

## Purpose Confirmed

Iris strode into the bustling tavern, the place lively with lunch patrons. She scanned the room, searching for the familiar faces of her companions. Her eyes quickly landed on Sera and Tanith, engrossed in a lively conversation at a nearby table.

As Iris walked toward the back of the tavern, she saw Kaira sitting at a corner table, noticing the deep emerald green tunic standing out against the muted colors of the tavern. The soft and lightweight fabric shimmered in the light as she moved, adding to the City Guard's aura of quiet strength. Intricate gold embroidery adorned the collar and cuffs of the tunic, adding a touch of elegance to the otherwise simple garment. The high elf waved her over and Iris made her way to the table, smiling as she sat down across from her new acquaintance.

Iris couldn't help but feel a slight flutter in her chest as she sat across from Kaira. The captain's piercing blue eyes held hers for a moment longer than necessary, making her smile.

"I ordered our food and drinks if that's alright," Kaira said as Iris sat.

*Of course, you can buy me a drink anytime.*

"It is! Are you done with work for the day?" Iris asked the Guard Captain.

The woman nodded. "I am. I'm all yours today," she said with a sly smirk. "I figured we could explore the city a bit, and I can show you around. Did you have anywhere, in particular, you wanted to visit?"

"I did, actually. The temple, if that's alright," Iris said.

The elf's brow rose. "Interesting, I didn't take you to be religious. Or at least not for our gods."

Iris waved that off. "I'm not, but it was suggested I visit to meet with the seers. Something about a ceremony."

Kaira leaned back in her chair, intrigued. "A ceremony with the seers, huh? Sounds mysterious. Are you sure you don't have any secret goddess-worshiper tendencies?" she teased with a smirk.

Iris rolled her eyes playfully. "No, I promise I'm not hiding any secret blasphemous beliefs or cults. No need to arrest me, officer," she said with a chuckle. "The ceremony is supposed to be mana related."

The elf laughed, stealing a glance toward the bar, she quickly returned her focus to Iris, who couldn't help but smile as she looked at the woman. Kaira seemed to pause and almost bask in Iris's unabashed gaze.

The Guard Captain had long, pointed ears that were a hallmark of her elven heritage. On each ear, she had several piercings. The lobe of each ear had a simple silver

hoop, and above that, there were a series of delicate silver studs that ran along the curve of her ear. At the very top of each ear, she had a small silver cuff that wrapped around the cartilage.

Kaira's black pixie cut was short and chic, framing her delicate features and accentuating her sharp cheekbones. The hair at the nape of her neck was cut close to her skin, while the longer strands at the top of her head were styled in a messy, spiky fashion, giving her an edgy and playful look. Despite the casual style, her hair looked impeccably maintained, with no strand out of place.

*She's so gorgeous.*

The elf ripped Iris from her thoughts.

“So, Iris,” Kaira said with a playful smile. “Did you deliver the message you told me about? The one from Stilstead?”

Iris nodded a little too quickly. “I did! Lady Arden is going to send people to investigate the bandits. We also briefly went over my plans here in the city, which she invited me to a ball to discuss further.”

Kaira's eyes widened in surprise. “Lady Arden's summer ball? That's quite the invitation. What did you discuss with her that has piqued her interest in you?”

While Iris smiled, she felt a rush of dread at the thought of attending such an event. “She seemed interested in my work as an adventurer and our plan to start an Adventurer's Guild.”

Kaira raised an eyebrow. “An Adventurer's Guild? That sounds like a fascinating idea,” the elf said as she leaned forward, looking deep into Iris's eyes. “Tell me more about it.”

*I'll tell you whatever you want to keep you here in front of me.*

Iris leaned in, eager to share her vision. “Well, I was thinking we could create a space for adventurers like myself to come together, share information, and get support from each other. The guild could also take on quests from people or organizations, acting as intermediaries and providing a safer way for people to hire adventurers for jobs that aren't suited for the Guard or would take too much time for the army to respond.”

