emotions into. His worry about this fight, his anticipation of learning about Dreaming, the difference between himself and his three opponents. He relaxed and fed it all into the flame. The One Power seemed to beckon in the darkness, but this wasn’t the time for that. He set the sword down on his shoes and walked to the center of the room, thoughts quiet. The three warily stepped around him, two near the front and one right behind.

*She’ll be the first- no thoughts, there is only the now.*

All three raised their arms, getting into a fighting stance.

“Begin when this rock hits the ground,” said Talina.

In the back of his mind Lysanias chuckled, he was one with the rock, the Talina, the entire room.

The rock dropped. The instant it hit the ground Lysanias felt it, spinning, taking two steps towards the girl behind him and striking out with a fury of blows. He just slipped under her guard by millimeters, hitting her four times in the body and making her slump over. He spun back to the others, already dismissing her from the combat.

The girl moved to his right, and now the closest to him gave a yell and charged him. Lysanias neither welcomed or disparaged this action, simply zigzagging left and right, then spinning to the side as she got in range. She went past him, surprised not to be blocked but simply avoided, and now behind her felt her side being pummeled. She too went down.

Lysanias wasn’t quite recovered from that action by the time the last Aiel girl made it to him, but she did a running kick figuring that would be safest. If she missed she would go past him, making it harder to get behind her like he had for the others. She didn’t miss, solidly smacking into his body and staggering him a little. She landed, pivoted, and struck out with the other leg. This did miss, giving Lysanias a chance to come around and make his own attack. He struck out, and she did manage to knock one of his strikes away, but their martial art was obviously based on simply hitting as hard as you could, not being quick about it. So his other four landed, taking her out of the fight as well.

“Looks like I won after all,” remarked the one girl who had lost the right to participate. She walked over to her friend and poked her. “You dead?”

The girl glared at her with her eyes.

“You have gained much honor in this fight,” Talina told him. “They are not seriously wounded, I hope?” She too bent to check on the nearest girl.

“The whole point is to not seriously wound, simply to stun,” Lysanias explained. “They’ll be fine in a few minutes.”

"And you'll teach that to us?" one of the other girls asked, eyes wide.

"That's the plan."

"Imagine those sworn to peace in battle we could take with a fighting style like that!"

*Imagine what?*

"But we don't raid each other anymore," the last girl reminded her.

"We might start again. You don't know."

"That's a good point," allowed the one still poking her friend. "Once all the current sworn to peace in battle's year is up, who is going to be sworn to peace in battle? Already their numbers are dwindling as it's been six months since the last battle."

*Why do they keep saying that long and complicated phrase? Am I missing something?*

"A problem for others," announced Talina. "You are all here to learn about Dreaming, so I suggest you focus on that, for now. Prop these girls up against the wall, I can see they are still conscious. No need to wait to begin class, they can listen to what I have to say just as easily paralyzed as they can able to move."

*Harsh much?*

One of the girls started glowing, and Lysanias saw streams of air shooting out of her, lifting or at least dragging the girls over to the edge of the room. Lysanias at least brought some cushions over, which he slipped under them while trying to stay away from the glowing girl so she didn't feel his ability to channel. It seemed she was concentrating on not dropping her friends so he didn't have to worry, but still made a mental note to try and sit farthest away from her while not appearing to sit farthest away from her.

"I'm Alisha," the one that lost her spot told him. She had her brown hair cut short, and it seemed was missing a tooth on her left side. She was trying to jam her friends hands into her armpits so they would stay there, but one kept slipping out. She seemed to think this hilarious. "This is Tamil. Hello, I'm Tamil!" She made Tamil wave one of her hands while doing a funny voice, earning her a fresh glare. Tamil had longer hair, currently done up in a bun, green eyes to contrast her friend's blue, and two small hoops of gold in each ear. Alisha went back to trying to stuff her hand back into her own armpit. She managed it, her arms staying there so she stepped back. "Perfect!" She smiled at him.

*I could probably fix that tooth of hers if I could do it without having to explain my whole situation. "I'm Lysanias, nice to meet you both. You two are pretty good friends, huh?" Because if you're not, I think you better sleep someplace else tonight. I'm feeling a lot of complex emotions from your friend right now.*

"We've known each other forever."

"Alisa, you will do ten laps around the city when class is over. I said to prop them up and listen, not flirt. You are taking too long, save it for the sweat tents."

"Oh really?" Her mood immediately took a downturn, and she crossed her own arms. "Perhaps I'll just walk out that door right now and go back to my previous studies. You may be a Wise One but that doesn't mean I have to be one. I am your student in Dreaming but you cannot punish me for simply introducing myself to this man. You came to me, remember, saying I might have the Talent for Dreaming. But it's only one road among many I could take now, I'm still considering my options."

Talina's face grew more shocked and angry as she said this, finally she sputtered. "Now it's twenty laps around the city! Carrying a bag of rocks!"

Alisa shook her head. "No, it's not. Don't you get it? He Who Comes With the Dawn has broken all bonds. The old Aiel me would have been intimidated by you, for sure, as you are a Wise One and worthy of respect. But now? Now I wonder who I am as an Aiel, and maybe it's time for me to find out. Maybe it's time for all Aiel to discover who they are in this new Age. You want to teach me? Fine. But you will not punish me like I was a child just for talking to someone. You call yourself a Wise One, but I've seen the wider world now. I know what powers walk it. You are a very small part of it, and you hold no more fear for me."

The other girls in the class seemed awestruck at this exchange, and Lysanias felt both horror and pride coming from Tamil. "I can't believe what I'm hearing!" Talina sputtered. "It wasn't that long ago that-

Alisa threw back her head and laughed. "By the Creator, if I hear that phrase one more time out of some old person's mouth I'm going to scream. It's over, okay? Let it go. I'm not

that mindless girl anymore, running to satisfy your sadistic need to know I'm out there lifting rocks or whatever. Did such punishments for minor infractions make sense before? Yes, we needed to be strong. Our land was harsh, we needed to be ready. But now He Who Comes With the Dawn has given us a new task. Keep the peace in the world. A world of dragons, of Traveling on a whim, of new wonders discovered at the schools every day. We need to be strong in others ways now. Running around like chickens with our heads cut off isn't going to cut it anymore. If I have done wrong, I will accept punishment of course. But I have done no wrong this time."

*I probably shouldn't get involved, but the water bender way is redirection, right?* "It seems to me," Lysanias said quietly as she tried to think of a response, "that it is now you, Talina, that is holding up this class. I came here to learn about Dreaming, and so far all I've done is paralyze three people. You want to have a shouting match with this girl, do it outside of the time you're supposed to be teaching us." *What was it she said?* "Save it for the sweat tents."

Everyone in the room looked at him like he was insane.

"What? I thought it was just a phrase that meant save it for later. Did I get it wrong?"

"You have no idea how wrong you got it, wetlander. I don't need you to defend me either."

*From beardman to wetlander? Is that a promotion or what?*

"Let's just get on with it," sighed Talina. The other students gathered their cushions and sat, facing her. She went over what would be taught in the class, as it wasn't as easy as just opening a door to get to the World of Dreams. They would need to learn how to fall asleep quickly, how to remain asleep once there, how to tell they were dreaming, how to go from their own dreams to the World of Dreams, and how to manipulate the WoD to achieve various effects. She also issued a series of warnings, foremost was that if you died while in a regular dream, you probably woke up. But if you died while "lucid" you were probably dead here, too. Other dangers were roaming nightmares, that broke off from dreamers and rolled through the WoD. Those could suck you in and get you killed. Sometimes a particularly strong nightmare would generate a creature that escaped that dream and roamed around making trouble. And of course wolves were sometimes spotted there, but they usually stayed away from people.

She made each of them repeat key points back to her until she was satisfied, then described the various sensations and thought patterns ones should utilize to go between states of mind. She ended the lesson by telling them to try Dreaming themselves to the base of Avendesora which Lysanias clarified was the huge tree in the center of town. Again he got some looks like "even outsiders should know that." She explained they should accomplish this by holding the image of the tree in mind as they fell asleep, and with luck they would find themselves there.

By this time the sun was going down so she told them to eat an early dinner and get to bed early, the real class would of course begin once everyone had met in the WoD. Alisha waited until she was gone to leave with Tamil, obviously trying to avoid running into her outside class. For her part, Tamil didn't seem to mind her defeat at his hands, saying it was "a fine joke, as long as you don't expect me to be your sworn to peace in battle now" and looking forward to getting some lessons.

*Be my what? Do I even want to know?*

Back at the inn Kid jumped up from the lobby area when Lysanias got back, and asked him how his day went.

"I got into the class all right, at least. I just hope tomorrow's class is a little more peaceful."

"Did ya screw something up?"

"Me? Why would you assume I messed up?"

"So you're saying you didn't, then?"

"No, I didn't." They went back to the room where Lysanias made them some more food with magic and he told her about Alisha.

"Sounds like my kind of girl. I don't mean that way, I mean she could be a friend of mine," she clarified.

"I figured that."

"Anyway, saw something strange wandering around town, thought maybe you might want to know. I bring it up because no one else seemed to notice it."

"This reality should be safe from the shadow avatar, it must be something local. Can those that can channel see things normal people can't? I'll have to ask Nynaeve. Anyway, what was it?"

"I hesitate to call it a creature. Freaked me out a fair bit, I'll admit that to ya. The thing was sorta hanging around in a dark alley."

"What thing?"

"Kind of a blob? But it moved around, seemed to be watching people pass, sort of person sized. Imagine a shadow that could move around and was solid like a person. I mean it wasn't stuck to a wall, like ya would expect a shadow to be, it was a form that was standing there."

Lysanias' face hardened. "Can you show me where you saw it?"

"Nah, it's long gone by now. I watched it for a bit and once it realized I could see it, zip. Left right quick. You recognize it?"

"Let's just say that I've encountered creatures like that before. Back home there were some shadowy beings that could possess people, they were working for the avatar of shadows. Maybe it was left behind after the big battle?"

"And I just happened to run into it? Mate, if there's one there's got to be more."

"True, you seeing the only one here would be a coincidence unheard of. Still, for all we know it could be native to this world. The shadow avatar can't be the only source of dark creatures, I mean the ones on my world came from someplace else."

"So just forget it?"

He shook his head. "No, I would probably ask. Did you find the place she was talking about, their gateway hub?"

"I did. Want me to track her down?"

"Tomorrow. I think it can wait, actually I could ask if there's any danger. In fact that's exactly what I'll do, right now. Give me a few minutes and I'll have an answer for us." He made a gateway to the practice area so he could chant without bothering anyone, calling out Rosalina to make a barrel and some wood to burn. *May as well get more practice in calling spirits, if I'm going to need horse one day.* With that done he asked the world if the creature that Kid had seen and described to him was a danger to anyone in the next two days.

No

*And there you have it.*

He went back and told Kid not to worry, she could go through looking for Nynaeve tomorrow.

"Give me something to do, at least. Lan should be along at some point though, right? He wasn't going to give us just one lesson, right?"

"He said to come find him at the White Tower when we had a minute. He didn't know how much time Dreamer training would take up on a day to day basis. Us needing to be asleep to really get anything out of it."

"Fair enough. White Tower, I can ask to be through through to there. Fine."

After eating Lysanias went to lay down, attempting to relax as he had been taught and focus on the tree. He had of course gone to see it since his arrival in town, even sitting for a moment underneath it and projecting his senses to get a better look at the leaves. He kept this image firmly in mind and he lay there, trying to recall how things felt when he had a dream about the future. He was fairly sure the two abilities would be linked, and that he would have a leg up on the others. *If they haven't already been Dreaming up until now, which they could have been. In fact I might be the worst of the bunch.*

But it turned out to be that he was neither the worst nor the best of the group, appearing near the base of the tree before two of the girls. Talina greeted him.

"Welcome to the World of Dreams," she said, waving him over.

"I'm dreaming?" He seemed to come to his senses, realizing that yes, this was a dream, wasn't it?

"Yes, and you are with us. Well done."

He looked over at the others, looking around at the world they found themselves in. It looked exactly like real world, just with less people. From the buildings to the tree, every detail looked the same as far as he could tell. And of course it wasn't dark, despite there being no real lights he could see perfectly. The girl's clothes changed almost continuously, even sometimes leaving them altogether, which they didn't seem to notice or care about. He glanced down to see he was wearing his armor and the only pair of pants he really owned.

*That seems about right.*

"As you learn focus your clothes and appearance will stop changing so much," Talina told them. "For now, try to focus on this area because if you think about someplace else, you're likely to find yourself there instead of-" Two of the girls vanished.

"Here," she finished lamely. "What did I just say?"

The two shared a look but the other two reappeared in a moment.

"Well done. Let's try a few things now, keeping our minds solely on the task I give you and not jumping all over the place."

Not long after that the other girls appeared, and Talina took them around to get a feel for the World of Dreams. She explained that buildings and things of permanence, like the tree, could be found where you expected them but things like doors or wagons that moved could be in a different position each time you looked. While they walked around Lysanias tried various things, from sensing energy to picking up a rock and trying to determine what it was made of.

*Nothing. Inari was right, I can't seem to access any of my powers here. I can't even tell they're here, I can't feel spiritual energy or life energy. I can't make barriers, I can't move things with the force. I highly doubt chi-blocking would work, their bodies are back asleep someplace. Anything I do like this has to be done following the rules of this world, like Talina said, treating this place like a dream. And when I step from the dream into the real world, again I'll probably be fairly powerless. I'll just have to get really good at manipulating the dream as the skill should carry over. Then I can at least simulate everything I can do. I mean if Jason can make icebergs appear out of nowhere a little fire bending or teleporting should be no problem. It's wild, to think I'm standing in a dream with others. One single shared dream, a whole dream world that mirrors the real one. Astonishing, really. I wonder if-*

"Here you are!" exclaimed a familiar voice, and the group spun. Standing there in his jeans and t-shirt was Jason, leaning against a nearby building. "To use a quote; 'that was easy.'"

"Jason," Lysanias spat, surprised. "How can you come here?" He idly noticed he had his shield and sword in hand, not that they would do much good here.

"Tut, tut, it looks like rain. My dear Lysanias, I'm not my master. I can go where I please, same as you. Just because he's locked out of this place, doesn't mean I am."

"Who is this?" Talina asked, stepping in front of the girls.

"This is Jason, the reason I'm learning about Dreaming. He wants me dead."

"Is this true?" she asked.

"Why, not in the least! My master on the other hand... Well, he could join our side, that would be much better than him throwing his life away. But I'll admit to not wishing him well."

"By the way, how did you find me so fast?"

"Do you think we're stupid? You do, don't you? We're not. You think I expected you wouldn't get training to make sure I didn't just tear you apart inside a dream? Of course you're going to do that. As there are only a few worlds you could get that training from, and this dream world connects to all of them, so it was a simple matter to wait here until you appeared. And here you are!"

"Powerless."

“Pretty much. Sorry about that, but my master insisted. You cannot gain abilities like mine, that much is clear. You’re dangerous enough with what you’ve got now.”

“You would kill him?” asked Talina.

“Unless he changed his mind about joining?”

“Never.”

“Pity. It seems then-”

“Oh no, he’s under my protection,” she announced, stepping forward. “You will not just come here and threaten one of my students.”

“And what are you going to do about it?”

Behind Jason a spear materialized, and it plunged into his back. It shattered and he laughed. From that point the iron man armor appeared, fading from transparency to visibility. “You people really do think I’m dumb. Obviously I’m not coming over to talk with you without taking precautions.” He raised a hand, the palm glowing. “Farewell, Lysanias.”

*A bolt streamed out, and Lysanias did what he had been training to do, he dodged. Figuring the shield was paper at best against whatever Jason could cook up, but not realizing that because he held the sword he believed himself to be as fast as he was when holding the real sword. The bolt sizzled by him, and it wasn’t until the horrified scream came from the others that he realized one of the rules worked in reverse, too. Don’t fire at anything that is in front of something that can be hit if they dodge. I just dodged. He started to turn. What did I just do?*

## Chapter 8

Life is a dream from which we all must wake before we can dream again

When: He finished turning

Where: The World of Dreams

Lysanias watched as the hole bored through Alisa's chest began to grow. In seconds it wiped her top half as if she was a piece of paper being burned. Her horrified expression being wiped away as easily as the rest of her. Then it spread to her legs, and she was simply gone.

*The eyes from my dream. Those were the eyes!*

"I didn't mean to do that," Jason told them, sounding shocked. He lowered his arm.

"Lysanias, you have to believe me, that wasn't my intent."

Lysanias looked over at him, armor betraying no hint of his emotions, and the remaining girls threw themselves at him. Punching and kicking Jason, or at least what they thought was him. He was standing next to Lysanias, the armor now obviously empty. Or at least that's what he wanted them to think. "I have to think about this, maybe there's a way... It's dangerous. Have to think. Lysanias, you have to believe me, I didn't mean for her death! Only yours!"

"Do I?" he asked. One of the girls caught sight of him and pointed, screaming. The others looked in his direction and stopped attacking the armor.

"We can't talk now, I'll see you later. In your dreams." He and the armor vanished. The girls looked around, confused and angry, but with no outlet for it.

"I couldn't stop it," Talina admitted, sounding helpless. "I tried. Who was that? He's so strong in the dream."

"Wait, there's still a chance," Lysanias told her. "How long before her body dies? If I can get to her, I can maybe save her." *Er, how, from these people's perspective?* "Find a channeler, they can do healing, right?"

She shook her head. "She's already woken from the dream. I'm sorry, but she's gone. Even if I knew where she lived, and I don't, we were too late the moment that weapon hit her. What even was it? Was that Balefire? It didn't really match the description I heard of it."

"No, it was something from... elsewhere. Are you certain? Absolutely certain? Imagine your, what did you call him, your coming with the dawn guy was here, could he do something? Even if it was a one in a million shot, or someone with some power you don't know." *I must be the equivalent to a channeler here, with all the ways I have to heal.*

She nodded sadly. "I'm sorry, everyone, but even the Creator could not save her. She will be reborn in her proper time. As for you all, try to wake up, we will have no more lessons tonight. Does anyone know where she lives?"

Tamil nodded, obviously trying not to cry, because that's not what an Aiel would do.

"Come to the classroom, you can take me to her. We'll need to tell her family what happened. Then I will need to have words with you, about who that was and how he can be hunted down for what he did."

*You're not going to like the answer.* "I should come with you. It's my fault she's dead. If I had taken the blast, not dodged-"

"Then you would be dead. You think your shield could have protected you? If I couldn't stop that attack, you are not skilled enough to create something that could." She looked at it and it snapped in half, then vanished. "You see?"

"It doesn't matter. Better me than her, it's why I exist. I am the shield!" *I'm supposed to be the shield. Me. How could I let this happen?*

"She is gone. Go on now." One by one the others vanished, Lysanias thinking about how it felt to wake up from his dreams of the future, and he opened his eyes to the room.

"Finally," said Kid. "You're crying. What happened in there? This you doing stuff while being asleep is really gonna get old fast, ya know?"

"He killed her, trying to kill me," he admitted, wiping the tears. He had no time for them.

*Have to move.*

"Who killed who?"

“Jason. He’s the reason I’m here, he’s a Dreamer like the people here, but he can step into reality too. He’s an agent of the shadow avatar. Apparently he can come, even if his master is locked out. I dodged his attack and one of the girls was hit instead. She’s dead.”

“Oh no!” She put her hands over her mouth. “There isn’t anything you can do?”

“Talina didn’t think so. But we’ll see about that.” He got up and pulled on his pants, then donned his armor. Grabbing up his sword and shield he turned to see Kid putting her armor on as well.

“What are you doing?”

“You’re worried he’ll come after you, aren’t you? That’s why you put yours on.”

“This isn’t your fight. I’ve already gotten one person killed tonight, I won’t risk another.”

She paused, putting her hands on her hips. “Lysanias, why am I here?”

“You’re looking for your friend Surge...”

She shook her head. “No, why am I *here*? Why would I have appeared in this time, and this place, just as you arrived? Maybe it’s because I’m supposed to help you. Believe me, he won’t find me easy to beat. You’re going, right? I should be there to support you.”

“Look, he treats reality as a dream. Do you understand what that means? I can somewhat counter him because of all I can do, but he’s dangerous.”

“Huh, seems he’s the real Radical Dreamer. Doesn’t matter. I’m coming.”

*The what?* He sighed. “Thanks. Just don’t get killed, okay?”

“Not planning to!”

The two teleported to the school to await the others, hanging outside the building until Tamil came running up.

“What are you doing here?” she demanded.

“I’m the one that got her killed. I should be the one to tell her parents.”

“Father. Her mother died in the last battle. I suppose that might discharge some of your obligation towards her. Killing that man would take care of the rest.”

“I plan to. Why do you think I’m taking these lessons? So I can deal with him. I just didn’t expect him so soon.”

“I see. Who’s this?”

“This is Kid, she’s a... friend of mine.”

“Why are you both wearing that weird armor? I have never seen the like.”

“In case he shows up, of course,” Kid told her.

“Wait, his waking self wouldn’t be nearby, would it? I would dance with him right now if you can lead me to him!” She gripped her belt knife.

“I don’t know where he is,” he honestly admitted. *What good would dancing do?*

“This is simply a precaution then. I see. I too have obligation towards Alisha, though we were not yet first-sisters. Please include me when you discover his waking self, that I may see him dead.”

“You have my word,” he agreed, seeing no way out of it.

“That is well. Ah, here is Talina, come, I will take you all to where she was staying.”

“They don’t know he can come over into reality, do they?” Kid whispered to him.

“No, they don’t. She thinks he would just be a man, not the equivalent to a deity.”

“He’s *that* powerful?”

“Is there anything you can’t do in a dream? Reality must resist what he does somehow, at our last meeting he didn’t just wish me dead, but he did some crazy stuff.” *Of course, he was doing all that from a distance, his ‘clone’ was actually fighting me. Or was he just watching and his clone was doing stuff? I suppose if I can make a copy of myself that can make wards, he can make one that can do what he can do.*

“Bloody ‘el. I see what you meant before, he really could be a problem, couldn’t he?”

“E-Yup.”

“In that case I sincerely hope you were lying to her just then!”

“Big time.”

“Gotcha. But if he can do all this stuff, where is he?”

*That’s a very good question.*

The man was already up, he explained he heard his daughter cry out, but by the time he had rushed to her side she was gone. Lysanias explained to him what happened, apologizing for being the one to survive.

"You are a wetlander, and do not know our ways," the man said. "We Aiel accept that any day we may wake from the dream. We are a... pragmatic people."

*There's that saying again. I suppose people that know the World of Dreams exists may incorporate that into their philosophy. It's their way of saying "die." Wake from the dream? Odd.*

He went on. "True, I have lost both my wife and now my daughter, but even in the short time she lived, my daughter gained much honor. Both in her personal life and during the last battle. None of you have obligation to me."

*These people are big on honor and obligation, aren't they?*

"Perhaps not, but still the wise ones who can walk the dream will be told, and more assigned to watch the students so this does not happen again. I could not prevent that odd beam of energy from striking Alisha but wonder if he could deal with four or five of us at one time."

"Thank you."

*It's me he wants, I doubt they'll be in danger. He did back off after hitting her, could that be an act? Something to throw me off? Doesn't seem like it, he could have destroyed me by continuing his attack. Still, it can't hurt.* "May I see her?" Lysanias asked. "I don't know your customs, as you say, but I need to see her with my own eyes." *And my own senses. If she's not dead, though by now there's little chance, but these people can't feel what I feel. She could be hanging on by a thread, and if I can strengthen her soul, or give her energy, or anything, I'll do it!*

"Very well."

The group moved through the house, which was more like an apartment because Lysanias saw the rooms were cut off from any others. *That's why the corridor, I bet there would have been doors there, but wood is probably hard to come by around here. Hence the curtains instead. I get it.* The place was starkly furnished and had no pictures on the walls, no growing plants or clutter. There were a few books piled on a shelf built into the wall, but it was more like the man was camping here than living here. His daughter's room was the same, just some blankets on the floor. He threw them back and she was laying there. She could have been sleeping, apart from the odd hole in her chest. It was clean, there was no blood at all, just a dark hole all the way through her.

*What did he shoot at me that could do that? I guess there's no doubt. She's dead. Oh Alisha, I'm sorry.* But he made sure, feeling her out for spiritual and life energy. He felt neither. "She will be avenged," he promised.

Now outside again, Talina sent Tamil home and rounded on Lysainas. The moon overhead cast a silvery light along the streets, which were empty now. In contrast to the day the night was cold, and Lysanias wished he could trade the armor for the jacket that Celest had parted with, but they were still in danger. *We'll always be in danger, apparently. I have to find some way to deal with Jason for good. But how will I ever know I'm fighting the man and not a copy of him?*

"Now you will tell me of this man, and how he came to walk the dream. The only men I have heard walking the dream of late have been those that run with wolves. Men of yellow eyes, come again from the wheel in our time of need. That man did not have yellow eyes, and you two obviously have history. Tell me why my student had to die that you would live instead."

"I can do better than that. I can show you." *Save me a half an hour of explanation.* He touched her head with his palm and went into her brain, sending her all the memories he had of Jason. First hearing about him from Inari, fighting him in the last world, what he could do. Talina staggered back after he let her go.

"You can channel as well? That was a thing of the One Power?" she gasped.

“Consider it just something I can do. What I showed you was a true vision. My advice, if you see Jason again just get everyone away from him. I plan to run myself, until I can deal with him properly. I won’t have anyone else caught in our fight.” *Unless he shows up here, of course, and then I’m sticking my sword into him and hoping for another rare candy. This time to use as I choose.*

“Wait, I have more questions now than I did. Who was that small girl with the animal ears? Was she in the dream? What were those scenes of that city you were fighting in? I’ve never seen the like, even in the dream. How did he destroy that building so easily? What were those-”

Lysanias held up a hand. “I’ve shown you all I can. There are things both within your world and without that you are simply not meant to know.”

“But yet you came to me to learn?”

“Of course. I don’t know all, the more I learn the more I realize there is *to* learn. Please, simply treat me as before. I am your humble student for now, nothing more.”

“I will try. You really thought you could save her, didn’t you?”

“Yes.”

“Very well,” she allowed when he said no more. “Then I will see you for tomorrow’s lesson.”

“I’ll be there.”

Lysanias made his way back to the inn without teleporting, Kid silently trailing along behind him.

“I could send you back if you didn’t want to walk the whole way,” he told her over his shoulder.

“No, you’re not out of danger. Plus, if you want to talk, I’m here.”

“Thanks.”

But he didn’t want to talk, he was too busy beating himself up over what had happened. His anger at Jason and his confusion over why he actually seemed sincere in saying he hadn’t meant for this conflicting within him. *Why would someone that works for the shadow avatar feel remorse over a single person? He’s helped kill billions, no? Directly or indirectly, by not opposing the avatar. Susan was right, there are going to be times this job doesn’t seem worth it. How do I make this right?*

He had no answers, and having made it back to his room he warded the walls and door with “ignore me” wards in the hope Jason would then overlook the whole room should he come nearby, and tried to get some rest. He tossed and turned for some time, but finally slept.

In the dream, Lysanias was looking down at what appeared to be a toilet stuffed full of stuffed animals of all descriptions, and he was wondering how to deal with it.

“Finally,” said Jason. “I thought you would never go back to sleep. I feared you would be off learning how to ward your dreams, as it seems people can do here. Weirdest thing, never saw the- hello?”

“Who put all these in the toilet anyway?”

“Oh gods, you’re not lucid. Hey, Lysanias, this is a dream. Snap out of it buddy, I need to talk to you!” He started snapping his fingers under Lysanias’ nose.

“I mean that one is a lion, and there’s a tiger, and there’s a bear. Who would do that?”

“Talk about a yellow brick road... no, that doesn’t work. Lysanias, snap out of it. Snap into it. Whatever. Hello? I’m talking to myself here!”

“What’s going on?” Lysanias’ eyes seemed to focus.

“You with me at last?”

“You!!!” Lysanias drew back as far as he could in the small room he found himself in, sword and shield appearing in his hands.

“There’s still a chance to save the girl!” Jason shouted, closing his eyes and putting his palms out as the blade sliced through the air and very nearly took his head off.

“I’m listening,” Lysanias told him, voice like iron. The edge of the sword had cut into Jason, and he was surprised to see blood trickling out. *But this could be another clone.*

Jason cracked an eye open. "Ow. Mind pulling that back a little?"

"Talk."

"Okay, okay. Just go back in time!"

"Just go back in time, he says. You know how dangerous that is?"

"More so the longer we wait. That's why I said we have to hurry. With a bit of subtlety there shouldn't be many negative consequences. Do you know enough to do it? Or can you do it with magic or something?"

"You interrupted my *first lesson*, jerk!"

"What?" He seemed surprised. "You mean I really found you that fast? So you know *nothing*? Great!" He threw his hands up. "Now what are we supposed to do?"

"Why can't you go back and save her, if you're so worried about her? And why are you so worried, by the way?" He removed the blade, but was still wary.

"I can't. You think I wouldn't? Look, time travel is tricky enough, but I didn't exist here until I saw you. I came to this world, checked for you, and there you were. Then she was dead. The furthest back I can go is to that time. There's not enough time for me to save her. But you were here earlier, so you can!"

"How?"

"Easy. Keep her out of the World of Dreams. Any way you can. Then she won't be there behind you, so when you dodge my blast nobody dies."

He considered, lowering the blade more. "That could actually work. How would I keep her out though?"

"Do I really have to spell it out? Keep her awake that night, that's all." He wiggled his eyebrows and winked, nodding. Then he made a "nudge, nudge," gesture with his elbow, "You know what I mean?"

*Do what? But no, it might take keeping her from the dream permanently, and there is one way I could do that.* "Whatever. So send me back in time."

"Send you back in- who do you think I am, Kitty Pryde? You have to do it yourself! Plus I haven't explained how it works yet, or what the plan might be!"

"Why?"

"Why what? You have to do it yourself? Not sure. I can speed myself up or slow myself down, but I can't do it to others. I could turn you into a neut, but not change your position in time."

"A neut?"

"You'd get better." He started pacing, the room allowing only a step or two before he had to turn around. "Great, if you know nothing though, that means training you, and it's darn near impossible to go more than an hour through time. What are we going to do?"

"Why do you care so much, anyway? You never answered that one."

He stopped, looking shocked. "Why wouldn't I?"

"Uh, your boss wants to suck up whole worlds, for one?"

"What does that have to do- oh, gods you don't know anything, do you? Look, my master infiltrates a world that's on the brink, right? Some event is going to happen to wipe it out anyway. They nudge it along a bit, but they still have to follow most of the rules of that world when they're there. See? They get a chance. The people living there get a chance to fight for their existence, and drive my master off. They do that, cool, they proved they are worthy of that life. They screw it up, they don't fight hard enough or whatever, they lose it. Of course you wanderers show up and change the status quo but there's not *all* that many of you, so more realities are without you than with you. This place obviously fought and won without any outside help. I respect that. Silverstreak thinks he locks my master off, some kind of dimensional encryption or something but really, what he can do, my master can undo with enough time. But that's not the game. They get their chance, and he abides by it. Same with me. If I go someplace and the people there don't figure out how to deal with me, they're forfeit. This place *won*. I wouldn't even be here if I wasn't chasing you down. But now an innocent girl, a person that won though the battle with my master, is dead. And you can fix it. Or you could, if you knew more. There must be a way!"

“Wait though, if she’s not there and I dodge your attack, will the you of the past break it off? Or will we just make it worse, like you try that ice attack or that explosion again trying to get to me? I don’t want to save her to lose all the others. Or get killed myself in your attack.”

“But isn’t that what you wanted?” he asked shrewdly. “A way to take that attack instead of her? You can’t have it all, Lysanias.”

*Rabies, he’s right. Wasn’t that what I was telling Talina. Was he listening? Probably, he wanted to talk to me here rather than risk me attacking him on sight in the other. I should have been her shield. Still, he gets a second shot at killing me that he won’t even realize is any different. I guess one step at a time, past me- past alternate me will just have to look out for him- my- self? This is going to get confusing...* “Look, if we have a truce for now, come find me in the real world. I think there may be a way.”

“Wake up, and I’ll be there.”

## Chapter 9

I doubt you can understand the magnitude of the stupidity in your statement

When: Awakening from the dream

Where: His room at the inn

His eyes flashing open, Lysanias figured he would be looking up into the face of Jason, perhaps in power armor or wearing a power ring of some kind. Instead all he saw was the ceiling of the room.

*So is he coming now, is he unable to find me because of the wards, or is he waiting until I take the wards down to make me think he's unable to find me because of the wards?*

Jumping out of bed he grabbed Ragnarok from the sheath, thought better of and set it on his bed, *then* went to go wake Kid so she didn't wake up with a guy holding a sword standing over her. *Good way to have a misunderstanding.*

"Kid, wake up." He gently shook her.

"Huh, what's going on?" She cracked her eyes open.

"Jason is on his way here. Just in case he's not being truthful, can you watch my back?"

"I guess? What time is it?"

"Weren't you the one saying something about clocks before?"

"Right, right. I'm up, give me a second."

She sleepily got up and grabbed her daggers, while Lysanias got out his mountain spirit and woke up the sword. Kid and the spirit took up positions at the corners of the room and Lysanias went over to his ward array, putting a hand on it. *I've dampened them down without destroying them before, how did it go?* He searched for the spark of power that was on the paper and willed it quiet, turning the set off and making the room visible again. Less than a minute later Jason appeared in the room without a sound, standing in the circle they were keeping clear for gateways.

*What would happen if I cut his dream body in half with a gateway? And was his appearing there coincidence, or is he subtly telling me he knew the room layout all along?*

"Ah, there you are," Jason said, turning and catching sight of him. "Quite the welcome, all that bared steel. You would think I was dangerous or something. You could really hurt a guy's feelings, not trusting him like that. Who's the cutie?"

"The girl or my mountain spirit?"

"What? The girl, who's the girl?! Why would I be talking about your weird spirit thing?"

"Hey, I don't know what you like, why would I assume you were talking about her?"

"It's pretty obvious. Didn't you think it was obvious?" He looked over his shoulder.

She looked between the two. "What are ya two talking about? What spirit? Is this some kinda joke you two cooked up? I thought you hated each other, why are you talking like pals alla sudden?"

Jason sighed. "Never mind, it's not important. So, what's the plan?"

"The plan is go into your head and grab the memories you have of moving through time. Then I can duplicate it, putting your plan into action."

"You can really save her through timeline manipulation?" Kid asked. "My planet had some people messing with the timelines, but only jumped between eras. That way it wasn't too dangerous, but it was still dangerous! Are you sure that's really the best way?"

"No," Lysanias admitted. "But if I can prevent that girl's death, I have to try. Hopefully as it hasn't been too long, there isn't that much risk."

"I guess if you succeed we won't know the difference. This conversation won't even have taken place."

"True. Here, take this." He walked around Jason, keeping him covered the sword, and handed it over to Kid.

"I do daggers, not swords!" she protested.

"It's fine. I'll be out of it when I'm inside him. If he does anything funny, run him through. A killing blow will turn him into something else, and that'll be the end of it."

"Very well," she agreed, taking it. "Cor, it's light as a feather! You wanna sell this, mate?"

“Not on your life. All right, here we go.” He put his hand on Jason’s head, and concentrated on entering his mental landscape.

Nothing happened.

“That figures, without the sword enhancing me I’m not good enough. I at least expected something... ah well. Here, let me touch it. Yes, that’s fine.” With one hand on the top of the blade and the other on Jason’s head he tried again.

Nothing happened.

“Stop fighting me!” he snapped.

“Doing what?” asked Jason, looking confused. “I’m not doing anything. Did you start yet? Should it feel like something on my end? I didn’t feel anything.”

“Don’t resist me!”

“I’m not!”

Lysanias glared at him, but Jason just felt... like nothing. “Wait a second, are you really here? Is this really you?”

“Of course it’s me. I want this problem solved, I’m not going to trick you. What would be the point?”

Lysanias concentrated. “I can’t feel your spiritual energy, life energy, there’s no magic on you. Nothing.”

“Of course not, my body is- oh.”

“Great!” Lysanias yanked his hand away. “That’s not going to work.”

“What’s wrong?” asked Kid.

“He’s not really here. This is his ‘dream self’ whatever that means. I can’t go into his brain because his brain isn’t even in this reality. I can’t sense his energy for the same reason.”

“So should I just run him through on principal then?”

“Hey!”

“No, give it here, we’ll have to think of something else.” He took the sword back and debated putting it away, but put it on his shoulder instead.

“You can supposedly do anything though, right? Like this reality was a dream?” Kit asked him.

“Mostly, why?”

“Could you build him a time machine?”

“Oh sure,” he answered sarcastically. “One time machine, coming up.” He waved a hand, and an egg shaped pod appeared in the middle of the room. “There you go, fully functional time machine.”

“That’s great!”

Lysanias looked between it and him. “What’s the problem with it?”

“The problem is it’s useless. I don’t know how to build a time machine. So I would have to maintain it. Here’s what would happen if you tried to use it. It would start, and send you back in time. But the instant it was away from me I can’t maintain it, and it would vanish. Now where are you? Stuck between seconds? Flung in time? I have no idea!”

“Can’t you go with him?” Kid asked.

He shook his head. “Same problem as me going back myself. I hit a wall because I didn’t exist in this world at the time, the machine vanishes, and we’re back to square one again.”

“Where were you?”

“Checking other worlds that have Dreamers. I mean, I guess,” he allowed, “if he could travel to one of those worlds, I could travel with him in the time machine... but no, time doesn’t run the same speed between worlds. What’s a second there may be a week here. How would I know how much time to go back? And by the time we came back here, oh and now there’s two Lysanias running around, it could be months from now. Then how do we deal with there being two Lysanias? Kill one of them? At least doing it my way there’s only one of

you. Would past you believe present you, that it wasn't some trick by me? Only you could know that."

"Good question. Though I could do some tests to be reasonably certain."

"Not really practical in other words?" Kid asked.

"Not in the least," he agreed. "I'm just going to have to teach you, I guess. But can you dream into reality like I can? If you're stuck in the World of Dreams, that's no better!"

"I've got that covered, it's fine. But I don't know how to yet."

"Crud, I have to teach you to reliably tell you're in a dream, stepping between dreams, and the time shifting stuff on top of that?"

"You mean between dreams and here?" Kid asked.

He shook his head. "It's the same thing. I think. Hey, I just sort of figured stuff out, after Ea came to me and said 'go to it, kid!' I mean he said that to me, not me saying that to- you get the point. I'm not even sure how to teach him this stuff, I've never had to do it before."

"But it can be taught, and that's the key here," Lysanias told him. "Otherwise these people couldn't do it. It's not a power, it's a skill. You got better at it, right?"

"Sure. In the beginning I ran into an older version of myself that could do a lot more. So I kept practicing."

"I guess we'll start there."

"I guess," he sighed. "Get back to sleep, we'll do what we can tonight. We'll have to avoid those girls, they probably won't be happy to see me. Hopefully in the next few days you can see me and your other 'teacher' the same night so she doesn't get suspicious."

*If only my clones survived me going to sleep, I could do that and my own practicing for three times the benefit.* "I'm sure we can work something out."

"We're gonna have to. Past a week and it gets *really* tough. Let's shoot for 6 days from now to make the attempt. I'll head back to the World of Dreams and wait for you to start dreaming again. Then we can take it from there."

"See you soon, then."

Jason vanished.

"Ya gonna trust im?" Kid asked, passing her hand through where he had been.

"I suppose I'm going to have to. For now. If it's not real it's the most indirect attack I've ever seen. He couldn't want to use this roundabout a method, right?"

"Does seem odd. Want me to keep watch?"

"No," he sighed. "If he wanted us dead he could have killed us just then. Fill the room with lava instead of ice, or acid, something that would pretty much kill me instantly. Or fill it with odorless gas that knocks us out and just knife us in the back. But he didn't. I think the truce will hold for now."

"It's you he's after anyway, it's your risk to take, mate."

"That it is. Thanks for the help."

"Course!"

The next five days passed quickly for Lysanias, given he wanted to beat the deadline for going back in time. When he wasn't asleep he was in class with Talina and the rest of the girls, or talking with Jason. He had sent a message to Lan at the white tower that he was holding off sword training for the moment because he was focused on Dreaming, so he wouldn't be worried. The sixth day dawned, but he wasn't that confident. Moving through time, it seemed, was a lot like feeling out energy or substances. A matter of intuition, not reason or willpower. Not that he could really boost those in his sleep either, but he felt he was better suited to skills of that nature.

