

Chapter 1

Our New Journey Begins

When: Seconds after Lady Inari offered her hand in friendship

Where: Inari's world

Lysanias, the man out of time, stared down at the beastkin girl (or goddess, or whatever it was that she was) that had just made him the offer of a lifetime. The chance to save other realities, learn what skills they could teach, and return home a competent professional instead of a fifteen year old in the body of a 6000 year old man. The chance to explore what he could do, the time to master his many skills, and maybe not need saving again and again by his friends Don and Everest. But still, he wasn't completely on board.

"I'm not completely on board," he informed her, indicating he wasn't completely on board. "I'm going to need to know a lot more about this whole situation before I sign up to just be flung into other worlds, alone, with the expectation of saving them from the shadow king."

"That's fair," Inari agreed, withdrawing her hand. "I should make the whole pitch before you sign up. We have a lot to offer each other, and there's a lot at stake. Let me show you something." She turned and walked to the edge of the room that seemed to have a large wooden chest against it now, and opened the lid. Lysanias stepped up beside her, staring down at what appeared to be a huge box full of marbles. Inari thrust her hand into the box and started rummaging around, the tip of her tongue sticking out the corner of her mouth as she concentrated. "Here we are," she announced, pulling out a marble. "Take a look."

"How many-" Lysanias began, taking the marble, but then realized that might not be the correct question. *This trunk appeared out of nowhere, I didn't see her gesture or call upon magic. If these are what I think they are...* "How many trunks like this do you have?"

"Oh!" Her eyes widened in surprise. "Very astute, Lysanias. You are fairly intelligent, aren't you? You've not had much chance to express it, given the nearly non-stop combats you've been in, but there it is. To answer your question; I have many trunks like this, each one full to the top. Now, can you tell me what this is?" She touched the marble in his hand and Lysanias looked it over.

To him it felt brittle, like it could fall apart at any moment, and the surface was dark. "Do these represent worlds?"

"They do. This one, I'm afraid, is the world your wanderers come from. An odd coincidence of language, those who travel as you do between worlds for us, fighting your 'shadow king' are also called wanderers."

Lysanias glared at it. "So the world is lost?"

She sadly nodded. "We didn't reach it in time. It happens. We have many worlds, but only few wanderers to help save them. We can't take just anyone, you know? They have to possess certain qualities, and that limits our choices. So we tend to take only the best, like you."

He snorted. "Like me? Maybe you weren't watching as closely as you should have, but I was the one getting beat up all the time. How many times in the last six months have I nearly died? Four? Five? What am I going to do? How can I stop this?" He held the marble up, and she took it back with a shake of her head. "Even training for a year-"

"Don't misunderstand. You're there to deliver the warning, and help the people of the world you go to fight off the 'shadow king.' Not singlehandedly save the world yourself. And time isn't an issue, not really. Let me explain." She carefully set the orb down and closed the chest. "Have a seat again."

"Okay." Lysanias went back to the bench and Inari stood before him.

"Before you go I have something for you. Several somethings, in fact. Usually I give people the ability to understand any language, but you already have that. So something of similar utility to that, but that's minor. The thing I'm excited about, for you specifically, is this." She held her hand up and there appeared two red, glassy-

"What do these marbles do?" he asked, confused.

"Huh?" She looked over at them, and grinned. "Ah! No, I'm not pranking you, and these aren't marbles. Despite what they look like. These are a very special kind of eyes from another world. The *copy wheel eye*. Or as they would call it, if I might bypass your ability to

translate everything instantly, the *Sharingan*.”

“Okay?”

“As you weren’t born with them, giving you these has a share of drawbacks as well as benefits, so I suggest you think carefully before accepting them. The main benefit is that when activated and viewing someone performing a skill, you can immediately use that skill as though you were them. You basically absorb all the hours they spent practicing right out of them. But it isn’t just physical stuff, it could be used for things like learning how to teach someone too. I’m sure physical actions are the majority of the skills you would gain with them though.”

Lysanias paused, mulling this over. “That would seem to negate the time constraint. But there must be people better suited to them. Stronger, faster people-”

Inari shook her head again. “It has to be you. I’ve been saving them for a person just like you, Lysanias. Let me explain.” The eyes vanished again and Inari began to pace the room. “Let’s talk about kids for a second. Kids have an amazing potential to learn, do you realize that? They have to basically invent the concept of language on their own, while people around them gibber and make noises. They then have to figure out which sounds mean which things, and all the while, learn how to balance so they can walk, what the various sensations in their body like being hungry mean, all kinds of things. All at the same time! Then later how to spell the words they’re using, different usage of the same sounding word, it goes on and on. The amount a child learns in their first say twenty years of life is staggering, if you think about it.”

“I’ll take your word for it, I don’t seem to recall having to learn how to read and write.”

“Good, because it’s true. And you’re right, the first people and their kids didn’t have to learn those things, they were sort of given to them, like they were to the angels. But take the rest of your childhood. It was cut rather short, wasn’t it?”

“True.”

“So in essence, you didn’t get to use your full potential because you got put to sleep. So you’ve still got it! Plus you’ve been through a number of experiences, enough to fill, oh I don’t know, three books at around eighty thousand words apiece. That gained you further potential you have yet to use because you’ve been focused on staying alive these past few months.”

“And with those eyes I could call upon that potential and learn far more than someone who wasn’t basically still a kid inside. Two people might get the same eyes, and thus the same ability to learn, but I would get more use out of them in the long run. Because others might ‘run out of’ potential, so to speak, and be unable to learn more.” *Like skybourne magic, having a dozen spells bouncing around my head. I wouldn’t dare learn more for fear of getting pushed out of my own brain. Someone else might start losing things they’ve learned as they used the eyes more and more, which I bet would be random. I could learn more without danger of losing what I had.*

“Exactly!” she agreed, spinning around. “In addition you aren’t limited like the people that came after you. You can increase your skill at doing things nearly without limit. There’s a diminishing return, of course, because ten masters of something will only have a slight variation in a skill, so you won’t be able to watch them and get ten times better than everybody. But maybe twice as good, which is still something pretty special. That’s why it has to be you!”

“What’s the downside?”

“Ah.” Here Inari paused as her face fell. “There’s an immediate one and a long term one. The immediate one is actually doing the implantation. We basically have to rip your eyes out and put these in their place. Now don’t get me wrong,” she hurried on, “I’ll do it magically so the change is instantaneous, but it’ll still be really painful. The eyes will just be sort of sitting there in your eye sockets until we ‘connect’ them so to speak. Again, regeneration magic can do that fairly quickly. But your body will have to get used to them, meaning you’ll be blind a day or two and have to stay here while you recover.”

“I see. And the long term?”

“Using them will be painful as well. And you’ll lose your sight for hours afterwards, the longer you keep them active the longer the loss of sight will go on for. Your body will be

adjusting to the new skill, so it won't be immediately usable. Once your sight returns you'll be able to do whatever you saw, so you'll have to use it from safety."

"So I won't be able to use it to see what an enemy is doing, unless I want to fight them blind and without whatever it was I was trying to learn to do."

"Correct."

"Just how painful are we talking about here?"

"Let's just say it's a good thing you have a strong resolve, you'll be able to handle it."

He scowled. "That doesn't tell me anything. But okay, I get the eyes won't be mine but it seems like they could work out fairly well in some situations."

"One minor point, they are red, and that's not a really common eye color. It'll set you apart from people."

He barked a laugh. "I'll be from another world, that sets me apart fairly well from the start. Hey, what about my mountain spirit?"

"What about it?"

"Can it use the eyes too? I mean we're linked enough that our pain is the same, and if I lost an arm it would too."

"Yes, it can use them too."

"I see." Lysanias mulled it over a moment. "What else do I need to know?"

"Let's see... I told you about your foe. You know how it operates, taking someone over and causing trouble. It will usually appear near a time of strife for the world, to take advantage of the situation and save its own energy. Downside- you have to kill the avatar to free the world. We'll make sure it can't come back, but believe me, unless it leaves by itself there is no other way to deal with the avatar."

"Once you've traveled a bit you'll have enough 'dimensional energy' that you can learn some new tricks, like sensing out things that don't belong in world and putting things into a 'pocket space' like Elita's pocket dimension spell. But without any spell, you can just shove stuff into it."

"I'll always try to put you down near people of note, those that can either teach you a lot, or have a large part to play in whatever coming disaster threatens the world. Make new friends! Remember you're just there to help them, not solve all their problems. You get the eyes, whatever I decide is worth the language ability you already have, and anything you can take from the worlds you go to. Techniques or technology, weapons, whatever you think will help you."

"Technology?"

"That means science. Ideas. Like remnants are technology. Guns are technology."

So if I can figure out how to build or power things, I could bring that knowledge back to my world too. "I see. Ideas alone can be priceless."

"Indeed!" she agreed seriously. "I've got some worlds in mind, they use hand to hand combat primarily on the first one I'll send you to, plus a host of special techniques. I think it'll be a good fit for you. Then there's a place you can get a really nice *living* sword, a place to pick up an unmatched cutting tool and some techniques like predicting your enemies actions in combat or seeing distant places. I know you were working towards that, but this will save you the time. The list goes on and on, of course you only have so much potential but there's not that many ways to use spiritual energy, so you'll master a lot before your 'well' runs dry, believe me."

"Very well, let me think a minute."

"Of course. I'll even give you two!" she replied with a wink. She bounced into the other room, busying herself with something out of sight of Lysanias sat in thought.

Assuming I didn't fall in that last battle after all and this is just my version of Heaven, which I doubt given who I am, her offer seems pretty good. Being blinded a few hours in exchange for instantly learning a variety of skills is probably a small price to pay, and that will leave me free to practice what I want otherwise. If I can take other's skills, I'll probably be able to defend myself as they would have, and not need to reveal I have other worldly powers. I drive the shadow king off a few worlds and if I think it's not going to work out, I just tell her that. Even if she takes the eyes back for somebody else, I doubt I would lose the skills or knowledge I had gained along the way. Imagine taking ideas and techniques back to my

world, things that could really make a difference! Seeing how other people live? What choices they made which shaped their worlds? How many people get a chance to do that? Not many! I'd be a fool to pass up this opportunity, right? I do have a lot of potential, and really I have no place in my world I really fit. It passed me by. But I come back in a few years, with no time having passed there? With a new strength and full of purpose? I could carve a life out for myself teaching or help the alchemists figure out how to use the knowledge I bring back. Then the sky is the limit, literally. Help the skybourne rebuild, find new mines or replacement materials for the dwindling supply of metal. Maybe even construct something that can withstand whatever the oceans throw at ships that keep us confined to Pyre. Yeah, there's lots I could do if I came back more powerful. But teaching... if Xerxes doesn't open a school like he was thinking, I could. Not just for powers or magic, but for science too! If you have a thirst to change the world, make it better for everyone, and an idea how to do it... maybe a place like that Fladdermus College, just not so focused on magic. And maybe with more morals?

"Okay," he told Inari, crossing back into the kitchen area. "I'll do it."

"That's great!" she replied, raising a wicked looking knife and slamming it into some kind of melon on the counter. "Let's get these eyes of yours implanted!"

Er, is it too late to back out?

"So what do you prefer," she asked, after having Lysanias lie down on a bed in another room. "One wing, or maybe an extra arm? Not needing to eat, drink or breathe, seeing in the dark, the ability to hit invulnerable things with unarmed strikes, or the ability to cling to surfaces?"

"Uh, not sure what one wing is going to do for me, and an extra arm just sounds silly."

"What if it was growing out the top of your head?"

"I'm going to pretend I didn't hear that. Seeing in the dark... useful, but I have ways of making light now. How common are invulnerable things?"

"Honestly, not that common."

"I figure. Clinging... I don't know. That leaves not needing to eat, drink, or breathe. Could come in handy if I find myself somewhere the food is disgusting."

"Or you have to be underwater for extended periods. It's a magical ability, though. If you're maintaining it other spells will take a little more of your concentration, but otherwise you'll be unaffected."

"Then I assume it wouldn't work in magically dead areas, either?"

"That's true. But those are rare as well."

"Fine, let's go with that." *Of course I can make my own food with magic, but not having to breathe might be the best thing. The shadow king did try to kill me with a poison cloud just a few hours ago.* "I still do have to discover my identity gift. Maybe I can while on this journey."

"The ability the Allfather gave you, that's unique to you? If you don't come up with it while wandering, you never will. Now, let's tie this around your eyes, you should keep them closed until I'm sure they've taken to you properly." She raised Lysanias' head and wrapped what was essentially a soft band secured by velcro around his eyes.

"Don't you need to see my eyes to do the transfer?"

"Not really. Now, are you prepared? The pain will be pretty bad, but brief. I'll get regeneration on you immediately, okay? Just bear it."

Lysanias took a deep breath and clenched his fists. "Ready."

That's when his eyeballs exploded. He cried out, wanting to cover them but found he couldn't move his arms.

"You're okay, I'm sorry, it's okay," Inari assured him. "You should start feeling better in a second, just hang on." Almost immediately the pain started to subside, and Lysanias found he could move again. He unclenched his fists, taking in deep lungfuls of air. "Are you okay? Was it terrible? I bet it was terrible, I'm sorry but it was the only way. I'm so sorry!"

"It's okay," he managed. "It's manageable, and getting better."

"That's good news. Okay, stay still a moment I'm going to put my blessing on you, give you your new ability." Lysanias felt her do something magical, and suddenly realized exactly

how to use his newfound ability to negate his need to eat. It wouldn't stop him being hungry if he started out hungry, but he wouldn't die of hunger, so that was a plus.

"I think I got it," he told her.

"Great! Do you want me to stay? I'm happy to, while you recover."

He shook his head. "The pain is nearly gone, and I'm sure you have other things to do. I'm going to talk with my spirit, see what it thinks about all this, and maybe I can walk around later. I don't need my eyes, after all, the practice in sensing out my environment will be good for me."

"That's the spirit!"

Lysanias groaned.

"Anyway, feel free to go wherever, this place is pretty small so you can't get lost. And honestly I'm pretty sure you could feel my magic or spiritual energy from just about anywhere. If you need me just come find me. You're my guest and while you don't have to eat anymore, I'll whip you up something good whenever you want. Food from other worlds!" He got the feeling she was doing something with her hands, what we would recognize as "jazz hands" but the effect was lost on him.

"Thanks. I will."

"Then I'll see you later."

So Lysanias talked with his spirit, going into his "inner landscape" to do so. The spirit didn't have much advice but was looking forward to trying out the new eyes it had gotten as Lysanias had. (It was also blind at the moment) As well as communing with other spirits, and finding mountains on other worlds. That done Lysanias walked around the forested area surrounding Inari's cabin, using a combination of ESP and spirit sense to not smack into too many things. The forest was teeming with life in the form of birds, small fuzzy animals, and more, all that were quite tame and curious about him.

He hung around for two days, his senses getting a bit of a workout, and taking care of some things. He shrunk down one of the captured "polearm" weapons as he had for Elita, making a similar wand he could fire energy out of with a squeeze. He cut some of the larger bits of metal into more manageable chunks, and Inari gave him a larger, metal, chest to store things in. He had taken back the unused alchemists creations they hadn't used in their battle with the shadow king, and he reshaped the interior to have "pockets" along the edges to hold the small vials of liquid or powders. He couldn't make any new wards, he needed his eyes for that, but at least he felt more prepared now. Finally Inari announced he could take the band off. He undid the hook and eye, then slowly opened his eyes and blinked them, her small form coming into focus.

"How does it feel?" she asked, looking him over.

"Normal." He rolled them and looked out the corners of his eyes, and it seemed his vision had returned. "I think it worked, at least I can see as well as I did. To find out if they work as you say, well, that will have to wait I suppose."

"They'll work, don't you trust me? Want to see what you look like?"

"Sure!"

She handed him a mirror and he peered into it. A misshapen monster looked back at him. "What the-" he cried, dropping the mirror in shock. "What happened to me?" he demanded, but Inari started laughing her head off.

"Oh my, the look on your face! If you could have seen it!" she wheezed.

"I did see it, what did you do to me!?"

"Here, I can't even-" she managed, handing him another mirror from somewhere. He glared into it, and his own bearded face, now with red eyes, glared back.

"It was a trick mirror of some kind, wasn't it?"

"Yup," she agreed, calming down. "Oh, that was worth it. So worth it."

"Yes I'm sure it was," he icily agreed, turning his face this way and that. "Wow, that looks strange. But I'm not the one who has to look at it."

"Think of it as a badge of proof you come from another world. Anyway, want to get started?" She held up a pouch after taking the mirror back.

"I can bring my stuff, right? Sword, arrow-spears, shield?"

"Of course, go grab them. I'll wait."

A moment later he came back, his equipment now more at hand. *Need to find a way to more easily carry this shield around. Maybe a bracelet I can put a ward into? Then just get it out from there?*

"What a striking figure you are!" she gushed. "Now, here's how these work." She reached into the bag and took out two marbles. "This pure white one will put you in touch with me, here. If you have questions or want to come back. This is the first world you should go to." The marble she handed over was quartered into four sections, red, clear, blue, and brown. "Just put a little spiritual energy into it, you know how to manipulate your inner energy, yes? It should be fairly easy."

"Okay, I can give it a shot."

"The others will come to your hand in the order I think you should go. Each has something unique to offer, and like I said before on the third one you'll be joined by someone like you, a wanderer. She can teach you the skills you get from moving across worlds. Oh, before I forget, take a good look at this." She held the marble up. "Looks rather dingy, doesn't it? That's not happenstance. You'll know you've gotten the avatar of the shadow king when it brightens up."

"How do I find them? Just ask the universe I'm in? Will that ability even work?"

"Sure. Where you go might be a bit surprised to be contacted like that, and may have a personality all its own, but it'll work. Finding the avatar? Well, if it's smart it'll have brought something across to block that sort of answer, or created it locally. Just keep an eye out, it's usually fairly obvious. Eyes. Keep them in your head, but still keep them out. What an odd saying."

"Okay." He took the pouch and tied it to his belt, then took the marble. "Anything else I should know?"

"Don't die. Many realities are counting on you to save them."

"Got it. Wish me luck."

"Good luck. See you later!"

"Right." He took a deep breath and gripped the marble tightly, willing energy into it. There was a shifting sensation, not unlike his own ability to teleport, and suddenly he was standing somewhere quite different, his hand empty. It was a small room with totally metal walls, and two women were there with him. A single light illuminated the two, and the table and chairs in the room were all solid metal. Lysanias was impressed. *It seems this world has resources to spare, if they can build everything out of metal.* One woman was seated looking at the other, she was wearing some kind of dark armor and had her back to him. Her hair was gray and she seemed, and felt to him to be quite angry. The other was just wearing a blue top, some kind of arm bands, and had her hair up in a tail. She was staring at him as though he had just materialized out of thin air. (To be fair he had.) The older woman was speaking.

"You can't just waltz in here and dole out vigilante justice like you own the place," she was saying. "What are you looking at? Look at me when I'm talking to you!"

"Uh, there's a man-" the other said, trying to point. Lysanias noticed her hands were restrained, making him wonder just what this place was.

"What man? The door hasn't opened!" she insisted.

Suddenly there was a sliding sound and a small window opened in the wall. "Chief, councilman Tenzin is here," said a man beyond the wall.

The woman jerked her head, looking at the man. Then she looked back at the other woman. "How did you know?"

"Not him," the other insisted. "Him!"

"She has a point, you know," Lysanias offered, making the other woman whip around to see where the voice was coming from. "Vigilante justice? Bad idea, learned that one the hard way. Believe me, I've been in my share of prisons just trying to defend myself-"

"How did you get in here?" the older woman demanded, standing. She was looking around but the room was sealed otherwise.

"Ah, now that's a bit of a funny story!" Lysanias hedged. "You two are central to the coming conflict, so I'll be happy to tell you. Sorry if I've interrupted something here, I can

wait.”

“Uh, chief?” asked the man at the window.

“Get some more officers in here, I want this man restrained and questioned as to how he got in!”

“There’s no need for that,” Lysanias assured her hastily, holding up the hand not weighed down by the shield. “I’ll be happy to tell you!”

“Right chief,” said the man, and the hole closed up.

“Look, my name is Lysanias,” he told them. “May I know your names? It’s very important we talk, your world is in grave danger.”

“I’m chief Beifong, and this is Korra,” the woman said. “Now start talking, how did you get in here and what do you want?”

“I’m here to find the avatar-” Lysanias began, intending to say “of the shadow king,” but the woman in blue perked up.

“I’m the avatar!” she announced. “At least someone cares,” she said Beifong.

“Wait, you’re the avatar?” Lysanias goggled.

“She’s the avatar,” Beifong agreed. “For all the good it’s going to do her in this situation. Why? What’s your business with her?”

Lysanias ignored the question. “You *admit* to being the avatar? I just, I don’t see why...” He blinked, wondering why the shadow king would have chosen someone like this, a young woman hardly out of her teen years, to destroy the world. But she was restrained, so she couldn’t be all that powerful. “Well, whatever. Good job capturing her, I admit I didn’t think it was going to be this easy.”

“What was? Finding her?”

Lysanias put a hand on his sword. “That’s right. I’m here to kill the avatar, to save your world.”

“Whaaaaaaaaattttt?” Korra wailed.

Chapter 2

Cleaning up Misunderstandings

When: No time has passed

Where: The world of the avatar

Lysanias slid the sword out, the rasp of the corrupted angelic metal echoing throughout the small room as he did. Beifong stepped in front of Korra, arms raised, but he didn't see any weapons. He raised his shield, looking for an opening to get past her. "Look, I know it's a bit of a shock, but this has to be done. Your world is in great—"

Suddenly there was a pounding, and a muffled voice shouted from the other side of the wall. "Open up in there. I demand to know what's going on!" There was obviously some kind of scuffle, and Lysanias turned his attention back to the two ladies.

"Great danger, as I was saying. That's not who you think it is, not any more. She's been taken over by a force of great evil, and must be purged from this world."

"No I haven't!" Korra insisted.

"Of course you would say that," Lysanias retorted. "But you just admitted to being the avatar of the shadow king, so it's a little late for that."

"Avatar of what?" both woman said.

"Wow, that sounded almost convincing. Look, just step aside, please. I know what I'm doing. It's why I'm here, to protect your reality from a deadly force that will destroy everything until there's nothing left. I know it's crazy, but let me kill her and I'll be on my way. Your world will be safe."

"I don't understand anything you're saying, but you're clearly mad. Korra, I won't let him hurt you, so just sit tight a second okay?"

"Get me out of these, I can take care of myself!" She was straining against the bonds holding her to the table.

"I don't want to hurt you," Lysanias told the woman. *If I even can.* "Please, you have to believe me."

"I don't have to do anything I don't want to." With that, a steel cable shot out of her gauntlet and sped towards Lysanias. He had little time to dodge as the room was so small, so he simply tried to bash it out of the way with his shield. He felt a measure of surprise as the cable simply snaked around it and handily roped his upper arms together. *How in the world did she do that? Is she actually a remnant of some kind, and this is part of her body? I could sever it, I suppose, but I hate to hurt her...* "There, that should hold you," she announced, pulling the cable tight. "Now I want some answers!"

Before he could say a word the wall opened up, and into the room jumped an older man, bald, with a pointy beard. He was wearing some kind of orange and yellow outfit, with a red cape. "What's going on in here?" he demanded.

"This man says he's here to kill Korra!"

"What?!"

"I'm here to save your world from the avatar!" insisted Lysanias, wondering how this cable was constricting him. In wasn't tied or anything, just tight around him. "You have to believe me. Don't make me hurt you!"

"Korra, are you all right?" the man demanded.

"Sorry chief, he insisted," apologized the man as several people in that dark metal armor crowded into the room. "Wait, what? Who's that?"

"Just get him secured!" Beifong commanded. They did, more cables wrapping him up.

Oh great, now what? I suppose I could teleport... "Look, I can prove it!" he insisted. "I'm from another world, and you are all in danger!" *And now I do sound like a raving lunatic. Fantastic.*

"Is that a sword?" asked one of the man, gesturing to it. "I'll take care of it." He seemed to expect something to happen. "That's odd, what's it made of?"

"I can't get his shield away from him," complained another man.

"Will everyone be quiet a second?" Korra shouted. "It's me this guy wants to kill, I'd like to know why!"

"Like you don't know."

"I don't. Who are you?"

Lysanias regarded her, and she seemed genuinely confused. "Maybe I have it wrong? Look, take that pouch from my belt and get out the white... marble. Then hand it to me, and I'll prove what I'm saying."

"It's some kind of trick," one of the officers insisted. "Don't do it."

But the chief shot another cable at him, whisking the pouch away his side. She opened it and looked inside. "It does look like marbles," she announced, taking out the white one. "You want this one?"

"Yes. Take the sword, put it into my hand. I can't move, what am I going to do?"

She considered, then looked back at Korra. "It's your call."

"Give it to him. I'd like to see what he has to say."

"But a marble... well, why not? He did appear out of thin air I guess. Drop the sword."

"Fine." Lysanias did, and she reeled in the cable holding him as she moved forward. Alert for any trick she handed him the marble and he put energy into it. It glowed.

"Lysanias?" asked the image of Inari that now hung in the air. "I haven't even turned around, you can't have gotten into trouble- oh." Her image looked around the room with some amusement.

"What in the world?" breathed Korra, eyes glued to the image.

"Can you tell if someone's the avatar from where you are? She admitted it the second I got here! I thought it was going to be hard, but tell these people this girl... what did you say your name was?"

"Korra."

"This Korra has to die!"

"Oh. May have slipped my mind a little bit, sorry everyone, my fault." She said this but her ears were twitching and her tail was swishing like she was really excited about something.

"What is this? What's creating this image?" demanded Beifong, swishing her hand through it.

"What's your fault?" he insisted.

"They kind of sort of have an avatar of their own. Whoops?" She gave an exaggerated shrug, like that excused everything.

"Whoops? Is that all you have to- you arranged this whole thing, didn't you? As a joke!"

Inari burst out laughing again. "I totally did. The avatar, get it? I said it over and over, knowing you were going there! You got your sword out and everything, it's priceless, it really is!"

"This is all some big joke?" Beifong demanded.

"Not to me!" Lysanias assured her.

"Is she in the spirit world?" asked Korra. "Are you from the spirit world?"

"I've never read about anything like this," the man informed them all.

"Anyway, let the poor man go. And Korra too, they need to train together to save your world, like he no doubt told you. You can believe this face, can't you?" She pointed to her cheeks with two fingers, one on each side.

"I don't know what's going on!" Beifong announced. "I'm getting too old for this... avatar stuff."

"Can someone tell *me* what's going on?" the man asked, looking around. "Are you in the spirit world?" he asked Inari.

"I'd be happy to explain," Lysanias told them. "Just untie me."

"Lin?"

"Oh very well!" she agreed in a huff, waving her officers back. They retracted their cables, the steel unwinding on its own and pulling back into the small backpack he saw they carried on their backs.

"Guess you have this in hand. To be clear, there's no reason she couldn't be our avatar. But I'm pretty sure she's not. It's never that easy, believe me. You need to look properly, okay? Korra is powerful, but there are still more powerful things in that world. Seek them out. Talk to you later, Lysanias!" The image of Inari vanished.

Thanks a lot. "Thank you," he said to Lin. "If I might pick up my sword? I'll put it back,

honest.”

Lin glared at it, then concentrated, then looked back up at him. “It looks like metal, but I can’t bend it. Why?”

Bend it? Why would she want to bend my sword? “It is metal, but as far as I can tell, from the heavenly realms. Then it got corrupted by dark energy and nearly destroyed, that’s why it’s so black. I had to fix it myself. I don’t know what you’re trying to do,” yet, “but it’s still a sword, it’s sharp, I don’t know what to tell you.”

“You have a sword from the spirit world?” Korra asked. “Wicked!”

“The heavenly realms, yes.”

“The spirit world, that’s what I said!”

Lysanias blinked at her. *I think my ability to communicate is translating what I’m saying into something they have here, rather than what I have where I come from. Interesting.* “Oh, right, sorry.”

“Pick it up, but you better have a darn good story if you don’t want to be thrown in a cell!” Lin told him.

Great, more time in prison. What is it with me and getting locked up, anyway? “Thank you.” He picked it up and slid it back into the sheath. “Now, perhaps we could go somewhere and I can tell you my story?”

“Oh, you’re not leaving this room until I’m satisfied,” Lin informed him.

“And believe me, she’s hardly ever satisfied,” the man said with an eye roll.

“You stay out of it, Tenzin!” she snarled, poking him with a finger.

“Sorry, Lin.”

“Sit down! The rest of you, out of here!”

“I’m staying,” Tenzin said in tone that brooked no argument.

“Do what you like!” Lin snapped, sitting herself. She slammed the pouch on the table in front of her.

I can’t sit down, there’s only the one chair.

But Lin had that covered, she gestured and the restraints holding Korra opened. She rubbed her wrists and looked confused. “You, up. You, sit,” Lin issued this as a series of commands, and both parties shrugged.

Is she controlling the metal somehow? Like I can control earth? That must be fairly useful, if the world is anything like this room. He snorted and rolled his eyes. *Probably another little “joke” on Inari’s part. I woke up in a cave before, now it’s a steel box. Next time it’ll be an even smaller box.* He sat, and the others lined up across from him.

“Now who are you,” Lin demanded.

“Like I said, I’m Lysanias, and I’ve come from outside this world to give you a warning. You are all in danger, great danger. Someone or something on this world has been taken over by a being like the one you just saw. But this one wants the potential of this world for itself, so it’s going to try and destroy this world. Then it can basically eat all the energy and potential of this realm and add it to itself. I’m here to help you stop it.”

“Apart from what you’ve shown us, do you have any proof of this? I admit the little trick you did with the marble is impressive, but that could just be a trick.”

“I’m sure one way or another... wait a second. Yeah, let’s do two things at once! Tell me about what you can do. I see you controlling metal, do I have that right? What else can you do?”

“I’m an earth bender, it should be obvious. Tenzin is an air bender, and of course the avatar can bend all the elements.” She said this like she was explaining something to a two year old.

“It’s not, I’m not from your world, as I keep trying to tell- wait, if you’re not the avatar of the shadow king, what *are* you the avatar of?”

Everyone looked to Korra, who seemed surprised at the question. “What, of? What? What do you mean, of?”

“I mean you must be the avatar of something.”

“I really have no idea, I’ve always just been called ‘the avatar.’ Do you know?” she asked Tenzin.

“I don’t. It’s a very interesting question though,” he admitted, stroking his beard. “I just

assumed it was a title, but now that I think about it, it's a strange title to have, isn't it?"

"Sure is."

"So you claim to know nothing of bending?" Lin pressed on.

"I do not."

"Fine. I can bend earth, Tenzin can... control, I can control earth."

"Ah! Thank you!" Lysanias nodded, now understanding. *It is similar, that's nice to know.*

"Tenzin controls wind, and the avatar can control fire, earth, wind, and air."

"I can't air bend yet," she admitted, "but the others I'm pretty good at." She flicked her hand open and a small flame appeared there.

Lysanias smiled. "Then we've got our proof!"

"What do you mean?" she closed her hand and the fire went out.

"I'll make you a deal. You demonstrate everything you can do. I mean everything.

Because I'm sure there's subtitles to this 'bending' you're glossing over. I spend the night in a cell, that's fine, and tomorrow I show you that I can do everything you can do." *And probably better, despite not being an elf. It's perfect, I get to absorb everything these people can do right from the start, and they get to know I'm telling the truth about myself.*

"Why do you have to spend the night here?" Lin asked. "Not that I wouldn't get a certain satisfaction from throwing you in a cell."

"Now Lin..." Tenzin chastised.

Lysanias tapped the corner of his eyes. "These eyes let me absorb skill, but they go dark afterwards. My body has to get used to the new things I'm absorbing. Depending on how much you can show me, how long it takes, I'll be blind for hours at a time. That's why I want to see everything you can do, only put myself through that once. As for staying here, it's a show of good faith more than anything. I'm a stranger here, we need each other, so I have to win your trust."

"That would be a nice trick," she admitted. "As only the avatar should be able to bend all the elements, you doing it would prove you're not from around here."

"So do we have a deal?"

"And what if you're lying? What if you can't?"

I strangle that beastkin girl who is obviously NOT some kind of goddess. "Keep me here. Attempted murder of the avatar, resisting arrest, whatever. I won't run."

"You would put your freedom on the line? Interesting." She crossed her hands over her chest.

"To prove what I say is true? Get you on my side so we can start combing the world for the avatar of shadows? Yes, in a heartbeat."

"I'll go get some paper," Lin announced, standing. "We'll make a list so we don't forget anything, and I'll have the courtyard cleared for the demonstration." She got up and made the door open, spilling a bunch of officers into the place.

"Are you okay, chief?" asked the one in front, being crushed by the ones behind him.

"Don't you all have work to be doing?" she shouted. "Away from here! Scram!"

They scattered, and the door closed again behind her.

What a forceful woman.

There was an awkward moment of silence as the three that were left stared at each other.

"So, you're from another world?" Korra asked with a slightly embarrassed laugh.

"What's that like?"

"Never mind that, what are *you* doing here?" Tenzin demanded. "I told you to stay at the south pole!"

"That doesn't matter now, don't you see we have larger concerns!" She pointed to Lysanias.

"Oh no, you're not deflecting this. But as an air bender I do applaud your effort."

"Thanks."

"..."

"..."

"So?"

"To train, what do you think? I got a little side tracked, I admit, but it's time you stopped hiding me away. I'm the avatar! I have to know what's going on in the world, and this is the best place in the world to be for that! Your mother agreed with me, she let me go!"

"Don't bring my mother into this!"

"I'm just telling you what happened."

"Is that so?" He closed his eyes and pinched the bridge of his nose. "And now this stranger appears, further complicating things."

"Sorry."

"No, you're probably just trying to help, like you say. You just came at the exact worst time, is all. With all this 'equalist' nonsense, and the council bickering about everything... but you don't care about politics."

"Probably another little joke by Inari, sending me here when she did. All of this unrest, it could be the work of the shadow avatar, you know. It might explain things."

He considered. "Yes, I suppose you're right. I guess we'll just have to see."

The door opened again and Lin stormed back in with a pen and paper. "Right," she said, throwing them down. "Let's start a list."

It turned out to be a fairly extensive list, it seemed that these people had developed a lot of techniques around simply controlling an element, and when it was done Lin looked it over. "In this room alone we can demonstrate most of these. You know healing, don't you Korra?"

"I learned from the best!" she bragged.

"Humm, but can you lightning bend?"

Her face fell. "No."

"I hate to involve others, but there must be someone in this prison that can do it. All right, I'll go find someone." The door slid open and a man walked in.

"You wanted to see me, chief?"

"Good timing. Take these three to the courtyard, it should be cleared by now, right?"

"Right chief. Uh, do I need to restrain them?"

Lin looked Korra over. "There is still the matter of the street you tore up. The shopkeepers are hesitant to press charges against the avatar but..."

"I can cover the damages," Tenzin sighed. "As long as you promise to not be so hot headed in the future!" He glared at Korra as he said this.

"I won't promise to just stand around while people are bullied or hurt! They were gang members, they had to be stopped."

"There is such a thing as subtlety, you know."

"Or taking them into a back alley first," snorted Lysanias, recalling some advice Don gave him.

Korra giggled, but wilted under Tenzin's gaze. "I'll try."

"Then for now the matter is settled," Lin told them. "But I'll be watching you, Korra."

"I know," she said, deflated.

"They don't need to be restrained," she told the officer.

"Very good, chief. This way, please."

The group followed the man through the prison, which Lysanias noted was basically solid metal. Everyone he saw wore the same metallic armor with spool of wire on the back, so it seemed there was no shortage of "metal benders" around here. *And if they can control it, they can probably tell where it is in the ground. Mining here is probably done very differently than on my world, no wandering around tunnels hoping to find metal deposits. With no collapse of civilization due to the chaos moon, it's no wonder everything is made of metal here. They never lost any they ever found, and the ease of finding it made it plentiful.* Finally they came to a central area where the prisoners could get some fresh air, and the group stood around waiting for Lin to come back. She did a few moments later, a man in a prison jumpsuit in tow.

"So what exactly do you need from us?" she demanded.

"Just a short demonstration of what you can do," Lysanias replied. "The process is

fairly painful for me, so one thing after another is best.”

“We’ll need some water,” Korra observed, looking around.

“Go get a bucket of water,” Lin commanded the officer, who walked off to look for one.

And I’ll want my spirit to observe this. Mountain spirit, come out, time to put our new eyes to the test. As usual it took a few tries but he stood there, and it seemed the others could see it, only somewhat surprising him.

Finally all the pieces were in place, and the four people stood in front of Lysanias, who was holding the list. “Right, I’ll just call out each thing, shall I? Ready?” They all nodded that they were. “Okay.” He closed his eyes, then reached into his store of spiritual energy, willing it to move into them and activate. He felt a pain start to build up, so he knew it had worked. *Sharingon activated.* “First is fire bending, go!” he said, opening them.

Both fire benders went into a short kata, and Lysanias felt he understood how to create and control fire perfectly. “Now lighting!” The man shot lighting into the sky after a brief charging period, and Lysanias moved down the list. The pain in his eyes increased but he held on as each person added to his knowledge. *Come on, faster, I can’t keep this up.*

The list was finally exhausted and Lysanias stopped the energy flow, dropping to one knee as his eyes went dark. The pain drained away, leaving him exhausted but exhilarated. His mountain spirit also melted away, back into his soul. *I understand it. I understand it all, it’s amazing. And it seems far more efficient than my own way of moving earth around, Lin was tearing up huge chunks of rock at one time. I can’t wait to try it. All of it.*

“Are you okay?” Korra rushed to his side, grabbing his shoulder. “Your eyes are closed.”

“Are they?” Lysanias hadn’t even realized, and wondered if maybe he was “blind” simply because his eyes were just shut for the duration. He forced them open, and Korra gasped.

“They’re white. Your eyes were red and now they’re white!”

“That’s probably normal,” he hedged, not able to keep them open any longer. “I knew this would happen, it’s fine. As agreed, I’ll now go quietly into a cell until my vision recovers and I can demonstrate everything I learned back to you.”

“What is all this?” asked the prisoner. “Why did I have to do that?”

“Never you mind. Return him to his cell, I’ll find one for our ‘guest’ here myself.”

“I’m staying with him,” Korra announced.

“Throwing you in a cell will be a pleasure.”

“Lin!” Tenzin admonished.

“What? It’s true. She should spend a night in jail, maybe it’ll be good for her. Give her something to think about the next time she feels compelled to meddle in police business.”

“But he’s a... man.”

“He’s also blind, Tenzin. I’m sure it’ll be fine.”

“I suppose it’ll keep you out of trouble while I figure out what to do- I mean what I’ll be doing next.”

“Do you want to take my hand?” Korra asked. “I don’t mind guiding you.”

Lysanias got back up and shook his head. “My other senses aren’t diminished. Lead on, I can follow you just fine even blind.”

“Oh, okay.”

With that they were led back inside, and Lysanias followed her energy signature to his cell, and home, for the next several hours. His equipment was taken, but he wasn’t issued a “uniform.” With that done he followed Korra into the cell and sat down on the bench in there next to her.

Already in jail. What would Don say?

So here’s how Lysanias’ eyes work. He’s blind for as many hours as turns he kept them active. Each person he views performing a skill past the first can only add up to half their

rating, based on how many times he's viewed that skill being performed. So if he viewed 5 people with a skill of 10 his skill would be $10 + 5 + 2 + 1 + 1 = 18$. Not 50.

Can he learn skills endlessly? No. While he's not exactly a "paragon" character like Susan, I've been keeping track of his XP "for him." 50 per "book" that came before. Also he had a ton of SKP saved at "character creation" so he's got that to spend as well. So it'll be a while before he runs out, but he will run out. Previously I was just tracking advancement through time. The formula is basically $(10-REA) * (\text{next rating} * 2) + (\text{number of hours it took to get to your current rating from the previous one})$. I wanted REASON to factor into it, because a smarter person can learn faster than a less smarter person. More realistic, than just saying "you beat up some robots, now you can learn math!" No. He put time into his skills, they went up. Simple as that. (Note that Lysanias has 4s in his physical track, 9 in REA, RES, and KNO, and 5s in everything else) (Note that beings with a higher than 10 reason use a different formula)

Skills from other worlds may not have a paragon equivalent, or be backgrounds not skills. Toph is a good example of this. She basically has the ESPer background "Sensory Substitution" but it's used through the skill of earth bending, so has a weakness she has to be touching the ground. And be an earth bender, if she was a water bender it wouldn't have worked. So I'll pick the closest thing or explain how I think the skill works and follow those rules. Or use a similar spell and just use an energy cost. Does bending take energy? They seem to bend a lot, and not get any more tired than regular fighting would make them. It's hard to say.

Anything he learns can supersede something he already knows that's similar, to save XP. Like he's going to replace gnome earth bending he learned from Everest with earth bending, which acts as the spell elemental control because have you seen how much benders lift? A lot. These skills can also just add to what he already knows, like close combat.

Lysanias has learned/increased the following skills in this chapter:

Martial Arts (Kung Fu, they're all pretty quick in their fighting style)

Close Combat

Off-hand

Energy Boost

Armor wearing

Air, Water, Earth, Fire bending, as the spell but costs 2 energy to activate

Supernatural Combat (Basically used as ranged when throwing stuff around, but as it's basically TK but it's not ESPer combat, Demongate High's Supernatural Combat covers it)

Lightning Bending (as the ESPer skill Electrokinisis)

Metal Bending (as Earth Bending)

Earth Senses (as ESP background sensory substitution when in contact with the ground.

Must make a "perception" check with earth bending to notice finer details, like a coin buried in the ground vs a huge hole or tunnel underground)

Water Bending style Healing (As healing in Demongate High: HDL energy spent healing when in contact with water)

Temperature change of water (As state change for Alchemists)

Learning all this wiped out his entire stock of leftover skill points and the XP he got from the first book. Sheesh.

Notes about bending:

While gnomish earth bending was as TK for damage, bending is 1d4 damage. The size and number of things that can be lifted at once will compensate for that. Honestly, they get slammed around a lot by stuff and they're usually fine. Take fire bending, how many times has someone actually been burned by it? Three, and never in Korra, and she uses fire bending a

/ot. It was all in The Last Airbender and all plot related. So I'm saying a "burst" of fire is too short lived to burn someone, though a steady stream of it would certainly start catching stuff ablaze.

Bending is controlled by a different stat. STR for earth, END for fire, MAN for air, and COO for water. This helps determine how well you can hit, while your skill determines how much you can lift. So you can put energy into your stat when bending (putting energy into fire bending increases the radius of the fire produced, so the effect is the same) to help hit better. It wouldn't help you lift more, but be more accurate.

I think I got everything.

Chapter 3

Getting to Know You(rself)

When: A few moments later

Where: Jail cell

“So tell me about this world!” Lysanias finally spoke up, as it seemed Korra wasn’t going to. “I didn’t see much, just wandering around this place. But I didn’t see any elves, or dwarves, or mechanical beings or anything. Just people.”

“Wait, your world has elves? What about mermaids?”

“Uh, maybe? I never met any, just a water elemental. We have unicorns, so I wouldn’t say the possibility was zero. I saw humanoid turtles and lizard people, so probably.”

“Wow, that must have been great! Castles, dragons, you had dragons, right?”

“Oh sure, I met one. Huge thing, breathed ice, helped me subdue a huge mechanical death machine from before the chaos moon showed up.”

“Chaos moon?”

“The one that brought magic back to the world.”

“You can do magic?! Honest to goodness, literal, spells and stuff? That’s so great!”

“I only know a few spells, honestly. I was pretty focused on my other abilities, and spells were costly.” *Of course there’s my skybourne magic, which I do want to practice, but best not mention that. I only know three “spell” manipulating magics that way, and I have to save that kind of magic for emergencies. I’ve got a long way to travel so I don’t want dozens of spells bouncing around my head.*

“Can you show me?”

“When my sight comes back, sure. I have to see where the magic is going, in order to properly target the spell.”

“What else can you do?”

“A few things,” he hedged. “Honestly I’m more curious about what I’ll find outside these walls, and I did ask first.”

She laughed. “You did, didn’t you? Well, I’ll trade you. We’re stuck in here anyway, so...”

“True. Okay, so to begin with the Allfather created a bunch of people, including my parents, and about a thousand or so years later they decided it was about time to have kids. Me. It was about that time He decided to wipe us all out...” Lysanias continued, recounting his history of being safely “stored” in the cave to avoid the flood, and being lost because Inari needed him for later. How the dwarf Don Fortress and the gnome Everest found him, and how they, with the help of various ladies that came into and left his life saved the world. “From the thing I’m here to save your world from. I call it the shadow king, those it takes over the avatar of the shadow king, but I like shadow avatar as well. It’s shorter to say.”

“And that’s why you can learn any skill? Your God didn’t put any restrictions on you?”

“Yeah. I think that’s why He wiped us out, as well. The humans that came after us were very limited.” *In more ways than one. Skills, aging as time went on, actually dying of it!* “Of course a bunch of them now have magic, so who knows how that factored into His plans. I have to think a God would have seen that coming and allowed it, or not. So it must have purpose.”

“Maybe He thought you had finally grown up enough to handle it?”

Lysanias snorted. “With all the wars that resulted, further wrecking the world that remained? I don’t think so.”

“I certainly can’t say. Hey, do you think you can teach me anything from other worlds? I *am* the avatar, after all. Despite not knowing what I’m the avatar of, exactly.”

“Not sure,” he admitted. “I can try. You could see my mountain spirit, so you’re obviously aware of the supernatural. You should be able to learn to sense and manipulate spiritual energy at the very least.”

“Is that what that was? I wondered what suddenly popped out of you.”

“It’s basically my soul, bonded with the spirit of the mountain, and projected out of my body to guide me and fight by my side. Not that I’ve been inside that many mountains for the guiding part to come in handy. Plus it hardly ever comes out the first time I call, but I think with

more practice I can overcome that and get its help more often. And as it can instantly learn anything I can learn with my eyes, I figured I might as well give it the opportunity.”

“Wild. I have so many other questions. But I’ll give you a break and tell you about my world.” So Korra told them about the four nations, begun as people that could do a certain type of bending stuck together. How the fire nation had been the most expansionistic and warlike, and how the avatar fit into the picture. “I’m the bridge between the spirit world and the material world,” she finished. “So while we don’t have dragons and such, we do have spirits that sometimes show up. They’re harmless most of the time, but they can be destructive if angered.”

“Interesting. So the chaos moon never came here, so you don’t have magic. But on the other hand your civilization never fell, so you have cars and stuff. Cars you said, right?”

“Yup! Trains, cars, electric lights, it’s pretty convenient.”

“Can’t wait to see it!”

“In more than one way, right?” They both chuckled.

They talked, having nothing better to do, finally it was time for lights out and both went to sleep. Lysanias didn’t dream, but he did get the sense that some powerful spirits were looking him over, wondering what he was all about. They didn’t seem hostile or friendly, just curious, as though maybe they could help, but maybe not. They left his dreams and showed him nothing of the future for now.

The next morning Lysanias opened his eyes and stretched. *Hey, I can see again.* He hopped off the bed and went to the mirror, looking himself over. His eyes were as red as he had seen before, and he noticed there were three strange notches in the red part, like the outstretched arms of a windmill. *Weird. Were they there before? I didn’t get a good look, that stupid trick mirror Inari used rattled me. I guess they must have been.*

“Good morning,” Korra called to him, rising herself. “How are you?”

“Look for yourself,” he said cheerfully, turning.

“Hey, your eyes are back. Does that mean...”

He grinned and flicked a hand open. Balanced on his palm was a small flame, and his smile widened. *Flame from my hands, and the earth trembling at my feet. Amy you were right about this too. I’ll become a man that you can be proud of, and maybe one day... well, whatever.*

“Great!” she gushed, smiling herself. “It worked then?”

“It did. I feel like I could take on the world. Hopefully Beifong will come soon and we can get out of here.”

“Not before breakfast,” complained Korra, putting her hands on her stomach. “And I could use a shower too.”

“Ah, my lady has but to ask!” Lysanias told her, bowing deeply. “Allow this humble servant to clean and offer you refreshment.” *If I can manipulate magic here, given you don’t seem to have any? I know at least one spell that draws on my own energy, let’s try that first.* “Let us be cleaned!” he cast, magic lighting up the cell. *Ah good, that worked.*

“I feel refreshed,” Korra admitted, looking herself over. “Even my clothes are cleaner. That was magic?”

“That’s magic,” he agreed. “Now, something a little different.” He turned to the bed, intending to use it as so the food he was about to make didn’t roll around on the floor. He felt around for magic, and while it was very faint, he felt it would be enough for this. “Create food!” he cast, drawing on the magic of creation, that of the sun. For an entire minute magical circles spun and lit up the area, and when it was done a bunch of random fruits, meats, and breads dropped into the bed. “Great, that works!” *Sigh of relief, check.*

“Oh man, I want to learn magic!” Korra whined. “That was so cool!”

“Stick to bending,” cautioned Lysanias. “We know you can do that.”

“What even is all this?” She picked up a banana.

“Yeah, that’s an odd one. Here, let me show you.”

Some time later Beifong showed up, carrying a tray. Trailing behind her was Tenzin.

"What in the world?" she remarked, looking the cell over. The remains of the fruits were sitting there, along with an improvised knife made from part of the bars to cut the bread and meat into manageable chunks.

"Oh, thanks," Korra said to her. "But we already ate. Wanted to get an early start so we could get out of here. Thanks for going through the trouble."

"How did you..."

"Magic!"

"Uh huh." It was clear neither person believed her, but Lysanias nodded as they looked over at him.

"Right, magic. Come on then, let's get this over with. You'll either be free to go or issued your very own prison jumpsuit, one size fits most. Personally I'm rooting for the jumpsuit."

"You're going to be disappointed," Lysanias cautioned her as she undid the lock. She let the two out and set the tray down. "Come with me, I've made sure the courtyard will be free again."

"Lead on."

Now in the middle of the prison again, Lysanias went into a series of stretches to limber up.

"So you're going to show us that you can do everything on this list," Lin reminded him, tapping it. "Get to it."

"Actually, I was hoping to make it a little more dramatic than that," Lysanias offered, pulling his shoes off. Once in contact with the ground he knew at a basic level where they were even without looking, and even how thick the walls surrounding the courtyard were. *Amazing. Another sense, it'll augment what I learned from Amy quite nicely.* He set the shoes down and stepped away from them. He looked around, noting there were several buckets of water nearby, intended for his water bending demonstration.

"Oh? How's that?"

"Fight me. All three of you, all at once."

"Like a pro bending match?" Korra asked, eyes shining.

"Uh, sure, whatever." *She didn't mention that, I have no idea what that is.*

"Stupid sport," Tenzin remarked. "Are you sure about this?"

"Oh yes. You take a solid hit, you go down. Naturally I get three because there's only one of me. Otherwise you use your bending, and I use mine."

"I like your style," Lin admitted. "I wouldn't mind going a few rounds, get a bit of a workout. If you can even deliver, because you talk big. How about you two?"

I hope I can deliver.

"I don't know," Tenzin admitted. "Three on one? Doesn't seem fair."

"Then this'll be over quickly and I can get back to work."

"You're sure about this?" he asked.

"I have to see just how good I am now. I feel I absorbed so much from you all, I'm bursting with it. I have to move, see what I can do. Your skill is in my muscles now, do you even understand what that means?"

"I guess I'm about to. Very well, one fall apiece, three for you."

"Agreed!"

"This should be interesting," Korra chuckled, moving out and slightly behind Lysanias. Tenzin did the same, so now there was a triangle around him. Lin was directly in front.

Okay, I can do this. My skill should be far in excess of theirs, even if they've been fighting longer, I've been in my share of combats. And they think they're flanking me, but even without sensing their energy, which I can't turn off, I can feel where they are through the earth. If I can't take them, after everything I absorbed yesterday, can I really say I'm fit to wander?

"Are you ready?" Lin asked.

"Ready!"

Lysanias felt Tenzin moving, and figured three on one actually *wasn't* very fair, so he

should even the odds a little. Taking a stance himself he threw both hands into the air and two slabs of rock popped up around him, forming a barrier between himself and the two behind him. He felt a blast of wind but it cut off just as the rock went up, so he was safe for the moment. *Couldn't have done that with gnome earth bending!*

Korra took a step and smashed a fist into the wall, hoping to drive it into him but he had felt her approach and used air bending to leap the wall, or at least tried to. He screwed it up, Lin didn't need to move to use her primary weapon, the length of wire she kept on her back. He was grabbed by it and slammed into the wall at the same time. He kicked out with his feet, smashing it down so it didn't hurt him, but he was still being pulled by the metal wire. Now back on the ground he felt all three of them again and knew Korra would be making the next move.