“What types of quests would these adventurers take? What things have you done?” Kaira asked.

“Oh! So much! It's basically how I've lived for the past year. Let's see, monster extermination, item retrieval, escorting, and exploration, are just a few things they could accomplish. I think there is so much potential for good to be done, especially with how everything is changing with mana. Plus, that's how I got Mocha! I helped a farmer kill a big fox monster. Then there were the drakyyds in front of Cosdale. Those were crazy. The murder hares...” Iris started.

Iris looked around quickly as she took a breath. She then launched into her story, telling the elf about what she'd done as an adventurer, focusing on the fun stuff. Like the time she and Mocha tried to eat some mushrooms with dinner which ended up getting them both high. She finished by telling Kaira more about the guild plan and what it meant. How it would fit in with the Guard.

Kaira listened intently, nodding as Iris spoke. "That's a really innovative idea," she said, her voice low and smooth. "And you have done so much! It would be so helpful for adventurers to have a space like that. And it would be a great way to connect with people who share your passion for exploring and taking on challenges."

Iris couldn't help but feel a warm flush spread across her cheeks at Kaira's words. "Yes, exactly! I think it could really benefit the community as a whole, too."

Kaira smiled, her gaze lingering on Iris for a moment. "You're so driven and passionate about this," she said softly. "It's really admirable."

Iris couldn't help but feel a surge of happiness at the compliment, and she found herself leaning in closer to Kaira. "Thank you," she murmured. "It means a lot coming from someone as accomplished as you."

Kaira's eyes glinted mischievously. "Oh, you think I'm accomplished?" she teased, her smile growing wider. "I'm just a captain in the Guard. Nothing compared to a brave adventurer like yourself."

Iris laughed, feeling a sense of ease and comfort around Kaira. She could tell that the elf was subtly flirting with her, and while part of her felt a little shy, another part of her was soaking it up. She leaned back in her chair, feeling a sense of contentment wash over her. Maybe starting an Adventurer's Guild wasn't such a daunting task after all.

As they waited for their food, the barman brought over their ales. The foamy mugs clinked against each other as he set them down on the table, causing the liquid to slosh over the sides a bit. Iris took a sip and savored the refreshing taste of the ale, while Kaira leaned back in her chair and stretched her arms.

"I love this place," Kaira said, taking a long gulp from her mug. "The food is always delicious and the ale is brewed just right."

Iris nodded in agreement, taking another sip of her ale. She glanced around the tavern, taking in the lively atmosphere and the smells of cooking food. Despite her nerves about attending Lady Arden's ball, she was grateful for this moment of peace and relaxation.

As they chatted about their favorite spots in the city and exchanged stories of their adventures, the barman returned with their food. He set down two plates filled with hearty portions of roasted meat and vegetables, along with a basket of warm bread.

"Looks delicious," Kaira said, taking a fork and knife and eagerly digging in. Iris followed suit, savoring the flavors of the well-seasoned meat and the fresh vegetables.

Between bites, Kaira asked Iris more about her plans for the Adventurer's Guild, curious about the logistics and potential challenges. Iris answered as best she could, grateful for the opportunity to bounce ideas off someone.

As they ate, the conversation flowed easily, and Iris found herself relaxing in Kaira's company.

As they were finishing up, Iris noticed Kaira pausing with a fork in hand and sighing. The Guard Captain looked at her seriously and said, "I have a confession to make."

Iris tilted her head, curious. "A confession?"

*Oh, she's coming clean about the clarus incident. Bonus points, girl.*

Kaira took a deep breath and said, "I... I was one of the people changed by the Flash. I have gained a lot of abilities, and one of them is a higher resistance to poison. My body treats alcohol as poison."

Iris raised a brow, surprised and impressed. This elf was more than she seemed and she couldn't help but consider how useful such an ability would be—the poison resistance, not alcohol.