He had managed to speed time up or slow it down for himself, though Jason had no idea how skilled he was as he only had himself to compare to. It seemed the Aiel Dreamwalkers didn't practice time manipulation, or at least Talina claimed they didn't, so there was no other basis for comparison. He had eaten the candy, focusing on "leveling up" his skill at moving between dreams, and found he could (unreliably) move into the real world. As expected all his learned skills that were supernatural or magical in nature were worthless, but

he could do small things like Jason could. Creating objects or manipulating physical law primarily.

“Now remember, this is a dream,” Jason told him, standing in the real world before he was about to go back in time. “Take a moment, remind yourself of that, and fling yourself through time with abandon. If all goes well you’ll wind up in your own body, before the first class. Keep that girl out of the World of Dreams, any way you can.” Again he did the elbow nudge, Lysanias still had no real idea, or maybe he did and just didn’t want to admit it to himself that he did.

“Thanks,” he said grudgingly. “You’re not really a bad guy. If you contented yourself with your current powers and stopped trying to become a god, we could probably be friends.”

“If you realized the truth, that realities that are weak should be culled in order to evolve my master, we would be. But when next we meet I won’t know you at all. I’m sorry for what I’m about to do to you.”

“Me too. Hope we both survive it.”

He inclined his head and Lysanias took a deep breath, closing his eyes. *It’s just a dream. I’m standing in a dream, and now I’m going to go back before Alisha was killed. I am going back in time. I’m going back in time. I will find myself back in-*

“Lysanias?” asked Talina. “You still with us there?”

Lysanias opened his eyes, finding himself back in the classroom, the girls all laughing at him.

“Not quite time to fall asleep,” she chided. “I’ll let you know. If I’m boring you, we could always break for a few laps around the city.”

He spun his head, and yes, there was Alisha, looking at him like he was a freak. He tried to contain his joy, but he just had to smile at her. *She’s alive! It worked. I’m back.*

She edged a little away from him. “What’s that creepy smile for?”

“What?” He dropped the smile and turned back to Talina. “Dreaming, right! Sorry, Wise One, I assure you I was paying complete attention.”

“Then perhaps you can tell me about the dangers of stray thoughts in the World of Dreams?”

“Of course!” He of course had several days worth of knowledge the girls didn’t have, so Talina was satisfied with his explanation.

“I guess you’re off the hook this time. But do try not to fall asleep again.”

“Yes, Wise One!”

In fact, he couldn’t have gone to sleep if he tried. He was too excited, he was going to have a chance to save Alisha after all. Class seemed to go very slowly at that point, but he got through it. He got the same assignment as last time, eating an early dinner and going to the tree. The girls left, again Alisha and Talina as far from each other as they could. Before Tamil had spoken to him, but this time Alisha dragged her away, keeping an eye on the now ‘creepy’ Lysanias. He didn’t care, she was alive. *Now in the original timeline I went back and saw Kid, and told her about my day. She told me about the shadow creature, that’s right. I totally forgot to ask about that, I was so worried about saving Alisha. It’s fine, she’ll tell me later, right? For now...* He took hold of the One Power, thankful that back in his body he could do that, and wove a gateway to her room. He had seen it, and knew it was fairly empty, so peaking through and finding it empty he ducked down and went inside. Slapping an “ignore me” ward and then a second *just to be sure* he settled in to wait.

She arrived home not long after that, telling her father about her day and the “creepy old man” that was staring at her.

“Want me to spear him?” her father asked.

“I can do it myself, dad!”

He laughed. “You probably could. Imagine, a wetlander coming to us for lessons in Dream Walking. The world has changed.”

*Sure, I put a week’s worth of effort into saving your life and you’re talking about murdering me because I was relieved to see you alive again. Nice.*

He turned away as she stripped her clothes off for bed, but turned back once she was laying down and had her eyes closed. *Wait, one thing first.* He slipped the stele out and traced a quick “ignore me” ward on the door, just in case she shouted or something. His hands were shaking, but he managed it. *I can do this. I can save her life, it’s going to go perfectly. I have to do it before she falls asleep though.*

The ward done he turned back to her, walking back over to her prone form. *I’m sorry, but it has to be done. There’s only one way I can think of to save your life. If I could have talked to you, maybe I could have made you lose track of time and your life would be saved. But I can’t, so I have to do this.* He set a hand on her chest and yanked.

She gasped and convulsed, but he had in his hand a shining soul. Both his wards burned up, and he held his breath, ready to teleport away if her father had heard and came running. But he didn’t, so he relaxed. *Now for the hard part.* He felt around the soul, trying to figure out what part of it allowed her to be a Dreamer, and when he decided he knew it he sent power into it, destroying it. *I’m sorry. I’m so sorry. But I can make it up to you.* He then empowered it, doing what he had done for Kenzie and hoping she got something useful to her. *I can’t exactly come and train you, so you’ll have to figure out your new powers on your own. I mean can you imagine that conversation? “Oh hi I’m actually from another world and went back in time to destroy your nature as a Dreamer to save your life but I gave you a different power no one else in the world has to make up for it! Tehee!” No. That should do it.* The soul was shining differently now, so he let it go, watching it streak back into her body. With a nod he gathered the One Power and wove another gateway, to avoid the inrush of air waking her up. He went back to the street, down below where the two lived, and breathed a sigh of relief. *I did it. I saved her life. Now what happens? I can’t stay like this, I have to go “back” to the “future” right? I guess I just...*

Lysanias looked around, suddenly feeling as though a ball of ice had taken the place of his stomach. The sun had gone down so it was chilly out, but this feeling came from within. He spun, hardly aware of where he was, what he was doing there. He had a vague memory, but there, alone in the dark street, he only had one thought.

*Why in the name of the Allfather did I just destroy that girl’s ability to walk the dream?*

## Chapter 10

I don't feel like a flower. If anything, I feel like a blackthorn bush.

When: Six days ago

Where: His room at the inn

A very out of breath Lysanias crashed into the room at the inn, making Kid look up from the bed.

"About time you got back, mate. What, were you chuckling some cute young girl under the-

Lysanias spun, grabbing an "ignore me" ward from his pocket and slammed it against the door. He scanned the room, seeking any trace of spiritual or life energy. All he felt was Kid, *if that's really Kid and not Jason in disguise.*

"Hey, what's wrong?" Kid asked, standing. "You look as pale as Hydra Humour. Did something happen? Are we under attack?"

"I don't know," Lysanias managed, sliding down the door. He was breathing heavily from running back to the room, trying to catch his breath. "Something happened after class, something terrible."

"Did they find out about you? Threaten to kill you because they don't understand your powers?"

"No, nothing like that. I did something terrible, and I don't even know why!"

"What? What did you do?"

"I took one of the student's powers away. Her ability to walk the dream, I destroyed it."

"You did what? And also, you can do that?"

"Yes, used it to make Kenzie into a shaman. But this... I'm not supposed to use it like that. I don't, I don't understand why."

"Come on, sit on the bed and take me through it step by step." Kid hauled him up and shoved him towards the bed. Lysanias plopped down heavily, still in a daze. "So you went to class, right?"

"I remember that. Most of it. Then it's fuzzy, and I found myself walking down the street, having just removed that girl's soul and taken her power. Wait, of course!" He stood up.

She jumped up too. "What? What?"

"I can use my ability to look into the past to see what happened. I'll just look into my own. Give me a second." He concentrated, but seemed to grow more confused than ever, then sat down again. "That doesn't help at all."

"Did you not see anything? Is your power blocked somehow?"

"It's not that, it's just nothing out of the ordinary happened that I can tell. I left class and snuck into her room. For some reason. I watched her eat dinner and talk with her father while wearing 'ignore me' wards. For some reason. She got undressed for bed-

"And you were where, during this part, specifically?" She tapped her foot.

"I didn't look!"

"Sure you didn't. Go on."

"Then she went to lie down, and I pulled her soul out. I took her Dreamer power away, empowered it so she would possibly have a *different* power, and left again. That's when I 'came to' so to speak and freaked out. It wasn't Jason, not that I could tell. Am I going mad? What possessed me to do those things?"

"Don't look at me, mate. You can't tell what you were thinking?"

He shook his head. "It's like I can see the past of an object or person, in this case me. Like I was watching what happened, but I don't hear thoughts or anything."

"Too bad. This has never happened before?"

"Of course it hasn't. I don't go around stalking people and then taking their powers. It's crazy."

"But yet you did it."

"I know, why do you think I'm so freaked out?" He sat back on the bed again. "Why should I care that's she's a dreamer or not? I don't. So taking her powers, giving her different ones in exchange? Madness!"

"Hmmm. Is there any way to use your others powers to tell why you did it? You do have a few, you've said."

He shook his head. "Not unless I can figure out a way to ask and get one word answers back that make sense. But I don't have time, I need to get into the World of Dreams for my lesson."

"Is that really the priority right now? Until you figure out what made you do this, it could happen again!"

"I know, it doesn't make sense, but somehow I feel that's what I need to do."

"Yeah, so you can do horrible things again. I guess what's done is done, just try not to be alone, maybe? Still, this could be some kind of attack, couldn't it? To make you doubt yourself, or just get rid of a Dreamer? If you start taking them out one by one..."

"Don't even think that! I suppose I could have been possessed, but then why not make me off *myself*? Why do this seemingly random thing? Why go through the trouble of making sure she had a power to replace being a Dreamer? This attack wasn't directed at me personally, I was just used for the attack on another. But why her? There are lots of people in the class, was she picked at random?"

"I don't have any answers for you, Lysanias."

"I know, I realize that. Look, sorry for making you worry tonight. I'm glad you're here to talk to."

"I just wish I could help more. Me elements are no good at this kind of thing, no question about that."

"It's okay. Just... try to watch over me a little tonight? I don't think I can create a chain strong enough that I can't break it, but if I wander off, someone (that's you) needs to try and snap me out of it. Don't let me do something like that again!"

"I'll whack you on the head for sure!"

"I appreciate-"

"Over and over, until I can lob a fireball at you."

"Thank-"

"And if that doesn't work, maybe a meteor dropped on your head will do the job."

He glared at her and she looked at him innocently.

"You done?"

"Yes?"

"Thank you. Hopefully there won't be any more surprises tonight and I'll see you in the morning."

"Sweet dreams, I guess?"

He got into bed and wondered if he should grab something to eat, but didn't feel like it. So he simply stared up at the ceiling, trying to fall asleep. It took him some time, but he did find himself before the great tree, the others already performing various exercises around him.

"Ah, so you are a Dreamer after all," Talina said to him, coming over. "Now we're just missing Alisha. What's wrong, you eat some bad fish or something?"

"What? No, I'm just surprised to be here, that's all." *So she won't show up, will she? I really did take her abilities. Why? Why?*

"You can start practicing-"

"He can start dying," said a familiar voice. "Now that I know he's here."

"Jason!" he cried, whirling towards the sound. There was nothing there. "Wha?"

"Over here, dude," Jason said, waving from behind a cart. "Gotcha. You like my little 'throwing my voice' trick? Anyway, what do you think those are going to do to me here?"

Lysanias looked down and he was holding his sword and shield.

"Who are you?" Talina demanded. "How do you walk the dream?"

"The dream is my second home," he explained. He looked over and somehow in the distance there appeared to be a floating mansion in the distance. "Ah, home."

"Never mind that! What did you make me do, Jason? Was making me do that funny to you? Was it?"

“Er, you feeling okay there, Ly? I just got here, and not a word of welcome for your old friend. I would think you would be happy to know you didn’t really kill me.”

“I will kill you, for what you did to me!”

“Again, not exactly in sync with what you’re going on about. What are you accusing me of?” He appeared to have judges robes on, and banged a gavel on nothing. “Let the accuser speak!”

“Making me act against my will! Just moments ago, who else could have done it?”

“You mean like a puppet?” A strange parody of Yoda appeared on his hand. “The man, the man beneath the floor. He doth *control me!*” he made it say. It vanished again.

“You admit it!”

“No I don’t. Look, I just got here. I’ve been hanging out in the World of Dreams until you showed up, because I figured you would try to get training to keep me from attacking you where you were most vulnerable. Dreams. I haven’t been to the world you’re in yet. I couldn’t have done anything to you.”

“But... but...”

“I like big butts and I cannot lie!” He started shaking his, and transparent copies of himself appeared behind him, also shaking.

“Enough of this,” Talina decided. She stepped between the two men. “What business do you have with my student here?”

“Sadly, I’m under orders to kill him before he gets access to the Dream world and becomes even more dangerous. Unless he’s changed his mind about joining our side in the meantime?” He looked hopefully past Talina.

“Never!” *If he didn’t do something to me, who did? Who would even care to make me do those things? Kid? But she claims she only has attack style “magic.” Is she actually working for the shadow avatar as well? But if Jason is here to kill me, why go through the effort of sending two people, one that could have killed me in my sleep for days now?*

“Pity.”

“I won’t let you harm my student.”

“Lady, there’s not a thing you can do to stop me.” Suddenly he had on a green mask. “Somebody *stop me!*”

“Oh really?” A spear appeared in the air behind him, slamming into him with a thwack, but bouncing off something. Spreading like a drop of food coloring in water his Iron Man armor appeared, going from transparent to opaque. “Please,” he told her, his face being covered by the new mask. “This thing can take tank shells easily, you think a spear is going to hurt me? Or did you think I would come over here unprotected?” He raised a hand, it was glowing and crackling with energy. “Either way, I would appreciate it if you would move.”

“How about this?” A black mass, like a cloth, dropped out of the sky and started tangling him up. She turned to the girls. “Everyone, wake up. Until I deal with this man you’ll just be in the way. Step out of the dream back to your bodies, you’ll be fine.”

Meanwhile, Lysanias ran to the right, so he would be away from the others when Jason started shooting energy bolts at him. *Do I try to fight him here, or lure him back to the real world where I actually have powers I’ve practiced? I don’t want him to hold these people hostage though, I have to make sure they’re gone from here. I hope I can keep ahead of him, I don’t seem to have my speed identity gift here either.*

The sticky tarp vanished, and Jason looked around. “Ah, very good, you gave me a clear shot.” He fired, and Lysanias sprang forward into a crouch, the beam impacting the cart behind him and blowing it to bits. A second later it was back, as he rolled to his feet. *Can the idea of my shield take that kind of blast? Wait, what about “darkness bending?” He can’t hit what he can’t see, she had the right idea but thought in terms of a physical object.* A ball of darkness appeared around Jason’s head, which he clawed at but it wasn’t matter this time so his hand just passed through it.

“What the?” he asked.

Three of the girls had vanished, Lysanias saw two left. One was shining like she was holding the One Power, and a barrier of air was before her. She was standing in front of the other girl who it looked like was trying to wake up. *Wait, you can channel here? Can I channel here? Can’t risk it now with her still watching, but it might be interesting to try later.*

The paving stones flowed up, surrounding Jason in rock. As Lysanias couldn't see the ball of darkness anymore he felt his hold on it slip, but given it was probably dark inside it would be fine. *Wait, why would it be any darker in there versus out here? There's no 'sun' in either place.*

"That will hold him for a bit," Talina announced. "You girls get out of here. You too, you can't fight him!" she called over to Lysanias.

"It's me he wants, I'll go when I know you're all safe. He might use you against me otherwise!"

"Foolish wetlander."

The one girl vanished.

"I can channel, do you want me to stay?" she asked.

"Just go, he is obviously a master of the dream so channeling will mean little to him."

"Fine." She vanished.

"Clever," said Jason, appearing on the cart. "But not clever-" Suddenly he was hit by a huge rock, dropping out of nowhere and crushing both him and the cart. Wood splintered as the ground shook from the impact, and one of his arms gave a twitch from under all that. Lysanias looked over to Talina who shrugged. "I thought that was you. I wondered how an untrained person did all that, but by your face..."

"No, not me."

The rock shot into the air, and Jason was upright again, his boot jets firing. "I've underestimated you," he called. "If you can make a rock of that size appear you really are-what?" He had turned his head to look from Lysanias to Talina, but didn't make it. Instead he was staring off into the distance.

*I'm not falling for that old trick.*

"Crud, you've got them here, too? Or did they follow me? They're just what I needed right now."

*Or maybe I am?* He looked to see where Jason was looking and there on the roof of a nearby building was a writhing mass of darkness. Another rock fell, and he blasted it out of the sky. *Are those creatures? What are they?*

"You've got to get out of here!" Jason called. "You can't fight them, and if you attack them you'll just draw attention to yourselves. I'll draw them off, you two get out of here." He blasted them, bolts from his palm making them twist away, and he took off flying. The mass separated into several distinct shadowy creatures who took to the air after him. They were about the shape of a person, and the consistency of a dark sunglasses lens. Otherwise they had no detail, at least that he could discern at this distance. A moment later all were out of sight behind the tall buildings. The sounds of combat came from that direction.

"That was odd," remarked Talina. "Are you all right?"

"I think so," he answered, more confused than anything at the moment. "Do we go after him?"

"I don't know who that man was, what that armor was, or how he learned to do what he did, but he clearly knows you. Do you want him attacking you again? There is much honor in wanting to see an opponent defeated, but you would be like a babe against a fully grown man."

"Let's try to avoid that situation."

"I agree. Let's leave this place for now and you can tell me in class tomorrow who he is and why he's after you."

"Fair enough."

"Then wake up."

*Wake up she says. I don't have a waking up skill.* But he tried various things and found himself looking at the ceiling again.

"Jason's here," he told Kid, who was standing there leaning against the wall.

"What, right here?" she nearly dropped it but gripped the hilt.

"I mean he knows I'm here now. He attacked me in the dream, but then these weird shadow creatures showed up, dropped a rock on him, and in a surprising twist he actually protected us from-"

"Did you say shadow creatures?" She was gripping the knife again, looking worried.

“Yes, why? Do you know something about that? I mean there were dark creatures on my world, under the command of the shadow avatar so they must exist elsewhere but then why attack Jason?”

“I don’t know about that, but I know what I saw today. I was going to tell you, but then you were all ‘I did a thing!’ and so I didn’t get to. But now I can. I saw a creature that was like a shadow lurking in an alley when I was walking around earlier. No one else seemed to see it, but when it noticed I was looking at it, zip. It jumped back in the alley and I lost sight of it.”

“Great. So something that can move between the World of Dreams and here? And clearly it has some sort of powers as it created that rock to attack Jason, and it could fly. Or they could fly, if it wasn’t duplicating itself somehow.”

“If people here can enter the World of Dreams why not animals?”

“Wolves I heard about in class, but not anything else. Jason seemed to think they may have followed him. He knows what they are, I mean they tried to kill him. Unless, again, this is some kind of act. But that rock hit the cart and smashed it apart. It must have been real.”

“So it least somewhat intelligent? But what kind of creature has that sort of body here?”

“If it came from another world, who knows what kind of bodies they have there. It’s possible Jason made enemies where these things come from and they’re hunting him down.”

“That’s good for us, right? We let them do the work for us.”

He shook his head. “He seemed to think we were all in danger. ‘You can’t handle them’ he said. I don’t know.”

“Unless you can beat it out of Jason, we might never know.”

“True. If it had some distinguishing feature I could look it up in the hubPad. I still will, but ‘vague shadowy form’ could be anything.”

“It could be obscuring what it looks like to avoid being identified. I mean if it’s smart enough to do what you said, and it sounds like it waited for an opening to attack right?”

“Yes it did. I can’t rule that out.”

“You think one of these shadow things took you over? Or mentally commanded you to do what you did? You wouldn’t have seen a shadow hanging around if it stayed out of sight.”

“Not that I recall, but I suppose if I was possessed it could make me forget seeing it, if I did. Wouldn’t I have at least felt something, been given the chance to fight it off? I didn’t notice one when I looked into my own past, but then I wasn’t looking for one. I can check again. Still, why her?” *Of course, I don’t think you can fight off wand magic like you can Paragon style magic, so what do I know about what abilities they might have?*

“She was going to be really good at walking the dream?” she suggested. “So they wanted her out of the way? But they didn’t have anything against her personally so they gave her something else instead?”

“I guess.” He paused, thinking it over. “No, how would they know I could do that? Seems pretty far fetched, even for dream beings. No, it must be something else. Look, get some sleep. I’m not doing any more dream walking tonight. The wards should keep us unnoticed if Jason comes looking, assuming he got away from those shadow things. We can talk to Nynaeve tomorrow about shadow creatures native to this world.”

“What are we going to do about Jason though? He’s not going to just forget about you. You can’t be ignored all the time, and if he blows the city up looking for you, that’s no good.”

“I don’t know, I really don’t,” he responded wearily. “If only he had given me a little more time, so I could face him more equally. He has all the power here. We can’t threaten him by holding something he holds dear hostage, he’s alone. But he can easily do that to us.”

“Maybe make contact with those creatures, get their help?”

“Yeah, that’s an idea. Maybe tomorrow we can look around the city, see if we can spot one again. I should be able to talk to it, maybe get some idea what it’s doing here and if it can help us!”

“See, aren’t you glad I’m around?”

“There was never any doubt, Kid.”

She grinned. “Have a good night then.”

But of course he didn’t.

## Chapter 11

A man should never give promises in bed.

When: During the next dream

Where: Lysanias' dream

In the dream, Lysanias was standing in a bedroom, looking at himself in a mirror attached to a chest of drawers. Standing next to him was Kid, looking exasperated.

"What did you want to show me?" she asked.

"Look at this," he replied, grabbing his hair. He lifted it off, and as though it was hinged it came away from his scalp. "Why do you suppose that happened?"

"Wait," Jason said, "you're worried about hair loss? Aren't you functionally immortal? Will you even loose your hair?"

"How should I know, mate?" Kid answered, looking disgusted now. "Put it back."

"But it's still attached at this part, see? What happens the next time I wash it?"

"Lysanias, you dream about the weirdest stuff. But then, I suppose everyone does.

Hey, snap out of it! Wake up!"

"You think it'll just fall out?"

"What's holding it together now?"

"On second thought, don't "wake up," wake up, that would defeat the purpose of me being here. Yo, Lysanias, you're dreaming, work with me here!"

"I don't know. Should I just shave it all right now and start over?"

"Maybe I can set you on fire, that might do the job."

"Do you hear something?"

"Hear something?"

Lysanias turned. "Jason!"

"Finally- ack!"

Lysanias grabbed his throat, driving him back against the wall. "You tried to kill me!"

"Water under the bridge, I need your help now," he managed.

"I bet you did this to my hair!"

Jason goggled at him, the hair still bouncing around as he was being choked. So he brought his knee up and Lysanias fell back in surprise. "Are you with me now?"

"Jason?" Kid vanished, as did most of the detail in the room. His hair returned to normal and he looked around.

"Ah, finally."

"You escaped, then? Pity. Would have solved my biggest problem at the moment."

"And then given you another one. Look, you think I want to be here? But our petty feud needs to take a back seat, until your shadow infestation problem is dealt with."

"Petty? You work for the shadow avatar! You want whole worlds to be destroyed!"

"Those that are weak, where them being destroyed serves a greater purpose, sure. But I can tell you all about that later. For now, will you help me deal with the shadows?"

"Why should I? They seemed interested in you, not us."

"That will change. I'm the most powerful thing around at the moment. They're like magnets, once I'm gone their focus will shift."

"What are they, anyway? Not that I've agreed to anything yet, mind you!"

"Small mindedness, that's what gets words destroyed, right there. Okay, okay, I'm telling you!"

The sword had appeared in Lysanias' hand again, and he had raised it.

"I first met them after meeting my older self. After he tossed me around I realized I needed to learn more about what exactly I could do, so I went in search of teachers. I found a world where Dreamers existed and worked with them. They had some kind of plague going on, that only Dreamers knew about. Some kind of shadow creature, that stole Dreamers away. Made them vanish entirely, and after that no one even remembered them. Creepy, to be honest. I must have attracted their attention despite being pretty careful, because after I left there they started showing up on worlds I visited. They aren't all that smart, not alone anyway, but they're like ants. Lots of them can do what one couldn't. But they learn and

adapt, so they must have seen me leaving and figured out how to follow me. Now they've come here."

"So people that walk the dream could start disappearing? Thanks a lot!"

"Maybe, maybe not," he countered. "Can people here go between dreams and the real world?"

"Why should I tell you anything?"

"It's important, come on! Look, I'm at your mercy here, I came into *your* dream. You can do anything here, I would be lucky to light a candle. I'm trying to help this world out!"

Lysanias looked him over. *He seems to be sincere. He hasn't attacked, and I wasn't lucid before. He could have killed me and I would have been unaware. Why take the risk of telling me it's a dream?* He opened a hand, palm up, and fire flashed there. Then ice, then it changed to metal, then simply a ball of light, all without apparent effort. *He seems to be telling the truth about that.* "Fine. They can't."

He visibly relaxed. "They're safe. The worst that can happen is they die."

"That's still pretty bad!"

"Perhaps, I would argue the other is far worse, and more insidious. But luckily these shadow creatures only seem to have power when near other Dreamers. Like they leach off their power in some way. Otherwise they just wander almost at random, staying out of sight but watching people."

*Like that one Kid saw. Interesting. And I encountered someone that could do the same, Gogo. Are they somehow related?*

"So if these people can't step into the real world, the shadow creatures don't get the power to act in the real world either. That's something at least. They'll only have power in the dream world, so like I said the worst they can do is kill someone's dreaming body."

"But they'll start to multiply, don't ask how I don't know. If we don't take care of them now, when there's sure to be just a few, this part of the World of Dreams will be overrun with them before long. And if any see *you* leave, they're sure to start following you as well."

"You're just a fountain of great news, I'm so glad you followed me here!"

"No need to be sarcastic. Will you help me or not?"

"Why do you care, anyway?"

"Why wouldn't I? This world won freedom from my master, I respect that. I don't want to bring them problems they wouldn't have otherwise. That's not fair."

"How do you know they aren't native to this place? They just act similarly to the creatures you've encountered before?"

"You do know who I work for, right? I just asked. They said those creatures were native to that one world only. Seemed pleased I had inadvertently set them loose."

"Of course," he sighed. "But what do you want me to do about it? I've had one-interrupted by the way- lesson in the Dream. One. I'm surprised I managed that ball of darkness against you."

"Is that what that was? Clever. I couldn't touch it like that cloth, so I couldn't figure out at first what it was. Then the stone enclosed me, like that would be any impediment."

"It was just about buying time at that point so they could get away."

"Fair enough. But to answer your question, I want you to spread the word. Gather the Dreamers around here and go hunting shadows. Before they start breeding or worse, interacting with the World of Dreams here and *evolving*."

"Oh, it gets better?" Lysanias wondered, smiling a big smile. "Do tell!"

"They can absorb energy from nightmares left behind here, or something, and become more powerful versions of themselves. Believe me, you don't want that to happen."

"I didn't want any of this to happen. I wanted to wander around, help some people. But noooo. Here we are. Wait though, you're supposed to be powerful, you take care of it if you're so guilty about it."

He looked down. "I can't," he finally admitted, looking like he was eating something sour.

"Oh?" He rubbed his hands together. "Some sort of exploitable weakness, perhaps?"

"No! It's just, they seem to become 'immune' for lack of a better word, to someone's attacks if one sees it and gets away. Say I simply burn one with fire, right? Another is

watching and leaves. Two days later I meet another shadow and I try to burn it with fire. Nope, not going to work. They've become immune to me burning them with fire."

"Wait, all of them? So no one can burn them with fire ever again?"

"All of them, and no, just me. Your fire and my fire, despite both being fire, are nonetheless different enough to still hurt them. But if you do attack and kill one, make sure none are nearby watching."

"Any other bad news?"

"They're always watching. They're smart enough to have one of their number hide somewhere and watch any fight others get into. Then scuttle away when they're the last one left, hooking onto our power to teleport away before we can flood the area with light or whatever."

"I suppose they're not 'alive' in the classical sense that I could tell where they were with spirit energy or life energy or radiated magic or anything like that?" *Wait, no, we're talking about dreaming here I can't do that in the dream anyway. Aarg!*

"I don't have those kinds of powers, so I can't answer that question."

"Never mind. Say we do clear them out. We go a week or a month without seeing any, so we decide they've been exterminated. What then? You go back to trying to kill me?"

"Er, yes?" He colored. "I mean it's my job right now. You know how the boss is."

He rolled his eyes. "Great. Guess I'll just have to stab you in the back before then."

"I'll be expecting it." He grinned.

*Weirdo.* "Truce until then?"

"Truce!" He held out a hand, and Lysanias shook it.

"Does this seem familiar to you somehow? I have the strangest feeling..."

"Yeah, me too! How crazy is that? Well, you want to get in some practice before you wake up?"

*Pass up a chance to learn how he thinks, what sort of abilities he actually has in the dream? I think not!* "Sure! I'm just lying there otherwise."

"Great. Let me give you an overview, just in case your Dreamers have a different view on what they can do. Given the city and how your teacher was dressed, it's probably a pretty low tech place. As what you can do in the dream is reflected by your understanding of time, space, energy, and dimension they probably aren't as good as they'll be once they figure those concepts out. So first of all..."

Lysanias woke the next morning feeling like he had already done a full day's work today already, could he go back to sleep now? But he got up, did his morning routine, got out Rosalina, and told both ladies what had gone on in his dreams the night before.

"A truce with Jason? Ya trust him?"

"No," he admitted. "But consider what I've seen, rather than what I think I know. He did distract those shadow creatures so we could get away. He didn't just come here and stab me once he knew I was asleep. He is training me. I think he's an honorable man with a desire to become more powerful, that would describe me too. Someone offered him that chance, and he's thrown in his lot. He can think for himself, he's not an avatar, so he's not going to mindlessly attack me. He's doing as his conscience dictates."

"Seems a bit elaborate for a trap. I'll keep me eye on him anyway, he comes 'round."

"Please do!"

"Meanwhile, what's the plan for today? Your class isn't until the afternoon, correct? More training with Rosalina here?"

"I don't mind," she told her.

"You said you found the place we can use to move between cities?"

"I did."

"Then let's head there, I want to tell Nynaevae what I've learned in case people who can channel can see these shadows and are freaking out about it. I'll tell my teacher about them in class, and she can tell the other Dreamers that live here."

"Come on then."

The trio made their way through the city and to the building where the gateway was housed, stepping inside.

"Welcome," said the man at the desk, looking up from his book. "Don't get many though here, so this is a surprise. Destination?"

*Shoot, where did she say she lived?* "The tower? Something tower?"

"White tower?"

He snapped his fingers. "That's it!"

"Tar Valon then. Passage for three?" He rattled off a price that meant nothing to Lysanias, but he knew the word "gold." He opened his pouch and handed over a few coins.

"Interesting design, never saw coins like this. Still..." He brought a scale out from under the counter and weighed them. "All right, here you go," he handed back one and some silver in change. "Though there, gateway number one, and hand this to the person you find there." He handed over a disk made of metal with some symbols on it.

"Thanks."

They went though, finding themselves in a somewhat dark cavern lit by globes of light, gateways to other places providing some light spilling through.

"Oh, I get it," Rosalina exclaimed. "These must be numbers!" She was pointing with her wand to where they had just come through, there was a black square on the floor with the number 23 there.

From another gateway a finely dressed woman came through, heading to another like she knew what she was doing. She too carried a metal disk, and was gone with hardly a glance at them.

"Let's look for one," Lysanias agreed.

"Are those magic?" Kid asked, pointing to the lights. "They look a lot like what you were making."

"They're made of Sadiar all right. The numbers seem to get smaller this way." *Are we underground? Still, back home they protected the gateway system so I have to assume this is a measure of protection for these people, it being where it is.*

Now out of another gateway a man behind another desk held out his hand. He wasn't reading, probably because this was a more trafficked place. Lysanias gave him the disk.

"Don't see many coming from there. Enjoy your stay in Tar Valon."

"Thanks. How do we get to the white tower from here?"

The man laughed. "Are you kidding? Don't worry, you can't miss it."

The three let themselves out into the street, which was a very different place from where they had left. Far noisier, with many more people moving about in the streets. Clothing ranged from elaborate and colorful to shabby and worn, and people of all ages could be seen. Again, many women were pregnant but not many very young children were to be seen.

*But that will change in just a few months.*

"If that's not it, I'll eat my shoes," Kid told them, pointing. Not far in the distance was an enormous white tower, clearly the tallest thing around, with a wall around it. It was pure white, and while he didn't want to risk anyone seeing him glowing even without the power he was pretty sure work was being done to repair holes that had been blown in the sides, high above.

*They did just have a war, it's no surprise a place like that would get damaged.*

They made their way there, and stating their business to a man in armor at the gate were let inside. There they entered the structure and were again stopped, this time by a woman behind a desk, and again told why they were there.

"Nynaeve Sedai? Ah yes, I have a note from her. Let me see here." She rummaged around behind the desk. "Yes, two people, one man with red eyes. She said you might ask after her. I'll send her to you when she's available. You can wait in that room there." She pointed to the left.

"Thank you."

The room was spacious and well furnished, with various soft chairs one could sit on. Several people were there, looking up at their arrival but then lost interest. Most were

watching the end of the room where a trio was finishing up a song. There was a small stage area, where three woman were sitting on stools. One in the front had no instrument, the one to her right had a small harp, the one to her left a flute of some kind.

The assembled people clapped politely and they bowed.

“Fancy, having live entertainment while we wait. This place has money,” Kid remarked. They launched into another song, and as Lysanias sat down it caught his attention.

*I wake from this dream  
But I can't tell you the things that I've seen  
I'd leave it behind  
If I could just change her mind  
I can't believe the things that you are telling me  
But something deep inside makes me feel this really isn't a paradise*

*Familiar to me  
Did you cross over an eternity?  
We're both so alone  
A warmth that we'd never known  
So stay with me, before our world starts crumbling  
Cause something deep inside makes me feel this really isn't a paradise*

*I'm falling asleep  
All the promises that I meant to keep  
The sweetest of dreams  
Was my life just taken from me?  
If I return, if I could change from what I've learned  
We'd never have to hide, everything would be alright in this paradise*

Again the polite clapping.

“Thank you,” said the singer in front. “For our newcomers, I’m Lynn and this is-”

“Minmai?” Lysanias jerked his head and shot up.

“How did you know our band name?” asked the one to the right.

“We’re finally famous!” said the one to the left.

“Band name?” Lysanias asked.

“Yeah, like I said I’m Lynn. This is Elmindreda, and this is May.”

“Everyone calls me Min,” Elmindreda told them.

“So together our band name is Lynn Min May.”

“Of course it is. And you weren’t sent here by any young looking girls with fox ears named Inari?”

They all shook their heads. “We’ve worked here for two months,” insisted May. “I don’t know any Inari.”

The others agreed.

“What’s this about?” Kid asked.

“Nothing,” he answered with a wave, sitting down again. “Must just be one of those things. Sorry to have bothered you. Please continue.”

“Are there any requests?” Lynn asked.

Everyone looked around at everyone else.

“Then our next song will be, ‘Keeper of the Stars.’” Lynn sat down again. “One, two, three,”

*It was no accident me finding you  
Someone had a hand in it  
Long before we ever knew  
Now I just can't believe you're in my life  
Creator's smilin' down on me  
As I look at you tonight*

*I tip my hat to the keeper of the stars  
He sure knew what he was doin'  
When he joined these two hearts  
I hold everything  
When I hold you in my arms  
I've got all I'll ever need  
Thanks to the keeper of the stars*

"They're singing about me!" Rosalina insisted as the song went on. "Sort of, I'm a keeper of stars!"

"And yet they maintain to not know Inari. Surrre they don't. It's her style after all. Just ignore them, it's what I'm doing."

"She said she didn't send Minmai though," Rosalina recalled.

"She made me hit myself in the head with a watering can *as a joke*. I wouldn't put *anything* past her."

"What?" Kid asked, clearly confused. "A watering can?"

"It's just a- I'll have to tell you later." He pointed, and Nynaeve, followed by Lan, was coming into the room.

They greeted each other and Nynaeve said to follow her, they were headed to the top of the tower to see the person in charge, a woman she called Cadsuane.

"In charge? I just came to see you!" Lysanias insisted. "I have important information for you!"

"You want to make full size gateways, right? I've got something lined up, if you think you're able to do it. She'll give you the details. If what you have to tell me is that important she'll need to hear it anyway. What's it about?"

"Have you been seeing shadow creatures sneaking around at all?"

She stopped dead on the stairs, turning back. "A few sisters have mentioned something like that. We thought it was some sort of after effect of the last battle. I haven't, myself, I thought people were just being jumpy. They're real? You know what they are?"

He nodded.

"Great, there have been rumors... If you can clear them up, we can make a proclamation or deal with them. Come on."

At the very top of the tower the group entered a sparsely decorated room where two women were standing. (Lan waited outside by the door) One was gray haired and wore a variety of hair ornaments sticking out the top of the bun she had made of her hair, the other was younger. She was well dressed in a skirt and blouse, finely made, and was writing something at a desk next to the larger desk Cadsuane probably used. Nynaeve curtsied, leading Rosalina to do the same.

"At least one among you knows how to show respect," she remarked, taking a seat. There were no other chairs, so they just stood there. "Pshaw, you're real. A man with red eyes, a tall, elegant woman with a wand, and a young girl with a mysterious power. You do exist."

"I have taken the three oaths, mother," Nynaeve said a bit sourly.

*Three what now?*

"Even so," she went on, "I had my doubts. You really can travel to other worlds, can't you?"

"Yes, mother."

"And you're each from different worlds?"

All three nodded.

"And you, a *man*, can channel Sadair like we can? Show me."

Lysanias saw no reason to refuse (despite no please or thank you in evidence, simply a demand and an expectation to obey) and drew upon the One Power, beginning to glow. The other woman scraped her chair back and stared, wide eyed.

"Impossible!" she breathed.

"Apparently not," Cadsuane told her. "Yes, you're middling strength at best, strange. That's sufficient, thank you."

He released.

"And you can make a gateway?"

"Barely... mother? It takes all the One Power I can draw and even then isn't very large. I have to almost crawl through it."

"We could solve that for you, it's true. But I'm not in the habit of simply handing out angreal, especially to someone that will soon *leave the reality I live in*, taking it with them. I

mean we have portal stones, we know about other worlds, but to talk to someone from there..."

"We are starting to make them ourselves again, mother."

He glanced over at Nynaeve. "Did you?"

She shook her head. "We got a hint from Rand, who gave us something we could use to make them," she explained. "I didn't bring that knowledge back with me. I helped refine it, true, but they did it on their own. Like I said, I've taken the three oaths, despite the many inconveniences they've led to wandering other worlds."

"I do recall, daughter. Also I note a rather distressing trend of you talking like you're not one of us anymore," Cadsuane noted with disdain. "Let me remind you that no matter how far you go, you still are. You represent the Aes Sedai here or on other worlds they've never heard of us."

She inclined her head. "Yes, mother."

"In any case, I'm told you have varied abilities we would find strange and unnatural, is that correct?"

"Yes, mother. All three of us have various abilities, ranging from Kid to my left with her more battle oriented 'magic' to Rosalina, to my right, who has her own brand of magic apart from me. I don't know much magic, the non-magical abilities I've learned from people in my travels has been sufficient for me."

"In that case, I'll make you deal." She leaned forward, putting her arms on the desk. "You retrieve something for us, and I'll trade it for an angreal of sufficient strength that you can use to make a gateway you can walk through. And no stronger. Does that sound fair?"

"You guys have fetch quests here?" Kid asked, sounding surprised. "Do it, there's bound to be a boss and we can raise our star level!"

"I wonder if that means finding a new Luma?" Rosalina wondered excitedly.

"Er, I still have no idea what it means," Lysanias admitted, "but I'm happy to help. Do you know roughly what the object looks like?"

"It's a rod we lost during the last battle," she explained. "I want it back before someone goes nosing around the area and happens to find it. If you find the one that forsaken was using I'll take it as well."

"The one?"

"I can give you the details," Nynaeve told them. "From what you've told me, something like this should be easy for you. There shouldn't even be anyone around to get in the way."

"That's before it became a fetch quest," Kid cautioned. "There's monsters there now, believe me."

Nynaeve looked at her like she was a snake with two heads, then at Lysanias. "You said you had some news for us about those shadow creatures?"

He told them about what Jason had said the night before, where the shadows had come from and what they wanted. "To snatch those that can Dream but where they go, he didn't know." Also how they were unable to interact with reality expect in the presence of one that could step from a dream to here. "And as only myself and he can do that, that I know of, those not in the world of dreams should be safe. Again, according to him. So pay them no mind, but maybe keep track of any that are seen so we can eradicate them before they start multiplying in earnest."

"Would the One Power work on them? Should we treat them as shadowspawn and just burn them down where they stand? If they're making people vanish or attacking their dreams clearly they are evil."

"I don't actually know. Given they're mostly a creature of dreams, and only partly 'here' most of the time, probably not. I wouldn't provoke them just yet in any case, let me do my own research into them rather than rely on what Jason told me."

