

Hey all. I can't program and am not British. Given all my 'Mericanisms, this shouldn't come as a surprise.

Getting back into Bhaalson was fun in the main, but also time-consuming given all the lore, the necessary font/color issues, and so forth, which, considering my time constraints this month, was harsh. Still, I think I'm happy with this. It's basically the last chapter that will be set in Beregost. In the next chapter, the group will be moving on, heading out and away again and... other things, but that would be telling.

Oh, I also have to say I've seen the BG3 version of Viconia... she's gone through some bad times. That chin, yo. That face... I mean, Jaheira just aged. Odd for a half-elf, but I can put it down to the fact I've no idea how many centuries it's been since BG2. Viconia? She was hit with an ugly stick. I present two pictures for your viewing pleasure...



Finally, I have to announce an annoyance I was not aware of. **+/- signs don't carry over into fanfic?!** Frick. That's going to be annoying at some point.

Anyway, here's the key, as per usual, for you all who downloaded the PDF or Word docs. Something I recommend, LOL.

Green – party-related stuff

Orange – Quest notifications.

Blue – NPC notifications/observations.

Dark red – Enemy observations/bestiary notes.

Red – directly related to combat notifications

Purple – Alchemy observations and notifications

And now, without further ado, let us BEGIN...

Chapter 18: Odd Revelations, Odder Meetings and Winter's Worth

Harry ran through the snow, cursing the fact that he was no longer getting any new notifications, as well as thankful for that. Setting aside the bestiary page notifications, whenever Imoen and the others had successfully wiped out one of the bands moving to attack Beregost he had gotten a new notification, which had boiled down to 'hooray, you wiped out one of the bands', giving no real information beyond that. When he stopped getting such notifications soon after the information about the Alu-Fiends had scrolled across his eyelids, Harry had realized instantly that probably meant that the siege had shifted to a purely defensive affair, with Viconia and the rest of them retreating into town.

Frustrating and terrifying as it is to know that Imoen, Viconia, Edwina, and Alora are fighting, it would be even more frustrating to have details about it and not have to be able to do anything, Harry thought before almost tripping. He righted himself, hissing a bit as one hand reached down to massage his thigh. "Fucking snow!"

Despite his high Constitution, Harry was beginning to feel the strains of this trek. The snow was making this trek treacherous. Every foot Harry put down, the snow acted differently. In one area, it was hard-packed, and he could get along relatively well. In another, it was icy, and every foot Harry put down threatened to go out from under him. Or wasn't quite hard-packed enough to take his weight, whereupon Harry's feet sank into it, forcing him to literally forge through it. *And do not get me started on the god damn snowdrifts! Every hour or so, I hit a fucking snowdrift!*

Luckily, it hadn't taken Harry long to recognize that pattern, and when he started to see the trail, such as it was, start to curve and be too out in the open away from trees, he quickly began to note where the snowdrift would be, and which side of the road to go on to

avoid entering it. Which just made him need to forge through slightly deeper snow than was on the majority of the road itself, while also being aware of things buried in the snow.

Because of that last thing, Harry had already needed to use his Lay on Hands spells to heal a twisted ankle twice, and one time, he had smashed his knee into a rock so hard that even through his Durability he'd felt the raw pain of it as if someone had hit him with a hammer. Harry thought at the time he had been on solid pack snow and could actually go at a brisker pace, but that had quickly turned out to be a falsehood.

Shaking his head, Harry pushed his thoughts away from his own aches and pains and the gods-cursed snow. Not that the rut his thoughts then fell into were any better, as his mind began to go over what he knew of the battle going on, the Alu-Fiends and what that could imply about the named enemy and the unknown monster, the original Notification about the ***Blood in the Snow*** quest.

Soon, Harry's thoughts turned morose and grim. *What could our party do against those Alu-Fiends if they took us by surprise? What could we do, what could I do against even stronger enemies? Which we **are** going to run into. The man who killed my father, the people behind the conspiracy with the iron, everything points to them being stronger than we are now, despite how much we've tried to level up over the winter. Hell, when you get right down to it, what could I alone have done against even some of our old enemies, the gnoll chieftain or Mulahey? Even setting aside the trio of mercenary women and his summoned minions, he could've overwhelmed me.*

The admission of weakness hurt Harry almost as much as the guilt he'd been fighting with, that it had been his decision to go out with Jaheira and the others on the long patrol that had pushed him out of position to do more for this battle. If Harry had been in Beregost, he could've done something. His tactics, his formations, they could've been important.

As it was, he was essentially praying that Imoen and the others could both work together with the locals long enough to survive. However, two of the goals necessary for that to happen, for the quest to be completed successfully, as his advanced adventuring system put it in its dried, often ironic tone, scared Harry. The lines about needing to fight a lesser something, and the named enemy. A named enemy rang all sorts of bells in Harry's mind. *Even if we survive this, we need... no, stop that. I need to get stronger, to become more than I am.*

"So I guess..." He mused aloud, as he pulled out a bottle of water, taking a drink before placing it back and going on, thankful for his ability to keep items warm or cold in his complex item box. "Whose service calls to me? No, not service. I'm not interested in simply

serving a God, no matter what I might gain. That, as arrogant as it might be to say it aloud, that isn't who I am."

He stopped speaking for a moment, pushing through deeper snow, then into a copse of trees, paralleling the road for a moment. Here, it was easier going, and Harry had breath to talk to himself once more. "Rather, it's about whose code and outlook of the world I appreciate more, who I find myself closer to. I've already eliminated all of them but Torm and Tyr, but who between them--"

"Finally!" A booming voice erupted from one side of Harry, and Harry jerked nearly falling to the side as his head twisted around, staring in that direction, while the voice continued, so loud it should have set the snow and the trees to falling and Harry to his knees, yet somehow, it did neither, even as it relentlessly pounded into Harry's head for a few seconds before it's owner tempered his volume.

"It is about time you got around to this! I have had a kernel of my being waiting for this moment for weeks, Harry of Candlekeep. Has anyone ever told you you procrastinate?" Tyr said irritably, for it was indeed the Maimed God who had appeared out of nowhere, seemingly to castigate Harry for his slowness.

Between one eyeblink and the next, he had appeared to stride alongside Harry, looking the same as he had during the impromptu court session Harry had had to go through months back. Long white hair and beard, the hair leading seamlessly into the beard, a bare chest, with only a baldric, holding a sword strapped to his back. As he strode along, his stump hand swung freely at his side, while his remaining hand rested on his belt. His eyes were also the same ruined holes they had been, although the lack of sight didn't seem to slow his pace down much.

Unlike Mystra, whose form had been changing even during that confrontation, or Ilmater, whose wounds and aches had forever shifted from one to another, Harry got the impression that Tyr had a very set view of himself when it came to his appearance. Regardless, his presence dominated the world, taller than an ogre and twice as powerful-looking, yet somehow his voice sounded calmer and more personable than it ever had during that trial.

The memory of that intervention, and the mention that Tyr had a portion of his attention devoted to waiting for this moment, made Harry pause, thinking deeply for a second. As he did, he noticed that the air around them had somehow crystallized. His body was still moving, his leg still churning underneath him, but everything beyond Tyr and Harry about a yard in every direction seemed to have become nothing more than a blur.

Within that area, things had become more defined. The snow seemed crisper, the air colder, Harry's breath fogged up in more and greater detail somehow. It was as if someone had taken a normal winter day and added an exclamation mark. The essence of winter distilled: chill, cold, lonely, but also a feeling of vast expanse and almost peaceful stillness despite the blur beyond this single moment.

Harry set aside those observations and the fact that his Greater Observation hadn't given him more insight into it, for a much more personal realization. "One intervention could be accepted, given the fact that you gods are all aware of my apparently unique circumstances and what I was doing at the time. This, though? I have to question if this is normal," Harry asked, his tone respectful.

"Actually, it is somewhat more normal for me and Torm to appear in person to particularly intriguing aspirants," Tyr objected mildly. "More normal for him than for me, though, I will admit. Torm has yet to forget he was a mortal man, and I doubt he ever will, which I am quite happy for."

Even as his legs continued to pump along, seemingly of their own accord now, Harry twisted his upper body and neck to look at the god. Seeing the expression on the god's face. It was a look he had not seen on anyone but Gorion back in Candlekeep: the expression of a father to a son. Only Ty'r's was slightly harsher. Maybe that type of look mixed with that of a general speaking of one of his favored officers? Regardless, there was some amount of true camaraderie and friendship there when Tyr spoke of Torm, which hinted at a more personal connection between the two of them than simply being two members of the Triad of Light-aligned gods most involved with outright fighting the dark-aligned gods, goddesses and so forth.

"However, Torm and I look for different things beyond a certain point. The moment you started down a leadership path while following your own code rather than the law and what is seen as common sense, you moved a bit beyond Torm's remit. I think you would still get along together, for certain, but it would not be a perfect fit."

"Implying you think you would be. But as interesting as that is, I still sense there is more to your interest in me. I remember something Milady Mystra said: she called me Fate Marked. Is this because of that?"

"She did indeed mention that. And yes, I will not lie, I am a god of justice and order, and I will not lie to you, nor any other. Further, you need to understand more about what you are, and what you might become." Like any good general or commander, Tyr would give those involved with him all the information he could in order to do their jobs or make

decisions. That wasn't to say he didn't understand the place of secrets, feints and so forth. He was a god of war, too. But he would never outright lie or lie through omission.

"You, Harry Potter, you are special. Back in your old world, you were a Fates Fulcrum." Tyr waited, pleased when Harry simply remained quiet, listening. "This means that the threads of fate act oddly around you, in ways that even we gods cannot always predict or control. Indeed, attempting to control them is forbidden to us. We can influence a bit, but not much. Your Gamer abilities, which you, quite correctly, call an Advanced Adventuring System, is one such. How you came to be here on Toril is another matter. Beyond that, I will tell you plainly, Fate had not made you a Fulcrum for no reason. You had a destiny in your old world."

This statement caused a notification not to pop up in Harry's line of sight, showing that while his Greater Observation seemingly wasn't working right now in this frozen (?) moment, the rest of his AAS was. Well, that and his AAS retained its snarky humor despite being in the presence of the God of War and justice.

[Know thyself!](#)

You have been told something about your past life on earth that you did not know. You were touched by Fate, and perhaps it was a bad touch. You have no idea what Fate, or Destiny, had in store for you, but perhaps it could explain why Riddle was after you? Why was his spirit still around? And maybe, just maybe, why you were left alone at the Dursleys.

That hit Harry hard, and if he had been in control of his body, He probably would have stumbled, would have collapsed and simply stared at Tyr in mixed horror and anger. Even with his Gamer's mind, the knowledge that Fate had something in store for him even before he came to Toril was a shock.

Tyr might have been blind, but despite the ruins where his eyes had once been, he still gazed at Harry with something like compassion for a moment. Yet still he went on, like a doctor trying to get the whole prognosis out in one go for a patient before the patient could truly start to panic.

"Further, the body your soul came to inhabit is special. And before it starts to occur to you, as I know it will, Harry, the soul that you replaced was more merged with you, subsumed by you, than extinguished."

That was indeed something Harry had just been about to think about, given Tyr's wording there, and he nodded, his shock slowly retreating into grim understanding. Sensing this, Tyr went on. "I will tell this to you plainly now. You know you are one of hundreds of

children of Bhaal, Harry, but that number has already shrunk dramatically. And whenever it does, the survivors grow in strength.”

Harry made to object, but Tyr continued before he could. “You don’t know yet how to truly use that strength, but it is there. The spark of the divine within every Bhaalspawn becomes a tiny bit stronger when that of the dead Bhaalspawn joins with the rest. This was undoubtedly Bhaal’s plan: to spread his power out and wait until it came together, then eventually be reborn. That means, as time goes on, even without you doing anything, your abilities, your strength will grow. You might not be able to consciously use that divine spark yet, but that will come in time as well, especially if you decide to swear your sword to me.”

Tyr’s jaw visibly clenched for a moment as he turned his ruined gaze away from Harry, staring ahead of the still traveling pair. “Others among the children of Bhaal have already not only learned this, but learned how to use that divine spark. The killer of Gorion is one of them.”

At that, another notification popped up, this one tied to one of his quests.

Attention: Your Main quest (long), Justice or Vengeance has been updated.

You have long suspected that Gorion’s killer, the armored giant who confronted the pair of you outside Candlekeep, was another Bhaalspawn. Now you know for certain, and worse, that he has begun to use the power of his portion of Bhaal’s power that resides within him. This will make him even stronger in practically every way you can think of than you are.

You already knew you needed to grow stronger. Now you just have another reason.

Tyr fell silent, watching Harry, but Harry’s Gamer’s Mind allowed him to push through the rush of anger and hatred that the memory brought to the fore with ease, and Tyr nodded, continuing his explanation. “But going back to your being a Fates Fulcrum. Prophecy bound you in chains back in your old world, Harry Potter, back in **our** old world, I should say.” The God’s lips twisted for a second, his expression that of both wry amusement and a flinch of remembered pain or loss. “While you managed to break its chains to a certain degree, Destiny and fate still have you in their grip.”

Pushing through his sudden worry that his life in this world was somehow according to the God of Murder’s resurrection scheme, Harry concentrated on the revelations of his old life, something he had rarely thought of for months except in relation to his Blood Magic. “Prophecy? Destiny? Are you talking about something to do with Tom Riddle?”

“Indeed, I am. Admittedly, some portions of your fate have already been rewritten, thanks to your arrival here in Toril, but you and he will still meet in the future.” Tyr said calmly, a small, amused chuckle entering his voice. “I doubt that shade will enjoy the

experience after all you have learned and how you have grown here, but that is beside the point.”

Harry processed this for a few moments, his eyes narrowing as the implication sank in. “Are you saying I’ll eventually be... what, called back home? How would that work?”

“I am a God of war, justice and law,” Tyr snorted. “I am not a God of traveling. It was pure luck that some of my followers were able to cross dimensions to this one, and thus I was able to do the same ages ago on Earth. I have no idea how that will be accomplished, or when it will occur.”

“...” Harry’s eyes narrowed further into suspicious slits at that, and his voice, when he spoke once more, held none of the innate respect or formality that he had been using before this. “That sounds like it could be incredibly fucking bad. I can almost guarantee that it’ll happen at the worst possible time, if not for me, then someone else. And you can’t even tell me how it’ll be done?!”

“It certainly could. Destiny is often a bitch,” Tyr answered, his own voice just as informal for a few moments, as that wry look came back to his weathered, beaten face. “If it wasn’t, I’d still have my hand, as well as my eyes.”

Harry had to take a few moments to push through all the ways being suddenly summoned back to his old world could go so very badly wrong for both himself here in this world and himself back in his old world, as well as his friends here. But eventually he was able to do so, reminded of Hermione and Ron. It might have horrified people, but honestly, his two friends were the only people he sometimes missed from his old life. Well, his two friends and Hedwig, obviously, but Hedwig was like missing a limb. After a little while, you had worked around it to a point where it was simply a dull ache, something you missed all the time, but didn’t let enter your conscious thoughts. Thinking about his old friends wasn’t something he did all that often, but when he did, it still brought back the feelings of abandonment and sadness he’d been dealing with when building the computer that had sent him here.

Although I’ll admit that I miss Hermione more than Ron, it was her not contacting me that I was most furious about, Harry thought, before asking, “Do you know anything about what is going on back home?”

“No. As I said, I am not a god of traveling. I could get there, with my previous connection to Earth; however, I could only do so once. Getting back here, where I essentially live now? For that, I would need Ao Over God to accept my travels back and forth, and he would not. I would not have enough power on Earth to empower such a movement on my own.”

At that, Tyr's voice became brisk again, a little more formal, no longer even an ounce of sympathy visible in his tone or body language as he trooped along beside Harry. "But you were thinking about getting stronger and were wondering who between Torm and me to pledge your sword to."

"Not service?" Harry asked, before he could stop himself. He honestly didn't know where that came from, but there was a bit of bitterness to his tone that surprised even Harry. The idea of following a god, of obeying divine commands, or of paying for not doing so sat poorly with him.

"**No**," Tyr intoned firmly, causing the whole firmament around them, this brief moment out of time, to shiver under the weight of the god's instant response and displeasure to that question. "I do not ask for men to simply serve me, Harry Potter, but their own senses of right and wrong, their own sense of law and order. In your case, you're not called so much to battle injustice as someone who becomes a judge under my name would be; you are called to truly fight against evil. Those bits of you would do well under Ilmater or Torm, but under me, you will find more."

"You mean more enemies to fight, more dangers? Is that what we humans are to you? Simply pieces on a board that you move to combat the moves of your enemies?" Harry said, scowling angrily. He was still incensed at the idea that destiny had molded his life back on earth, let alone that anything in this world might be some part of that so-called destiny, and railed against the very idea of being controlled even more than he would have otherwise.

"**No**." Again, the firmness of that response shook the area around them like a giant dog with a rat. "No god of light will ever treat a human as if they are a pawn, a thing to be used and moved only as we will. Every mortal has free will, Harry Potter. That free will might be manipulated, might become twisted, but it is always that individual's free will, even when they give it up to serve a Dark God."

After seconds spent blindly glaring at Harry so hard that he had actually stopped moving, and perforce Harry had, the god relented. He turned his attention forward for a second, and Harry felt his legs resume moving without any orders from his brain.

Before Harry could ponder that, the world around them shifted, reminding him of how the book about gods he had gotten at the Friendly Arm Inn had activated to show him various scenes of the gods in question. "Let me show you my battlefield. Let me show you the faces of evil."

Suddenly, Harry was not looking at the snowy landscape around them, that perfect moment of winter frozen in time. Rather, he stood amidst a battlefield like none he had ever

seen in history books, let alone in real life. It was vast, arcing from one side of the horizon to the other, and Harry instinctively knew he was seeing farther than any human or even elf could.

That battlefield was, well, it reminded him more of a picture he'd once seen in a book in the library back on earth of Hell more than anything real. Denizens of hell, creatures with claws, fangs, red skin and glowing eyes, creatures with black wings and devil-like heads, raged across the battlefield, filling the world with an overpowering feeling of corruption, a miasma of something that touched his soul and made him recoil. A foulness like that of tar or oil on water that could be felt rather than seen, a horror that marked the very world and the souls of all those who saw it.

Instantly, Harry's hand was filled with his sword, and his teeth gritted as he glared at the nearest creature, something inside of him reacting like a mongoose to a snake. He could not look at this creature, nor feel its wrongness, without desiring to fight it, its influence and the sheer wrongness and violence it represented.

"Corruption and evil. Beings such as these do not look upon true sentient beings, humans, elves, dwarves and such as being worthy of life. They would simply kill you all and enjoy your dying screams, taking sustenance from your pain. For that is what they do. That is what they are. This is the evil I fight personally," Tyr explained, making Harry aware of the serried ranks of a host that stood against the devils, a host of armored men and women alike, mortals and planar beings standing shoulder to shoulder. "But there are other evils out there, other injustices."

The scene shifted again. This scene looked almost banal in comparison to the first vision, at least at first. It was an image of an opulent office somewhere, and a man looking over a desk at another man. He said something, stamped a form, and the man in front of the desk wailed, falling to his knees, weeping, begging, his words not reaching Harry. The man across the table, the office owner, laughed and waved his hands. A second later, two guards came in, grabbing the wailing man's shoulders, dragging him away.

"Injustice. Injustice, in this case of a loan shark taking advantage of a man who had made a bad decision while drinking his grief away, played with the big boys, to speak. His daughter will be sold into slavery if someone does not intervene. But because a paladin of my faith is there, that daughter will be saved," Tyr nearly growled. "The loan shark's soul and those of his people will be judged."

This image was followed by another, a simpler one, a man being whipped in the field. "Abuse of power. In this case, a noble treating a free man as if he were a serf, and a serf as if he were simply an animal of burden, not a thinking being."

Another scene. This time, it was a man wearing a symbol around his neck that Harry was reluctantly familiar with: the symbol of the priesthood of Cyric. The man was laughing as someone screamed in front of him, held to a rack of some kind. The priest's laughter was mad and almost grating, despite Harry realizing there still wasn't any sound coming through with these images.

The silent mad cackling stopped abruptly as he seemed to look around for a second, before the image changed once more. "Madness, and the enjoyment of causing pain. Of treating someone else like a tool or creature that could be discarded at will. Like you accused me of, only far worse than simply a piece on a board. When you get right down to it, Harry, that is perhaps where all evil begins. When one person, one being, is willing to treat another like a thing."

Jumbled images followed that one, based on the same concept: misuse of power, of one person lording his position over another. Again and again, Harry found his teeth grinding, and he knew, knew that this was what the god was telling him. That Harry was already going to stop things like this, was going to stick his nose in and help people regardless, even as Tyr spoke. "My paladins are not overly popular with nobility, even as my clerics and priests often take positions as judges and magistrates in the more lawful, orderly nations of the world."

A moment later, they were back in that moment of frozen clarity, Harry's legs still moving underneath them, something that Harry realized they'd been doing even as his mind had been taken somewhere else by those visions.

When Tyr spoke again, Harry stared at him, the voice demanding more out of him than just an answer, as if with every word a weight was pushing down on Harry, as if Tyr was judging him. "Could you stand by and not do something? Could you look upon all of those images, and not want to fight against the evil inherent in them?"

"No," Harry said, it apparently being his turn, apparently, for one syllable answers. Even getting that single word out had been hard, but Harry pushed forward, striving against the strange heaviness that seemed to weigh on him.

"Even if you would be outmatched, even if you knew you would die? Even if you were set against a whole government, a nation, or a noble with an army behind him?"

This took a bit longer, and he eventually had to rely on a quote, his vote mind full of mush for a moment, despite his Gamer's Mind to jumpstart his conscious thinking. "For evil to truly succeed, good men must do nothing. I will not do nothing. If I die, then perhaps I will make it easier for those who follow behind."

“And in that, you prove yourself worthy of becoming a paladin of myself or of Torm.” Warmth filled Tyr’s tone for a moment, praise for a soldier who had proven himself before he became formal again. “But you are more than that, Harry Potter.”

Once more, images assaulted Harry. This time, of great battlefields, of generals leading wars, of commanders and captains bellowing orders and working against the chaos of both the battlefield and their enemies to seize victory from demons, undead, vampires, and cruel men and monsters alike. “Would you lead such a contest? Or simply follow? Would you try to change the laws, or simply fight them? Would you solve the issue in front of you, or the underlying problem? Become a simple hero who fights villains, or become a symbol of justice and order for others to emulate?”

“I would lead,” Harry said, this time the answer coming easier to him.