Korra pulled the wall towards her now, yanking it out of the way and holding it suspended in mid-air, ready to throw. Meanwhile, Tenzin was doing what Lysanias had failed to do, spinning to generate wind and jumping over the wall that Lysanias had created. At the top of his jump he released a blast of air in Lysanias' direction.

Perfect.

Lysanias didn't try to dodge it, instead he tried to take control of it, now throwing energy into the attempt because it seemed that even absorbing their skill, he was somehow still at a disadvantage here. He very nearly didn't manage it, but the air was redirected to Lin, who now had to suddenly dodge a burst of air she hadn't felt coming. It hit her left arm, doing minimal damage to her armor but knocking her around, and she nearly lost her footing and fell over.

Shoot, that almost worked.

Korra wasn't holding that chunk of rock up for her health, and tossed it in Lysanias' direction, because she's kind of exuberant like that and has probably forgotten the point of this exercise is to knock him over, not squish him like a bug. He took control of that too, redirecting it towards Lin, who smashed it to pieces with her fist.

"Stop giving him stuff to throw at me!" she complained, as Tenzin landed and fired off another burst of air. Lysanias knew it was coming but this time redirected it towards Korra. She tried dodging it, also getting hit in the left arm and knocking her off balance. She too stayed on her feet though.

What's with hitting the left arm today? Twice in a row? Seems odd.

Lin now yanked the cable, hoping to get Lysanias off balance and get the first knockdown. He knew he couldn't succeed in a contest of strength with her, so he used the pull instead, jumping towards her, flipping over, and striking with both feet. He connected but bounced off, doing a flip to gain his footing again.

The heck? It was like hitting a brick wall. You've got to be kidding me. Wait a second... Now in close he simply used metal bending to yank her armor and swing her around to deflect the two blows, one air and one fire, coming towards his back. Both slammed into Lin, knocking her forward, but this carried her into Lysanias who went down in a tangle of limbs with Lin on top.

"Still counts!" Lysanias told her.

"I see how it is."

She rolled off Lysanias and he swung his legs up, standing instantly. Lin retracted her cable and stepped back, so he turned to face the other two who were calling apologies to Lin.

With that out of the way, Korra threw fire at Lysanias, who again tried to take control of the blast but missed it, resorting to throwing himself to the side which also didn't work out too well for him. His chest got slammed with fire but it didn't knock him over.

"Knock him down, don't roast him!" Tenzin admonished her, shooting air at him.

"Sorry, forgot!"

Lysanias didn't try anything fancy this time, simply punching the wind while air bending, trying to deflect it. It stung, but he managed it. Korra grabbed up some water from one of the buckets nearby, shaping it into a ring around herself. So Lysanias stomped a foot while looking at her, faking both her and Tenzin out because he was looking right at her. He didn't need to see the section of rock Tenzin was standing in front of, having landed a second ago from his jump. Both of them bought it, Korra leaping back, thinking she was going to have to

defend herself, while Tenzin relaxed ever so slightly thinking he was safe for the moment. He wasn't, the wall basically fell on him, pinning him underneath.

"That was a dirty trick!" Korra admonished.

"Here's a clean one!" Lysanias retorted, grabbing some water for himself.

"I see how it is."

"Stop stealing my lines, avatar!" Lin shouted. "Get him!"

She shot a water whip at him, so he sent one of his own into it, deflecting it. Korra was fast, she wasn't out of water and another tendril came his way, and he just managed to deflect it this time. But now he was a step ahead, and snaked a ribbon of water her way. He weaved it around her deflection by a hair and she got slammed in the body, soaking her. Both were out of water and she was ahead again, so she stomped the ground, sending a wave of earth hurling towards him. Lysanias fell to one knee, punching the ground and trying to send that energy back at her. He managed it, his expanding ring of earth plowing hers aside and heading right for her. She leapt over it, coming to her feet after clearing it no problem. So Lysanias sent something at her she couldn't easily jump over, standing with a twist and thinking of Don as he created an expanding dome of air around himself that whooshed out from where stood. She didn't try to dodge it, simply yanked the ground up to deflect it.

Meanwhile, Lin was getting the rock off of Tenzin, who gratefully accepted her hand and stood to see who would go down first.

With Korra's vision now blocked, Lysanias sped forward and to the side, hoping to catch her off guard. He did, she was shoving the wall of rock towards where she thought he was going to be as he came from the side and did a sweep with his leg. He connected and she was sent sprawling, ending the contest.

"Impressive," remarked Tenzin, rubbing his arm where the wall had fell on him. "You only went down once."

"Never thought about fighting myself," Korra admitted, accepting Lysanias' hand to help her up. "I have to say, that was pretty amazing."

"Thanks. Are you hurt, let me get it." Lysanias grabbed more water from the bucket and held it against Tenzin's arm, making it glow as the healing energy was channeled through it.

By the time it was healed Lysanias felt he was done for a couple of hours at least, that fight had taken a lot out of him. Feeling out his opponents it seemed they still had more energy than he did normally, and he tried his best not to groan.

It's a good thing I ended it as I did. I couldn't have gone on like that much longer.

Bending is fairly efficient but it still takes energy. And that's the one thing I don't have all that much of.

"So are you convinced?" he asked, as the water splashed to the ground.

"I am," Tenzin admitted, flexing his arm. "Lin?"

"I suppose. He did demonstrate most everything we showed him yesterday. I didn't see any lightning."

And you won't, unless you want to carry me out of here. "I didn't want to actually electrocute anybody!"

"Probably for the best. All right, you're from another world and we're all in danger. What do we do about it?"

"Ah." *Yes, that's a problem, isn't it. Because I really have no idea!*

Chapter 4

Welcome to the Island

When: A few heartbeats after being asked “what do we do about it?”

Where: Prison courtyard

“Let me ask you this question,” Lysanias put to the others. “If I hadn’t showed up during, uh, Lin’s little talk with Korra, what would have happened? Obviously you would have showed up regardless.”

“True,” admitted Tenzin. “I would have insisted Korra return to the south pole to await my coming to train her.”

“And would you have gone?”

“Not without an argument,” admitted Korra.

“And would you have relented?”

Tenzin sighed. “Not without my kids making puppy duck eyes at me.”

Puppy what? I must have misheard that. “When would you have gone to train her?”

“When things settled down in Republic City.”

“And when will that be?” Korra asked shortly.

“Probably never,” he allowed. “Yes, I see your point. She probably would have stayed and begun her air bending training. Do you think that wise, to continue on that course?”

Lysanias considered. “Inari implied she sent me here far earlier than she normally would, so I myself could work on my own skills. Calling out my spirit is my first priority, in the middle of a combat just standing around hoping it answers me is not working. Then maybe my alchemy skills? I don’t know, I’ll have to think about it. I would say try to do what you would normally have done, and use me as a resource to bolster that. I have a lot of abilities, and given time I can find things out or make objects of power. If I can help in the training, so much the better. After all, I have your skill at air bending, having two teachers providing a different perspective can’t be bad, right? I can see energy flow and do other things you can’t. That might help. If Korra can become more powerful before the shadow avatar makes a move, she should. You all should. Training time, I don’t think, would ever be wasteful.”

“If you can figure out why I’ve never been able to air bend I’ll kiss you!” Korra promised.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” Tenzin harrumphed.

“Exactly,” Lin put in. “You have to clean up this courtyard.”

The group looked over the torn up ground, and Lysanias winced. “Sorry about that. I’m not going to be much help there. I’m wiped out. I sense you all still have more energy than I usually start with, which is somehow totally unfair, but my reserves are all but gone.”

“I see,” she said icily. “I guess Korra and myself can-”

“Wait a second, I’m an idiot!” Lysanias remembered, bonking himself in the head with his palm.

“Oh really?” Lin asked, as if such a statement could never be true, but hoping beyond hope it was.

“I can call on my spirit. Don’t ask me how, but it has energy apart from me, and it won’t be wiped out. It’s as good an earth bender as I am, so it can help. Give me a second.”

Mountain spirit, do you mind helping putting this area back to normal?

There was no answer.

Mountain spirit, hear me and know my need.

I hear you. I’ll come and help, it’s fine.

The mountain spirit appeared, making them jump back a little, but they got to work dragging the stones back and smoothing the ground over.

“I still can’t believe you got the best of us,” Korra told him while he stood near his spirit that was doing all the work.

He shook his head. “I managed to hit you all once, or trick you, in the case of Tenzin. I couldn’t have actually taken you in a real fight. Like I said, I’m wiped out. And that combat was what, ten seconds? That’s awful. I need to increase my endurance or find more efficient ways of fighting. I suppose I could have grabbed onto a chunk of earth and just kept swinging it around. It only takes spiritual effort to begin control of the substance, not keep control. But I

wanted to show I could do anything you all could do, so I kept switching it up. How do you have so much energy though?"

"I've been training all my life," she replied simply. "Lin is chief of police, she's in top shape. And Tenzin is the only air bender of his generation. He trains a lot too I expect, because of the pressures on him."

"I see. You mentioned that, the war that left the previous avatar frozen for a hundred years, and got the air benders wiped out."

"I think you would have gotten along with Aang. He could have used your insights about having the world pass you by."

"Yeah, that was tough. To lose everything you ever knew in the blink of an eye. You don't realize how fast things change when you're in the middle of them, I guess." *Would it really have been the same? A hundred years vs many thousands? Civilization rose and fell while I slept. His world kept turning as it had for the time he was out of it. Strange the parallels in our lives though.*

"I guess."

There was one more thing we had in common. Needing to make sure our type of power isn't lost. So I would understand him on that level too. Oh, there are other progenitors, and if Esta can wear Xerxis down maybe there will be one more in a couple of months, that world's time. He smiled to himself. But imagine if I had been the absolute last of my kind? Would I have simply completed the Allfather's work and swore never to have kids, or spit in His eye and wander the world having as many kids as I could? I guess we'll never know, now, though I do plan to go back, one day.

"That's good enough," Lin finally said when the courtyard was put back to some semblance of order. "Thanks for your help."

"Of course." The mountain spirit faded, leaving the group as three again.

"We have plenty of space on air temple island," Tenzin told Lysanias. "You're welcome to come stay with us. You have no place else, correct?"

"I've never even seen outside these walls," he agreed with a laugh. "Thank you. I'll be more helpful once I've had a chance to recover. Is gold valuable around here? Pick an object at random and I'll turn it into solid gold for you."

"Ah, that won't be necessary. Though it would be interesting to see- no. You're our guest, the least we can do is offer you hospitality if you're going to help save our entire world."

Wow, someone that gets it! Who doesn't want to throw me in prison become of it!

"Thank you very much. I do appreciate it, and if I can help in *any* way, please don't hesitate to ask." *Speaking of prison...* "By the way, can I get my stuff back?"

"Come with me," Lin answered. "Oh, and your polar bear dog has been taken care of Korra, you can meet him at the front gate."

Her what?

"Thanks, Lin!"

"That's 'thanks, chief Beifong,'" she snapped.

"Oh, sorry, I mean, thanks, chief Beifong."

"That's better. Come on."

Huh, hard like stone.

"We'll have to hold a press briefing," Tenzin told Korra as Lysanias looked his stuff over to make sure it was all there. "Your being here will need to be made public. They'll probably have a million questions. I'll set it up for this afternoon, may as well get it over with. Then we can head to the island, get you settled, and maybe have time for your first lesson today. The kids will want to play, they'll be underfoot so I expect anything we do to take twice as long." He said this with a certain amount of fondness, not regret.

Korra grinned, obviously happy. "That would be great, Tenzin. Thank you for letting me stay."

"I couldn't very well turn you away at this point, now could I? Come on, I'll give you both a tour of the city and council building in the meantime."

"If anyone asks, what should I tell them I am? No one will have ever seen me before,

won't it be odd some random stranger is hanging around the avatar?" He looked down at himself, dressed very differently than any of these people.

"Good point. Saying you're a bodyguard is a bit of a stretch, I'm sure Korra here would say something like 'I don't need one.'"

"I would."

"We could get you a white lotus uniform later, then no one would question your presence. For now let's just hope no one does question it."

"I could become invisible, if that would help."

"Really? No, then you might pop out if something were to happen, raising even more questions. Let people see you hanging around, that way they can accept you're with me."

"Fair enough."

So after the tour, and some lunch, Korra fumbled her way through a short "I'm the avatar" meeting with the press. Lysanias, Lin, and Tenzin were all there, Lysanias amazed at the crowd and the city in equal measure. Walking to the council building he saw huge buildings, cars, trolleys, and people of every size and description. Even now, people stood in a huge crowd, with flash bulbs going off and Korra speaking into a microphone to amplify her voice.

But only people. How odd, you think that with no demons or dragons or whatever to stir up trouble these people would have been more united throughout history. I understand what could divide dwarves and elves, one was angelic, the other demonic. These are all just humans, they all came from the same place. But according to Korra, there's been just as many wars here as on my world. For what? Resources? Couldn't be, look at how much metal was used to construct all these buildings! They basically throw it everywhere, can these places really be full of people? I guess. He looked around, marveling at the number of people on the streets, and the cars going past. I can recognize those from the rotting frames the alchemists had. Is that what they're supposed to look like? Wild. And all this without magic. Just a certain percentage of the population able to control a single element. I wonder how high that percentage is? What are those flashes- oh, wait, that's pictures, right? Yitrus said her flash wasn't adequate, or was that her lens? Right, the flash didn't 'flatter her lines' or something like that. Anyway, they must be taking pictures. If I went far underground and took Yitrus up on the offer to tour her city, is it something like this I would see? Wish I could take some pictures to bring back to show her. That people can create great things, when their planet isn't getting destroyed again and again. Thanks, Allfather!

The group, minus Lin who said she was getting back to work, boarded a small boat to take them to the island.

"You're central to the upcoming conflict too," Lysanias reminded Lin before they parted. "I hope we can count on you, and the police force, when we need you."

"I'll protect this city," she assured him. "Everything else, well, that's the avatar's job isn't it?"

"I'll do my best," Korra exclaimed, no doubt trying to win her over. "But I'm sure there's a lot I can learn from you too, chief!"

Lin just "Ha"ed and went back inside.

"She's going to be a tough nut to crack," Korra announced sadly.

You can say that again.

The three were met by three kids dropping out of the sky holding onto odd glider things, and crowded around hugging Korra. There were two girls and one boy, the boy being the youngest, and all three were dressed like Tenzin, primarily yellow with a red top. The girls had their hair up in a bun, while the boy was bald like his father.

"Are you staying?" the middle girl asked, and her face lit up as she got her answer.

"I'm here to stay!" Korra announced, making all three kids dance from foot to foot in excitement.

Popular person.

"Who's that, dad?" asked the boy, pointing to Lysanias.

"He'll be staying with us for the time being," Tenzin told them. "Everyone, this is Lysanias, a traveler from very far away. Lysanias, my I present my children? My eldest, Jinora,"

"Nice to meet you."

"...Ikki,"

"Hi there!"

"...and my youngest, Meelo."

"You have funny clothes!"

"Mello, be polite!"

"I was!"

"Nice to meet you all," Lysanias said, bending down to look him in the eye. "And you're right, I do have funny clothes, not a style I've seen around here at all."

"Your eyes are red, are you sick?"

He shook his head. "My eyes were an apology from a trickster spirit. They're very special."

The other kids crowded around to look at him.

"Are you a bender?" asked Ikki.

He looked to Tenzin, who nodded. "I won't keep it secret from the people around here, it will cause less problems later. Those not on the island, yes, try to stick to just one element and no out of world abilities, if possible."

"Agreed. In that case..." Lysanias straightened up, then sent a plume of water into the air, as they were right there on the dock. The kids nodded, figuring he was a water bender, but he froze the spike upright and tossed an arrow-spear at it, smashing through the top part. With a flourish he brought it back, spinning it around on his hand and putting it away again. Then, quick as a wink he shot fire at the spike, and then twisted to shatter it with air bending. The kid's eyes were twice as wide.

"No. Way!" Mello finally said. "Do it again!"

"That's impossible, there can't be *two* avatars," Jinora insisted. "Dad, what's going on?" She looked nervous, and took a step back.

"Lysanias is... special," Tenzin told them. "It's all right, he's not a second avatar, he's just something else. He can tell you his story later if you want."

"I want to hear it now!" Meelo insisted.

"Later."

"Aw!"

"Now come along. We'll find a room for our guests, let Korra get changed, find your mother, and you three can help me start Korra's training."

"Yay!" Ikki was jumping with excitement, but Jinora just looked suspicious at Lysanias.

Shall I guess what you're thinking, little one?

"I mean no harm to you, or your brothers and sisters," he told her, dropping to one knee before her. "You see this?" He showed her his shield, still held in his left hand. "This represents me. I carry the spirit of the mountain with me, just as it is pictured here, and I am the shield. No matter what happens now, I will do everything in my power to keep you and your family safe. I hope we can be friends."

"You'll tell me how you were able to do that?"

"If you want."

"I won't accept you until then," she said with finality. "I don't like secrets."

"Neither do I. Tonight then, after the training with Korra is done."

"Fine. But I'll be watching you."

"Good. As the eldest you have to keep your siblings safe. I would expect nothing less. Decide for yourself, but don't write me off just because I can do something you don't yet understand. Okay?"

She seemed slightly mollified, and Lysanias got up again.

"This way. Jinora, Ikki, why not show Korra to the girl's side of the island, and Meelo and I will take Lysanias. We can all meet at the training grounds."

Both girls grabbed one of Korra's hands and started dragging her off, asking her a million questions. "This way," Tenzin told him, and headed in the other direction with his son

and Lysanias.

On the way he showed them where he should go when he was ready, and gave him a sparsely decorated room to stay. "You can leave your stuff here," he said. "Think you can find your way to the training ground?"

"It's not far, it should be fine."

"Very well. I'm going to find my wife. I'll see you shortly."

"Thank you again, you've been most kind." *This door opens and closes from both sides, after all.*

"Given what you can do... personally, I don't know if what you were saying was true before. Maybe you were exhausted, maybe not. Maybe you were holding back to not seriously hurt us, and maybe not. But I'll be watching you too. Make any move to harm my family, and I will defend them with my life. My daughter had the right idea, though expressed in a very childlike manner. You are not in my confidence yet."

"You have nothing to worry about from me. I'd be happy to include you in my lessons for Korra. You should be able to sense spiritual energy too. You all should. Then you can feel for yourself I'm telling the truth. You saw my mountain spirit, would the avatar of the mountains themselves allow me to call upon it if I had impure intentions?"

"I have no idea," he admitted. "You have a sword, those arrow things, a shield, powers you haven't shown us, mastered the elements overnight, and appeared in a closed room with a dire warning of worse than you to come. I'm letting you stay here as much to keep an eye on you as hope you're telling the truth, that you do just want to help us. How can I let you just traipse off into the world with unknown intentions? For all I know you're this shadow avatar and are just studying us. I want to believe you, and I'll extend every courtesy, until and unless you turn on us."

"I appreciate your honesty, I know it's a very odd situation you've found yourself in. But what I said before, I meant it." He tapped his shield. "I made this to avoid having to cut down a dozen people that were fighting us against their will. It has a property I can demonstrate later. I am the shield, for this world and all those on it."

"I hope that's true. Come find us when you're ready."

"I will."

With that, Lysanias was left alone. He looked around the room, not really wanting to leave anything here, but recognizing he couldn't exactly carry his stuff around. He looked even more out of place with this shield on his arm. Luckily he had a solution in mind already. Dumping his chest out of the contain ward it was currently in he grabbed a chunk of metal and reshaped it into a metal bracer with some slots. He changed the material of the top to be glass, so he could see the wards we has about to put inside, and put his sword and shield into contain wards. He then carefully stuffed them into the slots and looked his work over. *Don would not approve of the crudeness, but for now it's good enough to have them handy, should I need them. Inari said I could learn to 'store' things as though in a pocket dimension once I had traveled to a few worlds, once that happens I won't need this. But this is at least a little more discreet. I saw that Korra was wearing some sort of arm bands, I could cover it up if they don't think it's discreet enough.* He left the stone arrow-spears, checked his appearance in the mirror and leaving the trunk behind, went to go see this training ground close up.

He came to an area on a hill with many large, wooden gates that were gently moving back and forth in the breeze, and he didn't have to wait long for the others to join him.

"What is that?" Korra asked, somewhat disgusted. She was wearing the same rather ridiculous outfit as the other air benders, giving Lysanias pause.

She's training air bending, right? But that outfit covers every inch of her skin. I learned the skill the easy way, but it still seems to me covering your whole body with multiple layers of fabric is not conducive to learning the element which is already all around you. But I guess we'll see what he has her do.

And so Korra's air bending training began.

Chapter 5

Training Montage

When: No time has passed

Where: Training ground

Jinora explained the purpose of the gates was to weave through without touching them, and Ikki added that you had to do it while the gates were spinning. Lysanias was somewhat puzzled, this didn't seem like the kind of exercise his knowledge of bending suggested would be the best. Plus, there were a dozen slabs of wood there, he doubted he could get through them without touching any.

His surprise increased when Jinora got through them perfectly.

Huh.

"Want to give it a try?" Tenzin asked her.

"Let's do this!" Korra agreed, and ran smack into the first gate.

And the second.

And the third.

And the fourth.

And so on.

She was spat out the place she went in, and knocked on her butt.

"Ow."

I think Korra is the "charge straight through your problems" type of person. "That looked painful," Lysanias told her. "Are you okay?"

"Why are there three of you?" she asked, looking over at him. "Oh, wait, that's better."

"Charging straight in isn't going to get you anywhere," chided Tenzin. "Did you hear nothing of what I said? Spiral movements, and flowing steps."

"Why don't you try it?" she told Lysanias, getting up again.

"Maybe, maybe I will," Lysanias considered. "Jinora, would you be so kind as to show me what you did again?"

"I guess," she replied suspiciously.

"You aren't thinking of cheating, are you?" Korra demanded.

"Understanding isn't cheating. Besides, I'll be blind for an hour at least this way. But maybe I can offer some tips, in the meantime. I'll understand what she did, even if I can't duplicate it until later."

"Am I doing it again or not?" Jinora asked.

"Let me go over there, and then you can go through." Lysanias pointed to the side of the gates, and went over there. Activating his eyes Tenzin started them spinning again and she zigzagged her way through.

Astonishing, she's really doing something totally different than I usually am. In combat when I dodge I'm basically just trying to avoid something. She's almost anticipating the motion of the gates and just not being there by the time they swing around.

As she hopped out of the other side Lysanias' eyes closed, and he went back to relying on his other senses to tell where people were. *Of course, no earth bending senses at the moment because I have my shoes back on.*

"Well?" Korra asked.

"It's difficult to explain. She's actually dodging them."

"Of course she's dodging them, tell me something I can use!"

"I wasn't done. She's dodging them before they reach her. Like she's reading the gates and responding to where they will be, rather than where they are. I understand it now, but how do I describe something her muscles are doing on an almost unconscious level? I mean there's no way she can be keeping track of all those spinning objects in her head at once.

She's put a series of moments into her muscles and is just playing them back to wind her way though."

"So I have to get smacked a bunch of times until I don't get smacked anymore?"

"I wonder. Tenzin, don't you think it's a little much, asking Korra to start with all the gates spinning? Why not let her go through a few times with them still? Then just spin a few of them. Then spin them faster. Then do all of them. You say this is a teaching tool but it seems more like something you would ask a master to do."

"I suppose it wouldn't hurt," he allowed. "They should be still in a moment, try going through them then, Korra."

"Got it."

Korra had trouble getting through the gates even still, Lysanias felt her frustration from where he was standing. She would make it through two or three, bump one, get frustrated, lose focus, bump another, and it was all downhill from there. He had taken his shoes off again, leaving them out of the way so he could "see" with earth bending again.

"This isn't working either," she complained, "can we try something else?"

"This is a fairly simple exercise," Tenzin told her.

"Are you saying I'm stupid?"

"No, I'm not saying that at all," he quickly replied. "Just that you shouldn't give up so easily."

"Maybe there's another exercise I could try for the moment, and come back to this one?"

"I'm not sure-"

Lysanias held up a hand. "That might be for the best. Tenzin, you can't feel it but I can. Korra is *extremely* upset right now. I don't think further repetition here will accomplish anything."

"What do you suggest?" he snapped.

"I think we need to explore the very basics of what it means to bend the air. First she needs to lose all those clothes she's wearing. You say to be 'like the leaf' but I don't think she could feel a gale force wind wearing all that. And this hill is nice, but there's a higher spot we could go to. My advice is, Korra, go back to your room and take off as many clothes as you're comfortable with losing. I think there must be a way up to the roof of that tower over there," he pointed, hoping that was the right direction, "I'm heading there now. Meet me up there and we can try a few things."

"That would be highly improper!" Tenzin complained.

"Now I really want to do it!"

"Naked party!" Meelo shouted, about to rip his clothes off.

"Not you, Mello," chided his father. "You already know how to air bend. Korra, why not try the gates one more time?"

"Aw!" he put his shirt down.

"I don't know, he's making sense, Tenzin. This getup, I mean you're an air bender but you have that huge cape on. It doesn't make a lot of sense."

"You can't parade around the island half naked! It's indecent."

What if she's completely naked? Is only being half naked a problem?

"Oh, poo. We'll be up on the tower, who can see us? And Lysanias is blind at the moment. I'd like to see what he has in mind up there."

"Fine. If you think a person that's known air bending for a day will make a better air bending teacher than someone who's been a bender their entire life, go see what he has to say!" He stormed off, muttering to himself. *Now I feel his frustration too.*

"I didn't mean to make him angry," Lysanias apologized. "I just think you aren't getting anything out of this."

"I'm not. He'll be fine. The tower, right?"

"I'll meet you there."

"Sorry kids, guess I won't be air bending on my first day. But who knows?"

"At least it'll be easy to push him off if he tries anything," Jinora allowed. "Honestly, take your clothes off?"

"I'm blind!" He waved a hand in front of his face. "Look!" He forced his eyes open and felt Jinora coming over to him.

"Hey, your eyes are totally white now. How did that happen?"

"When I use my eyes to see how someone does something they overload and won't work for a while afterwards," he explained. "I know where things are with earth bending, and if they're a person if they have energy inside them, but that's it. I couldn't tell you were wearing clothes at the moment."

"Humph, I'll bet. Give him a good shove," she said to Korra as the kids ran down the hill.

He closed his eyes with a shake of his head.

Moments later he felt Korra joining him on the roof, and looking around. He felt her put something down, probably her clothes.

"Looks different from here," she told him, walking over carefully. The roof of the place was fairly sloped, but they weren't going to be doing any martial arts up there.

"Looks about the same to me at the moment, so I'll take your word for it."

"Ha ha."

"Clothes off? Are you going to make me check?" He made a grabbing motion.

"Most of them, what are we doing up here, anyway?"

"Bending, hopefully. You'll see I've brought some rocks and I found a bucket, which I've filled with water. But let's talk first. Have a seat." He patted the space next to him and she sat down. "Now, bending, am I right? What's it all about?"

"What do you mean?"

"I mean, you control something from a distance, how amazing is that, anyway?"

"Pretty much the best thing ever!"

"I agree. But what are you really *doing* when you do it?"

"I don't know."

"Then that's our first step. What if you wanted to fire bend right now? What would you do?"

"Fire bending is in the breath. I would take a deep breath and will the fire forth."

"And water?"

"That's in the back and forth motion you do."

"But there's another component, isn't there? You're reaching out with your spiritual energy and giving a semblance of life to something. But it goes even further than that." He waved a hand and water jumped up out of the bucket, hovering in midair. "Take this ball of water, for instance. It's just floating there, it's not connected to the water in the bucket. I don't need to have a source of water it's connected to on the ground. My energy alone is holding it up."

"I suppose."

"But what is my energy? Here, take it." Lysanias released control and Korra took it, making it float still. "Close your eyes, but keep the water up there."

"Okay."

"You can't feel it, or maybe you can and you just never thought about it, but there's a line from you to the water right now. But what 'you' is that line coming from? Your connection to water. If you got cut, you would bleed, right? You're full of water. So bending isn't just willing something to move, it's connecting that thing with yourself, and then moving yourself. That moves the element. See if you can feel that connection, the line of energy moving from yourself to that ball of water."

The pair was silent a moment.

"I don't think I can."

"That's okay. Put it back and try the stone."

The stone lifted after Korra put the water back. "Now the stone is the same way. Is there not earth inside us? We eat the plants of the earth, we eat the animals that eat the plants of the earth. When we die we go into the earth. We become earth. It sustains us, supports us. Again, we use our connection to the earth to move ourselves, after making a part of the earth a part of us. Feel it, try to feel the earth inside you and the earth outside you."

"I don't think I feel anything."

"Then put the stone down and take my hand." She did. "What do you feel?"

"Your hand?"

"I'm warm, Korra. You're warm. The fire is in us. Not only that we have emotions, we have passions. Fire bend, create fire for me, keep it in your other hand." She did. "A connection to heat, is there not fire in you, avatar?"

"There is. Too much, according to some."

"Then feeling it out should be easy."

"Easy for you to say."

I have what I need, I can feel the energy moving inside her and how it supports the element she's bending. But the true test starts now.

"Let it go and stand up." The two did, still holding hands. "Now, close your eyes. We have come to air. There is air in you too. Take a deep breath, feel it inside you. Feel the air against your skin." Lysanias started making a motion with his other hand, stirring up the air around them. "There is air all around us. Connect with it. Connect with the air inside you. It isn't something to force, you can't force the air to move. You can only move yourself. And you can only do that by making a connection with it."

"I'm trying!"

I can feel you trying. Your energy isn't moving anymore. It moves to a certain degree and then stops. Curious. "It won't happen instantly. I want you to stay up here for a time, okay? Feel the air. Be aware of your breathing. Bend the other elements. Try and feel your connection to them, that comes from yourself. If you still can't do it I have another idea why, though not what to do about it. For now, relax, breathe, feel the air." He let go of her hand and made his way to the trap door they came through. "I'll be waiting below. There's no rush."

Less than an hour later his sight returned, and he worked on replacing the contain wands he had used on the sword and shield. That done he practiced calling his spirit for a time, until Korra reappeared before him. She had her blue outfit back on, which at least left her arms free.

"I still can't do it," she told him, feeling like a failure. "There is something wrong with me."

"I was afraid of that, and no, there isn't." *Well, there could be, with what I was feeling but she doesn't need to know that.* "Tomorrow we'll head back to town. You have libraries, right?"

"Sure, of course we have libraries. What are we going to find in a book to help me?"

"Great. In the morning I'll want to do some research into a few things. Then I think I'll be able to better answer that question. I have a theory about how this bending stuff works but I don't want to get it wrong. Someone must have studied the ability, and written about it. I'm hopeful a course of action will suggest itself. The sun is getting real low, and I have no idea when people around here eat but I've seen and done a lot today and I'm starving. So hopefully soon. I'll tell the family about my abilities and about the shadow avatar, and get to bed so we can get an early start tomorrow."

So the two joined the family for dinner, at the weirdest table he had ever seen, and it turned out Tenzin's wife, Pema, was pregnant. The table didn't have chairs around it, because for some reason it was sunk into the floor.

Someone cut a big hole in the floor, did more work to panel it to make the edge look all pretty, all to save the effort of making a few chairs? It takes up the same space, they didn't save anything there. You have to put cushions down to sit on, and now it's low enough to trip over and fall into a hole rather than just bump into in the dark. Very odd. "May I?" Lysanias asked, holding his hand above her belly after their introduction.

"Eh, I suppose?" She looked to Tenzin, who just shrugged.

He touched her, and concentrated on seeing her future as it related to the child. "Your son will be born amidst great strife, but will be healthy and strong," he announced, taking his hand away.

"Oh!" her eyes widened. "Tenzin was saying you had- that you could- Thank you!"

"Of course."

"Tenzin, a son, another son!" She rubbed her belly affectionately.

"I heard, Pema."

"I get a brother!?" Meelo asked.

"That could mean anything," Jinora huffed. "But I'm going to laugh if I get a sister instead."

"We'll see," Lysanias said with a grin.

As they ate Korra told them about Lysanias' theory about bending being a form of connection to the element, and then bending yourself.

"I never thought of it that way," Tenzin admitted. "But he's right, there must be an energy that flows between what we bend and ourselves. How else would we move an object without touching it? Do you think that brings you closer to air bending?"

"I'm not sure. He said he'll keep thinking about it."

Lysanias then told them about himself, and his travels about his own world. He demonstrated alchemy by turning a rock into a chunk of gold, then making a butterfly out of it and then making the wings move with animation. The kids were enchanted, even Jinora despite her efforts to remain aloof. He showed off metal bending, which Korra couldn't even do yet (*have to see about that, maybe when air bending training gets old. She can already earth bend, it's just an extension of that*) and even went outside to teleport. His spirit was happy to come out and say hello (on the first try) and showed that it could bend too. He even made a ball of light with magic, and sent it spinning around them.

"So that's my story," he finally finished. "I agreed to become an agent of Inari, at least for now, to protect other worlds. I hope that makes you feel a little bit better about me." *Jinora.*

"And we can learn some of that stuff?" Meelo asked excitedly.

"The energy sensing, aura reading, and spending more energy, probably. Magic and the rest, I don't know. You're like gnomes back home, you move a single element. He couldn't even see my mountain spirit, but I guess you all are more in tune with the supernatural than he was." *Despite being a gnome, which is weird.* "I guess you won't know until you try."

"Can we try, dad, huh, can we?" asked Ikki.

"It's fine with me. None of that is dangerous, is it?"

He shook his head. "The energy stuff? No, it's mainly just feeling things out, and you'll go unconscious before you took serious harm trying to spend your own energy. I mean if you did a thousand push-ups you would collapse, right? It's just like doing all thousands push-ups at once."

"And the rest?"

"I would say why don't you try some of the other things first, and if you can learn them, you can decide if you want to teach what you can do to your kids. When they're ready."

"An excellent suggestion! Kids, get to bed, it's past time anyway."

"Awww!"

"Don't awww me, I let you stay up to hear the story, didn't I?"

"Who gets the butterfly?" Jinora asked, who had been the most enchanted with it. She was currently gripping it, the wings long stopped moving.

"I can make more," Lysanias told them. "Tomorrow you can tell me about your favorite animal and I'll make you each one. How about that?"

"Would you?" asked Ikki.

"Sure, something that small is easy!"

"What do you say, kids?"

"Thank you!" they chorused, and ran to get ready for bed. Lysanias smiled.

"You're good with them," Pema told him. "I didn't think you had kids, from your story."

"I don't. I'm good with them because I'm still a kid myself, basically. I went to sleep not much older than Jinora is now. I may look like a man, but I'm still a kid at heart."

"Who isn't?" she asked, pinching Tenzin's cheek.

"Anyway, what's on the agenda for tomorrow?" Korra asked.

"I thought we might try a meditation exercise tomorrow. After the, uh, as you were

having some trouble with the gates-

"After my failure, you mean?" she asked.

"You haven't failed, you just haven't succeeded yet."

"Very wise dear," Pema told him with a chuckle.

"Anyway, I thought perhaps meditation... why? What did you have in mind?"

"A library."

"A what?"

"Lysanias?"

"I'm hoping to find some books on bending. Bending in general. People must have studied it. And written about their findings. I'm looking to see if some things I was sensing while Korra was bending earlier fit with what people here know about. I think there may be a way to clear this 'block' Korra has relating to air bending. But it would take an out of world ability, so I want to be sure it isn't harmful first."

"I should hope so!"

"I use it, when teleporting mostly, it's not directly harmful. But the thing I have in mind, well, I want to learn more about bending before I suggest it. And maybe I'll find some other techniques to try, too."

"I see. I have to go into work anyway, you can come with me and I can pick you up on my way back." He shook his head, not believing they were having this conversation. "Korra in a library? Maybe you are a good influence after all."

In this chapter, Lysanias put a 5 in the skill *Evasion* from the main rules by watching Jinora.

Chapter 6

The Answers are Within

When: Day 3 in the world of the avatar

Where: A boat to the mainland

"Thanks so much for accompanying us," Korra said sarcastically. "I'm sure I couldn't have walked to the nearest library without you." Her polar bear dog, a white creature that stood as tall as her, sat nearby in the boat. Lysanias felt a strange energy about him, somehow connecting him to Korra, and had accepted him easily enough when they had met the day before. His name was Naga, which had given Lysanias pause.

A naga, if I remember what Everest was telling me once about demons, is a half person, half snake creature. I seemed to recall a heavenly creature by that description, but he only knew about demons. Strange to see a creature here named after a demon on my world. Does it mean anything?

"I'm going to work," Tenzin reminded her. "You know, a job? Where you go all day and people pay you to be there? I've had some sudden debts come up because of... wait, who was it again that smashed up a whole city block? I remember reading in the paper about that, who could that have been?"

"Okay, okay! You want me to take a waitressing job or something? I'm the avatar! People should just give me money for keeping the world in balance."

"That's a preposterous idea!"

"I was joking, Tenzin. Come to think of it, how does the avatar make a living? It's not like I have marketable skills or anything. A nine to five? The avatar having a case of the Mondays? That can't be right."

"Don't worry about that for now. Just go to the library and stay there. I'll come get you a few hours after lunch."

"Your kids will be joining us?" Lysanias asked. "But there's only the one boat." He looked back towards the island, and yes, this was the only boat. *I suppose it could go back and forth, but that seems a bit wasteful.*

"They can make it on their own, with their gliders. We'll meet at the dock and find someplace with... what did you call it?"

"A high concentration of ley lines. I see a lot of forested area outside the city. There, that should be perfect." He pointed to the right, towards a hill covered with trees. The city was basically in the shadow of several mountains, and there was a lot of green far in the distance. Not so much in the city proper, but the rightmost part of the city was built around a mountain itself, probably full of tunnels to get people from one side to the other. But atop it were plenty of trees, he could see that even from here.

"Yes, that. You'll be all right there most of the day?"

"I'm sure even a day wouldn't be enough for me," Lysanias admitted. "I'd love to see what stories you guys have written over the years. And your history is probably fascinating as well. Even if we found an answer right away, which I doubt, there would be plenty to hold my interest."

"Yeah, great, books. I'll probably fall asleep in a chair someplace!"

"At least you would stay out of trouble that way," Tenzin grumbled.

"What was that?"

"Nothing! And you say you can get in touch with me, as long as you know roughly which direction I'm in?"

"That's right. Lead us to the library and point out which direction the council building is in. You won't be able to reply, of course, but if you hear a voice in your head that isn't yours? It's mine."

"I understand. Astonishing."

As they walked through the busy streets Lysanias again marveled at the immensity of the buildings and the noise of the city. Cars zipped to and fro on the streets, people rushed to destinations only they knew or cared about, and everywhere was metal, stone, glass. *How much of the earth has been clawed out to build all of this? And how much more remains? I*

wonder how much bigger their world is than ours. But I don't have a map of mine and even having one, would that even show the relative size?

"Stay put," Tenzin ordered, leaving them at the front of the library. "Do you want some money for lunch?" He reached into a pocket.

"I'll just eat magical food," Korra told him, holding up a hand. "If you don't mind, Lysanias?"

He shook his head. "It's fine, no trouble at all. As long as we can find a quiet spot, anyway."

"It's a library!"

"True."

"Very well. I hope your research is fruitful."

"See you later."

"Bye!"

"Honestly, it was like he was commanding Naga here to stay. I'm not a polar bear dog!" Korra complained after he was out of earshot.

"What are we going to do with him, by the way?" Lysanias asked, looking up at the beast. "I doubt he'll be welcome in the library."

"He'll be good. He can wait outside. He won't wander off. Will you, Naga? No you won't you're a good polar bear dog!" She had their heads together and was nuzzling him.

"Okay, I'll take your word for it. As for Tenzin, it'll take a little while for you to get into his good graces again. What exactly did you do when you first got here?" *In other words, how much did you cost him? That will determine how long it takes.*

"Can't talk about it, we have books to look at, or whatever!" Korra made for the door, commanding Naga to sit. "Come on, we don't have all day."

"See you, Naga."

"Woof."

A woman with glasses, shoulder length hair and a white outfit watched the two come in, and Lysanias nodded his head in greeting. *Look at all these books! They must have printing presses going day and night to produce all of these. Or do they have something better? They must, look at them all. The paper alone would have cost a fortune on my world, they must have better ways of making it, too. There's so much I could bring back, but right now I'm here for one purpose.* "Go ask her if there are books on bending," Lysanias prodded, having walked past her.

"You ask her. This was your idea."

"I can't just go over there and ask her!"

"Of course you can. She's a public servant or something. It's her job, you know," Korra took on a patronizing tone and deepened her voice, "this is the place someone pays her to be?"

Lysanias snorted. "Look, you're the avatar, go ask her."

"You're not shy or something, are you?"

"What? No, I just think-

"You are! You totally are! You beat three benders in combat but you can't go talk to that lady?"

Lysanias felt his face heating. "I don't know what to say, is all. I'm just not good at this sort of thing."

"Use your special eyes then," she said with a laugh, going over to her.

I'm not sure that would work.

"Hi!" Korra said brightly. "I was wondering if you had any books on bending." She glanced back at him like "was that really so hard?"

"All kinds," the librarian replied. "Was there something specific you wanted to learn? History? Actual bending forms? Theories about other types of bending yet to be discovered? The anti-bending movement? Chi-blocking? Stop me any time!"

"Gee, I'm not exactly sure. Perhaps my *good friend* Lysanias might come over here and tell *me* exactly what we're looking for?"

"Hi," Lysanias managed, looking down. *Oh my goodness I'm bad at this. Don was right, I do need to practice talking to people. It's fine when I'm in a group, or when I surprise someone in a prison and have to talk to them, but this is totally different. Plus I am thousands of years old, not fourteen. I'm taller than she is, for Pete's sake. Who is Pete, anyway? Where did that saying come from?*

"Hello!" the lady said brightly. "Lysanias? That's an odd name. I love your eyes, I've never seen red eyes before, but I've read it's possible."

Korra nudged him.

What, is she a female version of Everest? But of course she does work in a place with what looks like thousands of books. "Thanks."

"Books?" Korra reminded him.

"Right, books! On beding- bending! Elemental bending. Actually, I was hoping there might have been studies on people who could bend, but had maybe some kind of accident and then they couldn't anymore? Or say I wanted to stop someone bending? Can that even be accomplished?"

"I thought we were trying to-"

Korra was interrupted by a nearby chair being pushed back, and a very tall, very wide man angrily got up and marched over to them. He planted himself in front of Lysanias and glared at him.

"Er, can I help you?"

"You some kinda Amon follower?" he demanded.

"A what?"

"No!" Korra insisted.

"I'm talking to this guy right now, *girl*. Don't make me ask again."

"I don't know what you're asking!"

"I think you do. I knew his followers were dumb, but asking around a library for books on chi-blocking? That's got to be a new low."

"Look, *friend*," Korra somewhat angrily broke in. "Do you really think *the avatar* would be anti-bender?"

He barked a laugh. "You've gotta be kidding me. You? The ava- wait, you aren't, are you?"

She held up a hand and a tongue of flame balanced there.

"That doesn't prove-"

She looked around, spotting a potted plant, and went into a low stance, then brought her hands up. The dirt, plant and all, popped out and hovered there.

"How about that? Does that prove it?"

"Sir, I'm going to have to ask you to leave," the librarian said, finally able to get a word in edgewise.

"Fine, I'm going. But you two better be careful. If you're not who you say you are..." He left the threat hanging there like the plant and stomped out.

Lysanias let out a breath as Korra put the plant back.

"Honestly, the nerve of that guy," she said. "Didn't realize the library could be so exciting. I should come here more often. Anyway, books?"

"You really are the avatar?" the librarian asked.

"That's me, in the flesh!"

She looked between the two. "I'm confused. Why do you need books on- oh!" Her eyes widened. "You're trying to learn how to fight chi-blockers! Of course! I can get you what you need. We keep them under lock and key now because of all the, uh, negative sentiment now. But knowledge shouldn't be kept from anyone looking to learn. I doubt you'll run off or deface them, just let me get them." She came from around the desk and headed to the back.

"Maybe you better tell me more about this anti-bending movement," Lysanias suggested. "There seems to be some strong feelings about it. Could be a clue to the current identity of the shadow avatar."

"I've been kept pretty far from events in the world," Korra admitted. "But you're right, I think we could both do well by looking more into this."

With the books in hand the librarian took them into a side room with a door, and gently set the stack down. "I got you books on the origins of chi-blocking and a book on studies done on benders that lost their bending. I hope they'll help. If you need more or different subjects let me know, I'll be around all day."

"Thanks," Lysanias said gratefully.

"Sure. Happy hunting!" She left and closed the door.

"So why this?" Korra asked, pulling the pile apart. "I need to know how to air bend, not how to stop bending the other elements."

"But we don't know how to make you air bend," Lysanias reminded her. "So we need to take the problem from the other side. How could I stop you from bending? Maybe there is the clue to reversing that process, and letting you bend air. Are there diseases that do it? Have people been injured, hit in the head maybe or had a sword run through them and they couldn't bend anymore?"

"We're really looking for a physical cause?"

"What else could it be?" he asked, taking the books and spreading them out on the table. "Mental block? You want to air bend, it couldn't be that. Unless there was some trauma you had as a child after you air bended... air bent... what is the right- anyway. Some trauma around air bending and you blocked yourself."

"Not that I recall."

But would you, though? "Anyway, we start here."

"Reading, huh?"

"In a few minutes. I'm going to ask the universe which book holds the best chance of getting you past this block. Then we'll look it over, and go from there."

"You are a handy guy to have around!"

"Naturally."

So Lysanias closed his eyes and threw the first question he had asked here into the universe. *If there is a being that can answer me, please, I need your help. What book, of those before me, holds the best chance of getting Korra past her block around air bending?*

There was no answer.

Spirit or God of this world, please hear me. Show me the book among these that can help the avatar become complete, and air bend as she desires.

Again, there was no answer.

I implore the well of knowledge and the books themselves- reveal to me what book I need to begin my cure for Korra's condition of being an incomplete avatar.

The universe was silent.

"Okay, time to cheat," Lysanias announced, opening his eyes again. Korra was standing there, looking bored. "A half hour gone, and no closer. This is stupid, I should have just done this in the first place."

"Why didn't you?"

"I don't want it to be a crutch. I wanted to honestly ask this world without trying to force it. I did, look where it got me. So now I demand an answer. Let my skill be augmented!" Magical energy flashed around Lysanias, and he once again closed his eyes.

With greater skill I can cast a wider net. So now my question is this, oh universe: Where in this library do I find the book I need to help Korra?

In answer, Lysanias had a vision of a small spark of light beckoning him past the door of the room and into the library. He followed, drifting past his body and Korra, looking at him expectantly. Out into the shelves they floated, the tiny spark of light drawing him onward and

onward. But finally it stopped and hovered in front of a particular book, and Lysanias opened his eyes. "Come on!" He dashed from the room, trying to get there before the vision faded, and stood triumphantly in front of the book the vision had showed him. Taking it he and Korra went back into the room and cracked it open.

"This is about chakras, not bending," Korra complained, reading over his shoulder.

"Actually, I think there's a chapter on water bending and healing," he countered.

"I already know how to do those things."

"This is what my vision showed me. I'll take this one, why don't you take one of the chi-blocking ones? I'm interested in what that's all about."

"Fine." She took a book and fell into the chair, sullenly looking through it.

Sorry for asking the wrong questions. Thanks. He got the sense of a small spirit flitting away, but there was nothing there when he looked. *Odd.*

The book proved useful. Lysanias found information about the energy pathways of the body as they related to bending, and got the other books out of the way. "Look at this," he told Korra, putting it down. "This seems to confirm what I was feeling from you yesterday. Apparently people have studied the energy conduits of the body here, they've even named them. When I learned to widen my energy conduits so I could put additional spiritual energy into something, I had no idea it could be so... nuanced. Look. There's seven points of the body where energy gathers, traveling from the feet to the head. And water bender healers aren't actually healing, they're just providing energy to these "wells" so to speak so the body can heal itself."

"But what does this have to do with bending?"

"Everything, I think. Look, from the bottom up it goes earth, water, fire, *air*. It makes sense that you can do three of the four in that order because blocking your energy flow would stop you at that point. If your water chakra was blocked you could earth bend, but no more. But if fire? You would get earth and water. But check this out- they keep going. There's spirit, light and dark, then space and time. I can lighting bend, that means energizing my..." He turned back to the book, "throat chakra. Imagining going higher! Bending light itself. Or time? What would that even mean? Stopping time? Teleporting like I do now? What if my teleporting is using my crown chakra?"

"You think you're already a, what? A 'space bender?' You think I could learn to do that?"

"I don't know. But if you worked your way up..."

"Wait, this is making sense. Look at this." She got out her own book. "The basics of chi-blocking are hitting your opponent in precise areas that make them go numb. Paralyzing them, in other words temporarily stopping the energy flow inside their bodies. That's why it's called an anti-bending movement, I think they really can stop someone bending. Until it wears off, anyway."

"Wonder if I could find one? That might be an interesting technique to learn."

"Down boy. This Amon sounds like bad news, I'm sure I've seen or heard that name before, I just don't remember where. It does fit though."

"Sure. Someone studied these energy conduits, figured out where they were, and then hit somebody until they went limp. They marked the area, and pretty soon were practiced enough to hit those areas every time. Then then trained others. Boom, instant anti-bending movement."

"What I don't understand is why!" Korra wondered. "Why go against bending?"

"Why not? You can do some amazing things, any bender could. I could see some feeling that was unfair."

"I guess. I'll have to look into this, all right. That guy, whoever he was, seemed pretty upset. In the middle of a library! If that's the general sentiment- no wonder Tenzin didn't want to leave the city to train me. It's a powder keg!"

Hey, I know what that is. We used a bunch of those to blow up that-

"Say, if you have gunpowder why don't you have guns? Or do you?"

"You mean these?" Korra flexed her arms.

My goodness she has bigger muscles than I do. To be fair, she has been training all

her life. Just how strong is she? “No, I mean guns. Point and shoot. My world has them, Don was telling me about them and I was attacked by some wanderers with shotguns. You have cars, you must have guns.”

“I have no idea what you’re talking about. And what’s gunpowder? We have blasting powder, and blasting jelly I think, but not gunpowder.”

“Just a second.” Lysanias took a deep breath and gathered his courage, stepping out to find the librarian.

“Did you find what you were looking for?” she asked.

“We’re actually learning a lot, thank you. One more question though, do you have any books on guns? Or canons, I guess. Maybe history of guns? Designs?”

“I’m afraid I don’t know that... what did you say? Goons?”

“Guns!”

She shook her head. “Never heard of it.”

Lysanias stared at her. *What in the world?*

Chapter 7

Super Street Fighter II Turbo

When: After sitting down again

Where: Library “quiet” room

“So we don’t have these ‘guns’ you mentioned, what’s the big deal?” asked Korra.

“It’s just odd, that’s all. They seemed like something that didn’t require that much technical sophistication, so I figured you would have them here. I’m glad you don’t, at least we don’t have to worry about them. But you have cars and electric lamps and... what was that box that was playing music?”

“The radio?”

“Yeah, that. But no one around here ever thought of guns? Strange.”

“You think it means something?”

He shook his head. “I don’t know. But we have to be aware of any possible interference from the shadow avatar. Who knows how long it’s been around? Guns would make defeating it easier, so it might have worked to suppress the knowledge of them.”

“That’s a scary thought. What other things might someone have thought of we don’t actually have today?”

“Good question. Well, setting that aside let’s keep looking. I think we have our answer but I want to be sure.”

The pair skimmed the other books but didn’t find much else of relevance. Lysanias was interested in the history of bending and how it had been used over the years. Plus any cases of illness or injury that had resulted in a bender not being able to bend anymore, but either turned out to be quite rare.

“So what are you thinking?” Korra asked, when the last book was set aside.

“It says in the chakra book that the ‘wells’ aren’t really physical things in the body you could actually point to, but centers of where that energy could potentially be found. As such, mental or emotional state can influence them. Specifically in your case the ‘air’ chakra can be blocked by grief.”

“I’m not really all that sad about anything.”

“I don’t think it means just sadness. It means *grief*. Losing a loved one. Losing a job you love, or a pet you’ve had for years.”

“Having your car wrecked?”

“I guess. It isn’t that you’re sad about it in the here and now, it’s that you’re carrying that emotion around with you. You need to let it go in order to let the energy flow.”

“How do I do that?”

“I have no idea. Is there someone you can talk to, maybe about the events of your life when you felt loss? Someone trained in, gee I don’t know, emotional... I hesitate to say manipulation.”

“You mean like a shrink?”

“What does getting smaller have to do with it?”

“I mean a psychologist.”