"Very well. I can at least quell some rumors, and paint them as harmless for the moment. I haven't heard of any attacks, and if they can't, so much the better. We can start studying them, now that I know they aren't just the imaginings of a terrified populous. And those that can't channel can't see them? An excellent test for the ability, I suppose. You'll inform the Dreamwalkers?"

"In class today."

“Very well. I will see you when you have the rod and the scepter in hand. Good hunting.”

Nynaeve and Rosalina curtsied again, and Lysanias gave a stiff bow, they were obviously dismissed. They left, heading downstairs. They headed to an area to leave from, a place Nynaeve typically used, and she said to watch their footing, the place they were going was pretty torn up.

The gateway deposited them in a rather barren land, next to a mountain peak that seemed to have collapsed recently. The ground was rocky and had only minimal vegetation, as obviously there hadn't been time to regrow anything larger than weeds.

“What in the world,” Nynaeve gasped, the gateway behind her winking out. Tearing his attention from the cliff face that was destroyed Lysanias looked around at the odd looking creatures that had all stopped digging in the dirt and were looking at him like lunch had just arrived.

“You see, monsters!” Kid said excitedly, drawing her daggers. “I wish I had my armor on but still, this is gonna be fun!” She took off running as the creatures bellowed, raising their tools and made ready to charge.

*You've got to be kidding me.*

## Chapter 12

Whether the wolf beats the bear or the bear beats the wolf the rabbit always loses

When: Combat is about to begin

Where: Base of what used to be the Polov Heights

Lysanias quickly surveyed the battlefield, coming up with a plan of attack. *Had Kid not just gone sprinting off maybe we could have hopped back through a gateway and regrouped. Or I could have used earth bending to create a moat so these guys could only come at us from one side. But I can't strand her.* The group was surrounded, on all sides in the field were weird looking creatures and even stranger looking men. The creatures were taller than a person, and looked like a cross between a man and a beast. They stood on two legs, or hooves, or talons, and had the heads of animals like eagles or rams. They were doing the hard work of digging the place up, and both piles of dirt and mounds of dug up crystal of some kind were scattered around the place, which he thought could be used for cover. The men were obviously overseeing them, though how Lysanias couldn't fathom. They had no eyes, just a smooth forehead that came down and went into a normal nose and mouth. These carried swords, and were reaching for them and smiling. The animal men wore armor of a sort, the men were simply dressed in black.

*At least all they have to attack with is shovels, I don't think they expected anyone to interrupt them like this.*

"Strengthen!" Kid shouted, running towards the nearest beast. Red light and a circle not unlike something Lysanias would create swirled around her, pulling every eye.

*Wait, I thought she had to hit people to use her elements? And are they actually related to paragon magic in some way? There was a circle like mine- A question for another time, we are severely outnumbered here.*

"Give me the wands!" Rosalina shouted, reaching for the sword scabbard here they were tucked. He lifted it so she could grab them.

"Trollocs!" Nynaeve spat. "They can't be allowed to find the sa'angreal. Kill them all!"

"Yes, I think we all figured that," Lan told her dryly, calmly unsheathing his blade. "Be wary of male channelers."

"I'll get a detection weave going," she announced, her body glowing brighter. "Stay within a few meters of me!"

He looked at Lysanias. "Their blades are specially made, the metal will poison and corrupt your body quickly. Don't get hit by them."

"Got it." *So would they be able to hurt my spirit, then? Are they considered fabricated or magical?*

After Rosalina took the wands and looked the battlefield over, spinning to cover another angle and setting her feet, Lysanias pulled his shield out.

*Do I risk calling out my mountain spirit? I'm guessing those guys without eyes have some other means of "seeing" and without knowing if their blades can hurt my spirit I can't risk it. No, let's even the odds in another way, and if one of them gets hit, who cares? Of course, once I do my spirit energy is divided so much I won't be able to use many other powers. Typical, but there's so many of them! A dozen nearby, and at least double that in total hanging out here. They really wanted this job done quickly.*

He crossed his fingers. "Shadow Clone Technique!" Two clones appeared at his side and all went for their blades as the nearest trollocs reached them. They spread out, leaving Lan to cover Nynaeve.

*Shoot, I should have slapped an armor ward on her rather than going for my own sword. I can dodge or...*

The nearest trolloc suddenly clutched its face as a double strand of fire shot out of Nynaeve, impacting it in the face. The beast howled, stopped charging and dropped the shovel it had raised, clutching a ruined snout. It staggered back. At the same time a shimmering "net" appeared around the area also woven by her, and Lan stepped over and put the beast out of its misery by taking its head off.

*Never mind. She can really channel a lot at once!*

"I'll need to focus on cutting any male weaves that pierce the detection net, hope all you big, strong men can handle any more that get close."

*I'll do my best.* All three Lysanias started to move as the trollocs near them drew close, followed by an eyeless man. There were four of the creatures and one man, so he knew he had to take care of them quickly or still get surrounded.

The clone on his right fended off a strike by an eagle faced trolloc, choosing to "block" with the edge of his shield rather than the face. They were attacking with crudely made shovels and his shield had a razor sharp edge so it was a simple matter to bring the two together with the result you would expect of such a paring. A confused trolloc with only half his weapon, a stupefied look on his face, and then no look at all as the ultimate blade neatly cleaved him in two. Of course there was nothing neat about the amount of blood that gushed forth from the wound, but the clone was already turning, keeping the momentum of the sword going to strike out at the next nearest trolloc that was almost upon him. It too was cut down.

Lysanias proper darted forward, sword spinning towards the one to the very left of the group that was coming towards him. His sword too did not stop as it sliced through that one and then the one next to it, making the eyeless man behind them reconsider and screech to a halt.

The second clone stepped past Lan, who had just blocked and retaliated against the trolloc that swung at him, cutting his arm but hardly wounding the thing. Four more were right behind it so the clone figured he would not waste time waiting for them to come to him, and moved to attack. It cleanly cut down the trolloc, and spun to meet the eyeless man who seemed a bit surprised to be moved towards so quickly. Possibly it hadn't counted on how fast the clone was, but it paid for that mistake. It had its sword in position to block the strike, but the clone of Ragnarok shattered it and kept going, plunging into the man's chest. He started to spasm, but the clone felt the life energy leave the body. He was dead.

Back to Lysanias the original, the one and only, he stepped up to the next set of his opponents, a trolloc and an eyeless man. The man seemed to be "staring" right at him and Lysanias felt a momentary flash of panic, but then realized that was silly, what did *he* have to be afraid of? He whipped the sword forward to show this guy what for. This man too seemed to anticipate his attack, trying to block but getting his sword shattered in the process. He was nearly cut in half and Lysanias kept moving, heading for the trolloc to his right.

The clone nearest to Lan still had two trollocs nearby, and one figured he would try his luck apparently, taking a swing at the clone. He did the same thing, blocking with his shield and retaliating with the sword.

The first clone saw the one Rosalina had shot twice staggering forward, probably trying to get in range before she could attack again, and he couldn't exactly have that now could he? No. So he finished that one off.

By this time most of the opponents on the Lysanias side of the circle they had formed were dead, and those that were not starting running away, as while trollocs were dim, seeing several getting slaughtered in seconds reminded them they were cowards too.

Lysanias proper shrugged and turned to see what the situation on the other side looked like. Nynaeve, Lan, and one of his clones were about to be in range of two trollocs and one of the eyeless men, but there was a gap between Lan and Nynaeve he felt he could slip through. So he spirit stepped over there, appearing behind and to the right of the eyeless man who, not having his enhanced sense of energy, didn't realize he was there. So he took Ragnarok in the back without even knowing he was under attack.

Lysanias looked for another target as the eyeless man spasmed and went down, catching sight of Kid looking at another eyeless who had just retrieved his sword. He was uncomfortably close to Rosalina, and he wondered if he should expend the energy to hit him with lightning or something when Kid shouted "FirePillar!" which was apparently not some kind of caterpillar because a literal pillar of fire appeared around him, causing him to shriek and burn away. Satisfied she turned to the two trollocs that had apparently been whacking her without much success. "Yer mine!" she declared. "Need to get me element grid charged back up after that! Ye'll do for that!"

So he shrugged and watched as she poked both of them with her daggers, seeming to be holding back and hitting them in non-vital areas, then finishing the one off and calling out "fireball" against the other, slamming it with a ball of fire that appeared out of nowhere.

By that time his clone had finished off the last trolloc he has near, and Lan took out his second foe.

The group looked around. All around them trollocs and the eyeless men were dead or dying.

"How did..." Lan started to wonder, then seemed to realize there were three Lysanias on the field. "Did you..."

"Male channeling!" Nynaeve suddenly announced, weaves springing out of her and clashing with something unseen in the air. Lysanias looked, expecting to be able to see the strands as he was, after all, a man's man, but he saw nothing. But he wasn't helpless, and reached out with his senses.

"There," he pointed, to a seemingly empty spot. "I feel life energy in that direction, not very far."

"Right!" She wove, and something shattered, leaving three men dressed in black standing there looking awkward. "Darkfriends," she guessed, moving to the edge of her detection grid and facing them. "Previously guardian unless I miss my guess. You picked the wrong side, fellows. You in charge here? Give it up, your master is sealed away forever. At least until the wheel turns. You've got nothing."

"With the sa'angreal that lies here, we'll have something," the lead man insisted. "You may have torn apart our forces here but we can get more. We will find it first, before the white tower!" A gateway started opening behind him.

"Mate, you're not finding anything," Kid told them, shouldering past everyone. "I've used three red elements in these parts, and you know what that means."

"Red... elements?" asked the one to the left.

"That's right. I have just enough element power to do this." She jammed the hilts of her daggers together in front of her. "RedWolf!"

From behind her a ball of fire materialized, then coalesced into the shape of a red wolf, flames burning all around it.

*I don't know what else I expected.*

The wolf wasted no time, charging forward and while the men may have tried to defend themselves, a wall of flame struck the ground and as the wolf ran past bent over and simply incinerated all three at once.

"Good dog!" Kid yelled as it vanished again. "Anyone else? Come on out, I'll kick you so hard you'll kiss the moons!"

No one did, and the group set about making sure all the trollocs in the area were dead. One of his clones projected his senses over the area, and the remaining trollocs were running as fast as they could and didn't look like they were going to stop any time soon. Meanwhile Lysanias was using magic to clean everyone off, they were all soaked in blood and the smell, already pretty bad because there were rotting corpses from the battle six months ago still nearby, was getting worse.

"Now that that unpleasantness is over," Nynaeve said, burning the last trolloc body to ash with streams of fire, "perhaps we can get on with why we came here."

"Let me tell ya, you guys have it pretty rough," Kid announced, looking a little sick as the body went up in flames.

"Let me guess, things you kill in your world simply vanish?" Lysanias asked her.

"Yeah, how'd ya know?"

"I have some experience with worlds like that."

"Right, I guess you did mention that. I mean, honestly, if they didn't vanish we would have left a trail of bodies on our world like ya could never believe."

*Don't be so sure. I was there when Terra and the others were trying to raise "levels." They almost gleefully went from one end of the seeming continent to the other picking as many fights with the local wildlife as they could.*

"I'm glad you're on our side," Rosalina told her. "What was that wolf at the end? Your magic is pretty amazing from what I saw."

*Yes, like it's optimized for combat and nothing else. Just like Terra. Strange.*

"You mean RedWolf? It's a summoned creature, I don't know much more than that, like where they actually come from. We trapped and stole it in Terra Tower back home. Maybe they're just made of magic, I don't know. It's not a part of the world I came from, as I can still summon it here when the field is red. I guess it must just be a magical construct."

"Certainly effective," remarked Lan, "whatever it is. Those three didn't seem to stand a chance."

"Yes, things seem awfully weak here, no offense. Even my medium attack seems to do far more HP damage than I would have guessed. I didn't raise a star level, they weren't boss level from my point of view."

He looked around at the scorched and blackened ground around them, which Lysanias thought was smart because if he asked about "boss level" and "HP damage" they would have been there all day. "We'll have to post guards here if we can't retrieve the items today. We don't want more darkfriends digging the place up. Eventually they'll find what they're looking for, they have motivation after all."

"That's up to Lysanias," Nynaeve told him. "Do you have a plan?"

"There are several things I can do," he admitted. "I'll start with simple earth bending, get a lay of the land. If needed I can summon the spirit of the ant, that can give me information about things underground. It's a wide area, I don't know about covering it all even with help." He glanced over at his clones.

"At least feeling the ground out doesn't take spiritual energy," one remarked. "We're nearly useless with the three of us out like this."

"If we all go to the maximum range and just go back and forth, it might not take too long?" asked the other, sounding as if he didn't believe it himself. "Not many places to recharge ourselves out here, either."

"Let's give it a shot," Lysanias suggested. All three took off their shoes and spread out. Stomping the ground they closed their eyes and tried to picture what was nearby them. As all three had a copy of the sword and other equipment and so were augmented they all did fairly well, getting a good swatch of the land.

"There's something under there," remarked one clone.

"I've got a big piece of something over here," remarked the other. "Help me will you?"

The three tore a wide fissure in the ground, then looked down to see a chunk of something sparkling down at the bottom of it. All three nodded to each other, stomping again and using the ground to go under it and push it up. Everyone gathered around it. It was a far larger chunk than what he already saw littering the place.

"I wasn't at this battle," Nynaeve told them, "but I heard about it. Apparently the other side was throwing around balefire like it was going out of style, which was causing our side no end of problems."

"Balefire?" Lysanias asked.

A clone stepped close to it, putting a hand on it probably to analyze the material.

"A temporal weave. Basically it destroys the past of whatever it hits. So if you dug a hole, and were hit by balefire, the hole wouldn't have been dug. Naturally this puts a strain on the fabric of reality where balefire is used. It was tearing reality apart here. Egwene, a friend of mine and the then Amyrlin Seat figured out a way to counteract this. Using the sa'angreal we're here to find she wove reality back together, drawing too much of the One Power and dying in the process. This crystal is a byproduct of that. Apparently, according to those in the area, she became a column of crystal herself." She felt sad saying this last, but proud too, Lysanias felt. "We named the weave the Flame of Tar Valon in honor of her."

"Perhaps I can create some kind of monument to her later... So if she was holding this rod, in theory it's where we should focus our efforts. Finding these buried chunks of crystal.

This piece looks smashed, could the cliff-side collapsing have smashed and scattered it? That's why various sized chunks are scattered around?"

She nodded.

"Very well. Hey, me, make myself useful! Why don't you make a flame, you can augment my skill at chanting with magic and hold the hubPad, I'll try and get the ant spirit here and see what we can find out." The other two figured that was fine and got to work. Lysanias even chanted for the spirit of the dragonfly to further assist his efforts, he felt he would need it given he wasn't practiced at calling on ant. With all that going and the hubPad itself able to correct him as the chant went on he managed it, giving the power of the ant to himself and his two clones (barely).

With that done they were easily able to work together, ripping the earth apart and dragging huge chunks of the crystal up. Lysanias had Nynaeve make a gateway back to the tree though, so all three could go and recharge, there not being a lot of plant life in that area and thus, no ley lines. They finally had a mostly complete column and found the rod they were looking for, plus another column that held a long scepter Nynaeve said would work for a man.

"It seems whoever was facing Egwene in combat got turned into crystal too, that's where the second pillar came from. The Flame against balefire, creation vs destruction. Creation won out, wonder if that means anything."

"Your reality must have really suffered, to have needed this much crystal to stabilize it," Kid remarked. The pieces of the crystal tower were at least a meter across, and when complete probably stood ten to twenty meters high. It either shattered easily or was hit by a ton of debris when the nearby rock face collapsed. "But what are all these smaller pieces scattered around? Some of them seem almost human shaped. I mean this is clearly a hand." She waved a crystal hand before them.

"The darkfriends that thought they were doing their master's will. Tearing this reality apart to make way for the one the dark one would create after he was freed. Of course we know it just wanted this place destroyed and had no intention of remaking anything. Balefire is a terrifying force," she explained. "When Egwene released her final attack, or I guess healing would be more apt a description in this case, everyone around her that had used balefire up to that point got turned into crystal."

"Incredible." She was looking out over the now completely torn up battlefield, as Lysanias hadn't put anything back yet, so there were just mounds of earth and deep cuts in the land in roughly a line where the two pillars had been. "Our attacks, even the ones that seem to cause meteors to fall or lava to gush out don't actually hurt the ground. It's so strange..."

"Let's get them both out," Lysanias told his clones, who had by that time analyzed the material as well. (He had a plan) Working together they pulled the two sa'angreal out, handing them over to Nynaeve. "This one is a pretty great temptation," she admitted. "Maybe I shouldn't hold onto it."

"Don't think about it," Lysanias told her. "Instead, you remember what your friend looked like, right?"

"Sure, why?"

"With your permission I'd like to pull an image of her out of your brain. Then I can reshape one of these into her likeness and take it back with me. I figure the white tower should have a suitable monument to her, don't you? A crystal statue of her composed of the crystal she left behind should do the trick. These others I'll wield together and if you can help me," he tapped the rod, "we can stand the two pillars that are left side by side as a reminder of what happened here."

"I'd like that," she said, gripping the rod. "Do what you have to do."

So he melded with her, taking a look at how Egwene dressed and getting a sense of her personality. He took the chunk he judged to be the top and, after sharing the memory with his two clones, got to work with them compressing it and shaping it into her likeness.

"It'll be really heavy," he told everyone as he shrank the crystal, "but that will make it nearly unbreakable. I figure it won't need to be moved all that much, and if it did, I'm sure a group could manage it, channeling air."

Not long after it was done, he recharged, and then dragged the bits of crystal pillar that were left and fit them together as best he could, then used alchemy to make them one piece.

"Remind me never to get into a serious fight with you two," Lan remarked, as he physically hauled and used the force to set another crystalline chunk in place. Kid was helping, it seemed she had an off the charts strength as well; her world, like that of Terra, believing that "hundreds" or "thousands" of "HP damage" per "round" of fighting was somehow "normal." So she could lift chunks bigger than Lysanias himself could without apparent effort.

Lysanias laughed. "It's the augmentations of my equipment. Inari sent me to the worlds she did at first for a reason. Without them I'm fairly helpless, believe me."

"I don't need anything to augment my strength," Kid bragged. "It's all me!" She flexed her arms.

*It's the wacky reality you come from that thinks that kind of strength is normal. I'm sure you're scaled to it just like everyone here is scaled to their reality. It's just moving between realities happens to show all are not created equal. I'm sure you're only of middling strength where you come from, because you're facing things that have equal or greater strength compared to you. Still, I did get the short end of the stick in some ways, needing the sword and my other stuff to get even near what she can do. Take my stuff away and I'm back to being a total weakling, she doesn't need anything to be a complete monster in most realities! I do have to wonder how much damage she would do in Terra's world, though.*

The group then worked together, Lysanias finding a good sided chunk of stone underground he could melt with earth bending, and then force the pillars into so they would stand upright without support. Once she had the power of the rod inside her, Nynaeve helped clean the place up, using earth and air strands of the One Power to shove mounds into cracks and smooth the ground over.

"I could get used to this!" she remarked, shining away and looking a bit high on life at the moment. They got the place at least somewhat level again, so maybe one day this area could be a town or village.

*And hundreds of years from now will anyone even remember why these two crystal pillars are here?*

By the time they were done it was about noon, just enough time to get back, have a bite to eat, and go to class. Nynaeve opened her gateway into her own rooms at the White Tower, and led them back up to the top where they were allowed in to see the Amyrlin.

"You found them!" she exclaimed as Nynaeve carefully set them on the desk. "Well done, all of you. No trouble, I hope?"

"If you don't count two dozen or more trollocs in the area, a handful of myrddraal, and three darkfriend guardian trouble, none at all."

"My word, all that? You're not hurt at all, are you?"

"We managed things there."

"Fine, fine. I should have figured we wouldn't be the only ones after the relics, but they moved quickly. No prisoners were taken?"

"Kid saw to that. She summoned a wolf made of fire and that simply incinerated the three. Different realities have different physical laws, and so what might be a laughable amount of damage to someone in one reality could be completely fatal in another. She carries at least that much of her physical law with her, so the damage she does is out of proportion to what we're used to. The others we simply killed, not much use questioning them."

"To be fair, summons are overkill for most things on my world as well," Kid explained. "And my star level is pretty high, so... yeah. I'd give you the shiny soot I got from killing them, it's a rare material, but somehow I doubt you'd find it much use. I'm good a damage but I couldn't have found those on my own. It's a specialty."

"We could have used you in the last battle," Cadsuane told her. "Thank you for your help in securing these. I'm sure even for you it wasn't without some risk."

"Some," she admitted.

"I honestly didn't expect you back so quickly, so I don't have the angreal at hand as promised. If you would like to accompany me to the storeroom I'll lock these up and you can

make your choice. Young lady, if you would like some sort of reward for your assistance, please name it.”

“Oh.” She looked down, coloring. “Ain’t no big deal. I got what I want, a way to stop moving across realities and the hope of actually finding Serge in my lifetime.” She glanced over at Lysanias, putting a hand on his shoulder.

“Very well, but the offer remains open. Shall we?”

“That would be fine,” Lysanias told her.

She got up and went out into the hall where the two clones were lounging next to the crystal statue of Egawine. “We need to know where you would like us to put this,” one of the clones said.

She did a double take, looking at the clone that spoke, to the other clone, back to Lysanias, then the clones, back again. “Er, what is that?” she finally settled on, pointing to the statue. It was a fairly good representation of Egwene with one hand held up, where Lysanias figured a flame could be balanced by someone tying off a weave of fire.

“A monument to Egwene,” Nynaeve told her. “Made from the crystal her weave created as it beat back the balefire that was being used. I thought perhaps the courtyard?”

“You couldn’t have carved this!” she exclaimed, running her hand over the smooth surface. The crystal was partly transparent and Lysanias and his clones had made sure the crystal was “cut” to splinter light so it shone like a diamond. “Could you? It would have taken months!”

“Not exactly. I can tell you later, mother, for now let’s get this set so Lysanias can get to class.”

“Of course, of course. The courtyard you said? Yes, that would be fine, follow me.”

## Chapter 13

And what am I supposed to be an example of?

When: Later that afternoon

Where: Classroom

With the statue of Egwene firmly planted in the ground at the center of the courtyard and a flame balanced on her hand by Cadsuane herself, the group went down into the lower levels of the White Tower in search of angreal. Lysanias was given the weakest first, and pulling all the power he safely could through it the women there said he would risk burning himself out to draw even the additional minuscule amount needed to create a gateway large enough to walk through.

"And even then, I wouldn't recommend this one," Cadsuane said, taking it back. "You don't buy a house with only two bedrooms when you have a child already and another one on the way. You buy a house with three bedrooms."

*Ah, like hitting someone with a huge blast of fire instead of a small stream, even if you think the stream would get the job done. Why take the chance? Always allow for some extra capacity just in case.*

"Did you ever have any children, mother?" Nynaeve asked.

"Never you mind. Here, this is our next strongest one, it should do the job." She handed him a small carving of what seemed to be a bird, and he again embraced the One Power and started to draw through it. With this one he could create a gateway *just* large enough that he only had to duck down a little to fit through it, and Cadsuane rested a hand on what was clearly the next level of strength for angreal. "Does this satisfy you?" she asked, in a voice that suggested that yes, this should satisfy anyone and demanding more would be quite rude indeed.

*It's the same story with this one. I bet the next 'level' up would get me one I wouldn't have to duck through, while this one can do the job and has some power to spare in case I needed a shield of air or something at the same time.*

"He found us the most powerful sa'angreal and kept the male version out of darkfriends' hands. Are we really that stingy?"

"You did hear me say *just* strong enough to open a gateway he could walk through, yes? He's not crawling through this one, it's nearly as tall as he is."

"What if he cuts the top of his head off? It would be our fault!"

"Why would he do a fool thing like that? You can clearly see that you need to duck down a bit, it's obvious. He'll remember."

"This will be fine," Lysanias told them, a bit giddy from holding nearly double the One Power he could on his own. He felt he could see the individual stitches that made up the embroidery along the two woman's dresses, and the color variation in Nynaeve's eyes was really quite astonishing.

*Have her eyes always looked like that? They're brown, yes, but they aren't just brown. There's flecks of gold, and there's an almost blue ring right as the brown begins, and there's little lines of black radiating to the center. And her lashes are so long...*

Lysanias realized Cadsuane was snapping her fingers under his nose. "See, this is why we make people stay novices for ten years or so, and we don't allow them to draw their maximum limit even then. You still alive, boy?"

"I was just thinking about-"

"Her eyes, yes, we noticed you staring at them. She's married, don't forget, and her husband could probably beat you senseless."

*I wasn't tearing her clothes off, just admiring her eyes.* "Don't be so sure," Lysanias told her, releasing the Power. "Unless we're just talking regular swords, and then probably, yes." *Wait, this is only second in strength? What would the strongest angreal allow me to hold? And sa'angreal can allow even more than that? Could I actually see the threads that make up cloth using that rod we got back? The individual hairs on a cat? Probably best not to think about it, but I see now what she was saying. That rod is dangerous to anyone without an iron will.* "In any case, the bird will be fine, thank you." He looked down at it, seemingly carved out a round lump of wood it fit comfortably in his hand. The bird was seen from the side, sitting on

a branch, raised as though wood had been removed simply to reveal the shape that had been there all along. It was polished until it shone and felt slightly warm to the touch. He felt it would fit nicely in the pouch he was carrying the marbles around in, given he would want it nearby at all times in case he needed a quick gateway. *A quick gateway... that gives me an idea for what to put on the ring Nynaeve gave me.*

"Then you have the thanks of the White Tower. Please keep in touch with Nynaeve about any further information you gain about those shadow creatures."

"Of course."

With that she locked up the rod and scepter, then rewarded the room and went back upstairs. Nynaeve led them to her room again to put them back in Rhuidean.

Now back in class, Rosalina and Kid off doing something, Lysanias was about to tell everyone about the threat of the shadows when they walked the dream.

"Aren't we missing someone?" he asked, looking around the room.

"Yes, Alisha isn't here," Talina agreed. "Has failing to appear in the dream last night convinced her she's not a Dreamer after all? She should not be so quick to give up, there is no shame in taking a little longer than others to get started."

"I'm not actually sure," Tamil told her. "I went to come get her for class and she wasn't there. Her father said a man with red hair that stuck up out of his head but was black in the back and had a scar over his right eye came to see her early this morning. They spoke and she followed him somewhere. She hadn't returned yet."

"She isn't in danger, is she?" he asked, somewhat worried.

"She's an Aiel, she can take care of herself," the instructor dismissed. "Now, about these shadow creatures..."

Lysanias told the class what Jason had told him; they were only powerful around dreamers, how you couldn't fight them in the same way twice if one got away, and that they were harmless if seen here in the waking world.

*But not for the reason you might think.*

"But they have our ability to manipulate the dream?" one of the students asked.

"That's right. They seem attracted to Dreamers in some way and for some reason we can't explain, want to kill them." *They want to kill Jason, anyway, I have no evidence they want to kill other Dreamers. But best if they proceed in that way and just avoid the creatures until I know for sure.*

"Are they some kind of by product of the last battle?" asked another. "I know the pattern was weakened because of all the balefire that was used, did they come from another world though the cracks?"

"Yeah, I've never heard of Dreamers talking about these shadow creatures before this," said a third.

"It's true, I've not encountered them in the dream," Talina admitted. "Nor have any of the other wise ones I spoke to. What matters is they're here, and we will deal with them. I'm more interested in that man we saw, who said he was here to kill you. Was that true?"

"I'm afraid so. I oppose what he wants to do, so he wishes me dead. Simple as that."

"What does he wish?"

"To become a god."

"A what?" The others looked equally confused.

"Don't you know that word?"

"I have no idea how to even pronounce what you said. Gohad? What is a gahd anyway?"

*Great, I can't actually tell them because that would give away the fact that he, and if all goes well soon I, will be able to step from the World of Dreams into the real world and retain my ability to manipulate it like a dream. If they can actually do that and just don't know it, and then I give them that knowledge, suddenly the balance of power shifts in this world.*

*Technology is one thing, it can benefit everyone but this?* "Never mind, just know that he's as skilled in the dream as anyone alive ever has been, but he's only after me. He won't bother you." *I hope.*

"Then we shall move to more practical matters. Now, about what we spoke of yesterday, who can tell me three of the dangers of the world of dreams?"

The class went on, though Talina did devote part of the time to ideas on how to defend yourself from a shadow attack, as it was quite different than dealing with regular nightmares that were often seen there. He then had dinner and gratefully dropped into bed, with instructions to try and find his way to the tree again.

A week or so passed, without further interference from shadows, though Jason did appear in his dreams to further his training.

"Without the background knowledge of physics and the actual laws of the universe they're stuck imagining spears," he told Lysanias. "We know much more powerful things exist, so we can imagine them."

"And perhaps travel to highly advanced civilizations to study their technology and gain a further edge?" *Fancy armor and rings that allow one to fly and make objects out of nothing, for instance?*

"Exactly. Imagination is hard, Lysanias. That's why technology takes a long time to get going, getting people to buy into your ideas is even harder. But once people accept that technology can make their lives better, that pace tends to accelerate. The point is, these people here would not be able to imagine a starship, because they're lucky to have fireworks. But you could. Not how every part would work, but if you studied one you could get there. What could a person who was around starships their whole lives imagine?"

*Er, bigger starships?* "I have no idea."

"Exactly. Time, space, matter, the law of physics, they can all be manipulated by Dreamers. But if you don't understand lightspeed or how gravity works, how can your mind change or counteract those things? Now, let's find someplace your "wise ones" won't go, as I heard her order you not to do any Dreaming on your own so you'll be breaking the rules if you come with me, and you can get some practice in."

"Why can't I practice here?" He looked around, the dream Jason had found him in wiped away to just be an empty field.

"You could, but everything in your own dream is half as hard as it would be outside it. You got rid of everything but this field easily enough, didn't you? We need to see how quickly you develop, we can't do that here."

"I see. Let's go then."

Having spent the week practicing stepping between dreams (and everything else he could do, at least if he trusted Jason to tell him the truth about his abilities) Lysanias got out the Rare Candy and unwrapped it. It was fairly unassuming, just a ball of chocolate which reminded him that he really needed to find and store some actual cocoa seeds to take back to his home dimension. He knew it grew there at one time, the artificers had introduced him to the final product, and he felt everyone might like to have chocolate to eat again without needing to spend gold for the pleasure.

"Here goes," he announced, concentrating on wanting to "level up" his skill at stepping between dreams. He popped it into his mouth.

"How is it?" Kid asked.

"It's chocolate," he replied, biting into it. He crunched it and swallowed. "It was just a regular old chocolate." *Like I've had so much of the stuff I could tell good from bad, like wine or rare stakes. Ah, whatever, I just care about what it did.*

"You don't think Inari was playing another joke, do you?" Rosalina asked.

He scowled. "It's true, I took her word the stamp would turn someone into a zombie, I really didn't want to risk it. It could just be a regular candy. But the sword did turn one thing into another, I can't imagine her outright lying about it. A joke is one thing, a falsehood another."

"I guess you can find out tonight?" Kid asked.

“That’s the idea. You fellows ready to turn in?” He turned to his two clones, working on the ring over in one side of the room. Magical energy was swirling around it, the imbuing seemed to be going well.

“We could probably finish this up right now,” said his one clone.

“We’ve gone over it and over it,” agreed his other clone. “While we don’t have much experience in the magical sort, helping make the balloon at least taught us the basics.”

“We gathered materials relating to speed, we have the enhancer, we consulted the pad, we think it’s ready. It’s not that much different than making a talisman, just magically instead of supernaturally.”

“What exactly have you been working on?” Rosalina asked. “You’ve been awfully secretive about it.”

“A little surprise that will benefit us both,” the original said with a raised eyebrow.

“But why do it magically? You’re much better at the supernatural way of making objects, aren’t you? Being an artificer now and all.”

“True, that would seem to be the case. But this relates directly to magic so it had to be done magically. When I’m done, anyone wearing this ring will be able to cut their time to cast any spell in half. Including the Allfather cursed nine minutes it takes me to open my personal dimension.”

“And your time to open gateways, I presume?”

“You presume correctly. I checked, it counts as a magic spell, so it’ll be faster. Wand magic, your wand magic, magic users that happen to be around-”

“Wait, enemies too? That’s no good!” Kid protested.

He smiled. “I choose, on a subconscious level. I’m not helping someone cast a fireball at me or anything.”

“That’s good to know, that ya haven’t gone totally crazy.”

“Anyway, finish it tomorrow. The pad warns of getting it wrong and creating a cursed item. In this case it would probably never come off and double my time to do any spell.” He shuddered. “Let’s be safe.”

“Very well,” both said, and vanished. He waited a moment to absorb their memories of the working the process all day, and wished Rosalina a good night as well, dismissing her.

And so Lysanias got ready for bed. The week had flown by, with him getting practice in the sword, and the battle meditation from Lan. Channeling from Nynaeve. Dreaming from Talina and Jason. *I mean some of it happens at night and I don’t mind learning new things but it’s been a crazy week. I wanted to see how Alisha was doing, though her friend said her father said she’s fine. She’s apparently been meeting with this “Sangray” every day and has given up completely on being a Dreamer. She wasn’t abducted or harmed, she claims he’s helping her in some way but won’t go into specifics according to her friend. The timing is really suspicious but at least she didn’t try and try to get back to the World of Dreams and is now moping around. Where did this Sangray come from though, is he the one that made me take her powers? Nothing like that happened since, I didn’t stalk and attack anyone else in the class, I made sure Kid was waiting for me when it let out so nothing like that could happen. But I didn’t seem to have any more ‘blackouts’ in either case. I asked the world if she was in any danger and got a no answer, it was all I had time for. As long as she’s safe and seemingly happy I guess that’s good enough. I mean she never was a Dreamer, not in any sense of the word. She had never done it, despite having the potential. So it’s not like she would miss it. I still feel bad, but without more information what more can I do? Put aside my studies and obsess over it? I don’t have the time to figure out what power she has now and train her, I’m here to get training myself. Maybe after that I can tell her? Time isn’t a factor for me, after all. Somehow I can’t shake the feeling the answer will come, and it’s better to spend as much time as I can preparing for that answer instead of getting nowhere seeking it.*

Lysanias lay in bed, relaxing as the instructor had showed him and thinking about where he wanted to appear. Around here was dangerous, he could run into his classmates and he wanted a little time to practice unobserved. *I am going to be stepping into reality if I can. It wouldn’t do to have one of them see me trying it, now would it? The only other place*

*I've really seen is the White Tower, I doubt any would be hanging around there. Let's shoot for that. Get some practice in on my own, then head to the tree with the rest of the class.*

He kept the image of the tower in mind and tried to relax. Deep breathing. Relax.

With a start he realized it had worked. He was standing at the base of the White Tower in a silent and empty city. As always he felt as though he was being watched by unseen eyes, but he was used to that by now. At least, in a way.

*I've never really been by myself for very long in a dream that wasn't my own. With others around and working on things I can ignore it fairly well, but now alone I feel it more. There are dangers here, like detached nightmares I have only a theoretical understanding of how to counter. But with luck I won't be staying here for very long.* He looked around, heading down the street in a random direction at his now pathetic speed.

*My items really do boost me in many ways, don't they? None of them now though. Plus my identity gift must not even work, I feel so sluggish.* He looked down at himself. *Guess I'm ready for a fight though. Wait, if my armor is back in my sub-space pocket this is just a dream armor. If I step from this World of Dreams to the real world wearing this armor and then take it off, would I have two sets of armor? Would one be tougher than the other if I dreamed it so? Or would it vanish when I woke up? Many questions... I suppose I could practice my dream skills instead of just plodding along here.* He looked ahead and decided he wanted to be there, and he was there. *That worked. This seems a good enough place to step over... right?* He looked around, it was an alleyway between two buildings, but that didn't mean something wasn't there in the real world.

*Okay then, how about this?*

He concentrated, willing himself invisible.

Nothing happened.

*But yet I feel that something is happening. Right, I know I'm here, so I can't be invisible to myself. But others won't notice me as much, like I was wearing a... wait, if I know how ignore me wards work, why couldn't I... so many questions. Let's do this. It's just a dream, and I'm going to step from the dream into this part of the real world. It shall open before me and-*

Noise and activity of the city hit Lysanias suddenly, and the light around him changed. It was near sunset here, being slightly further west than where he had come from, but a city of this size had activity all the time. *I... I did it!* He looked around in wonder, people streaming past him and not seeming to care he had stepped out of nowhere. *This is amazing! This is spectacular! I feel great, I can do this!! This is... hold on.* He stared at the people going by. *Did it work? What's going... oh.*

Lysanias was unable to feel their spirit energy. They could have been dolls for all he knew. Or those robots back home, they felt as though they weren't even there. He couldn't sense their emotions, that they were there at all with the Force, or any kind of energy from lines or the life around him.

*I didn't realize how dependent I had become on that. I can't sense magic, or life energy either. I mean it's great that I just stepped from a freaking dream into the real world, and I've been doing okay for myself putting theory into practice, but I'm essentially crippled now. All the skills, the supernatural ones anyway, that I've picked up from my travels? Gone. And I can't really do anything with the dream powers I have to emulate them, not the sensing ones anyway.* He gave a laugh. *Look at me, standing here moaning the loss of my abilities instead of exploring what I could do instead. Let's see just how invisible I am at the moment, and get a feel for walking around and-*

As he stepped out of the alley he looked across the street and locked eyes with a couple of dark figures. One was pointing right at him, while three others seemed to be trying to figure out what that one was pointing at.

*Oh, that's just wonderful.*

## Chapter 14

Do you believe that if I simply willed it, the Pattern would bend around me and stop your heart?

When: Seconds later

Where: Alleyway in Tar Valon

The four shadowy forms menacingly moved meters mesmerizingly towards Lysanias. He stepped back an equal amount, noting how they ignored the normal people in the street by simply passing through them. Now at the mouth of the alley they stopped, their shapeless forms blocking off his retreat that way.

*Wait, Lysanias. Stop and think. All you know about these creatures comes from Jason. Question: Is Jason a trustworthy source? Answer: No. How do I know they're menacing? Just because they look like shadows? Maybe that's just how I perceive them, because they aren't completely compatible with this dimension. Just because they're dark and Jason tells me they're scary, has he actually spoken with them? Probably not. But I can speak to anyone, once I get my courage up that is. Let's try that first.* He stopped thinking about trying to be invisible, and the shapes seemed to perk up. *They see me all right. But can I convince them I'm friendly?*

"Hello," he started, putting his hands out to show they were empty. "My name is Lysanias. Jason has told me about you, how you want to kill Dreamers. Maybe you just want to kill him? That's fine, he wants to kill me so if you want him dead, have at it. He's no ally of mine. Hello?" He paused, looking for some sign of recognition. The fact they didn't have eyes or really clearly defined heads at all made this somewhat difficult. In fact he couldn't be sure how many of them there were, as they flowed as though a solid, dense "smoke" was being stirred inside their boundaries. *Could there just be one, and they break off pieces of themselves when they need more "hands" for a certain task? Those pieces become like my spirit clones, and then when they get reabsorbed that's how they adapt to Dreamers? It would make sense that's the case.* But they weren't attacking, so that was something, right? "Can you hear me? Can you understand me?" *Great, how do I even know that works like this? I didn't get near enough the people out there to see if they were now speaking gibberish.* He went on. "I have nothing against you, personally. There's no need for us to fight, now is there? Please, tell me who you are, and what you want. I'm sure we can come to some agreement."

One shadow detached itself from the others and moved back a few steps. It vanished. *Great, is that one leaving to get a fair distance from me, hide, and observe the coming fight?*

Next all three stepped back, and one raised a "hand" for lack of a better term. The alley was now somehow sealed off with a shimmer in the air.

*I should probably get ready to defend myself. But anything I can dream up, I'm fairly certain these guys can counter. But if I simply make real things, such as this...* He opened a hand and from nowhere various pieces appeared from below him. They assembled themselves, and a brilliant shaft of light sprung out from his newly created lightsaber. He put it together, after all, so he knew enough about how it worked to simply create one out of nothing. *Too bad I don't know how that ring worked. I can't rely on anything supernatural, but why have I been learning things like the flame and the void?* Lysanias calmed his mind, putting his emotions into the flame that was still inside him.

"Blub blub-" Lysanias was forced to articulate because the alley was suddenly filled with water. *I thought it was a barrier to keep me in, but it's to keep this water in! Wait, do I even need to breathe? My body is breathing back in my bed, it wouldn't stop breathing just because I felt, in my dream body, that... can you chance- aarg!*

It didn't matter, because the water wasn't water anymore. It was ice. The light saber, which had been sputtering a bit now solidified again, at least melting part of the ice where it was.