Kaira continued, "So, when I took all of those shots with you... I didn't feel any of them. I regret taking advantage of you like that, and the meal and drinks are on me as an apology."

Iris couldn't help but smile at the gesture.

She placed a hand on the elf's hand. "Thank you for the apology. I have enjoyed our lunch, I am looking forward to spending the rest of the day with you."

Kaira smiled, her eyes sparkling. "Well, I'm glad to hear that," she said, her voice dropping slightly. "I have to admit, I was a little worried you wouldn't want to see me again after that whole incident."

Iris chuckled. "I wouldn't hold it against you. We all have our moments."

Kaira leaned in closer. "Oh, I have plenty of moments," she said, her lips quirking into a mischievous grin. "But I promise, I'll try to keep myself in check around you."

Iris felt a warm flush spread across her cheeks at the flirty remark. She cleared her throat, trying to hide her sudden nervousness. "I'm sure you will," she said, trying to sound nonchalant. "So, where to next?"

Kaira smiled. "We can do whatever you want, maybe a bit of exploring..."

Iris felt her face heat, and she stumbled over her words. "W-Want to meet my horse?"

*Shit. Shit! Damn it, Iris! Get it together woman!*

Kaira's face lit up with enthusiasm. "Absolutely! I've heard so much about the great Mocha and would be delighted to make her acquaintance."

*Wait... what?*



As the two walked toward the door after paying for the meal, Sera and Tanith stopped Iris to inform her that they may be gone by the time she got back. The two were going to investigate more about what would be needed for the guild formation. Sera hoped she enjoyed getting to know the city, and Tanith gave her such a knowing look that Iris's face was surely as red as a tomato.

Iris led Kaira into the stables and instantly groaned. The elf glanced at her in confusion before a look of realization dawned on her.

Mocha was standing outside of her stall and making fun of the other horses.

Iris shook her head, unable to do anything except chuckle. "Looks like Mocha is in a playful mood today," she said as they approached the stall. Mocha's ears perked up as she noticed Iris and Kaira approaching, and she whinnied in greeting. "Hey Mocha! This is Kaira, she just bought me lunch and is going to show me the city."

Mocha let out a soft nicker, the sound coming from deep within her chest as she cast her gaze over Kaira. Her nostrils flared as she breathed in the scent of the new arrival. The horse looked between the two women, and then, without warning, she emitted a snort, the sound filled with a mix of amusement and judgment.

*Jerk! I do not sleep with everyone I meet!*

Iris gave her horse a threatening look that promised a private discussion later, but her horse just huffed and whinnied, clearly unafraid.

Kaira's eyes widened as she froze, staring at Mocha in awe. "Iris... is she..." she trailed off, turning to face her companion. "Where and how did you say you got her?" she asked, her voice tinged with disbelief.

Iris simply shrugged, a small smile playing on her lips. "I helped a farmer on the way to Cosdale not long after I arrived," she explained. "He said he'd give me a discount on any horse he owned after I saved the rest of his herd from a monster. Mocha and I just clicked, you know?"

Kaira shook her head in disbelief. "How much did you buy her for?" she asked, her tone incredulous.

"Uhm, I think it added up to about one small gold," Iris replied, her brow furrowing as she tried to recall the exact amount. "But it may have been a bit less. I only had a bag full of large and small silver coins at the—"

Kaira's eyes widened in disbelief. "Iris, you have no idea what a rare and valuable breed the Jarincian is," she said, her voice full of amazement. "They're one of the rarest

and most expensive breeds in all of Ikios. They're known for their speed, intelligence, and incredible endurance and are usually only found in the stables of the wealthiest Houses. And here you are, with one you bought for a few silver coins from a farmer.”

Iris scratched her head, suddenly feeling a little embarrassed. “I had no idea it was so unusual,” she said, sheepishly. “All I knew was that Mocha was a great horse and we had a connection.”