“Never heard that word before. If you say so.”

“That would be just what I need. The avatar in therapy. I’d be the laughingstock of the world.”

“Or would people recognize being the avatar is a stressful thing and cut you some slack?”

“You give people way too much credit. No, the headlines, I can see the headlines.” She put her head down on the stack of books. “Avatar Goes to Therapy. I don’t know if there’s anyone I could really talk to. I doubt even Tenzin would understand. I wish I could talk to my past selves, they would understand.”

“The who now?”

“Oh, it’s something I can do. At least, other avatars could. I’m the soul of the avatar born again and again. But the identities of those avatars are still inside me. If I could enter the avatar state I could draw upon their power as well as my own, and be basically unbeatable.

But of course I can't do that either. I'm a failure as an avatar in every possible way! Hurray for Korra, the most un-avatar of all the avatars!"

And you say you are not filled with grief? What do you call this? "Now wait a second, that's no way to think. You haven't even *started* being the avatar yet, how can you claim to have failed at it? You're how old?"

"Seventeen."

"And how long will you live, if you don't get killed by a horrible curse or something?"

"Into my eighties I guess? Some avatars have lived a really long time, more than a hundred years in some cases."

"So you're only a quarter of the way through at a minimum. That's not a lot. You've got plenty of time to do avatar stuff."

She raised her head. "You think so?"

"Of course. You're just getting started, believe me."

But she didn't seem convinced, and sat in thought for a moment. "You said, before we came here, there might be a way. Do you still believe that? You found out about the emotion thing here, so you must have had another plan in mind."

He grimaced. "As I see it, you have several options."

She sat up straighter. "Don't leave me in suspense!"

He held up a finger. "One; do nothing. Give up air bending and accept your limitations." "No!"

The finger swiveled, pointing at her. "Good answer." He brought two fingers up. "Two; explore your grief. Meditate on your life and see if you've been carrying around something so long you don't even feel it's there anymore."

"Humm..."

"Three; Give up air bending *for the moment*. Try to learn sensing your environment with earth bending. Or metal bending, I've never seen you do that. The lower down chakras. If lightning really is a 'throat' chakra, I doubt you'll be able to do that either. We could try it though, if you could do that and not air bend, well, it would throw doubt on our theory. Get some more successes under your belt and simply be the avatar for a while. Let go of the past by living in the now. Take a few months and come back to it."

"Doesn't appeal. I wouldn't mind metal bending though, maybe Lin could give me some lessons."

"I have her skill, remember?" *I don't know how good a teacher I would be, of course.*

"Oh yeah! We could do that. But I want to air bend. I *should* air bend. I mastered the other elements so easily, it's like I've let down those closest to me."

"It's probably only natural you mastered the other elements quickly. If you really are the reincarnation of the last avatar, who was the reincarnation of the one before them, and so on, you don't have to learn bending. You just have to recall how to bend. And I doubt Tenzin thinks you're letting him down. That thing with the gates was bizarre, believe me. You've had a tutor for a day, even he can't expect more at this point. And anyone expecting you to have mastered air bending without a tutor would be asking way too much. You can't just wake up one day and think, 'oh, I can air bend now.' and just go at it."

"I did for the others," she protested.

"Then that was a special case, and not to be expected normally. And forth..."

"Yeah?"

"I train you to sense and use energy like I can. You widen your body's energy conduits and hope that's enough to simply smash through this block of yours. With this 'chakra' concept I think it's possible, but at the same time I don't want you to 'overflow' or 'back up' to use a water metaphor. If your conduit is blocked, trying to force energy through it could have unintended consequences. This is a technique from another world, after all, so it wouldn't have been something you thought of naturally." *And I didn't really ask Inari's take on "polluting" realities with techniques from outside them. But if they can do it, it stands to reason they would one day figure it out. How do I know she wouldn't have originally created the technique?*

"That fits me best, honestly. The gates exercise proved that."

Lysanias smirked. "You did look sort of funny, trying to simply smash your way through

again and again.”

“So glad to have amused you.”

“Now don’t be like that. Chi-blockers, if they really can stop bending, prove you can block and unblock a chakra without harm. So the risk may be minimal.”

“I wonder. Is the gates thing a metaphor though? Be like the leaf, Tenzin said. Flow around obstacles. Can I somehow flow around this one?”

“Energy is energy. I don’t know exactly how it moves through the body, but I do know one thing. When we were up on the tower I was feeling you up- out. I was feeling you *out*. Your energy was not moving when you tried to air bend. Or rather it only moved to a certain point. That’s the other reason I had for taking you up there- get away from all other sources of energy so I could get a good feeling for what you were doing. It may not be strictly ‘physical’ but don’t think your inability to air bend is something you’re doing wrong. Or a flaw in you. You may just need to get ‘unstuck’ so to speak.”

“Thanks,” Korra said gratefully. “Honestly, this is just... amazing.” She indicated the books. “Tenzin no doubt would have had me running into walls or flapping my arms like a chicken hawk until we were both crazy. You actually came up with plans of action after researching the issue. Remember when he said ‘one day it’ll just make sense’? Classic air bending, don’t confront the problem, go around it. He wasn’t confronting my problem, or letting me confront it. This is a different kind of attack than I’m used to, but we are still attacking my block. I never would have thought of this, but I’m glad you did. This gives me real hope.”

“Happy I could help. Have you made your choice then?”

“Maybe I don’t have to make the choice yet. I’ll learn your energy stuff if I can, and still do Tenzin’s weird exercises. Something has to shake air bending loose, right? If he doesn’t after a time, I’ll do it your way. If that doesn’t work, we’ll try something else. Attack the problem from all angles.”

Lysanias smiled. “That’s the spirit. And don’t be too hard on Tenzin. He thinks he knows best, and is probably eager to prove it. He did presumably train his kids, but I have no idea after how long. He could be a terrible teacher, and they learned despite him. You can’t think all the blame lies with you. Me on the other hand? I know nothing, so I question everything. Besides, I had an advantage in being able to feel and see energy. And I’ve learned a lot of techniques on my own, by a variety of teachers. That’s given me some insight at least.”

“I guess. So now what? Hang here like good little puppy cubs?”

“I wasn’t kidding when I said being here would keep me enthralled for hours. My friend Everest would be rather annoyed if I didn’t bring him back stories of libraries on other worlds. I just hope I can find a place to buy some books before I leave. I’d like to bring him back an armful, one book from every world I visit.”

“Libraries usually have worn books for sale, we could ask.”

“*You* could ask,” he clarified.

“That shyness again?” she teased.

He ignored the barb. “Besides, I don’t even know what your money looks like, how would I pay for them?”

“Oh. That is a problem. Maybe you could do something for the library, work it off.”

“I suppose I could, as long as it didn’t involve an out of world ability. Speaking of puppy cubs, why don’t we bring Naga some water and find someplace to eat lunch? I doubt they want us eating in here, and we’re supposed to stay, but maybe I can at least find a quiet spot to make some food and we can eat on the steps. My spell makes meat, if that’s what Naga eats. She can join us.”

“She’d really appreciate that, thanks for thinking of her. Come on.”

The two went back to the front desk, and the librarian looked up at their approach.

“Finding what you need?” she asked.

“Those books have been a big help,” Korra told her. “We’re going to get something to eat so we’ll be back. Can we just leave them there? As I’m pretty sure you don’t want us eating in here.”

“It is frowned upon. I’ll just go lock the door.” She started to come around the desk again.

"Another question, do you have anything we could use a bowl? I want to give my polar bear dog some water."

"You have a pet polar bear dog? How did you even train it?"

"She's my spirit animal, it wasn't hard."

"Right, I guess avatars have those, huh? She must be dying out there! Let me see what I can find."

"Thanks."

She started rooting around behind the counter.

"Why do you have such a huge animal as a pet?" Lysanias asked her.

"Not a lot of choice at the south pole," she admitted. "We found each other when I was lost in the snow one time as a young girl. We've been together ever since. Plus, she's actually pretty small. Avatar before me had a giant flying bison. Avatar before him had a dragon."

"A dragon! Those things are huge!"

"You see? Besides, she's handy to have around."

"How about this?" the librarian asked, coming up with something round and metal.

"A hubcap?" Korra asked.

"Sure!" She flipped it over and sure enough it could be used as a bowl.

"Hey, that will work! You don't mind if we borrow it, do you?"

"Not at all. It was found out front ages ago but no one ever came for it."

"Great, we'll be right back." The two left, walking down the stairs. "Now where can we get some water?"

"I can use magic for that," Lysanias told her, looking around to make sure no one was in earshot. "Cast into the thing no one would even notice the lights."

"And I suppose I could have pulled water out of the air, if anyone asked. Okay."

Water out of the air? Well, I suppose clouds are in the air, it makes sense there might be water lower down too, just not enough to form a- wait, that's what fog is, isn't it? Duh!

With Korra blocking anyone from the street seeing the light, Lysanias filled up the hubcap with a quick casting of elemental creation, then chilled it a bit with water bending. Naga gratefully started lapping the water up while four people got out of a car across the street.

Oh great, now what? Lysanias looked over, one of them was the man from earlier. Naga stopped drinking and bared her teeth, growling at the men as they approached.

"Could be trouble," he told Korra, who turned.

"You the one that claims to be the avatar?" one of the men asked.

"I am the avatar, what's it to you?" she retorted, planting herself in front of him.

"My friend here says you were asking about chi-blocking. That true?"

"Yeah, so?"

"We don't like chi-blockers."

The others agreed.

"Neither do I. But I have to learn about them to fight them, right?"

"Hey, she's got a good point," the one in the back said.

"Shut up. We don't like people looking into chi-blocking either."

"You don't like people reading books?" Lysanias asked.

"Is that the guy?" he asked, looking over at Lysanias.

"Yeah, that's him," said the guy from the library.

What? No one could know me from this world.

"See, I don't think you're the avatar at all," said the man. "I think you're a fire bender. This guy over here, I think he's the earth bender, and he bent the dirt in that pot to make it seem like you did it."

"Why would I pretend to be the avatar when I'm not?"

"To get people to fall all over themselves helping you. But we don't buy it. So we're here to teach you a lesson."

"You're the one who's going to be taught a lesson!" Korra announced, taking a martial arts stance.

Korra, what are you doing? There's four of them and two of us, plus we can't be fighting in the streets!

“We’ll see about that, get them!” cried the man, and the others took their stances as well.

Oh not good, not good at all!

Korra wasted no time, throwing a blast of fire at the guy who was in her face, arching it downward and hitting him in the leg. It wasn’t a solid hit, and he didn’t go down.

I guess we’re doing this. Wonderful. What type of bending do I choose? Water is out, there’s not much left. Fire, like Korra? But that’s energy intensive, same with air. Which I can’t use because there’s only four people in the world that can use that style, and I’m not five years old. His gaze met the hubcap, and an idea formed in his mind. *But lots of people are earth benders, just like that guy said.*

As the guy to the left of the guy Korra was shooting fire at started to move Lysanias took up the hubcap with metal bending and sent it spinning at him. It took the man in the chest who staggered back a step, grunting.

The man at the back of the group took his stance and gestured, a slab of stone rising from the ground near Lysanias. This tried to smash into him, and it somehow succeeded despite Lysanias having the skill of both Korra and Lin. He tried to smash it to pieces before it hit him but somehow missed, and it whacked him in the chest and drove him back a bit.

Great, just great. Why me? Oh, I’m holding onto the hubcap, right, that’s splitting my attention. Why can’t I do anything right?

The man nearest Lysanias also gestured and a stone tried to smack him, so this time he tried to use what he had learned from Jinora and get out of the way. This didn’t benefit him either, and the stone smashed into his leg.

What is wrong with me?

Meanwhile the guy that had been hit by the hubcap shot fire at it, maybe hoping he could hit it and shake Lysanias’ control of it. He missed totally.

Three things happened at once. Naga sprang for the person in front of his master, who was trying to shoot fire at Korra, while Lysanias reluctantly dropped the hubcap and took control of the two slabs of rock before him, intending them to slam into the two hitting him. The good guys got the better of that action, Naga knocking the man over and causing him to freak out, Korra swept a strike through the fire and dissipated it, while Lysanias scored with both pieces of rock. Both men went flying, the one taking a fairly solid impact.

Sorry!

No one was more surprised than the man that had missed the hubcap as it clattered to the ground, he thought he had done something. He hadn’t. But he wasn’t surprised about that part. He was surprised when a deluge of water came out of nowhere and tried to smack him. He jumped out of the way, making it miss by a fair margin. Korra looked over at Lysanias, who shrugged, and looked back at where that had come from. A line of water was gathering from the side of the building, and standing there was the librarian!

“Don’t you mess with the avatar!” she cried.

“That’s right, I’m the avatar, look at me! Naga, hold!”

Rather than rip the man’s throat out, Naga simply took hold of him, as he had been trained to do.

With that, Korra simply ran over to the other fire bender and punched him, a solid hit to the chest. He coughed up blood and fell over.

Is that really any way for the avatar to behave? Is that guy going to be okay?

“Brother!” cried the one earth bender, trying to get control of the rock and hurl it at Korra. Lysanias kept hold of it, making the man turn and put more effort into it. Lysanias could feel it moving towards the man as his invisible line of energy tried to tug it away from him, but his skill allowed him to compensate for the man’s greater strength.*

I suppose if he wants it so badly... Lysanias shoved it at him, aware of the other one still hovering there. Lysanias just managed to maintain control, hitting the man in the right arm.

The librarian aimed another plume of water, this time at the far man, but again it was dodged.

“Don’t like water, huh? How about fire then?” Korra taunted, throwing fire at him. This struck, and as he had already been hit by a rock earlier, he felt now was a good time to

retreat. He turned to try and stagger back to the car.

"Let him go," Lysanias called. "Look, you can still leave," he said to the one still relatively unhurt. "We're all benders here, as you can see."

"Now it's personal!" shouted the man.

Oh come on. Fine.

He called the other rock over, aiming for the man's head. While at the same time, moving the other rock just slightly so it was that one the man's attention was focused on. The rock smashed into his head and he too went down. Lysanias let the two rocks go, then looked over at the terrified man being gripped by the polar bear dog at the neck. "Are you going to give us any more trouble?" he asked.

"Nope!" the man squeaked.

"Good. Now stay there while I make sure everyone is still alive around here."

"I think this guy's hurt pretty bad," the librarian admitted. "Did you have to hit him so hard?"

"I got carried away. Do you know healing?"

"A little?"

"Bring more of that water over here, we can work together."

"Okay."

They started treatment not a moment too soon, Lysanias felt the man's life energy fading. But he soon stabilized, so he didn't have to use any healing wards or other out of universe abilities. While the girls healed him he checked the others over, and Korra said "release" to Naga, who sat back and let the man up. He touched the other two, making sure their bruises were not as severe and didn't look as bad.

"What happens to us now?" asked the man, looking the street over as Lysanias slid the blocks back into the ground.

"Good-" Then they heard the sirens, and the librarian dropped the water she was working with.

"You can take it from here, right?"

"Go on," Korra said. "And thanks for your help."

"I was a little bit of a distraction, at least. Guess I need more practice, huh? See you later?"

"See you."

She took off.

The officers arrived with two cars and arrested everybody, once Korra had healed the one man enough to wake up and ask what was going on. All the while Korra was insisting she was the avatar and had been attacked, but Lysanias found himself sitting beside her, hands handcuffed behind his back, wondering if it was just his lot in life to be some kind of cosmic whipping boy.

I'm cursed. I must be. There's no other explanation. At least I can heal myself now that the action is over. And hey, I made it through a combat without getting knocked out myself. That's progress right?

Right?

**See chapter two for a refresher, he was putting energy into STR to try and wrest control of the rock from Lysanias, who has a lower STR but a higher skill.*

Chapter 8
Friend of Water
When: After processing
Where: Local jailhouse

“So,” Lysanias said to Korra, who was sitting beside him on a bench in the holding area. “Here we are again.” The four men had been taken away to their individual cells, leaving the two alone in the large cage the police used as a temporary holding area. There was one guard near the door, and every so often another would pass by, glaring at them. Korra was slouched over, hands clasped between her legs.

“You don’t think Tenzin will be mad, do you?”

“That you’re in jail again? No, what gives you that idea? I’ve been in prison like, five times now. And I came out fine. It’s fine, everything’s fine.” *So it isn’t just my God trying to punish me or anything, I get thrown in jail in other realities too. Good to know. I’ll have to send Him an apology when I get back. Maybe a bottle of wine? Or a fruit basket? Are there fruit baskets with wine? What do you get the being that created everything in the first place?*

“Five times? I’m not sure I should hang out with such a hardened criminal such as yourself. You’re a bad influence on me!”

“Me? Who started that fight?”

“They did!”

“What I mean is, who didn’t try to resolve it peacefully?”

“They didn’t.”

Lysanias leveled a gaze at her. “Who threw the first punch?”

“Oh, uh, I can’t remember. It was probably one of them.”

“Right. Anyway, they’re probably getting Lin to come talk to us, that’s why the delay. Throwing the avatar in jail would look pretty bad for the city. They would need a *very* good reason for doing so.”

“I hope you’re right.”

“I hope Naga’s okay, he didn’t get much water.”

“They’ll take care of him. They did before.”

“Yeah.”

An hour or so later, it was hard to tell, Lin angrily marched them into a similar interrogation room with two chairs this time instead of one. Both sat down, and Lin stood tapping her foot across the table from them. *At least she isn’t insisting I be chained up. That would be futile in any case, but I wouldn’t want to press the issue.*

“One day,” she fumed. “You could only go *one day* without brawling in the streets?”

“It wasn’t our fault!” protested Korra. “They attacked us!”

“Basically making it your word against theirs.”

“The word of the avatar-”

“Doesn’t mean squat to me. What do you say happened?” She pointed to Lysainas.

“Me? Oh. Uh, we got to the library and Korra asked the librarian for books about bending. She misunderstood-”

“Why does the avatar need books on bending?”

“We’re trying to determine what the cause of Korra’s inability to air bend stems from.”

“And you went to a library?”

“Yeah. I don’t know anything about bending, just what I learned from watching you all two days ago. I got a practical instruction because of the hours of training you all put in, but that doesn’t explain the inner workings. I figured there were people who dedicated their lives to studying it, and those sorts of people usually write books. I had some theories and wanted to see if they were correct.”

“I see. Go on.”

“She misunderstood and thought we wanted books on chi-blocking, in order for Korra to fight them better. While she was talking about it, some guy comes up to us and starts saying how he doesn’t like chi-blocker talk and such. We get him to leave, well, Korra did, and I thought that would be the end of it. We looked the books over a few hours and were going to

give some water to Naga. When we stepped out of the library those four attacked us, claiming Korra was just pretending to be the avatar.”

“They learned differently!” Korra proudly exclaimed.

“You’re not helping,” Lin snapped.

“Sorry.” She dropped her eyes.

“Then officers arrived, and you probably heard the rest of the story from them.”

“I did. You see why I didn’t want you around here, Korra? This city is tense enough because of Amon’s ‘equalists’ running around. We didn’t need the avatar thrown into it. If you can’t even go into a library without being accosted, the situation is worse than I thought.”

“Then maybe you need me more than ever,” Korra retorted.

“I doubt it,” she muttered. “What am I going to do with you with you two? The avatar and the traveler from another world. There wasn’t too much property damage this time, but you were still involved in a street fight.”

“You can’t really hold me,” Lysanias told her. “Quite apart from needing to find the shadow avatar, I could just teleport out of here. I stayed to tell my side of things and because I felt you were a reasonable person. Someone’s home is broken into, you don’t lock up the victims.”

“Which you claim you are, in this case?”

“That’s-”

He was interrupted by the wall sliding open, and a man stood here. “Chief? Sorry to interrupt, but there’s an Amy here to see you. Says she has information about the fight these two were in?”

“I see. Someone you know?” Lin asked.

“Maybe?” Lysanias hedged. “The librarian came to our aid, I don’t know her name.”

“Came to your aid? Why didn’t you tell us there was another witness?”

“I didn’t want her to be involved if she didn’t want to be. She ran off when she heard the noise your cars make.”

“The siren?”

“Is that what it’s called? I thought maybe she had her own reasons for not wanting to be seen by the police.”

“So you were shielding her?”

“I suppose you could call it that.”

“Send her in,” she said to the man, who opened the door. The librarian was standing there.

“Come in, Amy.” Lysanias offered her his seat, because he’s a gentleman like that, and she thanked him. Lysanias could feel she was quite nervous, and her eyes were darting around the room. “You say you have information?”

“I just wanted to tell you these two didn’t start that fight. Those four men who came out of the car did.”

“What did you see?”

“The avatar and her friend asked me about a bowl so they could give some water to their polar bear dog. I gave them a hubcap I had hanging around the desk, and they walked out. I realized they might want to use the spigot outside the building, and ran to show them where it was. When I got outside the four were attacking the avatar and her friend.”

“Ah yes, we have that hubcap. It’s dented, someone must have been metal bending it during the fight. That was you, I assume?” Lysanias nodded. “And the men said something about a water bender joining the fight, I take it that was you?” She looked expectantly at Amy.

“Yes,” she answered quietly. “I’m sorry I ran,” she said to Korra. “Maybe if I had stuck around you wouldn’t be here now. I just got scared when I suddenly heard the sirens, and so I just started to run.”

“It’s okay,” Korra told her.

Amy clearly looked like she didn’t believe her.

“So if I let you two go,” Lin asked wearily rubbing her head, “can you at least promise me you’ll *try* to stay out of here? A week? Is that too much to ask? Can you go a week without trying to beat someone up? Or tearing up the streets of the city, or whatever other trouble you’re bound to get into that I can’t even imagine at the moment because you’re the avatar?”

"I'll try," she agreed, "but sometimes it's not easy, you know?"

"Oh, I know, I'm having a little trouble myself right now. So are you pressing charges against the men who attacked you?"

Korra looked to Lysanias, who gave a little shake of his head. "No, it's fine. They made a mistake, they learned I was the avatar the hard way. I have to wonder if an equalist did something to them, to make them so angry at the mere mention of chi-blocking. Let's not antagonize them further."

"Very well. I'll let them go in a few hours. And I won't tell Tenzin about this. *This time.*"

"You're the best, Li- chief Beifong!"

"I'm going to regret it, aren't I? Your polar bear dog will be brought to the front on your way out. You can have the hubcap back too, I suppose, as it belongs to the library until someone claims it." She headed for the door.

"Thanks!"

"I can take you back to the library, if you still want to do more research," Amy offered.

"Right now I want lunch!" Korra complained. "We never did get to eat."

"I'll treat you to lunch!" Amy told them. "Maybe in exchange for your autograph or something?"

"You sure? I'm not a very good avatar, you might not want to say you've met me."

"Of course I do, you're the avatar! Who wouldn't want to meet you? I want to hear all about you!"

"I'll head back to the library then," Lysanias told the two. "I can make my own way back, you don't need to stick around." *I can just teleport back to the room we were in. The door should be closed so it should be safe enough.*

"What are you talking about?" Amy questioned, giving him an "are you stupid?" look. "You're invited too! Obviously."

"But I'm not the avatar."

"No, but I can't help but notice your eyes. And the fact you and the avatar came in together. Are you some kind of spirit, in human form? I want to hear all about you, too."

"You wouldn't believe a word of it," he cautioned.

"Try me. Now can we get out of here, please? Not that I don't just love hanging around interrogation rooms, but..."

Now sitting at the equivalent of a fast food restaurant near the library, Lysanias' eyes were watering. He had no idea what anything on the menu really was, so he just got what Korra ordered. It turned out she liked spicy food, a little too spicy for his taste. But he was enjoying the company.

"So you can't air bend," Amy repeated seriously. "And Lysanias here, your 'adviser' is coming up with a plan to help you?"

"That's right."

"Wouldn't an air bender be a better fit?"

"I spent some time with the only air bender alive who is over the age of fifteen. He had me running into wooden gates for an hour. Didn't help."

"He had you what?"

"It was an exercise in spiral movements, I guess. I'm not really a spiral movements sort of girl."

"What kind of girl are you?"

"Smashing through things with my fists."

The girls laughed. "So how did you two meet?"

"Prison, oddly enough. He just popped right into my life."

"Is that so?"

Lysanias nodded. "E-yup."

"You're not really going to tell me anything about yourself, are you?" she reasoned, adjusting her glasses.

"Not much to tell."

"Right. You just happen to be personal friends with the avatar, and have claimed to be able to help her air bend better than the only master air bender in the world. The one who

knew avatar Aang. You know, his son.”

Wait, what? Tenzin is the previous avatar's son? Doesn't that make Korra his father? Mother? Parent person? That's got to be weird, teaching the woman that used to be your dad the thing you learned... from your dad. “It's complicated.”

“And you shouldn't get involved,” Korra agreed. “Even though you didn't hit either time, I could tell you're a decent water bender-”

“Thank you.”

“-but we're involved in some pretty dangerous stuff. You could get hurt.”

“Or I could finally have an adventure, instead of just reading about them! Don't you see, this is my chance. You came into my life, are you just going to walk away again? Like you said I'm a water bender. But what good is that in a library full of books? I helped you out, and it was amazing! I got to use my bending to help someone, and it was the avatar herself. Oh, you probably didn't *need* my help, but what if there's a time you do? Come on, don't push me away, please?”

Korra looked to Lysanias, who didn't really know what to say. *On the one hand, I doubt this librarian is the shadow avatar. On the other her life has changed now. Before, I highly doubt Korra would have gone to that library without me being here. She would have been on the island, moping around about not being able to air bend while Tenzin was at work. They would never have met, those four men wouldn't have been imprisoned, Lin wouldn't have had a second chance to yell at Korra. But here we all are. What does my being here change in a world?* “It really is dangerous,” he told her. “Are you sure you can handle that?”

“If I walk away now, I'm going to spend the rest of my life regretting it,” she said with finality. “Fighting by the avatar's side? Learning exactly who you are? I love stories, why do you think I work at a library? This is a chance to actually live one. What good am I to anyone where I work? What difference do I make in the world? None. I have enough regrets, don't make me add another.”

“What about the regret you'll have of not walking away if you die in a month because of us?”

“I won't regret actually *living* for even a month instead of just *existing* back at that library another fifty years.”

“I like her,” Korra announced.

Was her life really that bad? “But is that enough?” Lysanias asked instead. “You know what we're facing here.”

“And are we confident enough to turn away willing help? It won't be just a couple of misinformed benders next time.”

“Tell you what,” Lysanias offered after a moment. “Let's head back to the library. My story isn't to be told here. If you can accept the truth of who I am, you can take part in this. If you promise to keep training, that is.” *Because you didn't hit, and just being a distraction isn't going to be enough.*

“Of course! Whatever it takes!”

“Very well.” He pushed back his chair. “Let's go.” *I suppose a librarian could be useful, we need someone like Everest, who has read a lot of books. She might be some kind of parallel to him, and that's why she appeared before me. Who knows? Korra is right though, we shouldn't turn down assistance. Stories. Huh.*

So back at the library Lysanias showed Amy what he could do, and told her about the being he was hoping to keep this world safe from. Naturally she sat there stunned for some time.

“Still want to join us?” he asked at last.

“More than ever,” she agreed. “If I understand you some evil spirit from another realm has taken someone here over and is going to use that person to try and destroy the world so it can take its potential and improve itself?”

“Exactly.”

“So let's stop it! I live here, I don't want it destroyed.”

“But without me around, you two probably never would have met. You change your destiny now, and who knows what might happen?”

"Destiny? How do you know what I would have done? Maybe we always would have met. You can't know." She paused. "Can you?"

"I suppose I could ask, but it's pointless."

"Exactly. Whatever happens now, I'm ready. Even if I walk out of here two minutes earlier than I would have, slip on the stairs, and break my neck, at least I can say I didn't run from my chance to make a difference in the world. Maybe all the difference in the world." She stuck out her hand. "I'm Amy, glad to meet you!"

Both were happy to shake it.

Some time later Tenzin arrived, and Amy, back at the front desk, told him where to find the avatar. He opened the door, looking in the two just sitting there and silently reading.

"You're still here?" he asked, looking between them. "The building isn't on fire, there's no panic in the streets. I'm impressed."

"Yeah, pretty quiet day," Korra told him.

"Yup, didn't even leave the building," Lysanias lied. "Just stayed right here. All day."

"All day," Korra agreed. "Right here, all day. Worst, you know, worst day of my life and stuff. Boring, nothing even happened."

"She's right, nothing at all."

"When I get home, I'm calling Lin," he told them with a scowl.

"Are we ready to go?" Amy asked, bouncing over to them. "I got permission to leave early, I can't wait to start training with you!"

"Go?" asked Tenzin.

"We made a new friend," Korra told him. "Tenzin, this is Amy. Amy, Tenzin."

"Korra, a word?"

"I'm sure I know what you're going to say," Korra stopped him with an upraised hand. "But forget it. She's heard the story, she's a water bender, she's ready to help. We're not turning her away."

"You told some random, and I mean no offense by this, librarian about you-know-who?"

"Not only you-know-who, but you-know-what as well."

Tenzin paused. "I don't think I know you-know-what."

"You know? All of it? Where I come from?"

"You told her that? Why?"

"So she knows what she's up against. Look, the more benders on our side, to a certain point, the better. Naturally I don't want to shout it from the rooftops I'm from another world, but Inari clearly said I should make new friends."

"Did she? This is the person that stuck you in the prison when you first arrived, so you would get roped up by Lin?"

"Yes, that one. It's good advice, come on even you can't deny Aang had a gang of friends. Korra's been telling me stories she heard from Katara. It's totally weird she doesn't remember doing any of that on her own, but I don't know how this reincarnation stuff works. You really want her to go alone in this?"

I suppose "her" memories meaning Aang's memories were contained in the body of Aang, it's only her spirit that migrates. So while her soul is the same those memories have been lost forever. Or maybe it's more complex than even that and it's foolish for me to sit here thinking about it.

"No, I suppose not. You're not staying with us on the island, are you?"

Amy shook her head. "I still have to work here, after all. I'll help where I can. I'm just coming now to get some training from Korra and Lysanias. Maybe some water bending exercises I can do, target practice or something. That sort of thing."

"I see. Very well. For the moment we're heading to the forest, unless that plan has changed? My kids will be arriving shortly, they'll be disappointed if-"

"We're still doing that," Lysanias assured him. "I wanted Amy to join us for that, too. See if just a normal, everyday water bender can learn what I have to teach. If she can, there's a good chance anyone can."

"It would be good to know that not just the avatar or air benders can learn your energy techniques. If both air and water benders can, there's no reason earth or fire benders can't."

Very well, we'll head for the docks and then over to the forested area."

"Great! Let's go!" *I'm very curious to see if this works. I hope so. Ley lines, here we come.*

Chapter 9

Talking Energy

When: An hour or so later

Where: The forested area found on the mountain outside Republic city

“Wait, this is a great spot!” Lysanias exclaimed, spying several ley lines in a small clearing. “We can stop here.”

“Good, my feet are tired,” complained Meelo.

“Sorry about that, but it really is necessary to find the right spot. It could shave a lot of time off our training. And consider that if you get the basics of this down today, you’ll be able to do something no one else in your world has ever done before. Pretty exciting, isn’t it?”

“I guess.”

“You guess. Come on, everyone gather round.” Lysanias looked his group over. Two young girls, a very young boy, their father, a young woman, and a woman somewhere between the ages of Tenzin and Korra. She had handled the hike well, not complaining, and seemed to perk up now that the training was about to begin. Korra looked down, if that was possible, while Jinora and Ikki looked excited. Tenzin was his usual unreadable self. “Now, the key to manipulating energy inside yourself is first being able to feel that energy. Just as when I learned how to manipulate magic, I had to first learn to sense magic so I could gather and shape it. In this spot are several ley lines, the energy conduits for the planet. When you’re standing inside one you can learn to take some of that energy into yourself, and supplement your own supply.” *Not that it’s very useful most of the time, because in combat you’re always jumping about and running around. So I hardly ever do it, but it’s part of the whole training so I may as well mention it. I bet benders would have better luck, because they can stay in one spot while still attacking and defending with their element.* He sighed. *I miss that sword Merlot lent us. Hey, if I can return to the exact time I left on my world, wonder if I could “borrow” it for a few seconds. Though if it got wrecked that would be bad. Huh. Anyway-* “We want them now so you can see what that energy feels like. And that’s what you’re going to have to rely on—your feelings. I can’t exactly describe what standing in the line is going to feel like to you, but if you listen to your body you’ll figure it out for yourself. You’ve been walking through them without knowing all your lives, it’s time to be aware of them. So here we are!”

“That’s what we have to do?” Korra complained. “I’m going to be terrible at this, I just know it.”

Is that why she feels down? “Might as well not even try then, I guess.”

“I didn’t mean that!”

“Oh. So really you have no idea how good you’re going to be at it.”

“I suppose. Just get on with it, Sifu Hotman.”

Lysanias felt he must have misheard. “See through hot pants?”

The kids giggled.

“Never mind.”

“Very well. Now, in a line just here, that’s it.” The “class” got in a line. “Now, before you, I’m not telling you how far, is a ley line. I want you all to close your eyes and slowly walk forward. Feel out your surroundings. When you’re past it I’ll have you stop and try again. If you think you feel something, stop. I’ll tell you if you’re inside the line or not. Got it?”

They all nodded that they did and closed their eyes. Then began their first pass into the line.

It was Jinora who stopped first, after about five passes through the line, and stood moving her head as though trying to listen to a far away sound.

“You feel something?” Lysanias asked her.

“I think so?”

“What? Jinora does?” Meelo teased. “No fair!”

“I’m not sure.”

“There’s one way to know. Turn and follow it to your left. There’s another that intersects this line, so the feeling you have should grow. Stop there and I’ll tell if you’re right.” She did, turning to the left and carefully making her way forward. Lysanias was looking at the lines and

she stopped just where she needed to be.

“Here?”

“You’ve done it. Congratulations.”

“No way!” Ikki gasped. “She really did it?”

“It’s no fluke, she stopped in exactly the right place both times.” He looked over at Tenzin with a huge grin on his face. “People here, benders anyway, *can* sense energy.”

“Astonishing. And my own daughter is the first of us to do it. Extraordinary.”

For the next two hours the training continued. The other two kids managed it, Ikki first then Meelo, then Amy, Tenzin, and finally Korra followed. They could stop with fairly good accuracy on the line, and then follow them back and forth to the convergence. Jinora, having gotten there first was on to the second lesson, feeling energy flowing through herself and the others. She could then try and make it surge through her, widening her spiritual pathways allowing her to spend more. He felt she was progressing well, and maybe could start learning to see auras fairly soon.

What was it Inari said? That children have an enormous capacity to learn? Maybe she’s just better at this sort of thing, but the kids did pick it up first. She wasn’t wrong about that.

“I can’t believe I didn’t feel it before,” Jinora breathed, eyes closed and “looking” around. “Life energy. It’s all around us. I think there’s even a small spirit somewhere nearby.” She pointed, but then looked over where the others were standing in a group. “But everyone’s just a big blob, how do you tell anything from it?” She indicated their general direction with a hand.

“That will come with practice,” Lysanias told her. “You’ll be able to separate individual people out, tell who someone is without looking, and see who has the most energy to spend just by feeling them out. For now we’ve done what we set out to do. We know you can learn supernatural skills, and in fact *have* done so. You six have done something today that has never been done on this world. You should be proud!”

“I’m hungry,” complained Ikki. “Can we go now?”

“I gotta pee,” Meelo told them.

Or not, as you please. At least Tenzin feels a bit of pride. Though for himself or his kids mastering the basics I can’t tell.

Amy waved goodbye to the group after thanking Lysanias, and the boat carrying them back to the island started on its way. “Come find me whenever you’re in the city,” she had told them. “I’ll keep practicing too, no little girl is going to beat me!”

Jinora stuck her tongue out.

When they got back the kids excitedly told Pema about their adventure, and both Ikki and Meelo ran off to play when dinner was over. Jinora hung back.

“I guess you can be trusted, a little,” she admitted. “Unless you’re hiding your energy somehow, you really do have less than Korra, or my dad.”

“You can use the ability to manipulate your inner energy to hide it,” he admitted. “But I don’t bother. If I was hiding from someone I knew could sense energy, maybe. But just walking around? It would be a bother. I glad you’re not too suspicious of me anymore.”

“I said a little. Are there any exercises I can do tonight?”

Not going to let an “old lady” beat you? Lysanias considered, then slipped a ward out of his dispenser and looked it over. “I think there might be, come with me.” She followed him to his room and he cut out several additional rectangles of the same size, then compared them. “Yeah, they look the same from the back. This,” he explained, dropping to one knee so he could look her in eye, “is a ward. It holds spiritual energy that can accomplish something. In this case, this is a healing ward. These are just paper.” He fanned the others strips. “Your task is to mix them up and try to guess which one the ward is. The amount of energy is pretty small, so it’s a good test of narrowing your senses. Try to get it faster and faster each time.”

“Okay, I will. Thanks,” she offered somewhat shyly, taking them.

“You did good today, I meant what I said earlier. You really should be proud, of yourself and your sibs.”

"I bet you say that to all the girls," she mumbled, coloring. "See you tomorrow."

"See you." He watched her go with a smile, then got up and looked over at the mirror in the room. *Careful Lysanias. You may have gone to sleep her age, but you're thousands of years old now. Just because you still think of yourself as being a kid, you're not. I see why Esta would travel with Xerxes, he's the only one close to her age. I will never find someone close to my age, never again. Oh, mentally I'll adjust to being an 'adult' but who can I ever have an actual relationship with?* He sighed. *Not that it matters, I'll be bouncing around realities for the foreseeable future, so it's a moot point anyway. She is cute though, especially when she's embarrassed.*

Shaking that off Lysanias got out the white colored "marble" and called up Inari, who appeared as a wispy "ghost" in the center of the room.

"What can I do for you?" she asked.

"What other purely supernatural things can I do?" he asked. "I know about sensing and moving energy within myself, and aura reading. Is there anything else?"

"There is, actually!" she admitted. "You want to take some notes?"

"Please." He got out his notebook and sat down, ready to record what she said.

"There's a technique for resisting temptation, or really anything mental. Possession, being mind controlled, and the like. Even piercing illusions, or your memory being altered. Next is generating a tangible field of energy around yourself, that can deflect punches at least. You could probably learn to increase your energy temporarily but others need to be born with the ability. Remind me to introduce you to Goku sometime, you can grab the technique from him."

"Okay, meet Goku sometime," he said as he wrote.

"You can deflect blows by forcing energy into your skin, but you really need an iron resolve for that. Not even you could learn it currently, I'm sad to say. You're almost there, but not quite. Then there's translating your energy into speed. You can basically take a step but find you've covered a vast distance. You can teleport, but in combat this would be faster to recover from. Oh, and you could transform yourself into an animal. You then register as that animal."

"All that?! I never knew!"

"I'm not surprised. All that takes absolute control of your spiritual energy, and you're only..." she looked him over critically. "Half way there. Most of those techniques wouldn't have been in wide use when you were a kid. Most didn't put the effort into just the energy side of things, with all the other stuff they could do."

"Half? I see."

"Why the sudden interest, anyway?"

"Oh, you don't already know?"

"I'm not watching you every second of the day, that's why you have the marble. You can't just wave your hands and I'll appear, you need to banana phone me."

"Bana- never mind." *So you're not omniscient, interesting to know.* "The people here can learn to sense energy, which I figured on given they could see my earth spirit. Oh, by the way, what's the policy on teaching people skills from other worlds?"

"Easier to ask forgiveness, is that it?" she asked, rolling her eyes. "It's fine, supernatural stuff like this is mostly internal. If it was throwing energy blasts or teleporting, we would have a problem. But those skills I outlined? Hey, if they can learn it they probably would have already, so go ahead."

His face hardened. "I wonder if they should have. This world, it doesn't have guns as I would have expected, given they have electric lights and cars and huge buildings. We theorized that maybe the shadow avatar was suppressing knowledge here somehow, to make it harder to beat him."

"They try something new all the time, to see what is most effective. I wouldn't put it past them. I wouldn't introduce guns, or any technology a world doesn't have."

"This world has enough problems, believe me. I wasn't planning to. Now, can you get my skill at manipulating energy to the required level?"

"I could," she admitted, but hesitated. "You've been using the eyes a fair amount there,

haven't you?"

"For all the good it did me. I have the skill of a half dozen people and still get trounced in combats."

"Have you learned chi-blocking yet?"

"No, should I? I don't want to fight benders. Though," he admitted, "the shadow avatar could be one..."

She shook her head. "No, that's not the reason. It doesn't rely on strength, and it incapacitates people fairly painlessly. I thought it might be the perfect fighting style for you. Bending is fine, but that's the real reason I sent you there."

Nice of you to tell me beforehand then.

"I heard that."

"What?"

"I'm just kidding," she snorted. "Yeah, check them out. I think you'll be pleased. As to your original question, you've used up a lot of your potential already." She crossed her arms and looked fairly cross herself.

"There was a lot to learn here!"

"I don't doubt it. And you only need to learn your preferred fighting style once, and I did send you here for a reason. Plus you can always forget a skill if you haven't used it in a while. You've learned martial arts though?"

"Everyone here seems to be a fighting master, that was easy."

"Chi-blocking is just an extension of that. So it's not too much more of a burden.

Personally, my advice is this; Pick a few skills you know you're going to use often, like calling your spirit and energy manipulation. You don't need to train in the things you can just siphon from people, so focus on them. You've got months, at least. If you don't master at least the energy manipulation technique by the time you leave, come back and we can figure out what you'll get from the next few worlds you go to, and how much potential you have left. If you have enough I'll at least demonstrate energy 'bending' to use the local term, and get you started on the basics of the other stuff. That way you're just putting the time in, which doesn't use up your potential like the other way of doing things does."

"That's fair."

"But you'll still want to leave something with these people, I assume? They'll want to do everything they can, no doubt, and you won't be there to teach them. Just a second." She seemed to be walking, but stayed in the center of the room. "I have some books here someplace." She looked up, running her finger over what must have been a bookcase Lysanias couldn't see before him. "And the world there uses this language... Okay, got it." She pulled a book down, and it appeared in her hand. "Yeah, this is it. Hold out your hands." Lysanias did, and the book vanished. He expected it to be in his hands, but nothing appeared.

"Er?"

"Huh, that's funny. Well, just stand there a second, it'll show up. Maybe the time differential is different than I calculated?" she muttered, punching numbers into a calculator she had pulled from nowhere. "No, no, don't move! Just hold your hands out, it'll get there."

He did, feeling more and more foolish as he did. "Are you sure something-" He dropped his hands and the book appeared, hitting him in the foot. "Ow!"

"Told you!" she giggled. Lysanias rolled his eyes and grabbed the book up off the floor.

Yeah, that's about right. "Energy Uses for Dummies," he read. "A primer on the manipulations of the inner spirit and what it can do for you. For dummies?" he asked, looking up. But she was gone. *Yup, about right.*

So Lysanias paged through it, marveling at all you could do simply by learning to manipulate your inner energy. *What animal would I turn into? Something huge, or something tiny? I suppose I could just shape-shift with magic, or maybe change my form with alchemy skills? Can't forget that. What would Jinora choose- bad thought. Bad Lysanias. Though even Korra is thousands of years my junior. While simultaneously being older than me. I hate my life. Had I lived all those thousands of years Korra and Jinora wouldn't be that far apart in age, from my perspective. On the other hand, would either girl interest me after all that time?* He set the book inside and got out his own, looking over all the notes he had made about

things he could do. In the end he listed calling out his spirit, energy manipulation, teleporting, blocking, and his original alchemy skills as the things he would work on while he was here. *I'll be asking the universe stuff no doubt, but how exactly do I get better at it? Dreaming the future could also be nice but I can only "practice" that once a day, how would anyone get better at that, anyway? Though I suppose telling the future of an object or person would count, the skills are related. One could influence the other.*

With that done he asked the universe where to go the next day to have the best chance at learning chi-blocker techniques, and was pleased to get an image of a storefront on the first try. He noted down the name he had seen, then decided to keep the ball rolling by asking when the best time was. He saw a clock with the hands at 7:00 and thanked the universe for being so cooperative. Then there was a knock at his door.

Feels a bit angry, energy level about there. Probably Tenzin. "Come in Tenzin," he called, and a surprised air bender opened the door.

"My family is going to start doing that to me, aren't they?" he asked.

"Probably. What can I do for you?"

"Just got off the phone with Lin. She swore up and down nothing happened today. Which just makes me more suspicious. What exactly happened while you were at the library, and where did Amy really come from?"

"Ah. Why don't you trust us, Tenzin? Is it really that important to know? I mean if your *old friend* Lin says nothing happened..."

"Don't give me that. Did Korra do something? Did she leave and get into trouble and you're all covering for her? I need to know!"

"It's fine," he relented, getting up. "There was a misunderstanding, a minor fight," *some guy that Korra punched nearly died*, "Korra chose not to press charges. The whole thing should just blow over."

"Press charges!?" he pressed. "Someone attacked the avatar? Who would be stupid enough to do that? In broad daylight even? Equalists?"

"No, benders. They thought she wasn't the avatar, because Amy thought we wanted books on chi-blocking. Which they apparently have to lock up now, because they'll get stolen or defaced. Everest would be livid."

"That's the... gnome? You traveled with?"

"The book lover gnome, that's right."

"And Korra wasn't hurt?"

"I was, as usual. But she didn't get a scratch. It's backwards, it really is."

"Are you all right?"

"I healed myself, it was just a minor bruise. Nothing to worry about."

"Trouble seems to follow her."

"Or me. That'll be the fifth time I've seen the inside of a prison because I was simply defending myself from people attacking me. It's not like the stories, where people tear someplace up and no one seems to care. Property damage is a thing."

"I agree. But you've learned what you need to, right? You won't need to go back?"

"To the library? No. But I've just been talking with Inari, the being that sent me here. She suggested the reason was chi-blocking, that it would be a good style for me because it's non-lethal and I don't need arms the size of tree trunks to use it well. I already have the name and time of a place to absorb the skill, we'll need to go to The Golden Wok tomorrow at seven. I'm assuming in the evening, nobody does martial arts at sunrise but fanatics. Which... they are. Shoot, maybe I'll ask for clarification, but I got the sense it was sundown."

"You're going to infiltrate an equalist training center? You're not dragging Korra there!"

"Actually, I thought she might benefit from seeing how the 'enemy' trains, and thinks. I was going to offer. Once I picked it up, to your family as well. They should know how equalists are going to attack, and maybe use their techniques against them."

"Equalists will recognize the avatar, you can be sure of that. Even if the common man off the street doesn't yet."

"That's why we'd go wearing these," Lysanias told him with a smirk, pulling out a ward. "They'll never see us coming."

Chapter 10

I'm Chi-Blocking, They Haten

When: Day 4, morning

Where: Air temple island

"You want to go where?" Korra asked at breakfast the next morning. He had given the book on energy skills to Jinora, who was eagerly reading through it, her breakfast forgotten next to her.

"An equalist training class. You should see what sort of things go on there, and I need to absorb the skills they teach so I can perhaps teach you."

"Great, another thing to practice. But why should I? I can bend!"

"Yes, and punch people into unconsciousness with great gusto. But don't you think there might be times you wanted to disable someone without seriously injuring them?"

She struggled to think of a time she would want to do that, face scrunching up in concentration. "No."

Tenzin sighed. "Really, Korra?"

"What? If someone's attacking me, I attack them back!"

"So, just to come up with an example out of nowhere," Lysanias went on, "if a group of misinformed benders started to attack you, and you could knock them out without having to make them cough up blood and need treatment afterwards, you wouldn't?"

"That sounds oddly specific," she gaily admitted, eyes darting to Tenzin. "There's no way something like that would ever happen!" She forced a laugh.

"I already know about your little run in yesterday," Tenzin told her. "There's no need to hide it."

"Lin told you, didn't she? That little chicken rat!"

"She didn't, actually. I had to twist Lysanias' arm to get him to tell me even that you left the library. I'm over it though, it's fine."

"Your twitching eye says differently daddy," Ikki told him.

"Just finish your breakfast."

So Korra agreed to go with him, and Lysanias made several wards keyed to the both of them so they could still see each other. (Calling the spirit of the dragonfly before each one, of course) The day passed with them both practicing their various skills, and about five that evening the pair walked unseen through the city streets. He tried several times to get the mountain spirit to come out, but didn't manage it and sighed, deciding to give it a few minutes.

"So what are the rules of these ward things?"

"Don't call attention to yourself. That includes punching things, knocking stuff over, or loud singing with dancing."

"Can I pick something up?"

"As long as you're not trying to cut off somebody's mustache, yes. Do try to make sure someone isn't looking right at the thing you're picking up, but otherwise they won't notice it's gone until we leave."

"Nice! Why are we going so early?"

"I don't know when the class starts. I know around seven is the best time for me to be there, but we still have to get into the place."

"True. Fair enough."

The pair slipped inside as people started arriving, and the class began. It was a restaurant that never seemed to fill up, despite the number of people that kept coming, and when the pair followed the latest people into the back there was a basement level converted into a dojo. On the walls were posters of Aman's masked face, a funny symbol Lysanias' ability interpreted as 'equal' and various anatomical charts. Lysanias walked over to one, looking it over. It showed the arms outstretched, with various points circled all over the body.

"Where you have to strike, no doubt," Korra said. "This is so weird, just standing here as these people walk past us. Should we take one?"

"Class isn't started yet, let's take a look around." *Mountain spirit, we're here, perhaps*

you would like to come out now? The pair did, opening doors when it was clear and rifling through desks and cabinets they found in the rooms beyond. They found some rolled up posters of all three types, and even several anatomy books with notes on energy pathways in the body and pages marked with the points to hit. The hit points, in other words. They also found fliers with Amon's picture, and the words "witness the revelation tonight, 9 o'clock."

"You know," Lysanias mused, standing there looking at the posters, "someone is printing all these. Someone sympathetic to the cause, or an equalist themselves? If you found out where these were coming from, how much closer would you be to the main guy?"

"Couldn't you just ask where Amon is?"

"I suppose. I hesitate to do that for a couple of reasons."

"Such as?"

"One, you wouldn't have found him that way. Two, we're supposed to be using this time for training. I go after him now, I've hardly trained at all in the, what, four days I've been here? Three, this is civil unrest due to the inequality perceived between those that are supernatural in origin, and those that are not. Hardly the kind of thing that would destroy the entire world."

"So you don't think he's our guy?"

"Not really. Not if he sticks to fliers and people yelling in the streets."

"I hope that's as far as it goes. What do you think of this?" She tapped the "revelation" fliers.

"Grab some. We'll drop in to see the chief tomorrow and let her know something big may go down soon. You don't print something like this months in advance, in case someone sees. It'll be in the next week or so, mark my words."

"But we got these wandering around here, something we wouldn't have done if you hadn't been here."

"True. But they could have fallen off the back of a truck. They got here somehow, you see any printing presses?"

She looked around. "Nope. We just tripped over them on the street. Got it."

"Or someone else did," Lysanias offered, a finger raised, "and turned them in to us, because avatar."

"Ah, further removing ourselves from the scene of the crime. Not bad."

"I try, I try." He gave a slight bow and they went back to rifling the room.

Once they were satisfied everything of interest had been found they grabbed a bag and loaded it up. They took a copy of the books, a poster of the man standing there, and a stack of the fliers. Korra considered, then grabbed an Amon poster too.

Spirit of the mountain, we're waiting for you! "What do you want *that* for?"

"I need something to focus on while I try to air bend. It may as well be this."

"Good idea, motivation. I like it."

They smiled at each other and went back into the training hall, where the teacher was about to begin the class.

They watched for two hours as the students flailed about, trying to hit where the instructor said. He went over how chi-blocking worked, taking through the diagram and correcting students as we walked around the class. Korra followed him, staying at a distance of course, but interested in the proceedings. It took about a half hour more, but Lysanias finally got the spirit of the mountain out so it could watch chi-blocking, if it ever happened.

Of course this is a more practical course. Anyone here has already shown themselves to be trusted, so there's no rhetoric. I just wonder why I'm here. This is all well and good, but unless the instructor actually starts fighting somebody, I can't exactly steal his skill. He's not using it to steal!

But Lysanias should have trusted his own abilities as around seven the instructor called a halt.

"All right, let's see what you've learned," he announced. "Everyone, in a circle and attack me as if I was a bender you wanted to chi-block."

Now you're talking. The class formed up and Lysanias activated his eyes, wincing at the sudden pain. Doubled because the mountain spirit had done the same, and he felt half the

pain it did. *At least it finally came out, I must have called a dozen times in the last hour. What was it on vacation somewhere? I just hope this doesn't take- oh my!*

With a flurry of quick strikes the man had disabled the first person to attack him, sending them toppling to the floor. He wove among the students, more lightly tapping people than hitting them, and Korra whistled.