Attention:

Your Gamer’s Mind has allowed you to adapt to the presence of the deity Tyr and to his testing of your soul and will. While the impact will still be felt, you can at least focus through it to some extent.

Harry went on, his voice more certain, stronger. “I would lead. I would try to change the laws, whatever kind of combat that called for, while shielding those who would be hurt by it, who would be defenseless against it,” Harry said, pulling forth the words from somewhere deep inside him, hurling them into Tyr’s face.

Tyr simply smiled, once more giving the impression of a general acknowledging a soldier’s valor. “That is why I am here. For all of the Triad, some of my paladins can be different than those sworn to the codes of Torm and Ilmater. Those paladins have another name. Champions. Paladins, they are good men, good women occasionally, but their willpower is limited, the way they view the world is through a specific lens, a simple part of my portfolio. The same goes for judges; they look to me only for guidance on jurisprudence. Champions are different; they can be both or more as they make war against evil in all of its myriad forms, voices for change and reform.”

As he spoke the last words, again, the firmament around them shook and shivered, not under the god’s anger this time, but under the implications of that, the grim reality of it. “It is not a soft life, and never will be. My champions are the tip of the spear, the point of the blade and eventually, my captains and generals in this world to combat evil on a scale that few paladins can ever aspire to. As such, I do not need to direct them as I would paladins, through visions and gentle touches. Rather, I give them more of my strength, so that they can stand against greater evils than paladins alone would be able to. I become a hand on your shoulder, a shield to the righteous, and I empower your blade as you battle your

enemies. So I ask of you, Harry Potter, Harry Gorionson. Will you become one of my Champions?”

Tyr has held out his hand to you, offering to make you a paladin. Will you fight, as one of his followers, against injustice, cruelty, and those who abuse their power?

Tyr is the god of justice, order and war. He is the leader of a coalition of deities known as the Triad and bears his title of the Maimed God because he is missing his right hand, lost in an act of extreme courage in his home plane, which, not incidentally, is the same plane from which your soul comes from, and because he lost his eyes, the better to serve as an impartial arbiter of judgement. His symbol is a pair of balanced scales resting on the head of a warhammer, signifying that justice must be upheld with vigilance, backed by the conviction to protect the weak and innocent.

Tyr’s paladins can oftentimes be called by another name: Champions. Each of them is unique, prized and treasured like the finest of blades. Each Champion has his or her own strengths, abilities and specialties.

But beware, because the place for any blade is in war. If you have any thought of living a quiet life, then becoming one of Tyr’s chosen is not for you. But it wouldn’t be anyway, as if you wished for a quiet life, Tyr would not be offering to become your patron. For all of Tyr’s Paladins have one thing in common: They are the type to charge forward, to find injustice and evil on their own, and challenge it where evil is found, regardless of where.

As a paladin of Tyr, Tyr offers you a few basic abilities and some that are tailored to what he knows of your personality and your abilities, further improving his champion’s skillset. You will also be able to use priest spells below Level 4.

The basic abilities that a Paladin of Tyr at your level can access are:

Lay on Hands: You will instantly have access to two more charges for this minor healing spell, and will gain one more charge per level from now on.

Enhanced Turn Undead. While a normal Turn Undead technique only cares about the level of the targets and the individual casting it, Tyr is a god of justice and goodness. If the undead warriors are Evil or have performed injustices as undead, you will have a 20% greater chance to turn them to dust, and a 30% chance to cause the undead to flee.

This percentage will evolve with each level you earn after this point, at 2% each level.

Warning: If the Undead was a just or good person in life, your turn Undead will not work on them at all. Using Turn Undead on such targets might even have unforeseen consequences, good or ill.

Detect Evil: This cleric ability is identical to the spell Detect Evil, like Lay on Hands or Turn Undead. All evil-aligned creatures in the area of effect will glow red. The paladin's ability, however, is an instant incantation, unlike the wizard-style equivalent.

Protection From Evil: Another ability that can be cast at a faster speed than the spell, this gives the wearer a +2 bonus to all attacks against and defense from evil creatures like Mind Flayers, demons, and Evil-aligned enemies.

Tyr gives two specific abilities to his paladins that none of the other gods who empower paladins do. These are:

Armor of Tyr: In the pursuit of justice and the defeat of evil, a paladin of Tyr cannot be overcome by fear, doubt or weakness. This Activated Buff grants you additional armor equal to your mental resolve, giving you greater strength, speed, and immunity to anything impacting your mind, including illusions and spells meant to negatively influence your constitution if you are facing enemies that are beyond your Level.

Righteous Wrath: A paladin of Tyr judges the guilty and those who prey upon others. For every three levels, a Paladin of Tyr can call upon Tyr personally for judgment against someone caught performing an evil act. This can range from a simple assault or breaking the law, to an evil ritual intended to call upon a dark god or allow a demon to enter this plane of existence. If Tyr agrees with your judgement, the guilty will be punished with a blast of holy magic commensurate with the severity of the wrong done, so long as the caster is within at least four levels of the individual in question. If the abjured is more than four levels higher than the target, the attack will do 75% less damage.

Harry read through all of that and then looked over at Tyr once more, pushing through the haze surrounding his mind, trying to push against his willpower, a test and a caution all in one. This was not a decision that could be made halfheartedly. It was one that a person needed to make wholeheartedly, understanding that his life would be forever changed. That any hope of safety or home would be forever gone.

The part of Harry that had hoped one day to be part of a family, to have loved ones, the part that had so enjoyed living in Candlekeep with Gorion and then with Tonks when she appeared and took over Imoen's body. Railed against the very idea. Yet that was a small part of Harry as he had grown up in this world. The bigger part, the part that remembered being a child, lost, alone, locked in a dark place, railing at the injustice of it all, that had seen the evil of this world, the madness of Cyric's followers, the death and violence caused by evil men and worse monsters, knew that he had found his purpose.

"I accept, Harry said.

“Then take my hand, and become a champion, Harry Gorionson!” Tyr shouted, his power flashing out around him with his words as he reached out, taking Harry’s hands in his.

Harry felt as if a door that had been closed in his mind and being had suddenly been unlocked. He didn’t feel so much stronger, but more, as if something that had been holding him back was gone now. It didn’t affect his physical abilities much, only heightening his wisdom by 2 and his durability by the same amount. He wondered idly if his basic stats had been lower than he would have gotten more out of it, but really, it didn’t matter much.

The more important changes were the additions to his abilities and skills. First, beyond the expected Armor of Courage and Righteous Wrath, Harry saw one of his stat-enhancing buffs suddenly evolve.

Attention: Your ‘I’ve got the Willpower’ stat booster has evolved under the touch of Tyr. It has become **Iron Will**.

Iron will: You have developed your willpower and pain threshold to the point where you can fight through pain that would drive most men to their knees. Anything less than a true disabling blow will now be ignored to the point where you can legitimately ignore any pain that does less than -8 health.

Second was an entirely new ability and a new addition to his life skills. The life skill, while interesting, wasn’t important right now.

A Seed of Knowledge: You are now aware of the portion of power within you that comes from Bhaal and that it can grow with time as other Bhaalspawn die. While you can still not consciously use it, with Tyr’s guidance, you might be able to meditate and come in contact with it without this portion of the God of Murder influencing your mind.

In times of Great stress and near death, you might be able to reach this spark for aid, although what kind of aid it would be, you have no idea.

Honestly speaking, the very idea that the portion of Bhaal’s power within his blood could influence his mind was horrifying to Harry. He didn’t even know if his Gamer’s Mind could keep out influence like that built into his very body. That was disturbing in the extreme, so even if it might be useful, Harry wasn’t going to mess with it, not even in terms of meditating in order to try and find that spark within him. Still, the Iron Will was nice. There were also two new slots in the activated skill area of his Character Sheet, but they were grayed out for some reason.

Tyr stepped back for a moment, watching Harry shake his head, staring around himself for a few moments. “That feeling you just felt was not only my imparting a bit of my

own power into you, Harry, but also unlocking your potential as a paladin at your level. I believe it's been mentioned several times that paladins rarely get to be above Level 5 before choosing a God, and your Lay on hand spells, Detect Evil and so forth had been capped by your lack of deity. I have other gifts for you, my young paladin, but if I gave them to you now, your brain would be mush for at least a few hours. Which you do not have. Thus, I have locked them for the moment. If you survive the trial to come, I think you'll find that they suit you well."

"Well, if that isn't ominous," Harry muttered, shaking his head again but straightening his shoulders, his hands clenching at his side. *Why can't we just stay in this moment of time or what-have-you?*

"It was meant to be." Tyr then just smirked a bit. "And as for the question I can sense, now that I have given you my patronage, this moment is going to end... and I have already done more than I should." The smirk vanished into a grim look as he gently shook Harry by the shoulder. "Gird your loins, Harry Potter. Your first test is upon you. For it would not do for my newest champion to arrive too late at his first true battle."

With that, the moment in time collapsed, and Tyr popped out of existence like a bubble, so suddenly it caused Harry to stumble.

When he recovered, Harry found himself very much not where he had started, whatever that had been. A moment in time stretched out, a moment in time taken out of the time stream and then sent forward? He didn't know. Regardless of how it had occurred, Harry found himself both with very sore legs and now within sight of the first farmsteads around Beregost. In the darkness ahead of him, he could see fire lighting up the night sky, tendrils of smoke blotting out the stars above.

"Well... that was helpful, I suppose," Harry muttered, before blinking and looking down at his legs. "Also, ow!"

Harry realized he was dealing with a status debuff, Sore Muscles and Pulled Hamstrings. There was also Exhaustion to consider, but thanks to his high Constitution, that wasn't as bad as it should have been.

Quickly, Harry used two consecutive Lay on Hands spells, healing the damage in his legs and bringing his health back to full. When he was done, he hurried forward, wishing he could do something about his slight exhaustion, but setting that aside for that. Soon, he began to see bodies among the churned-up fields, and then a notification about a new bestiary page appeared.

Staring at it, Harry knew that that would be his test, the creature the trial Tyr had spoken of. After a second's contemplation, he nodded. "So be it."

With that, he raced on, finding the going far easier after a few moments as he hit the area where battles had occurred, the snow having been tamped down or even turned into slush and quickly frozen mud underneath his feet.

Soon after that, Harry came within sight of the town proper through the fires and gloom, and with it, the Tanar'ri demon that had just smashed through a house's wall. Worse than that, Harry could feel it. He could feel the corruption, the miasma of evil, the delight in violence and carnage around the creature, the sheer impact on the world around it. This thing **should not** exist on this plane, and the world knew it and reviled its presence, the chaos of its being eating at the order of this plane of existence.

Any hesitation Harry had, of which there had been very little, of swearing himself to Tyr's service, disappeared at that. Staring at this monster, Harry once more understood that he could not see something like this, could not feel that presence, and not fight the creature behind it. If he was going to do that, then having a god's hand on his shoulder, giving him power and added strength, well, Harry was not so arrogant as to turn that down.

As that thought hit him, he found his body filled with renewed purpose. His remaining aches and pains of the journey faded away, including his mild exhaustion. He felt a hand on his shoulder, squeezing briefly, and his lips pulled back into a grin as a bellowing war cry ripped from his lips for the first time. "For TYRRRR!!"

End Flashback

As Harry closed his eyes for a second to rest after his retelling, Viconia stared at him thoughtfully, at this new Champion of Tyr, wondering idly if Shar would wish her to kill him now. To kill Harry and flee the town, to take her chances out in the wilderness. While Shar rarely acted openly, she was ostensibly an enemy of Order. Shar was a goddess of darkness, loss, things done in the darkness and the Mistress of the Shadow Weave, the opposing weave of magic to that created and maintained by Mystra.

However, such open actions were against Shar's very nature, for deeds done in the dark, clandestine activities, and subversion were her realm. And while Shar herself was known as an enemy of all gods who strode in the light, she did not demand that her worshippers fight such. Well, except for followers of her hated sister, Selune, or Mystra. Shar's rivalry with those two goddesses was much hotter and more personal than her stance towards other good-aligned gods. Honestly speaking, Viconia had no idea what Shar thought of Tyr and would, in fact, probably be accepting of some of his order-and-law-related portfolio. Shar might have been

called an evil god by most, but she certainly wasn't a fan of chaos or destruction for destruction's sake. Such things needed to serve a purpose.

Would Shar be worried about this new Champion, this Bhaalspawn who had chosen the way of good and order? Almost certainly. Did Shar know about Harry's new status? Given the night around them, that was certain too. But Viconia wasn't being given any divine guidance as to what to do with him, and without that, she fell back on her own feelings.

And left on her own without such guidance, Viconia felt that attacking Harry would be inherently wrong. Wrong on a level that would put Viconia, in her mind, on the same level as her mother for turning on Viconia when Lolth turned against their house. Which wasn't even considering her own... connection to Harry.

I can't do it, she thought, even if I know that eventually, the two of us may come into conflict about our beliefs, about how we view the world, about the demands of our gods. I cannot do that to Harry, to someone I have, as weak as it might make me think I am, come to care about.

Even taking her own sense of moral and emotional out of the equation, there was something immensely **enticing** about being close to someone who could become so powerful. Who was already far more powerful than his level would suggest. *Very enticing indeed*, she thought, concentrating more on that than on the emotional aspect, as it was much less worrisome to deal with. *And there is always the chance I might seduce him to fall from Tyr's grace... yes, that would please my goddess, I think.*

Aloud, she said, "Well, that was very interesting, but do not expect me to bow and scrape to you, oh great champion. You should also not expect me to always be willing to go along with any do-gooder plans that you make, or accept Tyr's narrow vision of what is right and what is wrong."

"I think I've shown through my interactions with you and a certain red mage of our acquaintance that I don't have a 'narrow vision' of what is right and wrong," Harry said dryly, before chuckling, which, honestly, was not worth the pain that it caused his chest and his whole body. He opened his eyes then, staring up at her, while his Greater Observation skill blinked a notification up in front of his eyes. This one, he read quickly instead of shunting it aside as he had with several since the arrival of Thalantyr.

Viconia is inwardly torn about your new status. While she remains leery about the growing emotional connection between the two of you, she is even more worried about your finally choosing a god of light, knowing this will almost certainly bring you into conflict in the future, if not directly, then in simply how you see the world and interact with it. She is also concerned about how Shar would react to her traveling with you and you in general.

It is doubtful that any great change will occur in how Viconia interacts with you, and she is still romantically interested in you, but who knows what the future holds?

As that observation disappeared, the vial of a second healing potion filled the bottom half of Harry's line of sight. He sipped happily at the healing potion for a few seconds before going on. "And I doubt there's any actual bow and scrape within you anyway. If you ever did try to do something like that, I think the fakeness of it all would make my teeth ache."

"You'd best not forget it, male," Viconia muttered, before bringing the healing potion to Harry's lips again. "For now, how much of their flesh should I flense from Edwina and Alora for running away as they did? If they knew of a place of safety, or were under a Fear spell, I could understand it, but leaving us behind with no such promise of actually surviving the night was both cowardly and foolish."

Left unsaid was which she found the most reprehensible, and Harry began to laugh again, only to groan in pain, which caused Viconia to curse him out for being a foolish male. Nearby, the adamantine golem finished off the devil and stood, still awaiting orders, while the rest of the defenders began creeping back, all to the sound of Viconia's increasingly loud admonishments.

Scene break

As the exceedingly odd pair of a newly risen paladin of Tyr and a Cleric of Shar fell silent, elsewhere, Kelddath leaned against a blasted broking tree, staring into the distance as an adamantine golem pursued Hephernaan, the instigator of this attack, away from the town. That fight had been entirely too close for comfort, and the fact that such a being was active here in the Sword Coast was something he would need to inform the wider clergy of Lathander about. *Not that there will be many who can match him*, Kelddath thought, grimacing as the pain of his various wounds pushed into his mind. *In a one-on-one contest, he would have killed me long since.*

Baatezu demons were always dangerous. Demons of any kind intelligent enough to both take human form, to rein in their miasma of corruption enough to fool people and to even act the part were even worse.

Shaking those observations off, Kelddath turned his gaze skyward to where a magic carpet flew a few stories above his head. "I thank you, Thalantyr, for your timely intervention. Although I am certain the mayor will try to demand answers from you as to why it took you so long to arrive, I will simply accept that, like the dawn, you arrived perfectly on time, and thank you wholeheartedly."

“Bah, it is not only me you should be thanking for this night’s work. I will admit that I became concerned when some idiotic fools tried to break into my estate. But it was a crystal connected to the life force of one of my factors here in town, shattering that told me something was wrong. Lucky you are that I decided to come in force just in case,” Thalantyr the conjurer said, a name that Kelddath always thought silly given how much of Thalantyr’s power was in enchantment rather than conjuration. Still, he certainly wasn’t about to comment. It would be rude.

“Yet even so, were it not for that adventuring party that has stayed with you this winter, the entire town would’ve been massacred long before I could arrive,” Thalantyr continued, as his hovering magic carpet descended. It settled onto the muddy, blood-drenched, frozen ground next to Kelddath. He stared off into the distance for a moment, also following his golem’s progress, before shaking his head and jerking a finger over his shoulder deeper into town. “There was another demon here, a Tanar’ri. That creature would’ve broken your defenses on the other side of town if not for the actions of that adventuring party.”

“They fou—” Kelddath froze, shaking his head. “How?! There’s no doubt in my mind that their wizard and cleric alike were out of spells, none of them are high-leveled enough to—”

“I don’t know about that, but their paladin, the one that leads them, was still standing up to the creature by the time I arrived. Well, admittedly by that point he wasn’t standing, but he was still alive when I sent my adamantine golem in to fight the Tenar’ri,” Thalantyr said, waving that off, his normal uncaring attitude mixing with a bit of droll humor.

“Wait, Harry arrived back?” Kelddath mused before shaking his head. “Well, regardless, I might have put my adventuring life behind me, but I surely still remember the power of good luck, and we seem to have had plenty of it tonight.”

One of the sirines moved up to him, holding out a potion, but Kelddath shook his head. He was exhausted, and as much as he knew Edwina (and hadn’t that made for some amusement over the past few weeks) and the drow had probably used all their spells, he only had a few resurrection spells in his daily spell book at the moment. Despite that and exhaustion weighing heavily on his bones, Kelddath actually wasn’t all that battered. A broken rib, several broken fingers, and his foot was definitely... well, he wasn’t going to look down at his foot at the moment, but that was it.

There were far worse off all around. “Start distributing those and the rest of our emergency supplies among the fighters still capable of combat without extensive healing. The enemy broke, but we’ll want to send at least a few archers out after them to make certain they don’t reform.” *Without Hephernaan and the Tanar’ri, it’s doubtful they could break our defense, but seeing what’s happened to the barricades, it’s best to err on the side of caution.*

The sirine nodded, then looked to the side, where two of her sisters were kneeling down beside the body of a fourth, gently covering what remained of her body with a cloth sheet taken from a bed in one of the nearby wrecked houses. Kelddath followed her gaze before sighing faintly, knowing there would be no resurrection for Cara. No God could resurrect someone whose head had basically disappeared into a fine mist of blood, gore and bone bits. *Still, I will perform a sermon for her when our Lord is high in the sky. Without Cara, I might be missing an arm and might not have even survived to greet Thalantyr.*

Pushing himself off the wall, Kelddath steadied himself for a second on his feet, still not looking down at the throbbing mass of agony that was his left foot, before staring all around, taking in the shattered remnants of the defensive barricade and two of the outer buildings, the number of dead that littered the area. He could tell that several of them would be able to be resurrected, but just as many wouldn't, although there actually weren't as many bodies as he had feared. With the sirine's help, Kelddath had held the transformed Baatezu in place, and the sirine songs had kept the other guards at their posts despite the aura of fear that Hephernaan had created with his mere presence.

Yet that was scant comfort, and Kelddath shook his head angrily. "What was this all about!? We've never been attacked like this. I could perhaps see several of the bandit clans out there gathering to make a raid on our town. It's well known that several caravans winter with us here, and that's good spoil. I even understand the tension between Amn and Baldur's Gate, the whole issue with the iron ore. But even so..."

"I would assume that group was behind this, yes," Thalantyr said, showing little interest but making idle chatter for a moment with the only one in Beregost he felt worthy of his time. "I would further assume that they have connections at least to the priesthood of Cyric, to be able to gather not one demon but two, and that the one you followed is high up or perhaps even leads the group behind those tensions. As for the size of this attack, consider. It is the dead of winter. No one could have escaped the destruction of this town, not even to the Friendly Arm Inn. It's simply too far away for any survivors to reach. The first convoy comes from either the south or the north as they always do, and finds wreckage and death here, months old..."

"Thus allowing whoever did this, whoever is pushing for more tensions between Amn and Balder's Gate to create their own stories. It would restart the war talk that had begun to die down when Harry and his group discovered what was going on with the Nashkel mines and purged them," Kelddath murmured. He had been told about the group's previous dealings by Vai and had even talked to Harry occasionally over the weeks about it. "I would've thought that would've been enough to convince both parties to look inward, though, and to resist any such efforts."

“My sources in Balder’s Gate tell me that they are still assuming that it is an Amnish conspiracy. My sources in the South tell me much the same,” Thalantyr answered.

Kelddath looked at him sharply, his eyes narrowing. “Far scrying and far-talking? Do you have up-to-date information?”

“No, not on this. I simply have acquaintances and friends there, as well as a few familiars whose job it is to simply gather information and pass it on to me occasionally.” The old wizard smirked just a little bit. “Just because I like to remain aloof from things doesn’t mean I am unaware of anything that could possibly interfere with my retirement.”

Thalantyr looked around, then shook his head, somewhat intrigued by this minor mystery. “The other idea behind this attack might be that it is entirely unconnected. It could have something to do with either a certain drow ranger who had passed through the area recently—”

“I heard about that as well from Harry and his band. Apparently, they met him, but he never stopped in Beregost,” Kelddath interjected, looking a little uncomfortable. While he didn’t have the same visceral reaction to Viconia that Vai did, Kelddath also held certain views and was generally uncomfortable with the fact that one of the greatest heroes of the age was a living testament to the fact that not all drow were as evil as their spider goddess.

“Then—” It was the wizard’s turn to break off as he stared towards where his adamantine golem had just gone over the horizon, frowning. “the transformed Baatezu you were fighting, you wounded it, but it was still able to destroy my adamantine golem and escape. Fascinating.”

“I should damn well hope it’s hurt!” Kelddath grumbled, reaching down to pull his hammer up from the ground where it had fallen from his grip a few moments ago. “I know I at least shattered a few of that fiend’s ribs, and might’ve mangled his hand in return for the ruin he made of my foot.”