Kaira shook her head, still in disbelief. “Unusual? That's an understatement. It's practically unheard of,” she said, her eyes widening in amazement.

Iris felt a sense of pride swell in her chest. She had always known Mocha was special, but she never realized just how special. “I guess I just got lucky,” she said, a grin spreading across her face. “But I'm glad I did. She's the best horse I could have ever asked for.”

Kaira smiled, a twinkle in her eye. “Well, I have to admit, you have excellent taste in horses,” she said, shaking her head, still in awe. “She's stunning. I can see why you're so fond of her.”

The guard captain turned to Mocha and patted her neck. “You know how gorgeous you are, don't you?”

Mocha snorted, of course, she did.

The two fell into a conversation, her horse easily replying and conveying her emotions to the questions Kaira posed. Iris moved over to a bench and sat down, watching the cute elf chat with her best friend.

She smiled when she caught Kaira stealing a glance her way and tried listening in.

“How is it working with Iris? She seems like she gets into a lot of dangerous situations,” Kaira asked the horse.

Mocha nodded her head and rolled her eyes before letting out a string of neighs that sounded like she was bitching.

Iris had an idea of what she was saying.

*This damn adventurer, she's always getting us into trouble.*

*Don't even get me started on those murder hares.*

*But ugh. Someone's got to look out for her dumb ass.*

Mocha let out a breath of air, before letting out a low nicker. *I love her anyways.*

Kaira laughed. “That's quite a lot. I am sure she's lucky to have you.”

Mocha snorted, *that's all you got from that?*

Iris could only shake her head and smile as she got up, returning to the pair. “You two talking about me?” Iris asked playfully.

Kaira smiled. “Of course, not.”

Mocha tried to nibble her hair, making Kaira laugh as Iris tried to push her away. “It’s hard having only me to understand you isn’t it?”

The horse nodded.

“Don’t worry, we’ll teach her,” she promised, before turning to Kaira, the elf looking at her with a soft expression on her face. “Would you like that?”

The elf nodded. “Nothing would make me happier.”

Iris returned her attention to Mocha, who was nuzzling her hand.

“I’m glad you like her,” Iris said, scratching behind Mocha’s ears. “She’s a handful, but she’s worth it.”

Mocha’s head moved forward and nibbled on Iris’s ear, the adventurer chuckled and pushed her friend’s face away. “That’s gross, Mocha!” she cried out as she wiped away her horse’s slobber.

Kaira watched the playful interaction with amusement, a smile on her lips. “I can see why you two get along so well,” she said, looking at Iris. “You both have such playful personalities.”

Iris grinned. “Yeah, Mocha and I have a lot of fun together. She’s quite the character. She’s saved my life more than once.”

Mocha let out a low whinny as she looked at Kaira and then nudged at Iris’s chest. “I know girl, I know. I’ve saved you too. We’re even.”

The horse nodded, nickering to the two of them.

With a gentle smile, Iris addressed her beloved Mocha, “Alright, girl. I have to accompany Kaira for a bit, but I’ll be back later. Can you behave yourself and play nice with the other horses?”

Mocha snorted, unimpressed with Iris’s request.

Rolling her eyes, Iris continued, “I know they’re just mundane horses, not as special and magical as you, but can you do it for Mama?”

Mocha turned her head away from Iris, feigning indifference, but after a moment’s pause, she emitted a soft nicker in agreement.

Iris gave Mocha a loving pat on the neck and leaned in close. “Thanks, girl. I’ll see you later. Love ya.”

Mocha responded by affectionately nudging Iris’s cheek.

Iris grinned at Mocha’s love and gave her one final pat before turning to Kaira. “Alright, let’s go. I’m excited to see the city.”

“Let’s check out the temple first, it’s the closest,” Kaira suggested.

Iris nodded, falling into step next to the shorter high elf.