*Yup, they're hostile, and trying to kill me. Great. Well, Jason said anything I do to the world or to them directly they can probably resist. Given they're probably much better than me at this stuff. But working on myself, that's a different story. Really wish I had water bending right now though.*

He concentrated, directing his dream energies into his own body. Wrenching one arm forward and one back he put a huge crack in the ice, but it wasn't busted off of him yet. With one more burst of effort he managed to shatter the whole thing, Vegeta style, as really he was only as strong in this form as he believed himself to be. He could feel that new strength taking part of his attention, as though he was maintaining a spell, but it didn't seem quite as bad as that.

The three were waiting. One raised a hand and shot darkness at him, causing him to spin out of the way so poorly that Tenzin would have stabbed his own eyeballs out in shame but it did the job. Barely. The beam lightly caressed Lysanias' body, impacting the armor and scoring it.

*That was a close one! Why is it so dark in this alley all of a...* He looked up, and huge chunks of stone were about to squash him. *Oh.*

He willed the one into the other, making them smash together as though using earth bending, which seemed to work. He wasn't dead, anyway, and the two rocks were now blocking the entrance to the alley. *Great, that's not attracting attention, huge rocks appearing out of nowhere.*

One of the rocks vanished.

*Gah, I can't stay on the defensive like this! I have to do something to... wait, couldn't I just escape? No, I have to take these things out if I can. But how? There's three of them and one of- so I have to be as fast as three of them!* He concentrated on not being stronger, but having cat like reflexes as well. He felt more of his mental attention be consumed, so it had done *something*.

The other rock vanished and Lysanias shot forward, not surprised to find his speed boosted by what he was believing himself capable of. Spikes shot out of the ground to try and pierce him, but he easily vaulted them and kept going. He was now on the offensive, in striking range of the mass of shadows so he used the lessons of chi-blocking and struck fast, not hard.

At least, that's what he tried to do, but his swinging of the plasma blade would have made even Rey's flailing during her "training" with Luke around look like a blademaster. He missed again and again, the shadow somehow bending its body away from the blade like an agent of the system.

*At least it did dodge, that means I can probably hurt it, I just need to... focus on hitting better too.* He sighed. *Do I stop thinking of myself as strong? I'm going to get bogged down by my imagination at this rate.*

Seeing nothing for it he imagined himself hitting better too, then launched into another attack against the same shadow. Or at least, again, he tried to. As he swung the blade simply vanished out of his hand, so he simply looked foolish swinging around nothing. He stared at his now empty hand, gritting his teeth and scowling at the blade that had betrayed him by vanishing.

*You've got to be kidding me. Is it my imagination or is that thing snickering?*

A vague hand shape shot out of the group, but this time it was Lysanias who easily bent around it.

And then willed *two* light sabers into existence. Thinking *Let's see how you like me now!* he again went into a flurry of slashes, using both hands to try and destroy these things. They both hit, and this time the shadows thrashed as the blades of light passed through them. They were not cut apart as Lysanias had hoped, simply being burned a bit with each stroke. But he didn't let up. He was pretty sure one fell, then another, while the third simply dodged his strokes. He winced a little as the first two seemed to burn away in agony, he didn't want to kill them, after all. *I'm sorry, if there was another way I would have taken it.* Without warning however many were left vanished, and he was left standing there with a person looking dumfounded at him.

*Great, this guy can't see shadows, so he just saw me waving the light sabers around in this alley for no discernible reason. How am I going to explain this clearly advanced technology? What am I going to do about- huh?* The man seemed to shake his head, shrug, and walk off.

"What in the world?" he blurted out.

"You should be more careful," Jason admonished from behind him. The two sabers came up, and he quickly raised his hands. "Hey, watch it, I don't want to get hit by those things either!"

"You were here the whole time?" he demanded, lowering them and thumbing them off, making the blades wink out. He held onto them though.

"I wouldn't say the whole time. Or maybe you might say double time? I felt dream energy being used and figured it must be you. Then I went back in time a little to watch your whole fight. Then I caught up and here I am!"

"Instead of, oh, I don't know, just to put an idea out there... *helping me?*"

He shook his head. "No can do, you know that."

His eyes narrowed. "Because you want me dead."

"Sort of. But it's more the case that I didn't want to draw even more of the things. They know how I do things, my assisting you (if I even could by the way) would have drawn more. That would have just compounded your problems."

"They could feel it?"

"Oh sure, they have very developed senses from what I've been able to tell. I use a lot of dream powers in an area I'm pretty sure they aren't, and suddenly a bunch show up. How else could they do that except feeling what I did from far away?"

"Great. Maybe we shouldn't hang around here?" He looked around nervously. *That one could be back with lots of friends.*

"Good idea. Here, I'll take us somewhere." He put a hand on Lysanias' shoulder and suddenly both of them were standing out in the desert someplace. "Shouldn't be any around here," he remarked, looking around. "So why those blades, anyway? I mean don't get me wrong at the end there you seemed to do alright, but it didn't seem like you even attempted to attack them directly."

"Why would I do that? I can learn from your experience."

"What do you mean?"

He sighed. *Are you really that dense?* "Think about it. I attacked those three as you suggest and what happens? The one that was nowhere near the battle watches and reports back to his or her friends. That's how it starts. Now whatever I did is useless, and I have to think of something else for next time. Pretty soon I'm in your shoes, and whatever I do just bounces off them. *Then* they attack in earnest, knowing I've got nothing. This way I save my ability to hurt them with area affect attacks for a real emergency, and hopefully they're smart enough to realize that and not send dozens at once."

"They'll try and force your hand by attacking in small groups, hoping to get lucky and not lose too many of their own."

"Right. Besides, you said anything I try they can counter, just like you counter me when I try stuff in our training. It's best if I just make things that are real," he lifted the hilts, "and enhance myself."

"Just make sure it's always these," he cautioned. "If you tried that other sword I don't know if the blue light it makes when you swing it would be enough to hurt them. That's all that was hurting them, by the way. The blade itself just passed through them, it was the light that burned them."

"I figured." *In fact, hurting them at all is going to be next to impossible if what he's said is true. Anything physical I try will just pass through them. Like if I dropped rocks on them like they did on me they would just step through it and ignore the attack completely.* "Does fire even burn them?"

"What?"

"Fire. That hot thing we cook food with. Does it even burn them?"

"Regular old fire? No. Not bright enough like your sabers, and they can pass through it otherwise. Making a fire that burns without fuel would, because your power is inside that flame directly. Getting one to crawl over a log and setting it on fire with your power wouldn't, because that's just normal fire."

"So how many variations of fire are there? Anything else like ice they would just pass through. I can't make "special ice" that's ice without water or whatever."

"Why do you think I'm so worried about them?"

“Because you quickly exhausted the relatively few means of dealing with them early on because you didn’t know better, and now they always have the upper hand?”

“You don’t need to look so smug about it. I can just damage them by believing they’re damaged, but of course they believe they’re not. I’ve had to get pretty good at that to survive.”

*A battle of imagination? Simply standing there and willing your opponent dead while they will you dead, and you think of yourself as alive while they try and maintain their own existence. That’s actually fairly terrifying.* “Why didn’t they do that with me? I couldn’t have negated something like that, could I?”

“They don’t know that. Besides, who knows what goes through their so called heads? They do things for their own reasons. Now enough about that, let’s practice.”

“Actually, I’d rather practice stepping between dreams if it’s all the same to you. If shadow’s senses are as good as you say there’s nothing stopping them from feeling us here, either. I’d rather practice bouncing around both worlds, and going to other places. You say teleporting is the same as making things, right? It’s just willing something to happen.”

He considered. “It’s true, I guess. It’s your show. Very well, I’ll wait in the dream world, see if you can follow after me.” He vanished.

It took Lysanias several tries, a few moments apart, to make it, meaning he needed a lot of practice in that skill if he ever wanted to do it in a hurry, then he and Jason teleported as far as they could see, then he tried to follow Jason again back to the real world. They did this over and over, then Lysanias practiced making himself stronger and faster, and then tried to slow time down for himself so Jason seemed to be moving in slow motion.

Finally he woke up and sat up in bed. It seemed to be about as light out as it was when we got into bed so he pulled his wrist mounted hubPad out. *I actually need to use this more, but the pad did say most functionality of it was locked? But it can at least tell me the time, it doesn’t feel like I slept for that long.* The device lit up and he stared at it. *That can’t be right. It’s not sunrise out there, it’s sunset. It’s still today. But I practiced for hours!* He let it drop to the bed, thinking. *So wait, back up. Jason said something about time not being completely linear in dreams and I nodded my head like I knew what the heck he was talking about. But I didn’t. Did he mean that I can dream for the normal amount of time dreams take, but that dream form of mine that’s running around perceives a different amount of time has passed? I mean it would be awful if I could only visit the world of dreams or walk around dreaming but awake for a few minutes at a time but still. I’m out there right now, right?* He got up and went to the window. *If I dreamed again, could I head back to where Jason took me and see myself? Could I do another training session elsewhere while an earlier version of me is training out in the desert? If I dreamed six or eight times in a night I could train for... a week? In a single night?*

He stared out into the sunset, wondering about this possibility. It seemed fantastic, if he could always tell he was dreaming he could potentially accelerate his training, or at least get a lot more practice in than either of his teachers expected. *As I can only be with them once I can’t get pointers on what I might be doing wrong, but at least I could come up with questions faster. But do I risk it? I wonder if staying inside my own dreams would allow me to practice the same amount of time?* He shook his head. *I guess I can attempt it, rather than just standing here. But as I do have some time...* He sat down again, clearing his mind and casting a question out into the universe.

*How many shadow creatures currently exist in this localized reality?*

He got no answer.

*I don’t know what I expected.* Grabbing the headband from the small table next to the bed and then yanking his sword out, he sighed. *Is there going to be a time I don’t need all this to do everything? I’ve got to find time to practice that skill somehow, maybe just asking the universe a lot of questions over and over.* He gathered magical energy, not verbally casting the spell so he didn’t bother Kid but augmenting his skill just the same.

*Counting both this world and the world of dreams connected to this world, how many of the shadow creatures exist?*

*One*

*Lysanias sat in stunned silence for a moment. What? Having killed those two, I think it was two I killed it's hard to know for sure because they were sort of stuck together, I'm pretty sure at least two others got away. There must be at least that many...*

*Oh no. There really is only one creature, isn't there? One creature that can either separate itself or that I'm only seeing a small part of at any one time. No wonder they can adapt to the attacks of dreamers and seem to stick together. The one that witnessed the attack just is reabsorbed like one of my spirit clones, and the greater mass learns all they need to. Okay, but how far can it go? Universe, how many individual shadow entities can exist at any one time?*

*Ninety eight.*

*Great, there was enough shadow 'mass' to create an even hundred shadows in this reality? How... how am I going to deal with all those? How fast do they "reproduce?" Or does the main "body" simply grow over time like anything else and new shadows can just be split off? How am I going to track them all down? Can I track the main...*

*Wait, what happens if I dream again, head out to the desert, catch the attention of myself when Jason is waiting for me in the world of dreams, tell "him/me" what I've just discovered... I wouldn't have to ask because I would already know. So I wouldn't come back here and ask just now, so I won't have to ask, so I won't go "sideways" in time to tell my younger self...*

*Yeah, maybe I figured messing with time like that was a bad idea, and that's why I didn't do it. Because I don't remember seeing myself, so I must not choose to do it now. Right?*

*I'm so dead. If those hundred shadow creatures decide to attack me all at once, it's over. Why aren't they attacking me right now? There's nothing stopping them. Are they still just learning about this place? They know about me now, it's only a matter of time, right?*

*Curse you, Jason, why did you have to come into my life in the first place? I can't kill a hundred of these things! Or one, or however you want to count them. It has the same right to exist that I do, and without even understanding why I'm being forced to defend myself... am I food? A threat? Just a flame to a moth? What?*

*Lysanias spent some time just staring at the wall, thinking, then decided he better get back to sleep. I've got a lot of training to do. And tomorrow, maybe I can get some of my questions answered...*

*At the source.*

## Chapter 15

To destroy, or be destroyed. When that's your choice, is there a difference?

When: The next morning

Where: Their room at the inn

Having eaten breakfast and cleaned up, Lysanias got Rosalina out and asked her and Kid to have a seat. They sat across from him on the bed and he sat on his.

"Ya got something in mind for us today, mate?" Kid asked, sounding hopeful. Training was all well and good, but she was rather impatient to begin her true search for Serge, and there wasn't much to do in a town so cut off from everywhere else and where you were an outsider the local populous viewed with suspicion. So the chance to actively do something seemed to energize her.

"I do. I learned a few things about the shadow last night, and was attacked by a few the moment I stepped into the real world from the dream."

"Funny way of fishing for congratulations on managing it," Rosalina remarked, tapping the side of her head with her wand. "But I guess congratulations?"

"Thanks. I also learned time in the dream, even in the real world, isn't the same as time outside the dream. It's going to be very complicated and confusing I'm sure but the point is, I need your help today."

"What's up?" Kid asked.

"I want to track down some shadows and observe them where they can't actively attack me. Meaning with no Dreamers around. Then I want to see if they can be hurt here, in the real world. We've got almost a hundred pieces of them to deal with, and I want to take the fewest risks possible."

"Pieces?" Rosalina asked.

"Turns out there's only one of them. They can either split themselves off or otherwise become smaller, independent versions of themselves. I'm thinking that's how they adapt to attacks. Simply rejoining the main "body" and communicating their experience to the rest of the... themselves." He looked a little confused, but decided not to think about.

"If you could find the main mass, you could take them all out in one shot!" Kid exclaimed, slamming her palms together.

"Maybe. If I could strike from surprise and had a sure one-shot-kill attack big enough to encompass the entire group. Otherwise I would then be surrounded by *all* the surviving pieces. Who I assume would be quite angry."

Her face fell. "Oh, right."

"It's no good," Rosalina decided. "It's bad enough you go gallivanting around in your dreams where I can't help you, taking on every one of these shadow creatures at once is too much of a risk."

"I wouldn't worry too much about my activities when I'm dreaming," he assured her.

"Jason says most likely I would just wake up if I was ever damaged enough to be killed."

"Most likely?" she asked.

"Jason says?" Kid asked on her heels.

He paused. "Yes, I see what you mean. No real way to test it either." *And really, how would he know? I mean he supposedly trained with Dreamers elsewhere but how does he know those Dreamers and me are the same? I'm not a real Dreamer, I just can learn their skills. Big difference, now that I think about it.* "Anyway, I am careful, believe me. Now, any objections to my plan?"

"Long as I get to throw some stuff at any I see," Kid told them. "That one I saw freaked me out. I'd like to know I could hurt them in a pinch."

"They are damaged by bright light, it's trying to keep them contained while you threw elements at it that would be the problem. But I suppose just making it go away would be good enough for you. We can try a few things."

"Have to find some first," Rosalina reminded him.

"That's what I have this for." He held up a piece of paper with a circle and various numbers written on it. "I need the practice asking the universe anyway." *So no cheating this time. I've got some time, let's actually try and practice this, whatever that means.*

He managed to hear the answer to 'In what heading will I find the nearest piece of the One Shadow in the real world?' right away, but it took him two tries to get an answer to "How far must I go along this heading to find the nearest piece of the One Shadow?"

It then took him three tries to get an answer to "How many pieces of the One Shadow will I find along this heading?" as he figured running into twenty of them may be a bit much. *After all, are they really helpless here as Jason said, or could they still attack me and I won't be able to effectively fight them? Though the saber did work...*

He then unrolled the map he had made the night before, causing both ladies to stare at it.

"Where did you get this?" Kid finally asked.

"Made it. Last night I had some time so I made myself a telescope," he drew it out and set it on the table, "flew up into the air, enhanced my vision so I could see better by starlight, looked the place over, came back down, created a copy of what I had seen on this cloth, and teleported everything into the room. When I woke up there it was."

"Simple as that, eh?"

"If I can make two new lightsabers out of nothing," he reached under the bed and brought them both out, "a map is nothing."

"Don't suppose I could have one of those?" Of course he had shown Kid his sabers before this, in case she needed to grab it and activate it for some reason.

"You're welcome to it, but you can't really recharge it. Sooner or later it won't work anymore. Actually, take both, I can make more." *Honestly, without real effort because it's so tiny. I could make hundreds a night, come to think of it. That raises some... interesting possibilities.*

"Sweet! Thanks mate!" She took them and they vanished, no doubt into her 'inventory.'

"Nothing for me?" Rosalina pouted.

"You live inside my soul," he protested, then went on a bit shrewdly. "All that is mine is already yours."

"Oh," she said softly. But of course she couldn't give up the point quite that easily. "I guess that's fine then," she huffed.

The trio worked out where they figured the universe was pointing them to, and Lysanias made a spirit clone of himself. It then lay down, sent its perceptions raging from its body, and headed off in that direction.

"Why make a clone do it though?" Kid asked as she got wards of unseen creature seeing and translation slapped on her by Lysanias proper.

"If it gets lost it's no big deal. It just goes away and I still get the information. I get lost on the way back and I die. It seems like an awfully big number I got back, there's plenty of opportunity for me to get turned around and not make it anywhere before my time limit."

"Good answer!"

Moments later the clone vanished, and Lysanias looked over in that direction. "There's a fairly large town straight that way, it must be the place," he announced. "It was fairly far away, and this place is absolutely surrounded... by a lot of sand. No wonder everyone comes in by gateway. I can only hope that now that whatever the shadow avatar was doing to this world is over this land will one day become green again. Let me make more clones and we'll be off." He made two more to stay and work on the ring, then took the girl's hands.

"Yer yourself, aintCHA?" Kid asked.

"I'm not a clone, you get to go with the real me. Hang on."

He *shifted*.

The trio found themselves outside a large town that looked like it at one time had fairly stout walls around it, which had been fairly well smashed down during the fairly big battle that had taken place around here a fairly short ago. It looked like they were being repaired in a sensible way, making it at least hard for someone to simply climb over. In other words, instead

of repairing a single section to full height, which would be at least twice as tall as he was, they were repairing the whole wall to taller than he was, then doing a second pass to finish off the tops. Bored looking guards stood around a gate.

*Wow, talk about taking a scene from home, this could be any village on my world. I suppose we had a similar history, lots of wars, magic tearing the world apart, and losing all the technological progress we had made and having to rediscover it. Naturally towns would be built along the same lines. Would they need the wall now, though?* He looked around, the mountains to the north looming in the distance. *This place is near the place the shadow avatar took for itself if what the others told me is right. Things like trollocs got sent this way all the time. Would they still be a danger?*

Kid wasted no time in marching up to the gate, probably expecting to just be let in. The others followed more slowly but stood behind her. The two men standing there on the other side, clean shaven above and below with just a weird topknot on their heads looked back at them. Both put their hands on their swords.

“Where did you three come from?” asked the one on the right.

“Would you believe Rhuidean?” Lysanias told him, seeing no reason to lie.

“With no packs, no horses, not even a waterskin?” said the one on the left. “You’re kidding, right? Seriously, what do you want?”

“You have heard of a thing called a gateway, right?” he asked.

“If you came by gateway,” asked the right one, “why not just go directly into town?”

“Because I didn’t want to slice someone in half?”

“You didn’t?” asked the left one. “I thought guardians all wore black?”

*There’s that word again. Nynaeve said that when we came back from getting the rod, but I didn’t get a chance to ask her about it.* “Not all the time,” he said, hoping they would buy it. He didn’t know either way.

“I suppose it doesn’t matter either way,” he admitted. “You’re only three people and only one of you is carrying any weapons that I can see.” He indicated Kid with her two small daggers.

*Yeah, that you can see. I could probably flatten this town if I really wanted to despite that.*

“I doubt you can cause that much trouble. Still, I do need to ask your purpose here.”

“I’m here to investigate rumors of shadowy beings. Perhaps seen in town or perhaps in dreams. You know anything about that?”

“My son’s been complaining about seeing a shadowy figure in his dreams,” said the right one. “He isn’t scared of it, he says it just watches him, but every dream he remembers seems to include this shadow.”

“First I’ve heard of it,” said the other.

“Didn’t really think anything of it.”

“It’s a thing though, really?” he asked Lysanias.

“It’s why I’m here.”

He grunted. “I guess that’s fine. We’ll raise the gate.”

They did, and the three went inside, the gate clanging shut behind them.

“Enjoy your stay,” said the one.

“May peace favor your sword... that you don’t seem to be wearing,” said the other. “We need a new saying,” he mused.

Lysanias nodded and the three headed into the town.

“Right!” Lysanias began, once they were down the street a ways. The houses here looked like houses back home, roughly constructed compared to some places he had seen. Many of the men here carried swords and had that funny hairstyle, and one in every four (houses, not men) looked to have burned down or damaged in the fighting. Many were in the later stages of being rebuilt, the services of good carpenters, bricklayers, and the like now in high demand. “Keep your eyes open. I doubt I can sense these shadow creatures because they aren’t really alive like you or... uh... I guess just you Kid because Rosalina isn’t actually alive in that sense either. Anyway.” He waved that off. “They aren’t magical, everyone around

here has spirit energy so that's out. Maybe I could feel 'dream' energy but that's only in the dream myself. It's up to luck us spotting one and cornering it someplace I can try a few things." *Actually, I'll get out my mountain spirit as well, add another set of eyes to the whole deal.*

"Or the dictates of the plot," Kid told them.

"Er, sure. Plot."

They wondered around for some time, and of course we wouldn't be here if there wasn't a shadow mass hanging around here, watching everything going on. Kid pointed it out. "See, I told you. Things work here similarly to back home, you just don't want to admit it."

"If you say so. Now, lets see what secrets you hold, my pretty. No, no, just keep walking."

"Huh?" Rosalina was pulled along and fell in step besides them again.

"I'm going to ward us so they don't see us, I don't want them knowing I can see them and running away before I get a chance to try some things." *I also want to know if they can see unseen things, so I'll send my spirit out past them, see if anything comes of it.*

"I get it. Smart!"

"Of course."

So they went past the creature and around the corner, where Lysanias slapped wards on them, and it was three on Kid at this point so he said to her to hang back, hers would be the weakest and easiest to see through. She nodded and the group went back over there, the spirit leading the way. The shadow didn't seem to notice it, even when the spirit put a hand through the thing, which interested Lysanias. *So they aren't unseen in the same way it is, as I assume they can see each other. Strange how my ward worked to reveal them to Kid... or is she a Dreamer and just doesn't know it? She very well could be, I guess. I'd have to take it off and see if she can still see them. But for now...* The first thing he wanted to try was reading their mind, if they had one, and see what they were thinking about as they stood there. He knew while they might know something odd was going on, there was no help for that, (and the reason he didn't use the ability very much) so he took the chance. Opening himself to the thoughts of the creature before him he suddenly cried out and staggered back, forcing them away again.

"Are you okay?" Rosalina asked, concerned.

He was holding his head and wincing, but forced his eyes open again.

"I know one thing *not* to do."

"What's that?" Kid asked.

"Try to read their thoughts. There may be only one of them, but at the same time there's almost a hundred of them. I just got all one hundred thoughts shoved into my brain at once!"

"Are you okay?"

"Give me a second, I will be. It was more a shock than anything else. I should have figured it would be something like that."

"What was it like? Did you get anything from them?" Rosalina asked.

He shook his head. "They're all over the place, yet all acting in concert. They were all thinking about different things, yet they were able to process it all. It's staggering actually."

"Are they super smart then?" Kid asked, looking over at the thing that hadn't moved.

"Not in the way we understand it. At least, I don't think so. Let me try something else."

Getting a bit closer he turned his senses onto the things, and as he expected he couldn't feel they were alive. The force told him *something* was there, but with no more specifics than that. They weren't magical in the least. He wondered what his ability to change the fundamental nature of something would do, he hadn't done that in *ages*, but without being able to touch them, he figured it probably wouldn't work. They had no aura he could read, didn't seem to respond to banishing, did not register to earth bending, being blown apart with Korra style "space bending" did nothing to them. Channeling did nothing, the elemental streams simply passing through them, after all they didn't glow or anything, and even light bending didn't work at least inside them. He could create light outside them, but they didn't

seem to notice or care, it seemed he couldn't make it bright enough to hurt them with his current skill.

*It's not something I put a huge amount of effort into. I can fire bend, that's all the light I need. Though I suppose making illusions would be handy.*

"Is it my turn?" Rosalina asked when he slumped to the side, scowling at the creature.

"Go for it," he said.

"I can't move them with my telekineses," she announced. She then tried her sleep spell, hitting them with her magical stars, the other wands, it all passed through them or seemed to do nothing.

"Are we sure they're there?" she asked, exasperated. "If it knows we're doing something, it doesn't seem to care all that much. It's still just standing there."

"I'm not sure of anything regarding them," he answered simply. "It's actually a good point. Maybe they look like that because they're both here and in the world of dreams at the same time. Without falling asleep and going there I can't say though, and Jason has never said. He's just one person, he probably never stepped back and forth to check. We'll have to think of something tonight, see if we can corner one both here and there. If they weren't standing so close to that building I would recommend your sun. That should roast them."

"Sun?" asked Kid, while Rosalina scowled with a "should?"

"I can summon a small sun," she explained modestly, looking away. "It can pretty much destroy anything, you know, as one does."

"Oh, it is on!" Kid told her, grinning. "We try my elements next, unless you've thought of something else to try, big guy!"

"Maybe a light *spell*? But my light saber is probably brighter and they can't really fight back apart from fleeing the scene. I could throw my solid sunlight at them, but again, it took many swings with my saber to hurt them, one little ball of sunlight isn't going to do anything. Try to suck them into a contain ward from a distance? But that would only hold them a moment not really solve anything. Go for it."

"One question though: do I start with my most impressive attack or work my way up?"

"You actually attack it and you'll become visible," he cautioned. "We've been fine because we haven't actually managed to do anything to the thing. If you actually can hurt it but only wound it, your ward burns up, it sees you, and then it runs away." *Or turns to actually attack us, now having perceived us as a threat.*

"Top shelf it is!" she announced. "Let me find a suitable element... I'll try white rather than red, the effectiveness won't be lessened by that much, but I have to guess these things would be innate black. That would make up the difference and then some."

"Whatever you think. Er, don't you have to knife stuff before you can use an element though?"

She laughed. "Told you I would tell you about this sooner or later!" She lifted the gauzy, shimmering fabric that served as her outmost layer. "This lets me start a combat with an eight element level."

"I see." *More overpowered items from an overpowered world I guess.*

"I could use HolyLight," she mused, "but if they count as undead they'll just be destroyed, not damaged, and that won't really prove much."

"I suppose they could count as undead," he allowed.

"Do you think they count as one creature or several? Ah, never mind, I'll just pick an area effect attack in any case. Right, you ready?"

The two nodded their heads.

"Then hold onto your hats." She posed, white energy now surrounding her as she seemed to gather energy for the attack. "MeteorShower!" she shouted.

Lysanias looked up to find two shining balls of light about to destroy everything around them.

*Uh...* he managed before the world turned white.

## Chapter 16

That mountain can grow awfully heavy sometimes. When do you find a chance to put it down awhile?

When: The moment after

Where: Fal Sion

Lysanias was *pretty* sure he was dead. He had just watched what appeared to be two enormous somethings streak out of the sky, covering the distance from orbit to ground in less than five seconds. They were huge, crackled with energy, and struck nearby with a further explosion. Think about that. Think about the speed an object would have to be going to drop from the upper atmosphere to the ground in *five. Seconds.* The kinetic energy would be enough that even a bowling ball could level a neighborhood. (It would be the equivalent of 5.5 tons of TNT) Going 216,000 miles per hour means you could reach the moon in a little more than an hour. He was *dead.* Everyone nearby was *dead.* The city was *demolished.* All to kill a couple of shadow creatures- what had Kid been *thinking?*

But upon further reflection he seemed to be fine? He opened his eyes to find Kid looking at him like a person who is not afraid of spiders is looking at a person they just found out is afraid of spiders after they just saw a spider. Like he had lost his marbles for thinking that tiny thing down there that a person could kill by accident and never realize it held some kind of threat to them. (Obviously I know about spider bites that could potentially cause great harm I'm just talking about normal house spiders (if you don't live in Australia or something.))

The shadow creatures were nowhere to be seen, though had they been killed or had they just run away in the confusion?

"You okay there, mate?" Kid asked him.

"How are we not dead?" he sputtered.

"Course you're not. Be a pretty awful attack, to hit the caster too. What, are you saying if you shot fire or something at Rosalina here as part of an attack to hit multiple targets, you could actually hurt her?"

"Of course, she's standing there, isn't she?"

"Crazy. Anyway, they're dead, so I guess it worked."

"You could tell?"

"I didn't have my eyes closed like a little baby."

"Huge energy beams shot out of the sky! Anyone would have closed their- uh..." He looked around. People in the street were indeed looking over at them, but the nearby buildings and the street below them seemed to be completely intact. "Nothing to see here," he called to them. "Move along. Er, guardian business, and all that."

"What kind of business?" asked a large man, scowling at them.

"Guardian."

"What's that?"

"What's- you know, male channelers! I'm a channeler, I was just showing off an illusion, it wasn't real."

"Oh, you mean a guardian!"

"That's what I said, a guardian!"

"Guardian."

"Guardian."

"No, guardi- you know what, I don't care. Whatever it was, don't do it again."

*What is this guy saying that I'm not saying? I don't get it.* "Of course sir, just trying to impress the ladies, you know how that goes."

"I suppose if you don't have these..." He flexed his massive arms and walked off laughing.

He spun on Kid. "Right, warn me next time, would you?"

"Sorry, forgot battle wasn't its own space here. Anyway, now we know that works. If you can find some more I'll try something a little less attention grabbing."

He looked around. "I just wish I knew if another was around watching the whole thing. And if so, did they now become immune to that attack and thus, all of them will?"

"Find me another set and I'll be happy to repeat the experiment!" she chirped.

"Sure I'll get right on that," he muttered. But louder "We'd have to wait at least a day, they have to communicate with others it doesn't happen instantly. So maybe in two days? But I'll ask if there are any more around here, so you can at least try a more *subtle* approach."

"Ain't about subtlety, but I could give it a shot."

"Wait, I'll just send my lumas out to look around!" suggested Rosalina.

He shook his head in despair. "I suppose it's no more outrageous than what we've already done here. Fine."

She concentrated and several of the dancing star beings appeared, and she mentally communicated with them. They flew off, coming back a few minutes later and reporting no success in spotting any more shadow like beings in the nearby area.

"Makes sense," Rosalina told the others. "If I was a shadowy being that could be hurt by light and couldn't fight back and two glowing orbs fell out of the sky and killed some of my friends I wouldn't hang around either."

"So we head back?" Kid asked. "That was hardly worth it."

"Given the sheer number of the things we need to take care of, I'm inclined to believe you," Lysanias agreed. He took hold of the One Power to make a gateway. "I'll take us back to the inn, at least a gateway these people understand. If we just vanished into thin air that would really cause a panic."

So back at the inn the group went over what white elements Kid had and how they might be used when she could only "cast" a few at a time.

"I could cast eight in a row if they were only level one," she explained. "And that would probably be enough given how devastating opposite element attacks are. Plus general scaling of damage if what Lysanias here told me says I'll do a lot more than he does per attack. But if it wasn't, my element grid would quickly run out of power because I couldn't recharge it. Not being able to hit the things is a big disadvantage for me."

"Could you use light sabers?" Rosalina asked. "Switch out your knives for those?"

"I didn't hit anything swinging them around," Lysanias cautioned. "If you have to make physical contact with something, that's no good."

"Then it's no good," she agreed.

"How long to recharge this 'grid' of yours?" Rosalina asked.

"No, no, you don't understand. It's not a question of time. I start combat with my element grid active up to level eight. It won't be eight again unless I hit something a bunch of times or leave combat and come back to it. On my world if I ran from something I'd never see it again. So in theory here my grid wouldn't be active against the same opponents because it would still be the same combat. Another would have to join or something and I would need to be at least far enough away not to see them while that happened."

"I suppose we should be thankful you picked up an item like that at all," Lysanias mused.

"Yes, it wasn't easy," she agreed. "Surge had to go through some, er, special activities according to him, when he gave it to me. But never mind that, we have what we have. It's up to us to make the best use of it."

"Agreed."

"To that end," Rosalina began, holding out her hand, "let me see the pad. I want to look into magic I might be able to use against them." He handed it over and she powered it on. "You said it was the light from the sabers, not the hot plasma that hurt them, right? I bet a simple light spell could help. Or if I could create a glowing line I could box them in, even hold them in place to an extent."

"Fair enough."

"Meanwhile, you and I can practice that flame and void technique while we work on your sword skills," Kid told him. "Then while you're in class I'll wander around this town some more. They do seem drawn here because of all the Dreamers here, maybe I'll get lucky and

see another. I'll try photon beam next, it's my lowest grade white element that just produces a beam of white energy. See how they like that!"

Lysanias had no better suggestions so they headed out to the practice field he had made, and got busy.

That night in the dream Lysanias sat at a large table with several others. Before them all was a velvet pouch that was tied at one end. Colors were muted here, there wasn't much light in the room, but he saw it was about the size of a pizza box.

"It's time," said the person at the end of the table, picking up their pouch. "Let's get them out, and we will show the world our power." He and the others excitedly reached into their pouches and drew forth a round object. His was a mountain scene, and glancing around the room he saw clouds, waves, animals, cities, all sorts of things reflected in the disks now held by the others. He looked back at his own, curious. It weighed nothing, but was solid; transparent, but gave off light; thin, but not too thin, he could grip it no problem. He had to hold it in both hands, as while it wasn't heavy it was unwieldy, as though unbalanced. The eyes of his fellow conspirators shown as the disks were held up, each in two hands. The room had brightened considerably now that the disks had been taken out, and every face shone with excitement.

"Who shall be the first to place their- who dares to disturb us?" He looked over at Lysanias, but past him. Everyone in the room turned.

"Those are seriously cool," Jason admitted. "Some kind of solid hologram? Do you mind?" He grabbed it away from Lysanias and held it up to get a better look. It changed to be a scene of darkness, points of light spread randomly through it. "Oh, does it change to reflect the person that's holding it?"

"How did this man get in here? Guards!"

Jason sighed and looked down. "Are you going to realize you're dreaming any time soon there, Lysanias?"

"What?" He blinked. "Dreaming?" The other people vanished, as did the constructs they were holding. Jason held onto his. "Jason?"

"The one and only. So what's this all about?" He tapped the thing.

"I'm not sure now," he admitted. "Something about putting them in the table?" He indicated the center where there was a circular depression, ready to accept one of the slabs.

"Weird. At least it isn't your hair this time." He set the thing on the table. "Ready to go?"

"Wait a minute, wait a minute, is this dream trying to tell me something?" He rapped a knuckle on the object and it made a hollow sort of thunk sound.

"You got me."

"Something I'm missing. Solid light. Wait, of course!" He smiled. "Kid!"

"What solid light?"

"Alchemy! Like my sword!" He concentrated and a model of his sword appeared in the air, floating there. "Look at the hilt. That's solid sunlight at the end. Back with Clary I made some daggers out of the stuff, while she made shotgun shells that absorbed sunlight and let it out when they were fired. We were using them against demons. I could make Kid a set so she could use daggers instead of the light sabers, which she's not used to. She still couldn't hit the things, not to charge her element grid, but she could still damage them if she had to, like I did."

"What are you talking about?"

"We discovered that the white 'elements' she uses in combat as her magic can hurt shadows. But they're powered by her hitting stuff. As we can't hit these things she can't recharge, but I bet my sunlight daggers would be bright enough if she 'cut' them."

"They could be solid," Jason told him.

"What? How?"

"Same way you do anything in the dream. You will it so. Of course, you're changing them directly and so they'll resist it, but you could will them solid. Then they could be hit normally."

"Oh really?" He got up from the chair and the table vanished, allowing him to pace around. *So would it only be the light damage still or would making them solid allow her to 'cut'*

*them thus wounding them?* “I wonder how hard that would be. Wait, they can’t become immune to us doing that?”

He shook his head. “It’s not damaging them directly. It’s just your willing them to be a certain way and them trying to resist being the way you’re seeing them.”

“Okay, okay.” He paced some more, lost in thought. “Can I bring people into the dream world? I mean they wouldn’t become Dreamers and I would have to step them out or they would be stuck there, but can I do it?”

“If you can imagine yourself doing it, you can do it. Just don’t take a real person into another person’s dream physically. They wake up, that person is simply gone, because that dream and anything in it is gone. You and I would be fine, we would just wake up too or find ourselves back in the world of dreams. Why?”

“It might work then- attacking them with a two pronged approach. You and Kid in the real world, Rosalina and I in the dream world. That way if they try to escape by slipping between worlds, they find us there. Or vice versa.”

Jason brightened. “Hey, that’s not a bad idea. It was tough fighting them on my own for that very reason, but if they can’t get away so easily... Yeah, that could do it.”

His face fell. “Wait, no it wouldn’t. Can’t they use our power and will themselves elsewhere? How would we know the difference?”

“Sure. But again, that’s just them seeing themselves as elsewhere. You just need to concentrate on seeing them where they are. Sliding between worlds is something else, something they can just do apart from us. I mean how would we find them in either place all the time?”

*Unless they exist in both at the same time. But this plan would show that.* “You have a point.”

“What can your wand do though? Why include her? Without the abilities of a Dreamer isn’t she more a hindrance to you in the world of dreams?”

“She’s been learning a light spell, if she can punch through them with a bright enough light, it’ll at least hurt them a little.” *I mean it’s probably not enough to make a difference, but both my mountain spirit and my sword are useless here. I’d like to get some help from the things I’ve picked up in my travels. And she wants to help, I want to find a way to let her.* “Also she might be able to learn a spell that creates glowing ribbons or bars or something, to help keep them from simply running away.”

“I suppose it could serve as a minor distraction,” he mused, “until they simply changed reality to not include whatever she did. Would take time, allow you to get another shot in. Okay. You trust me to work with Kid?”

“You don’t want her dead. She’s not a wanderer like me, she hasn’t attacked your boss. She just wants to find her friend. There’s no reason for you to attack her.” *Besides, she can hit you, and recharge her elements. She’s super strong compared to us, so even with your powers you might have a hard time with her. I suppose you could try taking her hostage? To get to me? But what else can I do, there’s only one of me and we have to cover both worlds so they don’t get away.*

“I suppose that’s all true. So what’s the plan?”

“We do nothing for now, I want more practice before I start anything with these creatures. Once I really start eliminating them they may come after me in force so I need to be able to defend myself. When I’m satisfied my skills are at least passable we start going after them. You support Kid here, I hang out in the world of dreams in case they try to run there. Or, if they start there, I support Rosalina and you wait to see if they run here. Either way we attack them, without dream powers, so they can’t become immune to it. Our powers just counter whatever they try to do to our partners.”

He snorted. “Rather ironic, other people killing the things that want to kill us. But yet, we have to be there which means they get our ability to manipulate reality. And we can’t attack them.”

“I’ll make you a pair of lightsabers, that way we can at least attack them that much. But really, you should be concentrating on keeping them solid so Kid can hit them, in the event she needs to recharge her element grid.”

“Thanks, but I’ll just stick to my lantern ring. It can make glowing things and is far more versatile.”

“Oh. Sure, whatever then.” *Sure, I offer you what I can make, but you don’t offer me what you can make. Some mortal enemy you... wait a second. Riiiiight.*

“You do know how long it takes to kill them with just light though, right? If there’s more than five in any one place they’ll be able to swarm us. I’m good, but I’m still only one person. You? Three might be your limit a month from now. You are just reacting defensively after all, but still. These shadow things don’t seem to need practice from what I’ve seen. They don’t seem to get any better, probably relying on becoming immune, but even when I was just starting out they could do things I couldn’t. They aren’t stealing your actual skill, just your ability to manipulate reality.”

“I know, but what else can we do? We have to start reducing the main shadow mass before it gets bigger and can support more than the hundred or so it currently does. That means taking a risk.”

“I guess all we can do is start small, try not to leave any alive to report to the others, and see how it goes. If we could somehow lure small groups away from larger groups maybe it’ll be fine. I’ve never really gone hunting them before, you understand. If only we could get help from the Dreamers here. But there are so few of them, and I’m not giving them a crash course in physics for this. They take that knowledge out of the dream and soon we’ve got hot air balloons, machine guns, and who knows what else out there years before they should.”

*He’s right. They would attack with things they know, like spears and things, which would pass right through the shadows. Any fire based attacks would quickly stop working, they would need real world physical weapons that emit light, like my sabers. And they don’t even have streetlights yet, much less electricity or plasma emitting crystals. Best to keep them out of it if I can. I wouldn’t want them hurt during this anyway, it isn’t really their fight. Fortunately these shadow creatures don’t seem too interested in Dreamers that can’t cross into reality, so they should be safe.*

Little did he know that it was thoughts like that reality just couldn’t let pass.