“I will need to raise my impression of that creature’s power, then. It is almost certain that Baatezu is involved in this whole attempt to cause war between Amn and Baldur’s Gate, perhaps even leads it,” Thalantyr muttered.

“Then perhaps this attack had just as much to do with revenge on Harry and his companions for their efforts as it did to light a new flame on the tinder of suspicion that lies between those of the south and Baldur’s Gate,” Kelddath mused, before shrugging. “I wish I could take them to task on that, but any other party of adventurers who had stuck their noses in would have resulted in the same outcome.”

Unaware that his offhand comment had smoothed over any anger that might have been sent Harry and his band's way, Thalantyr simply hummed, turning to gaze deeper into the town. Vai was coming towards them, and Kelddath waved at her.

"Well, regardless, we survived. By the Morning Lord's light, we will continue to do so," Kelddath said firmly, before smiling at Vai, who had just finished giving out some orders to a few of her men. They moved off into the darkness beyond the fires and the town, all of them armed with either crossbows or bows. "And I do believe that Harry and his party have paid off their... debt... to us all."

As the flaming fist officer looked guilty, Thalantyr snorted and shifted back onto his magic carpet, which began to rise into the air a second later at a gesture from one of his ring-covered hands. Whatever that was about, he had no interest in. What he did find some interest in, if on an academic level, was noticing the oddities he had seen during the fight between the young paladin and the demon and writing them down for later perusal and experimentation.

At his level, Harry should not have been able to fight that Tanar'ri as well as he had. But he did. He fought him incredibly well in point of fact.

Thalantyr had watched for a few moments before sending in his adamantine golem. *Yes, that youngster's been touched by the divine, either by fate or by divine blood. I can't tell which. But one thing is certain: the world is not done with that young paladin by a long shot. Indeed, he might look back on this night's work as simply a fond memory. Someone who blazes so brightly gathers shadows all the darker.*

Scene break

Thanks to the final head wound she had taken from a white piece of debris, Imoen had died. She had felt that final impact, a blaze of pain going through her head, then nothing more as she had already been very low on HP.

Imoen had not known what to expect when she fell, although she had idly thought about dying before. Edwina and Garrick had both died previously and been brought back, but neither had spoken of it. Looking back, Imoen felt certain that if there had been some kind of waiting room for the soul where they had to stay to wait to see if they would be resurrected, both men would have said something. If only to berate Harry for taking so long to resurrect them, in Edwina's case. Garrick would almost undoubtedly have just whined about it.

Regardless, whenever Imoen thought of what it might be like to die, that was what Imoen thought of: a waiting room like in the movie *Beetlejuice*, one of her favorite movies back on Earth, or something like the halls of the dead, as described by books about the new god of the dead, Kelemvor, who had taken over the job from Myrkul in the Time of Troubles. She had

read about him and other gods on occasion over the winter along with Lathander and many of the gods of light.

Regardless, neither concept matched what she was seeing now.

The moment the lights went out back in her body, Imoen found herself, her soul, floating in a sea of semi-nothingness. There was nothing above, nothing to the sides but gray. Not gray clouds, not gray walls, just gray. The essence of gray.

At first, there had been a kind of panorama directly below her to break up the monotony. There, Imoen could look down at Beregost, the town laid out like some child's Lego set. It had almost felt to Imoen that she could reach down and move some of the people around like little toys. She hadn't tried, though, and instead had watched the fight for a few minutes, then even that image faded, leaving Imoen floating in gray blandness.

After a few minutes of doing nothing, Imoen sighed, trying to move herself, to move her body, only to fail. "Well, crud. If this is some kind of waiting room for the soul, couldn't they at least include some magazines or something?" she nearly demanded, her mind bringing up old thoughts about Beetlejuice again. "I ain't going to ask for music, because good gods, could that go bad so wrong so quickly, but still."

"Unless they can tailor the music to your own tastes, that would almost certainly be a recipe for disaster. But what's a magazine? Is it something you read?" A voice called out from among the grey.

It was her voice. Imoen's voice, the voice of the body Tonks had taken over.

From out of the gray, another young woman, someone that Imoen knew quite well, appeared. Her hair was a dark brown rather than pink, her face a bit fuller, and her skin just a little whiter and less weathered. She also lacked the infectious grin that Tonks knew came from her own life. Imoen's smile, instead, seemed a little small, a little wry and secretive, her eyes gleaming not so much with lively humor as with sly amusement.

Regardless, the body and face were those of Imoen. Or perhaps, the Imoen that had grown up in Candlekeep rather than experiencing any time on the road since. Which, the soul that was Tonks realized, could mean many things.

As she pondered that, the other Imoen, instead of saying anything, looked down from the current Imoen's face to take in her own body.

That caused Tonks, and she was already starting to think of herself in that term, to blink, because she found she was not in the body she had been inhabiting. Rather, she was back in her

original body. In this, she was at least a foot taller, wider in the shoulders and waist, and, more importantly to Tonks, bigger up top.

Hesitantly, Tonks raised her hands to her chest, which was a good D size rather than the perky little barely Bs that she had gotten used to since coming to this world. She began to feel herself up a little, grinning cheerily. "Damn! I've missed you two!"

Tonks concentrated for a brief moment, and after a bit of effort, she felt her skin shift as she changed her face, then her hair. Pulling it into her line of sight, Tonks changed it from light pink to blue, then to red, and back to bubblegum pink, before her hands returned to her chest, which began to grow, shrink, and grow again as she laughed. "That's what I'm talking about! You never know what you have until it's gone."

"Disgust and envy rise from deep within me," Imoen muttered, her eyes raking up and down Tonks's form. "It's always been a toss-up for me who I'm more jealous of: women who are taller than me, or those who have better tits. Now you come along, take over my body, and have the ability to eventually do both. I'm not exactly sure how I feel about that, although you better believe I was pissed about the whole takeover thing at first."

"Er, yeah, I'd apologize, but I wasn't in charge of how I wound up in Toril," Tonks answered a little sheepishly, trying hard not to feel guilty. "That wasn't my choice. I was just following Harry, trying to figure out where he'd gone. Suddenly, these words were embedding themselves in my mind about my needing to be fit into a template, and then I was in your body and trying to get used to it."

As Imoen scowled, Tonks attempted to change the subject a bit. "Just don't tell me you've been able to watch my life or something since? That sounds both really boring and really frustrating, given how adventurers go from moments of levity."

"Yes, I've been able to watch," Imoen pouted, shaking her head. "I also know that it wasn't your idea to supplant me. I watched that first conversation with Harry. At first... honestly, I thought it was a dream. Then, well, everything sort of started to pile up after and made me realize it wasn't. Seeing Harry change like that, react to the idea you were related and, um, everything there, drove it home for me that what I was dealing with was real."

Imoen original flavor shook her head. "I wanted to hate you, and at first, I did. How dare you take my life from me, and all that. But you followed Harry with the best of intentions, and you... You've been more of a help to him than I would. I'm an okay thief, but I lean more toward the non-combat stuff. You fight better than me, you have those Blood Magic spells, which I wouldn't have known about unless Harry could teach me, and you're even a leader. Which I'm not."

Imoen's lips twisted into a slight smirk. "I'm just thankful you're not interested in him. That would've been ridiculously awkward, excluding the whole thing about both of us being children of Mister Murder Manslut. So... by now I don't blame you for that."

"*Phew*" Tonks breathed out a sigh of relief. "And yeah, girl, I'm not interested in Harry. He's not my type, generally speaking."

"Not my type either, excluding the whole growing up as if we were brother and sister thing," Original Imoen agreed, her eyes tracking downward from Tonks' face just slightly, something Tonks noticed, but didn't comment on. If it was her general jealousy, or a hint as to why Harry wasn't her type, Tonks couldn't say and wouldn't speculate.

"Huh, that makes sense, actually. As amazing as some of your thieving skills and so forth are, you **really** should have exercised more if you wanted to become an adventurer. I mean, don't get me wrong, I love sneaking around, and traps are riotously cool, but Backstab is the best, and I would've been better at it with more physical ability, to say nothing of getting my Metamorph powers back faster, having more endurance, more strength. Seriously, Dynaheir and Alora are stronger than us. Alora!" Tonks repeated, her hands on her hips. "And that's not even mentioning your Constitution."

Okay, I'll admit that. It's just, I was never really interested in all the physical exercises that Harry really enjoyed. I don't know why you think Backstab is so interesting; you've got that Blood Magic stuff," Imoen admitted, looking a bit sheepish as Tonks had earlier for a second before she began to babble excitedly, her face shifting into a wide grin. "I studied a lot of books about magic and so forth. I kind of wanted to Dual Class after a few years as a Thief, and let me tell you, that kind of thing is amazing! Knew you would be able to mitigate the damage it does to your health before you did, although there's at least another way to do that, and maybe a few items out there that would help a lot if you can find them. And by Oghma, don't get me started on those potions and stuff Harry's started working on. Alchemy could be freaking incredible!"

She frowned a bit. "Although I do also kind of agree that you need to keep it a secret, which is a bit of a downer. I'm not certain I would have allowed Imoen to travel with you, but I guess he's got hidden depths if someone like Alora can get along with him, er, her, currently, I guess. Heh, that was hilarious. Is Edwina still trying to change back, or is she getting used to things?"

"Still trying, but Edwina likes the added power and physical prowess being in a 'perfect form' gives her, so it's slow going because he wants to figure out how to transfer those enhancements to his normal body," Tonks explained, and with a grin asked what Imoen thought of their other companions. "Personally, Minsc's my favorite. He and Boo are great, with Alora

starting to become my second favorite. I can't tell ya I'm all that close to Dynaheir. There's something about her that always strikes me as if she's somehow judging Harry and me."

This went on for a bit, the two women sharing jokes about the other adventurers but after talking about how Jaheira had kind of mellowed on Imoen, and Viconia scared her, but that Imoen could understand why Harry was drawn to her, the conversation kind of petered out for a bit, the two of them staring at one another before Imoen said hesitantly, "So, er, what happens now, do you think?"

"Well, I don't think my, or, um, your, body was ruined or anything, so I suppose it can be resurrected. Are we... like, going to switch off or something whenever 'we' get killed?" Tonks' face scrunched up as her hair flashed to a dark purple of distress at the idea, but it had to be said, and honestly, if that happened, Tonks wasn't in a position to complain overmuch given how she had arrived in Toril in the first place.

"That could be really awkward," Tonks went on, before snickering. "Although maybe not as awkward to you as it would've been if I were interested in Harry romantically. Especially considering how far along that relationship would've been by this point."

"Switching off who lives in my body like that would be an eight out of ten on an awkward scale, while your being interested in Harry would be at least a twenty on that same scale," Imoen agreed, even as she emphasized the fact that the body in question was indeed hers originally.

"WELL, I'M GLAD TO SEE THE TWO OF YOU GETTING ALONG, BUT THIS SEEMS TO BE THE BEST TIME FOR ME TO INTERJECT," a new feminine voice intoned.

This voice was not one either Imoen or Tonks knew. It was a light contralto, practically thrumming, and carried with it a certain amount of presence both women felt.

Before either woman was able to analyze the new voice beyond that, everything around them changed. The gray nothingness gave way to a view of someone floating in space. Everywhere Tonks looked, there were stars, each star and constellation seemingly so close you could reach out and touch them, yet so far away at the same time. They were blazing threads of light throughout the starry skies, and Imoen original flavor, gasped, staring all around her avidly. "The Weave!"

"The what?" Tonks asked.

"Oh, yeah, forgot that you didn't read all of the theory books I did and that a lot of that information didn't really pass to you. The Weave is the magic of the universe; it's what mages of all kinds, sorcerers, wizards, everyone, reach out to when they do magic. It's the domain of..."

Imoen frowned suddenly, her awed expression turning almost slack with shock as she looked around her, inquisitive yet also frightened. "It's the domain of the goddess Mystra."

"EXCELLENT DEDUCTION," that same feminine voice from a moment ago said, and both Imoen and Tonks felt their heads turning almost as if someone else was moving their bodies for a second toward where the voice came from. From out of the firmament all around, an image started to form, the image of a woman molding itself out of the view all around them before that form began to change, becoming physical substance rather than nothingness, like a slowed-down transfiguration spell. Soon, a woman stood there, crossing her arms, staring at both of them thoughtfully.

The goddess who stood before Imoen and Tonks' souls was quite different from how Mystra had appeared to Harry. She was less human-looking, her hair still being made of the stars and lights of the Weave. Her eyes were deep black chasms, and Mystra also stood at least twelve feet tall.

Yet at the same time, she was far less angry than Harry had described the goddess of magic as being to Tonks during that trial. To Imoen, the goddess gave off the impression of one of the sisters at Candlekeep looking at a particularly interesting book, while Tonks was put in mind of a Ravenclaw who had been conducting a magical experiment in an empty classroom Tonks had stumbled on as a prefect.

With a wry chuckle, Mystra waved at each woman in turn, doing introductions, although obviously it wasn't necessary at this point. **"IMOEN OF CANDLEKEEP ON TORIL, BE KNOWN TO NYMPHADORA TONKS OF EARTH, A DIMENSION QUITE REMOVED FROM YOUR OWN. ONE THAT I HAVE VERY LITTLE TO DO WITH. INDEED, I'VE NEVER BEEN WORSHIPED THERE, UNFORTUNATELY. WIZARDS AND WITCHES GO INTO ANCESTOR WORSHIP IF THEY BELIEVE IN ANYTHING. THEY DON'T EVEN REALLY BELIEVE IN MAGIC, OR AT LEAST, NOT LIKE THE FAITHFUL BELIEVE IN THEIR RESPECTIVE GODS. RATHER, YOU WIZARDS SEE MAGIC MORE AS A POWER OF NATURE THAT ONLY THEY CAN CALL UPON."**

She gave Tonks a smirk, who had swelled up and turned red at the mention of the hated name. The goddess suddenly appeared just a little more human, her face shifting dramatically, becoming both younger and less pretty, but far more personable, her eyes now a warm teal. **"TO PUT IT IN LAYMAN'S TERMS, CONSIDER ME AN EMPRESS OF A WIDE WORLD-SPANNING EMPIRE, TONKS. YOUR LITTLE DIMENSION WOULD BE A DISTANT PROVINCE OF THAT EMPIRE, SEPARATED FROM THE REST OF IT BY WIDE, WIDE WATERS THAT NO ONE TRULY RULES. I KNOW IT EXISTS. I KNOW A BIT ABOUT WHAT GOES ON THERE**

AND THE LOCAL LAWS OF MAGIC BECAUSE OF MY PORTFOLIO AS THE GODDESS OF MAGIC. BUT THAT IS IT. I AM NOT LIKE TYR, WHO WAS WORSHIPED THERE AND THEN MIGRATED TO THIS DIMENSION AND THUS STILL HAS SOME DEGREE OF CONNECTION TO IT.”

Her smile widened as Tonks slowly got her Metamorph powers under control, Mystra not letting the woman blow up at her or even comment on how Imoen had snickered at Tonks’ first name. “IMAGINE MY SURPRISE WHEN YOU SUDDENLY ARRIVE HERE, AT THE CENTER OF MY DOMAIN. YOU DON’T ONLY ARRIVE, YOU’RE ALLOWED TO SURVIVE THE EXPERIENCE, YOUR SOUL INTACT AFTER BEING DRAGGED THROUGH SO MANY DIMENSIONS. LIKE TYR, I DO NOT KNOW WHY AO OVER-GOD DECIDED YOU SHOULD DO SO, BUT...” Here, Mystra’s face wrinkled into an impish smirk. “I’M CERTAINLY GOING TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF IT.”

Both Imoen and Tonks shuddered, a visible shiver of fear and worry going through them at the mention of Ao. Before the Time of Troubles, that name had not been known to any sentient being on Toril, but it had since become known that even gods had a greater being they all had to answer to. A being whose power had nothing to do with worship, and whose overall goal, or duty, was to just make certain the gods keep to their portfolios and take their own tasks seriously. To hear that such a being had made a decision about Tonks’s soul was worrisome in the extreme to both women.

It was so bad that Tonks’ form began to deflate, quite literally. She shrank down to normal Imoen height, and her tits began to disappear a bit, even beyond her normal small B cups. The sight of this caused Imoen, the original, to bite back another laugh before turning her attention back to the goddess. “Er, I understand you weren’t involved in Tonks’s supplanting me, Milady Goddess, and I don’t hold it against her, but um, why am I like this?” she asked. “I, if anything, shouldn’t Tonks and I have merged somehow? Or, or I should have been erased. Either seems more likely than me just being shunted aside and living through the experience.”

“YOUR SOUL WAS INDEED SHUNTED ASIDE INTO THE ETHER BY TONKS’S, UNLIKE THE ORIGINAL SOUL YOUNG HARRY’S REPLACED. THAT ONE... AS MUCH AS HE WAS A PALADIN AND SOMETHING OF A GOOD FIGHTER, HE HAD NO REAL STRENGTH OF **WILL** TO HIM...” Mystra shook her head, suddenly appearing older, a matron who was speaking of someone who had never lived up to their potential, instead simply coasting along. “HADRIAN’S SOUL, AS YOU KNEW HIM, WAS MERGED FULLY WITH HARRY, WITH HARRY’S PERSONALITY EASILY BECOMING THE MOST DOMINANT, OVERRIDING PRACTICALLY EVERYTHING BUT HADRIAN’S LACKLUSTER TRAINING.”

That caused Imoen to frown a bit. "I would have thought, well, given Tonks's greater life experiences and everything else, my own soul wouldn't have withstood what happened either," she pointed out.

"AH, BUT THAT IS BECAUSE YOU UNDERESTIMATE YOURSELF. UNLIKE HADRIAN, YOU ARE SHARP AS A TACK AND DRIVEN TO BOTH LEARN AND GROW." Mystra shook her head. **"NOR AM I GOING TO EXPLAIN IN DETAIL WHAT TRULY MADE THE ORIGINAL GORIONSON SO WEAK IN TERMS OF HIS SOUL, THAT WOULD TAKE A LONG WHILE TO EXPLAIN, AND I DON'T THINK YOU'RE HONESTLY ALL THAT INTERESTED."**

Mystra paused, and the area around them shifted again, changing instead into a wizard's lab. Both Imoen and Tonks had seen the like before, although there weren't any moving pictures or anything else around the place. **"REGARDLESS, WITH BOTH OF YOU HERE, I HAVE OPTIONS WE CAN PURSUE, AND OPPORTUNITIES HERE, OPPORTUNITIES I WOULD LIKE TO TAKE ADVANTAGE OF, AS I SAID."**

"Um, what do you mean by take advantage? That doesn't, well, that kind of wording doesn't exactly fill me with delight, Milady Goddess," Imoen said, frowning a little. "Not after I was forced to read every history book that covered the recent Time of Troubles, and everything that went on there. Erm, up to and including what happened between you and Helm. I don't think either of us would er, be good tools for revenge or anything like that, to say nothing about your wars with Shar or Cyric."

The goddess scowled at the mention of that most unyielding and inflexible of the Gods of Order, before she shook her head. **"NO, MY PLANS DO NOT INVOLVE PETTY VENGEANCE OR MY ENEMIES HERE IN THIS DIMENSION. FRANKLY, I DON'T THINK EITHER OF YOU COULD AFFECT ANYTHING ON THAT SCALE. EVEN WITH THE DIVINE BLOOD OF BHAAL WITHIN YOUR BODY, YOU DON'T HAVE AS GREAT A PORTION OF HIS POWER AS HARRY'S BODY DOES. YOUR SOULS ALSO AREN'T AS POWERFUL AS HIS, FOR NEITHER OF YOU WERE FATES MARKED AS HARRY WAS IN HIS ORIGINAL LIFE, SOMETHING THAT STILL TIES HIM BACK TO YOUR OLD DIMENSION EVEN AS HE BECOMES MORE AND MORE ATTACHED TO TORIL."**

While Tonks made a note of that, Imoen simply looked at the goddess, then back at Tonks. "So what did you mean?" She asked hesitantly.

"AS IMPORTANT AS HARRY MIGHT EVENTUALLY BE TO YOUR OLD WORLD, YOUR BEING HERE CAN BE EVEN MORE IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF MAGIC AND ITS

EVOLUTION BOTH THERE AND ON TORIL. MAGIC IS EVER-CHANGING, OR SHOULD BE, BUT FOR TOO LONG, BOTH ON EARTH AND TORIL, MAGIC HAS BEEN STRATIFIED, LINKED TO SPELLS, RITUALS, AND KNOWN KNOWLEDGE. PEOPLE HAVE STOPPED PUSHING FOR MORE, AND WORSE, HAVE STOPPED LEARNING ABOUT MAGIC FOR MAGIC'S OWN SAKE. WHAT INNOVATIONS THERE ARE ARE SMALL THINGS TO MAKE EXISTING SPELLS EASIER OR TO MAKE THE LIVES OF WIZARDS AND WITCHES EVEN EASIER THAN THEY ALREADY ARE, NOT TO PUSH THE REALMS OF WHAT IS AND IS NOT POSSIBLE."

Mystra sounded almost disgusted there, nearly spitting some of the words as they personally offended her. It was quite clear to both her listeners that Mystra disliked the idea of magic being easy or used to live a life of leisure.

"ON TORIL," Mystra continued, SORCERERS AND MAGES CERTAINLY INNOVATE MORE THAN THAT, BUT ONLY TO A SMALL DEGREE IN COMPARISON TO WHAT THOSE WHO LOOK TO SHAR'S DAMNED DARK WEAVE DO. YOUR KNOWLEDGE OF MAGIC IN YOUR WORLD CAN BE AS IMPORTANT IN TERMS OF BREATHING NEW LIFE INTO SUCH THINGS AS ANY OF HARRY'S DOINGS WILL BE TO THE ONGOING WAR BETWEEN THE TRIAD AND THE DARK-ALIGNED FORCES, TONKS."

As Mystra spoke, the tableau around them shifted back once more to the endless star scape with the Weave lighting up the area around them. Dark veins of some kind of negative energies appeared, darkening the sky around them, in parallel to but completely unconnected to the original Weave of light and power around them.

Looking at it, Imoen and Tonks both understood that they were suddenly looking at the Dark Weave. The dark weave had been created by Shar to allow her to combat the Weave of Mystra. A mirror and insult against the original Weave, it was a second source of magic that those who wished to use magic in a way Mystra did not approve of could do so. The cost was far higher, and it empowered Shar to a tremendous degree, but those who reached for such powers rarely cared about the consequences.