"You getting all this?"

"Oh yeah."

Finally the last person was unable to fight, both their arms being paralyzed, and they backed off.

"Not bad," said the instructor as Lysanias' sight went dark. "Some of you almost managed to hit me tonight. We'll make chi-blockers out of you yet."

"Let's go," Lysanias urged, now reliant on his other senses. "Get the door open while they're still distracted and getting up."

Lysanias followed Korra to Naga, who then carried the two back to the dock and swam them back to the island.

"You're safe, thank goodness," Tenzin gushed, meeting them at the dock. Both washed the water from their clothes with bending, and Naga shook himself.

"Not a problem," Lysanias told him. "It was a very interesting class, and we brought some literature back with us." He shook the bag out, holding his dispenser and the paper goods, which they had kept dry with water bending during the swim back to the island.

Korra handed over a flyer. "Witness the revelation?" he read, scowling. "What's that all about?"

"No idea," she admitted. "No one said anything about it while we were there. We're giving them to the police tomorrow, so they can look out for nine o'clocks for the next week or two."

"Your idea?"

"Not exactly."

"I see. I suppose you can't get into much trouble on your way to a police station. However, I'm going that way anyway to work tomorrow, so I'll take them." *And further distance us from the scene, I like it.* "What about chi-blocking? Learn anything?"

"I learned a little. Lysanias?"

"I learned a lot. Chi-blockers sacrifice strength for speed and accuracy. The way he moved, each time he struck he was just hitting as rapidly as he possibly could. He knew where to strike because of his long practice, that much was nearly automatic. Inari wasn't kidding, it's an effective style and I think it'll suit me well."

"But how do we defend against it?"

"Don't let anyone get close. I also wonder if you could make up a sort of armor. Cloth, for those that aren't metal benders, but that has metal disks sewn into the sleeves and at key points around the body. You hit something like that and you'll just bounce off. Then you're back to regular old martial arts, something they don't really train on."

"Unless they do, and we just watched a chi-blocking class," Korra countered.

"True. But I'm not sure you could train both, not at the same time. You go to strike and you use the wrong one, suddenly you're in a bad spot."

"I guess."

"Spread out the point of impact, in other words," Tenzin suggested.

"Exactly. If they can close the distance and get next to you, they strike too fast to effectively counter. Prevention is key."

"Well, we can try various things now that we have our very own chi-blocker," Tenzin decided. "Meanwhile, I'm glad you're safe, go get some rest."

"You got it, captain!" Korra agreed, standing at attention. "I'll see you tomorrow at oh nine hundred hours."

"When?"

"She means nine o'clock. Very funny, Korra."

"Thanks."

Tenzin took the posters to Lin the next day as promised, and Lysanias started coaching Korra in chi-blocking for the morning, planning to return to bending in the afternoon. Jinora had reported success the night before, and Lysanias said she could keep the ward, he had already made a replacement the night before. She was curious what they were doing and expressed interest in learning chi-blocking too, which Lysanias had no problem with. So both girls studied the charts and drew circles on Lysanias' arms to try and hit them. He also explained, not that Korra really got it, that it wasn't about strength, it was about speed, and she had to stop trying to smash his arm to pieces but instead just lightly tap it as quickly as possible in the right place. He also chi-blocked them so they could know what it felt like, and found it took several minutes to wear off.

"Maybe that heavy armor Lin wears all the time makes sense after all," Korra reasoned, having gotten her bending back. "I'd like to see a chi-blocker make it through all that."

"They would seem to be invincible against just that," Lysanias agreed. "Maybe that's why they haven't done more than make threats and stir up trouble."

"I just wonder how many classes like that are held. And how quickly people can be trained."

"One class, for two hours a night? Probably not very fast."

That afternoon Tenzin returned with Lin, while Korra was trying to move a piece of metal Lysanias had pulled out of the ground. He had Jinora mapping out the ley lines on the island, sort of a game, and she certainly wasn't off trying to chi-block her brother and sister, because she was a good girl. Yes that's right she was. She was supposed to be competing with them to see who could make the best map of the lines, and she'll tell them in a few minutes.

"Hey there, chief Beifong," Korra greeted her. "What can we do for you?"

"I'm here to see the guy from another world. This flier," she announced, holding it up. "I wonder if you can use your skills to see when exactly we should be on the lookout for it? We know where, there was a map on the back, so we've got the place watched. But knowing would make me feel better." She handed it over, and Lysanias looked on the back. There was part of a map there.

"I can ask. Give me a few minutes. Korra, keep trying to make that piece of metal float." Lysanias sat down, making himself comfortable for the ten minutes this was going to take.

"You're metal bending?"

"Tried more air bending, didn't get anywhere," she announced, pointing to the poster of Amon blowing in the breeze where it had been attached to a tree. "Figured I know earth bending, might as well try this."

"Really?"

"Is that so surprising?"

"A little, yes. Carry on, I'd like to see it."

"How goes the chi-blocking?" Tenzin asked. "I'm still not sure about prioritizing that over air bending training."

"Okay, but I've got a ways to go before I hit accurately enough."

"You're learning chi-blocking as well?"

Lysanias cracked an eye open. "You know what, I'll just go over there. Don't mind me, just continue talking, it's fine. Everything's fine!" He settled down again, away from the chatty Cathys.

How many days until the events on this flier happen?

There was no answer.

When is the revelation, as defined by this flier, scheduled to take place?

In answer, Lysanias got a strange vision. A white unicorn with wings seemed to be standing there and raised the sun. Then a black unicorn with wings raised the moon. They went back and forth six times, and the vision ended. *Strange ideas this universe has about*

things. *Were those spirits?* “Six days,” he announced, coming over to them.

“Then we’ve got some time. We’ll nab this Amon character and that’ll be the end of it. Thanks for your help.”

“Er, question?” Lysanias hesitated to ask as she started to walk away.

“What?”

“What are you actually going to charge him with?”

“What are you talking about?”

“What law has he broken? I mean yes, he’s broken into a radio broadcast now and again, but that’s a minor offense, yes? Plus, you don’t know what he looks like because he always goes masked. You storm the place and he just takes the mask off. Now he’s one of the crowd and you’ve got nothing.”

Lin stood rather stunned and tried to come up with an answer. “Inciting people?”

“What, talking to people is a crime now? Unless he, himself, has done something illegal you’ve got nothing. He’ll be back on the street in a day.”

“He’s right,” Tenzin admitted. “We don’t like what he has to say, but we can’t arrest him for that, Lin.”

“So what do you suggest?”

“He needs to clearly do something illegal, something he can’t weasel ferret his way out of. That’s a thing, right? A weasel ferret? I’m sure I saw one in a pet shop window. Anyway, let the ‘revelation’ go on as planned. Maybe it will be something illegal. You can’t really arrest a crowd anyway. And trying to arrest them as they arrive won’t work, they can legitimately say they were in the area to do something else. You wouldn’t be able to tell who was there for the rally and who wasn’t. Arresting even one innocent person is one too many.” *I’ve spent enough time in prison to not want to inflict it on anyone that doesn’t deserve it.*

“I suppose you’re going?”

“I’d like to see what happens. Maybe the man himself will be there, and I can get a feel for his energy and his state of mind. Maybe he’s scared, because he’s a puppet of some other person himself. Like if you arrest him, some other person calling himself Amon will show up because again, masked. You have to get the heart of the movement, and even now you can’t be sure it’s Amon. He could just be a mouthpiece.”

“You’re just a bottomless pit of good news, aren’t you?”

“I’m doing it!” Korra exclaimed suddenly. “Look everyone, it’s floating!”

Everyone looked, and Korra had the chunk of metal suspended between her two hands.

“Very nice,” praised Lysanias. “Keep it up. Try and feel how your energy is flowing right now, so you can do the same thing again.”

“Right!”

“You actually got her to metal bend?” Lin seemed rather surprised. “How about that?”

“I can’t take much of the credit. As the avatar I think she’s simply remembering how to bend from a previous life, rather than learning how to all over again. I was thinking about it, that should be possible but it’s more the soul that remains not the physical memories, right? Can the soul have memory? I mean her soul has been around for many years, right?”

“An interesting theory,” Tenzin admitted. “Aang could metal bend, learned it from Toph. She could be unconsciously tapping into that knowledge somehow.”

“Yeah, fascinating,” Lin lied. “Very well. I’ll have some officers in the area on the night six days from now. Come to the station and they can take you to the place we found on the map. A couple can go inside with you in plainclothes, we’ll see what this Amon has to say. If it even is Amon.”

“Now you’re getting it,” Lysanias told her. “I’ll see you then.”

“Don’t be late.” She walked off.

“You would think she would be a little happier for me,” Korra pouted, moving the metal up and down. “But nooooo.”

In this chapter, Lysanias put a 5 in the topic skill *Pressure Points*. He put a 10 in the special maneuver Combination Attack from the main rules. The closest to “chi-blocking” that exists in the rules is from Demongate High, “Paralyzing Strike.” This attack is a single strike that, if the victim fails a CON check, makes them go completely paralyzed. So that’s not what chi-blockers are doing. They use Combination Attack with both hands, essentially doing an off hand action every action. They then strike multiple times, in multiple areas, usually starting at the hand and moving up. That way they get the whole limb. So I’m defining the chi-blocking skill in this way:

Chi-Blocking (CMB)

REF †

Strike a critical point on the body to disrupt energy flow to the area struck. This paralyzes the area struck and denies them the ability to spend energy in that area for as many minutes as their failed CON check. To completely disrupt energy flow to a body location several points must be struck. Three in the arms, four in the body, four in the legs. These strikes must be done within as many segments as your skill rating, otherwise the target suffers a -1 penalty to actions with that limb for a similar number of segments, but has full mobility. Roll this skill as an attack, with a bonus of +1 for every 5 rolled on your martial arts skill. This is treated as martial arts for the purposes of delay.

Requires a 5 rating in some form of martial arts and Anatomy or similar skill.

Chapter 11

Amon Shows His Power

When: Day 11 with the avatar

Where: Outside the place the "revelation" will be revealed

The previous six days passed quickly for the group, with each of them dedicating a portion of each day to whatever new skills they were learning. The island had been mapped so there was a clear picture of where the ley lines were, and the acolytes living there were busy planting trees, shrubs, and flowers to see if the concentrations could be increased. Korra kept trying to air bend without success, but her metal bending progressed well. Jinora seemed to overtake everyone in sensing energy, but due to some natural talent in the area or simply more practice Lysanias couldn't know. The others hadn't asked for additional exercises as she had, and while he didn't inquire if she was still using the ward he had to assume she was.

The sun was now going down and the three, Korra, Lysanias, and Amy were standing on a building and looking out over the water. They were all dressed in nondescript clothing, bought with money provided by Tenzin, and Lysanias was looking through his spyglass at the people entering the building marked on the map.

"They're handing over a flier when they enter," he told them. "I don't suppose either of you brought one?"

Both girls shook their heads.

"Great." *I suppose we could do it the other way, but none of the wards I have are keyed to Amy. She wouldn't be able to see us.*

"I've got an idea," Korra announced, running over to the fire escape they had climbed to get up there. "Wait here."

"Wait, I've got the time- and she's gone."

"She's a very impulsive girl, isn't she?" Amy asked.

"That she is. Are you sure you want to come? Benders are going to be the last people they want around here."

"You might need my help."

"If we do, something has gone seriously wrong. We're getting in, doing whatever the crowd does, and getting out. If we see a guy in a mask doing something illegal so much the better. We're not here to take chances or get in trouble."

"And Korra knows this?"

"She knows the plan," he reluctantly agreed.

"Sticking to it, that's the key."

"Indeed. What is she- you have to be kidding me."

"What?"

"She's beating up some guy, good thing that wasn't a chi-blocker Korra. Ouch, I could feel that from up, what are you, oh my goodness." *Korra, hide the body. Better yet, carry him over here I want to make sure he's okay. Seriously you don't have to punch people full strength all the time!*

Korra looked around, confused.

I'm sending this into your brain- will you just get back here before someone sees you?!

"Honestly, that girl."

"What?"

"You don't want to know."

"One flier!" she announced, hauling the man up the stairs and dumping him on the roof. *Just how strong is she? I couldn't have climbed that ladder and carried that guy at the same time.* "Great, well done. And you really can't think of a situation where chi-blocking someone might be preferable?"

"He's not moving, is he?"

"Korra, you just went and assaulted someone. Then stole his property. Is that okay where you come from?"

"He was an equalist!"

"You can't know that. This may be the first time he's ever come to something like this, to see what Amon has to say. Plus he can now identify you, and how is it going to look when the headline reads 'Avatar Korra beats up helpless man in the street?' In fact it's a good thing he *did* have a flier or you would have just beaten up someone totally unrelated to this whole situation who was just out for a walk by the docks!"

"Oh."

"Oh, yes, oh. Nothing for it now." Lysanias checked him over, but in the dark and without really knowing what he was looking for, didn't know how serious the man's injuries were. *Didn't want to have to do this.* He took out the radio unit the police had given him, a massive thing he could use to talk to them before they went in. It was too big to lug around, but if something happened they could get in touch. *I think it was this button to talk, right?* "Chief, send a few men to our location. There was a bit of a scuffle, we've got a wounded man here."

"Very well," the radio squawked. "My officers should be inside, get going."

"Right." *How did they get in? Did they bring fliers just in case?*

The team approached the building and handed the flier to the man guarding the door, a large guy with hardly any hair on his head, but a patch of hair covering his bulbous chin. They were let in and moved past a series of metal machines Lysanias had no idea how to account for, into a central chamber simply *packed* with people.

How in the heck did this many people get in here? How long have they been coming? Hours? There must be a thousand people in here, how are we going to get close enough to see the stage?

More odd machinery was shoved up against the walls, and the place was hot and abuzz with excitement. The balcony they were on had a set of stairs leading down, and the group made their way to the lower level. Once there Lysanias realized it wasn't as bad as he had thought, with people standing in small clusters that let them work their way up to the front. Nearly an hour passed with them waiting until 9:00, but on the dot there was a booming voice coming out of speakers throughout the room.

"Please welcome your hero, your savior! Amon!" someone was bellowing, and a trap door started opening in the stage before Lysanias. It was lit from within, and from the light rose the masked man himself, flanked by several masked men. The crowd was going wild, and steam was being pumped in from somewhere to make the place even more uncomfortably hot and humid for some reason.

You have to admit, the man knows how to make an entrance.

He was cheering along with the rest, and nudged Korra who was sort of standing there transfixed, looking up at the man. She made a halfhearted attempt at some excitement, but seemed somewhat out of it. It didn't matter, he called for quiet and started telling the tragic and not made up at all backstory that led him to become "Amon." Champion of the little people, the downtrodden, the forgotten man. He went on about how a fire bender killed his family and "stole his face" which is what forced him to wear the mask.

So wait, you want to punish all benders for the action of just this one guy? How does that make sense? A measured response this is not.

He went on about the evils of bending, as if it was "bending" and not man that was somehow responsible for all the trouble in the world. There was some booing of the avatar, you know, the usual. He then went on about the spirits talking to him, meaning he wasn't mad at all, no sir, and how they had given him a special gift. "The power to take a person's bending away... permanently."

There were gasps and Lysanias narrowed his eyes. *Maybe this guy is the shadow avatar? It might know a way to do that very thing. But again, how does that mean the destruction of the world?*

Amon then offered a demonstration, and several people tied up with ropes were led onstage, with "Lighting Bolt Zolt" in the lead. They were all criminal types, members of the "triple threat triad" according to Amon, and used their bending to terrorize people in the city.

"We have to help them!" Korra whispered.

"How? There's like a thousand people, and the stage is ringed with chi-blockers. Besides, if he really can take bending away I want to know how. Then I can probably reverse

it.”

“You can’t know that. Besides, you’ll be blind for an hour at least afterwards.”

“True. Not looking forward to making it out of here blind. Wait, something’s happening.”

Amon had allowed Zolt to be free of his bonds, and said he could fight for his bending. The two squared off, probably about four meters apart.

“You’re gonna regret doing that, pal!” Zolt promised, as Lysanias sent power into his eyes. The now familiar sting caused him to wince, but this was one show he wanted to see very clearly.

Zolt shot two fireballs at Amon, who easily dodged, charging in fast and low. Two more fireballs went past him, and now only a meter or so away Zolt charged up a lightning bolt.

What? If he can do that, he should have opened with it. Charging up a lightning attack is slow. Bending seems tied to the martial art one does, but for this you basically have to sit there and be a sitting duck. You can’t defend yourself, because you don’t want to lose control of that energy you just gathered. So you lead with that when the guy is far away, then switch to the faster fire bending if he gets close. How are you the ‘most notorious crime lord of the city’ with skills like this?

True to Lysanias’ predictions, Amon grabbed the man’s arm and twisted it, sending the bolt of lightning up into the ceiling. He then grabbed him by the throat, and made a curious gesture with the other hand.

He’s let you go, stop throwing lightning around and elbow him in the ribs. Get off your knees and bash him in the jaw with your skull. Do something- wait, whose side am I am?

Amon then put his thumb on the man’s forehead and *used water bending to destroy the chakra centers that allowed Zolt to channel lightning, and then bend fire.* The entire thing took fifteen seconds.

He went down the body, and just destroyed them. Using the ability of water benders to heal he somehow figured out how to send an energy pulse into the body of the person he’s touching and close off or destroy the chakras. But that means he could actually bend the water inside somebody, something I didn’t even consider.

Lysanias had seen enough, and his eyes closed.

Amon went on about the era of bending being over, making Lysanias snort even as the pain receded from his eyes. *What are you going to do, water bend every bender in the world? That would take years, and they’re not exactly going to line up for you. Moron.*

“Did you see that?” Amy gasped as Zolt took a swing at Amon and fell over again. “He really did it!”

“Did he? This isn’t just something they staged?” Korra asked, hope in her voice.

“He really did it,” Lysanias agreed, as the crowd was going wild. The next guy in line was being brought up for “cleansing” but was not given the same chance as Zolt, simply held down until his bending was gone.

“Can you fix it?”

“I don’t know. It’s not damage, not physical damage, anyway. My wards wouldn’t work, neither would alchemy. I might be able to reverse the process with water bending though, but as I only know how to close them off now, I’d have to try a few things.”

“Water bending?” asked Amy.

“Forget that for now, should we save the others? Call Lin, now!”

“Save them? He’s not killing them. Though this crowd might, once all of them are taken care of. I guess I better.” *Chief*, he sent to Lin, knowing she was somewhat behind him and waiting for this. *If taking someone’s bending away is illegal, Amon just did it. In front of a thousand witnesses. Have your officers move in.*

He didn’t have to wait long as suddenly metal clad men and women burst through the windows and doors of the place, disrupting the proceedings. Now pandemonium swept through the place as they tried to make their way through the crowd to get to Amon. But he just calmly descended again, taking his force of chi-blockers with him.

“After him!” Lin shouted, not that anyone could really hear her.

It took an hour at least for things to calm down, it was hard to tell when you were blind, but everyone who wasn’t a bender passed them by. When the police had burst in Lysanias

and the others had simply headed to a wall and he had called out his mountain spirit, shielding them. Thus they had stayed out of it, and Lin angrily found them when the crowd had been dispersed.

"He got away," she snarled.

"What? How?" Korra asked.

"Escape tunnels leading to a boat that was ready by the docks. They were throwing around gas canisters like it was going out of style, so my people had to give up pursuit. Floating gas canisters, never saw anything like them before."

"At least you stopped the crowd from tearing those men to pieces," Amy put in. "I'm sure they would have, after Amon made them defenseless."

"We captured them, they didn't even try to run. Seem completely depressed, not even caring they were under arrest. What exactly went on in here? I didn't get a good account from my people, and of course none of the equalists will talk. In fact we had to let them all go!"

"Because standing around listening to somebody talk about the terrible life he had 'on his farm' isn't illegal," Lysanias decided.

"Sadly not. So what happened?"

Korra filled her in, and while Lysanias couldn't see it, Lin's face looked sterner than ever.

"He really did it?" she asked.

"He really did it, and I can do it too. Not that I would!"

"I should hope not. You kids get out of here, it's dark enough out and no one really knows what you look like, Korra. You shouldn't have any trouble."

"What are you going to do?"

"I don't know," she admitted. "I really don't know."

Back on the island Lysanias sat with the girls and Tenzin, recounting how Amon was most likely a water bender, and how he had used what Tenzin called "blood bending" to damage the body's chakras.

"And he claimed the era of bending was over?" Tenzin asked. "What's he going to do, line them all up?"

"Exactly what I thought," Lysanias told him. "Seems inefficient at best."

"What are we going to do?" asked Korra, her voice sounding distraught.

"Not sure," Lysanias answered. "I still don't think he's broken any laws, you can fill me in on that later, Tenzin. Keep benders away from him and think of a plan to discredit him. He claimed none of his family were benders, that's obviously a lie." Then almost to himself, "Why the whole 'the spirits choose me to do this' routine? It's so random..."

"But what if he attacks us? Attacks me?"

"That's easy. Just chi-block him. Oh, that's right, you don't believe there's a situation that would be useful."

She scowled, not that he could see it yet. "You're never going to let me live that down, are you?"

"Nope!"

"Fine, I'll keep training that."

"We all will," Tenzin agreed. "It seems the best defense. Take away his bending temporarily and he won't be able to take away ours permanently. Do you think this knowledge came from his chi-blocking experience? Like he figured out how to do permanently what is usually only temporary?"

"Probably," admitted Lysanias. "It came from somewhere. Normal chi-blocking wears off. Lin said she captured the people that had their bending taken, perhaps she'll let me see them. I can try a few things, see if I can restore what they've lost."

"Restore the bending of criminals?" Amy asked. "Are you sure?"

"I could always take it away again," he mused, pulling his beard. "After all, they wouldn't have gotten it back without me around. And I've already disrupted things around here. Just knowing how he does it gives us a big advantage you wouldn't have had normally."

"That's true," Tenzin admitted. "We'll have to be careful, if he somehow learns we know, he's going to wonder why."

“And target us?” Korra asked.

“Perhaps. But you, as the avatar, were always a target. We need to keep the two of you apart until you’re sure you could take him in a fight.”

“He moved pretty well against Zolt,” Lysanias told her. “I wasn’t close enough to see how much energy he had, but I suppose if you can beat me in a one on one match, you can probably take him.”

“I could take you!”

“You could take me before or after I learned chi-blocking and added to my skill in both lighting and fire bending?”

“Oh, uh...”

“That’s what I thought, you’ve haven’t tested that statement. Look, it’s late and I’m still blind for the foreseeable future. I’m going to bed. There’s nothing we can do about this tonight, so let’s get a good night’s sleep. The headlines tomorrow are going to be inflammatory, and things might start moving fast.”

Which also seems to indicate this isn’t my guy. His ability seems like something he really could have come up with on his own, despite Tenzin insisting “blood bending” can only be performed under a full moon. Like they were werewolves or something. It doesn’t seem powerful enough to destroy the world, just inconvenience some benders. He seems to want to cause trouble, yes, but not burn the city to the ground and dance on the ashes. Unless I’m missing something, this is just a man with a weird power, a bit of showmanship, and the desire to cause trouble. A distraction, in other words. As long as I keep practicing the stuff I decided on, things here should work themselves out as they would have without me.

“See you tomorrow,” everyone said, and Tenzin offered Amy a place to stay for the night.

“I can show you where the girl’s dorms are,” Korra offered.

“Thanks. But can I stay in your room? Somehow I don’t want to be alone tonight.”

“Neither do- Oh! You mean... oh, sure, that’s fine. Come on.”

Wait, are they... nah. Overactive imagination, Lysanias. Put it out of your mind.

Chapter 12

Birth of the Kinder More Gentle Korra

When: The next morning

Where: Air Temple Island

When Korra and Amy sleepily emerged from the “girl’s” side of the island they found Lysanias at the practice area, floating a fist size stone above his hand.

“Morning!” he said to them with a wave. “Sleep well?”

“It was a little cramped, but we got through it,” Korra replied. “What’s up with the rock?”

So they did... Banish the thought, Lysanias. Banish the thought. In the name of the emperor, bad thought be gone. I could have snuck into their room to- worse thought. “Just a bit of an idea I had. In fact I’m glad you’re here, I wanted you to try something as well.”

“Sure, I guess. What is it?”

“This.” Lysanias concentrated for a second on the rock and it liquefied into a blob. He then made a throwing motion and threw it against another nearby stone that was coated with more blobs of molten rock.

“Ouch,” Amy said, looking it over as it dribbled down and started to solidify again. “I wouldn’t want to get hit with a rock that hot.”

“How did you do that?” Korra demanded.

“Like this,” Lysanias said in answer, changing his stance. He now spun his arms in a circle and exerted his will on a bucket of water that was nearby. A ribbon of water formed a ring around him, and he flash froze it, lowering it to the ground around him. “Or this.” The ring evaporated, turning into steam. “It’s exactly the same thing. You’re just adding or taking away energy from the thing you’re bending. Water is obvious, but I thought perhaps less obvious elements might do the same thing. And I was right.”

“I’ve got to try that!” she exclaimed, looking around for a rock of her own.

“What about air or fire?” Amy asked.

“Adding energy to fire just makes more fire,” he told her. “I haven’t figured out how to keep it under control enough to simply make a hotter fire. I think it might be possible though, if you really concentrated on it. I’m not sure about a *colder* fire. Air heats and cools fairly easily but unless you were in a cave or something, it doesn’t last. And of course cooling a rock is an exercise in futility.” *I suppose if an earth bender wanted to cool their drink without watering it down they could put a stone into it?*

“What exactly am I doing?” Korra asked, floating a rock and staring at it.

“Whatever you do to turn water into steam. Just more. It takes a lot of energy to liquefy rock, that’s why I was using such a small stone.” Korra scowled in concentration at the rock. “You can feel energy now, right? You should be able to tell that energy is going into it.”

“True.”

“Have you seen a paper, or listened to the radio?” Amy asked. “What’s the latest on the Amon situation?”

“Are you sure you want to know?” Lysanias asked.

“That bad, huh? I better, as a bender I’ll need to know what to expect when I go in to work today.”

“Then come with me. We can grab some breakfast and you can see the good news. Coming Korra?”

“Yeah, be there in a second.”

Now at the table Tenzin showed them the headlines of the daily paper, along with a smaller headline that had Korra shaking in anger.

“Avatar Korra Mugs, Nearly Kills Equalist Outside Rally”

“What?” she yelled, snatching the paper up and scanning the story. “This... This... This isn’t how it happened at all!”

“So you didn’t jump off a roof, attack someone in the street, beat them unconscious, and steal their stuff?” Lysanias asked. “That was somebody else?”

"You're taking their side?" She shook the paper at him.

"Did you or did you not attack someone?"

"Okay, okay, I attacked someone. Did they have to go to the newspaper?"

"According to the article they went to the hospital," Tenzin told her. "Obviously the police investigated who had done it."

"What investigation? They knew- oh."

"That you had done it, because Lysanias told them? You were right to be concerned, Lysanias, apparently he had been rather badly hurt."

"I thought you healed him?" Korra asked Lysanias.

"I told you, it was dark, and I couldn't really tell how badly he was hurt. Carrying him up the ladder probably didn't help either."

"Get Lin on the phone, I'm giving her a piece of my mind."

"Are you sure that's wise? She is chief of police," Amy reminded her.

But Korra wasn't listening, just taking the phone as Tenzin calmly handed the receiver over.

"You already talked to her, didn't you?" Lysanias asked.

"I did. She seems to forget who she's going to talk to. I wish I had some popcorn ready."

"Popcorn for breakfast!" Meelo announced, sticking his head in the room.

"No son, we're not having popcorn for breakfast."

"Aw!"

Meanwhile, it seemed Korra was getting an earful from Lin, as she was sputtering and trying to get a word in edgewise.

"You can't just-"

"I know that but-"

"I'm the ava-"

"That's not-"

"If you would just-"

"She hung up on me."

"She's even more stubborn than you, if you'll recall," Tenzin gently reminded her.

"What did she say?" Amy asked.

"She made sure a reporter was called to the hospital to get the story. Said she did it to 'teach me a lesson' and that they haven't decided if they're going to press charges or not. That I can't just run around and beat people up without thinking."

"And do you think the lesson will stick this time?" Tenzin asked sweetly. "Because it didn't the *first* time you beat a bunch of people up in the street. When was that, again? Oh right, less than two weeks ago."

"I'll be out training!" she fumed, storming off with a muffin in her hand.

"Otherwise, what's the general sentiment?" Lysanias asked now that Korra was gone.

"Still too early to say," Tenzin told them. "I'll be heading into work soon, I'm sure the council building will be swamped with people demanding answers by noon though. Korra should probably make some kind of statement, but given her current mood, I'm not sure that's such a good idea."

"It seems things have gotten a lot more complicated," Amy mused. "We were talking last night, it's pretty scary to think someone can just walk over and take your bending away. It's like losing a limb, or something else you just take for granted but never really think about."

Isn't that the definition of taking something for granted?

"I'm heading out, can I offer you a ride back to the city?" Tenzin offered.

"Thanks, that would be great."

That day Korra and Lysanias tried to think of ways to use bending that hadn't been explored before. It occurred to Lysanias that you didn't have to use bending close to the body, but could instead do fire or air bending *over there* and draw the element towards yourself. This could catch someone unaware by smacking them with fire from behind, or draw an

object towards you with air bending. People routinely began these types of bending near themselves, because benders considered the art to be an extension of their bodies. But that was limited thinking, the fire appeared where you willed, within range, and air was all around.

Korra also practiced metal bending, rock heating, and chi-blocking, taking them into the night. Finally Tenzin arrived, looking haggard, and with a man in a blue suit in tow.

“Korra, this is Tarrlok,” Tenzin told them. “He insisted on speaking with you.”

“Ah, the famous avatar Korra,” he nearly purred. “It’s an honor to meet you.”

“Is it?” she questioned. “And why ‘famous,’ don’t you mean infamous?”

He laughed. “You must be referring to that awful article about you in the paper this morning. Put it out of your mind, the public has a very short memory.”

“Only when you do good,” Tenzin reminded him.

“Perhaps, perhaps. Anyway, I’m the representative of the northern water tribe, and I’ve come to you tonight with a proposal.”

“You aren’t?” Tenzin chided him.

“I am!” he cheerfully informed them. “I’m asking her!”

“You shouldn’t ask her.”

“But I am.”

“Ask me what?” she snapped.

“The council today, most of it,” he said which was a clear jab at Tenzin who he looked right at as he said it, “approved a new task force to deal with the problem Amon poses to the city. I’m leading it. And I want you by my side!”

“Forget it,” she said immediately. “I’ve got enough on my plate at the moment, thanks.” She softened. “But I do appreciate being asked.”

“You could take a minute to think about it,” he offered. “I don’t need an answer right this second.”

“Don’t need to think about it. Sorry you came all this way for nothing.” She turned back to Lysanias. “Let’s go over those points on the body again.”

Tarrlok’s eyes narrowed as he looked over at Lysanias. “Who is this? I don’t think we’ve been introduced.”

“She’s given you her answer, Tarrlok,” Tenzin said with a trace of smugness. “You better hurry back if you want to avoid the traffic.”

“Will you at least tell me why you’re turning me down? I thought you would jump at the chance to lead the charge against Amon. Especially after your, uh, *fierce* display with that equalist just last night.”

“I’ll tell you why,” Korra told him, spinning to face him. “And it’s because of that I’m trying to show a little restraint, for once. I’m the avatar, I’m supposed to be the bridge between the spirit and the physical world. Not that I know what that even means, but my job description does not read ‘help beat up chi-blockers.’ This is a political issue, and forming a ‘task force’ is only going to make the situation worse. You need to defuse the situation, not escalate it.”

“Is this coming from your air bending training?” he asked. “I know redirection is a favorite technique of Tenzin here.”

“It’s coming from a lot of things. I’m sorry, but that’s my answer.”

“I see. Well, I’m sure we won’t catch him tomorrow, so there’s still time if you do change your mind. Thank you for your consideration, and for introducing us, Tenzin. I can find my own way back to the boat, no need to trouble yourself. Good night all.”

He walked away scowling.

“I’m rather proud of you, Korra,” Tenzin admitted as they walked to the house for dinner. “That was well reasoned and explained.”

“I just don’t want any headlines about me for a few days,” Korra replied. “Good or bad. And I can see some kind of ‘task force’ going very, very, wrong.”

A week passed. Tarrlok kept sending Korra gifts in order to entice her into joining the task force, which wasn’t really making any headway taking down Amon. Mainly because without the mask on, he could walk by them in broad daylight and they would never know. Korra and Lysanias kept their training up, and he felt he was a tiny bit better at teleporting but

that was about it. As planned Lysanias went to go see the people that had lost their bending, and looked them over. He wasn't at all confident he could reverse what had been done, given he had never seen it done. And he was loathe to teach them the skills he had shared with the air benders of widening their spiritual pathways to see if they could cure themselves.

I mean what would it mean if I could 'cure' them of this? Could I give bending to people that can't bend now? It's obviously passed through family lines but how did benders come to be in the first place? Are people predisposed to one type, or could I make a hundred new avatars by doing the opposite of what I saw Amon do, once per chakra? I would have to study people that were not benders side by side with this guy, to see what the real difference is.

That night Tarrlok's assistant delivered the invitation to the Gala, which was neither Grand nor Galloping.

"Should we go?" Korra asked him.

"I don't know, I don't have a single thing to wear!" tittered Lysanias in response.

"I'm serious! What do you think?"

"Why is the guy so hot for you, anyway? I mean sure, you can bend three elements but so can any three benders. He's already on the council so he doesn't need legitimacy. It's bizarre. I do have to wonder..."

"What?"

"They're both water benders. What better cover for a person like Amon than to actually be on the council? They would never catch him because he's always one step ahead."

"You had to go and make it worse, didn't you?"

"Yup! I think we should go. If it's at his house we might be able to snoop around, see if he has a hidden mask collection or books on chi-blocking."

"What if he wants to get me alone?"

"Don't be alone with him. Stick to your date like crazy!"

"Which would be you?"

"I guess. But I was going to bring Amy as my date, you're not the jealous type are you?"

"Fine. Tell Tarrlok we're coming, and I'm bringing two guests."

"Very good," said the assistant, bowing and taking his leave.

The next night, dressed in what finery Lysanias envisioned the day before and created with his alchemy skills, the kids, Pema, Tenzin, Korra, Lysanias, and Amy stepped into the mansion owned by Tarrlok.

"Must be nice, being on the council. Just think Tenzin, you could have lived in a place like this if you hadn't been an air bender."

"If I hadn't been an air bender, I wouldn't be on the council."

"Oh right."

Tarrlok immediately grabbed Korra and started showing her around, first to a rather pudgy man named Hiroshi Sato, and his daughter Asami.

Wait, people have last names here too? This is the first last name I've ever heard! What's Korra's last name? What's Tenzin's last name? THIS IS BLOWING MY FREAKING MIND.

But he's probably not important to the story anymore, so we'll gloss over him for the moment. Asami on the other hand was looking beautiful. A fact Korra noticed as they walked away.

"She's really pretty," she remarked, little hearts in her eyes. "Why do I get the feeling she has a boyfriend though? He would have been here, right?"

"She is fairly attractive," Lysanias agreed.

"She's all right," Amy pouted. "Typical, your dates see a pretty girl and you're forgotten."

Both laughed and took one of her arms, leaving Tarrlok to scowl a bit.

"And who are you all, again?" he asked. "Feel free to enjoy the party, over there. Far away."

"Oh, I don't think so," Lysanias told him. "We'll be sticking to Korra if it's all the same to you. I'm her adviser, and I can't advise her if I'm not around."

“Her adviser?”

“That’s right.”

“I’m their date!” Amy said.

“Both of them?”

“That’s right. You have a problem with that?”

“No, I suppose not. Ah, chief Beifong, I believe you and Avatar Korra have already met?”

Oh wait, I have heard a last name before. Lin Beifong. Forgot about her.

Lin stalked over, weaning her armor as usual. “We have. How did you like that article? Pretty fair and balanced, I thought.”

“That’s old news. I’ve stayed out of trouble for more than a week.”

“Reports were you were hiding out on the island, so that shouldn’t have been hard. Try not to punch anyone while you’re here, okay?”

She turned and walked away, leaving Korra scowling.

Tarrlok continued introducing her and showing Korra off like a piece of arm candy, finally culminating in her facing a bunch of reporters shouting questions at her. He called for silence and said they should go one at a time. “That is, if you don’t mind, Korra? They want to hear your side of things.”

Great, here it comes, ‘why did you beat that guy up.’

But the first question was about Amon, asked by a thin man in front with glasses. “How serious a threat does Amon pose to the innocent citizens of Republic City?”

She looked over to Lysanias, who leaned in to whisper to her. “The only people that have had their bending taken were criminals.”

“Good point. My adviser has just reminded me that the people that have thus far lost their bending were all criminals. So what threat does he pose to *innocent* people? None. Will that change? Maybe. But for now he seems content to target those that use their bending improperly. That seems reasonable to me.”

“Reasonable?”

“Next question.”

“Are you on Amon’s side?” asked a man in red, with a hat that had a strange, tiny pink tassel on the top.

“As the avatar, unless it’s a spiritual matter, I should stay neutral in conflicts between people. So I’m not on his side or the benders side, because Amon is not a spirit.”

“Is that why you’ve haven’t joined the task force?”

“I’ll tell you why I haven’t joined the task force. Listen up, all of you, I’ll only say this once.”

Lysanias noticed Lin slipping in back of the reporters, looking up thoughtfully.

“When I first arrived in this city, I beat up some gang members, and your chief of police, Lin Beifong, told me something important. She drove the point home a few days ago when I was a bit, uh, overzealous in getting in to see the Amon rally. She said to me ‘You can’t just come here and dish out vigilante justice like you own the place.’ And she was right. Isn’t that what Tarrlok is doing now? Beating up equalists, searching for Amon? That’s vigilante justice right there, no? Has Amon broken any laws? Well, has he? Is it illegal to take someone’s bending? Moreover a criminal’s bending? Of course not, no one thought it was possible. So at the moment all he’s ‘guilty’ of is giving voice to the inequalities in our society. He holds rallies, again not illegal. If people are threatening benders, well, that’s on them, not him. You can’t go after him for what other people do. Plus he has some good points!”

“What?” Everyone started shouting and talking at once, and she held up her hands.

“Be quiet! You wanted my answer, I’m giving it. Maybe we benders do have it really good. I don’t know. I was kept away from the world for nearly all my life to train. I don’t know how non-benders live, I’ve always been a bender. Is he going about it the right way? I don’t know. Maybe this is the only way he feels will give proper attention to the issues. Maybe he tried a more subtle way and nobody ever heard of it. Maybe we only cared about him when he put on the mask.”

“Korra,” whispered Lysanias.

“Humm?”

“We’re never getting out of here after you’ve said all that. Tell them you’re going to investigate Amon’s claims of inequality in the city and report your findings. Maybe on the radio? You could give a proper interview, not just shout at people at a party.”

“Right. My adviser has given me a good idea. Who has a radio show?” Several hands went up, and Korra pointed at a woman in a long skirt, with a large pendant around her neck. “You. I’ll do a radio interview with you three days from now. Until that time I’m going to check this city out, talk to people. Benders and non-benders alike, ask them what living here is like. And Amon, if you’re out there, if you have supporters in this crowd, I invite you to speak at that time as well. Enough breaking into radio broadcasts with rhetoric. Sit down and actually debate me. Tell me what you want, what you think the non-bending people of the world want. Even if it’s by telephone, if you’re too much of a coward to come in person, that’s fine. I offer you a truce, if that’s okay with the chief here?” She looked to Lin, who was looking quite surprised. Everyone turned to her.

“No officers will arrest him,” she shouted. “He has my word. Korra’s right, he hasn’t actually broken any laws, technically. We couldn’t hold him.”

“There! You get a pass, Amon. I’m giving you a chance to make your voice heard as a calm, rational person with real concerns about how the city is run. Not as just a masked figure in the night, inspiring terror for kicks. You put on a good show, surrounded by your chi-blockers and a fancy sound system. Now let’s see if your ideals hold up to public scrutiny. Three days, set it up, tell me where to be.”

“You got it, Korra!” she agreed wholeheartedly. “We can work out the details later. This’ll make my career!” she chortled.

“Fine. The rest of you, no more questions. Save them for the interview, submit them to that lady or whatever. We’re done here. Let’s go,” she said to Lysanias, who nodded.

“No more questions, one side!” Amy shouted. “Move along there. My dates are coming though, one side.”

Did you have to say it like that?

The crowd parted, and a stunned Tarrlok watched her go, and a slightly impressed Lin went to join her exit.

Chapter 13

Korra Just Killed as a Radio Star

When: Day 23 with Korra

Where: Radio Studio

“Good morning, Republic City! I’ve got a special treat for you all today, yes, she’s sitting here in my studio. It’s Korra, the avatar.”

“...”

“Korra, the avatar!”

“Hi! Sorry, not used to this.”

“That’s okay. Also joining us are a bearded man by the name of Lysanias, who Korra calls her ‘adviser.’”

“Hello? I just talk into this thing here? How does this even work?”

“And Amy, a water bending librarian!”

“Hi everyone!”

“You can’t see it but she’s actually waving, folks. What a cutie. Maybe one day we’ll have radio for pictures, am I right?”

“That’s crazy talk!” Lysanias told them.

“A girl can dream, can’t she? We’re also joined by Tenzin, the air bending master representing air benders in the council. Incidentally, how many air benders are there, Tenzin?”

“Uh, including me? Four.”

“Wow, four. That’s worth a seat on the council, am I right? And a strange radio that was delivered yesterday, already tuned to a particular frequency. Unless I miss my guess, we’ll be joined by Amon later via this radio. We’ve got it turned up to eleven and close to a mic, so if Amon speaks, we’ll hear him.”

“Because he was apparently too chicken duck to come and talk face to face,” Korra put in.

“There was a fairly heavy police presence here this morning,” the host admitted.

“Holding back the crowds. It’s radio, people, you have to be near your radio to hear the interview, not standing outside. Sillies! So, let’s get started. Korra, you promised to spend the last three days walking the city and talking to people. Did you do that?”

“I sure did. We spoke to forty non-benders in all walks of life and thirty four benders. They had a lot to say.”

“What was the general sentiment?”

“That Amon’s off his nut.”

“Korra!” admonished Tenzin.

“What? It’s just a saying.”

“You can’t say that on the radio. This isn’t the Stern Show!”

“Really?”

“Anyway, why this sentiment, Korra?”

“When I was at the Amon rally, his message was all about how benders had been the cause of every war, ever. Not resources, not people just being terrible to each other. Benders, specifically. But in day to day life, bending isn’t really all that useful unless your job specifically requires it, like generating electricity. Take Amy as an example; how often does your water bending come into play in the library?”

“Not very often,” she admitted. “You ever get a book wet? It’s not so much a book anymore as a very crappy sponge. I can say ‘crappy’ on the radio, right?”

“That’s fine.”

“Good. So no, day to day bending doesn’t do much for me. Oh, I use it to heat my tea every morning, or boil water to cook an egg. But there’s this stuff called ‘natural gas’ and I’m not talking about any human expulsions. I can say ‘expulsions’ right?”

“I’ll get you a list of things you shouldn’t say at the break.”

“Thanks. Natural gas, it makes fire, that heats things up. I did once have an idea for a hot water system reliant on water benders, if they could move hot water around the city we could have hot showers in the morning way cheaper.”

“That’s probably true. So you’re saying that bending is becoming less relevant to

modern life anyway, so he should just let it go?”

“That’s right.”

Unknown to them, a very excited man across town was calling for a woman named “Zhu Li” to rush him to the patent office before the show was over.

“How can I let it go, when a fire bender killed my entire family?” Amon’s voice came through the radio next to the microphone.

“Ah, welcome Amon. If that is you?”

“How did you appear at the rally?” Korra demanded.

“I was raised through a trap door in the stage. I was flanked by six chi-blockers and my lieutenant. Does that satisfy?”

“It sounds like you. I guess I’ll take your word for it. So it’s simply revenge you’re after?”

“I’m after justice, for all the non-benders of the world.”

“Because if one bender is bad, they all must be.”

“But they are. They are the cause of all the suffering of the world.”

“That’s preposterous,” Tenzin told him. “You really think if bending had never existed, there would have been no wars throughout history?”

“I’m only concerned with what has happened, not with what might have happened.”

“So what, exactly, is it that you want?” asked the host.

“I want to make everyone equal, using my ability to take people’s bending away.”

“About that,” Lysanias asked. “Lysanias here, not a huge fan. Just running some rough numbers here, we figure there’s about one and a half billion people in the world, some percentage of which are benders. We’ll say about 300 million. Let’s say you can somehow line up all 300 million benders in the world and taking their bending away takes you roughly fifteen seconds per person. I mean one person has to be dragged up, then you stand there, then they’re dragged away. That’s four per minute, or 75 million minutes. That’s 1.25 million hours, at eight hours a day that’s 156,250 days and there’s roughly 350 good days to do this because I’ll give you a little break to sit down once in a while so,” he took a deep breath, “you’re looking at about four hundred and fifty years to get them all. Better get started!”

“That’s not the point. Obviously.”

“What is the point?”

“Who are you, again? Some kind of adviser? Because you sound like a math teacher and I hated my math teacher.”

“That’s not the point. Answer my question.”

“I see how it is. The point is raising awareness. One day making bending illegal.”

“What, you’re going to kill them or something? Anyone caught bending in public will be flogged, is that it?” Korra demanded.

“I’m sure some punishment can be devised.”

“What about rich people?” Lysanias asked. “Wealthy business owners and the like.”

“What about them?”

“Well, if you want to make people equal, bending is the least of your problems isn’t it? There can be no equality if someone has more money than me, isn’t that right?”

“I consider myself smarter than some people,” Amy spoke up. “Is that inequality?”

“I have a radio show,” the host agreed. “Should everyone have a radio show?”

“That isn’t the point either!”

“No?” Lysanias asked. “Then let me ask you this in another way. Two people rob a store on the same day. Opposite ends of town, they get away with roughly equal amounts of cash. They’re caught two weeks later and put on trail. At the trial, it’s revealed that one of the people is a fire bender. Does that person get a lighter sentence *for that reason alone*?”

“No, of course not.”

“Then aren’t benders and non-benders already equal in the only way that matters? In the eyes of the law?”

“Oh, you want to talk about laws? Let’s talk about the council then. Why are there no non-benders as a part of it?”

“That’s just coincidence,” Tenzin assured him. “You don’t have to be a bender to be on

the council.”

“That is a good point though,” admitted Lysanias. *And don't think I've not noticed your dodge about being equal under the law, because you totally are. So your movement is really so much smoke.* “In fact, I'd even take it a step further. Why not add a fifth seat to the council, exclusively to represent people of the city and exclusively a non-bender.”

“Humm, that could be arranged.”

“What?” asked Amon.

“Yes, it's a good point,” agreed Amy. “We have representatives from the four nations, but not the independent nation of the city itself. It is an oversight.”

“We could take it one step further,” Lysanias went on. “Let's give Amon that seat. He's a non-bender, right? Not, oh just to throw a style out there, a water bender. Right Amon? You're just a normal guy, and we wouldn't want more water benders, again to pick at random, on the council. That wouldn't be 'equal.' There are already two, if I'm not mistaken? Yes, Tenzin is nodding to me, folks. Maybe that radio picture thing would come in handy after all.”

“Are you implying something?”

“What? No, what are you talking about? I'm saying you're in tune with the common man, right? You know what he wants, how he thinks. I think you would be a great fit for this fifth seat, it would give you a chance to actually make policy and take your movement out of the shadows. I mean late night rallies? People shouting on street corners? Is that really the best way to go about things?”

“What about this 'task force' that wants to hunt me down?”

“I was against that from the start,” Tenzin told him. “It was Tarrlok who was pushing for that. Take it up with him.”

“Don't literally take it up with him, just write him a nasty letter,” Lysanias cautioned. “No vigilante justice. Attacking a council member would really be bad for your image.”

“Whoo boy, no, don't do that,” Korra agreed. “The chief of police does not like that sort of thing. Believe me.”

“I notice you haven't joined the task force,” Amon went on.

“For that very reason. I think you can be reasoned with. If you're serious about change, if you really want to help bring equality, which to me sounds a bit like balance, then fine. Let your voice be heard in an official capacity, equal to the other council members. You get your vote just like they do on issues.”

“They would just vote against me!”

“They vote against me a lot too,” Tenzin remarked. “But at least my voice is heard. Right now you're considered a criminal, or you will be once they make taking someone's bending away illegal. You have no voice. I can help you change that.”

“I... I don't know.”

“I don't need an answer today. Just think about it.”

“If, like I said before, you're not a bender,” Lysanias reminded him. “A water bender.”

“I'm not, so it's fine.” Even over the primitive radio you could hear Amon's temper heating.

“Great! There's nothing stopping you then.”

“We'll be back after these messages from our sponsors.”

“And we're back. So Amon, tell us about your early life. Korra tells me you said your family was killed by fire benders, what was it like growing up without your parents?”

“It was pretty-”

“Sorry, you say you lost your parents?” Lysanias interrupted.

“That's right.”

“So you survived the attack, what have you been doing since then? Also, how exactly did you know you could take people's bending away? Obviously Zolt couldn't have been your first, you were too confident for that. Were you visited by spirits? Did they talk to you? What did they look like? How did you practice this ability? Did you need practice at it? Are there people running around out there with no bending from your youth, and people think they're crazy, or did you just murder them? Did you have to work your way up the chakras or could you just close off any at will from the beginning? Sorry, I know that's a lot of questions. I could

repeat them slower if you wanted.”

“...”

“Are you still there? That thing’s still plugged in, right?”

“Amon, are you still there?” asked the host. “That’s strange, we seem to have lost him. Well, we’ll see if we get him back. Let’s talk about you, Korra. You’ve been seen with both Lysanias and Amy lately, Amy even claimed to be your date and Lysanias’ date at the party several nights ago. Are you all somehow romantically engaged?”

Korra laughed. “It’s nothing like that, she was just fooling around. We’re just friends, that’s all.”

“And he’s your adviser?”

“That’s right. I decided I could use one. You try being kept away from the world for seventeen years by the white lotus organization. You would need one too.”

“I don’t doubt it. And he’s the one advising you to somewhat distance yourself from the Amon situation?”

“That’s right. But our chief of police, Lin Beifong, helped me decide that too. Honestly, I’m the avatar and I’m a decent fighter but I’m still just one person. I don’t have all the answers-”

“She doesn’t even know half the questions yet,” Amy joked.

“Exactly. Tenzin’s great, I’m sure someday soon I’ll be able to air bend under his watchful eye, but I needed something only Lysanias can give me.”

“I see. And are you a bender?”

“I’ve been known to bend to the will of the mountain,” Lysanias admitted. “Metal as well is a favorite of mine.”

“Ah, an earth bender. Hey, we have Korra for fire as I hear she prefers that element in her fighting, Tenzin for air, Lysanias for earth, and Amy for water. How did that happen?”

“Total coincidence?”

“Must be. So you’re focused on training, then?”

The interview turned more to Korra’s personal life, and finally wrapped up.

“I’m serious about the fifth seat though,” Tenzin remarked as his closing statement.

“Amon, take that mask off, step into the light, and put your money where your mouth is. Enough cloak and dagger business, it’s not helping your cause despite what you think.”

“Support your local library!”

“Become the best you can be.”

“Try to keep your lives in balance.”

“There you are folks, words of wisdom from the avatar gang.”

“Uh, we prefer ‘team avatar,’” Korra informed her.

We do? I suppose ‘gang’ makes it sound like we’re always beating people up in the streets... wait...

“Thanks for the interview,” the woman said once they were off the air. She shook hands with everyone.

“Hope it helps boost your ratings or whatever,” Korra told her.

“I’m sure it will,” she replied with a laugh. “Come on, I’ll see you out.”

“Good job with the offer of the fifth seat,” Lysanias praised Tenzin as they rode to the docks on Naga. “Make *him* look like the unreasonable one for not taking you up on it. A master stroke, if I do say so myself.”

“I do have some experience in these matters,” he reminded everyone with no more than a hint of complete smugness. “Let’s see what becomes of it.”

What became of it was Lysanias being attacked that night by three chi-blockers bursting into his room while he slept. He had been dreaming about a masked man standing over him with a knife, saying “Now let’s see what makes you tick” and beginning to slice him apart. His eyes flew open and he sat up, hoping that wasn’t a dream of the future.

Wait, why am I feeling that tingling sensation that warns me of OH CRAP!

Three figures had burst into his room, all wearing the green jumpsuits and gas mask/goggle combos that were standard to “graduated” chi-blockers.