As they left the stables, Kaira couldn't help but comment on Mocha's behavior. "I've never seen a horse act like that before. Laken was right, she really can understand us."

*Huh, I never did get the guy's name. Laken. Got it.*

The corners of Iris's mouth curved up in a mischievous smile. "She is pretty amazing," she declared, "much like myself."

Kaira's returning smirk had Iris feeling weak at the knees.



Iris and Kaira walked through the gates of the city's temple and into the courtyard. The air was still and the only sound was the gentle chirping of birds in the trees. It was a sprawling space, home to a beautiful garden, a vibrant oasis of color filled with flowers native to the area in full bloom. Statues of Eona's deities and other spiritual figures dotted the area, standing stoically amid the tranquil scene. The exterior of the building was grand and imposing, with towering pillars and intricate carvings of the pantheon's Family adorning the facade, inspiring a sense of awe and reverence in those who beheld it.

*A bit pretentious. Like the old churches from Europe. Or the megachurches back home.*

The statues depicted Alos, the sun god.

Eona, the goddess of life and nature.

Finally, their two daughters. The goddess of death, Relena, and her younger sister, the goddess of night, Tenera.

Iris followed Kaira as the two made their way into the temple proper, where a large group of worshippers was sitting and listening to a priestess. The woman was delivering a sermon, her voice ringing out clear and commanding.

The interior of the temple was just as impressive as the outside, with high ceilings adorned with intricate murals depicting scenes from the pantheon's mythology. The atmosphere was hushed, with a sense of reverence and devotion filling the air. As they found a seat and settled in to listen to the priestess, Iris couldn't help but feel a sense of peace wash over her, as if the very walls of the temple were imbued with a sacred energy.

*With mana, it very well could be. Maybe the priestess has magic to that effect?*

Iris let her **Mana Sight** settle into place, looking around for the telltale signs of magic use, and sure enough, the priestess was a beacon of yellow mana. It didn't seem nefarious and appeared to be a sort of sustained passive spell the woman was using.



Narrowing her eyes, she pulled more mana and **Focused** on the spell, trying to gauge what it did.

She felt a tap on her shoulder.

Iris turned to see Kaira looking at her quizzically, a confused look on her face. “What are you doing?” she whispered. “Your eyes are glowing.”

“I’m just... curious,” Iris replied, lowering her voice as well. “The priestess has a spell on her, and I’m trying to figure out what it does.”

Kaira nodded, her eyes flicking toward the front of the temple where the priestess stood. “Well, be careful,” she cautioned. “We don’t want to disturb the sanctity of this place.”

Iris nodded in understanding, pulling back from her Mana Sight.

“That is likely for the best, miss,” a voice said quietly from behind them.

They turned to see a sun elf in red armor standing behind them, and Iris noticed Kaira freeze at the sight.

“Captain Harken, a pleasure to see you today. It has been some time since you have been to the temple,” the woman said, her tone questioning.

Kaira hastily stood, before giving the woman a crisp salute. “It has. How are you doing today, Praetor?”

The sun elf smiled. “I am well, or I was until I noticed a new face in our humble temple using magic,” she said with a nod toward Iris. “I would have expected you to inform her, Captain.”

Iris rolled her eyes. “I’m right here. I was just curious about the magic the priestess is using.”

The... Praetor raised a brow. “She is using healing magic. These people were harmed in some way, either physically or mentally, and it is the least we can do to ease their burdens.”

“Oh, that’s pretty interesting. I wonder...” she trailed off as she glanced back at the priestess who had paused her sermon while letting the masses pray. The telv woman looked around at those gathered with a pensive expression on her face.

The red-armored woman cleared her throat. “Miss...”

Iris turned back around. “Oh, sorry. I am Iris. Adventurer.”

The woman sighed. “And especially curious. Not quite a crime I suppose. What brings you here today, Miss Iris? Captain?” she asked as she split her gaze between the two of them.