Staring all around them, then back to the goddess, Tonks had to ask hesitantly, "Er, on an unrelated topic, I hope, well, I, I know about your hatred for Shar. Does that, does your talk about that stuff mean we should be wary of Viconia and her influence over Harry? Or that we should be trying to get rid of her or watch Viconia because you think we'll stab us in the back?"

"I'd watch her for an entirely different reason," Imoen the original muttered, making Tonks wonder again about her orientation for a second, but now was not the time for such things.

Yet, surprisingly, after a few fulminating seconds in which her hands clenched and unclenched in a very human gesture of anger and an attempt at self-control, the goddess settled down. "SURPRISINGLY, I DON'T THINK YOU NEED TO. I DO WONDER WHY SHAR HELPED VICONIA, IF IT WAS A MOMENTARY WHIM ON HER PART, A CHANCE TO GET MORE INFLUENCE AMONG THE DROW, PERHAPS? BUT AS MUCH AS VICONIA HAS ATTEMPTED TO INFLUENCE HARRY OCCASIONALLY, HE HAS BEEN FAR MORE SUCCESSFUL IN INFLUENCING HER. SO I DO NOT THINK YOU NEED TO BE WARY ABOUT VICONIA HERSELF."

Mystra then shook her head, her voice becoming far more serious. "HOWEVER, IF SHAR WAS NOT AWARE OF HARRY AND HOW CLOSE SHE HAS A FOLLOWER TO A NEW CHAMPION OF TYR, SHE WILL BE NOW. THE BATTLE THAT SAW YOU SLAIN, TONKS, HAPPENED AT NIGHT, UNDER A MOONLESS NIGHT, WHEN SHAR IS AT HER STRONGEST AND MOST AWARE. VICONIA WAS CALLING ON HER CLERIC POWERS THROUGHOUT THAT ORDEAL. SOMETHING WILL HAPPEN THERE. I AM CERTAIN OF IT, ALTHOUGH WHAT, AND IF IT WILL COME FROM VICONIA OR OTHER FOLLOWERS OF THE DARK GODDESS, I DON'T KNOW. WE GODS AND GODDESSES CAN PEER AHEAD THROUGH THE THREADS OF TIME, BUT ONLY IN A VERY LIMITED FASHION, ESPECIALLY WHEN SO MANY OTHER GODS AND GODDESSES HAVE A VESTED INTEREST IN MAKING CERTAIN OUR VISION IS CLOUDED."

Both human women looked at one another, then back at the goddess. That sounded ominous, but it also sounded as if there was nothing they could really do about it one way or another, except maybe talk to Viconia when whichever one of them returned to life. A thought process they shared that just brought the conversation back to that very topic. "So, um, you were saying about wanting, Milady Goddess?"

Mystra nodded, and with a pop, the three women were once more sitting down in the wizard's lab. Mystra, whose body had now shifted to a woman who looked vaguely Middle Eastern to Tonks, sat to one side of a table, looking across at the two younger girls.

"INDEED. FIRST, LET ME LAY OUT OUR CHOICES AS I SEE THEM, THEN YOU MAY TELL ME YOUR OPINIONS." This came out as a suggestion, but both young women could still see stars appearing and disappearing underneath Mystra's skin, along with flashes of light in her hair, enough to tell them Mystra, for all the human-like nature of this place, was very much not human.

They stayed silent, and Mystra went on. "TO BEGIN, YOU MUST UNDERSTAND THERE ARE RULES AND REGULATIONS THAT EVEN WE GODS MUST FOLLOW, FOR FEAR OF

BEING PUNISHED. AO OVER-GOD DEMANDS IT, AND I WILL NOT BREAK THOSE LAWS. AS MUCH AS I DON'T LIKE THEM SOMETIMES, LET ALONE THE PEOPLE WHO ENFORCE THEM."

That last had been added as a mutter, and again Imoen, who had far more interest in history than Tonks, shuddered at the memory of reading about Mystra and Helm's confrontation and how badly it had gone for the goddess. Mystra had, admittedly, been driven semi-crazy at the time, but that hadn't mattered to Helm. The Ever Watchful had killed Mystra instead of letting her back into the heavenly realms.

Eventually, near the end of the Time of Troubles, Mystra had been reborn as a human woman imbued with her power. How much of the current goddess Mystra was original and how much was from that human, Imoen wasn't going to comment on, but it was clear Mystra still had issues with Helm's actions and maybe those of Ao, who had caused the Time of Troubles in how he had punished all the gods by forcing them to walk the realms of Toril for a time.

"THANKS TO YOUR ARRIVAL, I HAVE GAINED A LITTLE LEEWAY IN THOSE LAWS, A LITTLE MORE ACCESS TO YOUR HOME DIMENSION THAN I WOULD HAVE OTHERWISE. NOW, I CAN SEND YOUR SOUL BACK OR IMOEN'S OR HAVE YOU TWO MERGE. I HAVE NO WISH, NOR REMIT, TO KEEP HER SOUL IN LIMBO ANY LONGER, ALTHOUGH I HAVE BEEN ABLE TO HIDE ITS PRESENCE FROM THOSE WHO WOULD FEED UPON YOU, IMOEN. THIS WOULD FORCE ME TO STORE IT SOMEWHERE. EVEN WITH THE BEST OF INTENTIONS, INFUSING A SOUL INTO AN OBJECT IS NOT A PLEASANT PROCESS. AND BEFORE YOU ASK, NO, I CANNOT CREATE SENTIENT LIFE EITHER. NOT WITHOUT REACHING OUT TO SOME OTHER GODS AND GODDESSES. THAT WOULD ALSO MAKE YOU INTO A BABY, WHICH WOULD BE..."

"Unpleasant. Or would force me to choose between keeping the memories of my life or just, well, returning to the wheel and starting afresh," Imoen muttered, frowning a bit. "But why do you want to send one of us back, and what would that entail?"

Mystra's face shifted again, becoming more inhuman, but also more enthusiastic. Her eyes, which had been a warm teal, changed into blazing stars as the Weave seemed to sparkle under the skin of her face. "I WANT TO INFLUENCE YOUR REALM! I WANT TO RESTART, WELL, I CALL IT THE SPARK, THE URGE AND NEED TO PUSH MAGIC AND KNOWLEDGE OF WHAT IT IS CAPABLE OF! YOUR UNDERSTANDING OF MAGIC, HOW IT WORKS THERE, THE LACK OF OTHER GODS THAT COULD POSSIBLY INTERFERE, ALL THAT MEANS THE MAGIC THERE, YOUR REALM AS A WHOLE, IT COULD BE SO MUCH **MORE** THAN IT IS NOW!"

Tonks was taken aback by Mystra's sudden enthusiasm, nearly flinching as those eyes stared at her, and wondering what potential Mystra saw in her old world, but next to her, Imoen hummed thoughtfully. Perhaps because of her education at Candlekeep, perhaps because of her natural inclinations or because of the way she had watched Tonks and Harry in action, Imoen felt she could understand where Mystra was coming from. "You, you mean some of their abilities. Transfiguration, conjuration, how easy some things they do are in comparison to how long it would take to learn such spells and then memorize them to use them on a daily basis here? Their whole, well, school of magic seems to be easier to use than here, although not nearly as powerful."

"EXACTLY!" Mystra said with a nod, then grew more serious, her features shifting again as the Weave receded from her face and her eyes changed back to merely mortal, even as her ears lengthened to look like those of an elf. **"I CANNOT GO TO YOUR REALM MYSELF, NOR COULD I INFLUENCE SOMEONE THERE. HOWEVER, IF ONE OF YOU WENT BACK, I COULD INFLUENCE YOU AND EARTH BECAUSE OF THAT. IMOEN, THE SAME THING GOES FOR YOU. THAT IS ONE DECISION: ONE OF YOU GOES BACK TO EARTH, THE OTHER REMAINS HERE IN TORIL."**

Mystra seemed to deflate a little, and both girls knew that the next bits would be about the choices Mystra didn't particularly like but felt obligated to offer. **"THE OTHER CHOICES ARE TO KEEP YOUR SOUL SEPARATE AND HIDE IMOEN'S SOUL SOMEWHERE. AS I SAID, NOT A PLEASANT PROCESS. OR, I COULD MERGE THE TWO OF YOU TOGETHER INTO ONE SOUL. YOU WOULD BE... MORE POWERFUL THEN, YOUR SOUL WOULD BECOME STRONGER IN THAT SAME, HARD-TO-EXPLAIN WAY THAT HADRIAN'S WAS NOT. BUT IT WOULD BE PAINFUL TOO, FOR BOTH OF YOU IN THAT INSTANCE."**

Tonks crossed her arms, humming. Having inflated back to her normal body from back on Earth, this dragged Imoen's eyes away from the goddess to Tonks' chest for a second, before she shook her head, as Tonks said, "I really wish I had Harry's Advanced Adventuring System powers right now. I'd like to know more about these choices you're offering us, and some specifics about what we get out of them. I get the impression you're being deliberately vague for some reason."

"I CAN'T HELP YOU THERE, I'M AFRAID," Mystra admitted. **"THE LEVEL, QUEST AND CLASS SYSTEM IS BEYOND THE POWER OF ANY GOD. YOUR FRIENDS' AAS IS ALREADY WELL BEYOND WHAT ANYONE ELSE HAS EVER HAD ACCESS TO, TO MY KNOWLEDGE AT LEAST."**

“Tonks is right. What do we lose? What do we gain?” Imoen mused. “In terms of skills and everything else, and well, um, what was your life back on Earth, Tonks? Could a complete stranger to your world step into it? It doesn’t sound like it from Lady Mystra’s words. And, er, what, um,”

Tonks grimaced, frowning a little. “Um... I honestly don’t think so. You wouldn’t know the first thing about using my Metamorph powers, or Wizarding World style magic beyond what you’ve seen me and Harry use.” She nodded over to Mystra. “I know you said you could spell it so we could share knowledge, milady, but my Metamorph powers are more instinct than anything else.”

“Worse, I... kind of snuck into a place I shouldn’t be in order to get to the device that sent me to your world.” *There is no way in heck I am going to try to explain the computer, just no. Let alone everything that Harry did to the darn thing that made it so he teleported himself accidentally into a new life, a new world and everything else. To say nothing about the fact that this whole galaxy is a game where we come from.*

At the same time, I don’t really want to leave my new life, you know? Tonks’s thoughts continued to ramble for a moment. She knew it wasn’t fair to her parents, or worse, Imoen, but Tonks loved living on Toril, and she loved the life she had built alongside Harry and their friends.

Across the small table that separated her from her two ‘guests’, Mystra held back a sigh, disliking how she had to lay out even more negatives. Still, she sensed that Imoen was, regardless of anything, intrigued by the idea of being alive once more, even if in an entirely different world.

“IT IS ACTUALLY WORSE THAN YOU MIGHT EXPECT, TONKS. TIME MOVES DIFFERENTLY IN YOUR HOME DIMENSION THAN IN THIS ONE, BUT IT DOES MOVE. MONTHS HAVE GONE BY SINCE YOU WERE LAST SEEN,” Mystra said apologetically. **“WHAT THAT MEANS FOR YOU PERSONALLY, I CANNOT SAY, BUT IT PROBABLY ISN’T GOOD.”**

“Then how the heck would you even send us back?” Imoen inquired, humming again. “I like the idea of having a life of my own again, Milady Goddess, but how would it really work? I mean, neither of us could be this voice of change you want if we’re caught and incarcerated.”

“TO ANSWER YOUR FIRST QUESTION, TONKS, YOUR ORIGINAL BODY IS IN, HMMM, CALL IT IN STORAGE, I SUPPOSE, A LINE OF MAGICAL CODE WITHIN THE SYSTEM YOU USED TO ARRIVE HERE. I COULD REACH IN, REVERSE THAT JOURNEY AND HAVE YOU OR IMOEN’S SOUL SLIDE BACK INTO THAT PHYSICAL FRAME. WHAT HAPPENS AFTER THAT, I WOULDN’T BE ABLE TO INFLUENCE DIRECTLY. HOWEVER, I

COULD GIVE YOU TONKS'S KNOWLEDGE OF HER WORLD, PULL OUT THE MEMORIES OF HER LIFE PRIOR TO COMING TO TORIL, AND EVEN GIVE YOU KNOWLEDGE OF A FEW SPELLS THAT MIGHT BE ABLE TO HELP YOU IN YOUR LONG-TERM GOALS."

Mystra then smirked, the expression almost Tonks/Imoen-like in its playfulness. "AS FOR EVERYTHING AFTER YOU TRANSFER... WELL, I CANNOT INFLUENCE MATTERS THERE, BUT I WAS ABLE TO LOOK IN ON EARTH A TIME OR TWO, AND I CAN TELL YOU THAT THE COMPUTER, THE GATEWAY YOU USED TO COME TO TORIL, IS NO LONGER WHERE IT WAS WHEN YOU USED IT. I WISH I COULD TELL YOU MORE SPECIFICS, BUT THAT IS ALL I COULD SEE."

Imoen looked even more intrigued, while Tonks felt as if Mystra was setting them up for a joke of some kind. "Will this transfer be permanent?" Imoen inquired, while Tonks fell silent, staring hard at Mystra, trying to reason out the reason behind her smirk.

"It will be for you if you go," Mystra admitted. "The method that Tonks and Harry used to travel to Toril is **quite** self-destructive and is not one that you could use to return. Not unless the 'Imoen' on Toril has died permanently. Your soul would be lost to the voice as it would have been when Tonks supplanted you if not for me. I protected you once; I could not do so again."

"Erm... then unless you can really sell us on why you want one of us to go back, merging seems the best idea," Tonks said, looking over at Imoen.

However, Imoen shook her head. "I don't think so. Yes, for either one of us going back might seem like a step into the unknown, but it's one where whoever goes will have the ability to survive. I, I'm a little leery about this whole memory transfer thing, but I was really interested in a lot of the things you and Harry talked about above and beyond magic in your world. Just so long as I don't need to, well, step into Tonks's life and try to explain away her absence."

"YOU WON'T. AGAIN, I WISH I COULD TELL YOU MORE, BUT SO MUCH TIME HAS PASSED THAT THERE'S NO NEED OR REAL ABILITY, EVEN FOR YOU, TO TRY AND EMULATE TONKS'S LIFE."

Imoen nodded at that, happy she wouldn't want to act like Tonks or try to live her life. Putting aside her emotional and familial connections, Imoen wasn't a fighter by any means. She could shoot a bow, sure and wouldn't turn away from a fight if one found her, but the idea of becoming a magical policeman would not be something she would be at all interested in. *If anything, I'd probably want to try to become a spell researcher in Tonks's world, if I could use her magic, which I bet I would, considering Mystra and everything. With a hobby of small-time thievery just because I enjoy it.*

“Hey, are you sure about this?” Tonks asked. “Er, I mean, you wouldn’t, if we merge, you’d still be living in a way, right?”

For her part, Tonks really didn’t have all that many friends to go back to, and again, really enjoyed living and adventuring with Harry and the rest. Since entering the Auror training course, she’d lost contact with most of her friends, bar Emmeline Vance, and well, she was more loyal to Harry and her friends in this new life than she was to Emmeline. Admittedly, when it came to family, the idea that her parents thought Tonks (they would call her Nymphadora, alas) was dead in some magical accident, or something, did hurt, but even so, she honestly had no interest in going back after the years she’d spent here.

“Maybe, but this way, I do it on my own terms even if in a new world,” Imoen argued back. “From my perspective, that of someone who’s only been able to observe for what feels like years while you and Harry and the rest have lived, this sounds far better.”

Tonks winced at that, feeling guilty again, but Imoen waved her off, repeating that she didn’t blame Tonks for that any longer. She then looked back at the goddess. “Although, with that said, I’m worried about bleed-over from this memory transfer thing. I’d need the majority of Tonks’s memories from her time on Earth, and I, well, that would be like merging with her in a way, regardless, right? I don’t want that.”

“WELL, FIRST OF ALL, REALIZE THAT IMPRINTING TONKS’ MEMORIES ON YOU WILL HURT. IT’S NOT GOING TO BE A PLEASANT EXPERIENCE FOR EITHER OF YOU. IF YOU WERE BOTH MORTAL, IN YOUR PHYSICAL BODIES, I MEAN, IT WOULD BE EASIER. BUT AS IT IS, IT ISN’T.”

When a determined Imoen and a resigned Tonks nodded, Mystra continued. “As for becoming part Tonks as it were, that won’t happen. You will only get the, the technical data. What she has learned, what she knows, not the emotional aspect and no memories that do not pertain to her life skills. Think of it as if the memories are the pictures from a coloring book, and the emotional aspects are the colors. You will only get the black-and-white version. It will take time for you to make them your own in some cases, but those memories will become a resource you can use rather than imprint on you Tonks’s personality.”

“Then let’s do it,” Imoen said, enthusiastically. “Honestly, like I told Tonks, I’ve wanted to Dual Class to mage for a while, and this lets me do that in a whole new world! That’s all kinds of interesting, even if it’s going to be difficult for a while.”

Smiling widely, Madeleine nodded. **“EXCELLENT. LET US BEGIN THE MEMORY TRANSFER, AS I SENSE OUR TIME IS COMING SHORT. THERE’S ONLY SO MUCH I CAN**

COMPRESS TIME, AND THE SERVANT OF LATHANDER IS MOVING TO RESURRECT YOU, TONKS. I WILL WARN YOU AGAIN, THOUGH, THIS WILL HURT."

Before either woman could protest or do the soul equivalent of preparation for their incoming migraines, threads of energy flashed between them. As those beams of light struck, both specters shrieked in pain.

Memories and thoughts flashed from Tonks to Imoen, but she wasn't the only one receiving something. Tonks suddenly had far more knowledge about spell craft and spell theory than she ever had wanted to, while Imoen got the knowledge of Tonks in her old world, the magic there, and some things about her body. Memories of Hogwarts and Candlekeep, of learning and training, passed in different directions, and then, they were separated once more.

"IT IS DONE," Madeleine stated firmly. "IMOEN, YOU HAVE ALL THE KNOWLEDGE YOU WILL REQUIRE TO GET ON IN EARTH. AND NOW, IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO GO, NYMPHADORA IMOEN OF CANDLE-EARTH."

"Er, okay," Tonks muttered woozily, so out of it she didn't notice either the use of the hated name or the truly sad phrasing. Before she could recover, Tonks yelped as a force grabbed her by the scruff of her neck and pulled. The last thing she saw of Mystra's conjured realm was Imoen blearily waving farewell.

OOOOOOO

From Tonks's still-impaired perspective, there was a feeling of being thrust into a tube too small for her, oddly a feeling she had experienced before when apparating, and then nothingness, no sensation, no context, no up or down. This was followed by a bright flash of light, accompanied by a feeling of a hand at her back pushing on her, and the next moment, Imoen nee Tonks was back in her 'own' body, blinking and staring up at a nighttime sky lit by fires beyond her peripheral vision. This sight was occluded quickly by Harry's worried face as a voice she knew belonged to the high priest Kelddath, intoned, "It's done. Young Imoen has returned to life once more. Now, if you'll excuse me, I have other people I should resurrect tonight."

"Thank you, Kelddath. Do you need us for anything?" Harry asked.

As Harry spoke to the priest of Lathander, Imoen turned her attention up to Alora, Edwina and Viconia. While an extremely repentant-looking Alora tried to help her up, Edwina looked as if she was biting her cheek to keep from snapping back at something Viconia. The drow, still under the effect of the Color Change Charm Imoen had renewed on her that afternoon before their first skirmish, looked as if she had been letting both gender-cursed wizard and halfling thief have it.

Alora, her face showing more than a bit of sadness, either from honest guilt or Viconia's tongue-lashing, attempted to help a weary, nearly blind Imoen to her feet. However, the process was made more difficult by her being a halfling, and thus the only person in their party who was actually shorter than Imoen. Harry eventually had to lean down to pull Imoen to her feet.

There she swayed a bit, as Kelddath hadn't actually healed her at all beyond returning her to life. He simply lacked the spells after the battle throughout the night. The same could be said for Viconia. This left Imoen still incredibly exhausted, her health well into the red, an effect that carried over to her physical body.

"Rggh, is it over?" She mumbled aloud, looking at all of them, then out past their shoulders to the town. She could see parties of townsfolk, men and women alike, going around, putting out fires, dragging still burning stuff into the roads out beyond the original defensive line, and no more fighting to thankfully.

"It is, and since Kelddath just said that they're not going to need us tonight, I think we all need to get some rest. Viconia, I'll want you to memorize only healing spells tonight. If we can, we'll want to get up to 100% health as much as possible, and then we'll pitch in with whatever work is needed."

While Viconia nodded agreement at the first, she scoffed at the second, before shrugging her shoulders. "You're the leader here, Harry. I suppose we can do so. Although, do not ask me to lend my aid to that of the Sun worshippers. Bah."

Harry nodded, then turned to look at Edwina and Alora. "And you two, don't you have something to say to Imoen?"

"I'm sorry!" Alora shouted, causing everyone there to wince at the volume her halfling lungs could put out. "I just, that thing was so big, so scary, and we weren't doing anything, and then it roared, and I ran, only that made everything worse!"

"Frhhh...." Edwina grumbled, but eventually nodded. "I... have to apologize for, for not taking your position in the battle or that of this... woman, into account when I decided to retreat. You, both of you, should have come with us, but you did not, and I suppose should have made allowances for how slow of mind you can be."

Viconia's hands formed into claws, but Imoen groaned, shaking her head. "Nope. Fuck that, not taking just an apology, especially like that. You're both gonna be buying me drinks tomorrow night until I can't feel my feet. But right now, just pour me into a damn bed. This night's lasted too damn long as it is."

"For my part, I will accept Alora's apology. Yours, Edwina... oh no. I am going to get you back. Someway, somehow, I will get you back," Viconia threatened.

Edwina tried to put up a confident front, but his sideways glance at Viconia as they began to move told the true story, and Harry chuckled, half-carrying, half-supporting Imoen as they headed home. "Sleep first, revenge later, girls. Bed now. None of us have any healing spells, but my AAS should still let those of us who are actually wounded to sleep despite that."

To that, neither Edwina, who wasn't injured outside of a few bruises and small cuts, nor Viconia, who was battered under her armor, could argue with that. There just weren't any healing spells to go around at the moment. Indeed, the

The group trudged wearily on through the firelit night on weary feet as work to put the town right went on around them. Even Imoen, who wanted to tell Harry about her out-of-body experience, was so tired she didn't even bother trying, instead falling asleep on the sofa, while Harry and the others barely reached their sleeping rolls before they fell asleep.

