**Chapter Six: The Storm Brews**

I looked at the images reflected in the scrying pool with utter disbelief. I rubbed my eyes repeatedly and pinched myself several times but the images reflected from the depth of the pool remained unchanged. I quickly came back to my senses and did what I should have done in the beginning; I recorded everything in a memory crystal and ran to report the incident to my master.

My master had his signature condescending sneer plastered on his hawkish wrinkled face as he received my crystal with the very tip of his thumb and index finger as if it was a plague carrying rat. “What have you come to report this time; did you see some petty thief? A purse snatcher perhaps? Is someone stealing coins from the temple’s fountain again?”

I can’t say that I wasn’t pleased when I saw his smug smile got wiped clean off his face when he saw what was in the crystal. ”What is this? Where is this? What kind of strange sorcery are these people using?”

I looked at him with feigned surprise and replied, “You don’t know? But you are the great and powerful Arch-mage Zelpir of Silvermoon tower, how could you not know?”

I was lucky that he was too engrossed in the recording to notice that I was being sarcastic. The egotistical idiot actually thought I was being serious and replied, “The mysteries of the world are many. Even I do not have the knowledge of everything in the infinite cosmos. Although I might appear to be all knowing to a lowly acolyte like you, I am always striving to learn about the small amount of things that I actually do not know about. For example, the people in these recordings have the same pale complexion as the Andalasians from the continent of Kirk and most people would have mistaken them as such, but with my keen observational skills, I have deduced that they are not Andalasians.”

I listened to him speak with my jaws open in astonishment. How can someone be so stupid and egotistical at the same time? I once again cursed my bad luck which had caused my assignment to this moron. There were so many decent mages out there but I had ended up with a narcissistic monkey who thought that acolytes where nothing more than state sponsored slaves.

I took a deep breath to try and calm myself then swallowed down my scorn for the idiot so that I could pretend to speak respectfully while hiding my complete disdain for the bumbling buffoon. “Revered Master Zelpir, shouldn’t we report this to the Council of Mysteries?”

Zelpir blinked owlishly a few times because he had had the crystal too close to his eyes making him look even more incompetent than usual. “Ah… yes. Of course. Ahem… the Council of Mysteries. I was just about to do that.”

It was really tragic that I had to remind the “great” and “wise” arch-mage something as basic as the rudimentary operational procedures of the department that he was in charge of.

To his credit, he didn’t tarry much after that. He grabbed me and the memory crystal and performed a translocation spell which directly transported us to the inner sanctum of the Council of Mysteries where he handed the crystal to the secretary who was waiting there.

It only took about a minute after the secretary left before we were ordered to come inside by a rather flustered looking acolyte. He led us through a long twisting corridor until we reached an ornate golden door that was decorated with the insignia of the Council of Mysteries: a pair of eyes with the right one having an image of the sun instead of a pupil and the left one having an image of the moon. The acolyte opened the door and motioned us to go inside. Apparently he wasn’t allowed to go into the fancy looking room.

Once we went through the door, we found ourselves in a large hexagonal room. Each of the six walls were painted a different color; brown for earth, red for fire, blue for water, light green for wind, golden for metal, and white for spirit. A raised bench stood in front of each wall. The bench representing earth looked like it was made out of granite, sandstone, turquoise, diamond, and other gems and rocks. It was also covered in beautiful flowers and colorful plants that were bursting with vitality. The bench that represented fire was made entirely out of flames which swayed and flickered hungrily, casting strange and ominous shadows across the walls and scorching everything around it. The chair that corresponded to water was a whirlpool filled with the willfulness and tempest of the sea. Inside the water, I could see schools of bright colorful fish swimming around, but in the darker depths, I felt something cold and dangerous stirring restlessly. The bench next to that was the one representing air and it was just a fluffy cloud hanging in the air. It looked completely harmless if it wasn’t for the occasional flash of lightning that lit up the inside of the fluffy cloud. The bench for metal was a throne made from swords, sabers, spears, shields and all other types of weapons and armor. The bench that represented spirit was the strangest one from the six. The best way to describe it would be ephemeral; sometimes it was there, sometimes it wasn’t. At times it looked like it was made out of pure holy light, at other times it looked like it was made up of tormented spirits with ghastly faces and semi-transparent skeletons radiating death.