## Chapter 17

Yes, I'm alive. I'm usually pretty good at staying alive. I've only failed one time that I can remember, and it hardly counts...

When: The next night

Where: The World of Dreams

In the dream, Ahmanda, one of the dreamer students, was on fire.

Like, literally, on fire. One second she was trying to change Perit's clothing, making them disappear, while Perit did the same to her. Thus she had to focus both on keeping her outfit in place while trying to undo Perit's. With a shriek she burst into flames. The class stopped and looked over at her.

The day before had been fairly typical; training with Lan, teaching the class on chi-blocking, attending class on Dreaming, making a few more of the new wards, finishing up the imbuing on the ring to accelerate any magic done around him, making a chain for it to wear around his neck because he couldn't exactly wear it on his hand in this world, eating, and meditating to practice the flame technique.

*Yes, that shadow clone technique was well worth it. And Inari said it was a forbidden technique on that world? Why? There seems to be no downside, and being able to practice three or four things at once would really benefit anyone, right? Weird.*

But now it was nighttime and the Dreaming portion of the Dreaming class was going on. They were somewhat outside the city, not that any "damage" to the World of Dreams would carry over, but sometimes people, animals, or carts appeared which could be a distraction. Plus, with the buildings on one side and the great expanse of the desert on the other, they only had to watch one way for any trouble. Nightmares or other nasties would be seen coming a mile off otherwise, the World of Dreams having its own share of dangers apart from the shadows from another world that now hung about. With Alisha still missing every day (he had looked in on her again) there were exactly six people so they paired off for the exercise in trying to do two dream things at once, and that's when Ahmanda had burst into flames.

Talina waved and a sphere of water splashed over her, dousing the flames. "What were you thinking about?" she demanded of Smerfete, her partner. "Stray thoughts can be extremely-

She didn't get to finish her sentence as Smerfette suddenly went flying. She screamed, then went plunging down, but a split second before she hit the ground thrust a hand out and stopped herself, dropping to her feet instead.

"Why did you do that?" she demanded of Ahmanda, but then realized she was still freaking out about being on fire, and so couldn't have had the presence of mind to do such a thing. "What in the world?"

"We're under attack!" Lysanias reasoned, spinning and trying to look everywhere at once. "Shadows, where are they?"

"There!" shouted Tamil, pointing. He looked over and coming from the city a little ways off was a blob of shadow, separating into what looked like five separate pieces.

Perit reacted first, gesturing in the air and making a spear come out of nowhere, sail though the air, and completely pass through the shadow that didn't even bother dodging such a simple attack.

Lysanias glanced back at her. "You can't hurt them with physical attacks, just stuff that's glowing or direct damage!"

"I forgot!" she admitted, covering her mouth with her hands in shame. "Sorry!"

"But we can make it harder for them, right?" Tamil asked, taking a step forward. She raised her arms dramatically and the ground between the group and the shadows rumbled a bit. Then a line of rock shot up between them, reaching several meters high.

Lysanias was fairly impressed. *Nice earth bending!*

For all of a tenth of a second, when a thin ribbon of the wall at the bottom vanished. It started to tilt a little bit, wiggling back and forth.

Smerfette concentrated and vanished, appearing behind Lysanias. "I don't think it's going to hold!" she said, sounding worried.

"Push it over on top of them!" suggested Talina, and the wall swayed back the other way, crashing down and making dust billow out from the sides.

"What did I just say?" Lysanias cried, as the shadows just stood there, unaffected. "You can't affect them physically!" *What, am I just talking to myself here?*

"Oh, right, I get it now!"

*Now she gets it? Who is the student here and who is the teacher?*

A black sphere appeared behind Lysanias, which he didn't see, but he did feel something pulling at him. So did the others, four of them resisting, but two of them flying towards him with a yell, so they were now seemingly stuck to each other.

Lysanias could finally do something, and knew from experience without his items he was fairly useless. He hadn't gone far in being pulled as the others had, the point of gravity had been right behind him. But he was stuck against the others who were flailing around trying to free themselves. He didn't need greater strength in this case, he needed to be faster, so he could start doing something against all these shadows. So he concentrated on seeing himself as faster. *I'll just appear over there when I'm ready, trying to physically free myself is going to be pointless, that much is clear. These girls are stronger than I am and they got caught, what chance do I have?*

With four people in one place the shadow that acted next figured that was good enough for now and detonated a black explosion of energy, engulfing all of them. Lysanias knew he couldn't dodge, so settled for trying to make himself tougher as the energy coursed through him. It didn't help.

Plus his selfish ways hadn't helped the girls he was stuck to, who all screamed as they were damaged. Of course they didn't go flying apart because they were still stuck together, so at least they could share their misery.

"Oh crap!" Perit exclaimed. "Maybe this will help?" She concentrated, and a gentle rain started to fall on the group out of nowhere.

*Er, how exactly?* "Or maybe we should get out of here?" Lysanias suggested. "We're being overwhelmed and there's more of us!"

"We're Aiel, we don't run," scoffed Shuezane. "They want to fight dirty, we can fight dirty too. That rain gives me an idea." She clapped her hands in front of her dramatically shouted "Light storm!"

Not a blasted thing happened.

"Or not?"

Lysanias rolled his eyes. *We're fighting creatures with far more experience here, and we can't even reliably do what we want on our own.* "Are you sure about the 'no running' plan?"

"It should have worked!" she protested.

As if to parody her a shadow stepped to the front and flowed upwards, becoming almost totally human in shape. It too slapped its "palms" together and an area of darkness opened above it. Beams of darkness started shooting out of it, towards the unstuck students. Sheuzanne managed it, yelling "stop stealing what I was going to do!" but other others didn't, being stuck at least once.

"I'm sorry!" Ahmanda croaked, having taken more of her share of the damage so far. She concentrated, but then winced. "Oh no!"

Another energy blast tore through the group, and both Smerfette and Talina vanished with a cry.

Shuezane glanced over, noticing her teacher and one of her fellow students had vanished. "Maybe we *should* run..."

"You think? Get out of here! Wake up again!"

This became a priority for the group as the wall that had been sitting there suddenly rose up into the air, and Lysanias got the distinct impression it was going to squish them all in a second.

Tamil vanished.

Lysanias wanted to run, he was rather badly hurt but until all the others were gone he had to remain their shield. It was what he did, after all. In desperation he envisioned Rosalina's sun overhead but he couldn't concentrate enough because of his wounds.

With Tamil gone the shadows started moving forward, perhaps satisfied their prey was weak enough to take on physically. They weren't wrong. Ahmanda vanished, leaving only three, and Shuezane had to start trying to fend off five shadows reaching for her. Lysanias had to concentrate on making sure the wall didn't smash into them, and finally both other girls were gone. The shadows turned to Lysanias.

"I was on the fence about you," he told them, as they started getting closer. "But this was an unprovoked attack, showing that Jason was right about you. You're dangerous and must be destroyed. You just declared war on me, and it won't go well for you." *Yeah, that'll scare them, given how useless you just were. Great speech.* He woke up, wincing as he sat up in his bed. Tearing the covers off he reached out with the force and took up his sword, popping the cap off the solid sunlight on the hilt. Light spilled out, and he looked down at himself. He was a mess of bruises, on his chest and his left arm, but it wasn't too bad.

*Looks like Jason was right. You get hurt in the dream, at least some of that damage carries over onto your body. I just wish I knew that those that got hit and vanished woke up okay and didn't die. But I don't know where they live, so I would have to ask. That would take the rest of the night and if they aren't dead at this point, they'll be fine.* He slumped back down, putting the cap back on the hilt so he didn't wake Kid with the light, and put the sword next to him.

*So we're back to being useless then, is that it? Always getting hurt in combat, and no dwarf and gnome to save you this time. They tore us apart! I mean yes, there were five of them, and yes, they can work together almost as one person that can do five things at once and yes, we're only students and yes, we were caught by surprise but still.* He thought a moment. *I should have created some light sabers right away, ready to grab off my belt. And I should have been thinking about being faster right at the start too, instead of waiting until we were attacked. But I wasn't expecting an attack, so... but I guess I'll have to now! Great.*

His thoughts were silent a moment.

*It wasn't unprovoked, was it?* he suddenly realized, a chill seeping into him. *We had killed a few of them here in the real world. If another saw it, as is their way of doing things, they would have taken notice of it. They would have seen me there. They can't attack me here when I'm not dreaming, so they attacked me where they would have power, in the World of Dreams. If any of the girls die because of it, will that be on my shoulders? But what could I do? I tried communicating with them. Even tried reading their minds, which I couldn't comprehend because it's so vast. Should I have tried harder, thought of something else before having Kid kill those she did? Are all Dreamers here now in danger because of a choice I made? Were they watching and waiting to see what we would do, and now I've made up their minds for them?*

It wasn't a pleasant thought. He shook his head and sat up again. *I have to know. Universe, did all the people in the dream wake up after the attack?*

Yes

*Thank goodness. Then they may be hurt, but they won't die from it. I can see them in class tomorrow and heal them if they need it. Ugh, should I even train with them now? I guess it depends on their motivation. If motivated to kill only me, no. Stay away and keep them safe.*

*I can just run if I see any shadows, I'm not Aiel. If motivated to kill all Dreamers, yes. If I don't, and they want all Dreamers dead, they'll need my help (such as it is currently). If not, staying away from them in the World of Dreams is the better bet. But how do I know their intent? I guess... Universe, I ask this, should I remain with the others in the World of Dreams to help fight off shadow attacks on their person?*

*Unknown*

That set him back a moment, but he nodded to himself. *I get it. At least I got an answer. It's stuff happening technically in another world, so this world wouldn't be able to help me get an answer. And while there I can't exactly ask, because my dream self doesn't have that power. Well played, Shadows, not that you even knew.*

He flopped back down again. *Only thing I can do is keep training. Survive the best I can, maybe come up with some other way to talk to them before things get even more out of hand. Can they read? Maybe there's some kind of gestured language we could use? They have thoughts, they communicate between themselves. They can't exactly talk, they can't interact with this world enough to make sound in the air. But they could point to letters... if beings that can simply fuse together and share knowledge have a concept of written language because how would they hold anything to write with? Aarg! I would have to somehow teach them what written language is! I can't do that.*

He fell asleep trying to figure out what to do, and was dreaming of being chased by giant letters when Jason found him.

"Dude, what are you dreaming about now?" he asked, as if fearing the answer.

"About time you showed up," Lysanias chided him, coming to. The letters vanished. "We were attacked during training, we could have used you. Several people almost died. Okay, maybe you can't hurt them now but you could defend us!"

He looked pained. "Sorry to hear that. But you... didn't die I guess?"

"You don't have to sound so enthused about it. I got hurt because they stomped all over us but- say..."

"Yes?"

"Where are you most of the time anyway? You only show up when I'm dreaming."

"I figured you wouldn't want to see me in real life. I know vaguely where your body is, but figured you would be more comfortable me not knowing."

*Crap. Crap. Crap. I haven't been warding the room, or taken the greater precaution of sleeping in the dimension. He could have just come in, stabbed me a few times while I was asleep, and that would have been the end of me.*

"What's that glare for? You can't have wanted me there, I attract shadows! They want to kill me, and they get powers when they're around me. Isn't it better I stay away until I feel you're in your own dreams?"

"It's a good thing you didn't, I've warded the room the fry anyone that tried to get in. It would hurt even you." He tried to sound confident and stuck out his chin.

He nodded his head, not believing it for a second. "Uh huh. Sure you did. And some innocent maid tries the wrong door and blows the place up? Nope, not buying it."

"Your funeral."

"It's really not, though. I would probably just wake up at home, go back to sleep, and come back. Remember, it's Ea's power that let me Dream like this, and he that originally sent me to other realities. I work for a different boss now, so they move me across worlds, but I still have the same powers."

"You just keep telling yourself that." *Crap. Crap. Crap! Is he right? Can I not actually kill him once he gets back around to attacking me again? Is he going to be after me for all eternity?*

"You eat something sour just now? Can I have some, I love sour stuff." He looked at his hand, where a weird looking worm appeared which he slurped down. "Want one?" He offered one.

“Never mind that! Where are you normally? Answer the question!”

He shrugged and ate the worm, making Lysanias feel a little sick. *Do they eat worms on his world? Sour worms? Weird.* “I don’t have some secret base or anything. Either I’m in my little dreamshard world or hanging out in some random place in this world. You know, people watching. They’ve got some odd people, you know that? Big people that seem to only live in forests, a whole ethnic group that just lives on ships, people who seem to own other people that can use the local magic equivalent, all kinds of people.”

“Dreamshard?”

“Yeah, a persistent dream world you can retreat to. You’re not advanced enough to try making one.”

“That’s fine.” *So like my personal dimension, but more mutable I bet because it’s a dream? That’s sort of neat. Your own little paradise you can spend hour in every night while dreaming but still get up for work the next day.*

“Why?”

“Just wanted to be sure you weren’t causing trouble.”

“You still have no idea.”

“I’ll ask the universe if you were telling the truth later. Well, let’s resume training so this night isn’t completely shot. As I’ve just been reminded how much further I have to go, no sense wasting time.”

“You got it, boss.”

So Lysanias put several more hours of training in, and the next day several people he didn’t know showed up for class. They knew about and greeted him, and he convinced those who were still hurting to accept healing. As it was just bruising he easily managed to put everyone to rights, and the two others were introduced.

“Everyone, this is Amys and Bair, two Dreamers who have agreed to help protect the class while in the World of Dreams.”

Lysanias looked them over. Bair looked older, with white hair and a wrinkled face. Of course, living in the desert did no one any favors so he felt that could be a bit misleading. Amys also had white hair, much longer, making Lysanias wonder if it wasn’t simply bleached from spending so much time in the sun. She was a head taller, skinny, and looked to be about half Bair’s age. However, feeling her out he also realized she could channel, and probably a lot more strongly than he could, unaided.

*It’s fine, she’s not going to be expecting a man to be able to channel, so she won’t go poking around, right?* But he edged away from her as much as he could while trying to make it seem like he wasn’t. *She could also be twice Bair’s age, given how Nynaeve’s notes suggested those that can channel live two to five times longer than everyone else at least.*

“These shadow creatures that have appeared are troubling,” Bair was saying. “We have people trying to figure out where they came from-”

*Good luck with that.*

“-and what they want-”

*Ditto.*

“-but until you are able to defend yourselves we will be nearby when you are practicing in the dream.”

“Maybe we can even show you a trick or two,” Amys said with a laugh.

“For now, let’s get started,” Talina told them. “Let’s begin by exploring what we did wrong when attacked last night. Perit?”

“We lost,” she grumped, crossing her arms.

“True, but let’s talk specifics. What was that rain you were making?”

“It was a healing rain, I imagined it healing you as it fell. Not quickly enough, I guess.”

“Ah, that’s what it was. Well, it was a good thought then, if not enough. Next?” She looked at him.

*Didn’t really want to relive my abject failure but I suppose it’s a fair exercise. Let’s see what I come up with. Then maybe they’ll have some ideas on how to actually communicate with the things and we can give that another go.*

*I mean I can dream, can't I?*

*Dream, get it?*

*Ah, who am I making jokes for, anyway?*

“My first mistake was not anticipating an attack...” he began.

## Chapter 18

This weapon is offered to a boy when he becomes a man.

When: The week after

Where: Streets of Morelle

Another week passed in Randland, Lysanias keeping himself busy both in the dream and out of it. Every morning he got Rosalina out so she could keep Kid company, though she started attending his chi-blocking classes for something to do.

“Ah figure it can’t hurt, and you just started teaching it, right?” she had asked. “Might as well tag along.”

Rosalina had no interest, preferring her attack wands to simply paralyzing people. She felt her time was better spent working on her aim, so a clone or two would go with her outside of town where she could cut loose. This also gave him more practice in blocking and dodging hostile fire, which was always a good idea.

With the two experienced Dreamers watching over the class from above there had been no more attacks, though they had moved further outside of town to make sure the shadows had absolutely no cover should they decide to attack again. Lysanias continued training with Jason when he wasn’t training with the others in the World of Dreams, and he felt he had gotten a little better in that time. What he didn’t feel good about was a new plan to try and communicate with the shadows. He wracked his brain trying to come up with some good ideas, one of which was large cards held up with sentences on them. He had Kid make some in her language, Jason made some in his, Nynaeve made some in hers, and Lysanias made some in his. Basic stuff like “Why are you attacking us?” and “Can you read this? Please point to it.”

Jason felt it was a waste of time, but as he could create his with a wave of his hand, he didn’t have the excuse not to. “For all I know they can talk just fine,” he told Lysanias as he handed them over. “They simply *choose* not to. Don’t forget them, in fact take them back to where you’re staying now and come back here.”

“It’s good practice anyway. Thanks, be right back.”

Wrack his brain as he could, Lysanias just saw no other way to communicate with these beings. *After all, if mind reading them doesn’t work, what else is there? I can’t get better at the skill with magic, that would just let me hear more of their thoughts at once, further overloading me. Maybe Skyebourne magic could help? Give them the ability to talk with me? The hubPad lists a spell to talk to animals, but are they animals? I don’t think so, they had conscious thought. Plus giving them the ability to talk means nothing if they don’t have mouths. And I really don’t want a spell I’m only using once bouncing around my head the rest of eternity.*

*Even if it means saving all their lives?* a small part of him asked.

*If I was sure it would... universe, will Skyebourne magic allow me to talk to the beings I call shadows?*

There was no answer

*Universe, is there any way to get the beings I call shadows to communicate with me?*

*Unknown.*

*Of course, they aren’t from around here, how would whatever provides these answers really know? I guess I’ll just have to hope the signs work, or failing that, a little pantomime.*

“Ya sure about this?” Kid asked, handing him the signs. He had two clones out, holding the four copies of “If you can read this point to it” cards between them. The group was in another town, having gone through the official gateway method, and they had again wandered around until the shadows had been found. This town was larger than the other, and hadn’t suffered as badly in the last battle. The buildings here were higher, the streets more

crowded, the clothing more diverse. Kid and Rosalina had “ignore me” wards on, but Lysanias hadn’t bothered.

“You’re the one who killed the last group,” he reminded her. “So seeing you is probably not the best thing for our efforts here. I have to try this again, if there is any way we can communicate with them, I have to try it. I won’t just kill them in ignorance, even if they do seem to want me dead for some reason. For all I know this is some game by Jason, see how many I can kill before they kill me.”

“He does say they’ve become immune to anything he can dream up. Pretty suspicious if ya ask me.”

“My thoughts exactly. We’re facing a huge threat but it just so happens he can’t help? Because reasons? I have to make the attempt. Stay here, they can’t hurt me, unless Jason is around somewhere watching this.” *In which case I’ll just leave, I guess.*

“Good luck,” Rosalina told him.

“Thanks.”

Lysanias and his clones moved forward, signs out and ignoring the funny looks he got from the people nearby. The shadow was right out in the open, so handing his sign to a clone Lysanias got out his stele and made a few quick “ignore me” wards around the shadow, who didn’t seem to care. People started streaming past without looking, and he nodded, taking the signs back. They all stood there facing the shadow and hoping for a reaction.

There was none. It just writhed and flickered like a shadow, he couldn’t even tell it was looking at him. He tried the other signs, but there was no reaction to any of them.

“Look, I’m trying my best here,” he told them, exasperated. “Give me something! A flicker, anything!”

No reaction. He lowered the sign and the clones did as well.

“I’m sorry about Kid killing a couple of you, honestly I didn’t even think it would work. But she says it did, and we needed to know more about you. I mean that’s no excuse, obviously, but we did try to talk to you before that.”

Silence.

“I don’t want to hurt you!” he insisted. “Do you get it?” He pulled his sword out and the clones did too. They set it on the ground in front of them. “No fight! You see? Come on, at least react so I know you know I’m here!”

Nothing.

“We.” He indicated them both. “Can bury the sword.” He picked up a handful of dirt and threw it over the sword. “Together.” He clasped his hands.

No reaction.

“I don’t think they care,” said the far clone.

“I hate to concur, but I think he’s right,” said the middle one. “Hello? Hello!” He was waving his hand over where the “head” of the creature might be, walking around the whole thing in case it was looking off to the side.

“I think he is too,” Lysanias proper agreed. He shook his head sadly. “We may just be too alien to each other. For all I know they’re screaming at me in some way I can’t even hear or notice. Hand me your signs.” He took them and shoved them into the pocket, then let the two clones go.

The shadow stepped back directly away from him.

“Wait, are you reacting to that?” he asked, excited and confused.

The shadow broke into three pieces, two stepping to either side of the main mass, then came together again.

“Yes, yes, three into one!” Lysanias told them, pleased to have finally gotten *something* from them. “I can do what you can do, on a more limited basis. You are seeing me, aren’t you? Give me more, we can work something out!”

But the shadow went back to being passive, making no further movement. He brought another clone out, which walked in a circle inside the wards and then vanished again. There was no reaction.

"Really?" he asked it, annoyed. "How about if I set Kid on you again? She wants to try out a grade-er, a level one element. Raise your hands or something if you don't want to be killed. She's right here, see?" He gestured and she stepped into the circle, so he yanked her ward off which burned away.

No reaction.

He shook his head. "I'm talking to myself here. Fine." He picked up his own blade and shoved it back where it belonged. "I'm leaving you in peace. Stand here for all eternity for all care. I've made my apologies, tried to communicate, and not harmed you. If you attack again without even trying to talk, I'll know to just defend myself. The next move is up to your kind. Attack Dreamers here again, and I'll see to wiping your kind off this world because you don't belong here. You and I both know Kid can do it. You'll have proven Jason right, that you're simply too dangerous to allow to exist and breed (or whatever it is you do) here. Or just leave and go back to your world, I won't chase you or anything. That is what I would prefer anyway. The choice is yours." He turned away, having been drawing the One Power into himself as he talked. He opened a gateway back to the inn. "Let's go," he told the others, and they stepped through.

The shadow was still just standing there as it closed.

"Sorry to have wasted your time, Kid," he told her. Rosalina was, of course, a part of him so her time really couldn't be wasted.

She shook her head. "It's fine. We had to make the attempt, to satisfy your sense of honor. I respect that. It's not as cut and dried outside my world. There, something attacks you, you attack it back until one side is dead. Though that thing with the dwarves was kind of messed up. The point is, you wanted to make sure they were an enemy, give them every opportunity to come to the table. So you did. Like you said what they do next shows their nature and your conscience is clear."

"I still hate to kill them without understanding what they want. With my powers I could probably give it to them. They can't just want me dead for the sake of me being dead, right?"

"That's anybody's guess."

"From what we've seen, a good one," Rosalina told them. "I'm going out to practice light ribbon magic. If you would be so kind, good sir?" She spread her skirts.

A gateway opened behind her to the practice area. "But of course. See you after class." "Bye!" She and Kid stepped through with a wave.

That night the shadows struck again, ten of them this time, coming out of the city towards the group at high speed.

*And so I have my answer, he mused to himself. And they like to have the advantage of numbers, don't they? Well, we won't be caught by surprise this time, and I'm already maintaining greater speed and made these. He yanked the two light sabers off his belt, blades springing into existence. Let's see how we fare this time. I just wish... He glanced over at the assembled students who were spreading out so as to not be caught by any funny gravity this time. (They can learn from their encounters too) They had refused the light sabers, despite Lysanias telling them they were really the best weapon to use. "Too much like a sword," they had said. (whined) "We Aiel don't touch swords," they said. (whined more.) Well, whatever. It's actually to my benefit. I've told them to cut loose with whatever they can think of, at least that's non-physical, but to prioritize simple light based attacks. Then we can see if next time they're immune to whatever these people used. After all, I have no evidence of such, that may have been Jason lying to get me believing it, not bother to verify it, and completely handicap myself in battle after battle. This way I can test that theory but still retain my ability to fight them later, should I need it.*

"Hey, remember me?" Ahmanda shouted to them. "You set me on fire! Let's see how you like it!" She threw both her hands up and absolutely nothing happened.

"I think you meant to do this?" Talina asked, gesturing. From the ground a curtain of fire sprang up, obscuring the shadows but not making them slow down any.

"You students, don't try anything so large, keep it small and simple!" Amys yelled at them.

*We are so not ready for this. Also, why didn't you put it under them? They'll just go over a wall. Wait, if I move the wall of fire does that count against me? I'm not the one creating it. Let's chance it.* He concentrated, willing the wall of fire to move, fire bender style, and engulf them. He managed it, and the wall surged forward, surprising them. They tried to get over it, but none was fast enough and all got at least slightly burned.

"Oh, right," Talina agreed. "I should have done that in the first place."

*No, you think? Heh, look at me completely ignoring their advice. But I managed it.*

Tamil bent down, touching the ground under her. "Just the top layer," she muttered. Light pooled around her, shooting towards the area occupied by the shadows. When it reached them the glow intensified, causing them further damage.

*I see, she just changed the dirt beneath their feet, causing it to glow. It didn't need to be a mile deep, so she did something "small" but of a wide scale. Nice.*

"How about this, then?" Shuezane asked, putting her hands out in front of her. What looked like a cannon appeared, which spat out a ball of light as she shouted "Fire!"

*Wait, they have those here? Or did she just invent a cannon that shoots cannonballs of light on the spot? I guess they could have gunpowder... even if Korra's world didn't figure that out. Here's a question- do they have eyes? If I appear behind them, will they notice right away? Let's find out, but not get surrounded.* He vanished, appearing to the far left of the line, behind the last one. He raised his sabers.

Amys, no doubt wondering what he had in mind, took his place near the center of the line, appearing there with a thought.

Smerfette gave a battle cry and leapt into the air, a glowing spear appearing in her hand as she came down. She missed as the shadow dodged to the side.

"Something smaller, fine," Ahmanda muttered. She raised a finger and a narrow beam of light shot out of it, directly towards the shadow in front of her. It seemed to vanish, and she let out a whoop. "Take that, creature of darkness!"

Perit raised her arms and a glowing ball appeared above her head, pulsing with energy.

Lysanias started swinging his sabers, and to his rather surprised shock, it didn't dodge. The blades slashed through it, and while it hadn't known he was there a second ago, it did now, whirling around to face him. *So you don't have eyes 'on the back of your head' do you? Interesting.*

A glowing spear appeared in Talina's hands as well, given a shadow had just entered her combat reach. She swept though it, as it didn't bother to dodge, instead simply going to claw her face off. She recoiled back, slash marks dripping the idea of her lifeblood where she had been fairly badly cut.

Bair, who was right next to her, shouted "No!" and held up a mirror, a beam of light shining forth from it. Her aim wasn't that great, the beam missing it by centimeters. Two shadows, nearly closing the distance on her, didn't bother to cover more distance, simply whipping an "arm" up and having it stretch the rest of the way towards her. She jumped away from them, so they clawed only air.

Amys had to jump clear as the ground around her suddenly became like a set of jaws, snapping shut.

"Fire!" Shuezane cried again, and another ball of light shot out of the cannon before her. The three in her line of sight didn't pause in their running, the closest about three meters away now, but waved their arms toward the ball. A dark portal opened, swallowing it up and spitting it back out behind her, and she cried out as it impacted her back and sent her sprawling.

Lysanias went to strike again but the shadow knew he was there, and he found himself swinging nothing through the air (with the greatest of ease). The shadow continued moving, backwards, leaking a wispy substance from the wounds it had taken before but seemingly not slowed by them.

*Great, but if I make an "energy sword" I'll be hurting them with that, and there's the possibility the next group will be immune to it. Can I make a harmless but yet unable to be destroyed blade that happens to be glowing? I guess I'll try it. They're so small, the hilts of the*

*sabers are easy to destroy and leave me without a means to attack. Maybe they were right to stick to ranged, light based blasts?*

Smerfette had now circled around the back of the one that tried to cut Talina's face off, stabbing it through the chest with her glowing spear. It looked down at the spear now shoved through its leg, and then over at her as if to convey "oh really?"

Bair dodged another claw, while another shadow vanished and appeared behind her, poised to strike.

Ahmanda sent another beam out at the next one she had line of sight to. It too vanished, and she threw a fist into the air. "I'm on a roll, why are you guys having such trouble with these things?"

*Wait a second, I know what solid light is, I've made some. I made some daggers for Kid last week out of the stuff. If it's not in a sword shape, it won't damage them, so they won't become immune to it. It's just a tube of light that happens to burn them.* He put his palms up and motes of light seemed to coalesce in his palms. He gave a squeeze and was holding two tubes of the stuff, but kept it "unreal." *This way it's my will against theirs if they try to destroy them, rather than it being "normal" matter they can just wish away.*

Amys now retaliated against the one in front of her, the one that probably attacked her but who could say? She raised both her palms and before her sprang up a sort of "grass" that was glowing with light. So it simply leapt into the air, avoiding the ground altogether and landing behind her.

Talina put a hand to her face, willing herself better, and when she lowered it her wound was gone.

Tamil straightened up, the shadows having moved past her area of glowing light, and looked around. Straight again was Lysanias and a lone shadow, to her right two meters away from Bair was a shadow, then there was one behind that one in a line. "I'll show you how small I can be," she muttered. Then got a look on her face like "wait, what?" She raised a hand which was dribbling sand which she caused to glow and shoot out towards the two. It hit both, the first much more strongly of course, but it was in the middle of gathering itself for a leap at Bair. It still made the jump, glowing sand passing through it and hurting it. This at least knocked it off enough Bair didn't even have to dodge, it got next to her but stumbled, unable to actually attack.

Amys totally failed to dodge the one now behind her, and it raked claws through her blouse, bloodying her back.

Lysanias struck out again, feeling the shadow trying to unmake his blades but he kept concentration on them as they swept through the shadow's body. It didn't go down.

The two shadows that Ahmanda had "killed" now struck out from behind her, where they had teleported to to dodge the beam. She didn't even consider they might be behind her, she had been lining up her next shot, so the pain of two pairs of claws raking into her again and again came as a complete surprise. They each took a leg, nearly tearing both of hers off, and then slashed her back to ribbons as well, causing her to cry out and stumble forward, twisting to see what had just happened.

Smerfette took a blow to the side from a two shadows, though one was only a glancing blow she was still somewhat badly hurt. At the same time two attacked Bair who tried to defend herself from attacks coming from two directions by simply not being there anymore. She got hit once, right in the face. She had a huge gash on her cheek and put a hand up to it, feeling it slick with blood.

Ahmanda twisted around, a beam of light shooting out of her finger to try and drive the two back. It went wild, the two not even bothering to dodge it.

Meanwhile Lysanias was swinging some more, batter, batter, batter, it's a swing and a miss. "Stand still, will you?" he growled. It did not comply, in fact after the attack it looked healthier than before it. *Keeping my speed up and maintaining these two blades might be too much for me. My concentration is too split.*

Talina decided to press the attack, catching the shadow before her through the chest area again, burning it.

Tamil saw that Bair was hurt, as she was now apart from the battle and directly before her, and willed herself to her side. "Heal yourself, I'll watch your back," she told her.

“Right.”

Lysanias decided not to go with the fancy moves this time, simply sweeping the blade in each hand through the shadow that was before him.

Shuezane was back up, and started healing herself, then had to dodge as the two that had been fighting Bair took a step towards her and lashed out.

*Finally* Perit was ready to do something and shouted “Close your eyes everyone!” She jumped into the air and reared her now rather enormous ball of light back. “Take this, shadows!” Lysanias looked at her, hanging in mid-air as she flung it forward.

*She looks so cool right- eyes!*

He threw his arm over his face as the battlefield erupted in light.

## Chapter 19

They'll steal your coat off your back and beat you bloody if you don't offer your shoes too.

When: After the ball of light exploded

Where: World of Dreams battlefield

*You would think, Lysanias thought to himself, that after all that- the beating these shadow things have taken, and then that huge explosion that seemed to go on and on- It would have helped. Not so much.*

He quickly surveyed the battlefield, the shadow in front of him thankfully inert at the moment. A few of the shadows were still standing though. He couldn't even tell how hurt they were, but whatever they were made of, they were tough. At a quick count only two had been outright killed, (or had fled while he couldn't see) though four were on the ground, not moving. That left four still able to fight, making him wonder exactly what made these things tick. Perit landed lightly on the ground, looking around. "Seriously," she spat. "I gathered all that light energy and it didn't just outright destroy them all?"

"Don't let up," Lysanias called to the others. "Finish them off before they escape!"

"Go," Bair told Tamil. "Kill them, I'll be fine!"

"I don't have to leave your side, wise one," she replied, bending down to touch the ground again. A line of light shot forward along it, lighting up the ground under the nearest shadow that was still on its feet.

Lysanias stuck the glowing tube into the shadow before him and was relieved to see it vanish.

*One more down, seven more to go. Sheesh.*

He willed himself to be behind the nearest one that was still up, blades held out before him. Jason had told him that shadows seemed to take damage from light very slowly if they were just constantly exposed to it, so he pulled the blades back and shoved them in again and again until it finally fell over, and then vanished. Meanwhile the girls were healing themselves or finishing off the ones that were standing, then went for the unconscious ones, until finally the battlefield was clear again.

"Everyone all right?" he called. They all looked around at each other, and everyone was nodding.

"We seem to have made it through," Talina announced. "Well done."

"I for one would like to know what that was at the end," Amys demanded, whirling on Perit.

"Yes, rather unorthodox," agreed Bair. "Though I don't doubt its effectiveness."

"Just a little bit of cleverness on my part," Perit told them smugly. "After all, it seemed to me that if we can heal ourselves, they could heal themselves."

"I suppose," Amys agreed. "But that doesn't explain-"

"I'm getting to it, wise one. With the advantage of numbers they could damage us slightly faster than we could heal ourselves, and the battle would be lost. So I reasoned that an attack of a greater magnitude was called for. Something that would hurt them all, hurt them badly, but be harmless to us."

"It was still just a light based attack? But that seemed to damage them so slowly," Lysanias protested. "How did you do that much damage all at once?"

"Basically I packed a bunch of light into that orb again and again, then let it back out again. The light came out separately and damaged them several times in a row, while being bright enough to blind them so they couldn't attack us while we were covering our eyes."

Everyone stared at her, some getting it more than others.

"You used us as a shield, gathering your power for a greater attack than could be done be done individually," he decided. "You couldn't have done it on your own, because it left you vulnerable to attack. But as you were in the back and seemed to have the time, you took advantage of it and charged up a shot."

"Exactly," she said with a grin.

"Hummm..." *So that means in our next encounter they'll have one or more in back, charging up attacks to throw it us. Great. So was this a net gain for us or not? Still... He*

stepped to the side, raising an arm to the side as well. Before him an energy sphere sprang into existence, and he concentrated on shoving more power into it for several seconds. It was crackling with what looked like lightning along the edges, and he couldn't hold it back much longer. *It's like the exercise we were just doing, holding our clothes in place while trying to will someone else's clothes away. I have to keep the energy compressed and put more in at the same time. But I don't want to blow us all up, just see if it works.* He thus decided "It's sort of a big bang... kind of attack!" letting it fly. It streaked forward and when he judged it far enough away he snapped, releasing the pressure that kept it together. It exploded, and everyone shielded their eyes. There was a crater there, and dust and small rocks started hitting the ground like hail. The World of Dreams shimmered in that spot and went back to normal. "Got it."

"You mean it's the Perit Blast!" Perit told him. "Don't forget who came up with it."

"Agreed, it shall be so named!" he agreed with a laugh. "I won't." *It's all about imagination and cleverness, isn't it? Maybe not against shadows, who could be harmed by that sort of thing once and then never again, but against anyone else? Basically you have to keep an open mind and maybe do some quick thinking, like Perit did just then.*

Lysanias will remember that.

"With the threat gone, shall we continue our lesson?" Talina asked. "Amys, Bair, if you would be so kind as to watch for more shadows as you did before? They may come in greater numbers after a defeat like that. If they do," she turned to the others, "we get out of here. I saw the wounds you took, Perit's quick thinking saved us that time, but if we had to handle double or triple those numbers, I don't think we would stand a chance."

"Yes, teacher," they chorused.

"Yer cutting class?" Kid asked the next day at breakfast. The group was sitting in the dining area of the inn, though of course Rosalina wasn't eating anything.

"I've already cleared it with Talina," he explained patiently. "So it's not really cutting, if I understand your usage correctly."

"I think it's a good idea," Rosalina told them. "We should move fast."

He nodded. "It's a necessity at this point. If we don't-"

"A *bear* necessity?" Rosalina interrupted with a grin.

"Er, if you like?" He looked over at Kid who clearly had no idea either. "Anyway, if we don't, I'm afraid the next wave of shadows we fight won't just match our numbers and then a little more, but be two or three times as many."

"You've proven you can defeat them in fair combat," Kid agreed. "The next logical step, therefore, is unfair combat. Does this mean..." she trailed off.

"Yes, you're taking the field. Now our original plan was just us four, but Lan and Nynaeve should come for the morning lesson. Kid, you've got your sunlight knives which I think you're more comfortable with anyway, if you wouldn't mind letting Lan borrow a light saber?"

"It's fine."

"Great. I figure I'll invite them along. If nothing else hopefully she can get us through the gateway network without paying every time. I'll want to hit as many cities as we can today."

"What is the actual plan?" Rosalina asked.

"You're going to put me to sleep with magic, so I can be dreaming. I typically dream enough for several hours-"

"Wait a second," she cut in. "I'll vanish if you go unconscious."

"Or will you?" he asked slyly, raising a finger.

"Er, yes, yes I will. You know that."

"Or do I?"

"Wait, are ya gonna use a clone for this or something?" Kid asked.

"Actually, that's not a bad idea. But no, I was thinking this." He pulled a ward out. "This is the ward I made to maintain a power, like the one that maintains a spirit. Man, I haven't

called any spirits in ages... Anyway.” He shook his head. “I think it’ll work the same way. If not, yeah, we can try the clone thing.”

“You think this will maintain me?” she asked, taking it from him and looking it over. It was just a regular paper ward, with the usual writing on it.

“That’s the hope. Now, you put me to sleep, I dream, I cross into this world from the World of Dreams. We head through a gateway and I bring Rosalina with me back to the World of Dreams. With Jason here with Kid, Lan, and Nynaevae the six of us check the town over. We find shadows we back off, drive them into the real world, and Kid takes care of them. Meanwhile the other person stays in the World of Dreams in case they try to escape that way. What do you think?”

They thought it over a moment.

“No offense, but it’s a terrible plan,” Kid told him.

“Yes, I was sure it would- wait what?”

“You’ve got it all backwards. Plus giving the shadows two Dreamers to draw on instead of one seems foolish. Plus doesn’t Dreaming cut your power set way, way down?”

“For the moment I guess. In many ways it’s more versatile, but in others it’s more limiting. Sensing certainly is more limited. What do you suggest then?” he asked a bit curtly. *I spent a lot of time thinking about this. Is it really that bad a plan?*

“Let Jason handle the World of Dreams and doing the herding. He’s probably better at it anyway. You stay here in the real world and when we hit a town, it goes like this: We step through and do your questioning of the universe “are there pieces of shadow here” or however you want to ask. If yes, great, we head out and look for them. When we find them Jason steps himself over in case they run, and we kill the now powerless creatures. If no, Jason crosses over and checks the World of Dreams which you wouldn’t be able to get an answer about. If there are some he picks a good spot, lures them in, and shoves them into my waiting arms. They’re again powerless so much easier to kill and if they escape by stepping back over, he’s there to pop them back again. We leave, hit the next town, and repeat until we’ve exhausted the network of towns we can visit through the gateways.”

Lysanias paused to think this over, eyes darting as he worked through all that. “Okay, apparently I’m stupid. That seems like a much better plan.”

“I wouldn’t say you were stupid.”

“You were thinking it, though,” Rosalina said, putting a hand over her mouth.

“Was I? Gosh, I didn’t even realize. Sorry ‘bout that!” Both girls laughed, and Lysanias’ eyes narrowed.

“Yes, yes, very funny. I guess I was just thinking like a Dreamer and decided I needed to be Dreaming for all this. But yes, if he can go back and forth like you say that seems a lot more reasonable.” *Maybe I just didn’t want to rely on him for anything?*

Not long after the group headed to the big tree, the place Lysanias had told Jason to meet them. All three were wearing temporary “ignore me” wards created with the stele, so Jason couldn’t see what direction they came from. *A useless gesture, he may already know where we’re staying but maybe not. Isn’t his goal to become more omniscient because Dreamer power doesn’t work that way? He doesn’t know anything he hasn’t seen before, and he can’t ask the universe like I can. I have warded the room at night so he would overlook it, but that doesn’t stop him watching what building we go into. Let’s give him as little information as we can in any case.*

The trio greeted Jason and headed to the gateway room to await Lan and Nynaevae, who they told the plan to. He also put wards on everybody so they could see the unseen, and of course on Kid so she could talk to them.