OOOOOOO

As the Adventurers in Beregost fell asleep, Mystra was reaching across time and space to power up a certain enchanted computer. At the same time, shown by a strange, purple, pink, and dark umber vortex that appeared on one side of the magical laboratory Mystra had conjured into being, she was also speaking to the soul of Imoen, the original version. **"THERE ARE A FEW THINGS MORE YOU SHOULD KNOW BEFORE I SEND YOU THROUGH TO TONKS'S MORTAL SHELL BACK ON EARTH."**

"That phrase is rather disturbing, Milady Goddess. Why not just say her body, please?" Imoen pled, having had a few minutes, if such measurements of time actually were applicable here, to recover from the memory transfer.

"BECAUSE FOR ALL INTENTS AND PURPOSES, WHEN YOU GO THROUGH, IT WILL BECOME YOUR BODY. VERY LITERALLY AND, MOST IMPORTANTLY, PERMANENTLY. I TOLD YOU BOTH THIS WOULD BE A ONE-WAY TRIP. THIS IS YOUR FINAL CHANCE TO BACK OUT IF YOU WANT, IMOEN OF CANDLEKEEP," Mystra warned.

But Imoen simply shook her head. "When you say it will become my body, it seems as if you mean more than just the fact I'll be inhabiting it. Might I ask why?"

"TONKS WAS WRONG ABOUT ONE ASSUMPTION SHE MADE WHILE WE WERE SPEAKING TO ONE ANOTHER BEFORE. HER METAMORPH ABILITIES ARE A PART OF TONKS, NOT SOLELY HER BODY. HER BODY IS INDEED QUITE MALLEABLE, BUT WITHOUT THE SOUL TO EMPOWER IT, THAT ABILITY WILL NEVER LAST FOR LONG. WHEN I PULL HER BODY OUT OF THE MACHINE'S MEMORY, AND YOUR SOUL TRANSFERS INTO IT, TONKS'S BODY WILL START TO CHANGE. YOU WILL HAVE ONLY A

FEW MINUTES TO FORM IT INTO THE SHAPE YOU WISH. AS YOU HAVE SEEN SINCE YOU WERE DISPLACED OUT OF YOUR PHYSICAL SHELL, THE SOUL DOES RETAIN ITS OWN 'SHAPE', SO TO SPEAK. IF YOU DO NOT FORCE THE IMAGE YOU WISH ONTO IT, THEN YOU WILL REVERT TO HOW YOU LOOKED IN LIFE AT CANDLEKEEP. UNDERSTAND?"

"...Not entirely, but I think I get the gist of it," Imoen murmured, a grin coming to her face. Thanks to the memory exchange, she knew what a computer was and what the term 'memory' meant in this case, although some of the nuances still eluded her. She was more confident about her understanding of Earth's magical school, and more importantly, what Mystra meant when she said she would have one chance to manipulate Tonks's body before it fully transformed to look like Imoen's old one.

Big tits and at least another foot of height here I come! Heh, that's one heck of a bribe right there. And Mystra didn't mention it until now, even though she could have dangled it in front of me like a carrot in front of a horse. That speaks well of her, Imoen thought warmly, smiling at the goddess.

"Beyond that, you should know that the larger the changes you make, the more tired out your body will be. Nothing will have happened to Tonks's former flesh and body shell while in storage, but you will run through its energy quickly the moment you start changing things."

"Right. So tits instead of height," Imoen answered cheekily.

Mystra snorted but became serious a moment later as the maelstrom of varicolored energy shifted and solidified. "Remember, you will have knowledge and abilities the locals do not know of and cannot reproduce. And like everywhere else, there will be people who fear the unknown and covet power. Do not share what you can do lightly, but also... do not be afraid to find like-minded folk. There is only so much you can do to revolutionize how a whole society sees the pillar it uses to set itself apart from the rest of the world on your own."

Imoen became serious too and nodded wordlessly.

"Good. Now, as soon as you have a vision of what you want to look like, pass through this portal to your new life, Imoen of Candlekeep," Mystra stated, gesturing.

Imoen gulped a bit, then took a moment to imagine how she wanted to look. *Violet hair instead of brown, not quite pink like Imoen, but close, a kind of homage. Keep my height...mmm... hips and ass are fine if some of the looks I got at Candlekeep from the guards were anything to go by. Tits... Up to at least... yeah... higher cheekbones, maybe, give me that 'noblewoman' look, oh, and perfect eyesight too.* Once she had an image in her mind of how she wanted her body to look, which took a bit from Edwina, if Imoen was honest, she stepped forward, pressing a hand into the shimmering wall of energy. The energy reached out for her,

pulling her in, and the next moment, Imoen saw blackness, then Yellow words on a black background flashed across her mind like lightning, followed by the image of a skull.

Exiting the Game. Your Physical Template is being prepared. Stand By.



What in the heck? Imoen thought, before hastily bringing up the image she wanted to appear in, thinking that this was the proper time to start concentrating on that image. As she did, she found it quite hard, the words thundering into her head. But eventually she was able to concentrate on the image well enough to feel the shift. At the same time, Imoen was concentrating on her breast and face, the hair was left by the wayside.

By the time she remembered her hair, Imoen suddenly found herself elsewhere. So sudden was the shift that Imoen, in her new body, went from kneeling and leaning forward to stumbling to one side, her shoulder smacking into something metallic that went over onto its side with a clang. Imoen's head hit the wall next to where the computer had been hard enough to cause her to grunt in pain.

"Ow," Imoen grumbled. "I know all those stories I read mentioned how the first step was often the hardest and most painful, but I didn't think they meant it literally. Fuck me."

That was as far as she got before a voice shouted from behind her, "Who, wha... no, nevermind. Don't move, or else I'll Stupefy you! And get away from the computer, whoever you are! I, I won't let you destroy it!"

The voice was that of a girl, younger than Imoen if she was any judge, bossy and authoritative. It seemed a little sleepy, but firm, focused at first, though the speaker sounded far more frantic, almost desperate as she spoke about the computer that Imoen's arrival had knocked over.

Before Imoen could turn around, another voice spoke. This one's tone was that of an adult woman, calmer and more sophisticated, with a distinct accent that made Imoen feel... things. "No, no, ma cher, she can't do both, you know. Move away from ze device, Cochon. Then turn around slowly, nes pa?"

“Er, don’t know what a nes pa is, but um, sure. I’ll, er, I’ll hold my hands out to the sides too,” Imoen said, her mind going over a few spells in her mind. The knowledge that ‘Tonks’ had kept her wand in a holster on her right hand was also there, but Imoen mentally sneered at the idea of needing such a foci. *Now, a visible target, I need that*, she reflected, a part of her both eager and worried about using her new magical abilities in combat right off the bat.

“That sounds like a good idea, yes. Hermione, move to the left, I will go right. We don’t want this person to have a single target to aim for,” the second voice intoned. “And you, wait until I tell you to turn.” A few seconds passed, filled with the steps of the two girls (or women) who had Imoen at what she knew was a wand point.

Then the first voice intoned, “Alright. Start moving away from the computer. Stay on your knees, and keep your hands up in the air. Accio wand!”

There was a tearing sound as Tonks’s wand burst out of wrist, and flew to the hand of the person named Hermione. “Now. Start moving.”

Well, at least I didn’t really need that foci. Imoen mused as she turned. But any thought of fighting went out of her head as she saw the two people in front of her now.

There were indeed two of them, one a young girl, maybe fifteen, maybe sixteen, with the kind of face that would only become prettier as she grew up, her frizzy hair a charm point. She was developing a set of curves that were already decent, but even there, Imoen could tell that she would grow,

The other, though, she had to be right up there with Edwina for beauty, a body that could turn any man’s mind into mush. “Fuck me...” she whispered, staring at the blonde beauty.

Fleur Delacour cocked her head, then smirked. Perhaps it was because they had this woman at their mercy, or perhaps it was because she was so obviously staring at Fleur, but Fleur no longer thought the stranger was any threat. With that, she decided to do a little bit of teasing to lighten the atmosphere. “Perhaps if you’re good.”

“Fleur!” Hermione gasped, while Imoen laughed, and some of the tension left the room. Hermione groaned, shaking her head, but a good deal of the tension was gone now, and Hermione sighed. “Where did you come from, and who are you?” She growled.

“Erm... I’m... call me Hecate,” Imoen said, picking out a name randomly. *I might as well go by a whole new name here, as this is literally a fresh start for me, right?* “And... you might not believe me but... um, I come from the computer...”

To Imoen's shock, the glorious Fleur merely frowned, while Hermione gasped, her wand falling to her side as she strode forward. A moment's hesitation passed, and then she was moving around the newly renamed Hecate, touching a portion of the computer before turning. "It... she might be telling the truth. Something powered the computer, and there isn't even anything down here. You removed the power box, Fleur."

That last was said in a grumble, but Fleur was unrepentant. "'ermione, you went back to England and not only snuck into zhe Department of Mystère but also stole an item from their charge. At zhe time, I was both horrified that you got away with it and that you went to zuch lengths! Of course I removed a portion of that horrid machine!"

Waving that off, Hermione turned to Hecate. "So... if that's the case, and you come from wherever that computer sends people, do you know someone named Harry?"

OOOOOOO

Work continued throughout the night around Beregost proper to get many of the fires under control and to rebuild some of the fortifications just in case, but none of the combatants, either Harry's adventuring party or the militia men and convoy guards, were part of that. Some bowmen remained on guard atop various rooftops, but they were a very small portion of the town's fighting force. Most of the guards rested, although admittedly, perhaps nowhere near as well as Harry and his band could, thanks to his AAS.

That was something that Imoen brought up the next morning after Viconia spent a worryingly large amount of time using her memorized healing spells to get all of them up to a hundred percent health.

Even Edwina and Alora had taken wounds last night, although not nearly as much as Imoen, Harry and Viconia. While Harry and Imoen had both been in the red in terms of their health, Alora had a broken arm and been in the yellow. The Fear cast on her by the Tanar'ri had caused the halfling to run blindly into another segment of the battle, without having the will or concentration to try and fight. She had only broken when Thalantyr had arrived.

As for Edwina, she had a sprained ankle from running away and putting a foot down wrong. The transformed Red Wizard was the only one who had been in the green, which had definitely not sat well with Imoen or Viconia the night before, hence the tongue-lashing Viconia had been giving her when Imoen had been revived.

"I can't get over some of the simple things your AAS does, Harry. The ability to see our stats is huge, sure, along with the quests and other things, but being able to sleep eight hours solid? With no dreams, no nightmares, and while ignoring the pain we're in when we head to

bed?" Imoen shook her head, staring down at her body. She didn't have very many wounds beyond cuts or bruises, but still felt weak, achy and sore thanks to her low health.

Viconia nodded. "I agree, Harry. Sometimes it is the little things that matter the most, and a solid eight hours of rest without being woken up by my own aches and pains, being able to memorize my spells while so wounded?" Viconia had been in the yellow in terms of her health, but hadn't any broken bones, just a lot of accumulated bruises. "All of you are feeling the results of that right now, are you not?"

"We truly are, and I thank you for it," Harry said, although he could have done some of the healing himself. However, he had retained all his Lay on Hands charges in order to help the locals, figuring that Viconia would probably not like it if the townsfolk came up to her for healing now that the battle was over. "For now, though, I think that we need to get started on our day. Imoen, could you head out and see if you can find Kelddath or Vai? Check to see what they want us to do. I'll get breakfast started. I don't know about the rest of you, but I've had several days going with only beef jerky and water, and I want a full meal."

Shaking her head as Harry seemed to be waving off her interest in his AAS, Imoen pushed herself to her feet. "I wanna talk to you later, Harry. It's not immediately important, but I wanna tell you something. For now, I'm going to go buy some parchment and ink."

Some of Original Imoen's book learning in Candlekeep had carried over to Tonks when she had been sharing her memories of Earth. This had given her two ideas to try out with her Blood magic to cut down on the cost. One was to use a foci, although Imoen's thoughts on that score had been somewhat dismissive. The other was to use the gestures of a normal spell from this world that was close to the effect the user was looking for. A third had to do with using items, such as a Potion of Regeneration, which would instantly start healing the caster.

At the moment, any use of a Blood Magic spell drained Harry and Imoen of 15 health points, which was better than it had been, but was still a massive hit to Imoen. Without Viconia around, Imoen would have killed herself at least twice over even before the Tanar'ri had shown up, so cutting that cost down was not a small consideration for the thief, since her health pool wasn't even half of Harry's thanks to his Constitution and Class advantages.

"I think we need to be more scientific about how we are going about using the AAS," Imoen went on. "I know we found things that can heighten Strength and Wisdom via exercise and fishing, but still, there are things I'd like to experiment with in terms of your AAS and further ways to cut down on the cost of our Blood Magic spells. Edwina, you want to help out with some experiments? Beyond being a people person, I don't have any real skills that'll help with the repair efforts."

“Hmmpf, even as a man, my hands are not suited to such plebian work. As for Harry’s AAS and the Blood Magic you both can call on, I have long stated that I would like to do a more in-depth study of it. It is good to see that you have finally come around to my point of view,” Edwina said, although her eyes narrowed a little as she looked at Imoen thoughtfully. “Indeed, that kind of thinking is so far above your normal methodology that it makes me both intrigued and wary. Are we certain that resurrection doesn’t do anything unusual to those with the blood of Bhaal in them?”

“Hey!” Imoen barked, glaring over at the man turned woman, crossing her arms under her chest. Her inner Tonks grimaced as she did, lamenting the lack of a real chest there. *Don’t worry about that now. You can change your bod to be what you want it to be when you get your Metamorph powers back, but that’s a long-term goal. Blood Magic and AAS first.*

Shaking those thoughts off, Imoen gave the Red Wizard the most ferocious glare she could. It should not have been much, and if this was original Imoen, it would have been, but Tonks had more ability with glaring even if she didn’t have her Metamorph ability. “I died because I was using so many Blood Magic spells that getting a light tap on the back of the head killed me! That is one heck of an incentive to not have it happen again!”

“Ha! Well put,” Edwina shot back, snorting, and after getting Harry to agree to sit down with her tomorrow, Imoen left to check in with the local leaders. By the time she got back, Harry had cooked up some hashbrowns, toasted bread with some kind of berry juice to dip in, and both bacon and sausage.

“Leave some of the bacon. That’s the last of our supply for now, and I want to make sure we save some for Minsc and the others,” Harry ordered as Imoen made a beeline for the bacon, as he knew she would. “Jaheira and I can recreate the berry dip, so you can have as much of that as you all want. It’s become a buff-type food, giving health points.”

Imoen grabbed a piece of bacon and slid into place between Alora and Edwina, biting into the bacon before reporting, “Eh, I wouldn’t worry, Harry. A lot of animals got slaughtered last night out on the larger farmsteads. We’ll just need to buy the carcasses we want.”

“Huh... Alright, I’ll check on that. I’ve got a few other errands out there in the fields, and my AAS will let me butcher any such carcass,” Harry mused, before looking at Imoen. “Does Vai or Kelddath want us to do anything specific?”

“The mayor’s taking control of the rebuilding efforts, and seems to be doing an okay job of it, even if he tried to chat me up to learn about Viconia. ‘The most delectable elf who travels with you’ was the way he put it,” Imoen snickered.

“Bah, as if any fat fool of a politician could even catch my eye, let alone last long enough to give me even a bit of the pleasure he would gain by merely being allowed to touch a body as beautiful as mine,” Viconia scoffed.

Laughing at Viconia’s response while Harry and the other two just rolled their eyes at her, admittedly earned, arrogance, Imoen went on. “Vai’s got her troops doing short-range patrols through the nearest farmsteads along with a lot of the farmers, hence why I know there’s a lot of dead animals. Would you believe that a few of those families are ready to return to their farmsteads after only a night spent in the town proper? Crazy.”

Imoen took another bite of bacon, nodding to herself internally. *Yep, Harry’s food is yet another reason to stay in this dimension. I wish Original Imoen all the best, but I like it here way too much to give it up.*

“Anyway, Kelddath’s in charge of healing. He and his acolytes are kind of hard-pressed. They used most of the temple’s healing potions and everything else throughout the night, so Kelddath and the rest only have their own spells, and there are a **lot** of wounded to deal with. Despite that, everyone seems in remarkably good spirits, despite the fact that there are at least seventeen dead that are still waiting for a chance to be resurrected, and fourteen that won’t be resurrected by the guards.”

She looked down at the table for a moment, shaking her head. “I... One of the sirine also died permanently. They’re going to be doing a burial ceremony for her midday, and I already agreed to take part in it as one of the dancers to commemorate Cara’s life and Lathander’s Light.”

Imoen hadn’t been as close with Cara as she was to Nifiri, but she still wanted to show her respect. Imoen was also very interested in Lathander's worship and wanted to learn more about the Morning Lord. Not that she thought worshipping him would give her any special abilities, but the beliefs his followers espoused were compelling.

“In that case, I’ll head over to Kelddath and do what I can with my Lay on Hands spells and also pay my respects. Viconia, just to be clear, you don’t have any healing spells left?”

“I have absolutely no spells left,” Viconia drawled. “I didn’t bother memorizing any other type of spells last night, and I used every single one of them on all of us. Nor would I bother to sue such on any of the local plebeians.”

Despite that little joke, Viconia looked at the party seriously. “We got **very** lucky last night. If not for Harry arriving, I would be dead, Imoen would have been turned into slurry, and that demon would have had at least ten, maybe fifteen minutes to rampage through the town before that Conjurer and his servants arrived.”

“Thalantyr’s arrival was really what saved us,” Harry protested mildly, while Imoen fell silent, listening intently, not having heard about how the battle had ended last night, only that it had. None of them had been in the mood for a long conversation last night, or had the energy for one. “If he hadn’t, that demon would have rampaged through the town at the very least.”

I also want to question Kelddath about what happened on the other fronts. I doubt my group was the only one under heavy pressure. There’s still a Named Enemy we didn’t run into. “Did the mayor or Kelddath say anything else? If not, just tell me how the battle went from your perspective.”

Seeing the others all nonverbally volunteer her through glances and facial expressions, Imoen sighed and began to explain how the siege had started: how they had intercepted groups away from the town several times, using traps and limited spellwork to offset the numbers of their enemies. She then explained how they had fought through around some of the farmsteads before retreating to town and joining the static defense.

Harry asked some questions about their tactics and so forth throughout, and came away even more annoyed that he had been caught out of position than before. “If I had been here, I might’ve been able to use some of my tactics and formations, maybe even get in a few new ones. Regardless, you’re right, going forward we will want to make better use of your trapmaking abilities.”

Imoen agreed with that. Her and Alora’s traps had made a big difference, almost more than her own Blood Magic spells. She had also praised both Viconia and Edwina for their spellwork, particularly Edwina’s Monster Summoning spell. “I’ve also got a few ideas in that direction. I’m wondering if Alora and I can maybe make some pre-prepared traps, and have Minsc or Jaheira, when she’s using that Forest Meld technique of hers, help me set them up. Me and Alora could also start working together on specific trap types, maybe raise our trapmaking skills over the winter, along with the strength training.”

Before her discussion with Old Imoen, Imo-Tonks would not have thought about that. She had used traps and stuff, sure, but she had mainly seen it as a sideline to her real combat skills. Now, though, that was different, and Imoen recognized they would need to become a serious part of her repertoire going forward.

“OOH, that sounds like fun! I think I also leveled up! I’ve been feeling really upbeat and even more peppy than normal. Since I’m part of your adventuring party, it doesn’t mean you can see my stats and allocate them where I want them to go?” Alora asked excitedly.

Alora had become part of Harry’s Adventuring Party as his AAS saw things back when Edwina had first brought her back to the house the party had been using in their stay in Beregost. Now, if it had been Edwina, Harry would probably have withheld that until Jaheira and

the others arrived, just as punishment for Edwina and Alora's retreating from the front as they did. However, holding anything back from Alora felt far too much like not giving a pleading puppy a treat. He sighed faintly but nodded, while Edwina gnashed her teeth to one side.

Despite the group having become much closer over time and her Oath to keep Harry and Imoen's abilities a secret, Edwina still had not made the jump to full party member status. It was scant comfort to him that Dynaheir had also not made that jump.

"Yeah, let's get your level up done now. I'll want to wait for the others to arrive before going through the Quest notification stuff, though." When the others all looked at him, Harry shrugged. "Completing those quests gives us a lot of experience, and I think some of us might level up. When that happens, I want Minsc here at least. I might not be able to help Dynaheir if she levels up, or Jaheira and Khalid at all, but I can help him."

Harry pulled up Alora's character sheet quickly and did indeed see the little glowing yellow cross there. Clicking on it, he then looked at her stats, humming thoughtfully. "You already leveled up once with us, Alora, so this is actually really good for you. It's probably a good sign for the rest of us leveling up after I click on those Quest-specific notifications and accept the experience gained from completing the quest."

Name: Alora

Race: Halfling

Gender: Female

Class: Level 7 Thief

Strength: 10 (Racial cap: 14)

Dexterity: 19

Constitution: 12

Durability: 4 (Racial Cap: 10)

Intelligence: 14

Wisdom: 9

Charisma: 10

Luck: 22

Not bothering to read Alora's simple biography, as it probably hadn't changed, nor the lifestyle skills (she had several to do with farming and fireside cooking, which was neat but

nothing combat-related), Harry asked politely if, thanks to the talk about traps, she wanted to add all the percentage points to that skill. After doing so, he mused, “I... think your best idea is to put some points in Durability. We used your first level-up with us to give you some more Strength, but that might’ve been a mistake, honestly. It helps you do more damage in Backstab, but your Durability is so low that it’s equal to Imoen’s when we first started out.”

Since then, Imoen had leveled up three times, along with leveling up right before Harry could start to see her stats. She had put points into her strength and charisma first, then her durability... which only brought it up to 6.

It also hadn’t helped Imoen close the gap with her Metamorph skill, or at least, Imoen and Harry didn’t think so. The two of them felt it had to do with Constitution, Strength and Dexterity, and maybe Charisma. Durability didn’t seem to fit, but again, Harry’s AAS hadn’t given them any hints as to what stats Imoen needed to raise, nor had Imoen (Tonks Version) thought to ask.

“Ugh. That hurts, but hey, I’ve got the Shadow Armor now,” Imoen grumbled. “Still, given how easy you broke your arm, I think Harry’s right. Raise your Durability, girl.”