My first instinct would be to call my spirit, these jokers couldn't see it, but what are the chances it would come on the first try?

The room was small, barely a few meters across, and the bed was pushed up against the wall so at least Lysanias couldn't be flanked at the moment. The three circled the bed, thinking they had the upper hand.

The odds are somewhat overwhelming. Still, I shall acquit myself nobly. Can't air bend, there's no way I'm an air bender. Not a lot of earth around here, or water. Great. Fire it is! Unless...

He sprang out of bed, catching himself with his right hand as he did and summersaulting between two of his assailants. He came upright behind the man, or woman it was hard to tell, and as the person was turning around unleashed a flurry of blows against his back to try and paralyze them. He was rewarded with a surprised gasp and the person falling forward, paralyzed.

What do you know, it works.

Now the one to Lysanias' right leapt at him, trying to get under his guard and do the same to him. He jabbed three times, but Lysanias simply countered his blows with three quick strikes of his own. He didn't have to worry about the man's strength, he was clearly not putting any effort into the strikes so as to get them off as rapidly as possible. Lysanias could just swat them away as fast as they came.

But now Lysanias was being flanked, as the man behind sprang into action. Lysanias felt him coming with earth bending, because you don't think he slept with his shoes on, do you? As this attacker went to hit him Lysanias simply did a flaming uppercut, driving them back.

After all, I don't want to tear the floor up here, do I? I'd have to clean it up afterwards. But why do I have the sudden urge to shout "You must defeat Sheng Long to stand a chance!"

“I thought you said he was an earth bender?”

“That's what he said on the radio!”

“Don't believe everything you read in the papers,” Lysanias told them.

“That doesn't even make sense!”

Lysanias saw that the one on the right was now taking his chance, so Lysanias figured he would try that “dodging” thing again, and try to get behind the guy. He did one of those “spiral movements” Tenzin was always telling Korra about, and deftly got behind the guy, who hit only air.

“He moves like an air bender!”

“But he fights like a chi-blocker!”

The one furthest away now had to try and get through his buddy because Lysanias was almost pressed into the guy's back in order to create that exact situation. He started forward, and Lysanias knew he was going to be within striking distance before the other guy could turn around.

This is strange, I seem to have an almost instinctual understanding of how this combat is going to go. I must have absorbed more than just fighting technique when I was watching Korra and the others perform bending. Some kind of combat intuition?

Instead of trying to parry another flurry of blows he kept his spiral up, again putting the man he was behind between himself and the other guy. He was turning with the man, so his back was right there, he figured he might as well do something about it. He didn't turn quite enough, taking one hit from the guy and feeling his chakra be impacted. He knew it would take hitting all four to completely do him in, so he concentrated on taking the guy before him down. He again managed all four blows against the man's body points, and there was a thud as the man joined his companion in counting dust bunnies on the floor.

“Impossible!” cried the man, taking a step back.

“What, that I could learn chi-blocking too? Uh, anyone can learn that you know.”

And with a flourish he went to finish the combat, but this guy was no fool. He wasn't born yesterday. He had a good head on his shoulders. He had both feet on the ground. He

wouldn't take a wooden nickel if you gave him a dime to take it. He had horse sense and the mind of an elephant. The other thing he had was a preservation instinct, and this led him to the conclusion that getting out of the way of those strikes was probably the thing to do in that situation. So he did.

He then turned tail to run, trying to jump through the window one of them had crashed through initially and get away. But Lysanias was right there with him, throwing another flurry of blows. The man went down.

Lysanias looked at his hands, then down at himself. With no weapons, no friends, no special powers apart from that one burst of fire earlier he had taken out three highly trained people who had come to do unspeakable things to him. He had only taken one blow and-

To me, and maybe to others on the island.

"Korra!" he yelled, looking out the window to see if anything was going on out there.

Do I just leave these jokers here? I don't know how long their paralysis will last on adults, I've only done it to the air bender kids. But she could be losing her bending at this very second. What do I do?

In this chapter, Lysanias defends against a chi-blocker. Here's how I'm handling this: Opponents make opposed checks in the Combination Attack special skill. If the defender gets more/equal "strikes" to the attacker they have enough to defend against the "strikes" of the attacker. Then opposed martial arts checks are performed. Again if the defender is higher they have defended against the entire attack. If they get less "strikes" then the number they fail by get through. If they get lower on the martial arts check they miss all strikes.

Chapter 14

Night Moves

When: Seconds of thought later

Where: Lysanias' room

Looking the three barely twitching men over Lysanias knew he had a problem. He didn't want to stay here when Korra could be fighting for her life (or her bending) this very second. But at the same time, he didn't want these men to get away and cause more trouble. (Or report back to Amon.) He needed a way to quickly subdue them that didn't rely on bashing them in the back of the head until they were unconscious.

I could shove them into contain wards, that would solve the problem, but they can still see. They would totally freak out, and what happens when they get out and start telling people about me? The shadow avatar would recognize a ward a mile away from the description. I need to do something these people would understand. Wait a second! Lysanias went over to his trunk and pulled a contain ward off the side, out of a small holder. *I still have a ton of metal chunks in here. I bet it would bend nicely and wrap these fellows up. I just have to release it over in the next room.* He did, floating it back and using metal bending to create a thick "rope" he wrapped around the three, pinning them in place.

I hope that's good enough, I don't want to spend any more time on them. Stay!

With that done he called to his spirit and the second time it heard him and came out. He had grabbed one of the moonlight orbs from the trunk as well, which lit his way as it was somewhat cloudy and dark that night. They charged over to the ladies' dorms and saw several members of the white lotus on the ground, paralyzed.

Great, just great. Still, never thought this solid moonlight would come in handy, but it's actually better for nighttime stuff than my solid sunlight orb. Less strain on the eyes, and no chance of werewolves around here. Thanks again, Rick.

But as he got close to the girl's rooms he ran into some guards that weren't knocked out, and he hastily sent some back to check on their fellows and secure the three in his room.

"Bring metal benders, and if they seem to be paralyzed, don't be fooled. They may be faking it to get close and chi-block you."

"Right. I'll show you to the avatar's room!" said the one.

"Lead the way."

They burst in on the Avatar, having a life and death struggle with... her pillow.

"Er?" Lysanias managed, looking around. He didn't feel anyone else nearby, and he didn't get the sense he was about to be attacked either.

"I think she's fine," said the guard.

"Oddly enough, I think you're right."

"Hmm?" Korra woke up, looking around the room. She squinted at him in the moonlight held in his hand. "What's that, and what's going on?"

"This is solid moonlight made with alchemy, and what's up is I was just attacked by three equalists. So I thought you might be in danger too. Apparently not."

"What? Equalists here?" She sat straight up in bed and threw her covers off.

Oh my... wait, what? She seemed to be dressed in her clothes, ready for action. *Oh. Well, I suppose she comes from a colder climate, being near the pole and all. Still, sleeping in your clothes? That's weird.*

"Yeah, some of the island's guards were taken by surprise but if you're fine..."

"We better check on the kids, and Tenzin."

"Right!"

Korra got Naga up and the three of them rode over to where Tenzin and his family lived, but were assured by the guards there they had seen and heard nothing. One went in, reporting that the family was fine when he came out a few minutes later.

"So wait, the attack was just against me?" Lysanias asked no one in particular. "What sense does that make?"

“What’s this about an attack?” a sleepy Tenzin asked, trailing the man who had gone in to check on him.

“Three equalists burst into my room a few minutes ago.”

His eyes flew open. “My goodness, are you all right?”

“For a wonder, yes. I only got hit once, so I’m a little sore but that’s about it. I was more worried about Korra or you, but it seems the attack was directed against me.”

“Curious. Where are the three now?”

“Hopefully still tied up in my room. I sent some white lotus people to keep an eye on them, and to tend to the ones that were taken out. They were all still alive, don’t worry.”

“Let’s go see them, then. You, call the police and get someone out here. It seems Lysanias has a nice little gift for the chief, I would hate to see them get away.”

“Right sir.”

The three were being carefully covered by the white lotus members, and Tenzin pulled their masks off. There were two men and a woman, and all glared sullenly at him.

“I don’t suppose you’ll tell me what this was all about?” Tenzin put to them.

“We were ordered to escort Lysanias here to see Amon. That’s all we know,” said the one man on the left.

“You don’t know why?”

“We don’t ask questions of our great leader.”

“He might as well employ animals then,” Lysanias remarked. “He’s a water bender, you know.”

“We will not tolerate your filthy lies about our leader!” the woman spat. “He fights against benders!”

“Right. And just so happens to have a “gift” from the “spirits” to take bending away. You didn’t think it was connected to bending at all?”

The three just glared.

“Well, suit yourselves. The police will be here shortly to take you into custody, and I will be pressing assault charges against all three of you. We’ll see how your ‘great leader’ gets you out of it, if he doesn’t just forget you exist suddenly.”

“You did fail him,” Tenzin agreed. “He won’t be pleased.”

“You won’t turn us against him!” vowed the man on the right.

“Wouldn’t dream of it.”

“How did you do it?” asked the woman, seemingly unable to contain the question any longer.

“Do what?”

“You attacked me with fire, but then you bent this metal. That shouldn’t be possible. Are you a fire bender or an earth bender like you said on the radio?”

Oh great, she would notice that. “The same way Amon blood bends without being a water bender, I guess,” he said, trying to brush the question off. “Think about it.”

She just looked confused.

Twenty minutes later the group was floated over to the police boat by earth benders, and Lysanias said he would be down in the morning to give his full statement and talk to the chief. They drove away, the noise of the engine slowly dying down over the flat expanse of water.

Guess I didn’t need you after all, he thought to the spirit, who was still hanging about in case the three made trouble somehow. *Thanks for coming when I called.*

It bowed but held up a hand.

“What? Is something wrong?”

It pointed at the boat.

“What about it?”

Then it turned and spread its arms, seeming to take in the entire island.

“What? I really wish you could talk without me having to go into my inner soulscape. I may have to, if I can’t get what you’re trying to get across.”

“I could get him a pencil,” remarked Tenzin.

The pantomime continued, with the spirit seeming to shade its eyes against the sun and look the island over, then pointed at Lysanias.

"I'm still not following!"

It threw its hands up in frustration, making a noise like rocks falling downhill.

"Wait, I think I'm getting an idea," Tenzin told him. "This whole island, right? How did they know exactly which room you were staying in?"

The spirit started clapping.

"Oh. How *did* they know which room I was staying in?"

"That's what I think it wants to know."

"I suppose if he was the shadow avatar, he would know, right? But no, why send only three people in that case? If he even suspected, he would figure I would know or have things from other worlds I could use to defend myself with. It doesn't make sense."

"Now I'm worried we have a traitor on the island."

Korra scowled at the white lotus member that had stayed with them.

"One of us?" scoffed the man. "Never!"

"That would be a scary thought," she remarked. "I've known some of you my whole lives."

"I wonder..."

"I could ask. As this concerns me directly I wouldn't mind getting an answer right away."

"Ask?"

"Never mind. Go back to your duties," commanded Tenzin. "I'll take it from here."

"Very well. Have a good night." He walked back towards his post.

"Let's go back to my room, I'll ask there. No need to have guards, which I hope are now on a greater alert, wander past and wonder why I'm just sitting there with you hovering over me. Can you do that? Hover?"

"Briefly," Tenzin admitted. "We can fly with our gliders though. I'm a bit old for it now, but you've seen the kids doing it."

"True, I just wondered if you could actually hover. We're off. You might as well go back to bed, Korra. Sorry to have gotten you up for nothing."

"I don't mind a little moonlight stroll. Even if the moonlight is only in the palm of your hand. You'll have to show me that later, it's pretty neat."

"Sure thing."

It was only ten minutes later when Lysanias received an answer to his question regarding the identity of the traitor on the island. (Naturally he hadn't wasted time asking if there was one first, figuring there was and if he got an answer like "there isn't one" he would have been quite surprised.) A few moments later he, Tenzin, and several other members stalked along with them seeking the traitorous monster than had sold Lysanias out to Amon. He saw them coming and bolted.

"After that man!" shouted one of the white lotus, and they took off through the night in pursuit.

"You could have hit him with lightning or something, right?" Tenzin asked.

"That could kill him by accident! Where's he going to go? It's an island, as we were so recently reminded." He indicated his spirit.

Tenzin snapped his fingers. "The docks! He isn't swimming back to the mainland!"

"Exactly. Come on."

They hurried over there directly and soon enough the man came pounding towards them.

"Going somewhere?" Lysanias asked, his spirit, now twice the size of a man standing there next to him. All the white lotus members were benders, so the man could see it. "You're trapped, might as well just make the best of it and come clean."

The man seemed to consider, almost taking his stance, but looked back over his shoulder as the others were close behind him.

"Fine. I surrender," he admitted, deflating a bit.

"Why did you do it?" Lysanias asked.

"Tell him where your room was? They paid me. You know how much I make standing

around guarding the avatar? Not much.”

“Money? That’s it? You sold someone out for money?” Tenzin was clearly shocked. “If Amon had threatened your family or something it would have been one thing, but just money? You’re supposed to be the honor guard of the avatar herself. How could you even think of acting in such a manner?”

“It had nothing to do with Korra. It had to do with him,” he pointed, “who even *is* this guy, anyway? He came out of nowhere, started hanging around the avatar. They’re always training together, or something, but he’s been seen with that Amy girl too so they’re not lovers. Amon just wanted to talk to the guy, and I make a little on the side. He promised not to go after the avatar! I didn’t see the harm in it.”

“Unbelievable,” Tenzin breathed. “Korra can’t just meet someone and be friends with them without you getting him kidnapped?”

“What’s he staying on the island for, if they’re just ‘friends?’ Huh?”

“He’s staying here because- I don’t have to tell you that!”

“We’ll take it from here,” said one of the white lotus group, stepping forward. “We’ll think of something suitable for a man who would betray the avatar.”

“But I didn’t, just this weirdo. I mean have you seen his eyes? Tell me that’s natural.”

“Don’t make excuses. If they had succeeded how would the avatar have reacted? It’s a clear betrayal of her, even indirectly. The fact he took on three chi-blockers by himself after being surprised out a sound sleep should give you some idea why Korra keeps him around. He must be a fighting genius.”

Which I suppose I am, now. Neat!

“Whatever.”

They started dragging him away.

“Wait,” commanded Lysanias. “What will happen to him?”

“That’s for our higher ups to decide,” said one.

“I don’t want him imprisoned or anything,” he decided, thinking about his own stints in jail. (Brief as they all were.) “Find the money he was paid, throw him out of the white lotus, but let him make some other way in the world.”

“Are you sure? You could have been killed, or worse, had your bending taken by Amon.”

“Or maybe he did just want to talk. Regardless, I won’t let you ruin his life because of one moment of weakness.”

“Okay, I’ll tell them, but it really isn’t up to me.”

“Fine.”

They escorted him off.

“That was quite noble,” Tenzin told him.

“Without me around, he probably would have continued being in the white lotus,” Lysanias explained. “To just lock him up? Or break his legs or whatever they do to traitors here? I don’t want that on my conscience. I’ll sleep someplace else, Korra should as well, maybe come up with a new ward to secure my room. I haven’t done a new ward in ages, I should keep my hand in it. It’ll be fine, and his life isn’t ruined because of my being here.”

“I see. I suppose every man has his price, but he could just as easily have betrayed Korra directly, if you hadn’t been here. He was obviously susceptible to bribery.”

Lysanias sighed. “I’ll never really know how my presence changes things. Even staying here on the island most of the time doesn’t stop that, I guess. I’ve tried to stay out of the way but if stuff like this happens, what am I supposed to do about it?”

“Not sure I have an answer.”

He sadly shook his head. “I’m heading back to bed. Hopefully there won’t be another attack tonight.”

“One more thing. Those three, you didn’t... blood bend them, did you? You beat them some other way?”

“Blood bend, no, I didn’t even think of it! I just thought in terms of stuff they would reasonably expect me to do. I chi-blocked them. Shoot, that would have been faster, wouldn’t it? But no, I wouldn’t have, no way to explain that!”

“I only ask because we consider it a ‘dark art’ so to speak. Some evil people have used

it in the past, and quite frankly if knowledge of it passed out of this world, I wouldn't shed a tear."

"I see. It does seem rather brutal, taking control of someone's body away from them. I'll only use it as a last resort, even with trying to keep the fact I can do it at all secret."

"I appreciate it. I'll have your guard doubled just in case. Good night."

"Night."

The next morning Lysanias and Korra went with Tenzin to see Lin, and she greeted them at the police station.

"I don't suppose they've been babbling all of Amon's plans that they know about in an effort to gain some sort of leniency?" Lysanias asked her.

"They haven't said a word," Lin told him.

"Pity."

"You want to bring them up on charges?"

"Whatever we can do. Trespassing, breaking and entering, assault-"

"Intent to kidnap," Tenzin added.

"Exactly. But if you can get any information out of them in exchange for less jail time or whatever, do it. Amon is the primary focus here, not them."

"True. And if you hadn't been here, they would never have gone after you."

"Exactly."

"Very well. I'll let you know when you'll need to appear for their trial and give testimony they attacked you."

"Of course."

"I have to ask though, couldn't you use your abilities," she wiggled her fingers, "to get information from them without asking?"

"Well, my friend Amy, that's Amy Pond the water spirit back home, she... That's odd." Lysanias stopped short. "This Amy is a water bender, and my Amy was a water spirit. What an odd parallel."

"What are you talking about?" Lin demanded.

He waved her off. "Just an odd coincidence. As I was saying, the Amy on my world could read minds, at least a little, but I didn't pick that up from her. It's a more advanced skill than I was ready for. I could touch them and learn their pasts, but from the outside where would that information seem to come from? Anyone in Amon's organization would assume they talked, and maybe set up some form of retaliation. When they could honestly say they didn't give any up, I just tore the information out of them. I don't want them getting killed on my conscience."

"I see. Our best leads and you don't want something bad to happen to them."

"That's right, I don't. It would be easy to just go in there, pin them down with my spirit or chi-block them into senselessness, and learn everything they've done in the past year. But if I did that, what kind of person would that make me? Would you want every moment of your life for the past year to flash by someone else's eyes?"

"I have nothing to hide!"

"Oh really?" He stared into her eyes, an eyebrow raised. "You wear your armor twenty four hours a day?"

"Well, maybe not nothing- never you mind!" Her cheeks reddened.

"Ooooh, who's the lucky guy?" Korra teased.

"It's nothing like that!"

"Sure it's not!" She bumped Lysanias with an elbow and they winked at each other, as he finally was starting to understand what that meant.

"If you're just going to make insinuations you can all just get out of here. We'll do it the old fashioned way."

"Breaking their kneecaps?" Korra asked, looking strangely excited.

"No, good police work!" she snapped. "Go on, out of here!"

"Call Tenzin if you need us," Lysanias told her, pointing a thumb at him.

"Need you to do nothing?" Lin said under her breath. "Sure, of course I will."

So Tenzin went to work, Lysanias and Korra visited Amy at the library for a bit, for three reasons. Lysanias wanted to look her over, see if there were any physical similarities between the two girls (not that he expected any, given how supernaturally beautiful "his" Amy was) and two for a quiet place to think. Third he wanted to look up the history of blood bending, which Amy, being a water bender herself, could just tell him. She said the practice was *highly* frowned upon, and given most could only use it three days a month hardly worth the effort anyway.

So most really can only use it under a full moon? Strange how Amon... you don't think he was carrying a piece of moonlight like I can, do you? I've never tried it, so I don't exactly know if I can do it as he did or not. Wonder if Korra would volunteer to let me try it on her?

With that explanation out of the way, he went into a separate room to ask the universe directly if Amon was the shadow avatar. Now that he had a sense of the sort of answers this world would give him, visions of spirits and whatnot, he felt he could interpret the answer properly. Interestingly enough, the only thing he could get out of the universe was the equivalent of a shrug, no matter how he asked.

"Does this universe not knowing what a 'shadow avatar' is play a part?" asked Amy, when he told her about what he had seen.

"Maybe. In fact that's as good a theory as any. I suppose he could be warded somehow against my power. If I was a shadow avatar and hiding from people that could do what I can do, I would. If I asked directly who the host of the shadow king was, I would probably get the same 'I have no idea' answer, because the universe can't gather information about him."

"So now what?" Korra asked.

"Head back and train more, I guess. See if Amon sends more people to 'persuade' me to come talk to him. See what his next move is, and if there's some threat to the world he poses. He still just seems like too small a person to be our guy, despite sending people after me specifically. I did hint he was a water bender, if I was him I would want to know why I said that too."

"Stay safe," Amy told him. "I'll see you later, I'll stop by the island after work."

"Happy to have you!" Korra told her with a smile. "See you then."

Chapter 15

Amon's Threats

When: Day 40 in the Avatar universe

Where: Breakfast table

"Still no response to your offer?" Lysanias asked Tenzin at the table that morning.

He shook his head. "None. His week is almost up, but we've heard nothing. Not that I expected Amon to unmask himself and come to claim to the council seat, but even a tersely worded "no thank you" would have been the polite thing to do."

"Pity. That means the law will go into effect and he'll become a criminal."

"That's right."

"What law, daddy?" asked Ikki.

"The council made it illegal to take someone's bending away like Amon is doing," he explained. "But as he's only used it on criminals at this point—"

"That we know of," interrupted Korra.

"Yes, that we know of. As I was saying, only used it on criminals he would get a pardon for it. As obviously used in an official capacity it would be allowed. There are more than a few benders I wish we could make less of a threat."

"Remember, I can do it if you needed me to," Lysanias reminded him.

"And let the world know that? I don't think so."

"Up to you."

"You can beat him, right?" Ikki asked Lysanias.

"Of course. You don't have to worry, you're safe with me around."

"Okay!" she got up to leave the table.

"Don't forget your jacket if you go out," Pema told her. "It's supposed to start snowing today."

"Okay mom." She skipped away, her brother close at her heels.

"Thank you for the meal," Jinora said, their ritual phrase after eating. "I'll be in the practice room when my tutors arrive."

"I know."

Jinora got up, bowed, and calmly left the room.

"She's really been focused on that book you gave her," Pema remarked when she was gone. "She was always such a good child, but you've really made an impression on her. I only hope some of it rubs off on her brother someday. Brothers!" She colored and giggled a little, still happy to think of his predictions about her coming child.

"She comes to see me for various clarifications and to gauge her progress," Lysanias told her. "She seems like a very serious person. I like her."

"And speaking of progress, how is your progress, Korra?" Tenzin asked. "You don't come to me for 'various clarifications.'"

"That's because I've made no progress to gauge," Korra complained, pouting a bit.

"Don't be like that," Lysanias chided. "You can follow a person around the island blindfolded by following their energy. You can lift more than you ever could so your energy pathways are widening as they should. Plus your strikes are getting faster and more accurate, I think you'll be a decent chi-blocker in another week or so. You score on my pressure points more than half the time, after all."

"But none of that is air bending!"

Lysanias made a "Bah!" face and waved that off. "What do you really need it for? You have four other methods of attack at the moment, three elements and chi-blocking. What's air going to do for you that you can't already do?"

"It's just important, who ever heard of an avatar that can only use *three* of the four elements?"

"You've gotten through the gates, haven't you?" Tenzin asked.

She sighed. "Yeah, I'm not trying to plow through them anymore, to borrow Lysanias' phrase. I understand spiral movements, my energy just doesn't reach that chakra. I mean I can feel it now, within myself, I'm that good at sensing energy at least. But that doesn't tell me why!"

"I still think we need to explore the grief angle," Lysanias informed her. "Talk to someone. It doesn't have to be me. Find a, what did you call them? Psycho-tress?"

"You mean a psychologist?" she asked, disgusted.

"Yeah, whatever. Find one that has a good reputation, knows to keep their mouth shut, and go talk to them. See what shakes loose."

"It can't be just grief. There's got to be something else!"

"Suit yourself, it's just a suggestion."

"As long as she's learning something and not just spinning her wheels," Tenzin admitted. "That's good enough for me at the moment. I knew it wouldn't happen overnight."

"I am," Korra reluctantly admitted. "Lysanias is a big help, though sometimes his explanations of things leaves a lot to be desired."

"Hey, I've never had training in how to train someone in this stuff. We're both in the same boat here."

"I know, I'm just teasing." She smiled at him.

"Oh, you're doing an extra fifty push-ups today young lady!"

"Fifty!? I'd like to see you do twenty at a time!"

"That's not the point."

"Fifteen even!"

"Okay, I'm not-"

"Ten on a good day! I mean have you seen your arms?"

"Okay, okay, an extra ten, are you happy?"

Both broke into laughter.

It does bring up a good point, when am I going to put on some muscle? I'm training just as hard as she is, but I don't seem to get any better. I mean it's only been a month here, but it's been how many months since I got woken up? Is something wrong with my body now? Guess I shouldn't get too worried yet, I'm not as clumsy as I was before at least, so that's an improvement. Still, Korra is so strong! And toned, she showed me her stomach muscles once, I couldn't believe how fit she looked. And that figure of hers? She may not be as supernaturally beautiful as Amy back home, but how could anyone resist that body? Plus she has those huge... reserves of spiritual energy.

That night, Amon broke into the local radio broadcast again, sending this message out into the airwaves: "Hello my fellow equalists. I have heard the whispers among you, rumors spread by that friend of the avatar's, about me being a water bender. That some pretty words by the avatar and Tenzin have showed me the folly of our cause, that bending can never be removed from the world as I wish. But I say it can. To prove I have not been cowed by the council's 'offer' of a seat, I call upon them to cancel the pro-bending finals that will happen just days from now, and close down the arena. If they do not, there will be... consequences."

The family sat around the dinner table, all looking grim.

"Pro-bending," Korra finally said at last. "You know, one of the reasons I was so excited to come here in the first place was because of the arena. I figured I would go to matches all the time. Then you showed up, Lysanias, and I didn't go to a single one."

"It's all nonsense anyway, I'm glad you didn't," Tenzin told her. "Bending is a form of spiritual expression with a long and noble history. Not something to be done for the entertainment of the masses."

She snorted and tried not to laugh.

"What?"

"Oh, nothing, nothing. You're right, of course." She shot a glance at Lysanias and winked.

They both have a point. With machines like cars and electric lights and such, what does the average person need bending for anyway? One day it may be used as just a spiritual expression, done in ceremonies relating to the spirits but otherwise not a part of everyday life at all.

"You don't think they'll shut the tournament down, do you?" asked Meelo. "I wanted you to take us, dad!"

“What did I just get finished saying?”

“Now dear,” Pema gently admonished him. “Pro-bending exists, and wouldn’t spending some time with your son be nice?”

“Hey, I’d want to go too!” Ikki interrupted.

Oh? I guess you are a bender as well, are you sure honey?”

“What? A girl can’t like pro-bending? Korra does, and last I looked she was a girl.”

Last I looked too.

“Of course she can, dear. Your family then, spending time with your family. Minus me.”

“I suppose,” he harrumphed. “But it’s a pointless conversation now, anyway. I’ll vote to close the arena, though I have no idea what Tarrlok will be thinking.”

“So just when people, benders and non-benders alike, can come together in an expression of skill relating to bending, you’ll take it away from them?” Korra chided him.

“That’ll go over well.”

“What would you suggest? Just go on if nothing had been threatened?”

“Yeah. Giving in to terrorist activity just lets them win. You can’t allow a masked man breaking into a radio broadcast to dictate city policy. What’s he going to demand next? You cave to him once, the next time is just that much easier.”

Huh. The same reason I don’t use magic to raise my skill at everything, or use my ability to see the past of something I touch to find where those equalists came from. She was actually paying attention, how about that?

“I see. We’ll discuss it at tomorrow’s meeting.”

“Can I come?”

“And contribute what, exactly?”

“I don’t know, my opinion as the avatar?”

He glared at her, but she didn’t back down. “Oh, fine, come if you like.”

“Great. Wonder if Amy is a pro-bending fan? We’ll have to stop in and see what she thinks too.”

Naturally the headlines the next day were full of speculation as to what the council would decide. As they walked to the council building, Lysanias thought about what he could offer to influence their decision.

“I could use my ability to see the future in order to see if Amon is bluffing,” he offered. “If something happens there, I would know about it. If there’s going to be some kind of attack, we call it off. If not, we go on with it.”

“But wouldn’t our decision to have the final match influence what Amon is planning? If you see something happening there and we cancel the whole thing, he wouldn’t bother showing up. So your vision should have shown nothing happening, which means we would let it continue, and thus Amon would move against it. And you would see something happening, meaning we would cancel the whole thing.”

Lysanias started tracing a finger through the air, trying to keep track of what Tenzin had been saying.

“Wow, remind me never to travel through time,” Korra remarked. “I’d be paralyzed with thinking how the most minor change might destroy the entire world or something.”

“There has to be some fault in that argument,” Lysanias decided at last, “but I can’t figure out what it is. Fine. Make the decision and *then* I’ll head over there. If there is an attack, at least I can get some sense of it and maybe whatever security is there can be a little more prepared.”

“I’ll be happy to take you over there. You can poke around while it’s empty, and anything you come up with will probably just be common sense stuff anyway. Probably above suspicion that it came from your abilities.”

“I would think.”

An hour later the council seemed to be moving towards canceling the pro-bending finals, which had Korra fuming.

“People have been looking forward to this for months,” she protested. “Are you really going to let this guy in a mask dictate policy?”

"It's risky," Tarrlok told her. "Anyone that's hurt will be our responsibility."

"There must be something we can do to prevent him getting near the place!"

"I'd love to hear your thoughts on how *that's* going to be accomplished."

"He's right, Korra," Lysanias told her. "He's just a man. He takes off the mask, walks past security, and during the match goes to the bathroom and just puts it back on."

"Plus equalists are just people too," Tenzin informed her. "They don't wear signs. You saw how many people were at that rally where Amon first showed his ability to take bending away from people. Imagine all those people at the pro-bending final. They walk in just like anyone else, and now there's fifty chi-blockers there to make trouble."

"I do want to point out one important consideration," Lysanias went on. "If Amon does show up, this would be the opportune time to capture him. The entire arena could become a trap he can't escape from."

"And what if a dozen people in masks show up?" asked the only woman on the council. "The only thing that distinguishes Amon is his ability to take bending away. Given we can't exactly force a bunch of suspects to do that, and he can claim to not be able to if given the chance, how would we know we had the right guy? We couldn't keep any of them captive because it would mean keeping at least the majority of them wrongfully imprisoned. That would really set the city against us."

His eyes narrowed. "Huh. This whole mask thing is more troublesome than I thought."

"Wait though," cautioned Korra. "What's Amon really going to do there? Blow the place up? Of course not- there's going to be people there that can't bend as well as people that can. He wouldn't blow up his own followers, or the people he's claiming to protect!"

"Oh my!" Lysanias' eyes lit up, and he grinned an evil grin like he had never grinned before. He also had the urge to twirl a mustache, but all he had was his bushy beard.

"What?" asked Tenzin.

"Let's say he does blow some stuff up? How hard would it be for the council to 'leak' some numbers to the press? Can't you see the headlines the next day? 'Amon kills twenty non-benders at pro-bending competition.'"

"Turn public opinion against him completely!" crowed Tarrlok. "I like how this man thinks! How much are you paying him, Korra? Come work for me and I'll double it! No, triple!"

Lysanias shook his head. "You couldn't afford me. You see, I don't take money- I get paid *exclusively* in girly giggles."

Korra laughed.

"See, I'm earning right now."

She laughed all the harder.

"Oh, a tip as well? You're too kind."

"Anyway," Tenzin put in, trying to put a stop to all this nonsense. "The question of going ahead with the tournament is still on the table. You've heard the arguments for and against- Oh, Lin!"

The group turned and saw chief Beifong closing the council door behind her. "Thought you might want me here, given the threats Amon made last night," she told them, walking up the isle. "Have you decided yet?"

"No, we've been talking about it, but no vote yet. As police chief I'd value your opinion though, about what we might do."

"I'm not one for suggesting policy. But I am here to tell you that I'll be glad to station extra officers around the arena that night."

"Overtime for police officers?" grumped the man sitting to the left of Tenzin. "What's that going to cost us?"

"Less than a new stadium would," she replied dryly.

"True. What do you think, Tarrlok?"

"Her record is untarnished," he mused, looking down at her from the raised platform the council table sat upon. "We were talking about Amon slipping chi-blockers into the crowd. What if we had some officers not in uniform there as well? Station some at the doors in uniform, so there's a presence, but the rest are just keeping an eye on the crowd itself. They see anything, they can act."

"That could work."

“And we needn’t limit ourselves. There are private security firms we could employ for the night, to bolster our numbers. Yes, I’m liking this more and more. They could come in later, cover the exits in case Amon does show up. Make it harder for him to get away.”

“But if people are panicking and running all over the place...” said the man in green at the center of the table.

“So much the better, to have trained people in key areas. Keep people moving, direct traffic, that sort of thing. Anyone trying to disrupt that must be an equalist and thus can be taken into custody immediately.”

“I see your point.”

“Anyone else going to barge in here? Any other opinions to render?” He looked over at the doors and waited a moment. “No? Then I call the vote, keeping the arena open as scheduled?”

The “Ayes” had it.

“I’ll head to the station now, see who wants to volunteer,” Lin told them. “If I don’t feel I have enough officers, I’ll just assign some.”

“It’s good to be the queen,” Korra remarked.

“Indeed. I assume you’ll be there?”

“Of course!”

“Very well. Stay out of trouble until then, all right? I’ll see you later, Tenzin.”

“We were going to head to the arena and check it out, make sure nothing was already in place to cause trouble,” he told her. “We’ve got a few minor things left on the agenda, if you wanted to go see your friend now, Korra. We can meet there around ten.”

“Good idea. I’ll send some people over too, the more eyes there the better. In fact, better station some people there until this thing is over...” She looked sour.

“I’ll keep an eye out for them.”

She nodded and turned to leave.

“Wait a second, make sure you have two people together at all times,” cautioned Lysanias. “We know Amon isn’t above bribing people, and I’m sure police officers feel they’re underpaid. Rotate them, keep them guessing, so anyone doing something suspicious is seen by someone at least once.”

“Humm, good point. I’ll see what I can do. Maybe I can tell them I want them to travel in pairs so they don’t get jumped by Amon. It could work. Thanks for the reminder.”

“Of course.”

“I’ll walk you out if you want.”

“We’ll move on to other business then,” Tenzin told the two, who were turning to go. “You’re welcome to stay, if you want. Don’t think I’m chasing you out of here with my suggestion to see Amy.”

“See your government in action? I’d-” Lysanias started to say, looking back at Korra who was behind him, making an X with her arms and shaking her head. Tenzin whipped his head around and she went to acting innocent. “No, we better go. Thanks though. We’ll head to the library, then meet you over at the arena. Hopefully Korra knows where it is?”

“I do, no problem.”

“That’s fine,” he sighed. “You know Korra, you could be a little more interested in how the city is run. You may have a spot up there one day.”

She barked a laugh. “Not likely!”

He shrugged and the two left, jumping on Naga and heading to the library while Lin got in her squad car and (presumably) went back to the station.

“Pro-bending?” Amy told them, leaning over the desk after greeting her two friends. “I’m a huge fan! I’ve been on pins and needles ever since last night.” She lowered her voice and looked around. “Do you two know anything? Is that why you brought it up?”

“You can’t tell anyone...” Korra cautioned.

Amy straightened up, then put a finger to her lips. She stomped her foot on the ground, wiggled her fingers, waved her arms about in a circle and then spread them wide above her

head.

“Are you having some kind of fit?” Lysanias asked, not comprehending.

“It’s an old kid’s saying,” Amy explained. “I swear by earth, fire, water, and wind that I shall tell no other soul.”

“Oh, the movements represent the elements? Huh, how neat is that?”

“So spill!”

Korra looked around to make sure no one was near enough to hear. “They voted to keep the final match on as scheduled.”

“Yes!” She pumped her fist. “That’s great news! You’ll both come with me, right?”

“As your dates?” Korra asked with a wink.

“Duh! Officially dating the avatar? That would be so amazing! Can I say I’m dating the avatar, if anyone asks? No, why would anyone ask? Could I put a poster up on the wall about it?”

“You’re both girls though,” Lysanias pointed out.

“What’s that got to do with anything? You’re not one of those people, are you?”

“What? Dimensional travelers from another reality where values are different? Yes, in case you forgot.”

“Oh, right. Besides, I said dating both, so it’s fine. That means you too, traveler boy, so you better bring your A game. I’m not all that into girls, but this is the *avatar* we’re talking about here. She’s been both a hundred times, she transcends gender. Lighten up. I mean if I’m dating her, and I’m dating you, then you’re dating her at the same time. Everybody wins, it’s obvious.”

Lysanias blinked at her. *I’ve never really thought about dating, or even that I would, having to move from world to world now. I wonder if that would even work.*

“I suppose I wouldn’t mind dating you both,” Korra admitted. “You don’t think it would be a bit awkward?”

“Why would it be?” Amy seemed confused.

“I’m not sure.”

“There’s no problem then. So who’s your favorite to win?” she asked Korra. “The Boar-q-pines or the Kolau Komodo Rhinos?”

“I haven’t really been following it, I’ve been too busy with training lately. I mean we are facing the end of the world here at some point?”

“I guess. It’s a shame the Fire Ferrets didn’t make it, they were the up-and-coming team this year. But I guess one of their members dropped out and they couldn’t find a replacement.”

“Fire Ferrets? That name sounds so familiar...” Korra mused. “Like I should know it for some reason. Oh well, who are you rooting for?”

“The Komodo Rhinos. The Boar-q-pines are total cheats!”

The girls started chatting about the various teams and Lysanias just shook his head. *I wonder if my world will ever get back to the point we have enough resources and leisure to enjoy games of this nature? Because I didn’t see any evidence of games being played while I was wandering around the world. Pity, they both seem really into it, look at those smiles. That kinda makes them both super cute at the moment.*

Dating? I wonder...

Chapter 16

Date night

When: Later that same day

Where: The arena

When Lysanias, Korra, Amy, and Tenzin arrived at the arena they found officers, paired off, already combing the place.

“What do you need from us?” Lin asked, after they greeted each other again.

Lysanias looked around. The arena was a rather complex affair, with seats to the sides, then a “moat” area that Korra explained people got knocked into during the course of play. In the center of the place was a raised platform the various elements of water and earth were delivered to, so they could be bended at the other team to try and knock them over the edge. Fire benders, of course, needed no such aid. “How about that central area there? Can I get over there? It would probably offer me the best view of the future of this entire place.”

“We can take the elevator up. The manager is being quite cooperative, he doesn’t want to see the event shut down or blown up on the night. Let’s go find him and see where the doors are.”

“Fair enough.”

Lysanias stood in the center of the ring, wondering what the place would look and sound like, packed with people.

Imagining standing here, being part of the winning team? Thousands of people cheering for you, knowing you were the best. I can see how it could be a draw.

Closing his eyes and looking inward, Lysanias opened himself up to any impressions of the future that chose to manifest themselves. Nothing was clear but he remained patient, knowing this sort of thing wasn’t something he really practiced, and could come in spurts. He sat down, touching the floor and trying to remain relaxed. After a moment he saw some people in brown uniforms celebrating something. He got a flash of an empty stadium, people excitedly chanting, and a guy with a microphone announcing stuff. He opened his eyes.

“Well?” asked Lin.

“Nothing,” he admitted. “Everything in the near future to this spot seems totally normal. No explosions, no masked men running around, just people having a good time.”

“So it is a bluff?” Tenzin asked.

“Not necessarily. Maybe he’s caught coming in, or just happens to be seated next to an officer not in uniform. He slips on the mask, gets seen, and *whack* to the back of the head. Or he checks the place out and sees how many forces are here, deciding it’s too risky.”

“We can’t relax, in other words,” Lin asked.

“Right. The future hasn’t happened yet. Right now, given what you’re thinking of doing, that’s what has the best chance of happening. If you hear my prediction and decide not to station anybody here, the opposite might happen.”

“I’m stationing as many people here as I can in that case,” Lin told the manager. “Let’s keep this vision from changing.”

“I’m happy to come back every few hours, see if it does,” Lysanias told them.

“You some kind of psychic?” asked the manager. “Because I don’t believe in that crap.”

“Some kind, yes,” Lysanias answered, getting up. “But here’s a tip- I’m putting my money on the people in brown to win. And I don’t waste my money.” He winked.

“Yeah, whatever. You done here?”

“You mind if we stay?” Korra asked. “I’d love to do a little bending up here, just to see what it’s like.”

“We’re here to secure the place!” Tenzin reminded her.

“So we can’t have a little fun while we do it?”

“You can stay,” agreed the manager. “If you get me your autograph, anyway,” he hastily added. “For my son,” he even more hastily amended. “He’s nine, big fan of the avatar, he is.”

“How, I haven’t really done anything yet.” Lysanias could feel Korra’s depression from where he was, and shook his head a little. *She needs to get over that, she’s still so young!*

“That’s the truth,” Lin muttered.

“What?”

“Nothing! You three have fun, my people will take care of things, don’t worry Mr. Ragato.”

“Just come find me before you leave so I can get that autograph!”

“I promise.”

Lysanias went back the next day, and the afternoon of the event, getting a better sense of the future now that he knew what to look for. It was easier each time, or at least it seemed to be, as it didn’t take him nearly as long to get any visions the second or third times. Both times back he got the same impressions, and even stayed to ask the universe if there was any danger here, to which he got back a “no” answer.

And so the forty second day arrived, the day of the big match and the “date” with Amy and Korra. Meeting Amy that night, Lysanias discovered, was quite unlike meeting her any time before that. *Because apparently this is a “date” and so must be treated differently than just a couple of friends getting together?* Korra was distracted the whole day before, wondering what to wear, if she should do her hair differently, and generally blushing and giggling a lot more for no reason he could see.

It’s a good thing I’m being paid with giggles, my pouch must be overflowing at this point.

“On the one hand, we’re going to a pro-bending match, not a dance,” she said, “so something elegant isn’t going to do. And that’s not me, anyway. My outfit has to be appropriate to the event, but still look nice. After all I want it to look like I put *some* effort- are you listening to me?”

“What’s gotten into you?”

“Uh, we have a date tomorrow, did you forget already? My *first* date, and yours too if what you’ve told me about yourself is true. Sure, you’ve saved the world beside some hot girls, but you never dated them. And you’re dating me too, so you should be honored!” She said this not at all seriously, but Lysanias felt more than a little fright and pride and despair as she said it.

Wow, girls are complex. Even feeling their emotions myself with my abilities I don’t think I understand her. “I don’t understand the big deal,” he told her honestly.

“You don’t under- you can’t be serious. Jinora, tell me he’s not being serious right now.”

“I think he is,” she said, looking him over. “By the way, you always wear that same thing. Is that what you’re wearing on the date as well?”

“I don’t have many clothes, and I keep it clean every morning with magic. Why wouldn’t I wear this?”

Both girls got horrified looks on their faces. “He really has no idea, does he?” Korra asked.

“I don’t think he does.”

“No idea about what?”

“Dating!” both answered.

“Well, no, I don’t.”

Both looked worried.

So Lysanias had gone into town with them and having sold some figures “sculpted” out of rocks he found lying around (too delicate looking for an earth bender to have created), they had money.

“I’m sure Tenzin would have given us some money,” Korra had told him.

“Isn’t he still paying the city for when you wrecked up a whole block?” Lysanias reminded her.

“You do have to bring that up, don’t you?”

“Yes, I do. Besides, it’s good practice for me, and that shop keeper loved them so what’s the difference? I prefer to pay my own way if I can.”

“Fine. Jinora, stay with him, help him pick something nice, okay?”

"I'm not going with you?"

"You'll see what she picks out on your date tomorrow," Jinora explained. "Come along."

An hour or so later she had helped him pick out some decent clothes, and had taken him to a place to get his beard and hair trimmed.

I could have it taken off, but I'm sort of used to it by now. Plus I can still see Don angrily stomping off when I asked his advice on how to shave. Best leave it for now, though I may not be back there for years. Plenty of time to take it off and grow it out again.

It was now the night of the event, and Lysanias found he was more nervous about things than he figured he should have been. *It's Korra, she's gotten me into some weird state of mind. Despite what my visions of the future say, this night could still turn out to have been a bad idea. I should worry more about that than what Amy's going to be wearing, or how I look, or what we'll talk about, or... oh.*

"So, what do you think?" Korra met him at the dock, spinning to show off her outfit. Her hair, usually stuck into "tubes" was now down and somehow formed into ringlets. Her clothes were still primarily blue, but her top hung off her shoulders and it looked like she had taken a pair of pants and cut the legs off them, turning them into shorts.

"You look great," he told her honestly. "How did you get your hair like that?"

"Oh, a little water bending, it's not important. You really like it?"

"Yeah."

"Korra?" Tenzin asked, walking up. "You're wearing that?"

"Now I know I've chosen well. What's wrong with this?"

"Seems like you ruined a perfectly good pair of pants, where's the rest of them? Aren't you freezing?"

She laughed. "Actually, they weren't, but they're perfectly fine now. Honestly, do you know how hot it's going to be in that arena with all those people there? It's a little cool tonight but the cold never bothered me anyway."

"Suit yourself."

The family piled into the boat and made their way to the mainland, and Jinora was looking longingly at Korra.

"What's up?" he asked her.

"Dad made me wear this stupid *air bender* outfit, as always," she complained. "Just because we're the last air benders do we have to advertise it all the time? Honestly, can't we just wear normal stuff for once?"

It probably would get her stared at. "oh, it's that air bender family. They think they're so great." Maybe for once she might want to blend in, just be a normal kid. "I see what you mean, you're supposed to be having a night off."

"Exactly, you understand. Why couldn't I wear something a little more... normal?"

"Hummmmm." Lysanias looked her over. "I can't do much about that now, but if you can't wear new clothes how about a new skin? With your permission, of course?" He reached for her normal hair bun. *If she's going to be stared at, it might as well be for the right reason.*

"Sure? But what are you-"

He undid it, then touched the top of her head. "Just you wait." *Never changed a person before, but the alchemists said it was possible. It'll wear off, but hopefully not before we get back. Let's see now...* His power surged into her body, shaping her in the way he desired.

When he was done she seemed older and taller, (not much taller, it didn't change her clothes and he didn't want her bursting out of them) and her hair flowed down her back and nearly touched the ground. (It had also been changed in color to a shimmering golden hue) Her ears were slightly pointed and pierced, and her nails, usually trimmed close because she was at heart a martial artist, were long and pointed. Her eyes were now green, and her lips were as red as if she had applied lipstick. (which her father, naturally, disapproved of and so you know that sort of thing wasn't going to happen) "Do you have a coin?" he asked, "two coins, actually."

"What did you do to me?" she asked, looking her hands over. "Oh my gosh my hair!" She gathered it up, throwing it over her shoulder and stroking it. "It's so long, like I grew it out my whole life! How did you-"

"Now, now, let me finish before you look. Does anyone have a couple of coins?"

"I've got some coins," Tenzin said in a tired tone, no doubt wondering how this night was going to go. He had made some arguments about taking them, but Lysanias had assured him no attack would happen there, and even read their fortunes and saw them healthy and whole in the future. He came from the front of the boat where he had been staring towards the city. "What do you need them- by the spirits!" He had finally actually *looked* at his daughter, who was now standing there almost looking like an elf. "What did you do to Jinora?"

"Don't worry, it won't last until the morning. Coins?"

"Hey, looking good Jinora!" Korra told her.

"Oh, I wish I could see!"

Tenzin handed the coins over and Lysanias' hands closed over them, forming them into small arrow earrings. *After all, she is still an air bender.* He knelt and carefully fitted them through the holes, then took a step back, considering. "No, still something missing," he mused. He looked around the boat and spied a coil of rope sitting there, which he snagged a piece off of and spun in his hands, turning it into silver. *Gold would clash with her hair, I think this complements it better.* This of course shrank it considerably, which is exactly what he wanted. Drawing her hair back behind her ears he secured it with the chain, looping it through and around, then "welding" it together again in the front. As he did he made a clip and clipped it in place, then stepped back to admire his handiwork.

"Perfect!"

"Daaaang!" Korra admitted. "Looking good, Jinora. Maybe I should have asked for a makeover too. But I didn't know you could do that!"

"He just likes me better, I guess," Jinora announced with a smile. "Maybe I'll start dating him too."

"You will not," Tenzin muttered.

Lysanias blushed a bit, wondering how he had gotten so popular with *the ladies*. But he felt he should say something about it. "Oh sure. She didn't fight me on it, I could have turned her into a frog."

"A frog!" she croaked. "You mean a bull frog, or a spider frog?"

"Just a frog."

"You have some weird animals where you come from. What would have happened to me then?"

"You'd have gotten better. Like I said, it's only temporary. The rope will stay a silver chain forever, but living things tend to return to their own shape. According to my alchemy teacher, that is. Something about their spiritual energy undoing what I did with my spirit energy to return them to their natural state."

"And if she doesn't turn back?" Tenzin asked somewhat nervously.

"The man was hundreds of years old, I think he knows what he's talking about. I can change her back later in either case, I remember what she looked like."

"Oh."

"There's no mirror on this boat, is there?" Jinora sighed.

"Oh, oh, me next!" Ikki demanded. "I want fairy wings, pink hair, red nails, purple eyes, a fox ferret's ears and tail!"

Lysanias laughed. "I'll see what I can do, okay?"

Amy was equally dolled up, her hair done up and wearing a close fitting top and medium length skirt, also in blue. Both girls exclaimed over the other to the appropriate degree, and the group joined the throng leading into the arena.

"Keep your eyes open," Lysanias reminded them. "I'll see if I can get another reading, but with all the noise and people here I doubt I'll manage it. I'm fairly certain nothing will happen, but if it does, you know how to use the armor wards I gave you. Jinora, Ikki, you can feel spiritual energy the best, no one can sneak up on you. If you don't let them. Other than that, enjoy the match I guess."

"We will!"

About an hour later everyone was inside and the match began. The group had been

chatting away, after some initial nervousness, but they were still friends and there was a lot to see. There was a pre-show, people showing off fancy bending in the center of the ring, as honestly the actual match was only going to last a few minutes. Then jumping right into it would have been very bizarre, considering the effort it took to set the whole thing up. These people had paid for a *night* of entertaining, so a night of entertaining they would receive.

Finally the match took place, and with as many dirty tricks as they could get away with (which seemed like all of them) the Wolf Bats won the title for the fourth time.

It was at this point, half an hour later, that Lysanias learned Amon was busy blowing up the council building. He had timed it fairly perfectly, as once the match was over it had taken some time for word to get to Lin, who was inside making sure people made it out okay. Everyone on the force had been relaxing, thinking Amon had been scared off but in reality had just been busy elsewhere.

“WHAT?” screamed Lin, who an officer had finally found in the crowd and led outside the arena. “He did WHAT?” Tenzin, his kids, Korra, Amy, and Lysanias were all stunned, unable to believe what they were hearing. They had been told the news by an officer near a police truck, having just gotten off the shortwave.

“We’ve got officers down over there, the fire is raging but some fire and water benders are being rushed to the scene. According to the radio it’s chaos over there! They’ve just now had a chance to get in touch with us, there were so few officers there trying to keep things under control.”

“I’d better get over there. Tenzin, take your family home, and stay there until you hear from me. You could be in danger, Amon might not be content with blowing up council buildings tonight. He may try for council members, too. You five!” she shouted, motioning some officers over. “Drive the councilman and his family to the docks, and stay with them until they get back to the island. You’ve got white lotus members there, right?”

“Yes, we should be safe there.”

“You want me with you, or with Lin?” Korra asked. “I can help put out fires and move rubble if people are trapped.”

Tenzin seemed to mull it over for only a second. “Go with Lin. But stay on your toes, Amon could still be in the area waiting for you.”

“I will.”

“I’m coming too,” Jinora told them, stepping up. “I can do my part.”

“Jinora, you’re coming with-” He broke off as she spun to face him.

“No dad. I can help. I’m nearly as good at air bending as you are, and you know it. With what I’ve learned from Lysanias if there are people trapped under rubble I can find them. The more people that can do that, the more lives might be saved tonight. For once don’t treat me like a little girl! We don’t have time for it.”

He looked down at her, a somewhat shocked expression on his face. Finally he pulled her into a hug. “I’m so proud of you. Go on. But you come back, okay?”

“I promise.”

Wait, he’s still leaving? He’s been getting instruction in sensing energy too- oh, he’s protecting his other kids, and maybe worried about his wife. If she was taken hostage... Okay, that’s fine.

“Go on, get out of here,” Lin commanded, and the air bender family piled into the police van and took off. Jinora was smiling fiercely, and caught Lysanias’ eye.

“You think I did the right thing?”

“You must have, I’m proud of you too,” he answered honestly. “Come on, we have work to do.”