“This is a fantastic weapon,” Lan remarked, swishing the light saber he had been given from side to side.

“Not against shadows. Sure, it’ll cut through anything made on this world, even stone, hardly without effort,” Lysanias countered. “But as what we actually want to kill isn’t solid, all it does is light based damage. In other words, they can hurt you faster than you can hurt them, so make sure you *dodge*.”

“Dodge, got it.” He thumbed the control and the blade vanished again.

"I'm serious, I don't want to be standing over your corpse yelling 'why didn't you *dodge!*'?"

"I get it, I won't let them touch me."

"Good. Nynaeve, any questions?"

"I can't just hit them with fire?"

He shook his head. "A strand of fire isn't actually visible. It would just pass through them. If you can make a ribbon of light, like Rosalina has been working on..." He looked over at her and she demonstrated, making a circle of light with a circular motion of her wand. A strand of light had shot out, which she could control to make basically any shape in the air or on the ground. He felt it was bright enough to hurt them, and could cover a fairly large area. "This can trap them as long as they aren't too desperate, or pierce them to do actual damage." *Because they can just slam through it, it's only light in the air. It'll hurt them, not stop them.*

"I wonder," she mused. "The strands for a ball of light but with a tube of air and fire to channel it like a fiber optic cable?"

"I have no idea what that is."

"Never mind. That might make a glowing rod. Maybe a thin tube of ice that's lit on one end? Too bad we aren't actually glowing when we hold the One Power, at least not visibly. We could just punch them. I'll work on something, but worst comes to worst I'll just create several balls of light." She started taking the One Power into herself and several strands shot out of her, combining. "No, not like that."

"Jason, you clear on your part?"

"Sure, I get to be bait. I use a bunch of dream powers and they'll head towards me. We won't have to wander around hoping to run into them. They'll come to us."

"Good to know. Any other questions?"

Kid gripped her sunlight daggers and shook her head. "Just remember to let me do most of the work if you can. I can finish them in one shot."

Rosalina cut the glowing ribbon off with a flick of her wand, separating it and causing it to vanish. "I'm ready."

"Ladies first," he offered, sweeping a hand down as he bowed. They rolled their eyes but stepped through.

As an Aes Sadi Nynaeve and party were not charged to go through the gateways and hit two towns in quick succession. Just outside the building holding the gateway Jason vanished into the World of Dreams, and Lysanias settled himself to ask if any shadows were around. He got negative responses the first two times, but the third he got a yes.

"There's some here," he told Jason when he stepped back into reality. "Let's find an open spot and you can lure them in."

"Sure boss."

He looked around. "Can we head just outside of town?" *Most towns in this world seem surrounded by farms or forest, so nothing will get damaged should this go poorly.*

"They seem to be able to pick me up from huge distances," Jason admitted. "Plus I can do something big so it's fairly obvious."

"Will they expect a trap?" Lan asked, hand stroking the hilt of the saber. His thumb was near the control, he obviously wanted to light it up again.

"Not this time. Next time? Probably. They learn *fast*."

"So they may charge in, but next time move more cautiously?"

"Pretty much."

"Guess I'll enjoy it while I can. Say, any idea how many we may be facing here?"

"Er, more than one, less than a hundred?" Lysanias offered.

Lan scowled. "You really can't be more specific?"

"My powers originally told me there was only one. I had to ask how many pieces there were to get the real answer. Can I ask how many pieces we might face? I guess."

"Less than twenty? More than five? You must have some idea."

"The last time I tried to talk to them the shadow I found broke into three pieces. Maybe that's a standard scouting party? Until they know what we're doing they probably wouldn't

send that many to any one place. If they're trying to learn about us as I suspect, much faster to do that by sending just a few to many places. After all, they can't be hurt normally and most can't even see them. So why send a huge group?"

"Makes sense. Okay, let's find a good spot."

The group walked out of town and down the street a ways, stepping off the road into a clearing.

"This seems fine," Lysanias told them. "We'll at least see them coming."

"So Jason just does some stuff and we hope for the best?" Kid asked.

"I guess get into a circle, face outward, and give a shout out when you see them," Lan told her. "Don't break position unless you have to, any that charge us could be a faint and if we all turn towards the first ones we see, we could get hit from behind."

Kid shook her head. "So backwards."

Weapons were raised, and Jason stood in the center. "Now, what would attract their attention best?" he asked. "Ah, I know, let's do this." He raised his hands dramatically and a huge craft appeared overhead. It has a sort of saucer shaped front part, then a long, thick middle section like a cigar, and two glowing parts pointed backwards, stuck out of the back part of the ship.

"Is that... the Enterprise?" Nynaeve asked, gaping up at it.

"It sure is. I'm vaguely surprised you've heard of it though. Ever been? It's quite a ship."

"I'm sure it is. And no, I've just seen the show."

*Show?*

"Show?" he asked.

"Perhaps watching for shadows would be best?" Lan admonished them. "You know, the thing we're supposed to be doing."

"Yeah, yeah," she grumbled. "Show off."

Jason grinned. "It's only a model."

"Here they come!" Rosalina shouted, pointing. From the road several shadowy forms were blurring towards them.

The next fight was on, and Jason vanished before they could get close enough to use his power.

Lysanias didn't spare a glance but did spare a thought. *He put the ship away, right? It isn't going to fall and squash us all flat. Right?*

## Chapter 20

Because each time we live, we get to love again.

When: As the shadows got closer

Where: Clearing

“Shadow clone technique!” Lysanias called, crossing his fingers. Two clones appeared in the direction the shadows were approaching from, and all three reached for their light sabers.

“How does he keep getting us into these scrapes?” clone one asked clone two.

“He has it out for us, it’s the only explanation,” clone two lamented.

“I swear, if we get out of this that’s it. I’m *done*,” clone one promised. “Who does he think he is, anyway?”

“Exactly!”

“Boys, please,” Nynaeve pleaded. “Impress us with your witticisms some other time.”

“How about this one?” Kid asked, raising a hand. “Photon Ray!” The familiar beam of bright white light shot out. The shadows saw it coming and smoothly stepped to the side as they ran.

It missed.

“Wha- what?” she sputtered.

“Think they figured out that beam was dangerous?” Rosalina drawled.

“They can’t just dodge it!”

*Let me guess, things on your world just stood there and took it, right? How am I not surprised?*

“Apparently they can,” she countered.

“Well that’s just great!” She pulled her daggers.

“It get worse,” Lan informed them, igniting his saber. “Look.”

As the group watched the three shadows broke apart, meaning six of them were now almost within striking distance.

“Crud!”

The two clones stepped in front, sabers at the ready. All three calmed their minds, focusing on the flame that was within their minds, and readying themselves for combat.

“Light!” clone 2 cast on his shield, which began to glow.

*Sun magic? I haven’t used just regular old sun magic in forever! That’s a good idea though, wonder how I came up with it?* “Light!”

“Lumos Planus!” cast Rosalina, and her ribbon of light shot out. With a twirl she sent it around the group. “They won’t dare approach now!”

“Light!” clone 1 cast on his shield, because why change a winning strategy? “Huh?”

The first shadow creature crossed the line, sped past clone 1 who hadn’t recovered from casting the spell yet, and took a swipe at Kid.

“Shows what you know!” she yelled, jumping out of the way.

The next shadow crossed the line, ignoring the light and clone two taking a swing at it, who missed anyway, given it was somewhat of a challenge to even see where they were exactly because they were basically just as smudge on the world. It too swung at Kid. It connected, bypassing her armor by the simple expediency of smashing her in the head.

*What the?* Another shadow plunged through the line, making straight for Kid.

“Ow, quit it!” she yelled, as it seemed to plunge through her armor and score on her back.

Clone 1 and Lysanias both turned, raising their blades to try and help Kid, but paused.

*Er, that’s not going to work.* The shadows were almost stuck to her, there was no way either could swing a cranked up plasma sword around in close quarters like that. So both went for a shield bash, causing Kid to jump away from that as well.

“Oy, whatsa big idea?” she grumped, having been somewhat knocked by both shields (they weren’t swinging them full force, of course, they didn’t need to) and another shadow joining the fray so she didn’t really know which way to dodge.

"You would rather I use the sword?" both called at the same time, shaking it in their fists a little.

By this time Lan and Nynaeve had turned around, but Lan was just as hesitant to strike even with his much greater skill at the blade. Kid was thrashing around and starting to be coated with shadows, but he didn't want to chop her apart any more than Lysanias did.

"Any ideas?" he asked Nynaeve.

"One," she replied, bringing her hands above her head. A brilliant light shown from between them. The shadows hissed but didn't retreat.

"Lumos!" Rosalina called, lighting her wand up and sticking into the back of the nearest shadow.

The last shadow piled onto Kid, so she was completely covered by them, but swinging her daggers around nonetheless.

"Stop lashing out blindly and use your elements!" Lysanias called to her. "You can't miss now, can you?"

Kid ignored him and kept swinging.

"She's panicked," clone 2 figured, "I can feel her terror."

"She's not used to this. What do we do?" clone 1 asked, trying to get in there and do another shield bash, but kept jerking the shield back because he didn't want to bowl over Kid. "If only we had practiced light bending more!"

"Pause!" Lysanias called, willing his two clones into the time vortex with him. The action stopped.

"Oh, good thinking," clone 2 told him.

"I bit of breathing room, I shouldn't say," clone 1 agreed. "Do us a world of good."

He rolled his eyes. *What have I done?* "Look, we need to calm her down and get her using her elements. They'll take too long to kill with just light, and we can't attack them effectively because they're so close."

"We can't make her do- oh!" clone 1 realized.

"Exactly. When time starts again we're going to hit her with the force, giving her a command to use her elements. In her panicked state she might try to resist us, but if all three of us try at once, it should work."

"There isn't anything else we can do?" clone 2 asked, looking this way and that at the unfortunate Kid who was completely covered in shadows.

"Like what? You see how she's thrashing around," clone 1 complained. "All our skills are geared towards physically beating the crap out of stuff. We can't bend at them, or blood bend them, they ignored the light ribbon, Nynaeve's ball of light won't take them out fast enough. We can't affix wards to them, and I don't want them running around the dimension."

"I can see how Nynaeve is making her ball of light," clone 2 announced, looking up at it. "It's just the regular one she had us practice, only *more*. We could each make one of them. Can we gather the One Power in here?"

Lysanias tried it, and found he could, then let it go. "But even if we duplicated it, that's too slow. The whole point of bringing Kid along was that she could take care of them the fastest. I just didn't expect them to sacrifice themselves and ignore the rest of us." *Or physically attack us with claws. But what did you expect? They would just stand around like the city ones and let us kill them? Stupid, as usual, and it's Kid that's paying for it.*

"It's a good thing she has HP and not... whatever we have," clone 1 announced. "She might have been dead already."

The others nodded, agreeing.

"Very well," Lysanias told them. "On 'two' I'll drop us back into normal time, so on 'three' which I won't actually say, hit her with 'drop your daggers and kill them with your elements.' She should be helpless to resist us."

The other two repeated this, then nodded they were ready.

"One. Two." He dropped them back into the combat.

"Drop your daggers and kill them with your elements!" all three commanded.

Kid seemed to jerk as Lysanias' command drilled into her brain. She complied, dropping her weapons and shouting "Meteor Shower!"

Wait, I know what that does. The three looked up to see tiny points of light directly above them.

“Er, you don’t think she took our command to mean *everyone*, do you?” clone 2 asked nervously.

“Get everyone out of here!” He sprinted over, grabbing Rosalina while his other clones ran to touch Nynaeve and Lan.

“Where?” screamed clone two.

“Just down the road!” Lysanias called back. All three looked, imagined themselves there, and *shifted* as the two shining meteors smashed into where they had been.

The others looked around, uncertain what was happening.

“Where’s Kid?” Rosalina asked.

“Wait, you didn’t grab her?” asked clone two.

“I thought you would!” clone one replied, “Or him.” He pointed to Lysanias.

“You were closer!”

“No I wasn’t, you were!”

“Of course I wasn’t.”

“I think she’s fine,” Lan told them, pointing. Kid was sprinting towards them at top speed.

*Of course, she can’t attack herself with her own element, can she? That would be a really weird flaw in the whole system.*

“Oh, thank goodness she’s all right,” Nynaeve breathed, lowering her hands. The ball of light winked out and they all waited for her to catch up. She was waving and stepped forward, about to shout “I’m glad you’re all right” but oddly Kid didn’t wave back. In fact, when she got into range she skidded to a halt. “Photon Ray!” she called, targeting Nynaeve. Everyone was stunned as the beam pierced her chest, a look of utter shock on her face. She started to fall backwards, causing Lan to scream “No!” and rush to catch her.

“She’s still under the compulsion!” clone two decided.

“That’s fairly obvious, more importantly what do we do about it?” clone one shot back.

“Photon-”

“Oh crap!” all three exclaimed, and got between her and the others.

“Ray!” The beam slammed into their shields, but it wasn’t exactly physical so they didn’t get pushed back.

“Are we going to have to fight her?” Lysanias wondered, lowering his shield.

“Photon-”

“Sleep,” Rosalina cast, pointing her wand. Kid dropped, the elemental energy she had been gathering dissipating harmlessly.

“Help her!” Lan commanded. “Or by the creator you’ll regret it.”

Turning Lysanias saw she was in bad shape. A hole had been blown in her chest and blood was rapidly pooling underneath her. The clones and he dropped to her side. The two clones started trying to repair the damage alchemically while Lysanias grabbed healing wards out of his sub-space pocket and applied them. They glowed blue as they were supposed to.

*Come on, come on!*

“I can’t feel her spiritual energy,” clone one told them.

“I can’t feel her life energy,” clone two told them.

“She can’t have died that quickly!” Lysanias told them, as Lan’s face hardened. “Just keep healing her! She’ll be fine, I’m sure she’ll be fine.” *Please, Allfather, let her be fine!*

They did, closing up the hole and waiting for her to open her eyes.

She didn’t.

Jason appeared, looking around. “What’s the hold up, they never- oh. What did you do?”

“Can you help her?” Lysanias snapped. “She’s healed, but her energy isn’t coming back.” *And Sparkle wouldn’t teach me the method to use Lifestreaming to bring someone back... was she really just killed instantly?* “I even tried spirit batteries, but they didn’t work.” He waved a ward which hadn’t activated when he tried to use it.

"There's one way." He vanished.

"What?" He popped up. "You're leaving?" he shouted to the empty air.

"Don't be so emotional," Jason said, stepping out of nowhere with-

"Nynaeve?" Everyone was stunned as she was walking at his side. Lan looked at her, back at the corpse, up at her, back down, at her again, back down.

"What's going on?" she asked, clearly confused. "Why am I dead?"

"Are you?" Lan asked. "Is this some kind of trick? Some joke of yours?" He brought his saber back up, igniting it and pointing it at Jason.

"Boy, this is the thanks I get?" he growled. "I save someone's life and it's not 'oh, thanks Jason you're the best.' Noooo it's weapons pointed at me. Typical, I tell ya. By the way, is she dead too?" He pointed a thumb at Kid.

"Just asleep. What *is* going on here?" Lysanias asked.

"Pretty simple. You know how I made that ship?" He pointed up, and the enterprise was still hanging there.

"Yeah? So?"

"Well, when I saw her dead I went back in time a few minutes, swapped her out for a double that looked just like her before she was hit, and brought her into the future with me. Done. Pretty standard practice, really. You didn't notice? I am that good." He modestly started buffing his fingernails on his shirt.

"Standard practice?"

"It's no big deal."

"No big deal? You let us think she was dead!"

"Had to. Wouldn't have known to go back in time otherwise and save her. I had to see 'her' dead otherwise time would have gotten all confused. I mean if I had just yanked her through time she would have seemed to vanish, events here might not have played out the way they did, I wouldn't have known to go save her- so I wouldn't have, meaning she would get killed, etc. You have to be careful when you play around with time, man. The information still has to come from somewhere or it's lost."

"Yes, I understand that." *And why does that all sound like something that should be familiar to me? Think about that later, I guess.*

"So you're totally fine?" Lan asked, lowering the blade and clicking it off.

"I guess. Just a little stressed out seeing my own corpse lying there. Can you get rid of it?"

"Sure." He shrugged and it puffed into smoke.

Lan swept her into a hug, whispering something to her, and Lysanias turned his attention to Kid. His other two clones vanished, and he walked over to her. Rosalina was keeping an eye on her.

"Thanks for putting her to sleep like that," he praised her. "Good thinking."

"Sure thing. You really screwed up, didn't you?"

"Why do you sound pleased about that? I'm sure she would have been fine, if she had been real. We all got to her right after it happened."

"Just keep telling yourself that. Is Kid going to be okay?"

"Given a few minutes she'll wake up and not be under my command anymore. She'll be fine."

"And when she remembers almost killing Nynaeve?"

"Just a bad dream, best forgotten."

"Uh huh. So are we trying this again?"

"Not sure. This didn't exactly go as I planned."

"I should hope not!"

Moments later a fairly cranky Kid woke up and after being assured Nynaeve was fine, rounded on Lysanias.

"What was that, then?" she demanded. "What did ya make me do?"

"I'm sorry, we couldn't think of any other way to make you start attacking. I mean you were panicked, you can't deny that."

"I do, I guess. Never had an enemy get that close to me. Usually it's hit and run, they just piled on. They were slashing and I couldn't see- still, that was the best you could come up with?"

"At the moment, yes. Why? I suppose you could have come up with something better?"

"They were after me, so focus on getting me out of there not just making me attack them. Grab me and teleport away. Or use your fancy force powers to yank me and put me through your shield, or into a contain ward. I would have gone right through them, after all. Or reach through and stick an 'ignore me' ward on me."

He paused a second. "Sure, fine," he agreed, "those do seem like slightly better options, I admit. But I only had a few seconds to come up with something-"

"Can't ya *stop time itself*?"

"M- maybe?" He covered the ring on his hand, looking guilty.

She glared harder. "So really all the time in the world to think of something, right?"

"Mistakes were made, I admit that." He held up his hands in surrender. "You think I don't feel terrible about Nynaeve getting hit?" *Having to rely on Jason to save her?* "I do. Honest. But it all turned out fine, so let's just think of some other plan to keep shadows away from you and get on with it."

"You'll be doing it without us," Lan told him.

"What? She's fine, Lan. It worked out."

He shook his head, handing back the saber. "I can't take that chance. You clearly are the bigger danger here, given your relative inexperience with using all those powers you have."

*ME?*

He went on. "I don't blame you at all, Kid. You were given a command and you followed it. It wasn't your fault it was poorly phrased. If you want more sword training it's fine, you know where to find me. But these shadow things are your problem."

"I see." He took the hilt. *I don't believe this guy!* "Thanks." *For nothing.*

He nodded and turned to Nynaeve. "Let's make a gateway back."

"I see I'm not getting any say in this," she icily noted.

"I thought you were dead, my love. I won't risk that happening again. And you know what it would mean for me."

"I could die any time on a mission, you know that."

"That's different. I can help protect you when you're on missions from Silverstreak. He prepares us for what is to come. These things, I can't really hurt them, not like I need to. Plus they seem to believe it's best to ignore any damage they take and just kill us off one by one. I couldn't strike. I was helpless."

"So we come up with a new plan. Have high powered flashlights or something. Camera flash bulbs, I don't know."

He shook his head. "We're walking away while we're ahead. I cannot see you lying there in your own blood again."

"It wasn't even me."

"It easily could be, the next time."

"Very well!" She threw up her hands. "Sorry, Lysanias. I'll tell the people at the gateway hub to expect a man with a great serpent ring. They'll let you through without charging you."

"Thanks. Sorry... about what happened."

"Probably more traumatic for you. From my perspective I just was suddenly down the road and the battle was over. See you later." She said goodbye to the others and made her own gateway back to her rooms. It closed, leaving the others there standing in the road.

"So now what?" Kid asked.

Lysanias sighed. "That's a good question. Hopefully your attack killed all six, so we're down to about eighty? It's still a lot. I suppose I could put that light spell on your armor and pants, so that if shadows attacked you it would at least hurt them too. But they seemed to ignore it. How hurt are you, anyway?"

"Less than half my HP was taken."

"That's something, I guess. Can you heal yourself?"

“Let me smack one of your clones around to get my element power back up and I’ll use a healing element. That way I won’t have to waste one of my consumables.”

“Good idea, it won’t really... feel... wait a second.”

“I’m waiting, what’s up?”

“I know how we’re going to fight the next group. Let’s head back to the inn to change, we can leave the gateway open to this spot and come back.”

“Change? Change what? What are you talking about?”

“I’ve got an idea,” he told her with a smile as he started gathering the One Power. “I think you’re gonna love it!”

## Chapter 21

Someone has to give me the right to don it. Well, I would fight the Shadow all my days.

When: Moments later

Where: Back at the inn

"I hate this plan," Kid told them, stripping off her armor. The group, minus Jason who was waiting back in the field, were in their room and Lysanias had made a clone.

"What do you mean, this is a great plan!" Lysanias protested.

"Are you *sure* it isn't just a plan to get her out of her clothes?" Rosalina asked, arms crossed and tapping one foot.

"Look, we have to change clothes. One of my clones is going to turn himself into a copy of her. She'll be hiding nearby. The shadows swarm 'her' like they just did and when they're all there, I'll teleport away. The real Kid can hit them with the meteor right before that, and boom, the job is done. What's wrong with the plan?"

"For one thing, it won't work."

"What do you mean it won't work?"

"I mean it flat out will fail to work as you've just described it. I ain't like you. I have to be *in combat* for me element grid to charge up to eight using my item." She lifted a corner of the sarong.

He paused. "Oh," he finally managed. "Right. I forgot about that. But yet you're still giving me your stuff..."

"The plan will need to be modified, yes." She stripped off her top, handing it to him. "You just have to do a little more work. You make me look like Rosalina, you make her look like one of your clones, you make me look like another, then a clone takes my appearance."

"We're going to have to hang photos around our necks to keep that all straight," Rosalina grumbled, eyeing Lysanias who hadn't looked away from Kid. Her current state of undress was, after all, no big deal. "Plus I get to hand over my dress to her, and obviously *someone* isn't gentleman enough to wait in the hallway." She brightened. "Say, why not just beat up a few clones?"

"As amusing as that would be," Kid told her, slipping her underwear off, which was again no big deal, "ain't no good. I would be in combat 'gainst clones. My element grid would reset back to zero before I got a chance to hit the shadows, because I wasn't in combat with them. Plus I would need at least four, I don't know if I can hold back enough to not just outright kill one per swing. So that's one element level per swing, and the attack is level four. I suppose I could put the element at a lower position, the reduction in HP damage don't mean much 'round here. Still, without testing it, it's a risk they would get away."

*It's true, she's much 'stronger' than we are, given she's from an HP based reality. The damage she does is completely out of proportion to anything around here.* "I could probably make four," he mused. "But I guess it doesn't matter if that's not the plan anyway."

"I guess we better get on with it then," Rosalina allowed, actually sounding more pleased than her words would indicate. She reached behind her to unzip her dress. "Don't just stand there, you're stripping too, clone! You get a look at me, it's only fair I get a look at you."

With everyone undressed, Lysanias changed everyone into everyone else, who then got dressed in everyone's clothes.

"My goodness, you're tall," Kid said, slipping her dress over her head. "Say, what happens ta this stuff if Rosalina becomes a wand again?"

"My clothes will probably go with me," she decided. "Just as if the clone went away, because these clothes are technically part of it."

"Just curious."

A moment later everyone looked everyone else over. "That's going to be a problem," Lysanias said, pointing to her sarong. "You can't give that to Rosalina, can you?"

She shook her head. "Not and attack like ya want. I can't actually hit these things, so my element grid won't charge. And they would be pretty confused as to why I was stabbing me own party members in the back."

*They don't even wear clothes, would they even notice that something one person was wearing was now being worn by another?* "I guess we'll just have to hope they don't notice. Anything else?"

Everyone looked everyone up and down and decided it was fine. "Never really had to look up to anyone before," Rosalina complained, walking back and forth in the room. "I feel like my stride should be longer. How do you get anywhere with such short legs?"

"How ya think I feel?" Kid asked. "I'll probably trip over myself with these long legs of yours." She shook one of them at her. "It's only temporary, try not to make me look stupid."

"I was going to caper through the town. Maybe cluck like a chicken? Throw myself into the fountain and pretend to go swimming."

"You better not."

"Let's go. I'm going down to the tree to recharge myself. After that, we can head back here and open a new gateway back to where we were."

"Are you swishing your hips like that on purpose?" Rosalina asked Kid on their way out of the inn. "I walk in a very ladylike manner, you know!"

"I'm just trying to get used to these legs. Wait, swishing your hips ain't ladylike?"

"You know what I mean!"

"What about this?" She exaggerated her movements even more.

"That's even worse!"

Lysanias looked over at the clone, who currently looked like Kid. "You feel the urge to do any swishing?"

"If I do, I'll let you know. Being a girl is odd though."

"You don't get to say that," Rosalina told him/her. "Suddenly being a guy is worse."

True to her word, Nynaeve had alerted the people watching the gateway system, so after heading back to the town they left they visited three more. All turned up empty, but the forth one did not. Of course it was a sprawling town, as large or larger than **Rhydean**, but where that city was still mostly empty, this one was packed full of people.

"We can't do your little trick with the... what was it called?" Lysanias asked.

"The Enterprise."

"Right. There would be a panic! By the way, you did get rid of that one, right? I forgot to look."

"I got rid of it. Like I said it was just a shell filled with helium. It would have floated into space eventually, I guess."

"Be that as it may, better to not have it floating around on the winds. Any ideas for this town?"

"Apart from painting the whole place red?"

"Painting? The town? Red? Why red?"

"It's just a saying, they don't say that where you're from?"

"Say what?"

"Painting the town red!"

"How would you get enough red paint to paint a whole town? I mean we could do it—"

"Never mind! Let me think a minute." The group walked a bit further, getting some strange looks for their strange clothes, but no one bothered them. There were a few double takes as Lysanias was there "three" times but twins exist in Randland ("twins, like mirrors") so people probably just considered them triplets and filed it away to tell someone a neat story later about seeing three of the same person.

*The presence of the gateway network probably means 'outsiders' will soon become a normal sight. Before this you could probably only go as far in a day as you could get on a horse. I don't see any hot air balloons, he looked around in the sky, so that's out too. Wonder if I should help invent them here? I guess if Nynaeve didn't, I won't. Now you can go halfway around the world and back in a day, what will that mean for culture, goods, ideas?*

Jason noticed him looking around and looked up too. "Hey, that's a good idea, I get where you're coming from."

"Wha- what is?" *He can't read my thoughts can he? He never said he could.*

“Put a big ball of light in the sky right in line with the sun. No one would notice it but shadows, who hate both light and me using dreamers powers. They’ll come to investigate the source. We just need a warehouse or something that’s empty at the moment. Or any building with a flat roof for that matter. You see one?” He stood up on his toes looking around.

*Oh, he thought I was looking up at the sun.*

“Those look like seabirds,” Kid told them, pointing. “Are we near water?”

“You’re asking the wrong people,” Jason told her.

“Just a second, I’ll check.” Lysanias offered, looking around. He saw a bench in front of a building and sat down on it. “Prop me up if I start to fall,” he requested, then concentrated. He shot into the air in astral form, looking over the city as he rose. There was a fairly large body of water that way, so he (mentally) nodded to himself and dropped down again. “There’s water all right. What are you thinking?”

“I’m thinking these shadows could probably walk on water as easily as land, no?” Kid asked Jason.

“Sure, they ignore most anything in this world. I honestly don’t know if they could fly on their own if they thought of it. I mean how does something that can pass through normal matter stand on the ground? Answer- it’s impossible, it can’t. So they must be ‘flying’ one step at a time. Thus they can move over any kind of surface without even noticing, as far as I’ve been able to tell. I’ve tried lava, ice, water, acid... holes they’ll go around.”

“Perfect. Let’s head that way, then out from shore. I’m sure between you two you can make a boat or something.”

“Something,” both said, then glared at each other.

They headed that way and went down away from the docks, where kids were playing by the water. *I haven’t done water bending in forever!* Lysanias took a stance, as did his clones, and he waved his arms as you know water bending requires. The water started freezing in a huge area, and he looked over to Jason.

“If you can just make this move I’ll save my- what?”

“What?” Jason asked. There was a huge barge looking thing bobbing gently in the water, and the kids were frozen, mouths open, staring at it. “Nice *ice* though. I’ll take a martini, shaken, not stirred.” Suddenly he had a drink shaker in his hand. He sloshed it and it made a \*chicka chicka\* sound. He grinned a wide grin, holding it up for Lysanias to see.

He growled. “Show off.”

The shaker vanished. “Uh huh, and what was all that waving your arms around and making ice out of nowhere if not showing off?”

He sputtered. “That’s totally different!”

“Is it?”

*Isn’t it?*

“Ladies? Would you like to come aboard?” He gestured and a dock appeared leading out to it. He offered his elbow to Kid, who was really a clone if you forgot. Rosalina, who was really Kid, if you forgot, shoved him/her aside and took Jason’s arm.

“You’re so kind, whatever would we do without you?” she twittered.

A clone glared at them, Kid sticking her tongue out as they walked down the dock, and the clone grabbed Lysanias’ arm and dragged him forward.

“Is that what you’re into?” Jason asked, a plank appearing leading up to the deck.

“Well, whatever, I’m not judging you.”

Lysanias, having not told Jason who was who, just seethed. *Too late to tell him now.*

Out on the water Lysanias prepped “Kid” with several temporary armor wards, as there was no sense wasting proper ones. He didn’t know exactly how much punishment a clone could take before it vanished and he didn’t want “her” to disappear on the first swing and spoil the plan. They had to be clustered around Kid for this to work. *And the great thing is, how can one stay back to observe when we’re out in the open like this? There’s no place for one to hide.*

Jason concentrated on making the sun brighter and soon enough several shadows sped across the water towards them. It was four this time, splitting into eight. Unfortunately, only seven made it to the ship as the eighth one hung back, because they’re not stupid. He

and the dream power he was using to lure them in vanished, presumably to the World of Dreams in case any tried to escape that way. The boat, being just a real boat, remained.

*I just had to feel smug, didn't I? Thought I knew it all. But of course they're not going to act exactly as you expect.* "Here they come," he shouted to sell the illusion. "Get ready to defend yourselves!" He ignited his saber, while Rosalina, Kid, and the clones did the same. *Will they notice that "Rosalina" isn't using magic or that "Kid" is using a light saber and not her dual light daggers?*

He couldn't tell but as before most ignored the others and went straight for Kid, slashing at her and getting close enough she was covered in darkness. Three seemed to be hesitant, as if wondering why Kid hadn't opened with her Photon attack and at least taken one out as they approached. They circled the group cautiously at a distance as if confused. Lysanias couldn't move to strike out at them despite his speed, he didn't want to be separated from the others. He was, after all, their ticket out of there when Kid was ready to make her attack.

Which she did. "Meteor Shower!" she cried, and the familiar points of light appeared in the sky. Lysanias and the one clone that was not under attack grabbed the nearest person and *shifted* back to the ice flow, as he had just made it and could picture it in his mind just fine. He also wanted to watch the fireworks, and as before the magical meteors slammed into the ship, killing his clone, the shadows, and leaving the boat untouched. Lysanias opened himself up to the One Power in hopes of catching a glimpse of the shadow, and there it was, racing away from them across the water. Then it vanished. "It's beyond our reach, I hope Jason is paying attention," he told them. *I guess they don't care about advertising the fact a "scout" exists and tries to get away from every combat. So it didn't need to hide, just watch and get away clean.*

"So that takes out another, what? Seven?" Kid asked. "I suppose that's a decent number so far today."

"There's still a lot more to go," Lysanias told her sadly. "But this does seem to be working. A small group here and there and maybe it'll only be another day or two."

"Let's hope so."

The group waited a moment on the ice for Jason to appear, which he did, out on the ship. He looked around, shading his eyes and was standing with them.

"It got away," he told them simply.

*Got away, or was allowed to get away and report?* "I see. Couldn't handle even one of them, huh?"

"I've told you, they're immune to everything I can do to them now. Besides, once it was near me it simply teleported away. Did you think I would try to follow it? It probably went back to the 'nest' and I would have faced fifty or something. I'm not taking that risk!"

He glared but then shook his head. "What's done is done, I guess. Let's get to the next town, I want to clear out as many as I can today."

"Of course, captain my captain." He made a strange salute, spinning his wrist around in the air and snapping it to his forehead.

"Just come on."

The next town had no shadows but the one after that did, but no body of water to use as a staging ground. They were looking around for a good place to bait the trap when Rosalina spoke up.

"Couldn't you make a flying platform or something?" she asked Jason. "I mean if they can't 'fly' exactly we could attack them from absolute safety."

"It's true, I could make you an anti-gravity lift you could stand on," he admitted. "It would hang around even with me gone, I know how they work. Stand out a bit, given there's no flying things anywhere. Thing is though, maybe they can fly around, and they just don't realize it. If we're up in the air one of them might get the bright idea to try just 'walking' up the air to us, as if there was a ramp, and then the rest of them will know they can do it. I say let's not give them the opportunity to learn they can do that one way or the other."

"Fair enough," she allowed.

*Besides, we do need to be right next to them, lightsaber blades aren't that long.*

They hadn't found a suitable place when Kid froze in the street. "I don't think we have to worry about allowing them to find us," she whispered.

"Why?" asked Jason, not catching her mood at all.

"Because they just did." She pointed and down the street was a large dark smudge, clearly a group of shadows.

"We can't just fight in the middle of the street!" Lysanias protested, whipping his head around looking left and right, hoping to find someplace they could be lured to.

"Better get ready to anyways," Kid announced, igniting her saber. "Did you armor the decoy? I didn't see- huh?"

The shadow group (presumably) turned and booked it the other way down the street.

"Hey, get back here!" Jason called after them.

Several people looked at him and down the street to see what he was shouting at.

"Yes, let's cause a scene," Lysanias growled, whacking him in the arm. "Come on."

"I guess that wouldn't work," he agreed, taking off after Lysanias. "What, did I think they would just come like a dog if I called them? Stupid of me."

By the time the group got to the area they had seen the shadow it was gone, and given how buildings and people were no obstacle, it could be anywhere, even inside a nearby building. They would never know.

"Lost them," Jason said angrily, kicking a stone. "I don't think this plan is going to work anymore. They know we can kill them in a group now so they're not taking any chances."

"So quickly?" asked Kid. "It ain't been an hour!"

"Apparently so."

"We're going to need a new plan then, is what you're saying?" Rosalina asked.

"That's about the size of it. Maybe we could sneak up on them? Take them from surprise?"

"You mean with 'ignore me' wards? That could work," Lysanias agreed.

"I've already told you- how many times? I need to be in combat with them," Kid told them, exasperated. "We can't just sneak up and I use an element. I have to get my turn, and that means they have to see me. If they run from the combat my element power goes back to zero and I can't attack them."

"You're weird," Jason told her.

"You're weird!" she shot back. "And that's just ya face!"

"Please, let's not fight," Lysanias pleaded as Jason was about to retort. "We'll take our victory thus far today, come up with a new plan, and continue. Let's find someplace we can sit down and talk about our next move." *Though I have no idea what that move is going to be.*

"Yeah, all right," she agreed. "But I want my own body back!"

"Wait, what are you talking about?" Jason asked, confused. "Body? Are we doing a body swap episode and no one told me?"

"Just come on." He trudged down the street, deep in thought. *What are we going to do now?*

## Chapter 22

Death is lighter than a feather

When: Two nights later

Where: The inn

As it turned out, it didn't matter what plans the group made because for the rest of that day, the next, and the day after that they found no trace of shadows anywhere in the world. Jason assured them the shadows wouldn't just up and leave, not from a world so rich in Dreamers, but seemed to have pulled back where Kid couldn't go. She was a bit jumpy after the first night, and Lysanias asked her if something was wrong, but she didn't want to talk about it.

The next night he was woken up by her screaming and sitting up in bed.

"Are we under attack?" he asked, trying to wake up and look around the room. He held a hand out and Ragnarok came to him, and he hastily popped the cover off the pommel. Then he realized what a stupid move that was as he was now more blinded by the sudden light than the darkness that had filled the room previously. He put his hand over it, just letting out a few beams of happy sunlight, and looked around. Room seemed normal, Kid was sitting in her bed and not being ripped to shreds (or having her HP reduced in her case) and he felt though the force that they were alone in the room.

"We ain't under attack," Kid told him, shielding her eyes. "It was just a bloody dream, put that thing away. Go back to sleep." She threw herself down, facing away from him.

"Dream?" he asked, worried. He snapped the cover back on, plunging them into darkness but holding two fingers, upon which he balanced a tiny flame. "Wait, is that why you were so out of it yesterday? You were having bad dreams?"

"It's no big deal," she insisted. "I ain't about to complain about dreams, now am I? Running around after Shadows that want to kill me, why wouldn't me dreams be full of the bloody things?"

"Er, Kid, you know the creatures we're fighting here can *enter dreams*, right? You need to tell me when things like this happen!"

"Why would they enter my dreams?" she asked, trying to sound dismissive. "I ain't a Dreamer!"

"Exactly. You're more vulnerable." He swung his legs down and sat up. "Tell me what happened."

She half turned. "Yer serious?"

"Of course!"

"You'll just laugh at me. Think I'm being silly."

He considered. "What part of my behavior the past weeks you've known me suggest I would do that? Kid, we are facing a serious amount of enemies in this world and I still don't know if Jason is using them as some kind of assassin force or not. Now what did you dream about?"

Just a lot of shadows attacking me, that's all. Trying to scare me. Well it ain't going to work!"

*I think it's working already.* "They attacked you? Are you all right?"

"Course I am, it was just a dream. Drop it already!"

"Kid, you're in real danger. Wounds in dreams, especially from creatures like this who basically exist as dreams themselves, can carry over into your waking self." *And I should have guarded her more carefully, but then, I didn't think they could come after her in her own dreams either. Even without being a Dreamer, she would be at her most powerful in her own dreams. They took a big risk. But then, they couldn't know the world she comes from features almost constant combat, if what she's been telling us is true. It's much like Terra's world, you want to get anywhere you have to fight creatures big and small. So her natural inclination, even in her dreams, would be to fight! That's not typical, so they're probably quite frustrated she's fighting back. But wait, is it the same for her? I take a solid hit in a dream and then wake up, I'm bruised in that same spot. She doesn't bruise, she loses HP. So how does that even work for her?*

“How so? They can’t kill me, can they? So leave it.”

“Not there, no, at least I hope that’s the case. But what if they pulled you into the World of Dreams? They could trap you there, hide you away where I couldn’t find you, and we’re told to beware death there, it’s a greater possibility you won’t wake up if you’re killed there. Plus, they don’t have to kill you there. Keep you from getting a good night’s sleep a few nights and you’ll be easier to kill here in the real world.” *They could probably keep you asleep until your body dies, even with HP you still have to eat, after all.*

“Oh.” She sat up and looked at him. “What can we really do about it, though?”

He considered. “I can think of a few things. According to my teacher, anyone can practice being lucid in dreams, it’s not really a supernatural ability. Just a matter of ‘catching yourself’ dreaming, so to speak, and then not waking up so the dream continues. I could give you some pointers, you could try that so you could fight back more effectively. I can ask if there are any spells, i.e. weaves that can protect your sleeping self, after all a place with both magic and Dreamers may have developed measures for one against the other.”

“That’s all fine and good long term, what about the rest of tonight? I just deal with it?”

“I wonder if sleeping in the dimension would help? I could open it up,” he mused. He shook his head. “According to her all dreams happen in the same place, so probably that’s a no. For tonight, with your permission, I can watch over your dreams. I can use the practice anyway.”

She looked away, and Lysanias wondered if the light was better would her cheeks be red? “I’ll be fine, don’t worry about me.”

“Oh, are you worried about what I might see in there?” he teased.

“Na- no,” she sputtered. “It ain’t that!”

“Then what? Let me help you, Kid. You’re helping me here, taking them out so they don’t become immune to things I do to them. Let me help you there.”

“Fine, do what you like,” she told him, flopping down again. She turned away and he put out the light.

*I guess that’s permission, right?*

After he fell asleep again Lysanias stepped from his dream to the World of Dreams, going to the tree he now knew fairly well. That done he looked up, not that his destination was “up” because what did that mean here? But he let himself go in some way and the ground streaked away, being replaced by blackness. All around him, like stars twinkling, were the dreams of every rock, and tree, and creature. *Or at the very least, creature*, he thought to himself as he looked around. The “field” seemed to stretch endlessly, the dreams nearby not exactly shining like stars, but nonetheless each was visible to him as a pale, glowing sphere. As dreams were entered and left the spheres appeared and disappeared, making it seem he was floating unprotected in space among an infinite field of stars. Trying to look “down” at himself proved futile, he seemed to have no body here, or at least couldn’t see it. He could still feel he had limbs, and his face seemed to be there as he touched it, but his arms, along with the rest of him, were totally invisible.