Unlike Imoen and Harry, who, as Bhaalspawn, could gain four Stat Points to distribute, Alora was a Halfling. She didn’t gain a quarter of a point automatically allocated to Dexterity or Wisdom randomly, as half-elves would, but she did only get two Stat Points per level, and as Harry had seen, her race capped what Strength and Durability she could achieve. That was something Harry hadn’t come across before, but talking to Alora, understood there was a limit to how much muscle mass a halfling could put on. The same would probably hold true for gnomes, while Harry guessed dwarves would have a cap on their Dexterity or maybe Charisma, and half-orcs on their Charisma or Intelligence.

Alora agreed with that suggestion, pouting a little bit. “I could wish I could put more in Dexterity or Charisma, but meh.”

“Dexterity I get, as that’s the most important Stat to a thief, but why Charisma?”

“Because it’ll maybe stop people from blaming me when shiny things disappear for short amounts of time,” Alora answered with a shrug.

That caused everyone, even Viconia, to laugh.

As he finished with Alora, Harry couldn’t help himself and looked at his own experience points. He was indeed close to leveling up again, and flipping through the other pages of the party, he could see that Minsc and Imoen were as well, as was Viconia. *Ooh boy, that’s gonna be fun. Its possible all four of us could level up from this!*

Setting his delight at that idea to the side, Harry gestured to the door. "For now, troops, let's get a move on. Edwina, if you could conjure some monsters, maybe send them out with the patrols? Or, if you can control them well enough, have a pair of ogres help with the rebuilding? That might be a big help. Otherwise, simply join up with the patrols and lend them your magic. Alora, you and Imoen should look for ways to help, maybe by cooking or taking care of the wounded. Viconia, stick with Edwina for this morning and afternoon."

"Don't forget you two are going to be taking me out drinking tonight," Imoen said as she pushed herself to her feet. "Viconia might already have ripped you a new one for retreating on us as you did, but I'm still demanding payment in booze."

"And that's coming from your personal wallets, too, not the group's communal reserve," Harry added hastily. They weren't alone in that, as most of the party had some money to their name. Indeed, the only ones who didn't were Imoen, Jaheira and Harry. Even Khalid and Viconia had their own stashes, for whatever reason. "I know you both have some of your own money."

Edwina and Alora both nodded ruefully, having already learned that Imoen could drink like a fish and now understanding how much this was going to hurt their bottom line. Moments later, the group left the house and quickly broke up, heading in different directions.

Harry spent the rest of that morning using his Lay on Hands spells to help the injured. He used all of them one after another, before learning more about normal medical treatment from watching Kelddath's acolytes at work. Not enough to create a skill or matter much, but he at least learned something about alternatives to using alcohol to disinfect wounds, a few things for his Alchemy skills in terms of herbal remedies, and how alike stitching up a wounded man was in comparison to stitching up a torn shirt, while being wholly unlike it at the same time.

When noon came, Harry and many of the wounded watched the small ceremony to commemorate the fallen sirine. Imoen didn't watch. Instead, she joined the remaining three sirines in a strange, slow and methodical dance that seemed to radiate sadness as well as respect for the sun above in some fashion Harry couldn't quite put into words.

Even more awe-inspiring was the blaze of light that came from Kelddath's symbol of Lathander at the end of the ceremony. From where the holy symbol hung around the priest's neck, the beam flashed forward, impacting Cara's corpse, searing it into ash.

Kelddath has used a clerical spell, [Lathander's Rest](#).

This is a Holy Spell that can only be used by a cleric of Lathander on a believer of the Morning Lord. It is made to send the spirit of the dead directly to Lathander, while also turning the body to ash. Not for the followers of Lathander is the policy of being buried in the dirt, away from His Sun. They would much rather be scattered to the four winds.

This spell literally cannot be used in combat and has no other use except during Lathander's death rites, although if a believer in Talos, Shar or Cyric is nearby when the spell is cast, they may well be VERY painfully blinded.

Well now, I'm glad Viconia isn't here, Harry thought, idly wondering where the line between faith-based spells and regular type spellwork was. He set that aside, though, raising his head to the sun, letting it cause him to see spots as the others around him did the same, following Kelddath's example.

Once the ceremony broke up, Harry questioned Kelddath about the battle, but didn't really learn much about Hephernaan, the named enemy that his group hadn't needed to fight. The shape-shifting Baatezu had been transformed into a human form for the entire fight, but had retained his race's speed, strength and worse, magical resistance as well as their racial spells. He had been fast, deadly, and powerful, but had barely spoken a word, and those words had been the somewhat typical 'flee or die' threat.

Surprisingly, listening to Kelddath didn't give Harry enough information to cause a quest notification or some kind of Observation. Odd, but Harry felt he could take that as meaning Hephernaan wasn't going to be his problem, or at least not for a long while. Which, judging by how powerful the demon had been, was undoubtedly a good thing.

Leaving the temple and Imoen behind, Harry headed into Beregost proper, offering his services to the crews of workmen and townsfolk who were repairing the damage done to the outer houses of the town during the siege. He had nothing in the way of carpentry craft, but Harry was big and strong, and with a bottomless amount of energy after a solid eight hours of sleep. This seemed to serve him well enough to earn Harry some thanks from the various crew chiefs.

However, any type of hard work was both cold and uncomfortable during winter. Sweating in winter was not fun and made the worker's clothing colder as the wearer's sweat soaked in. The sun also quickly began to set, barely three hours after Harry joined in. This forced the workers to continue to work by lantern and torchlight. In that kind of environment, accidents happened, and Harry found himself pleased to have kept one of his healing potions back the night before when a carpenter accidentally cut into another's arm with his axe. Without the healing potion and Harry holding the limb in place as they raced to the temple, the man might have lost the limb entirely. As it was, Kelddath was able to direct a few healing spells into the injury, healing it utterly.

However, the workers decided to see this injury as a reason to call it a night.

Harry didn't and instead headed out into the area around Beregost. With his speed and specialized snow boots, he was able to cover a decent amount of area, searching for the bodies

of the dead attackers. Bounties were a thing after all, and now that their party had probably won the locals over, Harry was going to hold onto those and wait until the three months of his agreement with Vai expired. At that point, she'd have to pay the full price for those bounties, which would be a very nice addition to the party's war chest.

It was around eight at night by the time that Harry decided to head back to Beregost. He had also been hoping to find Thalantyr and thank him for his timely intervention last night, but the wizard was nowhere to be found. Apparently, he and his one surviving adamantite golem had returned to their estate when dawn broke. Thalantyr was a hermit because he didn't like other people, and staying around so many at once, even to receive thanks, was not something he was willing to do.

On his way back to their temporary home, Harry decided to check on the three drinkers. Eventually, he found them in the Burning Wizard, something he found somewhat ironic. He also saw one of the local thieves that the party and guards had been working with. The halfling Zhurlong was imminently forgetful, and the fact that he was busily drinking himself into a stupor already, despite it not being all that late at night, just made him more so in Harry's mind.

On the opposite side of the tavern, Harry saw Edwina, Alora and Imoen at a table. A few locals had brought out some instruments and were playing some kind of song, although Harry didn't have enough of a musical ear to tell if it was decent. Judging by Edwina's grimace, he decided it wasn't, although Alora and Imoen both were laughing, so maybe that was the point? Regardless, the three of them seemed to be doing well enough, and he left them there, heading home.

Opening the door to their temporary domicile, Harry was instantly hit by the smell of some kind of meat being cooked in the kitchen. Reaching the open doorway into the kitchen, Harry watched for a few seconds as Viconia moved around, staring down at her food as she cooked as if she had a personal grudge against it.

It always amused Harry to watch Viconia at moments like this. Such a proud, haughty woman enjoying something so domestic was odd, and the impact was made worse by how Viconia went about it. She took pride in her cooking more than simply enjoyed the task for its own sake, but she still did enjoy it. Whereas Harry knew Viconia hated cleaning and taking care of the house in any other form.

"Are you just going to stand and stare? I realize that my beauty can beguile, but I thought your self-control better than that, Harry. Or is it simply the angle from which you are gazing upon me that has pushed you over the line into becoming a drooling simpleton?" Viconia drawled, not looking up from her work.

Considering she was wearing leather leggings that looked painted on and a tight blouse of some kind that looked more like a bodice done in leather, that was a distinct possibility, Harry reflected. But he had learned he preferred legs, lips and breasts to rears as Viconia had just insinuated and only responded to this with a chuckle before saying, "Actually, it was the dichotomy of it all. Watching you and knowing what you are capable of and that glare on your face in comparison to what you're actually doing is somewhat attention-getting."

With that, he moved forward, ignoring the fact that he had seen a message about how he had rejected being charmed by Viconia's beauty. *I don't need my AAS to tell me Viconia's beautiful, although I might argue I was at least partially Charmed*, he reflected dryly.

Viconia snorted at that but shifted to one side as Harry joined her. She was making a steak and briefly told Harry that she had taken possession of one of the oxen slain during the battle, as well as a few pigs that had caught stray arrows from the attackers, Imoen having proven correct on that score. Several other animals were still missing, and she told Harry that Vai and the guard would likely have missions to round them up in the next few days. "But if you expect me to aid in such chores, Harry, you had best think again. Out of necessity, I joined in butchering these animals, but I will have no part in doing a farmer's work for him."

For myself, that might be another story, the drow reflected in rueful bemusement. Viconia had strangely found herself intrigued by some of the work going on at the various farmsteads. And she certainly had not been squeamish when it came to joining in with the work on butchering the dead animals she had purchased. There was something oddly soothing about seeing the fruits of your labor so quickly. It called to something within Viconia, a promise of a simpler life, perhaps? Something that Viconia hadn't realized she had any leanings towards before.

"I'll see about buying some of the pigs and helping to butcher them tomorrow. That'll let me refill our bacon stores," Harry joked. The two of them turned their attention fully to the meal. It was only for the two of them, and they finished cooking quickly before heading over to the table. Although before sitting down, Viconia had requested that Harry cancel the color-change spell on her. Harry acquiesced and watched with some fascination as the Color Change charm shifted across her body, the elfish look fading to her normal blue-tinted black skin.

The pair of them was quiet for a few moments as they sat down and ate. But as they did, Harry spotted a bit of anxiety or tension in Viconia's shoulders, a twitch in her fingers. That was enough for his Greater Observation skill.

Viconia is both very, very interested in seeing precisely where this might go, so long as the pair of you are not interrupted, but also has something serious on her mind to get off her chest first.

Take it seriously yourself, or else certain doors might be forever closed to you.

Contemplating that, Harry decided to wait, sipping at his wine and taking small bites of steak, while Viconia did the same. Eventually, this worked, and Viconia began to speak.

“You know I worship Shar. You have never shown any sign of holding that against me, but it is a reality we must face. You are now champion of Tyr, a God that my goddess considers an enemy, even if not as personal a manner as it would be with Mystra. There might come a time, as long as we travel together, when I will be faced with the choice. As much as you and I have come to share, as much as we might come to share in the future, my ultimate loyalty, my faith is to Shar. She reached down her hand and helped me survive when all the world was against me, and I cannot, will not turn away from her, come what may.”

Harry nodded slowly, a part of his mind thinking it somewhat sad that Viconia couldn't name what was growing between them. Not as if she didn't know, but as if she didn't understand, as if the drow woman literally did not know that there could be anything beyond physical attraction. *Viconia knows the love of family, if somewhat warped, thanks to her brother's sacrifice. But love between a man and a woman, she doesn't know what that is. Nor has Viconia ever equated attraction with anything but momentary release. I hope I can teach her that sex can be more than that, at least.*

“I understand,” he said aloud. “And you have never hidden the fact that, whatever might be going on between us, you would leave the party if we went to Baldur's Gate. If we have to go our separate ways before that because you've, well, attempted to kill me or whatever, I know it won't be anything personal.”

“Bah, you say that as if you think my attempt is doomed to fail,” Viconia grumbled, but it was a weak one. Viconia was no true assassin, and even if she took Harry by surprise, there were only a few ways she could overcome Harry before he could get a shout off, as he was just that tough and durable.

*Which is to say nothing of my newly evolved passive buff. Iron Will would keep me moving unless she stabbed me through the brain or the heart. It could be done... especially if we start sharing a bed, but I don't think Viconia could. Okay, wait, I **do** think she could, but not to me. Not to someone she's become interested in and friendly with. Not without my Greater Observation warning me of something in her attitude, anyway.*

“But... yes. Baldur's Gate would be dangerous for me, given everything that happened with the convoy master who brought me there and everything else. But every major city has those who will cheerfully be tossing around cancellation spells and looking for spies, and even a hint of a drow will be enough to cause a stampede of stupid holier-than-thou buffoons eager to prove their sanctity on the blood of any supposed drow, drow lover.”

“Or just a random person who looks a little weird,” Harry snorted. “I could wish it wasn’t so, but there are people like that everywhere, people always on the lookout to hide their own sins and evils by excoriating someone else’s.”

“Oooh, very well done,” Viconia’s lips curled, looking both a sneer of agreement and sexy at the same time. “I quite liked that turn of phrase.”

“So long as we both know you will have to leave at that point, I think we can still continue on this course together,” Harry said, winking as he tried to once more be a little more flowery in his language than he would normally be.

Understanding what he was doing, Viconia laughed at that, while Harry continued on again. “And as for your goddess and what she might order you to do, from what I understand, most of the time gods don’t actually give out direct orders like that. They simply give impressions or hints, right?”

“That is indeed the way of it. Not all of us are gifted... or cursed... with direct divine visitation.” Viconia looked at Harry for a moment, then smiled a far more genuine, warm one than a moment before. “You really don’t care about my worship of Shar, do you?”

It was Harry’s turn to chuckle then, remembering some of the dark times with the Dursleys, remembering how the whole world seemed content with leaving him in that place, with turning the other cheek and not noticing, and then how his friends seemed to have abandoned him entirely. *If Shar had come to me in my little cupboard, would I have turned her away, even knowing what she was?*

“I understand why you took her hand when your goddess offered you help. But despite who you worship, you haven’t done anything outright evil since we met. Snarky, you might be, aggressive and dangerous to be sure. But evil, evil like the devil we fought last night? No. I don’t doubt that there is a capability for violence and darkness within you, but I will judge you by your actions, as I always have.”

Those words carried weight. Perhaps because Harry was now a champion of Tyr, his words had the gravitas of a judge giving a verdict, even if he didn’t see any notification, which Harry idly thought he might have. Perhaps the wording needed to be a little more formal for that kind of thing? Regardless, it seemed to do the trick, and what little tension remained in Viconia’s shoulders and face disappeared.

“Good. And should it come to it that Shar does order me to do something, I will most certainly not be putting my whole heart and mind behind whatever effort I put forth, which will make it all the easier for you to survive it,” Viconia said, putting Harry’s earlier thoughts into words.

That was the last they spoke of Shar or anything serious that night. The conversation shifted to other things, clothing for some reason at first, although how they switched to that, Harry would never be able to tell anyone. Of food, which dominated a large portion of the topic, with Harry promising to try and re-create a sauce that “would show you what true spice is,” that Viconia had tried a few days after coming to the surface. It sounded vaguely like what Harry remembered as sriracha sauce back on Earth.

As the conversation shifted, the feeling between them shifted too, and Harry did not need a pink-colored notification to understand why.

Viconia has decided that tonight is the night to push things forward, so to speak. It is up to you to follow the path she is going to lead you on or put a halt to things.

For his part, despite the serious talk at the start of the meal, Harry felt no desire whatsoever to back away.

As they were cleaning up, Harry made extensive use of his Sexual Awareness Perception-based skill. He touched her shoulder, sliding against Viconia as they worked around one another, leaned in to kiss her behind one of her ears, the tip of the other, while Viconia did the same in turn, her hands running up his chest, his thighs. Unlike Harry, though, she needed to quest to find sensitive spots beyond the ones she already knew about. Those, she attacked more than once, leaving a Hickey on Harry’s collarbone, then another behind his ear in a similar manner to what Harry had done with her.

Finally, as the last of the dishes was cleaned and put on the drying rack, she twisted Harry around, pressing him hard against the counter, leaning in to kiss him ardently.

Lemon start:

This kiss was full of Viconia’s demanding nature, and Harry gave in, letting her dominate the kiss as her hands began to work at the buttons of his shirt first, then at his breeches. Harry’s own hands moved to her clothing, and the pair pulled back a moment to pull their shirts up and off their heads, tossing them to the floor of the kitchen. Then Viconia was literally climbing up Harry a bit, pulling herself up until her face was even with him. Once there, she kissed him again, her tongue dominating his in Harry’s mouth. Harry’s hands went to her rear, holding her there, her legs around his stomach.

He squeezed hard, and Viconia moaned, pain and pleasure mixing. But when he tried to turn her around to place her rear onto the counter, she pulled away, kicking off the counter with her feet, breaking his grip on her rear. Pulling away from his mouth, her teeth shifted down his throat, biting hard. It was as if she were trying to bite through a minotaur’s hide for a moment, but she still left another hickey there as she shifted her hands down. Pulling at his breeches, she

shifted them down, letting Harry step out of them. Her hands found his manhood, both hands working it slowly, and his cock, which had been at half-mast, rose quickly to full attention.

Harry's own hands were clumsy with distraction as they tried to work at her own breaches, and she slapped them away laughingly, haughty and amused, before she took a step back, her thumbs reaching down to her own britches and undoing the knot there, letting them fall as she took another step back, hopping up onto the table. The table shifted a little under her weight, but still held, and she cocked a finger at Harry.

Grinning, Harry made to kneel, leaning in, but Viconia's hand caught his hair, pulling him upright and away from her already moist womanhood. "I am always happy to know that to not hesitate to use your mouth for things other than talking, but right now, there is no need. I want you inside me, now!"

Seeing that she was telling the truth on that score thanks to his Sexual Awareness skill, Harry nodded and shifted forward to place his shaft against Viconia's trimmed bush, sawing gently up and down for a few seconds, using her natural juices to lube his cock. She hissed at that, then pulled him down into a kiss, while Harry's hands worked at first Viconia's sides, then her breasts. Once more, his Sexual Awareness showed him that one of her coal-black nipples was more sensitive than the other, and he began to work it with his fingers, tweaking, twisting, gently stroking, until Viconia was forced to pull back from the kiss to moan, whereupon he moved down her body just a bit, taking that nipple in his mouth.

As he teased and lathered it with his tongue, Viconia pushed at his waist just a bit, her hand grabbing at his shaft, then at his rear. With one hand, she lined his cock up with her now soaking pussy, before the hand on his rear became two, and Viconia roughly pulled him into her.

There was no gentle sliding motion, no slow movement. Viconia was most definitely not a virgin, and while Harry was certainly even a bit larger than proportionate for his size, he wasn't the largest she had ever taken. There wasn't nearly as much pain as it would've been with the two ogre pleasure slaves she'd partaken of before, but Viconia found the absence of that did not take away from the moment. Indeed, with all of Harry's ministrations up to this point, it didn't take Viconia long to reach her first orgasm, which she shrieked to the quiet household around them.

Harry also wasn't a virgin, and his time with the Dryad Matriarch was serving him astonishingly well at the moment. Where Viconia had actually thought he might not last more than a few moments as he rutted into her like the few human lovers she'd taken since coming to the surface, Harry gritted his teeth and continued to plow Viconia through her own orgasm and out the other side while she was still dealing with aftershocks exacerbated by his movement.

Indeed, he went so far as to pull back from playing with Viconia's nipple, which was now almost painfully tingling, switching to the other for a few seconds before lifting himself off of her and grabbing her by the waist.

He began to thrust into her forcefully, each thrust of his hips causing the table to rattle, and for Viconia to moan. Concentrating, through his own pleasure, Harry could still use his Sexual Awareness and knew how to vary his strokes, how to hit certain places within her differently from one moment to the next. He saw when she wanted to be kissed, and allowed Viconia to control the kiss, and felt her legs start to relax around him.

When Viconia's hands gripped his shoulders, and she somehow twisted them all around, using her own body weight to start the twirl while using his body like it was a pole, Harry went with it, finding his rear smacking down into the same chair that he had been sitting in during the meal.

Viconia rode him into the seat, then began to bounce again and again, her hips twisting and moving in a way that had Harry groaning, his eyes going from wide-eyed to clenched in a moment as he fought to keep off his orgasm. Viconia was having none of it. A subtle movement of her hips, and her lips moving from his two bite at his throat again, teeth once more leaving a mark, Harry grunted as he exploded inside her.

Feeling Harry empty his seed into her, Viconia laughed throatily, a laugh of victory and tenderness alike for a few seconds, even as she continued to work her hips, her laughter giving way to something like approval and what could pass for tenderness on her face. "I see you do not give way after a single peek; that is good. It would irritate me sorely for this night to be finished after only one go."

Harry's arms shifted from where they had been around her, his hands once more finding Viconia's rear. It was soft, pliant, just big enough for his hands and a bit more, and he squeezed, pulling her into him, Viconia had intended, causing her to moan again. "I am not going to quit until I fall unconscious," he promised, and Viconia's mouth found his again.

How they made it there, Harry didn't really know, although we could swear that Viconia had somehow been moving him in that direction despite Harry doing all the walking with her legs around him. The next moment that became clear to Harry was when Viconia was lying out on the sofa, her hair splayed everywhere as Harry once again plowed into her from above. Her nails raked his back, but this didn't even register to Harry as more than a slight sensation.

Viconia pouted as she saw it, but Harry simply shrugged as he ruefully realized that pain would always accompany pleasure when it came to Viconia, both giving and receiving. Still, his Sexual Awareness allowed him to keep pace, to match her experience and imagination with instinct, while Iron Will let him ignore the wounds Viconia did to him. When she began to play

with his nipples, and Harry found the sensation a little more arousing than it had been in previous experiences, he dipped down again to take one of her nipples with his mouth, breaking Viconia's attention, her hands going back to his back.

Viconia was writhing through her second orgasm of the night when Harry found his own closely on its heels, and a sudden thought went through his mind like ice water. "What about children, Viconia?"

The drow seductress moaned, thrusting groups back up at Harry, and Harry's attempted self-control instantly shattered, causing her to laugh that same triumphant chuckle again. However, it was a little wearier than the first time, and a little warmer to boot. "Never fear, Harry. Between humans and drow, the possibility does exist, but there is a small cantrip I can do in the morning to make certain that no issue comes of it."

"Was that a pun?" Harry asked, blinking as he gave her a very deadpan stare, causing Viconia to blush a little in embarrassment at the inadvertent joke. The next moment, her sultry look reappeared as her hands wound their way up into his hair and pulled him down into a kiss.

The night did not end on the sofa. The pair did not stop fucking when they found themselves too busy with Viconia's mouth on Harry's turgid cock mid-stairwell. It did not end when Harry ate her out on one of the beds in the room that had previously been assigned to the women of the party. It didn't end when they rutted against the wall of that selfsame room.