“This way,” Lin told them, heading towards another van. “You’re in charge here,” she told the man who had delivered the news. “Keep people moving out of the area, I don’t want another incident here.”

“Right chief. Hope it’s not as bad as they say.”

“We’ll see.”

Even with the flashing lights and sirens, the trip away from the arena took longer than Lin would have liked, given the sour look on her face. But finally the group reached the remains of the council building and got to work. Those that could sense energy split up, searching for anyone trapped in rubble, but luckily there were few like that. Those not at the arena had gone home to listen to the broadcast on the radio, so the place had been fairly deserted. It wasn't lost on the officers, or Lin, that those known for hanging around with the avatar simply closed their eyes and pointed to anyone still alive under any rubble. Earth bending was then the name of the game, freeing them, while Lin, Korra, and Lysanias told them where and how to shift the rock using their earth bending senses to make sure shifting things didn't make anything worse. Once free the girls used water bending to heal any serious injuries before moving them too much. Lysanias got by simply touching them and reducing their wounds, as using water bending after earth bending would have been a bit suspicious. But a wound that wasn't as bad as they had thought in the darkness of the night? Totally plausible.

Meanwhile Lysanias seethed. *He threw us off, making it seem like the arena would be targeted, but instead coming here. And why not? Most of the cops in the city were there. Leaving places like this unguarded. Huh, typical water bender tactic if what Korra says is true. They're all about redirecting attacks, using an opponent's strength against themselves. So he even thinks that way now, interesting. I'll have to be on guard, if it looks like he's attacking something it could just be a cover.*

I'm surprised there weren't more places hit, but this is really the center of power for the city. Seeing it blown to pieces is certainly going to hurt the council's reputation, and make it seem like Amon is one step ahead. And why not, he was. And I didn't even consider it. Stupid, as usual. But at least I wasn't the only one. There would be consequences, he said. We all just assumed he meant the arena, because that's where the action was. He played us all for fools.

Chapter 17
New Ideas for a New World
When: Day 43
Where: The island

After a rather exhausting night, Lysanias returned to the island and dreamed of dark birds circling and crowding around the place. But then he somehow jumped onto the back of one of them, and it started flying towards the city. He woke up puzzled, and made a note in his journal about it.

At breakfast, Tenzin sourly scoured the paper which was full of depressing news related to the council building being destroyed. Along with rumors about what Amon was going to do next, and the council's response to such a blatant act. (And quite a few opinion pieces about the incompetence of the police force that let such a thing happen, but let's not dwell on the negative too much)

"They were all at the arena!" Tenzin muttered, reading just such a story. He didn't mind dwelling on it. "And no one died, it's just a building. Who cares? We can always make another one."

No one died thanks to us pulling them from the rubble. If we couldn't have sensed their life force, gone right for them, how long would they have been pinned under there? Or been crushed trying to clear rubble? We knew where to be careful and focus our efforts.

"Could you put it back the way it was?" Jinora asked. She was back to looking like her normal self, as was Ikki, much to their father's relief. He would have loved his kids even if they looked like an elf and whatever it was Ikki had been with her mishmash of wings/ears/tail but having normal looking kids was probably best.

"With a lot of effort maybe," Lysanias told her after a moment. "If I could drain the energy of dozens of people, then get earth benders to set the chunks of rock into place. I could then flow them back together one section at a time. It would take almost as much effort as just rebuilding it the other way. But I could do it."

"Wow."

"So what happens next?" Korra asked. "You're still going to work, right?"

"Amon isn't going to keep the government from functioning, if that's what you're asking. We'll find a place to meet and discuss our next move. Why? Taking an interest at last?"

"I'm fairly sure Tarrlok is going to start bugging me about joining his task force again. I thought maybe I should be there to tell him no directly once more."

"I suppose it is the city's problem, not yours," he mused. "I'm actually somewhat relieved you're staying out of it."

"I'm not afraid of him, or anything!" she insisted.

"I didn't say you were."

"I just wanted it said, that's all."

"Of course." He looked suspiciously at her, but let the matter drop. A moment later the phone rang, and Pema went to answer it.

"Be careful at work today," Lysanias cautioned. "Maybe part of Amon's plan is to have you meet elsewhere. Someplace easier to blow up while you're still inside. Or position spies to see what you talk about. I mean who knows."

"Good point. I'll have to see who is hanging about, we can't take anything for granted now." He lapsed into silence, thinking about possible reasons Amon could have for not rigging the place to blow when they were there, as he had the opportunity.

"That was Lin," Pema announced when she came back. "She's on her way here, apparently she has something she wants you to look at, Lysanias. Wanted to make sure you would be here."

"I will be now, if she's coming. We can continue our training in the meantime."

"I'll have her sent to the training area when she gets here."

"Thanks."

An hour or so later Lin walked up the hill towards them, where Korra was trying to lay a hand on Lysanias to chi-block him. His spirit was out and blocking strikes from Jinora, who was trying the same thing. Not that she would have accomplished anything but it was good practice in striking rapidly and accurately. They stopped when they felt her coming.

"Morning Chief Beifong," Korra got in first, still trying to get on her good side. (If she had one)

"Morning," she grunted back. "Here." She handed Lysanias a curious thing, a glove with some metal bits stuck to it. "These go with it." She handed him two cylinders that looked like they screwed into the back and stuck up at an angle. "What do you make of it?"

The others crowded around him, all looking the glove over. Lysanias sniffed the tubes, and there was an acidic smell coming from them so he wrinkled his nose.

"There was some kind of acid in those tubes," she explained. "We emptied it out because it seemed fairly dangerous."

"Where did you get this?" Lysanias asked.

"My people weren't completely useless last night," Lin told them. "Some equalists were captured. They had on these devices, which they were using to electrify people."

"To what?" Jinora asked.

"Turn it over. See this green disk in the center of the palm? This metal part seems to stick up in a ring right around it, right? Then around that there's a thicker disk? You smack someone with this and the thinner disk is depressed. That opens a switch that allows the two chemicals to mix, producing a strong electric charge. The glove itself is insulated so the user doesn't shock themselves, but the shock is powerful enough to stun a person for several minutes. Especially, if like my officers last night, one happens to be wearing *metal* armor."

"I see. A weapon designed to take people out at close range, but not need the skill of a chi-blocker. And yet you still haven't thought of guns. Electrified gloves, sure, that's totally a thing I would have come up with. Weird."

"What are guns?" Lin asked. "And why do I suddenly find myself wanting a big one?"

"Never mind. A weapon from my world. Give me a second." He concentrated on the glove, opening his senses and seeing what he could tell. His first attempt at seeing the past of the glove just showed it being ridden over in the boat, but his second showed him its construction a few days ago. "I can tell you a few things about it. It's not spiritually active or magical. It was made several days ago in an underground facility and given to a man who used it three times last night before being captured. I can't tell how it got from one place to the other, it was put in a box with several more, so I just see it sitting in there. So I can't tell you where the place is, just that it looks like it was underground from the way the walls looked."

"That's a lot more than we knew before," Lin admitted. "But we figured it was purely mechanical, or chemical in the case of the actual electric charge. What I want to know is, did it come from *outside*." Her stress on the word told Lysanias what he needed to know.

"Your world? That will take a bit more question an answer with the universe. You want to stick around?"

"Get busy!"

"You got it."

As he walked to the nearby tree to have some shade while he waited for the universe to answer him, he heard Lin asking about being trained to feel energy like they did. She was saying her men noticed what they were doing and were asking about it, and she felt it would be a good tool for an officer of the law to have.

Lysanias had to smile. She sounded like she was eating something sour as she asked, probably feeling humiliated, having to ask the avatar for something. He didn't check, he just settled himself down and screwed the tubes back in so the glove was complete. That done he phrased his question. *Did any part of this glove or the idea for it come from outside this world?*

No.

Great, got it on the first try. "I'm not sure if this is good news or bad," he told the girls,

standing up again ten minutes later. It seemed Lin had her eyes closed, probably a short lesson in energy sensing going on. All turned toward him. "It seems to be native, not something from outside this reality at all."

"So some madman sat there and actually worked out a design for a weapon that my officers would be especially vulnerable to?" Lin seethed. "Is there *any* way you can figure out who?"

"I could ask. I hate to, because just like looking into the past of those equalists, that knowledge would come from nowhere. How would you explain where you got it from? Easier, I think, if you just become un-vulnerable to it. That would be something you could have thought of, so it wouldn't occasion as much comment."

"What? How?"

"Coat the inside of your armor with the same stuff this glove is made of. Or fit some sort of non-conductive material to the outside of it. Heck, I could do that for you right now."

"Let's see it," she allowed, looking curious and doubtful in equal measure.

Lysanias stepped close to her, looking the armor over. It was a somewhat long "tunic" with shoulder pads, and elbow guard, and a hinged joint under it. *The arm pieces touch, I can probably do it in three tries.* He touched the main body of the armor along Lin's side, willing a bit of the surface to become ceramic. The armor flashed white all at once, and he nodded, pleased. Moving on to the arms it took a few tries, the white spreading slowly on the first, but the second flashing white immediately. *So bizarre that it works that way. I'm just as good at the skill doing the body or the arm, why did one take so much longer? I'm just as smart, and only seconds separated the attempts. It's almost random, if I can do something the first time or not. Frustrating.*

"How about that," Lin commented, looking herself over. "But how do we know it'll work?"

"I could shoot lighting at you?" Lysanias offered.

"Not exactly what I had in mind," Lin admitted. "We saved the chemicals, we could put them back."

"If you didn't want to wait, at close range and with only a moderate amount of spiritual energy put into it, the effect should be fairly similar."

"He can heal you if it doesn't work, heck I could heal you," Korra reminded her. "And wouldn't it be better to find out if this works now, rather than later?"

"So you put it on and try it!"

"I will!" But it looked to Lysanias like she was goading her, and hoping to see Lin be electrocuted. "Come on, don't be a deer monkey!"

So Lin, grumbling about "if I start twitching and peeing myself you're cleaning it up" agreed to have lighting shot at her, which indeed bounced off her newly resistant armor. *Of course, I didn't put much into it. But this shows the theory is sound, anyway.*

"I guess it works," she admitted. "I'll have to see about having all the armor my officers wear modified. We certainly have ceramic, or I suppose rubber to coat the insides. I'll have to see which is the most effective, and takes the least time to do. Thanks for the idea, wonder why I didn't come up with it myself."

"Because earth benders are rigid in their ways?" Korra surmised. "And you have metal armor on and so you were going to keep on wearing metal armor instead of a rubber suit because that's just how you did things?"

"Very funny. All right, for now I'll take the glove back. Like you say, if I suddenly knew exactly where to go and find where they were made, people would start to wonder how I knew. Like, maybe I was part of it all along? That wouldn't do. I'll just have my officers look into it the normal way, based on the components that make up the glove and where they might be bought from. But if things get worse, I may just ask for your help again."

"That's fine. Thanks for understanding."

Lin just grunted, then reminded Korra about her promise to come teach them to sense energy, and went back to work. (Korra hadn't forgotten, it had been like a minute)

The group trained as normal the rest of the day, and got news from Tenzin, looking

even more grim than usual, when he got back that evening.

"Amon is officially an outlaw," he announced, sitting down to dinner. "And we won't go easy on anyone found to be associating with him. Especially anyone involved in the attack, which we've learned a little more about."

"Oh?" Korra asked.

"Apparently there was some kind of huge airship flying around that night. It let a bunch of people off, then they went back up and a minute later the building exploded. It's a fair bet the two are related."

"So then where did the glove come from?" Lysanias asked.

"There were other attacks that night," he explained. "Much smaller targets, usually single benders living alone. Some houses were burned, but the press hasn't put two and two together yet. I mean things get set on fire all the time. But we know who set them, equalists."

"Maybe playing with their new toys, feeling invincible?" Jinora reasoned. "Perhaps they weren't even supposed to be out that night? I don't care how tightly Amon controls his people, there are still bound to be some rule-breakers."

"In an origination dedicated to breaking rules?" fake gasped Korra. "You don't say!"

"I'm just saying, maybe look into anyone who isn't a bender that disappeared after that night. If they weren't supposed to be out using their new toys Amon might have them imprisoned, or killed."

"That's a fairly good idea, Jinora," Tenzin praised. "I'll call Lin after dinner and mention it to her."

"You two have been spending some time together recently," Pema observed, eyes narrowed. "I hope it's just business."

"Of course it is!" he harrumphed. "What else could it be?" He started attacking his food.

"What else indeed?" Korra asked, perking up. "This sounds interesting!"

"Just eat your dinner," Tenzin demanded, while Pema promised more details with her eyes. And her smile. And her nod. And winking. And giggling into her soup.

A day later Amy joined in their training sessions, and was with them now two days later, making this day 46 in the avatar reality. More and more benders that lived by themselves were being targeted, and the library had been closed and locked up.

"People kept destroying books on bending," she had explained. "It got to the point we had to have the police there all the time, and finally it was decided not to be worth it. So they moved the majority of books elsewhere and boarded the place up. It was... pretty hard to watch."

"I'm sorry," Lysanias told her, feeling her remorse as she talked about it. "That must have been awful for you."

"I'm more worried about the city. If attacks against benders become more common, they may just decide to leave. Amon wins by just driving us out and takes over with little opposition."

"Or the benders come together and stand together!" Korra said, making a fist. "Fighting back oppression and prejudice with force of will!"

"That would be worse," Amy explained. "Then larger forces would try and attack them, and then benders might get the idea to go on the offensive, leading to even more violence."

"Oh. That is a problem."

"Hey, isn't that Lin again?" Jinora asked, pointing.

She was right, a worried and worn out looking Lin was approaching from the docks area, and the group turned to face her.

After they exchanged greetings Lin got right to the point. "It's getting bad out there," she explained. "We've got some suits of armor converted over, but it's slow going. Meanwhile wearing it makes them super vulnerable, but taking it off deprives them of metal bending their cables. We can't fight them! More and more of these glove things are showing up, it seems they can be made by the dozens very easily."

"So you want to know where they're coming from?"

"That's right. I'll come up with some 'anonymous tip' later. For now, can you ask where we can find the production facility?"

"Sure. I did have one other idea for you, though. That airship that was hanging around, it was pretty big, right? Tenzin told us about it."

"According to reports, yes. What of it?"

"So it's not something one could easily hide, in other words. Plus Amon wouldn't use benders to provide power for it, so it must be burning some kind of fuel."

"Our air ships take a lot of fuel," she admitted. "You're saying find where fuel is going where it shouldn't be, or where there's a huge air ship sitting around outside of town."

"Or a big enough building to house it. The gloves were made underground, but putting an airship there might a bit much, even for Amon. It's gotta be someplace."

"That's a good idea. I've been focusing on the people, but that's just chasing shadows. They always are masked, and using gas, or bolos, or those stupid gloves to get away. I need to look at this from another angle."

"More visitors!" Jinora announced. "I think daddy's back!"

Everyone looked, and indeed Tenzin was striding towards them, at his side was Tarrlok, looking surprised to see Lin there.

"I'm surprised to see you here," he told her, obviously surprised (to see her there).

"I... just like checking up on Korra from time to time, that's all," she sputtered.

"Is that all it is? I mean you have phones at the precinct, don't you? I thought you might be trying to convince her to join the police force."

"You're not here to ask me to join your task force again, are you?" Korra seethed.

"That's exactly why I'm here. I figured you would be coming to see me after the attack, given Amon finally showed how dangerous he was. But you've just stayed here. Why?"

"Has Amon become a spirit since the last time you pestered me? No? Then it's not my job to do anything about him. I've already told you this, stop bothering me about it!"

"But... bending!"

"A question, if I may?" Lysanias asked. "Why are you so hot for Korra, anyway? Sure, she's the avatar, so three of the four bending styles in one person, I get that. So just hire three benders, what is so important that Korra, specifically, joins you?"

"I- just- want her by my side!" he sputtered.

"That's not an answer."

"I can tell you," Tenzin finally spoke up, sounding smug.

"Oh really?" Tarrlok sneered. "Please, enlighten us."

"You want to control her. Order her around. It's a power thing, you've always craved more. That's why this whole task force in the first place, right? Make yourself a hero in the eyes of the city, there's more chance your policies and such go through because everyone knows what a 'great guy' you are. You couldn't possibly be doing things for selfish aims, because of all the time you put into catching Amon. So your policies aren't as closely scrutinized."

"That's preposterous!"

"Is it? Then I expect a better answer to the question 'why Korra?'"

He threw up his hands. "Unbelievable. I'm just trying to do what's best for the city, and giving Korra the chance to help. That's all. I mean people are starting to wonder why you aren't taking a greater stand. Do you think he's right? Are you secretly helping him?"

"What?" she gasped, fury written upon her face. Her hands were clenched (in fists of rage) and Tenzin stepped between them. "Are you being serious right now?"

"That's more the Korra I know," he crowed. "Put that to good use, with me!"

"No," she replied, trying to relax. "Look, you want to put a stop to this? Well, you can't. This sort of sentiment has probably always existed, it's just found a voice with Amon who somehow figured out how to destroy chakra centers in the body."

"He does what now?"

"What?" She shook her head. "The point is, if you want to return the city to some normalcy, you have to accept some changes. Announce reforms, make sure benders and non-benders have the same opportunities. Let people that can't earth bend be police officers. The fact they all were, and wear the same outfit, let those glove things work. People not dependent on that ability might have given you a fighting chance, or maybe those gloves wouldn't have been thought of at all. There must be work that benders and non-benders can

do side by side. Next, get another person on the council right away. Fill that seat you offered Amon, since he didn't take it. A non-bender, representing the city. Show that you're actually listening to people's concerns and remind them that everyone's pretty much equal anyway. That bending isn't going away, no matter what Amon thinks or does. It's them you have to convince anyway, not Amon. Take his followers away from him, and he's just a man with a twisted dream."

"She hasn't thought about it all," Lysanias joked. "I'm sure that was just stuff that popped into her head just now."

"Yes, I'm sure," Tarrlok replied dryly.

"You've once again heard her answer," Tenzin told him. "Let's head back to work."

"Very well. Will you accompany us, Lin? We should start working closer together. As *the avatar* keeps refusing me."

"Ah, uh, oh of course. Yes, right, I'll ride back with you." Lin looked like she couldn't think of an excuse to stick around and get information out of Lysanias, and joined the two men who made their farewells to the group.

When they were gone, Amy turned to Korra.

"What's the real reason you don't want to be involved?" she asked. "Despite what Lysanias said, you could really be useful to the effort."

Korra sighed heavily and motioned them to follow, so the group sat beneath the nearby shade tree. "The truth is," she admitted after a moment, "I'm sort of terrified of Amon." She had dropped her eyes, and now pulled her legs in close, wrapping herself up into a tight ball.

"What?" everyone gasped.

"I've been having nightmares about him taking my bending. Nearly every night. I didn't want to tell you, but I guess you deserve to know."

"Oh Korra, that's awful!" Jinora cried, crawling over and hugging her.

"Yeah, you should have told us earlier," Amy chided, also hugging her from the other side.

"Thanks you two. But I just can't shake the feeling Amon is getting closer to me. That the one time we fight he's going to just take my bending away, and that'll be that. No more avatar."

"He'd have to get through me first," Amy told her fiercely.

"Me too," agreed Jinora.

Both girls looked expectantly over at Lysanias.

"He wouldn't actually get through me, so you don't have anything to worry about."

She cracked a smile. "You think so, huh?"

"Of course. You're as safe with me as a... brick built pig house!"

"A what?"

He looked curious. "I'm not sure, it just seemed like the thing to say."

"Weirdo!" the girls chorused together.

"The point is, I can't do anything about your dreams, but we are here for you. Tell us this stuff, okay? If it's really that bad, let's come up with a plan to make sure it doesn't happen. Face that fear by redirecting it, or going around it. You know, bending style."

"Or smashing straight through, Korra style!" Jinora added with a giggle. "Oh right, that didn't work so well for the gates, did it?"

"You're never going to let me live that down, are you?" Korra said with mock resignation.

"Nope!"

"We'll see about that!"

Korra fell to tickling her, which turned out to be Jinora's one weakness, and she was taken by peals of laughter as she squirmed about.

Lysanias' mouth was set in a line as he watched the three now horsing around. *I have to be the shield to protect this group, he decided. Korra felt really vulnerable and scared when she admitted her fear to us. It couldn't have been easy, and shows how much she trusts us. No matter what, I have to be there for her.*

Chapter 18
Making Republic City Great Again
When: Day 50
Where: The ruins of the council building

“So to sum up,” finished the water bender representative speaking at the podium in front of the demolished council building, “you have until this time tomorrow to submit five thousand signatures supporting you for the newest council seat. The election will be held in four days, and the official Republic City council seat will be filled.”

Lysanias and the others watched from off to the side as people started shouting questions and taking pictures of the man, and he pointed to a woman in front. He was there basically to keep Korra calm, as she was growing more convinced (bordering on paranoid) that Amon was “coming to get her.” Lysanias and the others had done their best to assure her they would protect her, and all three ladies were now moved into one room for the night, while additional white lotus members were put on guard. Still, she had been asked to attend and show support for the initiative, and given she did support it she was happy to come.

And with all the council members here out in the open, it could be a tempting target for Amon. He looked around the crowd, wondering if Amon was out there, watching all this. He had to assume he was, this was big news.

“What if no one gets that many signatures?” asked the woman. “That seems a lot in one day.”

“If no one does, the three people that have gathered the most will be put on the ballot. We’ll announce if we have candidates that have the five thousand signatures at five hours to go. That should give you some idea how close it’ll be. If we don’t, bring what you do have and we’ll take it from there. Next!”

“Why only three days? Elections generally take months!” protested a man.

“Given the serious nature of Amon’s movement and his reluctance to step into the role himself given his vocal nature about how unfair everything is, we decided some expediency was in order. In the next election the candidates will have the normal time to campaign, just like everyone else.” More questions were shouted, but he wasn’t done and held up a hand. “Also, three days makes it more fair. No one has time to dig up dirt on anybody, or run attack ads on the radio, or take bribes- I mean campaign contributions from special interest groups, or any of that. It will be a true ‘here are my policy ideas, take them or leave them’ situation. You think you have good ideas, and can be an effective council member? Fine. Prove it, and let the people decide after hearing what you have to say. Only takes three days to do that.”

“But that still disadvantages the less wealthy!” one woman shouted. There was a general agreement to this statement.

“There’s not much we can do about that,” he admitted. “But think of it this way. The more money they spend trying to get elected, the less wealthy they’ll be.”

If you’re rich enough though, at a certain point slightly less or slightly more money is meaningless.

There wasn’t much laughter at this statement, as the man no doubt hoped. He pointed to take another question. “How will you know the signatures aren’t forged?”

“If they all seem to be in the same handwriting, that’ll be a fairly good indicator,” he joked, and again no one seemed all that amused.

“You think this will actually make a difference?” Korra asked, drawing Lysanias’ focus from further questions.

“To Amon or the city?” he answered after a moment.

“What? I don’t know, both I guess.”

“I think it’s too early to believe Amon will simply disband his group with a hearty pat on the back and a gold watch for everybody. He might see what’ll happen, lurk about in the shadows for a time. If he feels there isn’t enough change, or if this whole thing is just a redirection, no, probably not.”

“Wait, what?”

“Remember, blowing this place up resulted from us thinking he was going to target the

arena. What if this whole thing is a misdirection for some other, larger, goal? He's a water bender, he thinks in terms of redirection. For all we know his real plan is to introduce more technology like those gloves, while giving the people using them a convenient target to test their effectiveness."

"You go down that rabbit stoat hole and his goal could be anything!"

"I agree, we can only plan for so much. As far as the city goes, eh, probably not. From what I've seen of my world and this one, people pretty much just go about their lives as best they can. They want basically the same things, and as long as they're pretty much left alone they're fine with it. Another person on the council isn't going to help the common man all that much."

"Pretty cynical," remarked Tenzin.

"I admit it'll take a few more realities before I have a complete picture, but I have to believe even across realities, people are people."

"I suppose. If nothing else it'll give the council someone else to argue with, unless they reserve that exclusively for me."

"I'll still argue with you," Korra promised him. "And I'll get your kids to if you're really missing it."

"They do enough of that already, thank you very much," he harrumphed.

Finally the man would take no more questions and the council members filed into a nearby car to head back to their temporary offices.

"So it's done," he breathed, relaxing a bit. "But for good or bad I have no idea."

"At least we're seen as doing something," said the only woman there. "The less excuse we give Amon to make trouble, the better."

If he even cares.

The next day it was announced that four people had gotten the signatures needed and so would campaign to be elected to the newly added council seat. Lysanias missed this announcement because he was busy having fun in the practice field.

Amy, Korra, and Jenora, having arrived together were staring open mouthed at Lysanias who was hovering over them, wings outstretched. He reduced the amount of air filling them, having been essentially holding himself up with air bending, and hovered closer to the ground.

"No fair using air bending when I can't!" Korra scolded him.

"Who cares about air bending!" protested Amy. "I want some wings like that!"

"They are rather fine, aren't they?" Lysanias agreed somewhat smugly. Fully outstretched they were taller than he was, and pure white. They were parallel to the ground in order to catch the air, but kept Lysanias' feet from touching the ground. "I copied them from a bird person back home, a lawyer. Hadn't thought about them until now, but given Ikki seems fine after her wings vanished, I thought I would try them out."

"You hadn't thought about giving yourself *wings*?" Jinora asked, a shocked look on her face.

"Hey, excuse me, princess. I've been rather busy lately."

"So why now?" Korra asked. "And can you come down here?"

"Fine." Lysanias let the air go and fell to the ground, almost managing to not fall over. Almost. He fell in a heap, his wings unbalancing him so he tumbled backwards. The girls fell to laughing at him trying to get up again. He didn't know where to put his arms to avoid the wings, and basically thrashed around trying to get purchase so he could stand up again.

"Okay, now I'm not so jealous," Jinora admitted.

"He looked pretty cool a second ago, now he just looks like an ungainly turkey turtle," Amy agreed. "Poor little turkey turtle, have you lost your wings? Don't worry turkey turtle there are better things." she sing-songed. The girls laughed all the harder.

"No, no, don't help me stand up or anything." The girls rushed over and hauled him up, so he shook his wings out and folded them behind him. He wondered briefly what would happen if one of them got cut off. Would it hurt? Where had the material come to make them, and what would losing it mean? *How about we just don't lose one, and we'll never have to worry about it?* "Thank you. To answer your question of 'why now' I dreamed of a bird

snatching a fish out of the ocean over and over again. So I thought I would try them out. Plus I've seen you three flying around the island enough I know air bending can help you fly. So I remembered them. It seemed like a good time, now that I know changing people with my abilities is safe."

"How do they work?" Jinora asked, walking around him.

"Just like an arm, actually. It wasn't as hard as I thought to get the hang of them. Actually *flying* would be a problem of course. I was basically just hovering, using the principles I've seen you girls using with your gliders. Could I learn to fly? Probably, but it's another thing to practice. That bird person could, wish I could remember his name. Deworm I think?"

"As in the early bird gets 'de worm?" asked Amy.

"I don't get it." Lysanias looked at her like she was speaking another language, which to be fair she was.

"The downsides could be worth it," Korra admitted, bringing the conversation back to wings. "I mean you have to walk around like that now."

"True. I learned I could change myself into myself with wings, and that they work. That's enough for the moment, I need to help you girls with your training rather than gallivanting around in the sky." *Or falling over when I land. They were heavier than I expected, I'll have to watch that the next time.*

"You had to put these slits in your shirt too," Jinora went on, ducking down and looking under the wings. "Oh, but you could fix them right?"

"Sure, if I needed to."

"Could you turn yourself into an actual animal?" Korra asked. "I mean how far does your ability to change people go?"

"I think so. At least temporarily. Why? Want to be someone else? Experience what it's like to be a polar bear dog like Naga? Maybe go for a run together?"

"Maybe. But I'm thinking more practically right now. We know what Amon's mask looks like, right? Someone could take his build and put on that mask. Then pose for pictures that he had been "captured" by the police."

"What good would that do?" asked Amy. "The real one would still be out there."

"Would he?" Korra asked with a grin. "How many of his followers have seen his face? I bet it wouldn't be that hard to convince them, sowing some confusion into his ranks. See, I can think like a water bender too. You know, being from a water tribe myself."

"It would be easy to convince them," Jinora protested, coming out from under the wings again. "All he has to do is take someone's bending away. It's not like he would be reluctant or anything."

Her face fell. "Oh. You're right."

"We can keep the idea around though," Lysanias offered. "I can make up a mask later, just in case we need one."

A tense three days followed, with political ads in newspapers and on the radio increasing in frequency to almost frenzied levels. There were no equalist attacks, and the group continued to train on the island while waiting for Election Day.

"I wonder if we shouldn't somehow misdirect Amon," Amy mused the evening before the big day. "Thinking as a water bender myself, that is."

"But how?" asked Jinora. The family was just sitting down for dinner, Meelo goofing off as usual but everyone else was used to pitching in to help at this point. Pema felt she was close to giving birth, so despite her protests her "guests" were more than happy to help set the table, watch the food, and clean up. "Even he gets to vote, so he'll know where to go."

"I know. Are you going to ask the universe, Lysanias? If he'll make trouble during the election?"

"The poling locations are all going to have at least a couple of officers according to Lin," Tenzin told them. "And she's again hired private security forces to help out. Though if he could tell where an attack might happen..."

"My dreams have only been about birds flying around the island," Lysanias admitted. "Along with my snatching a fish out of water, there's been a lot of flying imagery lately. I could

more directly ask, though. We were caught by surprise the last time, thinking Amon would do one thing but in reality he did another. We can't assume he'll attack polling locations, he's getting what he wanted, at least in part. But he might use the opportunity to cause trouble elsewhere while the police are protecting them."

"And if there just *happened* to be a bunch of officers in plain clothes hanging around and could take him in..." Tenzin left it hanging.

"It's plausible, and it doesn't hurt to ask. I'll do it after I eat."

So after dinner Lysanias came up with some questions he hoped would have a one word answer to, and figured he would cheat rather than leave it up to chance. He put the augmentation magic on himself and concentrated on his first question.

"What will the man who calls himself Amon do to cause trouble tomorrow?"

Abduction

Okay, that can't be good. "How many people will the man who calls himself Amon try to abduct tomorrow?"

Five

Great, guess which five? Wait, I don't have to guess. Or even ask. I better tell Tenzin.

"He's going to what?" he blurted, after hearing the answers. The two were outside, looking out at the setting sun over the water.

"Try to destroy the council. Unless you know of another five people that are important enough to try and silence tomorrow?"

"No, no, it's probably us," he admitted, starting to pace back and forth along the wooden deck. "Why though? Isn't he getting what he wanted?"

"We don't know what he wanted. We only know what he said he wanted. He may have wanted the council gone from the start."

"Then why all this equalist nonsense?"

"I have no idea. He probably thought he couldn't do it alone."

"Even with his abilities, attacking all of us would have been suicide, at least I hope he couldn't take all of us at once."

"Uh, he could just blood bend you all, remember?"

"Ah yes, there is that. Okay, maybe he could have."

"With his resources, it's possible he's going to wait until the winner of the new seat is elected, *then* have you all killed. With only one surviving member, who he can then coerce or control more easily, he'll have effectively taken over the council. In fact with his followers, getting the five thousand signatures might be easy. He could be a candidate and have a decent shot of just winning outright. Then he can even legitimately say he's an elected official, no one the wiser."

Tenzin frowned in thought. "Yes, that's a decent plan. Could he have thought that far ahead? That we would make a new seat and hold an election?"

"Doesn't matter if he did, or is just good at reacting to stuff. You, your family, and the other council members are in danger. You'll need to call Lin and have extra forces hiding nearby to take in any equalists that attack them."

"That's fine, but what are we going to do about Pema? I don't want her moved with the baby so close to being born."

Lysanias was skeptical. "You really think it's that close?"

"She's had three other children. If she says she's close I'm inclined to believe her."

"I won't argue with that. Still, we are on an island so that should help. Any boats we see approaching we just dump them with water bending." *Unless they fly, they do have that balloon according to reports. Is that what my dreams are warning me about? But that one was never found, they couldn't be hiding more than that, right? Easy enough to defend*

against one air ship. “We’ve got the white lotus, the avatar, Amy’s aim is getting better so I’d trust her in a fight, your whole family is air benders, and then you have me. I think we can fortify this place pretty well.” His face lit up as he suddenly had an idea. “In fact, show me where she’s going to go when the baby comes. I’ll make up some wards tonight and slap them around the room. Keyed to her and whoever else is going to help, they’ll be able to go in and out but everyone else will totally ignore the whole room!” Lysanias’ eyes were shining, thinking of this new way to use his “ignore me” wards. *Yeah, that could totally work. It works on the balloon, and on us, why wouldn’t it?*

So Tenzin went to call Lin and Lysanias went to go secure the room, slapping wards he made around the doorframe and spaced at regular intervals. Naturally he called on the spirit of the dragonfly, something he didn’t consider cheating like he could do with magic, as he felt that was practice. (Also he wanted to save his energy, he had used a fair chunk of it on the spell to augment his ability to ask the universe things.) It was rather late when he finally finished, but had some white lotus members test the room by walking down the hall looking for it. They all knew it was there, but couldn’t quite find the door, so the idea worked. None of them started to believe they were losing their minds, simply accepting that Lysanias had hidden it somehow without the least bit of curiosity how. *If you didn’t know the room was there you would simply walk past it. Any equalists that get this far will just walk past it without the least amount of interest. How about that?* With that he fell into bed, figuring he should get some sleep because tomorrow was sure to be a fairly busy day.

Chapter 19
Island Under Attack
When: Day 54
Where: Lysanias' room

The day got off to a rough start, as Lysanias found himself being awoken by Meelo falling on top of him.

"Come on, get up!" Meelo told him. "Something's happening in the city! Dad got a call, are you awake already?"

"Get off me! What? Meelo? What's going on?"

"Like I said, something's happening in the city. So I'm sposta wake you up."

"You did that." Lysanias looked around, it was not far past sunrise, poling locations were probably open. Tenzin said they would open fairly early, *why are bad guys never late risers?*

"I did good!"

"Huh? Oh, yes, just great. Go tell your dad I'll be there in a minute."

"K!" He zoomed out of the room, arms outstretched. *Wonder what my normal childhood would have looked like? Was I that impulsive and rambunctious? I don't even remember.*

He quickly got out of bed and threw his clothes on, performing his cleaning spell and wondering if he had time to make himself some breakfast. He decided against it and hurried over to the main dining area.

Which was empty.

"Er..." he said to no one in particular, looking around. There was a basket of muffins covered by a napkin on the table so he shrugged and grabbed one. Munching it he stuck his head out the door, wondering where everyone was, and spotted a man in the white lotus uniform.

I should just go ask him. Walk right up to the man and say "where is everybody?" No, no I don't want to sound too pushy, maybe "excuse me, do you know where Tenzin and his family are?" I suppose I just need to know where Tenzin is, maybe Pema and the kids are already in the safe room I made. That would necessitate a longer explanation, but of course if Tenzin went to work early he wouldn't even be on the island so maybe it's better to ask where Korra is, she and Amy should be together. But no, they would be down by the docks waiting for ships to come in if the island get attacks. Maybe "Hey, where did everybody go?" No, that's no good because then he would have to list where everyone on the island went, does he even know "everybody?" There's more than two dozen people that live here between the monks, the white lotus-

"Do you need some help, sir?" asked the man who by this time had come over to see Lysanias who was just standing there like a lump trying to decide how to ask where people were.

"Uh..."

"I think most people went to the tower," the man explained. "Something about getting the best view of the city?"

"Oh okay thanks," Lysanias mumbled, taking off in that direction. *What is wrong with me? I couldn't just ask the man where everyone was? He's going to think I'm either stuck up or a moron. I didn't even thank him properly, I'm so useless. Don was right, as always, but I can't exactly practice going up to people and striking up a conversation. They would really think I was nuts! I'm so useless.* He crammed more muffin into his mouth in shame. *Good muffin though.*

Lysanias finally made it to the tower and climbed the stairs to the top, passing Naga on the way up, who was waiting outside. He found his friends at the highest point, near the windows facing the city, looking worried. At the moment Korra was looking through a telescope out over the water at the city, and no one looked all that pleased.

"Ah, you're here. Meelo got you up then?" Tenzin asked.

"Rather energetically," Lysanias agreed, somewhat sourly. "Not that he told me where to go after he did."

"I told him to tell you to come here. Well, that's neither here nor there. The city is under attack, it's worse than we thought."

"What are you even looking at? You can't see anything from here."

"See for yourself," Korra suggested, handing him the telescope. Lysanias shrugged and took it, stepping up next to her and looking out over the water.

"That's a lot of balloons," he remarked. "Do the local police have that many?"

"No. Some of those belong to Amon," Amy told him. "You can see the difference in design, especially along the front. And the back. And the middle. The whole thing, now that I think about it."

"Wait, there must be half a dozen there!"

"Exactly."

"Where did he hide them all?" *And how did he afford them?*

"That's a good—"

"Wait a second, wait a second," Lysanias shushed her, moving the glass off to the right. "I think a couple of those ships are heading this way!"

"That figures," Tenzin grumped. "The call I got from Lin this morning was that two council members had been abducted, while the others had been kept safe by the officers in the area. Seems your tip paid off, Lysanias. They stayed in hiding, and when the disguised equalists went to attack, they found a little more than they bargained for. It's only natural they would try to take this place, too."

"Let's send them packing!" Korra announced, smacking a fist into her other hand.

"It doesn't make sense," Lysanias said mostly to himself. "Why not wait until later, when the election was over? And where is he getting the resources for all this? Those air ships can't be cheap to make or maintain."

"Amon is a rich guy, or has the backing of powerful people," Amy suggested. "Does it matter now why or how?"

"I suppose not. We better go out and meet them. I figured they would come by sea but I see three by air."

"It could be a problem," Tenzin admitted. "Should we just flee? Get Pema out of here despite her protests?"

"They're just chi-blockers," Korra admonished him. "Okay they may have the gloves, so just don't let them get near you. Problem solved."

"There could be dozens in each ship!"

"I know. I'm eager to see how my training is paying off!" Korra's eyes were shining with excitement, but Amy just rolled hers.

"Down girl," she chided. "He's right, it could be a problem. But Lysanias made the safe room, she's fine."

"That's right, even if we all somehow get defeated, they won't find that room. On the bright side, they are just chi-blockers," Lysanias told them, setting the telescope down and heading to the stairs. "By that I mean they won't be able to see my spirit."

How about it, mountain spirit? Can you lend me your aid?

I will aid you.

The spirit appeared, looking around at the room with interest.

Actually, I don't call it out unless I'm already in combat. It doesn't need to train, in a sense it's my soul. That means it doesn't get to see much of the world. I wonder if it would like to. I suppose I could ask it, when I get a moment. I can talk to it doing the meditation and going into my "inner soulscape." I'll have to do that sometime.

"Very well," Tenzin allowed. "Let's go greet our guests."

The airships drew near as the group left the tower, firing cables at the path down to the lower parts of the island. Fortunately this was exactly where the group was, and while three white lotus members joined them Jinora dropped out of the sky on her glider.

"Jinora, get out of here this instant!" Tenzin told her as dozens of people started descending from the balloons on the cables.

"No dad, it's my home too!"

"She's at that age," Amy said with a smile.

"Where she gets killed by equalists? This isn't a game!"

"I can handle myself." She took her stance as the chi-blockers got closer.

"I'm just glad it snowed a bit last night," Amy's remarked as she looked around. "There should be enough water around here." She gestured and the nearby snow melted and was pulled towards her.

Right, preparation! That reminds me. He pulled out an armor ward and stuck it to himself, then another and stuck it onto Jinora.

"Oh, I see how it is," Korra teased.

"They always go for the younger woman," Amy agreed.

"Thank you," Tenzin told him. "You three, go and get any others you can," he told the white lotus people. "We'll need more people later more than we'll need you three here now. Hold the next level if we fall, or come reinforce us if we need it."

They nodded, this made sense, and sprinted up the stairs. *As it is, it's pretty crowded on this landing. They would have just gotten in the way, it's true.*

"That's a lot of people," remarked Amy, as forces continued to pour out of the airships. They were sliding down a cable that had shot out, and were now running up the stairs, arms flailing behind them because apparently that's how people run in this reality. *And they don't look ridiculous at all, no they do not.*

"But look how narrow this staircase is," Lysanias reminded her, pointing at it. "No more than two or three people at a time can reach us. It'll be fine."

"I hope you're right."

So do I.

The group approached, and everyone took their stance and started gauging the range of their attacks. Jinora it seemed was raring to go, she got the first shot off and swung her glider, with the wings retracted it was a simple staff, and a burst of air shot forward towards the lead guy. Who simply jumped over it and kept running.

Wow, Amon sent some elite forces here, didn't he?

Tenzin was a step behind his daughter, bending a blast of air down the stairs to try and catch the guy as he landed. This was extremely successful, blowing the guy off his feet, down the icy stairs, and into the guy behind him who couldn't dodge out of the way fast enough.

The two at the sides barely glanced over as the man tumbled, and threw their odd metallic disks ahead of them. Lysanias had been waiting for something like that, and figuring they were metal went to grab them with earth bending. Naturally he missed the other one, only getting the one in front of him and spinning it back at the man. It hit the left arm, sparking and making the man cry out but not slowing him by very much. The other headed straight for Korra who didn't want to dodge because Amy was right behind her. So she stomped her foot and made one of the stones that made up the stairs fly up to try and intercept it. It just managed to make contact and the electrified disk spun away harmlessly.

The spirit now moved to intercept the two main chi-blockers that were nearest, but didn't move quite enough to the left. The one directly in front of Lysanias plowed into him and went sprawling, unable to figure out what he had run into. The one on the left got his arm caught but kept going, directly towards Korra.

Lysanias felt he should be contributing *something* to all this and reached out with his powers to grab the other electro-disk that was spinning away. He wanted to slam it into the guy about to get close to Korra, who indeed was reaching out with a gloved hand to try and stun her into unconsciousness.

Which of course he will be able to do no problem, whereas I slam someone with one of their thrown weapons and it hardly does anything.

Just as he predicted the disk slammed into the man's already injured arm, and there was a little spark, and that was it.

I'm so useless!

Amy arced a stream of water at the man, who almost got out of the way but took his third hit to (you guessed it) the left arm. It was still totally fine though, don't you worry!

The man directly behind "arm guy" threw a bola at Naga, the only opponent he had a clear shot at, who tried to just smash it to the ground. She didn't manage it and the bola wrapped around her legs, bringing her down.

"Naga!" shouted Korra.

The man behind the one slugged by the spirit hauled him up, chiding him for slipping and falling at such an important time.

"I hit something," he insisted.

Tenzin now didn't have a clear shot down the stairs because the spirit was in the way and moved over to help get Naga back up.

About seven people now clogged the narrow stairs and couldn't go anywhere, but Korra could act. She still had hold of that one rock and sent it at the guy right in front of her, hoping to not hit his stupid left arm again. She hit his chest, but he hardly felt it.

"You know," remarked the guy holding the two weird truncheon things, "maybe it was a bad idea to just all rush the place like this?"

The guy that had just been hauled up now sprang up the last stair to hit Lysanias with his glove, which Lysanias really didn't want to experience. So he tried yanking the glove off the guy, throwing energy into the attempt because what we wanted to do would look very cool if he could pull it off, but might result in him looking the fool otherwise. He managed to pull it off, the glove that is, despite the man's protest of "hey!" by grabbing the top of it. This part wouldn't trigger the electrocution effect, and allowed him to grab it with his left hand and jam it on his right in one smooth motion.

Now that's how it's done.

The guy next to the one that got blown off his feet by Tenzin hauled him up, allowing the man to the left of him to step into where he had been, now directly in front of the spirit he couldn't see. He tried to continue forward but somehow couldn't find his way around to attack Lysanias or Korra despite there being nothing in his way. He was very confused.

Jinora attacked the man before her, the one that just lost his glove, slamming into his body but not staggering him.

"This is usually much easier!" she complained.

"I know," Korra agreed. "Usually you hit somebody once and they just go down. It's so weird!"

Are they blaming me somehow?

The spirit stepped up to the man before it and chi-blocked him, the man tumbling down the stairs without even realizing what was happening.

Finally, one person goes down. This is going to take forever. And of course it's not me, with all the powers doing the work, it's my spirit just punching a guy. What is wrong with me?

"What in the world?" exclaimed the guy behind him, having to jump over the tumbling form of the now paralyzed guy. Then he said "Yaaa!" as he fell over.

There was more milling about, with Lysanias now trying out his new toy and trying to electrocute the man in front of him. *After all, he was prepared to electrocute me, right? He should be willing to take the same as he dishes out.*

He struck out, open palmed, aiming for the man's body to avoid any left arm shenanigans. The man would have dodged all but the most skilled attackers that were strictly human, but Lysanias was not. He connected, and the man went down in a heap.

And now I'm not even using powers, but instead a technological device created on the very reality I'm visiting. What's the point? Yipes!

He made a grab for the long chain that was now hurling his way, swung by the guy behind the guy that just went down. This was a bad idea, not for Lysanias, but for the man holding the chain. Chains conduct electricity, a fact he suddenly recalled as energy went through it and zapped him into unconsciousness.

Two for one special. Wonder how many 'charges' this glove has, anyway?

Naga was up again, Tenzin having been working on untangling her from the bola, and she shook herself off and looked around for a target.

The guy behind the two taken out by Lysanias had just seen him disarm a guy, put his

glove on, and then stun two guys. Taking no chances he threw his bola, which wasn't metal so Lysanias couldn't metal bend it. He knew his dodging chances were low from long practice with Korra and the others, but his metal bending skills were halfway decent. So he simply metal bent the glove of the guy in front of him to rise up and take the hit for him. The arm flew up and the cord wrapped around it.

The man's mouth dropped open.

That's more like it.

Naga roared, batting the guy with the messed up arm. She connected and her claws slashed into his body, driving him to the ground. (Did you know bears are pretty strong? It's true! He's so dead now)

Amy arched water at the guy behind the now dying guy, but he dodged it with room to spare.

Tenzin now took a step to the left and went for the same guy, hitting him in the leg at least, but the guy was still standing.

Needless to say, this went on for some time. The chi-blockers got smart and started throwing gas and smoke grenades up there, but with three air benders only succeeded in blinding themselves and causing more confusion on the stairs. They didn't choke because their masks had filtration systems built in, but it didn't do them any favors either. And as Lysanias didn't actually have to breathe if he didn't want to, or see his opponents when he could just feel their positions, he used the smoke to his advantage. Simply closing his eyes, heading into it, and zapping anyone that got close. When his glove ran out of "juice" he simply grabbed another and continued. Our heroes had the high ground, the stairs were somewhat snowy and slippery, and only three attackers could be at the top while they were attacked by seven things from the landing. One of which, not that you needed reminding, they couldn't even perceive. The man with the sticks might have been a challenge, but they were certainly made of metal so Lysanias just made him electrocute his own face before he could get close.

Bodies now littered the stairs, most simply knocked out or paralyzed, but a few bleeding to death from where Naga had slashed or bitten them.

"Fighting groups is horrible!" Lysanias managed, breathing heavily. *If I thought this was the end of it, I would have just used skybourne magic and put them all to sleep or something. That would always come in handy. But somehow I think this day is just getting started.*

"But with good friends at your side," Amy countered, grabbing both his and Korra's arms, "you can do anything!"

"You got that right," Korra agreed.

"Now we have a new problem," Tenzin informed them, being more practical. "What do we do with all these people? We can't just leave them out here."

"I don't want them crawling around my personal dimension either." *Maybe I should still just put them to sleep.*

"We can't stay and babysit them either," Korra added. "The city needs us. We need to get over there and help out in any way we can."

"I suppose with their gloves taken away and their hands bound, they won't offer much resistance," Tenzin reluctantly agreed. "Ah, here's some help!" Members of the white lotus, the original three and any they had found in the meantime, came jogging down the stairs.

"Tenzin sir, are you all right?" asked the one in the lead.

"Fine, yes, go get some rope and help us tie these people up. I don't want them running around the island but it's going to be some time before we can get rid of them."

"Right!"

They ran off again, and the group went among the fallen, grabbing gloves and bolas and anything else that could be used as a weapon as they went. Lysanias treated the most wounded with healing wards, and Korra scowled over at him.

"You're healing them?"

"Why shouldn't I? Just because they happen to follow a philosophy I don't agree with, that's no reason for them to bleed to death out here. I'm just treating the worst off, believe me."

"I think it's very noble," Amy told him. "I just hope we aren't missing those later, to heal police officers or others."

"I've made plenty, and I can always draw some battery wards if I need to do healing myself. It's fine."

Moments later more people showed up, hauling rope, and started tying the unconscious or incapacitated chi-blockers up. Any that had any fight left in them got zapped, using the gloves the group had taken from their attackers. Didn't take many people getting a jolt to make everyone fall in line, and the white lotus dragged them off to at least go sit someplace out of the snow.

"By the way sir, your wife said something about coming to see your new son when you got a moment."

"Oh my gosh, Pema!" Tenzin rushed off, leaving the others shaking their heads. "Did you hear that, everyone! I have a second son!"

Yeah, I told you that a month or more ago. Nice to see my ability to tell the future does work.

"Right, that's taken care of," Korra announced, dusting her hands off. "We have to get over to the mainland, let's head to the dock."

"Dock?" snorted Lysanias. "We're not going by boat. You're the avatar, you should travel in style."

"You can just teleport us over there?"

"No, not that either. Our transportation awaits us."

"What? Naga? She can't carry us all."

"No, not Naga. I'm talking about that!" He pointed up at the airship that was still tethered to the ground. "How would you like your very own airship?"

"Wait, you mean take an airship?"

"I mean take an airship. It's just hanging there, begging to be taken over. So let's do it."

"That airship?" she repeated. "I could have my own airship?"

"That's what I'm asking. Would you. Like. That airship."

"I want an airship!"

"How come you never get me anything?" Amy pouted.

Chapter 20

Kill All Robots

When: half an hour after the attack

Where: Airship

"I've got a flying machine!" exclaimed Korra, practically dancing onto the bridge of the airship. It had been fairly easy to take over, given most of the crew had gone down to the island to try and capture the last airbender family. It didn't occur to them, with so many people involved in the effort, they might *lose*. So there were only a few crew members left, those that could fly an airship but maybe not fight as well. They were now down on the island, leaving just our heroes and heroines aboard. Naga was down in the hold, too big to fit through the doors that led to the bridge.

"Not as impressive as making the entire island fly, but it's a start," Lysanias agreed, thinking of the skybourne islands back home as he looked the control panel over. This reminded him of looking their control panels over, and almost wondered how his friends were doing before remembering Inari's promise to return him the very second he left. *So they haven't actually moved an inch from where I left them, despite it being a couple of months for me. So weird.* "Now, does anyone know how this thing works?" Looking it over there were levers, dials, switches, and buttons of all kind arrayed before the group, set under a series of windows so you could look out at where you were going. The wheel was fairly obvious, but how to make it go forward, that was the key issue on their minds.

"I'm sure I can figure something out," Amy bragged, walking over to the control panel and casually pressing a button. Lights started flashing and alarms starting sounding, and she hastily pressed it again. The alarms went off. "Not that one, then."

"Maybe that was just the alarm activation button," Jinora suggested with a smirk. "Oh, try this lever!"

"Are you really sure about this?" Tenzin asked, a worried look on his face. "Stealing an airship, I mean?" He had gotten back from seeing his new son, Rohan, in time to see the ex-airship pilots being lowered to the ground, and agreed to come with them to see what the situation was in the city. He had told them Pema agreed to stay in the "safe room" until he got back, just in case more forces attacked the island. His other two kids were also there, so his relief at having them safe was plain.

"Of course. This way they'll never see us coming," Korra answered. "But why didn't your spirit join us, Lysanias?" Everyone looked to the side of the ship, where the mountain spirit was standing in the water. It was still just as huge if not bigger than it had been when it lifted them up here, and was looking around.

"I thought maybe we didn't want those other ships following us," he explained. "If you can figure out how to get us over there, it can wreck them."

"Can you put your spell on me?" Amy asked.

"Like he hasn't already?" Jinora bumped her with her elbow.

"I mean the one that makes you better at things, stop it," she replied, giving her a light shove.

"No can do. You have to at least have some base knowledge for the spell to augment. It isn't called 'do things you know nothing about' after all. It's called 'skill augmentation.'" *Plus I'm not practiced enough manipulating magic, I have to throw all kinds of energy into the spell to make sure I get it off. It's not worth it for something like this. Backfiring that spell? I'd probably lose skill at something.* He shuddered.

"Pity. Oh, this seems promising."