*To work then. I just hope this works, though I’ve done it before in class.*

His next step was to envision Kid, but not just her physical form which like his was somewhat meaningless here. But her personality, how she felt. He of course had an edge there because he knew her through his spiritual senses (such as it was, as she didn’t have energy as he defined it) as well as the force, had felt her emotions, seen her aura, and even felt her magical power and life force through *lifestreaming*. He recalled all of this, trying to *push* it into this space in order to attract her dream sphere, or propel himself towards it, whichever actually happened here. (With no frame of reference it was impossible to say what exactly was happening but he was pretty sure he wasn’t powerful enough to move *every single dream of every single person in every reality that existed* as was the theory about this place but was instead himself moving.) *Dreamers here say they’ve peeked in on dreams and seen fantastic scenes, that just dreaming wouldn’t account for. After all, if you’ve never seen a car or a computer how would you dream of one? But Talina described both of those things to me quite accurately, despite never seeing either in real life. She must have pulled the images from a dream of a person on a reality with those things, no other explanation is possible. Is it?*

*Could a person's unconscious mind 'touch' another version of itself in another world that has those things? Could two dream 'bubbles' overlap, giving each dreamer a taste of the mind it touches? There's just so many questions, this place is not well understood because Dreamers here have limited understanding of the multiverse. They studied it, but really did they even know what questions to ask?*

But those were thoughts for another time, as the field of dreams moved around him one sphere in particular filled his view, so he knew it must be Kid's. *Good, she's dreaming too.* He hesitated, reaching an unseen hand out to touch the dream but not yet making contact. *It's not too dangerous in there, I'll at least be in control of myself even if modifying her dream will be next to impossible. My teachers say not to play around but I can't just sit out here and watch her dream from the outside. If I can't see myself, I'm sure as heck not going to see a shadow slip into the dream to make her night miserable.* He steeled himself and reached the rest of the way forward, touching the dream and getting sucked in.

He had his body back and looked around, orienting himself. *Kid should be nearby.* He was in what appeared to be a wooden building that was currently burning down around him. Smoke and heat filled the air, and he quickly concentrated on separating his dream body's need to breathe with his real body's need. *The dream smoke will make my dream self dream suffocate after all, but as long as I remember this a dream and my real body is breathing just fine out there, I should be fine. Now, where's Kid?*

The room was a strange mix of old and new, being a rickety old wooden house that didn't seem like it would take more than two minutes to burn down. But in the room was what looked like an incomplete robot in the process of being built, computer equipment, and delicate looking tools. He shrugged, wondering what would happen if he brought the robot out with him when he left. *Could I actually get it working? Or would it just be an empty shell, or a jumble of electronics that would never do anything? I mean Jason made a green lantern ring that worked, could I make real, actual robots that I didn't have to maintain? I would just need to understand how they worked, right? If she understood how it worked, could her understanding and my Dreamer power... never mind, worry about that later. Find Kid now.*

As she wasn't in that room he headed deeper into the house and came to the kitchen, where a young looking Kid was scooping something out of a container and shoving it into her mouth.

"Want some?" she offered, apparently not questioning his presence there.

He looked around, and yes, this part of the house was clearly burning down too. He focused, pushing the smoke away so he could talk normally. It didn't really weigh anything so it wasn't hard to manipulate, and the air cleared. "Your house is burning down," he told her, not believing she was sitting there so calmly. "Shouldn't you be leaving?"

"I can't leave, the ice cream will melt. I have to finish it!" She took another big spoonful and chomped down on it. "Sure ya don wan any?" she said around it.

"The ice cream will melt?"

"Uh, yaaa," she drawled, rolling her eyes. "It's fire, it melts ice cream." She gave him an *are you stupid* look as she gestured at the flames with her spoon.

*Guess I can't argue with that logic.* "Perhaps we could eat on the go? How do we get out of here?"

"Gee, maybe the, I don't know, front door? I can show you if you want."

"That would be great."

"Fine." She got up. "We just-" She vanished.

"Kid?"

There was a scream from above him, and Lysanias tore out of the kitchen, looking for some stairs up. He found some and pounded up them, reasserting his belief this was a dream and he didn't have to breathe if he didn't want to. He burst through a door and found young Kid again, now obviously terrified of the fire as she was screaming and hiding under a desk. *That seems a little more reason-* oh. Three shadows stood watching her, but one turned as the door crashed open. Then the other two turned as well. The dream flickered around him somehow and now it wasn't just a ho-hum burning down building he could ignore because it was a dream, it was a real, honest to goodness, actual, *on fire building* and if he didn't get out of there, like right now, he was going to burn down with it. The smoke was stinging his eyes, it

was hard to breathe, or even see, and the fires flickering near him seemed more real somehow, larger and more dangerous than before. He panicked, trying to connect to the fires with bending and put them out, but of course that wasn't going to work.

*Run* his subconscious said to him. *You'll die. In a fire. Get away. Have to get away.*

He turned, about to rush from the room and try to find the front door, but Kid's cries still echoed through the room. *Wait, what about her? Have to save Kid!*

*Run, get away from here. Save yourself.*

*No!* Suddenly the perception of the house changed again, and once again he felt "above" the fire, as though it was no concern of his. The three shadows seemed to snarl and snapped open their hands, showing their long dark claws.

*So out of the frying pan? They were doing something to me?*

The three charged, leaving him only a split second to decide what he was going to do about it. Claws tore into him, making him wince, but he needed them close. He wasn't going to try fighting them here, in Kid's dream where everything external he did would be far harder. Instead he was going to try dragging them to the World of Dreams, where he might at least have a chance. He moved forward, surprising them as usually prey didn't just rush into their arms to be killed, and in their instant of shock he willed himself and the group back to the tree.

The scene changed, the burning building being left behind and the city appearing around him. The shadows seemed to hesitate, as if unsure what was going on, and Lysanias had to choose between trying to heal himself, see himself as faster to simply dodge them and try to stay alive, or step away from them and attack from a distance. He chose the simple expediency of willing himself away from them, up on top of a roof he saw in the distance. One followed. The other two did something strange, as a black "pseudopod" stuck out from both sides of them and two black "disks" appeared above them.

*Oh great, one moves to attack, the other two hang back and charge up something. We taught them well. A whole group could hardly handle... a slightly larger group. How the heck am I supposed to...*

*to...*

*Wait a second. I know that no other shadows but these are around here. How do I know this? I just brought them here. So I can use my full powers on them, and as long as I kill all three, they won't report, and thus, won't become immune to whatever I did to them.*

He smiled.

He raised a hand at the advancing shadow.

"Let there be light," he quoted. He imagined three spinning wheels in the air around the creature, like he would see with magic spells. From these gateways light would explode forth, slamming into the creature and driving it back. He was... mildly underwhelmed when only one wheel appeared and the bolt of light, far thinner than he had hoped, struck forth and was easily dodged by the shadow. *I'm so dead.*

The shadow before him seemed to shrug, and raised a "hand" of his own. It didn't say anything, but a spinning wheel of darkness gathered before it and a beam issued out. He raised his hands, imagining an energy barrier before him which he felt just *barely* held the attack off. The shadow cocked the top of itself where a head might be, as if surprised to have been denied in this way.

Lysanias decided to strengthen this barrier before him, putting more dream power into it, which was smart as the shadow on the ground threw both spinning disks at him.

Both disks glanced off as the shield brightened, though again he felt not at all comfortable how close he felt they had been to smashing through. He then winced as two more disks whizzed by, again glancing off to the side after hitting the barrier. The one in front of him put out a "hand" and pushed downwards, and Lysanias felt the barrier wavering. He put effort into believing it was there, and solid, but as the hand went down so too did the barrier. It winked out as he felt his hold over it break.

*Marvelous. Don't give them time to react. Ugh, how do I use air bending style combat against these things? Wait, can their attacks hurt them?* He glanced up, and the four "destructive disk," as you might call them, were in fact coming around for another pass. He tried to wrest control of one away from the shadow on the ground and slam it into the shadow before him. It dodged that too.

*Wait, it did dodge it! That can only mean it would be harmful to them! I'll try again!*

He did. Again the shadow dodged.

*This is really becoming annoy- yipes!* The first blade narrowly missed him, but the second one did not. It scored on his right arm, and he cried out in frustration again. He was now "bleeding" from the chest, both arms, and left leg. He felt his control over the two dark disks start to waver and clamped his will down on them, not wanting to have to dodge another two of them. *They are mine!* He pulled them close, close enough to deflect a dark chain produced by the one in front of him. It slammed into the disk and was deflected, the razor sharp tip not finding his flesh at that moment. But what found the shadow's body was the second disk, which he willed into it, slamming it across the chest and making it stagger back.

*Finally.*

He then had to whip it back as both other disks headed right for him, which he managed to deflect. The two disks he had hold of vanished.

*Great, finally stopped believing in them, huh? That's what I would have done.*

The shadow before him lunged at him, leaking a black "fluid" from where it had been cut, and he responded with a blade of light from nowhere. The attack by the shadow was pathetic. It shouldn't have hit the broad side of a barn. But somehow it did. Lysanias took another huge gash on the arm, and the blade vanished. Both seemed a bit surprised.

But not as surprised as the shadow was when Lysanias created the same glowing blade in his left hand and slashed across the body of the shadow. It burned away with a scream.

*So they can make noise, interesting.*

The shadow still in control of its disks now hopped up on the roof, the blades swirling around them.

*Great, one down, two to go. And I'm injured. Wait a second.*

Because he can learn from his mistakes he didn't do any gesturing or calling out attacks he simply willed a spear of light from behind the thing to smash into it. It must have sensed something because it tried to dodge, taking the spear in the leg instead of through the chest. *It's better than nothing.*

The shadow on the ground started making new disks, but Lysanias was concentrating on the one before him. He willed the spear to explode, hoping to take the thing's leg off. It didn't quite work, but the explosion knocked it off balance, so it was better than nothing. It seemed to go down, but it was hard to tell because the thing was, as we all recall, a shadow. Lysanias wasted no time, creating another blade (in his left hand) and trying to slash the thing to pieces. He was too used to being augmented though, so while he did slash it, the thing hardly looked injured.

The shadow rose as two freshly made disks rocketed towards him. He tried redirecting them rather than simply blocking them, and managed to get one of them.

The other sunk into his chest and blew out the other side.

## Chapter 23

That, among all things, is the most sacred duty of the Brown—to arm the world with knowledge.

When: Awakening from the attack

Where: The inn

This time it was Lysanias waking Kid up with a cry, as he sat upright in bed and clutched his own chest, happy to be alive but hurt.

“Huh, what?” Kid managed. “Are we under attack?”

“No, it’s fine,” Lysanias grumbled, yanking his shirt off. He looked over at the candle on the nightstand and it flared to life.

“Cricky!” breathed Kid, looking him over. “What did that?”

Looking down at himself Lysanias saw an angry bruise on his chest where the dark blade had pierced him. Craning he tried to look over his shoulder, as it felt there was another matching one on his back. “Me stupidly trying to take three of them at once.” He concentrated, regenerating healthy tissue with alchemy.

“Are you okay?”

“I’ll live.” *This time. What was I thinking, taking three at once? ‘Oh, I can use my full powers because I’ll be sure to kill them!’ What a joke. As usual I should have been more prepared- concentrating on being faster just going into her dream. Wait...* “Did you have a dream about a fire?”

“Maybe. There was something about ice cream?”

He nodded. “Yeah, your house was burning down and you- dream little girl you that is- were concerned about the ice cream melting.”

“That again? It figures.” She stared into the candle with an unreadable expression, and the emotions he felt from her were equally confused.

“Again?”

“Me orphanage burned down some time ago, I guess I still have nightmares about it.”

“You owned an orphanage?”

“What? No, no, I was an orphan!”

“Oh. Sorry to hear that.”

She waved a hand. “It’s fine. Figured out I was clone and that’s why I didn’t actually have a mum or dad. So it’s no big deal.”

“I’ll take your word for it.” *That should about do it. So they’re alive, what did I use against them I won’t be able to now? The spear, right. And I hit them with their own blades, does that count? They just become immune to damage, right, so I could still take control of something they did without issue? Guess we’ll see.*

“You are okay, right? What exactly happened?”

“I found and went into your dream. It was normal at first, no shadows. Then suddenly you weren’t in the kitchen anymore, but upstairs. Three shadows were there trying to use the dream against you I guess, and I got them out of there. You should have gone back to worrying about ice cream.”

“I wasn’t a fighter as a kid,” she admitted. “Killing young me in a dream would be far easier than killing mature me. I reach for my knives first, now, so even in a dream I can defend myself. Young me wouldn’t. But did they cause that dream or just find it and decide to use it?”

“I can’t say. Anyway, managed to take one of them out, they used a technique I was afraid we had showed them. One kept me busy while the other two charged up attacks from a distance. I had gotten hurt trying to get them out of your dream so I was already at a disadvantage, but stupidly stood my ground and tried to kill them.”

“They got ya instead I guess?”

“Yup. Managed to wake up though, so I’m not dead! Yay!”

“You better not die, who else is going to help me find Surge?”

“Your concern for me is touching.” *My body and the marbles would still be here, even if dream me died. Inari would check up on me sooner or later, right?*

“What can I say, I gotta big heart. So what now?”

"Once I finish healing my back I guess try to get some more sleep. I'll watch over your dreams again if I can. But listen, Kid." He got up and hefted the bag of marbles he usually tied to his belt. (As one the style at the time) "If something does happen to me, at the very least keep this near you. Inari should check in eventually, using the white marble in here as a focus. You can tell her what happened and she can help you out of here. I don't think you can activate it, because you can't put spirit energy in it like I can, but she could open a door from her end. Your search can continue even if I die."

"Oh." She seemed a little taken aback by this. "Even after they nearly killed ya, you're willing to watch me dreams and still worried about me finding me boyfriend?"

"Naturally, this is what I do, Kid."

"Thanks." She looked away.

"Don't mention it. Now, can you see how my back is healing? I don't want to miss any."

"Okay."

With his various bruises healed, and those on his arms and legs demanded attention once his body was back to normal, both tried to get some sleep again. When next he realized he was dreaming he headed back to the tree on the off chance the two shadows were still there, but found no trace of them in the World of Dreams. That done he headed to Kid's dreams again, which seemed normal for the moment, and so he alternated between checking on her and going over the fight in his mind to see what he could have done better.

*I let them hit me because I wanted them close but I could have seen myself as too tough to hurt. I suppose making myself better able to dodge would have worked if it meant I was faster. I could have still taken them with me before they could react. I didn't need to be touching them after all. I could have created a decoy like Jason did that one time, then basically hide and- no, they can sense dream energy they would have ignored it and gone for me. Still, just standing there didn't work out. I should have dropped down and attacked those two before they were ready, or run so they didn't have a clear shot. I didn't want them getting away and my speed in the dream isn't any faster than I was before I realized my identity gift. But it might have helped. Always keep moving, that's what Tenzin and my blade kept telling me. That doesn't change because I'm in the dream world instead of the waking one.*

There were no further incidents that night, and both woke up to another blistering hot, desert day. After eating and getting Rosalina out, the group headed back to Tar Valon to see Nynaeve, to see if she could help. Naturally two clones stayed behind, one to attend class for him, the other to teach the martial arts class he was still trading them.

It was the clone that had an interesting idea, and posed it to Talina.

"If we got every Dreamer in the world together for a massive campaign against the shadows, how many would show up?" he asked.

"Including the students here?" she wanted clarified.

"Including them," he agreed.

She thought a moment. "Maybe twenty?"

"Great, that's sure to be-" He blinked. "How many?"

"Twenty."

"That's it? That's all the Dreamers in the world? That can't be right!"

"There's a few things you have to understand," she told him. "This class, one person teaching several? That's a new innovation from recently. Besides that, the Talent for Dreaming seemed to be all but gone anywhere but the waste for thousands of years. We kept the technique alive, we Aiel. But it was always two- a master, and an apprentice. Not a master and six students. Not every Wise One wanted to go looking for people with the Talent, or train those that were found."

"Even with numbers that low? Some disaster could have wiped that knowledge from the earth. It's not like I've seen you assign reading, so obviously none of what you're teaching is written anywhere for someone to rediscover later. Any Dreamers would have to stumble through it or just get killed outright by a nightmare or whatever!"

She shrugged. "Naturally, being a Wise One meant you were special, above others and looked to for your knowledge and wisdom. Why would anyone want to make Dreaming commonplace and give that up? Even in the face of having the Talent lost forever."

"And now?"

"Now the concept of schools was proposed by the Chief of Chiefs. And we had a huge war, and actually did face the prospect of Dreaming, as well as many other Talents being lost in the world. Plus," she indicated the other students, "talents seem to be coming back to the world, as shown by this huge group of dreamers all at once."

*Huge? Also, I wonder if 'Talents' are coming back because of some interference by the shadow avatar that is now gone, or just looking harder because they have to replenish after the war, or some other factor?*

"Someone needed to train them. The world is smaller, gateways allow us to leave the Three-fold land and return in the span of a day. We Aiel have been tasked with keeping the Dragon's Peace, every Wise One will be needed for that task in the future."

"I see. So no all out assault then. Pity."

"I'm actually taking notes about what we learn in class. Your class too," Smerfetea told him.

"Really?"

She nodded excitedly. "I was thinking of writing a book. Not for everyone, I mean, a learning book for those wanting to study these concepts."

"Why not for everyone?" he asked. "If someone were to read a book about Dreamers and what they can do, they might be more inclined to say 'wait a minute, that sounds like dreams I have!' You wouldn't have to go seeking out new people to train, they would come to you."

"I never thought of it that way!"

"An interesting idea," Talina admitted. "How's it coming?"

"Pretty good, I think. I write down what we go over each day so I can go over it at home, plus my own experiences in Dreaming." She blushed. "Not that I think anyone would be interested of course!"

"I think another perspective would be interesting," Perit told her. "I'd love to see what you've written!"

"Would you? Oh, I don't know, letting someone read it..."

"Come on, you have to have someone read it sometime!"

"Yeah," Ahmanda chimed in. "We could all keep some sort of notes and pass them around. We're all learning this together right?"

"I'll- I'll think about it, okay?"

"Of course there's another reason no one wrote anything down about Dreaming," Talina told them.

"What's that?" he asked.

"You know how time consuming it would be to copy books by hand? I've heard rumors there's some new process to make that easier invented by someone or other at one of the Dragon's schools but if true that's still really recent. It just wouldn't be practical when our teaching method had survived thousands of years."

*And you can't just wish books into reality and step into the real world with an armload, you would have to do it the long way.* "I understand. Well, good for you, Smerfetea. Even if I got bad news, at least I got some good news too. If any of you have ideas on how to fight fifty plus shadows with only twenty of us, and they can be anywhere and do anything in the World of Dreams, let me know."

They just looked skeptical.

Meanwhile, the main group met up with Jason at the tree and told him what happened that night, and Lysanias wasn't sure he was all that sincere about being glad he had survived the encounter.

"You want to ward your dreams?" Nynaeva asked, once they got in to see her.

"I want to ward Kid's dreams," he clarified. "I can protect myself. Until she learns some lucid dreaming techniques she can't. I'll coach her there, anyone can learn to be lucid in their own dreams but not overnight. A ward would really help, if there is such a thing."

"I guess it would work on another person," she mused. "There is a weave that will seal your dreams off from outside interference. You can put it on someone as easily as on yourself, and knot it off. I can teach it to you."

"Great!"

With that recorded and learned they checked more cities, even those off the gateway network by having Lysanias "fly" ahead in his projection form, then create gateways for the group. No more shadows were found. About mid-afternoon the two clones went away, having fulfilled their duties teaching, and Lysanias got a far away look in his eye as he sorted through the new memories he had made being in two extra places at once.

"I had a good idea, but there's bad news," he told everyone. "There's only about twenty Dreamers in the world according to Talina. So we're basically on our own, these shadows are our problem and if we do find a huge group of them, there's no way to muster enough forces to take it on."

"Especially if they aren't in this world," Kid agreed. "I can kill unspecified numbers of them with my area effect attacks, but you have to get them here to have me do it."

"We'll think of something..."

Much later they sat eating dinner, each having something conjured up by Jason according to their current desires, and talked about what to do next. (It was better than what his magic could produce.)

"They have clearly retreated to the World of Dreams," Jason told them. "Which is going to be a real problem for us."

"That's an understatement," Lysanias replied dryly. "You're supposedly helpless against them now, I'm obviously not good enough to take more than one at a time, they always attack in groups, and we're supposed to be killing them *here* so they don't adapt to the attack! But they aren't cooperating and being here for us to kill!"

"We could bring her into the World of Dreams, but it's pretty dangerous for her." Jason regarded Kid. "If they got her away from us, she really couldn't defend herself very well."

"I have no idea if my elements would even work in a World of Dreams. They might not!" she cautioned.

*We could always try it beforehand. She could use a harmless element like one of those 'turn' elements she talked about, on one of us. Or could she, without actually attacking us?*

"Good point. Can we just drag them back here one at a time?"

"That would take forever!"

"What else do we have? Even if we did find them, and there were more Dreamers in this world, I don't want any of them dying for your carelessness for allowing them to come here."

"I wouldn't say careless..." he muttered.

"Stupidity then?" asked Rosalina sweetly.

"On second thought, I'll accept careless," he agreed.

"That's big of ya," Kid told him.

*Did you bring them with you hoping to kill me? Is that why you wouldn't say careless?*

"Ain't there another problem?" Kid went on. "Ya don't know where these shadow things hide in the World of Dreams. You try to attract them and ya may get twenty at a time! Go to the wrong place and you could stir up all of 'em!"

"That is a concern," Jason admitted. "But honestly they're better at telling where we are than us telling where they are. I mean they live in the dream, of course they can sense unnatural things like us there. Unless we somehow teleported right on top of them, they would feel us coming long before we felt them. They would rush to attack us, giving us at least a little time before they got in range so we could run if we had to."

"What are you thinking, Rosalina?" Lysanias asked, as she had turned pensive.

"I'm thinking we're all acting like there's some kind of rush, but really there isn't. Time doesn't move the same between realities so Kid leaving tomorrow or a year from now won't mess up her chances to find Surge. Lysanias and Jason are both essentially ageless, so a year of their lives is no big deal. I'm a wand spirit, I don't age. We've driven them off for now, so let's take a breather. You're here to study, so study. Use the time to improve your skills using the clones, and when they venture back here you'll know. As long as they aren't harassing Dreamers, which you can ask them to report, let them hide. You can ask the universe if they'll appear here every day, when you get a yes answer we'll be ready for them."

"Wait them out?" Kid asked. "Wow, you are so not from my world..."

"I agree," Lysanias agreed. "I don't like the idea of just ignoring them until they strike. What if they find every Dreamer, then take them all out in one night? By my count there's more than seventy still left, that's three per Dreamer. Maybe a 'Wise One' could handle three but I couldn't." *Though admittedly I didn't use any advanced techniques like time control either, and I could have. I just don't want to run the risk of them learning about something from me, and putting us all in even greater danger! But they don't seem to know about time control anyway, I learned that from Jason. So in a way they're more helpless, thinking in terms of spears and conventional, hand to hand, combat.*

"Do you have some suggestion then?" he asked.

Lysanias shook his head sadly. "You know, I really don't. I have no idea how we're going to find and destroy so many shadows in any reasonable time, and without any of us getting killed. This seems like an unwinnable situation at the moment."

No one had any refute for that, and silence fell over the group.  
*Some leader I am.*

## Chapter 24

Almost dead yesterday, maybe dead tomorrow, but alive, gloriously alive, today.

When: Two weeks later

Where: Under the great tree

The sun was, as always, blazing overhead as the group made their way to the plaza beneath the great tree. However the shade of the leaves blocked it out quite nicely and the group, having finished their various responsibilities for the day, sat on stone benches. Lysanias was swirling a hand in the air, using bending to cool and create a slight breeze in the local area. After all the training he had been doing, both awake and asleep, plus teaching his own class, it was nice to use a simple ability like air bending.

*At least I know the shadow clone technique now. I wouldn't be in nearly as good a position as I'm in without that. How did I get along without it? Being in three places at once is fantastic.*

"How's the Dreamer class going?" Kid asked. "Any more attacks?"

He nodded. "No injuries though. With so few Dreamers in the world we've found and explained to all of them what's going on. If they're alone we've told them to just run, and it seems to be working."

"But you agree we can't keep this up?" Jason asked. "We need to do something."

"You're sure they won't just follow you?" he asked.

"Not when there are still Dreamers in this world. Oh, some might break off from the main body, I don't know if they can communicate with each other across realities after all. But the bulk of the shadow mass will stay here until every Dreamer is... whatever they do to them."

"What if we took all the Dreamers with us?" Rosalina asked. "Then just sent them back later?"

"You want to reveal the existence of other realities to a bunch of primitives? I mean no offense, but these people don't even have electric lights!" He indicated the town before them, which Lysanias couldn't refute.

*Of course, neither do we at home, but there are far more magic users there than here. That somewhat makes up for it. And with money one could buy replacements; solid sunlight, candles that won't go out... but I suppose we would be primitives according to him as well.*

"He has a point," he admitted. "We can't be sure, not without me staying to ask the universe if all the shadows have left. But with me here, there's still a Dreamer here, so some would likely stick around. And where would we take them? Inari lives in a single bedroom cabin in the woods!" *Though she could probably think more rooms into existence if she wanted. But it would still be a bit of a shock to these people to evacuate them to another world.*

"That ain't even the worst of it," Kid decided. "There might be Dreamers ya don't know about. I guess you could track them all down, even the ones who aren't trained yet. But in leaving could ya be sure ya got them *all*?"

"Probably not," Lysanias admitted.

"What's to stop them coming back?" Rosalina asked, scrunching her face up. "Even if we did kill all that are here now? They know about this place now, right?"

"Same thing that keeps them from just covering the land end to end with shadows right now," Jason told her. "I have no idea. Maybe they don't know what's happening here, only these hundred are connected. So if they don't report back the main 'body' if you will knows something here was powerful enough to destroy that many shadows. If I knew something took out a hundred of me, I'd stay away from it."

"Maybe this was all they could spare?" Kid suggested.

"Don't know how many there are."

"Fat lot of good you've done us, mate."

"Hey, I was *supposed* to be killing Lysanias here, don't forget. But here we all sit, all buddy-buddy. I've done you lots of good."

"You couldn't take him before," Rosalina scoffed. "What makes you think you can now?"

He just scowled.

"The fact remains we should try something else, I'm not comfortable just training here when those shadows could be planning something big," Lysanias told them.

"You have a plan?"

"The plan is the same. With a bit of a twist, I admit. We have to lure them to someplace we control. Someplace we can have Kid standing by in, here in the real world. We drag them, one at a time if we have to, across the boundary and she destroys them with her elements. Meanwhile I keep the rest busy." *Somehow.*

"We? As in you and me? So you're not going to tell the others you can step across from the World of Dreams to the real world?" Jason asked.

"Ah, no. Not if I can help it. I figure I would have to, they would want to know where you kept vanishing to with them. I can't just not tell them."

"You could. What you're saying is, we're doing all this on our own? The two of us?"

"It seems like the only way."

He stroked his chin. "This does seem to have a high probability of you getting killed. And it wouldn't even be my fault." He gave a thumbs up. "Yes, a plan with no drawbacks!"

"Wait a minute," Rosalina broke in angrily. "This is dangerous! You can't do this alone!"

"I'll make some dream clones of myself, or otherwise prepare properly this time, don't worry," he assured her. "I can learn from my mistakes." *Slowly. Clones wouldn't have my powers, so I doubt the shadows would go for it. But if I'm fast enough by manipulating time that there's effectively three of me, that should be fine right?*

She set her mouth and glared at him. "You better."

That night he went to bed early while the rest of the group headed out to the wasteland outside of town. They headed away from the main road out towards a stone marker Jason had set in the real world, which by then should have been reflected in the World of Dreams. Lysanias, once he realized he was dreaming, headed there himself.

"Ah, there you are," Jason said, leaning against the thing. He pushed himself off it as Lysanias approached. "Any last minute changes to the plan?"

Lysanias looked him over. He was back in his armored suit, red and gold, and Lysanias felt a momentary stab of jealousy that he could just make something like that and not have to maintain it. *Though of course I could make myself a full suit of armor, it could even look identical to that, but that's all it would be. It wouldn't allow me to fly or shoot energy blasts or whatever else he can do with it because I don't understand how to make an armor that can do all that. Without turning parts of it into talismans, anyway. I suppose it would only slow me down, I'm a chi-blocker here first and foremost because my other powers don't work, but he still doesn't have to show off.*

"Not that I've thought of. We get them here, you drag as many as you can into the real world where hopefully Kid and the others are waiting." *As you're probably still better at it than I am, even though I would rather you stay here to distract those that are left. For all I know you'll only try to grab one at a time. But this entire plan hinges on getting them out of here for Kid to destroy so even one at a time is better than nothing.* "She gets into 'combat' with them, her elements charge up, she mass kills them, meanwhile you get back here to drag any more there that you can."

"Leaving you totally alone with them for at least several seconds. Have I expressed my delight about this plan?"

"You have. Repeatedly all afternoon."

"Couldn't remember. So let's get to work!"

The two then used their dream powers to create various fantastic structures, impossible shapes in the air, flew around, and generally did as much as they could to send "dream energy" into the area, which Jason had insisted the shadows would follow. "Like a moth to a flame" he had said. Lysanias hoped he was right. *If they're smart enough to realize this is a trap...*

But he shouldn't have worried. A large shadow mass appeared nearby, breaking into smaller and then smaller shadows, so there were ten in all.

"They're not fooling around," Jason noted grimly. "You ready for this?"

Lysanias nodded. He had been maintaining the idea he was both faster of body and slightly outside of time the whole time, so he honestly couldn't be any faster. (That he knew of. He hadn't watched a Dragon Ball Z style high speed combat yet.)

Five of the ten were suddenly before the pair, while the other five raised a hand like appendage and the now familiar black disks appeared above them.

*Oh boy, here we go. Do try to remember all the combat lessons you've had during your time traveling, if you would? There's a good sport.*

As the shadows seemed to slowly move towards him he held his hands out to his sides. His plan, what he and Jason had worked out, was to play to their strengths. Lysanias wasn't that great at manipulating the Dream, but his teacher said he was learning quickly. His real strength, however, was in skills he could use both awake and asleep.

*I keep them busy by attacking and dodging using what I learned in Korra's world. Jason grabs them and takes them away. To that end... Two glowing pairs of claws sprouted from Lysanias' hands, and he took his stance. So now I'm concentrating on keeping myself faster, speeding myself up in time, and now these 'magical' glowing claws. I'll be too distracted to do much more Dream manipulation, but concentrating on the Flame and the Void, dodging as though I was an air bender, and striking as though trying to use chi-blocking I should be able to handle these that get close easily enough. Once those over there start making blades fly around I'm not so sure how it'll go, but we'll get there when it comes to that.*

He centered himself, letting everything but the shadows approaching him, and the coming combat, fade away. He was the shadows, both near and far. He was the ground below, the sky above. He could not be defeated because one cannot defeat oneself. They were not him, but he was them. Finally they were in range, and he whirled between them. He focused on the three furthest from Jason, who he was trusting to "grab" and bring into the real world. He struck out with his claws, letting his skill at chi-blocking take over. He connected with two, surprised to see how slowly they seemed to be moving now, but that shock was minor compared to seeing one of the bobbly forms stumble and fall as he whirled passed.

*Did I just nearly kill one of these things? If so, preparation really is the key to winning battles!*

The other two, clearly wounded and hissing angrily, took a step away from him in surprise.

A shadow reached Jason, who let its claws bounce off his armor. "You can die, if you want, while I'm gone," Jason told him with a smirk, and the both he and the two nearest to him vanished in a burst of light.

*Show off.*

One of the shadows, one who had for the most part dodged his efforts to attack looked about ready to spring, and Lysanias was prepared to whirl away. But instead it stepped in front of the one that was down and seemed to concentrate on it.

*Trying to heal it? Interesting, didn't expect that.*

Lysanias kept moving, catching a glimpse of a dark disk streaking towards him from one of the further away shadows, and he had to decide if he was going to try redirecting it or just dodging. He decided on redirection, flinging an arm out to cause it to hit the one at the end of the line, closest to him.

Jason popped back into existence, looking around with interest. (To see if Lysanias had died in the time he was gone no doubt.) His face fell, Lysanias was still just fine.

Two more disks headed towards Lysanias, and as he had sensed dream power being used to heal the shadow he had almost killed, he redirected them in that direction, hoping to at least keep them from healing more. Both dodged out of the way, they had seen it coming, and he contented himself with simply distracting them.

*If they're focused on me, they won't be expecting the attack by Jason.*

The remaining disks vanished, apparently they were tired of having their attacks used against them, and now Lysanias had to dodge a simple beam of dark energy that struck out from the furthest one from him. Then all the others followed suit, so he twisted and bent as several beams whizzed by him. He even had to dodge one from the ones he had hit, no doubt

it believed his attention was on the ones further away. But air bending is all about *spiral* movements so he could keep all of them in sight as he whirled.

Two more shadows vanished along with Jason, and he would have sworn he saw the remaining one look around, confused.

The shooting stopped, and Lysanias kept moving, expecting that they were up to something. They were too blobby for him to be aware of where they were looking, and he wondered what they were up to. Jason appeared, now having to choose between ferrying only one this trip, or teleporting closer to the ones attacking at range to get two of them. Given his secret wish to not have Lysanias survive this, it's fairly obvious what his next move is. But he had to get a bit closer, giving that shadow time to enact his part of the plan, which was to simply create an area of darkness around the battlefield.

Lysanias willed it away an instant later, then watched as Jason made it vanish. He smiled. The plan was working! He now turned to the others, wondering what they were up to they didn't want him to see. They just seemed to be standing there, so he reached out with his senses again to see if they were up to something tricky.

They were.

He felt dreaming power being redirected above him, and risked a glance up there. *Oh crap.* There seemed to be huge chunk of stone streaking towards him, and he knew getting hit by that would probably ruin his day completely, so he willed himself fairly far away. The enormous boulder was moving far faster and was much larger than he had anticipated however, and even if he had succeeded, which he wasn't certain he did, he got to experience his body being crushed under it. The rock, moving as fast as it was, no doubt did substantial harm to the area as it created a huge crater, which of course the shadows ignored because it was a purely physical thing. But he wasn't thinking about that. Lysanias was thinking about how glad he was to have woken up, once again, from what had nearly killed him there. Every part of him ached, he was glad it was dark because he didn't want to see what his skin looked like, though he could imagine it. Bruises probably covered every inch of him, and he groaned as he concentrated on healing himself.

*Oh no, what's Jason going to find when he goes back there? Is he going to step into solid rock? Jason, don't go back,* he sent, in what he hoped was the right direction. *They got me, I'm awake again!* Of course he couldn't tell if the message had been received, but once he felt healed enough he *shifted* over to the rock where Kid was supposed to be.

"What are ya doing here?" Kid demanded. "Was that all of them? Jason said ten, can he not count or something?"

"Wait, did he go back?" Lysanias demanded.

"Huh? He's right- where did that guy- I guess he did?"

The pair looked around.

"Boo," Jason said, making himself visible again. Lysanias almost roasted him, jumping away from the spot, but saw it was Jason before he could create the fire. "The look on your face!" Jason laughed. "Now that was worth it!"

"You got my message then?" he asked icily, trying to control his breathing. *Maybe just a little fire? Or no, he's still in armor, electricity that's the ticket.*

"What did they do to you, anyway?"

"They must have been working on making a big rock," he explained. "When they stopped shooting at me, they must have been adding mass to it. Then they slammed it down on the whole area."

"You mean to tell me you got squished, like a bug, under a rock?" Jason managed, having burst out laughing again. "Oh, I have to go back in time and see that!"

"Sure, laugh it up fuzz ball," he grumbled. "But remember we only got half of them, and they know the blades don't work very well because I always redirect them towards others. Stop laughing you jerk!"

"I can't. I'm just imagining your face with your eyeballs pushed out like a frog's, squished under a freaking rock that fell from space. I mean, you're a Dreamer, and you get killed by something so simple?"

“Yes, yes, very amusing,” he agreed sourly. “It was enormous and moving at high speed. All five of them must have been concentrating on it.”

“Uh huh. Just keep telling yourself that. Probably was the size of a baseball and just beaned you in the head from the back. But whatever. Hey, we got five, right? Look on the bright side!”

“The bright side? Five is terrible! We haven’t managed to get rid of even half the original hundred, and that was our best plan yet. By the way, how did the plan go on this end?” He turned to Kid.

“I did my part,” she informed them. “Jason appeared with two shadows, I went to attack them, that charged up my elements, and I just used a white area effect attack. Easy.”

“So the five did at least get killed. That’s something,” he breathed in relief. “You think that plan will work again?”

Jason shrugged. “Hard to say. They’ll probably be more cautious now than ever. They feel just the two of us, they might just rain rocks on us from hiding, now that they know you’re weak to it.”

“Weak to it?” he sputtered. “It must have been a kilometer across!”

“Sure it was...”

“It was! You believe me, right Kid?”

*“No reason not ta. But ya did screw up by letting those others get away.” She shook her head. “I’m not getting outa here anytime soon, am I?”*

## Chapter 25

This isn't a metaphor for anything! It's just boots.

When: Maybe two hours later?

Where: Same place

Lysanias wasted no time in going back to his room and going back to sleep.

"We're doing the same thing," he had told the others. "Hopefully we can catch a few more before they 'report in' and get wise to us."

"In my experience it happens pretty quickly," Jason warned him. "I think you're already too late."

"We have to try!" Lysanias stared him down, not giving an inch.

"You're the boss, I guess."

So the two were back in the same place, once again using Dreamer powers to try and attract the shadows. One of the first thing Lysanias did was create a huge transparent dome out of impossibly thick glass, which Jason kept looking at and snickering. It was shot through with a grid of metal to strengthen it, and he wished he had his others powers here to help make it even stronger. *I could put a ward on it, I do have one I use on the 'air grenades' I made to make them tougher. Huh, haven't thought about them in awhile, after all the trouble I went through to make them. I wonder if shadows could become immune to something like that, only light based? Something prepared beforehand not a direct attack against them. But yeah, that ward would keep it from breaking I bet, but this is the best I can do. It allows light in so maybe they won't notice it? What's he looking...* Lysanias, again concentrating on moving faster both physically and temporally glared at Jason who was seemingly staring off into space but really looking at the barrier. "What?"

"Oh nothing, just admiring your work. Say, where's this big rock they used, anyway?"

"You know anything not in the real world tends to fade away if someone isn't concentrating on it. Same reason the ground here isn't all smashed up. I'm telling you I tried to get away, it was huge."

"Huge or huuuuuge?" He spread his arms wide.

"Shut up!"

He just looked smug.

"There," Jason said, pointing. "They're coming. Either they're mighty brave... or mighty stupid."

*Or they have better plans than we do.* Lysanias looked, and yes, once again a large mass of darkness was breaking off into separate pieces, and again he quickly counted ten. *At least they aren't returning in greater number. Will they do the same thing, have half hang back and... wait what are they...* The shadows had screeched to a halt and then simply vanished. All of them.

"That's odd," Jason remarked. "Think we scared them off just being our bad selves?" He posed like a body builder which was rather stupid as his body was totally encased in the armor.

"I don't know," he replied hesitantly. He glanced around nervously, looking around expecting to be attacked at any moment and from any angle. *Could they become invisible? I suppose I could, so if they think about it, they could. None of us have done it and given them the idea though. With my luck they'll put explosives in the ground or something so the dome is useless.* "Stay alert."

"Oh, I was thinking of taking a nap, thanks for the tip captain obvious." Jason delivered this line looking at Lysanias so he didn't see the ten shadows return with someone in tow. But Lysanias did, and his eyes widened. "Oh crap!"

"What?" Jason looked around. "That can't be good."

Standing there in the middle of the ten shadows was Kid, gripping her daggers and looking around wildly.

"Come on, we've got to get her away from them!" Lysanias shouted, willing himself over there. He reached a hand out to grab Kid away from them, but his hand simply passed through a rather cold feeling shadow. "Wha?" He glanced over at Jason who had Kid's right arm in his left hand, and his right hand was palm up, gesturing at her. On his face (which was exposed now as the faceplate was up) was an expression that spoke volumes, and it mainly said "Are you *stupid?*"

Both vanished.

"I don't suppose we could talk this..." Lysanias began, before the shadows did something and blew him totally up.