It only ended when the two of them were in a bath together, Harry's magic having created both the water and heated it up. Viconia faced away from Harry, Harry's hands gripping her breasts hard enough to leave bruises as she urged him on, her hips rising and falling, her hair stuck to her neck and shoulders by a mixture of sweat and water as Harry grunted and groaned underneath him.

Clenched around him, shrieking at yet another orgasm to the night, Harry grunted, once again emptying himself into her, before slumping, his eyes nearly rolling back in his head. The exertion of so much sex with Viconia had pushed him even more than the race to Beregost had somehow.

How long they lay there, Harry didn't know, but his eyes had started to close when finally Viconia shifted, twisting around just a little bit, to give him an astonishingly tender kiss on the cheek after their night's exertions. He then opened his eyes as she pushed herself off of his chest and off of his now somewhat painfully raw cock, nor did he open his eyes as she pulled herself all out of the tub and onto the floor. "I will return to help you to your bed for the night, which will be beside me in the women's quarters. Alora and Imoen will just have to share the other room. But it is a little too cold, and I need to go and put some more fire on the fireplace."

End Lemon

Harry nodded, smirking just a little bit as a notification that had been in the periphery of his vision shifted to the foreground and a movement of his eyes.

Congratulations.

You and Viconia have become intimate. Despite the AAS, this doesn't mean your souls are bound together, or that you will be together for all eternity. That kind of thing is beyond even the gods to determine, and this isn't some romantic novel. But in the future, who knows what the two of you can build?

At present, this means that your relationship status has changed to **Significant Other(s)**. You can still build on that through respect and trust points; however, there is a cap on how much, given that Viconia has made no bones about the fact that she will need to leave in the future. Because of that, your relationship cannot evolve to that of Lovers.

Viconia did not go straight to the fireplace. Instead, she had headed into the women's room again and grabbed a bathrobe for herself, the night having gotten chilly. Then she had headed down, putting a few more logs onto the fire. She was just turning to head upstairs when the door opened, and Imoen came in, looking a little drunk and hardly able to open the door. However, her eyes widened as she took in Viconia, then sniffed the air around the room before shaking her head. "Nope! About-face, Alora, Edwina. Unless either of you wishes to sleep in a house that smells like a brothel."

"And how exactly would you know what a brothel smells like?" Viconia asked, torn between amusement and pride. She was not at all annoyed, nor put off by the statement. Rather, she was quite happy. Harry had proven himself an incredibly good lover, thanks to his prior training with that dryad, no doubt, and Viconia looked forward to many a night's romp in the future as they traveled together.

"Never you mind," Imoen muttered, even as Edwina leaned over her head to stick her own head inside, staring from Viconia to the messed-up sofa, then to a pile of clothing she could barely see in the doorway of the kitchen.

"Indeed not. I believe that we will all adjourn back to the Burning Wizard. I will inveigle upon the innkeeper for a room, and if he has no room to let, I will cheerfully demand one at spell-point rather than put up with that smell or attempt to make myself comfortable in a room so soiled. I expect that one of you will clean all of this up before we come back tomorrow morning," Edwina ordered.

The door closed before Viconia could reply to that, and she growled a little under her breath before turning and heading back up the stairs. Cleaning could wait until the morning. She certainly wasn't about to do it.

Scene break

The next morning, Harry spent the morning cleaning up and was barely finished before Edwina and the others returned. "A snowstorm's just begun, so all work around the town has halted," Edwina reported, sniffing the air experimentally, then smiling slightly. "Using the smell of cooking to offset the smell of your simian-like mating. You are smarter than I would've thought after the majority of your brains no doubt leaked out of Viconia throughout the night."

"Harsh, but at least in terms of my plan for the cooking, you're quite accurate. I've got fresh bread cooking. I even worked in some rosemary and olive oil. There's also soup and sausage sandwiches. Things that will not only warm us up but also be reusable in the future." Harry's lips quirked a little as he gestured with one hand towards the kitchen table, hiding a smirk as he spotted Viconia looking at him stonily, her eyes narrowed and her fingers twitching.

Viconia had forbidden him from using a Lay on Hand spell to heal himself that morning because she wanted the marks she had left on him to remain, to mark her territory and essentially brag to the others, including Jaheira and Dynaheir, when they returned. So the nail marks on Harry's back and the various bite marks and less intense hickies remained. But Harry could easily ignore the throbbing from the scratches on his back and from his neck thanks to his Iron Will ability.

This seemed to annoy her, as Viconia couldn't do the same. She had found herself walking very gingerly once the adrenaline wore off, and she had not even tried to put on the gambeson she normally wore under her armor; instead, Viconia simply dressed for the cold weather without any armor. Even for someone like Viconia, going that often, and so enthusiastically, had taken a bit of a toll, to say nothing about how sore her nipples and neck area were after Harry had begun to return the favor in the form of bite marks.

On the one hand, I was... intensely pleased with his performance. Being able to be both gentle and ferocious betwixt the sheets is an excellent talent, Viconia mused. Yet on the other hand, it does not behoove a woman like me to be showing the aftermath of our lovemaking more than the male I lay with! She then smirked sultrily, her annoyance evaporating. Well, it seems I must do better in the future. Challenge accepted.

"UGH! Enough of making cow eyes at one another, you two!" Edwina snapped, having caught that look and the answering grin from Harry. *Good grief, he must have been good for Viconia, a drow steeped in all the exotic eroticism of her people, to already want more.* That thought caused Edwina to feel odd for a moment, but she pushed through it to address more

important matters. "From now on, the two of you need to keep your sex stuff away from the kitchen. Better, you need to keep it out of sight of the rest of us."

Imoen nodded firmly. "One of the rules of living in such close quarters is that there needs to be rules and stuff like that for that kind of thing," she said, nodding her head firmly. *Secretly bringing boys back to the Hufflepuff common room was always a chancy thing, and having a boy in our actual dorms or vice-versa never ended well once other people were aware of it.*

"Just so long as all of you are willing to give us the house for a night out of every three or four," Viconia demanded just as determinedly.

As the two women argued, Harry breathed a well-hidden sigh of relief. Honestly, he'd been wondering if Viconia would want an encore that night, which, well, certain bits of him would **very** much complain about at the moment. Even with Iron Will, Harry's wizard staff was in no way ready for action just yet. *Yet that's what Lay on Hand spells are... well, not exactly for, but can be used for*, he thought to himself, chuckling a little, which only served to bring Edwina and Imoen's attention his way.

With the snow falling fast and furious, the work around Beregost was halted for that day, forcing the group of adventurers to stay indoors. This forced Harry to deal with Imoen's teasing and Alora's giggles, while Viconia's glares kept them at bay.

Imoen and Harry also discussed what had happened to Imoen when she died. To hear that the original Imoen's soul had been transferred back to Earth and that Mystra wanted to push forward magical knowledge and learning was one thing. To hear that she, like Tyr, felt that Harry might be pulled back there himself eventually was another. Harry had hoped that Tyr was being paranoid on that score, but hearing another god say it gave the idea more credence. Yet at the same time, it wasn't anything that Harry could do anything about right now.

The same could be said for some of the ideas for Harry's alchemy and cooking that New Imoen and Original Imoen's discussion had given ImoTonks. The Potion of Regeneration was an idea, sure, but the idea of an item that would grant the wearer permanent regeneration was beyond him right now. Her ideas about further cutting down on the cost of using Blood Magic were also interesting, and Harry gave her the go-ahead to try and experiment with that.

This actually paid off. The experiment of using various movements that mimicked similar spells from the local school of magic worked, reducing the health cost to only minus eight points. Using a staff like local magic users did occasionally did not.

The next day, when the snow stopped falling, work started again to repair the damage done to the town, continuing all that day and into the next. Imoen, Viconia and Edwina only

participated in such things half the time, but Alora and Harry went out every day. Alora helped around the place, acting as a gofer for the workmen, or out on the farms, helping with the animals. Meanwhile, Harry gathered more bounty trophies, helped along by his Complex Item Box. This also helped him gather a few animal carcasses and draw and quarter them at the same time, something that made him even more popular with the workers and farmers, cutting down on the work needed to make their farmsteads right and helping to provide enough meat for the whole town for days with barely any effort.

On the third day after the siege, Jaheira and the others finally arrived. Jaheira and Khalid had remained where Harry had left them, waiting for Minsc and Dynaheir to catch up with the three Flaming Fist guards, before pushing on after another snowstorm had ended.

The group arrived cold, exhausted, and demanding food, which Harry cheerfully provided. Learning what happened during the battle over their meal, Jaheira and Khalid were shocked and appalled, knowing precisely how dangerous demons were and how much energy it took for a demon, and in particular a strong, intelligent one, to change his form.

When told that Harry had pledged himself to Tyr, their reaction was mixed.

Minsc was simply ecstatic, shouting about how Harry would “Obviously choose someone like Tyr so as to be butt-kicking for goodness and justice alike!”

His witch looked at Harry as if, for some reason, his agreeing to follow a god of light at last had been important in some fashion, and Harry did not need the notification that popped up as she observed him to know that the decision had seemingly hardened her belief that Harry was why she had come to the Sword Coast. Still, she hadn’t chosen to tell him anything about some great destiny or other, so Harry would remain silent on that score for now, although he could have done without the other bit of that observation as Dynaheir’s eyes slid to Viconia, hardening noticeably.

How Dynaheir knows you don’t know, but it’s clear she can, through some womanly instinct, tell that things with you and Viconia have come to a head. She has long been leery of Viconia’s influence over you, and that concern might shift to overprotectiveness if given even a hint that Viconia might be influencing you.

The next aspect of that notification was more helpful though.

Due to becoming a Paladin of Tyr, you have earned 800 Respect and 900 Trust with Dynaheir.

Relationship Status Friendly Traveling Companion: 2800/3000 Respect, 2900/3000 Trust.

That meant that Dynaheir was very close to becoming a real friend, and thus becoming a party member.

For his part, Khalid was simply approving, if nowhere near as effusively as Minsc. He admitted that even to those who followed the Elvish Pantheon, Tyr was an acceptable sort of God. His wife also used that term: acceptable. "Tyr is not so much about justice, goodness and light, but also a balance, about justice and moderation as much as seeking out evil and warfare. I can't exactly say I approve of his warlike aspect, but I suppose it goes part and parcel with the rest. And I agree with why he offered you to become a champion and not just a paladin, Harry. Your leadership and tactics abilities have already pushed you into that general area, that of a war leader."

As they all settled down into another feast that Harry had prepared for them, he announced that it was finally time for them to go over the various announcements and quest completion things that had been building up. Before he began, though, Dynaheir made the announcement. "I also leveled up at some point. I believe distance had no impact on sharing the experience you all gained during this siege, and that was extreme even halved as it is for those of us who have yet to cross the threshold from mere travelling companions to party members. I believe I was given a bit more endurance, perhaps because I was exerting myself at the time to keep up with Minsc's progress in the snow. My large friend had a far easier time of it than I did, for certain."

"Fair is fair, dear Dynaheir! I was making a trail for you and our guard companions at the same time," Minsc protested. "I always knew where you were. Boo kept his eye on you at all times. It is not my fault that traveling in winter is harsh on those with shorter legs. Minsc had offered to carry you, after all."

"And make those poor officers break trail for us? They would never have been able to do half as good as you did," Dynaheir chuckled, then looked over at Harry. "But please begin, Harry."

"Alright, let's get the semi-gory stuff out of the way, since that explains why I shut down the idea of you and Alora going on a shopping trip after everything's settled down, Imoen."

He looked over at Jaheira, Khalid, Minsc and Dynaheir, who had spread out over the sitting room with the rest of the party. "Before you four got back, I went out occasionally all around the town and out into the Wood of Sharp Teeth and gathered hobgoblin ears and such-like. We've got 135 hobgoblin ears, 42 bandit scalps, 22 minotaur horns, 25 ogre ears and 9 Alu-Fiend ring fingers."

Harry grimaced at that last one, but it was a momentary thing. While the Alu-Fiends had looked nearly human, they hadn't been, and the bestiary page covering their abilities had been very clear on that. Personally, Harry was willing to not think they were entirely evil, but if any

attacked him, well, despite his new status as an official paladin, he had no qualms about profiting from their demise to a certain degree.

“Anyway, let me sell them and refill the party’s coffers before you all start shopping. Although when you do, I will want us to refill at least our magically enhanced slingstones, along with fire and acid arrows,” Harry snorted a bit. “Vai might not like it, but selling all that off is going to net us a good amount of gold. Especially since we are officially out from under my An Oath Fulfilled Quest.”

“Read those notifications first, Harry,” Jaheira instructed. “Those are probably going to be the wordiest, and the least straightforward considering how widely the rewards and outcomes could vary.”

“The Oath Fulfilled far more than the Blood in the Snow quest, I think. I’d also have thought you were more interested in my abilities as a paladin,” Harry teased gently. While Tyr had called him a Champion, and he had described himself as such, Harry’s class hadn’t changed to reflect that term as it would have for most of the advanced ‘class kits’ for some reason. Perhaps because Tyr hid his champions among his paladins? Or because it was such a unique term there wasn’t a specific ‘kit’ made for it in the greater Level, Quest and Class System? Harry didn’t know.

“Oh, I am,” Jaheira actually laughed at that, shaking her head. “But I have also learned the value of anticipation and patience. Get the more irritating stuff out of the way first, then we can sate my interest.”

Viconia chuckled at that along with Khalid, while Alora and Edwina looked like they disagreed, and Imoen snorted, ruffling the halfling’s hair affectionately. “Bah, this girl’s all about instant gratification, right? Gotta say I lean in that direction myself.”

“You got it!” Alora laughed. “But I’ll go along with the majority I guess.”

Snorting Harry shifted the pile of Notifications from where it had been hovering at the upper right corner of his vision to front and center. Then, mentally searching for the right ones, he pulled them forward, starting with:

Congratulations!

Blood in the Snow (Small Quest) has been finished successfully. Beregost has survived!

The town of Beregost came through the monstrous assault launched against it due to the presence of the Soul Taker Dagger somehow spreading to vile ears. How that information spread, you have no idea, but neither is that something you need to deal with... presently. The

town is saved, the dagger still in your possession, and due to defeating this quest, you have also succeeded in finishing An Oath Fulfilled.

Harry noticed Jaheira and Khalid exchanging startled, furious glances at something he had said, while Edwina was suddenly looking far too smug to be good for party unity. How much of that was because Edwina's face was pretty enough to Charm even when she looked full of herself, Harry decided not to speculate, nor did he look at any of them long enough to activate his Greater Observation. Instead, more intrigued by what would come next, he continued reading his next notification. He was able to go directly to it, thanks to a brief eye movement, not unlike how Harry could switch between bestiary pages or the pages of his own information screens. He explained this to the others, then read the next notification, which was quite a bit lengthier than the first.

Congratulations!

You have completed the Side Quest (medium): **An Oath Fulfilled**: win the 'Respected' title with the Mayor and Guards of Beregost.

The people of Beregost will see through the end of winter thanks to your efforts against the demons and their allies. While the town is still in danger if the trade up and down the Sword Coast does not resume when winter is over, right now, its folk sleep soundly in their beds because you and yours were up to the job of defending it against this latest threat. Given the nature of the enemy as outlined in your Side Quest (Small) **Blood in the Snow**, you have succeeded in winning over the local civilians, guards and leaders.

You have gone above and beyond the necessary **Respected** stance this quest required to succeed successfully. You have become **Well-liked**. This title might seem banal, but unlike **Respected**, which is a positive neutral stance, **Well-liked** is a friendly, positive stance.

The mayor and other leaders will look on you favorably in terms of general attitude and any requests made of them. The guard will help you in any battle they see you and your party involved in, and everyone in the know about your drow companion (2 people) will keep your secrets regardless of any exterior threat or stimuli.

All prices for goods and information sought within the town, even from the Temple of Lathander, will cost ½ as much as they would for a Respected adventurer.

This was followed by another notification, though Harry didn't have to eye-click (an odd term, but one he felt fit) anything in the first notification to go to this one. Rather, it came up on its own and was the green of party-related stuff. Although in this instance, it was only something about Harry. Reading through it, he blinked, then cocked his head in pure confusion. "Okay, so because I fulfilled my Oath to the town, I received a personal upgrade, as the rewards for that quest said I would. But... it's a bit odd."

Jaheira and Khalid stopped their silent discussion at that, with even Edwina turning her attention to Harry rather than continuing to smugly sneer at the two Harpers. "What do you mean?" she asked.

"Er, any of you know what a Chaos Dice is?" Harry asked, frowning in confusion. "Or a Wand of Wonder?"

Dynaheir blinked. "I... believe I have heard of the first. It is a very odd story. When two gods, neutral or good, come into conflict and don't want to go to war with one another, they occasionally use random games of chance. Chaos Dice are one such. What they do, I know not."

"I have heard of a Wand of Wonder, but what specifically it does, is beyond even my experience," Edwina said, frowning a bit at needing to admit not knowing something.

"OOOh! Minsc does. He found a Wand of Wonder once while in a battle in a cave in Rasheman," Minsc exclaimed, smiling happily and pulling Boo out of wherever he had been hiding on the man's massive body.

"I was forced to take shelter after a most ferocious battle with some trolls. Alas, no matter how often Minsc put the mighty boot to their rears, he lacked fire or other means to keep them down, and at the time, Minsc had been hunting alone, and thus had no friends to aid with the butt-kicking. I was eventually forced to run, to take shelter in a cave. The trolls followed me in and soon, they knocked mighty Minsc down! With my weapon knocked out of my hand, I then grabbed up a stick, which I then smashed a troll over the head with."

Minsc boomed a laugh, one large finger stroking Boo's head. "When the top of the stick, I thought it a crude club or a rusted mace, cracked on top of the troll, there was a spark of light that blinded both the pack of trolls and Minsc. A loud pop occurred and there was Boo! The wand pulled him from his home to aid Minsc in his butt-kicking for goodness, and he immediately went for their eyes! This gave me enough time to start a fire with flint on the pile of debris where I found the wand. With that fire, Minsc finally put down the trolls. Once that was done, Minsc took the wand and went home."

The large, bald ranger looked morose for a second as his listeners were torn between interest in the tale and annoyance at how he went from third person to normal whenever he spoke. "Minsc had hoped to have the wand summon more such companions, for surely all rangers could benefit from having a Giant Miniature Space Hamster by their side. But such was not to be. The witches of the tribe told Minsc what it was, telling me the effect was random, thus proving that Minsc's luck was truly incredible to bring him Boo, but that the odds of it happening again were slim. Even worse, the Wand had not survived

Minsc's mighty strength. Although I still maintain glue would have been enough to put it together again."

"... Leaving everything wrong with that last statement to the side, I will admit that, paired with everything else we've learned of that little creature since coming into your sphere of influence, Harry, it doesn't actually surprise me as much as it should. I am both thankful I am getting used to surprises like this, and terrified at the same time," Dynaheir murmured, shaking her head, then focusing on Harry for a moment. "But what does all that have to do with what you're talking about?"

At that, Jaheira and the rest all blinked and turned in his direction as well. In reply, Harry shrugged and read off the rest of the notification he had been staring at for a little bit.

Due to exceeding the necessary reputation level and given the very nature of the quest and the Oaths involved for all parties and the deities who had demanded this of you, it was decided that the creation of a random skill within you did not fall under the purview of any single deity.

"Translation: Tyr had a skill he wanted to give you, but because Lathander's servant was involved in the exchange of Oaths as well as there being other gods during your trial, they demanded to have some input, regardless of whether or not the outcome would become a real boon to you. Too often, gods tend to forget the original goal when it comes to playing with the lives of mortals. The more gods involved, the more this tendency comes out," Edwina said, snorting in amusement.

"That, or Tyr might not have been able to give me a specific 'upgrade' as he's already given me so much. Before I came out of that frozen travel moment or whatever it was, Tyr mentioned he had gifted me some new Activated Abilities, but I wouldn't be able to use them until after the battle because my body's acclimatizing to them would've turned my brain to mush for a few hours."

Jaheira and Khalid, by far the most experienced of the group, nodded at that, with Khalid assaying that he had seen such 'mind-down' moments. "A, a, an old companion of mine was able t, t, to find a u, u, ultra-rare Skill Scroll." Those were exceedingly rare Scrolls that, like spell scrolls, could be found and used to give someone a new ability, although most of those on Skill Scrolls were either esoteric, rare, or powerful. "H, h, he basically stood there l, l, like a statue and s, s, spouted gibberish for h, h, hours. If we h, h, had not already cleared o, o, out the dungeon, we w, w, would have been in trouble."

Nodding at that, Harry went on, finishing the notification.

In the interest of fairness, the gods decided your new ability through the use of a Wand of Wonder paired with a Chaos Dice, as well as taking your existing abilities, particularly your Leader status, into consideration.

Congratulations.

You can now **Spirit Summon, Servant.**

“...” For a moment, no one spoke, then Edwina came to the most logical conclusion. “That conjures up the image of summoning some undead heroic spirit to serve alongside you in a fight. I haven’t heard of paladins who can do that, but I suppose it could make sense, if one squints, twists one’s head, and looks through life via a kaleidoscope.”

“Perhaps we need to let Harry actually tell us all of the information before we leap to conclusions, hmm?” Jaheira stated archly, not having enjoyed the smug looks Edwina had been sending her and her husband’s way.

Thankfully, even Edwina didn’t want to argue against something so obvious, and Harry was able to eye-click the link. This sent his Head’s Up Display to his Learned Skills page. There, the new Skill glowed a light gold, expanding as he watched.

Spirit Summon, Servant. Current number of Servants able to be Summoned: 1 out of 1.

Percentage until upgrading: **0/100%**

Given to you by a random roll of Chaos Dice controlled by many hands, this Skill is like a Blood Magic spell in that it takes from your available health pool at a cost of 25 Health Points. This is a flat rate that will not go up until you can summon more than five servants at a time. This spell essentially summons a gremlin, a servant creature to do your bidding in terms of non-combat functions.

Through use, you can master this spell, but it only has one charge per day. That number will go up every Level you gain after learning this skill. The spell lasts for six hours before the servant dissipates.

To use this activated skill, simply say the words summon servant while thrusting out your hand to indicate where you wish the servant to appear.

“Good grief, but I wish most spells were so simple, simply a few words and a gesture to use? No extensive training or ritual in order to record the spell into your spellbook in a usable format?” Dynaheir murmured. “There are few spells indeed which could be so easily learned, and this is not one of your Blood Magic spells, I do not think.”