After figuring out the controls for opening the underside doors, cleaning the windows, turning the radio on and off, the lights, (in cabin and outer) air conditioning and heat, Amy finally worked out how to make the airship go forward and turn, which is all they needed at the moment. The mountain spirit paced them, but the other two ships by this time realized something was wrong and started to turn away from the island themselves.

"If only there was a button to shoot out a harpoon and stick them," Jinora lamented. "You have to think an equalist balloon would have plenty of weapons on board."

But no guns though!

"How do you know there isn't?" Korra asked. "There was one to harpoon the ground."

"Good point."

"Don't worry, my spirit can't get that far away it's true, but it's so huge now all it has to do is stretch an arm out in either direction." The spirit did just that, reaching for the propellers on the one side of the nearest airship. They met with an invulnerable creature and simply shattered one after the other, forcing the airship to make an emergency water landing. The other was next, and shortly it too was now floating there, helpless. The mountain spirit shimmered and vanished, it wouldn't be able to keep up across the bay trying to walk, so Lysanias let it go with feelings of thanks.

Though don't go too far, I may need you again very soon.

"Why not tear them to pieces with metal bending?" Korra asked. "Your spirit can do all the bending you can, right?"

"Sure. But after waking up in a world that was physically running out of resources, I'm not inclined to waste the metal by sinking these things. Your resources aren't limitless either, remember. Repair those spinning bits-

"Propellers," Amy clarified.

"Right, what she said. And you'll have a perfectly functional machine again. Just grounding them keeps them off us, and the soft landing made sure anyone inside wouldn't be hurt. You don't always need to do the flashy thing, sometimes just the minimum is enough."

Plus it needs to conserve energy too, just like I do. Neither one of us has unlimited amounts.

"I see." She looked thoughtful.

"Let's go," Jinora announced, pointing towards the city. "That way!"

"I know what direction we need to go in!" Amy told her.

"So why are we going in the other direction?"

"Back seat driver!"

"There's no seats in here."

But finally Amy got it straightened out and the airship drifted towards the city. Tenzin found a telescope in the compartment and stood looking through it as the buildings came closer. "It's a riot down there," he announced.

"Like a lot of clowns or something?" Korra asked hopefully.

"No, I mean like people running and screaming. And I'm not even sure what I'm seeing here but there's some odd machines out in the streets."

"Odd machines?" Lysanias asked.

"Take a look." He handed the glass over and Lysanias peered through it. He was right, a bunch of metal suits were wheeling around the streets, each seemingly twice as tall as a person. *These people can't have remnant technology, they haven't figured out guns yet. What exactly am I looking at?* "I don't know either. Back on my world I would have said they were intelligent machines, big ones. But here? They aren't cars."

"You think they're from another world?"

"The gloves weren't. But it's impossible to say, even close up." *For now, anyway. So much for not causing trouble until after the election.*

"I see. I suppose someone could be riding around the inside."

"They're big enough, that's for sure."

"What are we going to do about it?" Korra asked. "We can't stop this." She made a sweeping gesture to take in the whole city.

"I'm not sure. If the police are overwhelmed, and it seems they probably are depending on how many of those wheeled things are out there and what they can do, there's certainly nothing we can do."

"We have to try though, dad!"

"And I applaud the sentiment, but what?"

"Disable those machines. One at a time if we have to. What do they look like?"

Lysanias handed the glass back to Tenzin, who peered through it again. "Bulbous. One wheel in the back, maybe a tread for the legs? They don't walk forward, they roll forward. Two arms like a person."

"Wheels? That's the weak point then. How well do you think it would work without that

wheel?"

He considered. "Hard to say. I mean they must have put it there for some reason. But honey, that thing is huge! How would we even get close to it?"

She looked over at Lysanias. "How did we get up here?"

He nodded, considering. "It's true. As chi-blockers they wouldn't be able to see my spirit. It could pin one down while we wrecked the wheel. Knock it over, pin the arms, it would be like a turtle. One at a time I have to believe they would be helpless, especially given it would be like trying to fight somebody blindfolded."

"What I don't get is what they're made of," Tenzin mused. "I mean, wood? Can't be. But metal would have crumpled easily for any member of the police force."

"Probably escorted by a dozen chi-blockers. Something that big you just smash up police vans with," put in Amy. "The escort takes care of anything that can threaten it, so they don't have time to bend it. They're too busy dodging people trying to electrocute them."

Most police would have insulated armor by this point though, right? Or not, they can't do it my way. And the face is still a target.

"I guess we'll know soon enough. Can you land this thing someplace?"

"Land?" Amy paled. "Uh..."

"I'll take care of it," Lysanias offered. "I need my spirit out anyway. I can drop down to a building on wings, get it out, he can grow, and just lift the rest of you down."

"My airship!" cried Korra. "I didn't even get a chance to name it!"

"We'll come back for it, I promise. Who's going to fly up and reclaim it? Me."

"That's fine then."

Lysanias and the group walked to the door, the ship now hovering over a tall building with a flat roof.

"By the way, what did you mean when you said 'wings' before?" asked Tenzin. "I assume that's figurative or something?"

"Oh, that's right. You never saw that, did you? Well, these slits in the back of my shirt are there for a reason. Watch." He concentrated, and wings unfolded behind him, settling into place.

"..." said Tenzin, clearly flummoxed.

"I'll send my mountain spirit up for you in a moment," Lysanias promised before he dropped out of the sky and spread his wings. Catching the air he gently lowered himself and considered consuming a few spirit battery wards.

I think I'll be okay for the moment. My spirit is going to do most of the work from here on out, right? By the way, would you like to come out again, spirit of the mountain?

I will come.

The spirit hopped down to street level, Lysanias following so it didn't vanish again. Then it started to grow, large enough to allow those still in the balloon to hop into its hands and be lowered to the street. Naga of course couldn't see it, and couldn't be convinced to jump to her death despite Korra standing there calling her, so in the end Lysanias put her in a contain ward, then let her out again when they were at street level. The mountain spirit was not smaller again, but still towered over the group.

"You're still full of surprises, aren't you?" remarked Tenzin, looking around.

"At least I'm good for something." Lysanias drew his wings in, not wanting to change form again in case they would come in handy later. *Plus, with all the chaos around here a man with wings walking around is the least of people's worries. Nobody would believe anybody that saw me.* "Come on, nearest one was this way."

The group took off down the street, peering from an alley towards an iron suit currently harassing some benders that were trying to take it out. They weren't having much luck, the armored form too tough for them to crack.

"Looks like just the one," Amy mused. "They must have fanned out to cover more ground."

"Being inside a huge metal suit of armor would make me cocky too," Korra agreed.

"Like you aren't already?" Tenzin muttered.

“What was that?”

“I said let’s take it out!”

“Yeah, that’s the Tenzin I want to see. You want to knock it over, hot stuff?”

“That’s you, in case it wasn’t clear,” Jinora clarified, looking at Lysanias.

“I know that, she wasn’t talking to Tenzin then!”

“What, I’m not hot stuff?” he asked, pulling on his pointy beard. “I have four kids, I must be doing something right,” he bragged.

Lysanias rolled his eyes and directed his mountain spirit to engage the enemy, which it did by running headlong into it, trying to drive it to the ground by tipping it to the side. It wobbled, there was an enormous crash Lysanias swore he felt all the way back to them, and the thing rolled on as nothing had happened.

The spirit, not having eyes to blink, nevertheless stared indignantly at the retreating machine as if it couldn’t believe what was happening. But Lysanias could.

“Any other bright ideas?” Tenzin asked dryly.

“You don’t have to rub it in,” Lysanias snapped. “You know how much that thing weighs? Tons! I’d like to see you lift it with air bending!”

“I’m sure I could. I could run right out there and fling it high into the sky.”

“Ha! Go on then!” Lysanias stepped out of the way so Tenzin could take his shot. But still, the man hesitated.

“Boys, please, compare them later. Right now, what are we going to do about it?” Korra asked. “It’s getting away.”

“Compare what later?” asked Jinora.

“Never mind!” Tenzin insisted, cheeks reddening.

“I’ll tell you tonight,” Amy whispered.

“I don’t know. I felt that impact from here. It’s the whole war machine situation all over again, my spirit is only as strong as I am. Even growing larger it can only do so much.”

“Can’t we stop it with bending?” Korra asked.

“Those other benders couldn’t. They ran away,” observed Amy. “Oh right, they can see the spirit, they probably messed their pants when they saw it coming out of the alley straight for the thing. I can’t believe we’ll fare any better.”

“Let’s at least follow it, maybe we’ll see an opportunity.”

“They probably thought it was a spirit,” Jinora told them, “but if an angry spirit was charging around anywhere near me, I’d run too.”

So the group stayed behind it, out of sight as the thing rolled around the city, living life like it wanted to live. The original benders were long gone so it was probably looking for others to round up. But no one else was stupid enough to attack it and it couldn’t exactly go knocking on doors so it looked a little forlorn, if a thing with no face could look like anything.

“We’re going about this all wrong,” Amy decided, looking down the street which was not even close to where the thing was going.

“What, you want to run away?” Jinora asked. “I suppose that can be a valid strategy in a situation like this.”

“No, silly, I see something that can help. Come on. Men, keep it in sight we’ll be right back. Korra, Jinora, you’re with me.” The girls rushed off of Naga, leaving the men scratching their heads but moments later they were back carrying cans.

“Paint?” asked Tenzin. “Did you just rob a paint store? What, does your room need a little redecorating?”

“No,” she huffed. “We’re attacking the wrong thing. There’s a person in there, a chi-blocker. They look out through that bulbous glass plate on the top. We cover that up and they’re blind!”

“You can paint bend?” Lysanias asked, as the girls levered the cans open with screwdrivers. (also stolen)

“Sure, it’s water based paint!” She grinned.

“But it’ll just run off, or they’ll have a water nozzle there to clean stuff like this off,” Tenzin protested. “They must have thought of this!”

“Good thing we have both a fire bender *and* some air benders here,” Amy went on.

"Lysanias can turn rock into lava by adding energy to it. I can turn water into ice by removing it, or into steam by adding it. Can't you two do the same? Heat the air? Give it a blast of hot air and I'll bet you can quick dry this paint. If nothing else, heat a bunch of air with fire bending, keep it hot, and just swirl it around the canopy."

Tenzin thought a moment, but couldn't come up with any effective argument for this. "Let's give it a shot. Make hot air... could probably make cold air in warm weather, come to think of it. Why have I never thought of that?"

Because bending seems focused on combat rather than utility?

"We're ready here," Korra told them, lifting two blobs of paint out of the cans with a flourish. "Lysanias, you want in on this?"

"We saved you the blue, because you're a *boy*," Jinora informed him, tipping the can to show him.

"Thanks," he replied sarcastically. "Later you can play princess because you're a *girl*."

"Princess Augustine, who saves her kingdom by pretending to marry the bad guy and then knifing him in his sleep? I love that story! I pretend I'm her all the time!"

"You've got some violent stories on this world," he remarked to Tenzin, grabbing the paint with water bending. The spirit looked expectantly at him, but he shook his head. *I want you on drying duty. Heating the paint directly with fire may just vaporize it, but hitting the metal on the outside I bet would warm the glass too. Try that if you can't heat the air enough.*

"The mover adaption was a lot different," Tenzin explained. "I didn't realize it when I got her the original work."

"What's a mover?"

"Animated pictures shown on a-"

"Can we focus here?" Korra asked, clearly ready to do some paint bending.

"Sorry," the guys said, getting into position.

With a mighty battle cry of silence to not announce their intent, the group burst from hiding behind the mecha tank and slammed it with the paint. The air benders, the mountain spirit included, whipped up hot air around the thing, while Amy and Korra heated up the water in the paint to help it to dry.

With the occupant of the mecha tank now effectively blind they had to open the cockpit to see out or risk smashing their machine to pieces if they moved. But they weren't stupid, so they just *stopped moving*. The thing had already been shown to be mostly impervious to attack, why would the squishy person inside come out to be beaten up by benders? The group now stood in a circle around them, waiting for them to do something. As a game, it had a lot to be desired, at least for those outside the metal monstrosity marginally more massive than most mammals.

With a shrug, Korra directed her energies towards the wheel, as the thing was just sitting there. She concentrated. She scowled. She cursed, both quietly and more loudly as the metal refused to bend.

"I don't want you repeating any of those words!" Tenzin told Jinora. "Honestly Korra, there are children present!"

Jinora looked over to Amy, who said "I'll tell you what they mean later."

"You are definitely a bad influence on my daughter."

"She has to grow up sometime!"

Meanwhile Korra tried harder. Finally she gave up.

"I can't bend the wheel!" she complained, looking around at the group. "Did they make this thing out of a metal that can't be bent?" The group looked it over, the machine despite presumably being brand new was neither shiny or pristine, even where it wasn't splattered with paint. In fact it seemed rather grungy, now that Lysanias got a good look at it. The legs looked like they could be extended to make the thing taller, and it had triangular "grasper" hands on each arm. The thing was huge, and must weigh a ton given his spirit couldn't knock it over. He could tell what it was made of, but it might take more time than the-

Lysanias felt a tingle.

"We've got to get out of here!" he cried, looking around for the danger. "Come on, this

way, back into the alley!" He took off in a run and the others, not ones to discount the guy with all the powers, followed him. A second later another mecha tank rolled up, and started turning this way and that to see who was around.

"Of course it would have a radio!" Amy chided herself. "And we just stood there like lumps! We should have saved some of the paint. Lured others into a trap using the first one as bait!"

Well, at least I'm not the only one that berates themselves? Small comfort though.

The group was back hiding in the alley and watched as the "disabled" mecha tank shot a line out of the arms which wrapped around the body of the other. It was then towed away, leaving Lysanias rather depressed at how the whole thing worked out.

"So now what?" asked Jinora. "The paint idea worked. We just have to come up with a plan to get them out of there before they can call for help. Or like you said, have enough paint on hand we can take out more than one."

"But we take out two, and they'll just radio to send half a dozen. We couldn't handle that many. And who knows how many are out there?" asked Tenzen.

Lysanias shook his head. "Actually, I've got another idea. The basic principal is the same, so I hope that paint store has more water based paint. Come on, let's load up."

The group started back, wondering what he had in mind.

Chapter 21
Republic City Rampage
When: moments later
Where: The streets of Republic City

Naturally a paint store had lots of paint, and was otherwise untouched because why would looters steal *paint*? Sure, if spray paint had been invented it would probably be targeted but not regular old cans of hi-gloss. So the group loaded the spirit up with paint cans and started stalking another mecha tank to take out. Several times they were stopped, people recognizing Tenzin, and asking what was going on or what they should be doing.

"The equalists are attacking the city," he would explain. "Probably trying to disrupt the election. For now, stay in your homes and listen to the radio for further news."

"Got it!" they would say, and scurry off.

"But *are* equalists attacking the city?" Amy finally asked.

"I think that's pretty clear!" Korra answered, gesturing at a wrecked car burning by the side of the street.

"But there's no evidence it's them," she went on. "Couldn't some other group or rival nation be attacking? We just assumed it's equalists. It could be the forces of the shadow avatar making a move at last."

"Whoever it is doesn't matter," Tenzin told her. "The point is the city is under attack. We're trying to help. When we get nearer to the center of the city we'll head to the police station and see what the situation there is."

"I guess."

They came upon a polling location, currently being harassed by two mecha tanks, the police forces on site barely holding them back.

"Think we can take two at once? Lysanias, will your plan work here?" Tenzin asked.

"No," he vehemently denied, shaking his head. "I didn't want to do it in front of witnesses. Do you know what sort of uproar *that* would cause?"

"What are you planning to do? Shrink them?" Jinora asked.

"No. Same as with Naga earlier, just make them disappear into contain wards. That will keep them from radioing for help."

"Wouldn't they ultimately starve?" asked Jinora. "I thought you didn't want to kill anybody."

"They would die of thirst before that," Amy explained. "The human body can go far longer without food than it can without water."

"You know what I mean!"

"It would only be temporary," Lysanias explained. "We paint the glass and shove them into the ward. They call for help, but get no reply. Sooner or later they open the machine and see oh, wait a second, where am I? It's so dark here, that can't be right. At that point they *get* out and now there's two things in the ward, not one. That should, in theory, cause it to fail because it's only meant for one thing at a time. The machine and person appear, we stick the machine into another ward and just have one confused chi-blocker to deal with."

"What if they don't get out?" Amy asked.

"We wait twenty minutes or so for them to get bored and come out on their own. If they don't we tear the ward open on top of a tall building. The machine inside falls and hopefully gets smashed up too badly to work, while the person inside is mostly unharmed because they're strapped to a seat."

"Even if we left them, it would be fine," Tenzin mused. "We're taking them away from the city, so they can't cause trouble."

"Wouldn't releasing them near the shore be safer?" Amy asked. "Putting the things into ten feet of water would cause them to stop working, right?"

"Good point," Lysanias agreed. "What a great idea for a ward. Leave a 'target' ward someplace and all the subsequent wards teleport whatever they're attached to towards the 'target.' I have the communication wards that work in pairs, wonder if I could expand them to

be further linked?"

"Right now let's worry about these two in front of us," Tenzin chided.

"Yes, of course!"

"You all stay here. I'll get their attention and get them to chase me. Hopefully we can lead one or both of them off, as capturing me is probably a higher priority than just making trouble here."

"Signal me, I'll run out on Naga and pick you up," Korra told him.

"Right. They're probably pretty fast."

"That'll work," Lysanias agreed. "Good luck."

"Don't actually get captured, dad."

"Certainly not!"

The group prepared, getting the paint cans opened and sticking them at various points down the alley so there were always a few in reach. With that done, Lysanias handed out wards. "Just stick it on if you get an opportunity and will the object to go inside it. Let's move deeper into the alley and find some cover. If we can make it pass us and attack the back, so much the better."

As Tenzin ran out and started attacking the mecha from the rear the others moved off, Korra waiting for Tenzin's signal. It wasn't long before the three zoomed by, drawing both tanks, single file, down the alleyway.

I'm an idiot! We don't have to get close to the things. Well, I don't. I could have attached it to rock. Amy could have put hers on ice, and couldn't Jinora fold it into a paper airplane like Elita showed me and just fly it over to them? Stupid, as usual. In fact, Amy could make spears like my old stone arrow-lances or other shapes to attack from a distance with. Could she "compress" ice like I can and make it harder to break? Oh right, better focus on this.

Naga spun, making it look like she was going to "attack" the pair of them, and the group burst from hiding, tossing balls of paint their way. All scored, making the pilots of the machines blind for the moment, at least long enough for the group to get close and stick their wards on. One vanished immediately, but the other ward just burned up.

"Mine just vanished," wailed Jinora looking up at the thing she was quite small in comparison to. "Did I do it wrong?"

"No, I must have not done a good enough job on that one," Lysanias explained, coming over. "I'll try another." He did. Then another. Then another. That one finally worked.

"That was odd," Tenzin remarked, Naga padding over to them. "Why was that one so difficult?"

Lysanias shrugged. "It almost seems random if something I do will work out or not. And those things were pretty big."

"Are you sure it wasn't something I did? I didn't spoil it somehow?" Jinora asked, looking worried.

"Nope, you did it right, the ward burned up. If I had done a better job on it, that would have worked. It activated, that's obvious because it wouldn't have burned up otherwise, the ward just wasn't good enough to contain the machine."

She looked a bit skeptical but really couldn't argue with the guy that made the things. "Okay."

"You couldn't air bend every time when you were first learning, could you?" Amy asked her.

"No, I guess not. Oh, just like you couldn't get through the gates the first time. First twenty times. First fifty times? I forget, how many times did you try it?"

Korra glared at her. "It's the same thing here, probably. It just seems random because he made those earlier."

"It's the trouble with having to practice stuff on my own, and not just absorb it from people with my eyes," he agreed. "I'm invariably bad at any of the skills from my world. I just haven't had the time to practice them all, there's so much I can do. And stuff like this keeps happening, keeping me from training for long."

"How long will they hold for?" Tenzin asked, ever the practical one.

"If they decide to get out in the first minute, only a minute. If they don't at least an hour."

"We can't wait. We have to get to the police station."

"That place will be one of the first targets. It'll be a war zone," Amy cautioned.

"You think I don't know that? It's also where we can find out how bad the situation is, and where we can do the most to help."

"And it isn't about seeing if the chief is okay?" Jinora asked slyly.

"It doesn't matter who the chief is!"

"Okay dad."

"It's as good a location to head towards as any," Lysanias admitted. "Let's head there, but everyone take some new wards. If the machines come out hit them with one again. Hopefully without a living person inside it might be easier? In any case, just try and scare the equalist off."

"Do what?" Korra exclaimed.

"Do you want to try dragging an unconscious person around when speed and stealth are the current priorities?"

"Just put them in a separate ward."

"Oh." Lysanias hadn't thought of that. He shook his head. "I don't have an unlimited supply of those things, and some have already burned up. Better to save them for the machines."

"Besides, capturing one or two equalists won't really change anything," Amy reasoned.

"But they could tell us where the stuff came from!" Korra protested.

"My abilities can do that," Lysanias reminded her. "I was reluctant before because Amon didn't seem like much of a threat. Little did we know he had the resources to plan something on this scale. And a factory to build him war machines."

"Fine. We can scare them off," she petulantly agreed.

They hadn't even made it out of the alley when the first machine came back into existence with a boom. Coming out displaced a lot of air, there was no missing it. The chi-blocker stood there, completely confused as to what was going on.

Lysanias moved, the machine was right in front of him, so he slapped the ward that was in his right hand onto it.

It burned up without absorbing the machine. *Why am I so terrible at everything? It wasn't like I rushed making these, I put a lot of effort into these things. Ten minutes apiece, don't even work, hate everything we do.*

Tenzin was up next, he too lunged for the machine, seeing that the equalist could probably be inside and causing trouble in seconds. This ward worked, and the machine once again vanished, leaving the man standing there thinking he was going insane. He was staring at Lysanias' wings, who had quite forgotten them at this point.

Korra, seeing the machine gone, dropped the ward to the ground and tried chi-blocking the guy. Lysanias could see her strikes were very, very sloppy and probably wouldn't have hit even if the guy hadn't managed to knock them away from himself.

Jinora now dodged to the side so she didn't hit Korra and shot wind at the man, who nimbly dodged, now getting his footing back. This was a fight, the thing he had trained for. So what if it was five to one, he could still win, right? That guy with the wings, he must have been seeing things, right?

Of course it was actually six to one, as the spirit was also right there, and it simply chose to try bashing him into the ground. It got in a hit that would have killed a lesser, untrained person, and the man simply crumpled to the ground and didn't get up. It looked sheepish, as much as the personified spirit of a mountain that had no face could look.

"Oh, great job!" Korra complained with disgust. "What was that about just scaring him?"

"Uh, I think he's dying?" Jinora had a horrified look on her face. "His energy is ebbing."

"That just figures, doesn't it!?" Lysanias complained, getting out a healing ward and applying it. It began to burn with the familiar blue flame, and he felt the energy loss stop at least.

"Now we have an unconscious guy to haul around," Korra went on. "That's so much better than just chi-blocking him and getting him to talk."

“We couldn’t chi-block him, we would have to leave him,” Amy explained. “That’s no good.”

“Why not?”

“Because if someone came upon him and it hadn’t worn off, they could kill him for being an equalist!”

“Maybe that’s what he deserves!”

“How could anyone deserve to be killed while they’re helpless?”

“Why should he deserve to be killed while not helpless?” Jinora chimed in.

“You stay out of it!” Korra snapped.

“Don’t talk to my daughter that way!” Tenzin snapped back.

“People, please, this isn’t helping,” Lysanias yelled at them. “I screwed up, okay. My spirit did, anyway. I’m not strong, and everything it’s tried to do hasn’t worked out. So it probably believed hitting him full force wasn’t going to do much and we know better now. Apparently if you’re a huge spirit projection and you hit someone, they could die. Good to know. We’re all on edge and yelling at each other isn’t going to help. Now I think he’s stable, is there a place we can put him that’s out of the way? Where he won’t just be knifed for being dressed as an equalist?”

“Could you change his clothes so he’s not?” Jinora asked.

“Probably. But you can feel my energy, right? I’m not doing so well myself in that department. And I don’t have too many spirit batteries to draw from, so I can’t waste it changing people’s clothes.”

“You are low on energy,” she admitted, looking him up and down. “Have you really been doing that much?”

“It adds up. And I’m lowest of all of you, you know that.”

“I guess.”

“Wait a second, I’ve got an idea,” Amy announced. “Come on.” They crossed the street after loading the man onto Naga’s back, and she headed for a truck that was parked there. “Now, let’s see if…” she tried the back door. “Yes, it’s open!” She peered inside and it wasn’t too full of stuff, so she grinned at them. “Shove him in here!”

“I suppose it could work,” Tenzin agreed. “It would get him out of the way. But what if the owner comes back?”

“That’s the best part. Just stick one of those “you can’t see me” wards on him, or better yet the truck. We can come back later and get it off, or a rain will do it, if you can’t make them burn up after like a day.”

Everyone looked to Lysanias, who shook his head. *That’s an interesting idea though. Put two ward symbols into one ward. One of them is a counter to activate or deactivate the ward after a certain time. Huh. I really need to sit down sometime and really think about what I can do.* “I’ll just put it on him. He can always take it off later.”

“Couldn’t you put it over the door?” asked Jinora. “When the guy *opens the door from the inside* to get out he’ll tear it, ending the effect. That’ll keep him from being driven someplace, waking up, and thinking he’s dead because no one can see him. If the owner comes for the truck in the meantime, okay it’s a problem, but he’ll get it back soon enough.”

These people might deserve my powers more than I do.

They did what Jinora had suggested, and by the time they were closing it up, the second guy and machine appeared as the other ward burned up.

“Oh great, who still has a ward?” Lysanias asked.

“Don’t hit this one!” Tenzin cautioned.

“Yeah, I learn from my mistakes, thank you very much!”

“What’s going on?” asked the man, looking around wildly. “What just happened?” His eyes clamped onto Lysanias’ red eyes, and flicked just a bit to take in his wings. “Wha?”

“How about you just leave and try to forget it ever happened?” Korra asked, putting a hand on his shoulder in a friendly way. “Or we can do it the hard way and beat you up.”

He put his hands up, backing away from her. “You’re the avatar, right? And Tenzin? I’ve heard about your friends too, I don’t want to fight you all!”

“Good choice. Get out of here, and don’t look back.”

"You got it." He turned tail and ran, not looking back.

"See," Korra bragged. "*That's* how you scare someone away. Not by bashing them in the head and almost killing them."

"Yes, thank you for the demonstration, I'll make some notes later," Lysanias promised. "Can we get rid of this thing before it attracts attention?"

It took three wards before it was absorbed, and Lysanias put both in his pocket. *Hey, I have two fully functional attack machines. The alchemists back home would go nuts over them. But would I want to introduce something like this to my world? Huh. Still, one to sell and one to keep as the saying goes, if I could figure out how to power it and how it works, it could come in handy. Right?*

The group made it to the police station without further incident, but immediately saw there was more work to be done. Three of the evil machines were loading officers into the back of an armored car, and from the looks of them they were unconscious.

"How are they carrying them?" asked Korra from their vantage point behind another truck parked a little ways down the street.

"Magnets, I bet," answered Amy. "Attaching to the metal armor. Look, they only have one claw arm, the other is just a big magnet."

As they watched, chi-blockers carried another unconscious person out, ready to be loaded into the truck. After dumping the officer they went back inside.

"They control the whole police station?" Tenzin gasped. "We've got to do something!"

"Great, we get to fight three of them," Lysanias complained. "That's going to take a lot of wards." *Why can't we ever fight anything small? No, it's always giant flying snakes or huge war machines.*

"We need a plan," cautioned Amy.

"Here's what we'll do to start," Lysanias suggested. "Cover that truck with paint, so it can't see to get away. We show ourselves and it'll take off immediately, so we need to stop it first."

"Good idea."

"Those machines are going to move to attack us right after that," Tenzin warned.

And what are a bunch of benders going to do about it? We can't attack them directly, that's the whole point they were made. "Oh, you covered me with a little bit of water." Or "Oh no, a tiny amount of fire hit me, what will I do?" Please. But I'm so low on energy I'll hardly be able to help. Should I bring out that "wand" I made out of those staves the skybourne attacked us with? I still have it. That armor looks fairly tough though, and I've never really practiced aiming the thing. What can I do that doesn't take a lot of energy but can still take them out? He reviewed his abilities in his head, then brightened and smiled. "My spirit can help hold them off. I think I have an idea what might work, and it doesn't take energy that I've been able to tell, *and* I'm fairly sure I can pull it off despite not practicing it every much. Just keep them off me and let me get close enough to touch them. I think I can shut them down, leaving us to deal with the chi-blockers inside. Which I think will be much easier."

"How are you going to do that?" he asked.

"Who cares, let's just go, that truck could leave at any moment!" Korra reminded them. "Get the paint ready!"

So the group charged out, balls of paint flying. They struck the windshield and side windows of the truck, at least the side closest to where they had come out of, and the three mecha tanks turned to engage them.

I really hope this works.

Chapter 22

Tune in to this Station

When: Beginning of combat

Where: Outside the police station

Amy recovered fastest, sending another ball of paint at the nearest mecha tank, smacking the window and covering it up. Jinora followed up with heated air, baking it on before the wipers could be turned on. The one further away zipped behind the truck, emerging from the side to try and flank the group. As it did they fired their cable at Korra, who was nearest. Korra dodged, but the cable got her anyway, and electricity flooded her body. She screamed.

Korra! Don't you die on- what?

She seemed to steel herself and absorb the electricity, firing it back at the mecha tank. It obviously took a jolt, but didn't go down.

What in the world did she do? Really wish I had my eyes out but I'll need them for this battle.

Lysanias couldn't stand around gaping, he had a job to do. He knew he was far too slow to simply *run* over to the now "painted" mecha tank, and envisioned himself under it. With a lurch he was there, and started to reach out and touch the "foot," where the tread was. There was a metal cover over it, which he figured was probably good enough. His spirit had reached it, and grabbed onto it to further try holding it in place.

Tenzin raced past, towards the back of the armored car, in case there was a chi-blocker there about to come out and see what was going on. He shot a blast of air into the back, which Lysanias caught out of the corner of his eye, so there must have been.

To help take the officers off the magnet and tie them up, no doubt.

Amy jumped on Naga's back, shouting "forward!" because the two chi-blockers that had just come out of the station carrying another officer had dumped them and were now about to join the fray.

The mountain spirit decided that the chi-blocker nearly to Lysanias was the larger concern, given the mecha tank wasn't really putting up a fight now that it had been blinded, and moved to intercept him.

The mecha tank in front of the station fired its cable at Tenzin, who nimbly dodged out of the way as only a master air bender can. It clanked off the nearby mecha tank about to be touched by Lysanias, but that didn't damage it in the least. The cable shot back, ready to be fired again.

The spirit, now holding back appropriately, kicked a foot out at the approaching chi-blocker. She couldn't see the spirit and went flying back, unable to reason out how or why as she blacked out from the pain. The spirit seemed to peer over at her, but was satisfied to not feel her life force draining out of her. She would survive.

Korra now had to get out of the claw before being electrocuted again, so she stomped her foot and two pillars of rock shot out of the ground. One before her, one behind. They were fairly thin, there not being a lot of space in the claw, but it was enough to get some leverage and try and yank the thing open. The claw went nowhere, and Korra's face took on an "oh crap" quality.

Lysanias *finally* touched the tank, and with a silent prayer to a God that had rejected His people and destroyed the entire world in a flood just to get rid of them, willed the war machine to make peace not war.

The mecha stopped moving.

Yes! Their main purpose is to move around and attack us. Reverse that and you get a hunk of metal that sits there and does nothing.

The spirit now turned to help Tenzin, blocking the way by simply standing in front of him so the mecha tank, the claw retracted, couldn't be fired at him again.

Jinora, (*nice of you to join us*) now fired a blade of air at the cable, hoping to sever it

before Korra could be attacked again. But she did something quite clever. Instead of sending one burst of air she angled four, hoping to hit the same spot with four different attacks at all once. After all, what was she practicing manipulating her inner energies for if not this? The cable parted, and the claw fell open as Korra rock wedges now did their work.

"Thanks Jinora!" Korra yelled honestly. "You saved me!"

Jinora certainly was not thinking along the lines of "*Senpai noticed me!*" while feeling a warm glow of pride or anything at that moment, by the way.

The second chi-blocker saw the first go flying but of course couldn't perceive why, and figured it must be something Tenzin did. After all, air was invisible, right? You didn't get *white* air just because an air bender did something to it. This wasn't a *cartoon world* where air suddenly becomes *less transparent* because it's moving around a bit unnaturally, right? Right. So it must have been him. He too was getting near when he ran into the spirit's foot and staggered back, unbelieving. His eyes couldn't believe Tenzin had done something, the man wasn't even looking at him. But he had taken a nasty hit from *something* and didn't want to repeat the experience. He started to back off.

Naga had reached the mecha tank that threatened her master, and jumped on it, Amy shouting "woo hoo!" on her back. She connected, the sight of a polar bear dog madly charging you is enough to give everyone pause, even someone inside a metal suit. The occupant got rattled around as Naga tried shaking the thing.

The spirit saw that the chi-blocker was backing off, and turned to make sure the other mecha tank wasn't causing trouble, and stepped back between it and Tenzin.

Lysanias, having recovered from altering the first tank now estimated the distance to the second. He was about to teleport again when he remembered something. *Oh yeah, I have wings. Why don't I just use them to push me along a bit faster along the ground? That's more energy efficient than teleportation, right? It's not that far.* So he leaned forward, snapped his wings out, and found himself speeding towards the mecha tank at a far higher speed than his legs would have managed. *Actually, just touching it with my wing is probably good enough, it doesn't have to be a hand. These wings are part of me now, aren't they? What's the difference?*

The driver of the mecha tank gave a "what the?" sort of shout, as he saw this weird bearded guy making a beeline for him on *wings* and perhaps gave a second's thought to his life choices? Anyway, he pushed the fire button in, making the cable shoot out to try and snare Lysanias.

This is perfect.

Lysanias didn't even bother trying to dodge, figuring he was pathetic enough on his own two feet, and this "flying" stuff was *very* new to him. So he let the claw grab him, knowing even if he got electrocuted before he could shut the thing down, his armor ward would take it. The claw got him around the midsection, and Lysanias started to grin as he took hold of it.

Meanwhile Amy, now near the head of the mecha tank Naga had slammed into grabbed some nearby snow, melted it just enough to turn into water, then splashed it up against the window, coating it with ice as she froze it again. The effect was the same as the paint, as anyone who has driven a car through a freezing rain will tell you. (Don't do this.) The glass became nearly useless, impossible to see out of.

Now touching the cable, which was part of the mecha tank, even as he sailed back because of the force of the claw, he put his power into it and tried turning it off. The machine slumped over, useless, and with a flap of his wings he landed again, the claw falling off him as he did.

Tenzin blasted into the truck again, why change a winning strategy after all, while Jinora had *an idea*. She fired another barrage of air "blades" into the now weakened glass canopy of the mecha tank. It shattered, sending ice and shards of glass down into the cockpit.

The pilot screamed and yanked the controls, basically just trying to make the machine swipe these people off. Naga dodged back, as did Korra, so the machine only hit air.

Lysanias had heard the shattering glass and scream, so he pushed off with his wings to get enough height to see over the van and see what the situation was. The tank was flailing around, so he gritted his teeth and teleported again, now looking up at the mecha tank. His wings were still out, so he simply swept them forward and when he felt the cold metal upon

them he let his power flow out a third time.

The battlefield grew quiet, the third machine now unable to attack in any way. Lysanias snapped his wings back, somewhat pleased with himself that he had been able to do all that.

“What did you do?” demanded Amy.

“I turned them off,” he explained. “Their entire purpose was to be war machines. The opposite of that purpose is to sit around like a lump and do nothing.”

“Will it hold?” Tenzin asked.

“Not for long,” he admitted. “I’ll start with the one I did first.”

“Start?” asked Amy.

“Disabling-”

“Hey, what’s going on out there?” called a voice inside the mecha tank. “Just what do you think you’re doing?”

“You explain it,” Lysanias told the others. “I still have work to do.” *If I have the energy for it.*

Lysanias stepped up to the first machine he had disabled and put his hand on the metal, seeking the secrets of it with his abilities. His first try yielded nothing, and he was fully conscious of how little time he had, but his second succeeded.

“So that’s why,” he remarked to no one in particular. “This metal is extremely pure. Naturally an earth bender wouldn’t be able to bend it.” *But that doesn’t stop me. My lack of energy for this? Yes. The metal itself? No. And of course we’re in the middle of a freaking city, how many ley lines are you going to find here? None, that’s how many.*

With a great sigh he gathered himself and looked the machine over. *Right there, I think.* By standing on the cover of the great tread he could just reach the beam that held the legs in place, and willed a tiny slice of it out into his hand. It worked, and he jumped free as the thing tipped over, only having one leg to stand on.

By this time more chi-blockers were pouring out of the police station, but his friends and spirit were handling them just fine, so he went over to the second to repeat the procedure. This too was successful, and then it was the third one’s turn.

“Hey, what are you doing out there?” called the voice as he got closer. Looking up he saw the equalist peering down at him from the shattered glass. “They wouldn’t tell me anything!”

“I know, good help is so hard to- Are you all right?” he called up to him.

“What? Oh, this?” He indicated the cut on his face that was still bleeding. “When your friends smashed up the glass I got a piece right here. How did you tip that one over like that?” He looked out the shattered canopy and could probably just see the other one, now on its side and thus, completely useless.

Lysanias didn’t see any reason not to tell him. He held up the two round disks of platinum he had taken from the rods of the other two. “You’re pretty vulnerable when you’re not moving. I just cut this out of each one, and down they went.”

“Cut it? This stuff is almost pure platinum, you couldn’t have cut it that fast!”

Oh, is that the name of it? Guess I don’t have to ask then. “Then I guess I’m not going to cut yours that fast either, and the tipping sensation you’re about to feel is simply a figment of your imagination.” He stepped up to the leg rod.

“Wait, wait, how did you stop this thing? I can’t even get out. At least get me out of here!”

“Sorry, no can do!” he shouted up, and a third disk joined the other two. The machine crashed down, and that was it, Lysanias could feel it. The man had shouted his surprise but had gone quiet, and Lysanias walked over to the head part. *I’m out of energy to do things with. At this point it’s spirit battery wards or I risk passing out.* “You okay there?” he asked the man, looking sideways at him.

“I don’t believe it. And what’s with your eyes? Do you have *wings*?”

“I guess you’re fine. You’ll be able to get out soon, keep trying.” He walked away.

“Wait, who are you? What are you?”

When he got to the front of the station the chi-blockers had been routed, but Tenzin

was looking worried.

"More could be inside," he explained. "In fact I would be very surprised if they weren't."

"Let's go see to the officers," Amy suggested, pointing a thumb at the truck, "then we can plan our next move."

The officers in the truck had been gassed, but were coming around. Lin was among them, and sat up groggily as she was shaken awake.

"Tenzin?"

"I'm here, Lin. You're safe. What happened?"

"Gas started pouring into the station. We couldn't get away from it. Amon must have someone on the inside of the force, to do something like that."

"He has been known to bribe people," Lysanias agreed, thinking about the white lotus guy that had been paid off. "How do you feel?"

"My head is killing me, but I'm ready to take my station back."

"We're with you, chief," agreed the others in the van.

"Of course you are!" she snapped, then winced. "I mean, thanks." Tenzin tried to help her out of the truck, but she shoved his hand away. "I'm not helpless, I can climb off the back of a truck by myself." He looked a bit down but got out of the way. "What happened here?" she asked, pointing to the downed mecha tanks.

"They got shafted," Lysanias replied with a grin.

"What?"

"See, there's this shaft that goes between the legs, so I figured-"

"I don't want to hear it. They're disabled, that's good enough for me. Let's get going."

She turned and made her way towards the front of the station.

Charming woman.

The group made their way down to the boiler room, figuring that's where the gas had been pumped into. She wanted to leave some officers down there so they just didn't get gassed again, and sure enough some chi-blockers were there guarding the room. The group made short work of them, and the chief got an idea.

"You two, take off their stuff and put it on yourself. That way if any other chi-blockers come down here they won't know we have control of this place."

"Right chief," agreed the two, going behind the boiler to hide the unconscious bodies, their own armor, and change in privacy.

Good plan. I wouldn't have thought of it.

With that done the rest of the group started moving through the place, finding to their dismay the prisoners had all been released, and there were equalists roaming the halls that needed to be taken care of.

"At least there's plenty of empty cells for them to go into!" Korra said brightly, tossing another chi-blocker into a cell and closing the door.

Lin just glared at her.

Finally the place was cleaned out, and they started getting reports in again. Lysanias sat down heavily on a chair in the command room while his spirit looked around with interest. Naturally it had shrunk down again to fit inside, now being simply human sized again.

"What is that thing, anyway?" asked one of the officers.

"A spirit that's helping us," Jinora quickly answered.

"Oh, that makes sense. Is that guy a spirit too? Doesn't look like one, but I've never seen somebody with *wings* before."

"Ah... You want to take that one, Lysanias?" she asked him.

"What are you talking about?" asked another, looking around. "What spirit?"

"That spirit. Right there? How can you not see it?" It was waving at the man.

"See what?" The officer was looking right at it, but clearly didn't see the spirit.

"Say, I don't think I've seen you before, now that I think about it," said the officer, looking the other over. "What's your name?"

"He's an equalist plant!" Lysanias realized, jumping up. "Restrain him!"

“Now just a second!” protested the officer, putting his hands up. “There must be some mistake.”

But the spirit reacted, yanking the man’s metal hat off and smashing him in the head, being careful to hold back of course. The man crumpled.

“What’s going on?” demanded Lin. “Why did you do that?”

“He couldn’t see my spirit,” explained Lysanias. “He wasn’t a bender.”

“Oh, that’s just what we need,” she said to the ceiling. “Equalists using the same trick I used, but thinking of it first!”

“He must have been faking it, just in case we escaped somehow,” said an officer.

“Clever, hiding among us in the truck pretending to be gassed.”

“Yes, yes, Amon, water bending, I get it,” Lyn spat angrily. “Get that uniform off him and chuck him in a cell. See who is supposed to be in it and start looking for them. They must be around someplace.”

“Right chief.”

“Thanks,” she said to Lysanias, seeming a little more impressed than he had ever seen her. “That was pretty quick thinking. And if your spirit wasn’t around, we would never have... Hey, the rest of you!” They all looked over at her. “Lysanias, can you have your spirit hold up some fingers? I want to make sure the rest of my people are actually my people.”

“Sure.”

But they were, correctly saying how many fingers the spirit was holding up, and she relaxed a little.

“At least that’s one less thing to worry about. But reports aren’t good. This election of yours Tenzin, I don’t think it’s going to go the way you wanted.”

“As long as some votes are cast, we’re taking whoever they voted for,” he vowed. “We get one candidate with a single vote, that’s our new member. Amon won’t be able to say we at least didn’t hold up our end of the promise.”

“Speaking of promises,” Korra said slyly. “I think someone promised to go up and get my airship? The station is secure again, it’s the perfect time!” She stepped up close to him, grabbing both his hands and trying to pull him standing again.

Lysanias groaned. “You know how beat I am, right? You can feel it for yourself?”

“What’s this?” Lin asked.

“They captured one of Amon’s airships,” Tenzin explained. “But we had to leave it hovering over the city.”

“That could hold a lot of clues,” Lin mused. “If you can bring it back here, I’d like to take a look around inside it.”

“Sure,” Lysanias said, allowing himself to be pulled up. Korra gave his hands a squeeze and dropped them. “Why not? Does anyone here know how to control something like that? I’d like to have someone competent fly it, maybe figure out how to anchor it once we get it back here.”

Everyone in the room looked around at everybody else.

There was a moment of silence.

“Wonderful. Come on, Amy, you’re with me.”

“Right behind you!”

The spirit trailed them both, almost seeming to laugh as Amy grabbed his arm and started singing “just the two of us.”

“Hey I’m coming too!” Korra called after them. “It’s my airship!”

“Dad, can I...”

“Go ahead,” he allowed.

“Yay! Wait for me you guys!”

Chapter 23
Never Split the Party
When: Later that day
Where: The station again

Lysanias had a busy day that day, after getting the airship back to the station. From the higher vantage point they could radio the station about what was going on in various parts of the city, which helped. After an hour of recovering Tenzin asked him to teleport back to the island and check on Pema, which he did, and she was fine. He helped repair cut transmission lines, and further defend the station from mecha tanks using intrinsic alteration. Those he had previously disabled still sat out there, but with police help the new ones were simply stopped, and had their drivers hauled out. Some officers then at least figured out how to make them move around a little, and set the broken pieces out of the way. Then it looked like mecha tanks were patrolling the outside of the station, further giving credence to the illusion that it was under equalist control. The balloon with Amon's symbols all over it completed the lie.

The day wore on. As it did, the bender side got more organized and able to fight back, while the equalist side took losses and retreated from places. After all, every third person in the city was a bender of some kind, and that meant they had at least a passing familiarity with martial arts.

"Did Amon really think he could, like, take over the city or something?" asked Jinora, watching from the airship. "Even with their fancy gloves, it's a city full of fighters."

"It's not over yet," Korra assured her. "Though I have to admit I wonder what he was thinking?"

"What does that even mean, take over the city?" Lysanias asked. "How would Amon retain control until he had taken the bending of every person in the city? I mean he would have to get *everybody* to be sure he didn't miss a single bender. Would they just line up? And what about after that, would it even be enough? No one would actually follow any laws he proposed, most everyone would hate him for what he had done. He'd be dodging assassination attempts the rest of his life. Just taking someone's bending, doesn't mean they suddenly forget martial arts. They could take up chi-blocking or get those gloves Amon is so fond of. The number of his enemies stays constant, bending or not. In fact it might even increase, given people might turn away from his ideals as time goes on if he just ruthlessly tries to control everything."

"Probably hasn't thought that far ahead," Amy told him. "But you're right, this is a bold move on his part."

That night the master of redirection himself came on the radio and said how great a victory had been won, and that he was now in control of the city. The group was in Lin's office, a stark metal room that probably didn't see much use with how active Lin was in running things. Not one for sitting around doing paperwork, Lysanias had thought while standing there. But it was a quiet place to talk, and plan their next moves.

"That liar," Jinora said with a pout, as Amon's broadcast ended. "He hasn't 'won' anything."

"But if people think he has, it'll go easier for him," Tenzin explained. "We were so busy protecting the police station we didn't think to protect radio stations. We knew he liked broadcasting, he broke into regular broadcasts enough times."

"What can we do about it?" Korra asked.

"Not much, unless you feel up to trying to liberate all the radio stations in the area?"

"We're all beat," Amy complained. "We can do that in the morning."

"Yes," agreed Lysanias. "Trying to convince that *second* group of benders the station wasn't under Amon's control certainly made the *third* group easier to deal with. We knew what to say by that point."

"At least some effort was made," Lin countered. "I'm glad groups formed to try and take control of this place back. Even if the effort was a waste because we had already done it."

"There seem to be a lot of civilians coming here," Tenzin mentioned, another family of people going by the office.

"I figured we had the space, why not put it to use," Lin explained. "I allowed the families of any officers to stay here for the night, figured it might be a little safer."

Tenzin nodded. "Amon would target members of the police force first, and especially when they were spread out and unsuspecting at home. Good thinking."

"Didn't ask you," she grumbled, but still looked as though she was suppressing a grin.

"What happens tomorrow?" Korra asked. "Try to find Amon and put a stop to this?"

"That's up to you," Lin replied with a shrug. "Me? I guess I'm on vacation the next few days, so I'll be kicking back here and taking a well deserved rest."

"What?" Tenzin exclaimed. "You think this is all just going to blow over? The city needs you, Lin."

"Does it? You heard Amon, it's his city now. Let him police it. Judging from the reports we got in today, I think he's going to have his hands full. 'Heavy is the head that wears the crown' as they say. You know how much paperwork running a city generates? Amon is going to find out. And if he doesn't keep the water running and the electric zapping, or whatever it does, he's really going to have a rebellion on his hands. From all sides!" She smirked.

"So you're going to do nothing?" Korra asked, somewhat horrified. "Just hope he bungles it enough everyone turns on him?"

"What did you have in mind, *avatar*?"

"I don't know, keep helping people, maybe? Take out more of those mecha tanks?"

"He'll just build more. No, that doesn't actually solve anything, because it's not the root of the problem. To do that, you're going to need..." She pointed to Lysanias.

Everyone looked over at him, and he nodded. "It's true. I can't deny Amon could be the avatar of shadows. I'll have to ask your universe where he might be, and then we need to make a plan to attack that place."

"It'll be thick with those mecha tanks," Jinora cautioned. "Will you be okay?"

"I'll have to think of a better way to deal with them, maybe, but we don't need to rush in there like Korra would."

"Hey!"

"We could scope the place out, see what sort of guards are posted. That sort of thing."

"I was at least hoping to collect the ballets," Tenzin told them. "Find out who the new member of the council is."

Lysanias considered. "I don't know. Let Amon's forces battle benders another day, and there could be a lot of casualties. On both sides."

"Or the equalist movement goes away when they see just how much bender opposition there is," Lin suggested.

Lysanias shook his head. "Benders kill equalists, that's just adding fuel to the 'down with benders' fire. We have to put out the fire, somehow. The movement is too big now, too hard to stop. Even capturing Amon, he could have plans in place for a new 'Amon' to take up his mask and continue the fight. How do you fight the idea that non-benders are less equal to benders when he's right, some people can manipulate the elements, others can't. That's a pretty big divide."

Huh. Just as back home some can use magic, and others can't. Did the guild anticipate this issue and solve it before it happened by forcing magic users to charge prices out of reach of most? So you basically have to be a magic user to benefit, while here everyone gets a benefit from bending in the form of electricity, entertainment, law enforcement. But no, there's a way for those without the spark to use magic, it's called a spell lens. And rather than just give everyone one of those, they priced them out of the market too. There's nothing that can give someone bending, so the analogy isn't perfect. Still, I suppose up until now they've been coexisting just fine, it was Amon that came along and decided those that couldn't bend should have a problem with those that could. Take him away, none of this would have happened. There was just never an "Amon" equivalent back home, or there was a long time ago and the guild took care of it. I mean there were magical wars, who knows what their cause was, in the end? We may just be past that point in our history while these people are just reaching it.

"So we show Amon is a hypocrite, just in it for power," suggested Amy. "Prove to everyone he's a water bender himself, that would do the job."

"Have to find him first," Jinora muttered.

"And how do you prove someone is a bender? He just refrains from bending water and there's no way to prove it," Korra complained. "And he would have to do it in front of an audience. A large one, to show there were no tricks involved and get the word out."

"We can think about that too," Lysanias promised. "I think everyone has had some good ideas. Tenzin, tomorrow we'll go out, get the results of the election, and take back a radio station. Announce the results, make a statement that benders should only defend themselves, not go actively looking for trouble. Just sit tight and let the professionals handle things, which will happen soon." *Though I hate to give him any advance warning, anyone not expecting an attack at this point would be a real idiot.* "Meanwhile, maybe we can come up with a plan to more easily disable these war machines. Everyone should think about that, we have the pieces of the ones we disabled to study, as well as the working ones. Korra, you and Amy can scope out where Amon is staying. I can ask tonight, so we can have that information tomorrow. If you can promise not to just rush in there?"

"I'm not stupid!"

"I'm not saying you are. Jinora, you stay here with Lin and come up with a plan to force Amon to water bend. Actually you'll be here anyway, look those war machines over. Work with some of the officers, look for weak spots we can target. We need a quick, energy efficient way to stop them." *Because teleporting around is pretty hard on me.* "You know basically what I can do, I can leave you a list... which you won't be able to read. Well, I can tell you and you can write it for yourself anyway. We can rest up that night, the next morning we'll attack his hideout and put an end to this."

"That all sounds reasonable," Lin allowed, after everyone had mulled the plan over a bit. "I guess we have a plan."

"Can you teleport us both back to the island?" Tenzin asked. "I'd like to spend some time tonight with my wife and Rohan."

"As long as you don't mind traveling by ward, sure. I'm going to need to work on more contain wards, I have a feeling I'm going to need a lot of them before this is over. I suppose I could just try lifting you, I only need to do it for a split second, and my energy is somewhat recovered. Though I could make a lot of wards with the energy I would use lifting you..."

"Whatever you think is best."

"What about Oogi, dad? Lysanias repaired enough of the phone lines that you could probably reach home. Just have Ikki fly him over here, then the two of you could fly back."

"We could probably use him when we attack Amon," Tenzin mused. "Good thinking, Jinora. Lysanias, let's find you a quiet place to do your thing, and then a bed for the night. I'll get in touch with the island, I'm sure I can get there on my own fairly quickly. The rest of you, Lin, can you take care of it?"