I was twisting my neck this way and that, trying to see everything when all the benches were suddenly filled with twelve people, two per bench. Each bench had a man and a woman sitting next to each other. The seat for earth had a man that looked like a massive mountain sitting next to a woman covered in leaves instead of clothes, the one for fire had a man that looked like a living inferno next to a woman covered in shadows, the one for water had a man holding a trident and a woman covered in ice, the seat for air had a man with fluffy wings and a woman covered in lightning, the one for metal had a giant man made entirely from shields and a woman covered in weapons, and finally the seat for spirit had a pious looking man who appeared to be a priest standing next to a woman in a black cowl whose left hand was just a skeleton without any flesh.

The pious looking man from spirit was the first one to speak. He rubbed his eyes tiredly and said, ”Why did you drag us out of bed at this hour? What could be so important that it couldn’t wait until morning?”

The man with the fluffy wings flicked his hand and an image was suddenly projected in midair. It was an image that I was very familiar with since it was the image that I recorded into the memory crystal from the scrying pool.

It was the image of a breathtakingly beautiful woman crying in the corner before she was interrupted by four people after which there was some sort of confrontation. The scrying continued to follow the woman as she seemed to resolve her differences with the others and they went to a strange and wondrous place filled with metal men using a completely unfamiliar flying metal contraption.

As the image continued to play out, I was surprised at how little surprise there was on the faces of the twelve people watching. The living flame that represented fire even yawned loudly. “Why are you showing us this? It is a mildly interesting world, but it is nothing to convene an emergency meeting about.”

The man with the fluffy wings had a somber expression on his face as he ruffled his feathers and replied, “This image wasn’t taken by our Realm Eye. It was taken by a novice acolyte doing a random scry using the most rudimentary scrying pool.”

For the first time, I saw shock and alarm on their faces. All traces of tiredness vanished as the room was suddenly gripped by an almost palpable tension. A sonorous voice from beneath the dark cowl of the woman from spirit loudly rang out, “That is impossible. It requires at least three of us working in tandem and the help of the Realm Eye to look beyond the veil. A mere acolyte cannot accomplish such a task, let alone a novice acolyte using rubbish equipment.”

The man with fluffy wings pointed at me and said, “There is the acolyte in question. Go ahead and interrogate him.”

Before I could react, the woman pointed her left hand made of bone at me and I suddenly found myself reliving the moments when I had seen the strange images in the scrying pool. A few seconds later, I was lying on the hard marble floor, covered in cold sweat.

The woman in the dark cowl turned away from me and said, “I have scoured his soul. He did indeed discover that world while he was scrying randomly. It seems like there is some sort of crack on the veil between this world and that one.”

The man with the wings shook his head negatively. “It is much worse than that. I did some research before we convened. It seems that someone in that world somehow figured out how to use some kind of temporal inversion spell, but it was done very carelessly. The spell worked by creating a tunnel through the veil, but the tunnel weakened the veil and cracks started appearing on it. Now the veil is slowly degrading. It won’t be long before traversable channels will open between this realm and that one. That is not all. If my hypothesis is correct, the veil that surrounds that other world is severely damaged. It is highly likely that our world will not be the only one that will end up being connected to it.”

At first there was only silence following this declaration but then all twelve members of the council started to speak at once.

“… a legendary realm gate?”

“… a confluence of worlds.”

“… fates and destinies are tangled up.”

Their complicated words meant very little to me as I lay on the floor, recuperating from whatever the woman from the spirit faction did to me. All I knew was that something unimaginable had happened and that something amazing was about to happen in the near future.