

Prophet

An angel. Pale pink skin, stretched over bone. Bare feet almost touching the ground, forbidden from contact with mortal soil. Tattered robes, clinging to the shivering cadaver. Hollow eyes, pinpricks of light buried deep in the sockets. Wings, with grasping hands where feathers should be.

Taji's eyes opened slowly. Through the haze of incense she locked her gaze on the statue a few feet from her. It depicted a figure, also in a kneeling position. The figure was draped in a heavy robe which obscured their form completely. This was an effigy of Arbandr, The Pilgrim, who leads souls to their afterlife. Once, when she was a child, Taji had seen the statue turn its head to look at her. She stared hard at it but Arbandr refused to look up. She sighed and stood slowly, stretching her legs as she did in order to avoid a cramp.

Taji had been in service to the Children of Divinity since she was young and her parents had realized her "dreams" had been coming true. It started small: stubbed toes, surprise visitors, knowing about gifts before they'd been given. It had been a party trick for a while until she warned the town about a flash flood in time to get everyone to higher ground. The village took nearly six months to repair, but no lives had been lost. After that, her parents contacted a priest of The Pilgrim and she was shipped off to the Priory to serve and train her gift.

She'd hated the first year. The priests were nice enough, and she got along with her fellow "students", but it took her a while to get used to the disciplined environment. Her second year was much better. Streamlined schedules, familiar faces, and (more importantly) a private room. The acolyte residences had been still under construction when she'd arrived, and all the students had to share a living space with bunk beds in long rows. The new rooms were small, especially for her and her fellow acolytes of The Pilgrim (they were expected to maintain a level of asceticism) but they were far from uncomfortable and even had their own small cooking area, if conjured food wasn't desired.

Taji stepped over to the window and opened it, taking in a deep breath of the air. She was on the fourth floor of the residence, and her room faced into the courtyard, giving her a good view of the day to day activities. Right now a group of Acolytes of Syglei The Champion were training around the large fountain in the center of the courtyard. There were twelve of them, paired up and absolutely wailing on each other. Hammers and swords (great and long), several different polearms, and even Satyr boy with nothing but a long heavy looking chain. A handful of priests (and other acolytes) stood nearby, watching for entertainment or ready to jump in in case someone got seriously hurt. They were all shirtless (though some of them wore wraps over their chest) with their gold trimmed, red cloaks and shirts tossed haphazardly in a pile. For an acolyte of The Champion, clothes were expected to get dirty, and well worn, and each acolyte took great care in maintaining and repairing their attire at the end of each day.

A low horn blew somewhere on the other side of the grounds and a moment later acolytes came streaming through various doors into the courtyard. Acolytes of Aetheria The Mother, wearing

earthy toned clothes and deep brown robes trimmed with silver thread laughed as one of them conjured a small storm cloud over another group. The now thoroughly soaked acolytes of Kein The Healer, started shouting at the laughing group, while they wrung out their yellow trimmed, green cloaks.

Most who entered the Priory as students chose a dedication upon their arrival (though it took some longer). There were a few who eschewed any dedication and were only there for general religious, spiritual, or educational reasons, though there weren't too many of those. The Priory was not about deity exclusion, but instead was intended to help people who wished to focus their studies, or those like Taji who had some gift that seemed to pull directly from one of the gods.

Taji closed the window. The incense had finished burning and the smoke had mostly aired out. She rolled up her prayer mat and slid it into the storage under her bed. When she was in her room, she kept her cloak folded and used it as a pillow for sleeping. She retrieved it from the bed and drew it over her shoulders, gently affixing the clasp at the front. The cloak was a deep violet colour with gold trim. The clasp was in the shape of a cracked half skull, a gift from her friend who worshiped The Betrayed.

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