“On the contrary, I have heard something of spells like this for wizards,” Edwina said excitedly. “Some high-powered wizards and witches who go on long-term quests or trips use summoned servants in order to make their lives more comfortable while on the road.”

Jaheira and Khalid both said they’d actually seen such before, and Jaheira went on to smirk just a little bit, looking around the house. “Actually, considering how rarely any of us bother with doing more than the bare minimum in terms of housework, summon this little creature now, Harry. Both Viconia and I are here to heal you afterwards.”

Nodding in agreement at that, Harry stood up, shifting around the sitting area until he was pointing at an area clear of any obstacles right in front of the staircase. “Summon servant!” He said, wincing and nearly stumbling at the hip to his health points, which occurred as the last syllable left his mouth.

However, his concern on that score didn’t last very long, as his eyes widened and he stared at the creature that had just popped into existence in front of him. Much like a monster who had been summoned by one of Edwina’s spells, one moment it wasn’t there, the next it was, but that wasn’t the most surprising thing. No, that honor rested in the fact that this little creature looked like someone Harry knew. *Dobby!* It took all of Harry’s gamer mind and willpower to not blurt that out, while Imoen just gaped at the sight of the house elf.

Admittedly, it wasn’t quite like the Dobby who had helped Harry repair the computer that had eventually sent him into this new life. Oh, the house elf was the same, to be sure, but his clothing was very different. Instead of a loose-fitting burlap sack made into clothing, this Dobby wore what looked like some kind of butler’s outfit, tailored to his tiny body. Yet at the same time, it was very much Dobby.

The creature looked up at Harry, and its eyes widened. “Harry *****, Sir!” Dobby flapped his mouth open and closed a few times, as if it was searching for something else to say, before sure looking down at itself, smiling widely, and saluting. “Dobby is ready to serve, Sir!”

Whether or not this was the real Dobby, somehow pulled across dimensions, which frankly, Harry doubted, or something else was going on here, Harry had no idea. But the creature certainly looked enthusiastic about being given something to do. Before Harry could do so, however, Dobby had turned, staring into the kitchen, then snapped his fingers. Instantly, there was the sound of running water, and a second later, the sound of moving plates.

“Excellent. A servant to have around the place.” Edwina smirked, leaning back in her chair and crossing her arms under her disturbingly alluring chest. “Clean the entire house

from top to bottom, do our laundry, and so forth. Once you're done with that, if there are any repairs or anything that needs to be done to the house, see to it that you do them. If not, write down a note about it, including any repairs you simply need material for," she ordered.

Dobby paused for a moment, but when Harry nodded bemusedly in agreement, his eyes lit up, and his ears began to waggle. "Yes, sir, Dobby will do." With that, he disappeared, although Harry could still hear noises starting upstairs.

Laughing, Imoen leaned over, pulling him into a hug, using the moved as a cover to whisper in his ear that most house elves preferred to be unseen as they went about their duties. "And I think we'd better keep that name to ourselves, yes?"

Harry didn't need to be told that, but nodded anyway, as he looked around at the others. "Well, I think that looks promising." He reopened his character sheet and quickly looked at the skill again, ignoring the fact that there were two other skills there at present, the ones that Tyr had given him, which he could now use. "And using it once boosted the percentage until upgrading at 5%."

"F, f, fascinating, although I still have to w, w, wonder why the gods gave you s, s, such a strange ability. And that l, l, little creature definitely d, d, didn't match any of t, t, the servant summons I've e, e, ever seen in the p, p, past," Khalid said. He was a little more well-traveled than his wife and had seen such magical servants a few times in the past, whereas she had only seen such once.

"I think they were more concerned about making certain that none of them were able to leave a specific stamp on you any more than Tyr already has. Or maybe the other gods just wanted to screw with Harry?" Imoen guessed, smirking just a little. *Given how Mystra looked when she spoke about the plans she wanted to do while trying to sell Imoen the idea of traveling to Earth, I wouldn't put it past her to do something like this just for the laughs. It took all I had not to crack up when I saw a house elf pop up!*

Viconia began to chortle quietly, soon joined by Dynaheir. "Well, thankfully, it seems as if Harry will be able to do all of the chores around the house for us, if not personally, then at least through his auspice is," the witch said, laughing.

The others all laughed too, but soon turned their attention back to the notifications, with Harry going back to the notification he'd been reading previously before the whole new Skill thing had sidetracked him. Meanwhile, Viconia and Jaheira healed him of the 25 health points he'd lost summoning Dobby.

Further, this victory has earned you much Renown.

Your fame, likenesses, names and so forth will be carried far and wide from this great victory even in the depths of winter. This will influence how people see you wherever you go for several months afterward. You aren't quite famous enough and didn't do well enough just yet to become truly famous on a permanent basis. Something new will come along and push your party's deeds out of the psyche of people, but for now, you may well become the new most famous adventuring company on the Sword Coast.

For better or ill. Your enemies will learn about your abilities, your powers, and what you travel with. Beware, for knowledge is power and preparation is deadly.

This wiped the smiles off of everyone's faces, and Viconia stood up, staring at Harry in shock and horror, her hands clenched at her side, while Edwina was barely less reactionary, putting her head in her hands, and mumbling about how it better be an exaggeration. "My presence in your party might have gone unnoticed before now, Harry, but if that fame continues for long enough, it will not for long! And what will happen when it reaches the eyes of people who will not be fooled by the Color Change Charm?"

"What will happen will happen, and we will deal with it then," Harry said, both soothing and firm. "I will not leap to conclusions, nor will I ask anyone else to do the same. We should've realized this was a possibility, sure, but would you have done anything different? Would your plans going forward change?"

Viconia wanted to shout "Yes!" She didn't want to be known; she didn't want to be famous or do good deeds like Harry did. She wanted to slink into the background, into the darkness, to go her own way unmolested and unknown. But for some reason, the images of some of the townsfolk came to her, specifically the children. The drow could all too easily imagine what the tenar'ri would've done to them. "I..." She fell silent, unable to give voice to what she was feeling, a turmoil of the soul and instinct.

Edwina had no such qualms. She crossed her arms under her impressive chest, shaking her head firmly. "As those demons and such were not only coming after the town, but after us, I would not have done anything different, simply because doing so would have removed all the other bodies I could place between them. However, Harry, if you had any illusions that either I or Viconia could enter any large city alongside you, get those out of your head right now. I will not tie myself entirely to the goodness and light that you now represent, and I cannot allow the notion that I am traveling with you in such a manner to spread."

Harry nodded, and for a moment, the group fell silent, contemplating what this newfound fame would mean in the future. Well, all of them but Minsc and Alora, Minsc didn't care one way or another, and Alora was busily trying to steal Boo from his giant hand,

where he had still been holding the little critter for a few moments ago. Not for that pair were deep thoughts and considerations of the future.

“... Let us just move on, please,” Jaheira murmured. “We know now some of the long term ramifications. Let’s go back to the Blood in the Snow quest, and the rest of our rewards.” She scowled. “Well, I say we, but more you and the others who actually fought.”

“A, a, and could actually get said r, r, rewards,” Khalid grumbled, for once showing a depth of anger and despair about his and his wife’s predicament he rarely showed.

Knowing Khalid wouldn’t want empty words of hope or commiseration, Harry just obeyed Jaheira’s suggestion, heading back to the Blood in the Snow notification.

Specifically, you have completed this quest by keeping the majority of the town's inhabitants alive:

Of the 1,537 civilians with no combat potential must survive, more than 1,200 survived.

50% of the Flaming Fist Garrison and associated combatants lived through the battle.

Specific Individuals whose Survival was important to this quest:

Vai – Chief Officer of the town guards. Status: Alive

Kelldath Ormylr – High Priest of Lathander. Status: Alive

Gerard Travenhurst – Mayor of Beregost. Status: Alive

Taerom Fuiruim - chief smith of Thunderhammer Smithy. Status: Alive

“Um... there are two more full notifications just about the things we had to do to succeed. I’ll skip the one about the buildings. Only five of the buildings were destroyed with none of the important ones were at worst damaged,” Harry answered, reading that notification quickly. “I’ll share the bits about the offensive goals I’m most interested in, shall I?”

With Jaheira and the others all making agreeable noises, Harry read off just those parts.

Offensive Goals. Destroy or decimate the attacking forces threatening Beregost.

1. Wipe out the forces moving to attack Beregost before they can reach the town. Your party ambushed and wiped out elven full bandit parties out of the thirty-five that gathered to attack Beregost.
2. You did not fight with Hephernaan, the Baatezu.

3. Your party killed off twelve of the attacking Alu-Fiends, a vast majority of the creatures involved in the attack.

4. You survived a battle with the low level Tanar'ri.

"That bit about not fighting the named Baatezu, does anyone else feel as if that means we might run into him later on?" Harry asked, getting to the crux of the matter as he saw it. A part of him, the new part of him, **wanted** to do so. Hephernaan was a demon who had led an invasion designed to free a Greater Demon's soul from its prison. That was the type of evil that a paladin of Tyr was probably supposed to face and leaving him out there in the world felt unpleasant. *And if asking this question doesn't give me a quest for it, that will be a pretty definitive sign that I'm not the one to deal with Hephernaan*, he reasoned.

"Quite probably. That is how such things tend to work out. However, hopefully, we will have handed off the Soul Taker dagger to someone who can destroy it or at least take it off our hands before that happens. And hopefully we will have time to grow in strength," Jaheira said, scowling angrily. "Did you get any information about him from whoever did fight him?"

"Kelddath fought him along with the sirines, and some. He survived but injured. One of Thalantyr's adamantine columns chased him off, but once away from the town, he was able to destroy before escaping," Harry reported. "Hephernaan remained in human form the whole time, but I'd guess he transformed to deal with the golem. Kelddath was near-crippled in the fight, but according to him, at least, gave as good as he got."

"..." Jaheira fell silent for a moment, staring at Harry thoughtfully. "I was about to say that we would need to at least have you all be above level twenty in terms of levels to take on someone like that, but perhaps not. Given your abilities, the stat points that you get with every level, you might be able to face such a one is that as soon as level twelve or maybe even eleven. But the rest of us would perhaps not be of much help against such an enemy."

Viconia scowled at that, but agreed, as did Edwina and Dynaheir. They had more knowledge about extra-planar creatures, and knew where they stood against such, but had also learned by this point that Harry was indeed far stronger than he should be at his level, even before pledging to Tyr. With that power added to his own, Harry would be a living nightmare to any evil-aligned creature, giving him an advantage even against a demon higher than his own level.

"Hey, hey, that's enough doom and gloom! Let's get back to reading through the rewards. You said about getting something from Thunderhammer Smithy when you told me about this Quest, Harry," Alora said excitedly. "Only, there's this really nifty dagger there. I was almost tempted to take a look at it myself but decided against that at the time."

“Yep, that’s still there, although I’m not just going to grab that Dagger for you, Alora. Even with Backstab, your staying anywhere close to the front line is a bad idea,” Harry retorted with a chuckle, before looking over at Jaheira and Khalid. “Before we go on, though, the rewards for protecting the Soul Taker Dagger says that my status will be Exemplary among the harpers, so much so that any concerns about my heritage will become mute. First time I’ve heard that my heritage would have been an issue...” he trailed off leadingly.

“Hah! The Harpers are not nearly as white as the driven snow, Harry, no matter how much they might profess it to be so. They are about the balance, about the proper apportionment of good and evil. This does not necessarily mean that they are always on the side of the Triad whose leader you have now come to worship,” Edwina said with some amount of smug good humor. “Of course, that’s why someone within the Harpers sold the information about the Soul Taker dagger. Else Hephernaan and whoever would never have known about it.”

“I realized that, but to have it pointed out to me that I might come into conflict with them later on, and now won’t, well, it’s both a relief and an annoyance in one,” Harry said, scowling at both points. *Although that actually assuages some of my guilt about what happened to Beregost. If just passing on information about it caused that attack, I am only to blame for bringing the dagger here and trusting the Harpers. That’s still enough to make me happy we’re going to stay throughout winter and help around the place, but far less than I had feared.*

“We Harpers are normally united,” Jaheira said, glaring at Edwina for a moment. “However, occasionally, some of us might have differing views on how best to create balance. Or could be more influenced by local society than the Harpers would normally wish to see. Regardless, it is not an issue we need to worry about now.”

Harry nodded somewhat reluctant agreement with that and continued on. “Well, in terms of rewards, we’ve got the one item free from Thunderhammer’s Smithy. When we go over there, I’ll want to talk about refilling our magic arrows and enhanced slingstones at least, along with getting a shield for myself. With the better prices and everything else, we should be able to do that for a decent price, although Imoen and I will be using our Repair spells on the rest of our gear. The experience for it is... wow...” He smirked over at Imoen, Minsc and the other members of his party. “Okay, so, tell me what happens if I hit this...”

With that, Harry closed the last tab that dealt with the Blood in the Snow quest, an instantly saw the notification:

Congratulations, you have leveled up!

Harry grinned as whoops of delight and laughter wound around the room. While Dynaheir and Alora had already leveled up and thus did not do so now, Edwina, Viconia, Harry, Imoen and Minsc all did so now. “While a part of Minsc laments the fact he did not join in the butt-kicking for goodness, he cannot lament the joy of leveling up like this!”

Looking more closely at his own Character Sheet, Harry hummed thoughtfully, seeing that he was not only leveling up, but had gone a little under a fourth of the way to his next level after that. Looking through the others, he noticed that Imoen was closer to a third of the way to her next level, Viconia a bit less than Harry. Minsc was a bit closer than Imoen in turn.

As Harry had been looking at the various Character Sheets of his party Edwina had leaned back in her chair, a snarl on her face. *Blast and botheration! Despite knowing my own self far too well to believe it possible, I had held out some facsimile of hope that I would be able to make the jump to full party member before my next level up. But now... yes, I can sense as usual, my Stat points went to enhancing my already vast Intelligence and, hmm... my Dexterity. Well, at least that is somewhat helpful, but blast it all, I need more! I... I might have to convince the witch that our working together to create some manner of item that will let us at least try and fool Harry's AAS in the future. This is unacceptable!*

Alas for Edwina, her thoughts did not parallel Dynaheir's on this score. While facing some of the same annoyances, Dynaheir was more philosophical about things. *So long as I am here, where Minsc and I can influence Harry's journey and his sense of right and wrong, that is the main thing. But considering how he is now a paladin of Tyr, I am certain that my respect and friendship points with Harry will only grow,* she thought, unaware of how close she was to that line already.

“Alright!” Harry laughed. “Let's see. Minsc, no offense, but I think Viconia and Imoen should go first. Strength for Viconia right, and... what, Imoen?”

“Charisma and Willpower,” Imoen supplied firmly. She knew offhand that her Charisma was only around 8, if that, despite the levels she'd gained since leaving Candlekeep and her Flirty Little Lass skill. “Give me another point in Charisma, and my Flirty Little Lass Skill should be more effective against men, too.”

Imoen had been thinking about her Metamorph powers a lot off and on and felt that they had brought up her Strength enough to use it. Beyond that and Dexterity, Imoen felt that Willpower was tied into it in some fashion, Wisdom and Charisma. Constitution, she felt, wasn't all that necessary as she'd used her Metamorph powers as a kid. Wisdom though, was probably necessary to use it on command rather than just having it act out from her emotions.

Even as Viconia hummed in thought, Harry followed Imoen's thoughts and put her stat points where she wanted them to go. He then began to laugh. "Well, Imoen, whatever deep thoughts you've had I don't know, but you just earned another quarter of a Wisdom point for yourself. Now you'll only have to, what, spend 18 hours fishing or so?"

Harry had seen near Fishman's Lake that fishing for twenty-four hours would be enough to gain a point in Wisdom. However, it being winter and Fisherman's Lake too far away to go and come back the same day, none of them had bothered trying to raise their Stats that way.

"Oh hahaha, laugh it up you arse!" Imoen grumbled.

"For my part, I believe that two more points in Strength will bring me up to an acceptable level," Viconia announced, then grinned as she felt her boy strengthen instantly as Harry obeyed. "Mmm, yes! Next, I think I wish to upgrade my Durability. Being bruised even through magically enhanced armor is not pleasant, and must be addressed now that I can finally hit hard as hard as I should."

With that, Harry turned to the last of his companions. "Minsc? I'd recommend Wisdom and Intelligence, but that's just me."

"Hmm... Put both my points in Constitution, friend Harry. As I was not able to keep up with you, I feel as if that is a necessity. I have enough strength to carry fair Dynaheir for days, but not enough Constitution to do so." Minsc winked. "Minsc knows his place, and his place is in the line of battle or far off sniping, not thinking or inquisitive mystery solving."

Sighing faintly, Harry shrugged and agreed. Honestly, Minsc had a point. As long as Dynaheir was around to do his long term thinking and Boo around to protect his mind, then Minsc was perfect for what he wanted to be: a big, happy ranger who didn't think deep thoughts because he was too busy sticking his boot in as far as it could go up the arse of any enemy that came his way.

"Well, enough about that, Harry!" Dynaheir said enthusiastically. "What about your own abilities, what have you gained since becoming a champion of Tyr?"

Dynaheir spoke the term Champion of Tyr as if she took some special joy in it, but Harry nodded despite that. He spoke first about the things he'd gotten right off the bat, before opening up his Character sheet. There, he leveled himself up, dividing the four points he gained due to being a Bhaalspawn into Luck, since it was his lowest Stat, Dexterity and Wisdom, 2,1,1. With that done, Harry then put his sole Weapons Skill point into halberds, as that would help him better wield his Bec de Corbin without the attack speed penalty he'd been dealing with prior to this point.

However, once that was done, Harry shifted to his Skill Sheet, and stared at the first of the two new abilities that Tyr had granted Harry. “Well... if you all thought Summon Servant was interesting, I think these will blow your minds. Like I said, I have two new abilities. The first is called Shield Bearer.”

Shield Bearer: Tyr has chosen to grant you a boon in the form of a new ability. You can now create the shield version of a Spiritual Hammer. It will either cover the same areas as or take the part of a shield if you are not holding one at the time of casting. This shield will act as a Medium Shield +1 defensively and will remain corporeal for six minutes.

This is an Activated Skill. It can be activated by saying the skill’s name, but you sense that with practice, you will be able to activate the Shield silently. You can further tell that you can train this skill in other ways, although what that implies or how the skill can evolve, you have no idea.

Currently, Shield Bearer has a cooldown of 3 hours and can be used 4 times before you need to rest. This is **level-based**, not control-based. The number of charges will go up by 1 every 2 Levels.

Your current understanding of this skill is at 0%

“A, a, an activated combat skill that can e, e, evolve,” Khalid breathed, while Minsc also looked gleeful, and more experienced or well-read members of the party looked on, stunned. “T, t, the use of **that** word, H, Harry, is very telling. M, m, my word, but t, t, that is rare. I’ve h, h, heard of the like, of course, but m, m, most of those are taunt or o, o, offensive in nature. A d, d, defensive one, I’ve only heard t, t, the like but perhaps twice b, b, before. Hmm... I w, w, would urge you to try and t, t, train with this skill every d, d, day, Harry. Minsc and I s, s, should duel with you a, a, at least once a day w, w, while you use it.”

“I am more intrigued by the fact that Tyr was able to create such a skill and gift it to you than the rarity of the skill itself,” Edwina murmured. “I have only read a few speculative theories about Champions of Tyr before this. We Thayans have not yet come up with a means of telling them from normal paladins, as their class still reads as that, regardless of what Tyr has given them. An entirely new skill that can evolve, though, tells me there is a greater connection to the divine in the term Champion than any have thought before. This will be most fascinating.”

“Harry is not some lab rat that you can experiment on,” Dynaheir growled, her earlier look of happiness and strange pride disappearing in an instant as she glared at Edwina.

“Bah! Observation of a subject in its natural habitat can teach those of us with enough wit a great deal without needing to be invasive about it,” Edwina waved her off. “What else can you now do, oh champion of sanctimonious irrationality?”

“...Not certain how to take that, but whatever. Although... if you think the Shield Bearer skill is interesting, this one will amaze you...” Harry said, grinning the grin of someone thinking of very bad things happening to very bad people. Or monsters. Either or, really.

Long Whisper: Seeing your inclination towards being a leader and talent for Tactics, Tyr has graced you with a unique Activated skill. This ability will allow you to communicate with other party members through the use of simple verbal speech, speech that will be carried to the individual spoken of.

This is an activated skill and will effect the entire party for two hours. To activate this skill you must recite the phrase: Where Sky Meets Earth, May all Hear as One. After this, everyone your AAS recognizes as a Party member will be able to speak to you or one another by saying “Address ‘Insert Name’”.

Warning: just because your words are meant to carry to only one ear, does not mean others cannot overhear them.

Long Whisper can be used four times per day. This will only go up by your Leadership Level, not your Class Level, and how it will change as you grow stronger is anyone’s guess.

Everyone stared at Harry, the implications clear to even Alora and Minsc, while Edwina was cursing internally, wishing for the fourth time since they began going over Harry’s notifications that he had full access to that skill set.

Eventually, Jaheira spoke, shaking her head. “My word. I had heard tales of how Tyr liked to give out Blessings that were each fitted for the individual, to make them even more dangerous than a normal paladin, but that... Harry, that gets rid of one of the most glaring issues with your map: the need for those of us who scout ahead to return to report, which takes time and effort. We could even use a skill like that to attack from multiple angles over a wider area than we could on our own!”

She shook her head ruefully. “Although I find it a pity the Shield Bearer skill isn't transferable.”

“The Enhanced Turn Undead will act much like the old one, but the others are Faith-based, so can’t be transferred... well, actually, maybe it would if any of you follow Tyr,” Harry hummed thoughtfully. “Maybe something to think about in the future.”

While Viconia and Edwina both looked horrified at the very idea, Imoen decided that was enough serious talk for the evening. “Okay, that’s enough talk about combat, war, skills or anything! We’ve leveled up folks. Let’s party!”

Minsc and Alora whooped, with a wry Dynaheir and Khalid joining in. Even Viconia showed no objection, although Jaheira rolled her eyes with some amusement before giving in and Harry laughed. Life, he decided, was good.

End Chapter

I had intended to show the remainder of the Adventurer’s time in Beregost, but if I tried to finish the two scenes I have to show that time it would probably take me at least a day, maybe two. So I decided to cut things off here. I hope you enjoyed the chapter and are intrigued by Harry’s new abilities. He’s never going to forget his routes, but he’s got a few new skills to play with.

Beyond that, Happy Hanukkah to my fellows, and a happy early Christmas present to those of ya who celebrate Winter Solstice in place of the actual birthday of a good Jewish boy.

I will post an updated Character Sheet list in January.