For the second time that night Lysanias awoke screaming, sitting up in bed lucky to be alive. "Why am I so stupid!?" he shouted at no one in particular as he started healing himself again. "I could have just willed her over to me, rather than stupidly rushing over there like an idiot. Jason did it. He didn't get himself blown up. He still got to play the hero, but without risk to himself. I *deserved* to be blown up just then. I'm a horrible person!"

Moments later the last of his damage went away and he consumed a spirit battery ward to replenish his energies. He was sitting there, stewing and fuming when he finally realized *Aren't I forgetting something?* He scowled at the wall, wondering what it could be, and suddenly popped up off the bed. *Kid! She could still be under attack right now!*

He *shifted* to the place in the waking world she was supposed to be, light saber out and a ball of fire ready to throw at the first shadow he saw, figuring the light would hurt it, even if the fire itself didn't. Silence and sand met his eyes and ears. Actually the silence met his ears and the sand met... things met up, okay? But the thing he didn't see was Kid or Jason. Or shadows, for that matter. *I have the right place, right? Yes, there's the marker. Where is everyone?* He looked around, wondering what to do now. *Ask the universe? But that's ten minutes of waiting around. Not ideal.* He lowered the ball of fire and put the hilt of the saber back in the shield. Taking hold of *saidar* he scanned the horizon, looking for any sign but of course it was rather close to sundown because he was supposed to be asleep during all this. *The city is that way, could they have gone there? If they did, how would I found them? If only I had some kind of device I could use to just call them. Sending thoughts to them I need to know their direction. I don't know any magic that could help, and I don't want to call on Skyebourne magic unless absolutely necessary. This is insane, what am I going to do? We should have talked about a rally point but who would have thought we would get separated? At some point I'm going to have to construct a magical equivalent to a cell phone for where there isn't any cell phones. Or just give her some wards to carry on her person I'm so **stupid!***

After a moment more he finally decided to do something, even if that something was just heading back to the inn to wait. He already had hold of the One Power so he made a gateway back, stepping into the room silently. Deciding to ask the universe after all he settled in and cast his question out into the night.

*How can I most easily find Kid?*

There was no answer.

*And really, why would there be? Universe, where can I go to meet Kid?*

Still no answer.

Grinding his teeth and wondering how could he practice this stupid skill he was about to put magic on himself to maybe actually get somewhere when the door banged open and he was knocked over by something warm and talking a mile a minute.

"You jerk, you had me scared half to death!" Kid told him, crushing him in a hug. "I thought for sure you were dead for sure! These shadow things grabbed me and then I was

someplace else that looked like the place I was before but that wasn't the place at all because you and Jason were there and then grabbed he and then-

"Died?" he wheezed. He didn't have to breathe but he had to take in air to talk. "I just woke up, it's hard to kill my dream self and me at the same time. You know that, how many times have I woken up here bruised? But that's not important- What happened to you?"

"Jason and I had to fight off ten shadows, that's what happened," she replied angrily, thrusting him away from her. She still gripped his shoulders, and she looked into his face. "Are you all right?"

"They killed me again, somehow, but I healed myself. I came after you and you were gone. I was trying to get an answer to where you were out of the universe but it wasn't cooperating." *Or I still just can't hear it clearly.* "Where did you go?"

"All over," she spat. "Those shadows kept trying to drag me into the World of Dreams, probably to more easily finish me off. Jason just ran, trying to keep ahead of them. We finally lost them, then I made my way back here, that's what took the most time."

*Didn't want to show Jason where we were staying, in case he doesn't know yet. Smart. Smarter than me, probably.* "I'm glad you're okay."

"Yeah, well, I almost wasn't. What were ya thinking, going over there?"

"I was thinking about saving you!"

"Never occurred to you to just wish me over to where you were?"

He colored. "No, it didn't, quite frankly."

She snorted, dropping her hands. "Fine. Don't scare me like that."

"I'll try, but this changes things. They knew who we were and what we were about to try. So they turned it around and attacked you, instead. I don't know how we're going to beat any more of them at this point. You didn't happen to kill any of them, did you?"

She shook her head. "Jason just ran."

"I see." *Again he either is telling the truth and he can't really hurt them anymore, or he didn't want her to see him hurt them and expose the lie.* "They're obviously targeting you, both in dreams and here, let's hope they don't know where we are at night any more than Jason does."

"Ya could ask, right? Rather than uselessly asking about me?"

"If we'll be attacked here in the night? Yes, that's a great idea!"

"You do that. I'm gonna get changed for bed, unless you think there's some other crazy scheme you want to try tonight?"

"No," he sighed, resolved. "Get some sleep. Sorry. At least we took out a few tonight."

"I took out a few."

"That's what I said."

She stuck her tongue out.

*Universe, will we be attacked tonight?*

*No*

*Ah, a clear answer. Thanks. Finally.*

He too went to bed, mind spinning to try and come up with some new plan, but nothing came to him before sleep claimed him.

The next morning he had no more ideas or answers and dutifully created three clones as usual to divide the work up he had to do. His original self went to Dreamer class, another went to continue lessons in chi-blocking, while a third went to practice the meditation and battle movement skills as clearly he still needed practice. *And maybe thinking about situations where instead of rushing in and getting yourself killed, other things you can do to keep people around you safe.* Kid said she was staying at the inn, despite having her dreams warded she still hadn't slept very well, dreaming of being torn apart by shadows over and over.

"You want me to stay here?" the clone asked. "I hate to leave you alone."

“They won’t attack during the day. Besides, having you just sitting there staring at me in bed? Kinda creepy don’t ya think? Just get out of here, I’ll be fine.”

“Very well,” the clone agreed, and the three shared a look. Heading to their separate tasks the day went on.

As it did, the clone out in the practice area grew more and more concerned about Kid, a bad feeling he couldn’t shake taking hold in him. Finally he decided to just put his mind at ease and create a quick gateway back, pop his head through, and show himself she was fine. He gathered the One Power and wove a gateway, watching the razor edge of the vertical slash appear and seem to rotate into position. Stepping through he looking around, letting the gateway vanish but holding onto the One Power. With his physical senses enhanced he immediately saw her bed was empty, and with his spiritual senses realized there was no one nearby. Starting to panic a little now he headed for the hallway and then down to the ground floor.

“Can I help you sir?” asked the man at the front desk as the clone walked over to him.

“Yes, did my companion, a young lady with yellow hair, a long ponytail and possibly wearing a shimmering piece of cloth across her legs, leave here today?”

“Why yes, she left the inn some time ago. Is something wrong?”

“I hope not!” He tore outside, looking left and right and wondering where she could have gone. *Would she have gone far? I feel like I need to find her soon, something is wrong. Is it the force, is it telling me this? But how do I find her? Wait.* He closed his eyes a second. *I’ve never tried using it like this before, but I can see into the past of an object or place. I want to look into the past of this place, to see which way Kid went.*

He cracked his eyes open again. *And I want it to work, so* “Let my skill be augmented!” He closed his eyes again, cleared his mind, and focused on Kid leaving the building. He opened his eyes and watched as ghostly figures moved past him at high speed. He felt a small sense of accomplishment for having made this work, and kept a careful watch out for Kid. When he spotted her he took off in that direction, trailing her ghostly form and keeping part of his attention on the present so he didn’t smash into anyone or anything that was now in the path she had taken. He got some strange looks, it wasn’t easy separating the past and the present while dragged down by being a clone and maintaining magic, but he did his best and followed her meandering path through the city. She had stopped to eat, but he didn’t care to wait so his vision flashed forward and he left again, following her and getting (he hoped) closer and closer to real time. His “bad feeling” got more insistent the further he went, but he didn’t dare move any faster because she had apparently wanted to go shopping. They were now in the “market district” further confusing his vision but he kept her in sight as best he could. Suddenly he saw a large group of people gathered around what seemed to be some kind of street theater performance but shaking his head and realizing his vision had caught up, he pushed through the crowd to find Kid fighting for her life against a handful of shadows. She was wildly waving her sunlight daggers around, clearly aware she was under attack but uncoordinated and not using elements.

*Because she doesn’t want to show them off to the people here? Wait, she wouldn’t have a ward to let her see supernatural things!*

“Lysanias! Help!” she called to him, as he pushed his way through. He had a copy of the sword and his other equipment so he easily knocked to the ground those at the inner edge of the circle, causing those around him to give him dark looks and try to grab him. He didn’t have time for that and just drew down a huge amount of air, then pushed it outward throwing them all back.

“He can channel!” someone reasoned, as without apparent effort half the circle was malformed as they got bowled over.

“That wasn’t channeling,” insisted a woman who was standing across from him on the other side. “But he does seem to be holding Saidar which is clearly impossible!”

*Note to self, shapeshift into a female form if you are going to be around people and hold Saidar at the same time.*

"Are you all right?" he hastily asked, drawing the light saber from the shield and watching it light up. The shadows that were glommed onto Kid drew back, hissing at the sudden light.

"No, my HP is really low. Get us out of here!" She reached a hand out to him after sticking her dagger back in the sheath.

*Great, and now I get to show these people Teleportation, because the shadows could just follow me through a gateway and I don't want to lop anyone's limbs off or cut them in half by accident opening one here. If I even can, Nynaeve said something about having to know an area well before you can open a gateway and I've never tested that. I've always opened them from places I've spent some time in.* "You got it!" She grasped his hand, the one attached to the shield obviously, and he *shifted* back to the hotel room.

"Did any follow?" she asked, grabbing the dagger back out again. Both scanned the room.

"I don't think so," Lysanias decided. "I don't see anything, and nothing's attacking you at the moment."

"I know that much, my HP isn't going down any more. Man, do I take a consumable to get it back up or just risk a nap?"

"I'm sure Inari can get you more, or make you more, once we leave here," he told her. "I wouldn't worry unless you're critically low on them."

"Even if I had ninety nine, that would be low because I don't have any way to replenish them," she countered, but seemed to do something relating to elements anyway that he didn't catch. She sighed. "That's better. Hey, thanks for saving me back there, how'd'a know I was in trouble like that, anyway?"

"Just a feeling," he admitted. "I'm surprised the other two mes didn't show up too. Though they may be busy, I was doing meditation exercises at the time with the flame and the void. Maybe that helped? What happened?"

"I went for a walk, had something to eat, then went to the market. Suddenly my HP started dropping so I figured I was under attack but couldn't tell from where. I got my daggers out and was just swinging randomly but that attracted a crowd and suddenly I couldn't get anywhere because those idiots just surrounded me. I mean I could have knocked them over I guess, I am stronger than anyone here..."

"They would have just followed, I think. I'm just glad you have HP and not, er, whatever I have. You must be hard to take down, that allowed me time to find you."

"Me too. So, what, shadows are targeting me now? I'm no Dreamer!"

"But they know you can hurt them. They were probably surprised you weren't as effective this time, maybe they'll think taking you by surprise limits your effectiveness?"

"So they'll try again?" she asked nervously.

"Maybe. I can ask."

"That's just great! I can't sleep without having me dreams warded, and now I can't walk down the bloody street because shadows might jump out at me."

"I'll give you a supply of wards, both to call me in an emergency and to see unseen things. They won't know to target a ward so it should be fine."

"That's all well and good, but what am I supposed to do?" she pleaded. "You gonna watch me twenty four hours of the day?"

*"I don't know, Kid. I still haven't had any luck coming up with a new plan, but clearly we have to do something quickly. They're really getting bold, simply using their claws, which I guess are solid enough even without Dreamers around, to wear you down. This situation is getting worse and worse, and I really have no idea what to do next."*

## Chapter 26

If wishes were horses; beggars would ride.

When: The next day

Where: the inn

The next night passed uneventfully, at least Lysanias and the others didn't see anything out of the ordinary. This made him more uneasy than ever as he got ready for the day and went down to breakfast. He had stuck close to the inn, having warded Kid's dreams, but didn't trust that the shadows couldn't track her down physically and just murder her in her sleep. Jason had been fine taking a night off, he certainly wasn't going to put himself in danger without the others around, so after Lysanias had told him they weren't "hunting" that night he just nodded and vanished.

*Hopefully he isn't going to go out stirring up trouble,* he had thought to himself.

Coming down the stairs Lysanias picked up a strange feeling from the common room, more heightened emotions than he was used to feeling at this time of day or place, and with a quizzical expression headed that way. There were more than double the normal amount of people there, all with spears nearby and looking ready to veil if someone sneezed. (He had learned the people here covered their faces when they went into battle)

"Outsiders," someone said, a man sitting at a table who was pointing at the two of them. Every eye turned to stare at them, and Lysanias swallowed. *I mean I could probably take them all... Right?*

"You leave this place last night?" he demanded, standing up and pushing his chair back.

*My physical body didn't, is that what he means?*

"We didn't," Kid insisted, resting a hand on a dagger. "What's this about?"

The man's eyes flicked to it, and back to Lysanias. He wasn't wearing his armor and his sword was in his *pocket* so he wasn't visibly armed. At least with anything these people considered a threat.

"You haven't heard?"

"We just got up," Kid agreed, and Lysanias figured he would let her talk, as she seemed to be fine with that. He started envisioning the flame in his mind, and Saidar beckoned to him like an invisible glow. *No, there's women here, if I suddenly started glowing like a woman embracing the One Power that would really freak them out. I'd really like to have hold of it- no, that's the addictive nature of it talking.*

"Did you?" the man asked.

"Yes," she answered simply.

He looked between them again. "Fine. But we decide you had something to do with it..." He trailed off ominously and sat down. Several people went back to their conversations, but others clearly wanted to see what they would do next.

"Do with what?" she asked.

"Murders," he answered simply. "Several of them, last night. Like some kind of wild animal broke into places and just slashed people up. But then it couldn't have been animals, not with that funny writing on the walls."

*Funny writing?*

The two looked at each other.

"You don't think..." Kid's face said to Lysanias, her eyes wide.

"Yes I do..." his face said back to her.

She started to turn, but Lysanias grabbed her arm. *We have nothing to do with it, remember? He sent into her brain. We're going to sit down, eat breakfast, listen to rumors, and when attention is not on us we'll slip wards on and head out.*

Her mouth compressed into a line but she nodded and Lysanias relaxed his grip.

"What do you think caused it?" she asked.

The man shook his head. "Some kind of dark creature, maybe? Just because the Dark One was sealed away doesn't mean we can relax our guard against His followers. I think we forgot that, and look what happened."

There was a grumbling assent to this statement and more people turned back to their tables.

The two ate in silence at the bar, the only place open as they didn't want to sit at a table with a bunch of strangers. Especially strangers with spears, itchy hands, and looking to do something, anything, that might keep their town safe. With their meal finished Lysanias pulled two *ignore me* wards from nowhere and slapped them on, allowing them to be ignored on the way out. (Of course he put down gold for the meal, it wouldn't be ignored once they left.) He then went around the back of the place and had Kid hold up his body while he projected his senses outwards to see if he could tell where the trouble had been. He didn't have to look too hard, there was a crowd of people clustered around several homes in the area so he went back and "woke up" again. "This way," he told her. "Let's go see what the situation is."

The two walked in silence to the nearest place it seemed something had happened last night, then easily slipped past everyone and inside. There had been a struggle, things were knocked over all right, making him wonder if it had been Jason after all. *Still, even if a person can't see a shadow, like when Kid was attacked they can tell they're being wounded. They might try to fight back. Jason could just turn a person to stone or any number of other things, he wouldn't have to physically fight someone.* As they walked through the place they saw blood splashed around, and Kid pointed to a wall.

"There," she said, looking grim. "What's it say?"

"Killing continues," he read disgustedly. "Great, so there's going to be more killings tonight? I'm just one person I can't defend a whole town. Especially when there's only two people in town that can see these things without wards."

"You don't think it was Jason either?"

He shook his head. "Doesn't seem his style. Sure he wants *me* dead, according to him, but at least he is helping destroy the shadows he admits probably followed him here. He has, as far as I can tell, held to our truce. After this long I think I know him well enough to say he doesn't seem the type to revel in killing someone like this."

"Let's see if the other places have similar messages."

"Right."

The two spent the morning walking around town, and determined several places had been attacked in the night. Three of them had messages scrawled on the walls in the victim's blood, which added up to "kill Kid" "or else" "killing continues."

"They're really afraid of you," Lysanias reasoned, sitting on a bench in the shade after seeing the third part of the message. *But why not put the whole message in one place? Or repeat it in every place? Why make us piece it together like that?*

"As well they should be," she replied, but without her usual grin. "This is realla messed up. They just looking for me at random then? Slashing up people to try an get to me?"

"Seems to be working."

"Yeah."

They sat in silence a moment.

"Any ideas what to do next?" she asked him.

"Only one thing I can do. Ask the universe where the next attack will happen, then watch that place overnight. Try to stay ahead of them and make them realize this plan won't work." *We need to destroy them anyway, if we can get them to come to us, so much the better.*

She nodded. "I can hang out with various wards on, attack anything that comes in. That could work."

"It would show them we can predict the future to an extent." His eyes narrowed. "We would have to kill them as quickly as possible."

"Got no problem with that. Why though?"

"If one escapes it could go back in time, tell itself to attack someplace else, and bypass us completely."

“Nah, we would have been told that in the first place and just be at the other place they attacked!”

“But then we wouldn’t have been in the first place so there would be no reason to go back in time and-”

Both stared at the other, a look of horror creeping across their faces.

“Where does it stop?” Kid asked. “The implications of this...”

“Exactly. But we have to try something. Let me ask.”

“Let’s head to the tree, that’s where we’re supposed to meet Jason,” Kid countered.

“He’ll be wondering where we are, and I want to see his reaction to the news of the attacks.”

*We don’t want him wandering around looking for us. He might ask at the actual inn we stay at if we’ve been seen there. Huh, maybe we should have been moving around but this area only has the one...* He blinked, realizing something that perhaps should have been obvious to him from the start. *Oh he knows where we are, doesn’t he? He’s not totally stupid. I am. I am the totally stupid one in this situation.* “Good point, let’s go.”

The pair met a dour looking Jason, and it didn’t seem to be an act as Lysanias felt frustration and helplessness from him as they approached. He greeted them sadly and asked if they had heard the news.

“It’s all anyone’s talking about,” Kid told him. “We saw. It seems the shadows were busy last night.”

“So it seems,” he agreed. “Too bad I can’t effectively fight them, I’d go back in time and try to save as many as I could. Have *you* come up with any brilliant plans?”

“We do what we must, because we can,” Lysanias told them.

He nodded. “For the good of all of us. Except the ones who are dead.”

“Too soon,” Kid told him with a glare.

But his frustration only grew as an hour ticked by with no real answers. “It’s almost as if the universe is saying there won’t be any attacks tonight,” he finally decided. “I enhanced myself with magic, but I still get no answers. I’m either asking the wrong questions, the universe can’t track them because they’re in the world of dreams, or something else is going on.” He looked at Jason out of the corners of his eyes. *He can’t block my ability with his, can he? Nah, they’re too different. But if time starts getting confused in the future it would mess with my ability to see it in the past, or what I am experiencing as the present.*

“So we got nothing?” Kid asked.

“At the moment, I’m afraid so,” he replied. “I’ll try again in a bit, maybe from another angle or something.”

“Stirring up trouble just once?” Jason asked no one in particular, looking off into the distance. “What are you guys up to now?”

As the sun set that day it seemed more people were out than he had ever seen. Lamps were lit everywhere, spears were close at hand, and those that didn’t look like Aiel were treated to hard glances wherever they went. Of course our fearless group didn’t have to put up with any of that sort of nonsense, two of the three were still wearing wards and Jason could make himself invisible if he wanted. They had no better answers now than hours before, nor had Lysanias had classes to take his mind off of things. (Everything had been canceled as every nook and cranny that could hide creatures capable of doing this was searched. They could be forgiven for not knowing they could walk *through* the creature that did it and be none the wiser.) Watches were set up, patrols were put out, and everyone was on edge. Those that could channel walked around holding the One Power but on everyone’s mind was how so many attacks could be carried out without raising a cry. What could have slipped into the city, caused so much death, and gotten out again without anyone seeing anything?

Of course, our group knew but couldn’t exactly tell anyone for fear of being labeled part of the problem. If the Wise Ones suspected him Lysanias didn’t know, he had been turned away when he went to see his teacher, who was sequestered with them.

Darkness fell, the stars came out, and Jason suggested Lysanias go get some sleep.

“Meet me at the tree,” he told him. “We’ll continue our patrol.”

“What about me?” Kid asked. “Ya ain’t just gonna leave helpless old me unguarded are ya?”

“Actually, how about you sleep in a ward tonight?” he suggested. “I would suggest my personal dimension, but even with my magic accelerated it’s still a hassle to get you out of there. If we need you, I can get you out in a hurry.”

“You want to just carry me around?”

“Good a plan as any. It won’t be exactly comfortable but you’ll be safer.”

She considered it a moment. “I guess it’s fine.”

“Of course, this leaves *you* vulnerable,” Jason told him. “You can’t put yourself in a ward, right? You’ll be in that room all alone, easy pickings if some shadows find you.”

“Crud!” he spat, pointing a finger at Jason. “You’re right.”

Jason just looked smug, crossing his arms over his chest.

He sighed. “I’ll just have to protect the room with *ignore me* wards and hope they don’t blow the whole inn up. Besides, if they knew where we were I think they would have attacked by now.”

“Keep telling yourself that.”

*Does he know something he’s not telling me? Aarg, I hate this!* “Whatever. Stay here, I’ll meet you at the tree once I fall asleep.”

“Bye for now!” He waved, and kept waving as they headed off.

“Er, how do we know that isn’t an illusion,” Kid asked, jerking her head back towards the waving Jason, “and he’s not invisible behind us?”

“We technically don’t,” he begrudgingly allowed. “But I have to hope he can’t evade all my senses at once. Even if he doesn’t feel ‘alive’ he does have spirit energy inside his dream body, and he can’t hide his presence from the force, or the vibration of his footsteps that I could pick up with earth bending. Not all at once. I hope.”

“You hope.”

“If he wanted to know where we were staying, he’s has plenty of time to find out up until now. Remember, there is only the one inn in this town. It’s not really a tourist destination it was their holy city until recently. There’s no need for any more than one inn around here. Especially with the gateway network they have, why stay in this hot, dusty part of the world when you can just head back to your own place every night?”

She had an *oh yeah you’re right* look on her face and nodded. “I just wish something could watch over you. I mean I could do it, but not all night even I have to sleep sometime. And all the ‘helpers’ you have vanish if you go unconscious so that’s no good.”

*Oh right, Rosalina. I hope she won’t be too mad I didn’t get her out today. But there’s nothing she can do at this point but feel bad for the people that were killed. She didn’t need to see it. I’ll check in with her before bed, in case she’s thought of something I’ve overlooked. “I need some kind of artificial life form,” like a remnant back home, “to watch over me. Too bad I still need to sleep. I’d trade not needing to eat for not needing to sleep, food is easy to come by with magic.”*

“Just be careful, okay?”

“I’ll ward the room, don’t worry. I didn’t forget.”

“Better to ask if you’ll die in your sleep.”

“Not a bad idea...”

So with Kid safely snug in a ward and the room covered with *ignore me* wards and a “yes” answer gained to “will I awaken safely?” Lysanias lay down and tried to get to sleep. He had checked in with his inner “companions” who had nothing to offer him, but of course Rosalina told him to be careful that night. Like he wouldn’t be. His mind kept going back to the writing on the walls, had the shadows really done that? He had tried and tried to communicate with them, but now they were sending him a clear message. Either Kid would die, or they would continue their rampage around the city. He couldn’t be everywhere, and once asleep they could tell where we was far more easily and just avoid him.

*They could probably wipe out an entire city if they wanted to. No one can see them, they can tear apart whoever they want and even landing a blow by sheer chance, it would just pass right through. They’ve killed me a few times now but it hasn’t stuck, and there’s still so*

*many of them in this reality. They just stay away from me and I'll never be able to get them all. Stalemate. There must be something I can do to tip the odds in my favor, but I can't think of it.*

He opened his eyes near the tree, as that's where we wanted to be when he 'woke' near the tree, then stepped into the real world to find Jason waiting for him.

"Welcome back," Jason greeted him. "Didn't lose Kid's ward, did you?"

"No, it's right here," he answered, patting his pocket. He had gone back to his room and picked it up, hoping the universe was right and he would wake up again as he looked down at his helplessly sleeping body.

*But of course, if I couldn't project my dream self like this, I would still be as vulnerable. Of course, if I couldn't project my dream body like this, I would never have needed to come here...*

"Good. Wouldn't want anything to happen to her."

Lysanias glared at him. "Are you implying something?"

"What? No. Why would you say that?" He looked hurt. "I meant what I said."

"Hummm..."

"Sure, I want *you* dead, but she's not a wanderer. Yet. She just wants to find her boyfriend. Or at least a version of him. Nothing wrong with that. She doesn't start messing with my master's plans, I have no problem with her."

"So you say. Come on." He took off down the street, mentally changing the way he thought of himself to look more like the people here. His clothes changed to include the veil, and he imagined several spears into his hand. *I'm effectively invisible now, they won't look at me twice but I don't have to worry about them not seeing me and bumping into me. I wonder if I could replicate the ignore me ward using dream powers somehow...*

The question went unanswered as the pair walked the streets.

"What exactly are we looking for?" Jason finally asked him.

"Wha- what are you talking about? You're the one with the more practiced dream senses. Can't you tell where shadows are? Why do you think we're out here?" *Are you stupid?* he didn't say.

"If they use dream powers, sure. But they can't do that unless we're around to leech off of. I can't just point to them."

He stopped dead in the road. "I thought you could tell where they are! They can tell where we are!"

"When we use powers, sure. Maybe other times, but that's because we're using a certain amount of dream power just to be here in the real world while dreaming. They're creatures of the dream, they don't give off the same vibe, if you catch my drift."

He threw up his hands. "This is just great, we're even worse off than I had thought." *And once again, I'm the one who is stupid. Great, just great.*

"I wondered why we were just wandering around," Jason admitted, rubbing his chin. "You were actually counting on me?"

"Good to know I can't," he grumbled. "So now what?"

He shrugged. "Try and draw them to us, like we did before?"

"I don't want to fight tons of them, I just want to keep people here from being killed. I can't imagine more than one per house being sent, we can handle that many the problem is finding them." *We draw them in and we'll be fighting any and all in the area, that's not what I want.*

"Can't help you there. They used claws. If we were close enough they could use our powers, we would know it anyway without having to feel them doing it."

He resisted the urge to scream. Instead he jerked around and stiffly headed down the street again.

Over the next two hours the pair used minimal dream powers to cover the city. They could enhance themselves with little risk of being detected, so they could jump up to various roofs and get better views, not that it helped. They were standing on a roof looking over the

city when suddenly Lysanias felt a chill, and dream powers were being used behind him. Jason was to his left and felt it too, whirling around.

“Oh no,” he said, “not one of you.”

*Lysanias turned, and a strange sight met his eyes. What in the world...*

## Chapter 27

Lies never make things easier in the long run. Unless they're to exactly the right person – usually a woman – at exactly at the right time.

When: A second later

Where: A roof somewhere

The sight that met Lysanias' eyes was enough to chill him, not even taking into account the almost supernatural chill the figure that was standing there generated in the air around them. Flanked by four shadows was a huge, serpentine creature, more fully defined than their shadowy kin but still as dark as midnight. If Lysanias didn't know better, he would have said it was a Loong from back home, that's what it resembled. Long body, powerful jaws, low to the ground on stubby legs. It looked at him as if seeking something deep within.

"I'll provide you what support I can," Jason told him, taking a step back. "That thing is as immune to my powers as the shadows are."

He turned his head slightly, holding his palms up to encompass the group. "I can't fight all this! I can barely take a couple of these things!"

"So activate your trap card!"

He got a look of confusion on his face, and Jason was pointing to his back pocket.

*Oh, right.*

Lysanias decided to try the other idea he had after fighting and getting killed, namely not making himself faster but *tougher*. He concentrated on knowing he was harder to hurt, as though his skin was the scales of a dragon, and the shadow's attention moved to him with his use of dreaming powers. At least, he felt that it did, as they made no visible move and it was impossible to really tell if they even had eyes, much less what those eyes were focusing on.

*So do I try to distract them and then get Kid out, or just- wait, aren't you making the same mistakes again? Yes, yes you are.* Lysanias knew that Kid was in a ward, now stored in his back pocket. Instead of stupidly (and tediously) getting that out and then willing her to be released, he simply willed it to be cut in half. As destroying a ward of this type released the contents, she was there on the ground next to him. Suddenly the shadow to Lysanias' left vanished, leaving only three and the serpent creature.

"They're up to something," Jason warned, tossing a device of some kind onto the roof. It lit up and surrounded them with an energy barrier of some kind. "Watch out for falling rocks."

*Very funny.*

The barrier was timely as the creature reared up and opened its mouth, spewing a black "flame" down on the group. The barrier only lasted a moment before it was overloaded, spilling black flame down on the surprised dreamers. Jason and Lysanias were able to avoid it but Kid, still asleep, was not so fortunate. Not that it mattered, given how much damage this reality would have to do to her to make her even a tiny bit concerned. But it did have the side effect of waking her up, and she blinked in surprise.

"Huh?" she managed.

All three of the other shadows vanished.

*My sentiments exactly. Huh?*

From Kid's point of view the serpent creature that was left sprang forward atop her, passing Lysanias who was no longer in front of her, pinning her down.

"Hey, what's a big idea?" she screamed, trying to squirm away. The others simply glanced down at her, wondering what she was talking about. "I can't break free of it!" she called to them. "Help me!"

"Er..." Lysanias managed, looking back at the creature who was still just (from his perspective) just standing there. "Sure?" He willed two copies of his light saber into existence, and both glowing blades sprang to life.

"What?" Jason gasped. "Below us!" he warned, as the outer walls of the building below them exploded outwards in a shower of stone. The roof cracked and buckled, as a cloud of dust went up around the place, and both men stumbled as they started to fall through the disintegrating stone.

*They're trying to bury us alive!*

The creature didn't seem to care as the floor beneath it crumbled, and in fact Lysanias could swear they were being pulled down faster than he would have expected, so maybe it was influencing gravity in the area? He tossed the saber in his one hand, grabbed for Kid, and willed both of them back down the street where they had come from.

They were not crushed by the falling building, but they were still close enough to hear it coming down, and Kid blinked like she was waking up. Lysanias was just relieved that had worked, and let out a breath. *Whew.*

"What happened?" she asked, sitting up. "Are you okay?"

"I'm fine, what about you? What was that all about?"

"What, the exploding building?"

"No, you said you couldn't break free of something."

"Yeah, didn't ya see that dragon like creature? It was pinning me down!"

"It wasn't. It was just standing there," he insisted.

"I know what I saw. Help me up." Lysanias offered a hand and she got up. "Think Jason got out okay?"

"Can a falling building even hurt his dream form? I just hope there wasn't anyone in that building!"

"Look out!" Lysanias jumped in front of Kid as out the wall came the dragon, straight for them. She pulled her daggers out and went into her "ready for battle" stance.

"I can't see it!" she complained.

*Wait, then how did you see it before?*

It went straight for her, slashing with a claw as it got close. "Ow, I lost HP! Where is it? I need to see it to hit it with an element!"

*Kid can more easily take care of this thing than I can. So let's see if this will work!* He reached out and touched her back, willing her to see the world as he did, in other words, to see the shadow creature before them.

"Oh!" she exclaimed, "I can see it!"

"So hit it with something!" he urged her.

"Meteorite!" she shouted, and a brilliant ball of white energy slammed into the thing. A further explosion of energy radiated out from the impact site, and the shadow form writhed as it vanished.

"Wow, I am glad you showed up," Lysanias said as Kid turned to him, smiling.

"I, on the other hand," said a voice as two people stepped out from around the corner of another building, "am not."

Both spun, Kid raising her knives again. Two people were standing there, a man and a woman, only one of whom Lysanias knew. The man had red hair, and a scar as though someone had slashed upward through his left eye at some point. Both eyes were focused on him, though, and he looked angry. The other person, the one who had spoken, seemed to be barely restraining herself from tearing Lysanias apart on the spot.

"Alisha?" Lysanias asked. She looked much the same as when he had last seen her, though her hair was longer and she looked a bit older. She was holding a spear and she was wearing the *shoufa* around her head, complete with veil that Lysanias knew she would don if she was going to do any serious fighting.

"Oh, he remembers!" she gushed, bringing her hands together in front of her. "I'm so honored. Oh, what a happy day this is for me!"

"Now, now, let's not be crass," said the man. "Shall we do what we came here to do?"

"In a moment. Before I kill him I want to know why." She focused on Lysanias again.

"Why did you do it? Why did you take my ability as a dreamer away? What possible motive could you have had?"

Lysanias stuttered. "I... I wish I could tell you! You have to understand, seconds after I left your place I remembered doing it, but not why. I wish I knew, it wasn't just some whim, you have to believe me. I tried to find you and explain about your situation but you were never around."

"You're supposed to believe this?" said the man. "What a crock of-"

"Tell me the truth!" she screamed, pointing her spear at him. "I had resigned myself to being a Wise One, of giving up the spear. Then you come along and suddenly I can't even do that. I'm a freak now, not a Wise One, not a maiden of the spear, they can't even see me anymore! And I have to use a weapon I am forbidden by my culture from even touching! You've ruined everything!"

"Can't even- what are you talking about?"

"This!" She shook her spear at him.

"It's a spear," he agreed, not following. *They use spears all the time, what is she talking about?* "Look, you should have gotten other powers, I wanted to find you and train you-"

"You think I would have accepted training from you? You ruined my life!"

*I think you're taking it a little too hard,* he wondered if he should say, but at this point a figure dropped out of the sky. "Lysanias, are you- oh."

"There he is!" said the man, grinning broadly. "He has some explaining to do to, if you can hold off a moment, Alisha."

Jason seemed visibly pale as he looked between Jason and the newcomer.

"So what's the story? From what I can tell you've been helping this guy!" He pointed to Lysanias. "Instead of killing him. Our boss is very perplexed, let me tell you. Sent me to figure it out."

"Who's this joker?" Kid asked, pointing with a knife. "Want me ta take care of 'im?"

"Yes, introduce me, everyone should know everyone," the man agreed.

"Lysanias, Kid, this is Sangray," Jason told them. "One of the most dangerous people I know."

*Wait, where does he rank where I'm concerned? Lower or higher? I really wish I could sense him out.*

He went on. "I assume you know them."

"Oh yes, the boss is always after those from worlds like the one Kid comes from. People who hit and can take damage out of all proportion to most everyone else in the multiverse. Say, you wouldn't want to come over to our side, would you? I'm sure we can find that Surge guy you're looking for fairly quickly with our resources."

"You've been spying on us?" Kid demanded.

"Of course," Jason replied. "He's all about sneaking around in the shadows until he thinks he can win."

"You know me too well," he said with a bow. "But this time it's all about Alisha here. Her training is complete, and she insisted on taking you on right away. The real question is, are you going to help us, reveal your plan to betray him all along, or are you done with the person who has promised you godhood?"

He looked back and forth between the two again. "Er, I don't suppose I could just sit this one out?"

Sangray laughed. "Sure, as long as you don't actually go anywhere."

"It's his power, he lea-" he started to say, turning to Lysanias.

"Ah, ah, ah, naughty, naughty!" Sangray told him, a gag of some sort appearing in his mouth. "He doesn't get to be told."

*That was dreamer power, I just felt it.*

Jason struggled to try and pull it off, Lysanias felt dream power being used, but the gag stayed in place.

*What? He can keep something around that Jason doesn't want there? Who is this guy? I need to buy some time to think.* "But wait, it hasn't been that long. How could you have trained? Even if Jason turns against us, Kid is equal to several fighters. Do you really think you can win?"

He smirked. "You really think you're the center of existence, don't you? You know that time runs differently between realities, can you really not see someone else taking advantage of that fact?"

*Crud. So wait, she got powers, this Sangray guy came along before I could, convinced her to go with him, and they've been training? For how long? What powers did she get? Kenzie got Shaman, what about this woman? Can I counter it with just dream powers?*

"I've trained long and hard to get to this point," Alisha told them confidently. "Would you like to see the fruits of my labor?"

"No?"

"Too bad. Come forth, Ya'peast, let the last thing my enemies see be my veiled face! Bankai!"

*OH NO!* Lysanias thought as the spear changed shape, becoming a massive sword in hands. *She became a spirit hunter! It all makes sense now! They have to leave their bodies in order to use most of their powers, and so no one around here would be able to see her. In addition to that her ultimate weapon release seems to be a sword, which as I understand it, Aiel are forbidden from even touching. No wonder she's a bit angry at me!*

"You see?" she shrieked, waving the sword around like it didn't weigh anything. "This is what I have to use! It's disgusting!"

He risked a glance over at Sangray, who was smirking like he was enjoying this immensely.

"Now die!" she shouted, and brought the sword up and back like she was going to give a mighty swing. Possible counters flashed through his mind, but he really didn't want to hurt this person. He had done what she said, and he couldn't offer a reason why. Plus she may have been brainwashed or otherwise mentally controlled by the forces of his enemy to increase her ire. He had to somehow defuse this situation, without letting anyone get hurt. But to his surprise Sangray grabbed the back edge of the sword so as she tried to swing it, the blade didn't go anywhere.

"What's the big idea?" she demanded.

"You kill his dream self, he'll just wake up," he reminded her. "I can take us to where his body is staying."

"Do it then."

Jason met Lysanias' eyes, and both were filled with horror. Jason gave a little shake of his head, "I can't help you" he thought, and Lysanias did the only thing he could think of to do.

He willed himself to wake up.

His eyes opened and the massive blade was there above him, about to come down and cut short his entire journey. "Pause!" he shouted, and the blade stopped inches above his body. He had closed his eyes again but now forced them open. The scene was frozen, Sangray in the room with Alisha, clearly they had used dream powers to just go there just as he would have. *So they knew the whole time. Why attack now? They saw the bigger shadow creature fall just as easily to Kid and decided enough was enough? I wasn't going to get killed that way and so they took a hand themselves?* He wiggled himself out from under the blade and stood looking at the pair. *What am I going to do with you?* he asked himself. *It doesn't seem like you'll listen to anything I have to say. And you...* He stared at Sangray. *What was Jason trying to tell me? What's your ability? He didn't just say 'he's a dreamer' he was trying to say you did something. You beat him at dreamer power, supposedly his own game, or at least Jason wanted to make it look like you had. He sides against me, it's three against two, though I am awake now so I could call out all my forces.* He looked over to his own sword, and the wand that was there as well. *I could hit at least Alisha with the stamp, turn her into my unthinking slave for a bit. Get her away from the two, bind her, wash the stamp off, then try and convince her this is a good thing for her?* He shook his head. *Risky. And I can't just kill her. She deserves better than this. That leaves only one plan- run, hope we think of something later or she just goes on with her life from here.* With a sigh he took a look around the room. *Nothing we can't leave. I keep everything important in the pocket, and Kid has that inventory of hers she uses. Nothing except this.* He bent over to pick up the sword but it resisted his movements. *Yeah, that's a problem. Still...* He reached into his sub-space pocket and pulled out an *ignore me* ward. Slapping it on himself he took a deep breath and then got out the pouch. From this he took out the white marble, gave the room one last look, and decided he didn't want time stopped anymore.

The blade smashed the bed apart completely, chopping a hole in the floor as well. "He got away!" she snarled. "How will we find them now?"

"I can still find him around here," Sangray told her. "I guess just start swinging?"

"Gladly!" She drew her sword back to swing it in a mighty arc around her but he *shifted* back to the street they had just left.

"Hey, they're gone," Kid said, looking around. "Well, he isn't." She pointed to Jason, who was now able to tear the gag out of his mouth.

"What do you intend?" he asked.

"What do *you* intend?" Lysanias shot back.

"You always knew I would try and kill you in the end. I hoped to clear this world of these dream creatures first, not having your help will certainly slow the process down.

"You would still do that?"

"Of course! This world can't handle them, did you think I would go back on my word?"

Lysanias looked thoughtful. "Look, give up on this dream of expanding your powers," he said. "Come with us. We could use you in our fight."

"I make you the same offer. Let worlds too weak to fight against my master fall, as a wounded animal should to make way for the strong. Let my master evolve and in the process raise us all up."

But both men saw that the other would not be budged, and Lysanias stepped close to Kid. He offered the hand still holding the sword and she grabbed his wrist, a confused look on her face. "What are you doing?"

"I can't fight her," he told her. "Especially because what she said was true. I'll need to figure out another way to deal with her." He looked back over at Jason. "Just remember your promise to me. When next we meet, we'll probably fight, but you better be able to look me in the eye when we do."

He nodded solemnly and Lysanias put spirit energy into the marble in his other hand, vanishing out of that world.