Iris smiled. “Lady Arden suggested I visit to go through a ceremony. The... uhh.” She squinted her eyes as she tried to remember.

“The Ceremony of Paths?” the sun elf asked.

Iris snapped her fingers. “That’s it!” she said, excitedly. Several members of the congregation turned around and scowled at her, forcing her to wince in embarrassment. She waved at a particularly mean mugging grey-haired high elf two rows away. “Sorry!” she whisper shouted. The woman shook her head and returned to her prayers.

The sun elf let out an exasperated sigh. “Please, follow me. I will escort you to the ceremony chambers.”

Iris nodded as she quickly got up and rushed after the elf and Kaira. The clinks of their boots echoed against the stone floor, while the Praetor's shiny red armor glinted in the dim light.

She took note of the temple's size as they walked through its halls, realizing that it wasn't as expansive as she initially thought. Despite its modest size, the temple's architecture and decor were impressive, with intricate carvings and paintings adorning the walls and ceilings.

It made her wish she'd visited more places back home instead of being stuck in her room playing games, watching anime, or studying all of the time.

She smirked.

*Nah. F that noise.*

She followed the two into a small circular chamber with a pedestal sitting in the center of the space. There were three robed men inside, their garments black with large hoods that shrouded their faces in shadows. The one near the pedestal had elaborate designs in grey stitching on his robes, with the symbol of an eye on his chest.

The sun elf stopped and saluted. “Hierophant. Lady Arden referred this terran to undergo the Ceremony of Paths.”

The Hierophant nodded. “Thank you, Praetor. We will proceed from here,” the man said before turning to Iris as the woman quickly retreated from the room. “Welcome, Iris. Do you freely wish to undergo the ceremony? Or is the Captain here to ensure you do so?”

Iris glanced at Kaira who had a frown set on her face at the accusation. She shook her head. “No, Kaira is showing me around the city. Lady Arden suggested I take part because of my magic.”

The man tilted his head. “Magic users are always a pleasure to assist. It allows us to learn from one another,” he said. “This is a very personal and private ceremony, I suggest you undertake it alone.”

Iris squinted and opened her mouth to argue, but Kaira placed a hand on her shoulder. “It’s fine, Iris. I will step right outside.”

“Are you sure?” she asked the elf.

The woman nodded. "I am, I'll see you after and then we can continue our tour."

Iris smiled at the cute elf. "Okay. Hopefully, I won't be long."

"You won't be, Miss Iris. The Captain may wait right outside for you," the Hierophant assured.

She turned back around after the door shut behind Kaira as she exited. Iris wasn't one to miss an opportunity to check out a cute butt.

"So, what's this all about?" she asked, curious.

The man gestured her closer to the pedestal and her curiosity rose as she realized the man was a moon elf. His light grey skin nearly hidden under his attire.

"We are the Umbral Seers. A new organization formed out of the Umbral Monks and priesthood of the Family. Our group was originally envisioned by a High Priest in the Sovereign Cities. This process and our magic allow us to gain an Excerpt of your Path. We use this Excerpt to help you, to guide you if you so wish, and to provide you warnings learned by trailblazers in this new reality we find ourselves in," he explained.

"My Excerpt? You mean my status?" she clarified.

The man tilted his head. "I have not heard it called as such, but let us try and see if it is what you are thinking. Please, place your hands on this mana core with me. It allows me to connect with your core better, which is how the gods show us your Excerpt."

*Oh man. This sounds a bit crazy.*

She stepped up to the pedestal and looked down at the large yellow core that sat there.

*Whatever they took this from must have been massive.*

She felt herself smiling. "Need more cores of this size? I'd be happy to undertake a quest in the near future to get some."

The man chuckled. "The Paladins of Alos procure them for our needs. Thank you for the offer, Miss Iris."

When her confusion was evident, he continued, "The woman in the red armor. She is a paladin. In fact, she leads the paladins within the city."

"Ohhh, that makes sense," she said with a nod.

The man placed his hands onto the core and his eyes took on a yellow glow that were visible through the shadows cast by his hood.

As she followed suit, felt a quick pulse of mana flow through her. Out of the corner of her eye, she noticed one of the other seers step forward with a board, a piece of parchment, and quill at the ready.

The Hierophant started speaking, his voice taking on a tone devoid of emotion. The man spoke as if he were reading her status sheet aloud. She used her **Mana Sight** and observed the process.

She saw a stream of mana go from the man through the orb and into her, that mana then pulsed throughout her, and touching the core in her chest. If she had to guess, he was using a spell similar in function to **Inspect**, but one that took time to process.

As the man dictated her stats, the man with the parchment was dutifully writing it down. Iris narrowed her eyes as ideas came to her.

The Adventurer's Guild should have every member come here, each taking the ceremony. Or, better yet, the guild would figure out a way to do something similar.

As the man said something about Steps, and gave a number, she smirked. But it was what he had said after her name that had confirmed her beliefs. Strengthened her resolve. She had known.

*I needed this.*

She *did* have a purpose, and it seemed that the world itself had acknowledged it.

It felt good to be right. To be validated, even on something as small as this.

The Hierophant finished his spell and she watched as the glow in his eyes dissipated.

He let out a sigh and turned his attention on the man that had written everything down.

"Please, initiate, read the Excerpt," he requested.

The man nodded and repeated her status again.

**Iris Stuart**

***"The Adventurer"***

**Terran**

**Path: Storm Warden (Mage)**

**Steps: 44**

**Core Quality: Remarkable**

**Affinity: Evocation, Alteration**

**Attunement: Green, Yellow**

**Alignment: Hybrid**

**Primary Attribute: Capability**

**Secondary Attribute: Constitution**

**Traits: Mana Sense, Focus, Unwavering Will, Danger Sense, Electromancy, Stormskin**

**Passive Spells/Abilities: Mana Conduit, Storm Armor, Static Discharge, Rushing Wind, Arcane Capability, Mana Sight**

**Active Spells/Abilities: Unerring Shot, Chain Lightning, Arcane Torrent, Spark, Arc Lash, Featherfall, Lightning Step**

She wasn't *an* adventurer, she was *The Adventurer*.

Such a surge of relief filled her, and she focused as the seer spoke. The Hierophant's eyes widened slightly as her spells were spoken, but then nodded as the monk finished.

"Impressive. You are one of the highest people the Church has performed the ceremony on," he said.

She smiled again. "You know of others around my level?"

He nodded. "I do, however, it has been Decreed that our organization maintains strict confidentiality of those who perform the ceremony," he clarified. "Now, there are some concerning things in your Excerpt. Or, rather, something of note that you should be warned of."

She narrowed her eyes. "What is it?"

"This is the next part of the benefit our Order will provide," he said while gesturing toward a small table with two chairs at the side of the room.

He led them to it and sat down, the initiate who had written her status handing the paper to the Hierophant as Iris sat.

The man gestured to the scroll. "When the Order learns of more significant findings, notices are sent to all locations where the ceremony is performed. Which, for now, includes here and locations within the Kingdom of Avira."

Iris nodded, following along. "What is of note, though?"

"The individual with the highest known steps learned that if you go beyond seven spells or abilities," he said, taking a breath to collect himself. "A backlash will occur,

potentially killing you as you bleed from every opening in your head. The individual was lucky to survive, and only due to having someone else with healing magic right next to them. It is suspected that this means that you can only have a max of seven passive and seven active. What we do know is that it has something to do with the complexity of spells and how they interact with the mind.”

Iris felt a chill running down her spine as she processed the information, her focus entirely on her Excerpt.

She was *at* seven active spells.

*Well shit.*

Her eyes suddenly narrowed as she read the paper over again.

*Wait, where are my stats?*