"Sure, Tenzin, I'll be happy to throw the avatar in a cell!"

"Chief Beifong!" Korra protested.

"I didn't say I would lock the door. Come on kids!"

The others filed out, saying goodnight, and Tenzin turned to Lysanias when they were gone. "I just wanted to thank you for telling Jinora to stay here. Clever of you to give her something to do though, so she wouldn't protest being left out."

"Of course. But Tenzin, she held her own in our fight earlier. She's going to want to come when we assault Amon, and we're going to need her."

He got a sour look on his face. "I know. Korra told me how Jinora severed that cable and saved her. She's becoming a fine air bender. I just want to keep her safe."

Oh right, have to ask about that electricity thing later. "And she'll have double armor wards when we go, believe me. She's a part of this team now, she won't take you telling her to stay behind very well."

"If you ever become a parent, you'll realize that keeping your children safe is far better than watching them get hurt because you wanted to spare their feelings."

"It's up to you, of course. You know if she can handle something like that better than I do. She comes up with good ideas, and is a good fighter. I guess what I'm saying is, I'd rather have her with us when the time comes. Think it over, all right?"

"It'll depend what the situation is, where we find Amon hiding."

"Right."

"Anyway, thank you. Now let's go find someplace you won't be disturbed." He looked around. "Uh, is right here okay? This seems quiet now."

"This is fine. Just promise to save me a bed someplace, that's all I ask."

The next day Lysanias made food for everyone with magic so they didn't have to go "shopping" but cautioned Lin to make sure anything left over was gathered up before twenty four hours had gone by.

"Why?" she asked, gathering the sacks up from where he had made it in her office.

"Because it'll vanish. And if someone's biting into a sandwich they made using this stuff and it just vanishes out of their hands it might cause a bit of a stir."

"I'll see what I can do."

Not long after he told the officers gathered in the main office area how far in each direction they should go to find Amon, and this let them draw a line to the outside of the city.

"Probably some kind of base outside of town," Tenzin figured, looking the map over.

"We can get there on Naga," Korra told him. "It shouldn't be a problem."

"Here." Lysanias handed over one part of the communication ward, and Korra pocketed it. "Just in case you run into trouble."

"I'll be careful," she promised.

"I'll keep an eye on her," Amy told him, earning her a dark look. "Come on, let's go."

With that Lysanias and Tenzin left to collect the ballets on his flying sky bison, all three of them getting a ward that made them unseen. It turned out that violence hadn't stopped because the sun went down the night before, and gangs of both benders and chi-blockers were out roaming around causing trouble. Lysanias saw storefronts smashed in, things burning, and more than one person lying hurt. They flew down to investigate that, neither man wanting to leave someone near death on the streets. After making sure no one was looking, which would have broken his ward, he used water bending to heal them, and stopped when they woke up again. Every one of them looked around, probably confused why they weren't dead, and staggered away hopefully to hide out quietly until the fervor died down.

"You're using a technique of ours, and not your own?" Tenzin remarked after the second one. "I would have figured you would be more comfortable using out of world techniques."

"Your way seems slightly more efficient," he explained. "Quicker, too. I would rather not use wards, they wouldn't be hidden from view so someone could see the flame. But the water, as long as I'm touching it, *is* hidden."

"I see."

When they came to a polling location Tenzin was about to tear his ward off so he could talk to those inside and get the votes, but Lysanias held up a hand.

"Wait a second. In theory I should be able to temporarily deactivate it, then you won't have to use another. It's not something I've ever needed to do, but I think I know how I might."

"As long as it doesn't set me on fire if you mess it up, you're welcome to try," he allowed.

Lysanias put his hand on the ward and closed his eyes. He could feel the ward's power, like a tiny ball of light stuck to Tenzin, that in this case was cloaking him from sight. Concentrating, he "squeezed" the ball and dimmed it down, willing it to not go out but rather simply shine less brightly for a time. "I think it worked," he announced, opening his eyes. "Go in and see."

"Right."

Turned out it had, and Tenzin quickly took the ballets and told the officers guarding the place that Lin had basically turned the city over to Amon to "teach him a lesson."

"Whoo hoo! Looting time!!!" one of the officers cried, waving his hands in the air. Tenzin looked sharply at him. "Is what I would be saying if I was of lesser moral fiber," the officer

continued, putting his hands down. He cleared his throat. "You sure you can handle those ballots alone?"

"I'll be fine," Tenzin assured him. "I'm visiting the locations on my sky bison, so I should have all the results in a few hours. Those council members not caught by Amon can do the count, and we'll announce the result on the radio."

"Guess our job is done," the officer said. "Let's roll out, boys!" The officers and election officials filed out, all looking for the sky bison they wouldn't be able to perceive.

"That worked," Tenzin told Lysanias, mounting up again. "Just six more places to go."

But they only had to go to two more places, as they found Tarrlok already counting votes at the third location. They took their wards off before going in, but left them on the bison so he wouldn't be attacked while sitting out in the street.

"Ah, Tenzin, you managed to avoid getting abdicated," Tarrlok greeted them. "Good, that's good."

"And I see you did as well. Looks like we had the same idea." He shook the case the votes were in, and Lysanias set the others down on the table that was set up for that purpose.

"Indeed. And you have the other ballots? Great! You can count those, I'm just having these re-counted and then we can add them up."

"Re-counted?" Lysanias asked them, looking over the people working there.

"Of course. We count them once, then write down the numbers for each candidate," Tarrlok explained. "This is kept secret, naturally. Then another group counts them. If we get the same number, we're golden. If we don't, well, then we have to do the whole thing all over again. This keeps anyone from messing with the results."

"Sensible!"

"By the way, no Korra today? I always saw you two joined at the hip."

"She has her own mission at the moment. Say, that reminds me, since you're here. You're a water bender, right?"

"That's right. Those chi-blocker idiots attacked me in my office. I guess they missed the huge waterfall behind my desk, I clobbered them in no time."

"Sure, sure, the point is, tomorrow we're going to hit Amon hard with everything we've got. Care to join us?"

"Oh, *now* you're offering *me* a spot on *your* team? When I was offering Korra a spot on my team for a month and a half now? That's rich."

"For one, you didn't know where Amon was, we do. And second, that was before the city started tearing itself apart. We need to put a stop to this, and Korra is just another fighter in that effort. We're not trying to use her for *political gain*." He looked sour, but didn't protest. It had been what he was doing, after all. "And third, Chief Beifong has already said the police are staying out of it, so at the moment the only law is the law of the jungle. So we won't break any laws going after him, ergo, now is the time."

"Wait, go back to one. How do you know where he is?" he asked shrewdly.

"Well, uh, we deduced he had to be keeping those air ships of his someplace outside the city, and looked for areas on the map that would suit. Korra is checking them out today, and as we're done early here, we can check the further out ones on Oogi."

"So you don't know *exactly* where he is."

"We will!"

"You hope. Still, I'm all for *not allowing all this to continue* so count me in."

"Great! You can come with us... humm, wait a second." *I wanted to get into the radio station unseen, that way we would have a better chance at them not smashing the equipment up when they saw us coming. But how do I explain that to this guy, who isn't in on my little 'I'm not part your world' gag?* "No, actually, you better get the ballots someplace safe. As a water bender you can defend yourself if you get attacked."

"Wouldn't they be safer in the air?"

"We've been seen visiting polling areas," he hedged. "Better to provide a distraction. If Amon wants these ballots destroyed," *he probably would have attacked by now*, "he'll go after us in the air while you get them somewhere on foot. You must have some kind of vault or something you put them in, right?"

“In case someone challenges the results, yes. Okay, fine, I can do that. It’s a water bending thing to do anyway, misdirecting things like that.”

Whew. Of course, if it is, then hasn't he already thought of it? Ah well, he bought it.

“Thanks Tarrlok,” Tenzin told him. “Say, you’re impartial, Lysanias. Want to take one of these cases and start tallying? The sooner we get this done the sooner we can get to the station.”

“Sure!” That’s right, make the guy with dozens of abilities at his command sit and count tiny pieces of paper. Wonder if I could just ask the universe the numbers and save myself the trouble?

With a sigh Lysanias sat at the official table, under the watchful eye of the official vote counting watcher, opened the official, chained and locked “suitcase” Tenzin had shoved the votes into, and began his official count.

Chapter 24

The end of Amon

When: Day 57, early morning

Where: The airfield outside the city

Lysanias and the rest of the team looked through binoculars down at the airfield they were about to assault, and considered their plan of attack. On their side were twenty six people, men and women both, all benders. Eight earth benders from the police forces not including Lin, five people Tarlok brought with him, and six white lotus members that had volunteered. Jinora and Tenzin, Amy and Korra rounded out the list, and of course Naga almost counted for two people. Oogi wasn't really a fighter, and was deemed too big to really help effectively, so had been commanded to stay back. The rest had arrived in trucks, taking dirt roads Amon's forces must have used to transport the supplies needed to build the mecha tanks and whatever those odd machines were they were all looking at.

"Korra was right, there's absolutely no cover," Tenzin worried, looking the place over. "It's just a series of long roads that go nowhere. Very strange."

They're going to see us coming long before we get close, and there's an awful lot of people down there. Machines too, some I've not seen before. At least the place is nestled at the base of the mountain range, there's no escape out the back. They would have to go through us to get away.

"You think it has to do with those odd machines?" Amy asked, looking at the planes that were sitting there.

"I don't know what they are, so I can't answer that question," Tenzin replied. "And you're sure Amon is down there?"

"I'm sure," Lysanias replied, thinking back to yesterday. "I asked before we left, after all."

The pair had easily snuck into the radio station to broadcast their message because no one was guarding it. They found a message from Amon, that he would be waiting for them at the airfield "they already knew about." All the equipment still worked, and there were no hidden explosives or anything around, so they saw no reason not to continue their plan. They were about to broadcast the winner's name but Lysanias got a bad feeling about it, and realized why.

"We can't do it," he told Tenzin at the time, grabbing his hand away from the 'transmit' button. "I figured out why."

"Okay, I'll bite. Why?"

"This isn't a trap for us, it's another misdirection. It's a trap *for whoever we name.*"

Tenzin's eyes widened in shock. "Of course! They would be completely unprepared and unprotected. Amon's people move in, kill her, and we're back to square one. Amon wants us to broadcast the name, so while we're feeling good about democracy in action, he's out cutting her throat or whatever."

"Worse, because now there would be less people willing to stick their neck out," *to extend the metaphor*, "and be elected."

"True, true," Tenzin pulled his beard as he thought about it. "They would figure, oh, I'll just be killed too. But did he leave notes like this at all broadcasting places in the city? How did he know we would come here, to this one specifically?"

"Good question. In any case, let's head back."

"I want to go to the island again, I'm nervous about the new baby and more attacks there."

"I asked about that, there won't be any more attacks there. Relax Tenzin. But we can still go back if you want."

"That's right. Who's driving the sky bison?"

"You are. You are in total control of the sky. Bison."

That morning before they had left Korra had addressed everyone because Lysanias was too shy to talk in front of all those people and tell them the plan he had come up with.

With everyone's help, of course.

"So listen up!" she yelled, because Korra was the opposite of too shy to talk in front of all those people. "Our plan is *not* to capture Amon. Our plan is to *discredit* him, then capture him. To that end we are bringing all the water we can so you water benders," she indicated those Tarrlok had brought with him, "can do just that. You are to focus getting his head incased in ice, as suggested by our very own Jinora here!" Jinora gave a little wave, standing off to the side. "She figures that if we can hit him with ice, he'll be forced to water bend to save himself, throwing doubt over his whole movement. To that end if there are no chi-blockers around *do not attack*. Back off and draw him to an area where there are chi-blockers. Then feel free to attack *all you want*. After he's subdued, bring him to Lysanias, who will make him safe by taking his bending away. Yes, Amon isn't the only one who can do it, like he claims. Until that's done be careful around him, he could fake being hurt and then take your bending before you know it."

There was a general muttering and slight stepping away from Lysanias as Korra had said the last part, and everyone not "in the know" eyed him with suspicion.

"Also be very careful of being alone with him," Tenzin spoke up. "If there are no witnesses, he's liable to just blood bend you, and then take your bending when you're helpless. No one would believe he did it, so there's no point in taking the risk."

"That's right," Korra agreed. "Travel in at least groups of three, but know that Amon can probably blood bend that many people at once, if not more."

"Figure on a lot more," Tarrlok spoke up. "Like, maybe all of us at once?"

"Do you know something?" Tenzin asked him.

"What, no, no, I mean, it's just, it's better to plan for the worst case, right?"

"Yes, well, I suppose it is," he answered suspiciously.

"Metal benders, fire benders, you take care of chi-blockers. Water benders focus on Amon. Everyone should have a knife, all our armor should be insulated," Korra went on, tapping her own. Lysanias had worked the night before, making sure everyone, including himself, had a set, even if they weren't metal benders. The protection from chi-blocking and the gloves was too good to pass up. Lin grumbled a bit, but handed out the extra sets from police spares, saying they better give them back when this was all over.

Nah, I don't think so. I could make a set of armor, of course, but this seems easier. It just seems like something a traveler between realities should have, you know? Even with armor wards, which I'll also be putting on myself and a few others. He looked over at Jinora.

Everyone checked their knives, strapped to the leg or arm where it could be easily reached. "You know how the equalists attack," Tenzin continued. "They'll try to bind us with bolas, blind us with gas. Stay with your team, anyone that goes down by bola, someone get them up immediately. Jinora and I will keep the air clear as best we can."

"Right. You can still be electrocuted as well, don't rely totally on the armor. Your legs and face are still vulnerable. Cover each other, work as a team, and we'll have this movement taken care of by this time tomorrow!"

"Don't forget the mecha tank's weak spot," Jinora whispered to Korra.

"That's right. The war machines have a weak spot, Jinora and the others found that out yesterday when looking them over. Obvious in retrospect, but we were never supposed to have that chance to study them. The tank, the smaller tank on their back, is their fuel source. Don't take the thing on directly, just get behind it and cut the fuel line that feeds the engine. Don't fire bend it, obviously, or it'll just blow up, I have no idea how big an explosion that would make. Metal benders, you've got those sharpened disks for a reason, use them to cut the lines. Even just making them leak is better than nothing if you can't get it all the way through. Those tanks only hold so much. The big one is the engine, if you can block the exhaust pipes or otherwise jam it, that would work too. Again, work together and draw their attention so their backs are to at least somebody, and you'll get your opening."

"Any questions?" Lin shouted. There were none.

Having reached the airfield that Amy and Korra had scouted the day before, the group considered their options. Lysanias' spirit was out, and again huge, carrying the barrels of water tied to a stick that had been put across its "shoulders." The benders could see it, and

had accepted it was a “friendly spirit” the “avatar” had tamed to help them. This way they could bring a lot of water inside, and keep the water benders “swimming” in ammunition to use to capture Amon.

“We’re just going to have to go down there,” Lin said at last. “From that note you got, he knows we’re probably coming anyway. It won’t be a shock to him.”

“True,” Tenzin agreed. “I just hoped to have *some* element of surprise. No hope of that now.”

“At least there’s plenty of snow around here,” Amy noted, looking the place over. “We won’t hurt for earth or water for bending.”

“Now if we could just find some air, we’d be all set,” Jinora joked.

Those near chuckled.

“Let’s get going, I’m not standing around freezing in this armor all day,” Lin ordered.

“You all know the plan, stick to it!”

And the group made their way to the hanger, a huge metal building with a door, currently open and inviting them inside. There were several buildings to the side, workshops or storage no doubt, but from the maw of the main building two rows of mecha tanks, protected by chi-blockers, rolled out. They grimly waited for the group to get in range, and the battle began.

The earth benders went into action, pounding their feet on the ground and tearing up the ground around the mecha tanks so they couldn’t maneuver as easily while the air and water benders smacked bola away from the group. Some of course made it through, but as no one rushed ahead someone was always nearby to help cut the cords. In a surprising twist, one of the mecha tanks suddenly turned on its fellows, and started smashing the heck out of another one, while a woman’s voice from inside screamed obscenities and such at whoever was in the one she was attacking.

Lover’s quarrel? Well, hopefully everyone is smart enough not to attack that one.

Lysanias himself stayed on the defensive. Gas canisters and such were being thrown, so he swept them away with air bending, figuring in the confusion no one would really notice. Then metal bending his own stock of sharpened metal disks to cut down fuel lines for any mecha tanks that showed their back to him. He relied on his spirit to defend him, any chi-blocker running towards him simply getting booted and going flying. Of course the spirit was holding back to the appropriate degree, but it still made Lysanias wince a little.

These people can’t even perceive what’s attacking them, they can’t dodge or defend themselves. It’s a little unfair. I just hope they’re not too badly hurt.

He and the spirit were heading into the hanger, so it could leave the water, upon which the whole plan depended. Suddenly he turned as he heard an explosion, then another. People were leaping away from fireballs as underground explosives went off, obviously planted there beforehand. Lysanias felt their pain and surprise, and his spirit dumped the barrels as both rushed back to do what healing they could. He first found a man with his legs blown off, passed out from shock, and hastily went to work repairing one while his spirit repaired the other. *Come on, you’re not dead yet, I can feel your spiritual energy isn’t gone. Stay with me!*

Unknown to him, dirt and snow were being brushed aside as a trap door opened and Amon, joining the battle at last, attacked from what was now the rear. The smoke from the explosions covered their approach, he and his elite chi-blockers now falling upon the unsuspecting benders from a direction they didn’t expect, catching them in a pincer attack.

Amon didn’t waste time. He singled out Korra and raced over to her, dodging attack after attack. Korra grew more and more frantic as he drew near, obviously using blood bending to throw off her aim just enough to keep himself safe but avoid suspicion. The man had trained well, and reached Korra, as destiny demanded.

“Say goodbye to your bending, avatar,” he snarled from behind his mask. He reached for her.

“No!” cried Korra, feeling energy sweep through her body. Lysanias felt utter despair across the battlefield and both he and his spirit looked over at her, making out Amon’s form

through the gas and smoke of the combat.

Knowing it was already too late, both gathered snow, melting it enough to turn to water and throwing it with all their might. Others, hearing Korra's cry did the same, and several streams of water enveloped his head, freezing solid. Amon now staggered back, Korra crumpling to the ground below.

The battle stopped. Those chi-blockers still up turning towards their master in concern, as he tried to get the ice off his face by simply punching it. Lysanias and the spirit ran over to him, taking up positions in front of Korra, who was simply staring down at her hands.

"You'll have to water bend," Lysanias called to him, wondering if the man could even hear him. "Go on. Do it. Save yourself, and show everyone here you *are* a water bender, after all. None of our side is going to save you, they want you dead for all the benders you've stolen from. It's up to you."

Amon obviously couldn't breathe, probably had water in his nose and mouth from the attack, his mask wasn't a tight enough fit to prevent that. As none raised a hand to help, and the chi-blockers frozen in place wondering what to do, he took the only course available to him.

He melted the ice off with water bending.

The stunned equalists didn't know how to react as Amon, tearing his mask off gasped for air. He too fell to his knees, choking and trying to control his breathing. It was in this state Lysanias put a hand to his face, and Amon was helpless to resist.

"As you have done to so many others, I now do to you," he said, and *took Amon's bending powers by destroying his chakra centers*. He tried to strike out but hadn't gotten his wind back, Lysanias easily slapped him away and tossed him down, making him fall to the side in the snow. "As far as I'm concerned, that puts the matter to rest, as justice has been done."

"Your movement is over," Lin shouted, coming up to them. "You all saw it, Amon was a water bender, just as this man said all along. He took people's bending away with blood bending, and now he has felt the same touch upon him. While he is willing to let Amon go, I am not. Amon, you are under arrest for various crimes, the full list to be reviewed later. Anyone that agrees to spread the word about this may go. Anyone else will also be under arrest for aiding Amon."

"If you're done fighting, take those masks off," Tenzin ordered. "Anyone masked I see in the next ten seconds is going down, hard. Get people out of those mecha tanks! Except that one that's smashing up that other one. They can stay, I guess?" He turned to Korra. "Are you all right? Korra? What's wrong, did you... did he..."

"There are still people hurt, I have to help them," Lysanias told her. "Korra, look at me." He grabbed her by the shoulders. "Are you okay?"

"No," she said, tears starting to run down her cheeks. "It's gone. I feel it. My bending..."

He closed his eyes, he knew that was the case. This close he could feel her emotions as though they were his own, they were so strong. "I'm sorry," he said honestly. "We can deal with that later. What one person can do, another can undo, and I'll do all I can. But right now I have healing to do. They could die, while you have simply been... inconvenienced. Can you manage?"

She looked up at him, her eyes shining. "You think... you can do something?"

"I don't know. I've only ever seen chakras destroyed. But right now you can't afford to let your guard down. We are still in enemy territory. Okay?"

She scrubbed her eyes on her sleeve and stood up. "Okay."

"Watch her," Lysanias told Tenzin, who nodded. "I'm going to heal those I can."

"Here!" someone shouted, "we need healing here!"

Lysanias ran towards the voice, it was a chi-blocker with their one leg and arm missing. *Amon didn't care if he hit his own people. He just wanted the explosions to cover his entrance.* "I'll take care of him, go find if anyone else is hurt and get the water benders to stabilize them. I'll be there when I'm done here."

“But what can you do?”

“GO!” Lysanias commanded, and the chi-blocker, mask off and looking pale, went.

Luckily this person still has their mask on, so when they start walking around with two arms and legs again, it can be claimed it was just somebody else that had been wounded so grievously. Spirit, I'll need your help again.

Once again the spirit put a hand on the victim and the two started repairing their body with what Lysanias knew the alchemists back home called transmogrification.

It was an hour, if not two later when the area was secured. Everyone had been healed up, and more police and medical personal had arrived to aid in the clean up. Those that agreed to spread the word were released, as Lin promised, while others refused and had to be tied up. It turned out that Hiroshi Sato had been behind the technological aspects of the moment, providing funding and equipment, and it was his daughter that had betrayed him in the end. He was taken into custody, she was not.

“I was just waiting for the right time to strike,” she explained. “You saw. I never participated in any raids or anything, just helping my dad build the planes and things. I sabotaged what I could, by the way. You believe me, right?” she said hopefully.

“I do,” a clear voice rang out. Everyone turned to Jinora. “I can see her aura, she’s a good person. It’s not something you can fake.”

“Lysanias?” Lin asked.

He concentrated, but this wasn’t something he had really practiced at all. He could see it, but trying to figure out what it meant? “I can tell she’s still angry, very angry at her father for doing what he did. And she’s afraid you won’t believe her. If she’s a good person? Well, Jinora has been practicing this a lot more than I have, given everything. I’d trust her.”

“Very well,” Lin agreed. “But we’ll be watching you, Miss Sato.”

“Thank you. I know. Thank you so much. I’ll help in any way I can, of course.”

“Chief, Amon wants to talk to him,” said an officer, pointing to Lysanias.

“Yes, let’s see what he has to say,” Lysanias agreed, and the two went over there.

Amon was chained up, looking ridiculous because he had makeup smudged all over his face for some reason, and was alternating between fury and helplessness. As Lysanias approached he straightened up though.

“So you’re the one?” he asked, looking the other man up and down. “I have a message for you.”

“A message?” Lin and he looked at each other. “From who?”

“You know, I never really asked for a name,” Amon admitted. “But it taught me how to take bending away, so I believed it.”

“It?” Lin asked.

“The dark spirit. It came to me in a dream, told me what was to come. Said someone from beyond would probably come, try to stop me. I should have listened more. It never told me you could do what I can do. Maybe it didn’t care, I was just a pawn.”

“What’s the message?” Lin demanded.

“The message is one word. Soon. Have fun with that!” He started to laugh and laugh, and the officers hauled him away and stuffed him in the back of a truck.

“He’s mad!” Lin suggested.

Lysanias glared at the truck, wondering if taking the man’s bending so quickly had done something to his mind. “Maybe. Or maybe this is only the beginning. Dark spirit? That’s the shadow avatar for sure. If it’s talking to people in dreams... giving them knowledge from outside the world...” *But how do I know Amon isn’t the shadow avatar? The only clue I would have is killing him and seeing if my orb that represents this world glows brighter. That’s no help, he’ll be dead if I’m wrong.*

“But you asked about the gloves, didn’t you?”

“I asked if the idea for the glove came from outside. Maybe that was the wrong question. I mean, maybe whatever answers me was like ‘of course the idea for gloves didn’t come from outside the world. You stupid? They’ve had gloves forever.’ I just got a no and didn’t press the matter.”

“I see.” She rubbed her face. “Well, he’s not going to be making any more speeches, and Miss Sato will show up all the chi-blocker hideouts. That’s for the weeks to come, we have more important matters right now.” Both looked over at Korra, standing forlorn by herself. It was like a circle had been drawn around her, and no one wanted to step over it. She looked smaller, more vulnerable, and no one seemed to want to even look at her.

We have to help the avatar who lost her bending.

Chapter 25

A new Chapter

When: Three weeks later

Where: The south pole

In the dream, Lysanias was a swan, and before him was a beautiful swan with a broken wing, crying on the edge of a cliff.

"I can still fly," said the swan. "Just you watch."

"You don't have to fly, you're still just as beautiful. You still have purpose," Lysanias said to the other swan.

"No, don't you understand, I can still fly. Watch!"

"Wait!" The dream ended as the swan stepped backwards off the cliff, and Lysanias sprang after her.

Lysanias awoke. *Another dream like that. Usually it's about snatching fish out of the water, or diving for a shiny stone. But this time was different. A broken swan? Does that mean...* He looked over to his left, where he knew Korra's room was, and felt her energy there. *Or Amy's, at the very least.*

The group was now on their stolen airship, traveling in style. Lysanias had mixed up some of the powder that made his own balloon work, allowing fire to burn without exhausting the source of the fuel. With that put into a bit of fuel and fed into the engine the Avatar had an airship that would never need to fuel again. Somehow the prospect didn't excite her as he had hoped. They were on their way to see Tenzin's mother, the most renowned healer in the world, as Lysanias (secretly) knew he couldn't do a thing to help her.

"It's better to stick to abilities found in your world," he had argued, trying to come up with a plausible excuse. "A lot of people saw Amon blood bend you, and you'll have a tough time saying 'oh, some visitor from another realm saved me,' without being thought mad. And I don't know if I can restore chakras, as I keep saying. I've only seen them destroyed. I screw it up and you could be even worse off, not even able to sense energy or see auras. You can still do that, right?"

"I suppose."

"So hold off for now. See what Katara says, and we'll go from there."

"Fine!"

It was the day of their arrival, and Amy, piloting the ship or at least keeping it on course as it flew if someone was there touching the wheel or not, shouted she could see buildings in the distance. The others, practicing spirit sense to keep Korra's mind off her problem, got up to look. *Great, into the great frozen south. And what's that? A cliff of ice? Somehow I am not reassured.* Moments later the ship got close enough to the ground to let everyone off, and the kids ran ahead to see their "gran gran."

Lysanias was currently wearing a heavy jacket, his armor which he had convinced Lin to let him keep, in a ward and safe. Otherwise he looked much like any other man, despite his red eyes. The buildings they approached were primarily wooden, but surrounded by a large wall of ice, probably to cut down on wind more than as a barrier against attack. Word had gone ahead so Korra's parents were there, anxiously awaiting their daughter's arrival. They were outlined by the glow of the inside, as stars had just started to come out as night fell around the area.

Everyone greeted each other, Amy and Lysanias trying to stay to the side as this wasn't really their place.

"Come in, everyone," Katara offered. "We'll get started right away, I know Korra must be beside herself."

And not in the powers, hey there's two of me sort of way. Huh, wonder if I could do that with powers? Make a copy of myself?

The group went inside and Korra went with Katara into the back, and began whatever it was she was going to be doing. *I'd ask to watch, but that might be taken the wrong way. Besides, this is going to take a bit more than a few seconds, which is about all I can keep my*

eyes active for anyway. Best to just wait and see what she says.

But her face said it all when she emerged again, and said there was no hope of her restoring Korra's bending. "Her connection to the elements has been severed," were her exact words. "She's asking for you."

"Thanks," said Lysanias, standing.

"There's really nothing you can do?" Tenzin asked.

"Son, I once healed your father when he was an inch from dying. And that was when we were kids! If Korra lay dying in my arms I could keep her alive and even restore her to full health, given time. But she's healthy. There's nothing for me to heal!"

"I see."

Yeah, that's going to be a problem. I have not been looking forward to this moment, no sir.

"Hey Korra," Lysanias greeted her, coming into the room. Korra wiped her eyes and looked up at him from where she was sitting on the floor.

"Ready to swoop in and save the day? I haven't forgotten about that promise to kiss you if you can get me to air bend!" She tried to smile but her heart wasn't in it.

"Wait a second," he put a finger on his cheek. "Wasn't the promise to kiss me if I figured out *why* you couldn't? Your air bending was always up to you. I more than fulfilled my end of the bargain there."

"Did you? Did I? Oh." She looked down again. "Well, get me my bending back, and... and... I'll do, you know, whatever you want."

Lysanias closed his eyes, not sure how to break this to her.

"What? What is it? What aren't you telling me?"

"I've had three weeks, Korra. You think I didn't ask about it in that time?"

"Oh no."

"I'm sorry. This really *was* your only chance. I asked in so many different ways, even if I could learn some new skill that could help. I even talked it over with Lady Inari, who seemed to think I was asking the wrong questions, and she said what was lost was lost. I can make you some talismans, objects of power that can allow you to control the elements, but doing it naturally?" He shook his head. "It won't happen." He swallowed. "Not ever again."

Her face hardened. "I see. And you couldn't have told me this before we came all the way out there? Nearly three weeks in that balloon, and you knew the whole time?"

He raised his hands. "I asked what your next step should be, and it showed me an image of this place. I don't know what it means, but you're supposed to be here. I only knew I couldn't help. I... couldn't bring myself to ask if anyone else could."

Her eyes darted in the direction of the door, it wasn't Lysanias' fault he couldn't know she was thinking about that ice cliff they had seen. "To have the support of my parents in this difficult time, no doubt."

"Maybe. Probably. Look, I've got a whole book on talismans and how to make them. Inari offered me other books on the subject too. You could have whatever powers you wanted, honestly bending is only the beginning."

"But that wouldn't be *me*," she protested. "It'll be the thing I'm wearing that does it."

"I guess, but who has to know?"

"I'll know." She got up. "Look, I need some time to process this. We can talk about it in the morning."

"Sure, whatever you want." Broken swan. What does it mean? What are you going to do, Korra?

Katara of course offered them beds for the night and served them supper, which Korra didn't really seem that interested in. She said she was going to turn in shortly after, and closed her door.

"I'm worried," Amy told them. "She's never been like this."

"She'll adjust," Katara told them. "And there's every possibility her bending comes back naturally, as the energy in her body begins to move again. Why, back when Aang and I were kids, there was a fire bender that lost his bending and had to look for it." She told the story

about how Aang and this other fire bender met a couple of dragons, who taught them the real meaning of being a fire bender. This of course made Lysanias think *You have dragons in this world, too? How about that!*

Korra's black mood increased, he could feel the bleakness in her room increasing as he went to bed. He tried to get her to open up, but she just shouted at him to go away, so he did. He felt powerless, wondering what Inari had meant by "the wrong questions" and why his visions had still told them to come here. Was there any help to be had in this place? He didn't think so. But he was resolved to sleep, and concentrated on trying to dream the answer.

In the dream, Lysanias stood before a small pool, where two fish were spinning in a circle around each other. *Black fish, white fish. One fish, two fish.*

You must help Korra.

The thought came to him as the moon glinted off the pool, and he looked into the night sky. Overhead the moon shone down, full and bright.

"I'm trying. I don't have the power. No one does! Blood bending can only destroy!"

No. It can also save. You must help Korra.

"I want to, more than anything! Tell me how, and I'll do it!"

You are asking the wrong question. You must save Korra.

"Again with the wrong question, I'm asking the only questions I have. Save her? From what?"

Herself. The water will guide you.

He looked down to the water again, and at the fish still circling. The water rippled, sending the moonlight scattering about the cave, and there he saw Amy's face, crying out in terror.

Lysanias came wide awake, he had a sinking suspicion what his dreams were about now. Hastily pulling on his boots and coat he felt around, and yes, her feeling of despair had gone. *Because she's sleeping, or because of something more sinister?* He didn't have long to wait to find the answer, her door was open. *Oh great.* He ran to the next room and opened the door, then shook Amy awake, who looked up at him.

"Korra's gone, get dressed. Something terrible is about to happen," he said.

"I'm up!" she announced, throwing back her covers. Lysanias looked away, as she wasn't wearing much even with how cold it was around here, and went back to his own room. Grabbing the ward that held his trunk he released it and grabbed a glowing orb out, then went back out to the hallway.

"Oh, what's that?" Amy asked, pointing to it. She too was now dressed in a heavy coat and pants.

"Moonlight. I figure it'll draw less attention than sunlight. Come on." He handed it to her, and she took it, holding it up as the two slipped out into the cold. The moon half full and stars shone brightly above them, exactly the same color on the snow as the orb.

"Where did she go?" Amy asked, looking around.

"The cliff. Come on." *Wait, we don't have time to just walk there. The moonlight orb I figured would be less obvious than the sunlight one, let us get closer without- right, she can feel us coming same as I would. I guess it's the quick way, and hope I make it.*

"But how are we going to-" He grabbed her hand and *shifted*, thanking the stars that she wasn't very heavy. There was a burst of air and Korra shot up from where she had been sitting. "Oh. That felt really- Oh!" Amy's hands flew over her mouth, as Korra's silhouette turned to face them.

"Korra," Lysanias began evenly. "I need you to do something for me. I need you to step away from the cliff, and come to me." He spread his arms wide as if expecting a hug.

"Korra no!" Amy cried. "I mean, don't jump, come away from there!"

"Oh, you can't help me get my bending back, but you can tell when I sneak out?" Korra remarked, eyes hard. "That's useful."

"I had a dream. The moon spoke to me, said I had to save you. Korra, *come here please.*"

"I don't think so," she said, looking over her shoulder. "I think it's a nice night for a swim." She threw off her jacket and wasn't wearing anything under it.

She planned to do this. Jump off. Freeze to death. She wants it to be quick.

"Korra, this isn't the solution!" Amy protested.

"Isn't it? Really? I'm useless like this. Talismans? Don't make me laugh. I've never been a good avatar, this is just the latest failure in a string of them."

"And so this is your answer?" Lysanias asked, arm sweeping out to encompass the cliff. "This is the Korra who smashes through problems?"

"That's right. Don't you get it? If I die then another avatar will take my place. A *better* one. I mean they could hardly do worse."

"You don't know that."

"Of course I do, it's happened hundreds of times."

"No, I mean you can't know what the next avatar will be like."

"He's right. If you kill yourself this way, what will your spirit do upon being reborn?" Amy asked. "Knowing you died this way? Feeling that over and over? You can't put your future self through that."

"And I can't keep living like this, so it seems we're at a stalemate," Korra replied.

"Of course you can!" Amy protested, tears now streaming down her cheeks. "You just have to come here. Don't leave us behind!"

"What about the dark avatar? I can't work with an avatar only a few days old, I need you! It's your world, not mine. Help me save it." *Come on, how do I save you? I'm not getting through, moon spirit, any spirit, help me! What can I say to get her over here?*

Korra shook her head. "Need? A powerless avatar? Meelo could take me out as I am now. It's hopeless."

"So keep studying chi-blocking. You're getting pretty good at that, right?" Amy suggested.

"That's not enough for the avatar. You don't get it, you don't hear what I'm saying. The avatar is the bridge between worlds. Without my bending I'm nothing!"

"What does bending have to do with it? That doesn't make you a bridge," Lysanias protested.

"Well it sort of does," Amy whispered.

"Not helping!" he hissed back.

"Oh, right, yeah, what he said."

She shook her head, a sad smile on her face. "This is getting us nowhere. I am... glad... I got to see you one last time. My friends." She stepped backwards.

"No!" cried Amy as she dropped out of sight.

Both ran to the edge of the cliff, Lysanias shrugging out of his own jacket as wings sprouted from his back. *I get it now. Diving for a fish, a broken swan, but I'll never reach her. Can I pull her from freezing water, get back here with wet wings?*

"I won't let you!" Amy cried, holding the orb aloft. Korra, now halfway down to the water- stopped.

Lysanias gaped at her, unable to realize what he was seeing for a second, but then it clicked. *Of course. Full moonlight! The thing that lets normal water benders use blood bending. She's blood bending Korra, it can be used to save!*

"I can't hold her!" Amy told him, strain showing on her face.

"Right!" He leapt off the cliff, diving towards her, and spread his wings as he got closer. Air filled them, and he saw Korra struggling against Amy's power as he flipped around, hovering near her.

"Let me go! Let me go!" she cried. "Let me die!"

"Never." Lysanias took her in his arms and flapped his wings, allowing them and his bending to carry them both to safety. He landed several meters from the edge and wrapped his wings and his arms around the shivering and crying Korra.

"Let me go," she was weakly saying. "It's better this way."

"No, it's not," Lysanias told her. "Korra, look at me. Look at me!"

She did.

"You are not your ability to bend. Say it! I am not my ability to bend. Come on, I don't

hear you!"

"I'm not..." she mumbled.

"What was that?"

"I'm not my ability to bend."

"That's better. Louder!"

"I'm not my ability to bend."

"That's right, you're not. You're the avatar, and you still have a place in this world. You can chi-block, you can sense energy and see auras. You can learn to spirit step and spend more energy at once. You might even learn to take an animal shape. You have friends, you have responsibilities to this world. You don't just get to disappear into the night like a bandit."

"Is she okay?" Amy asked, running up to them. "I tried to be as gentle with it as I could."

"I don't know. Korra, are you all right?"

She weakly nodded.

"Okay. Now I don't want any more talk like this, okay? No more attempts at suicide.

You've already given up the wrong thing- life. Now give up the right thing- the idea that bending defines you. It doesn't. YOU define you, Korra. Give up all your grief, all your fear of the future, all your anger. Leave them all here in the waters below. You didn't die, but those things *did*. You can still become the best avatar this world has ever seen, because you'll be the one that knows what it's like to be both a bender and a non-bender."

"We're here for you, Korra!" Amy told her, dropping the sphere and ducking under the wing. She too hugged Korra. "Don't scare me like that again, ever, please!"

Korra looked over at the night, at the dark place she almost lost herself to.

"Okay," she agreed after a moment of silence. "Okay."

Did I really reach her?

"You really mean- oh!" Amy looked into her eyes and then nearly jumped away from her. "Uh, should your eyes be glowing like that?"

"What?"

"They are," Lysanias said in wonder. "They're actually glowing with light."

"You're kidding."

"No, look." Amy pulled up snow, melting it but then turning it into a thin sheet of ice.

"Look at you shining right now, Korra. You are, you're shining... and you're half naked. Go get her jacket you perve!"

"No, don't leave me," Korra begged, grabbing them both up in a hug this time. "Just... just for another minute, don't leave me."

She closed her eyes, cutting off the light, and both held her close a moment. When she opened them again the light was gone.

"Now go get her jacket," Amy ordered.

"Oh, it's not a big deal," Korra told her.

"What are you saying? It is two big, I mean too a big deal!"

"You aren't going anywhere?"

"I'm not," she promised.

"Fine. Because I'll jump off that cliff again, so help me. I'll do it."

"I know. I believe you. I can't believe you did that."

"Say, did I look cool? Wings in the moonlight? Heroically leaping after you?"

"Stop stalling! Jacket!"

"Okay, okay, I'm going. Or how about that blood bending- Okay, okay, I'm going!"

Korra put her jacket back on and looked at reflection in the slab of ice that was stuck there now. "What happened there, anyway? I still don't think I can bend, but I can enter the avatar state? That doesn't make sense."

"The final chakra!" Amy breathed. "I get it!"

"I don't," Lysanias admitted.

"Remember what we read? What blocks the crown chakra? Attachment. Korra, don't you see? Your attachment to your bending abilities actually prevented you from entering the avatar state. But you gave it up, you really, truly, in your heart left them behind. That unblocked the chakra and let you enter the avatar state!" She was nearly hopping from one

foot to another in her excitement.

Korra looked over at Lysanias. "Don't look at me," he said. "That's avatar stuff, you should know better than I do. But it sounds about right."

"He only got your *lower down* chakras," Amy went on. "I bet that's all he knew how to get, or practiced getting. You can still use the others. Oh, what were the others? Time? Light? Spirit? Forget simple *earth* bending, you might be able to do *darkness* bending."

"What would that even mean?"

"I don't know! But imagine if you could figure it out? Bending that no other person has!"

"It's worth a try," Lysanias admitted, and not just to further distract her. "I can do a lot of things, and we know chakras are tied to bending. Your condition proves it. It's logical to assume there are other bending forms tied to the other chakras. That would let you do things like me, I mean you know teleportation and spirit stuff and alchemy stuff is possible. No reason you couldn't do some of it. It's just a matter of using spirit energy in a certain way, that's all I do. You can still use spirit energy so it's just a question of finding out what that energy can do for you."

"See, he knows! Going into the avatar state also proves that there's something more to hope for, right?" She nodded, looking at Korra.

"At the very least I could see what the other avatars have to say."

What?

"Exactly! Oh Korra, you still have so much to live for, don't you? Come on, say you do!"

"I do. Look, I'm sorry about earlier-"

"We won't speak of it," Amy told her. "It was a temporary lapse in judgment brought on by extreme stress and depression. And it won't happen again, right?"

"I promise it won't."

"Then it's settled. Come along, feather boy. Let's get Korra nice and snug in her bed again."

So the three went back, riding on Naga who hadn't been worried. She knew everything would be fine the whole time, though she had shown up out of the darkness when she was needed. Amy went into Korra's room, shutting the door in Lysanias' face with her tongue stuck out, like "I'm sleeping with the avatar because I'm a girl and you can't because you're a guy so there."

With a shake of his head, Lysanias, who had promised no such silence to Korra went to wake up Tenzin and tell him she would need to be watched quite carefully for the next few days, in case it was all an act.

I don't see how entering 'the avatar state' whatever that is could be an act, she seems to have left her negative feelings behind. But she will still need subtle watching in case she slips back into her depression again.

And then I have to thank the moon spirit somehow. He looked at the moon orb, still in his hand. *What do you know? It really can save as well.*

Chapter 26
Declaring Independence
When: The next day
Where: Breakfast table

The girls sleepily dragged their feet to the breakfast table, Korra's dad, Tonraq, making a joke about how he thought they had gone into a coma.

"Morning dad," Korra greeted him, rolling her eyes.

"And how are you feeling this morning?" asked Tenzin, putting his fork down. "Didn't have any... bad dreams or anything last night, I hope?"

"No, I was fine," Korra told him.

"That's good, yes fine, just fine. Because you know you can always come to us, if you want to talk. Any of us. For any reason."

Her parents looked a little confused, but her mother Senna spoke up. "Yes honey, you can always talk to us, about anything. You know that."

"There's nothing to talk about, it's fine."

"Korra, you've just been through a traumatic experience, you've experienced a great loss and in a sense you need to grieve," Tenzin continued. "I just want you to know that we won't judge you, or punish you, whatever you happen to be feeling. We just want to help in any way we can."

"Well I'm fine, so it's fine."

"You told them, didn't you?" Amy exploded. "Lysanias, we promised!"

"Told us what?" asked her father.

"Did something happen last night?" asked Jinora.

"Did you?" Korra demanded, wide awake now.

Everyone stared at Lysanias. "First of all, Amy, I made no such promise. You did, and that's fine, but I did not. Second of all I am *fifteen years old*, despite what I look like. I do not know how to deal with things like we went through last night. So yes, I went to Tenzin, and Tenzin only, last night. For advice. You scared me last night, Korra. I was terrified I wouldn't be able to reach you, that my words, the only thing I had to use, wouldn't be enough. That you would be gone, and my mission here would basically be over. I still don't know if what I said was the right thing, if I did the right thing. I thought Tenzin might, and could advise me."

"Gone? You were thinking of running away?" her mother asked. "I know you always say you need your space, but..."

"It's fine mom, it wasn't like that."

"No, it was a bit worse," Tenzin admitted. "Korra, I am concerned about you. We all are. But I wasn't going to make an issue of it if you seemed fine."

"Make an issue of what? What happened last night?" her father demanded.

Tenzin held up a hand. "Korra was just working through some things, that's all. Her friends were there, and Lysanias just wanted me to keep an eye on her, because I've known her longer. I would better be able to tell if she was, how to put this, on a downward spiral."

"Korra, what did you do?" her mother demanded.

"Nothing, it's fine!"

"It doesn't sound like nothing."

"Why is everyone always trying to control my life? Why can't you just trust me a little bit once in a while? I mean, I know I screw up all the time... Oh."

"You don't screw up all the time," Tenzin assured her.

"Just most of the time," Meelo put in.

"Mello, go out and play," Tenzin ordered.

"I'm not done eating!" he protested.

"Go!" Tenzin pointed a finger and Meelo pushed up from the table. "Fine. Can't say anything around here, it was just a joke."

"Stay and finish your breakfast, I'm the one leaving." Korra announced. "Don't follow me." She went over to the door and grabbed her jacket.

"Yeah, don't follow us," Amy told her, grabbing hers as well. "I trusted you, Lysanias," she spat, looking back at him.

And the door slammed.

There was a moment of silence.

“Great, now they both hate me,” Lysanias finally said.

“No, they don’t,” Tenzin assured him. “They’ll see you were acting in her best interest sooner or later. You did the right thing in coming to me.”

“Just what happened last night?” Katara asked, finally speaking up. “Is it as bad as I think?”

“Yes mother, it was pretty bad. But also good, if what Lysanias told me is true. She was finally able to enter the avatar state.”

The others gasped, her mother putting her hands over her mouth.

“Without her bending? That is surprising,” Katara admitted. “But then, I suppose the one doesn’t depend upon the other.”

“But what is it? Besides making her eyes glow?” asked Lysanias.

“It’s a way for the avatar to draw upon the strength of every avatar before her,” explained Tenzin. “So obviously while she’s going to be stronger than an avatar a thousand years ago, her strength today will pale in comparison to an avatar a thousand years from now.”

“And she can speak to them? And those that come later, they’ll be able to speak to her?”

“Yes, that too. All their accumulated knowledge and wisdom is at her fingertips. If she herself is wise enough to listen to it.”

“Amazing. She’s not just a conduit for the spirits, she’s a conduit for your entire history, as well. She could write the complete, unbiased history of your world!” *You could actually talk to your dead father, through her. What an amazing thing.*

“I’d give a lot to read that,” Jinora piped up.

“So would I,” Tenzin agreed with a nod. “But can you see Korra with a typewriter, banging out chapter after chapter of ‘The History of the World’?”

“Not really,” she admitted after a moment of imagining.

“There you are.”

“Is she going to be okay?” her father asked. “Should we go after her.”

Meelo went to the window and looked out. “She’ll be fine,” he announced.

“How do you know?”

“Weeeeelll, currently she’s having Amy make her ice sculptures of what I guess is Lysanias, and she’s smashing them apart.”

“That’s our daughter,” he admitted, with no small amount of pride. “She’s fine.”

“Oh, sure, she’s fine, what about me?”

“Do you want to record any last thoughts for the world?” her father asked. “I can get you some paper.”

“Uh...”

Some time later the two girls came back in, Korra rubbing her knuckles because punching ice is hard on them, even if you are the avatar.

“So, where do we start?” she chirped, coming over to Lysanias.

“I suggested the face,” Amy told him, putting both hands and resting her chin on Korra’s shoulder. “But that beard would absorb at least some of the impact, but that just lets her hit you extra hard.”

“I don’t think that’s what she meant?” Lysanias offered hopefully, taking a small step back.

“Close,” Korra admitted. “But seriously, where do we start? If I’m going to learn all these new and different ways of bending you two are insisting exist, let’s get to it.”

Lysanias looked to Amy.

“We decided to get even with you at some future time. You know, so you can never really be sure when our vengeance will come? We hope the wait itself will drive you mad, so you only require a tiny little push at the right time to tip you over the edge.”

Is that really the kind of imagery we should be discussing after last night?

"That's right. Don't fall asleep," Korra suggested. "Don't. Fall. Asleep." She was grinning and nodding, and then both of them were.

"Not creepy at all."

The girls laughed, or perhaps cackled is a better word. "Water under the bridge, my friend," Amy told him. "She's worked through her frustration and we talked, so let's just move forward. Where do you suggest we go or do?"

That's just what they want me to think. But they do both seem in better spirits now. I'll take it. "Then I would say the library," Lysanias decided after a moment's thought. "Unless Katara has some books on it, being a healer. I want to go over exactly what the other chakras do, that should give us some ideas."

"I was thinking about that," Amy said, coming around to sit down at the table. "How did they know?"

"Know what?"

"The other chakras. Supposedly they are associated with other things, like spirits or time. But if no one has done any bending except the normal four elements, how did someone figure it out?"

"Maybe a spirit told them?" Lysanias figured. "I have no idea. Anyway, Katara should be around here someplace, let's ask her."

So the trio looked over Katara's books, and refreshed their memory from what they had found out while trying to get Korra to air bend. They sat looking it over, and trying to come up with where to start.

"Throat is spirits and electricity," Amy read. "You can throw lightning, right Lysanias?"

"I can. Not many times a day, mind you. That takes a lot of energy."

"Still, it's a place you can directly contribute to, because you can do it and she can copy you. Or do we start with the crown and work down? We know that chakra is unblocked, because avatar state."

"How did you figure out the old bending?" Lysanias asked. "You learned them at a young age, right?"

She shrugged. "They just sort of came to me, honestly. I never really had to work at the others." Everyone digested this.

"So maybe these will come to you, too. I guess we can just try a few things. Put energy into various places on your body, do a bending 'woosh' and see what happens!" Amy chirped, swooshing her arms through the air.

"A bending 'woosh?'" Korra asked.

"I don't know, what would you call it?"

"A bending form. Or a bending stance. Or a bending *anything* but a *woosh*."

"Form, woosh, what's the difference?"

"Oh, I want to do a woosh!" Jinora told them, coming into the room. "That sounds fun!"

"Come on, let's- wait a second." She glared at the book.

"What?" asked everyone.

"Spirits! Something about spirits."

"I don't think getting drunk will help," Lysanias told her.

"What? No, not that kind of spirits. Where's a calendar?" The group looked around the room, and finally found a one. "Yes! It's just a few weeks until the spirit festival. I thought so. Maybe that might help, the spirit world and our world will be closest during that time. But they'll be pretty close now, a couple of weeks can't make that much difference, right? Maybe I can talk to the spirits, get their advice. Tenzin would know a good spot!"

"Whatever you think is best," Lysanias told her. "We're in totally unknown territory, and my advice about connecting with the element you want to bend from the inside out didn't work as I hoped. So if you have an idea, let's try it." *Anything to get you moving and thinking about the future instead of what you've lost.*

"I think we might have been on the right track with that one," Korra admitted. "Now that I know more about bending. It's odd, losing it..." She took a deep breath. "Losing it has made me feel different. Inside. Like I was flipping a switch inside my soul that is now broken off. It's

hard to explain. Come on, let's go find Tenzin, and maybe some new switches for me to play with."

"You want to what?" he asked, after being found. He was watching his kids play in the snow, launching snowballs at each other with air bending and generally being kids.

"Ask the spirits for help with my bending," Korra repeated. "I thought you might have some pointers on contacting them."

"Why, that's wonderful," he gushed, perking up. "I've studied the spirits rather extensively, I know all about them. And yes, you're right. The upcoming spirit festival would be an excellent opportunity to connect with them. Oh," his face fell. "But I really have to get back to the city. With the Amon business winding down we'll be needed more than never. Plus we have a new member now that we can safely announce the results."

"Good thing you have someone around that can teleport, isn't it?" Lysanias said with a grin. "How about this? I'll take you and your family back to the island, tonight maybe? Tomorrow morning? Whenever. Meanwhile, you can suggest some exercises for Korra to do, and find some local locations to perform them. I can help, I can already call at least one spirit, the one that *helps you do supernatural things*. I can teach that to Korra, maybe she can call spirits like that too. If not, maybe it will help contact spirits around here. Take care of your responsibilities in the city, and I'll come get you closer to the opening of the festival. You can see what she's learned, pick up her training from there, and by that time maybe take some time off to train her directly. Meanwhile Korra can visit with her folks, and just enjoy being home for a bit."

Tenzin pulled his beard. "I suppose being in a familiar surrounding would help in talking to the spirits. This is her home, you would have the strongest connection here. Not go back to the city? Humm... Reporters would be all over you anyway..."

"Can I stay too, dad?" Jinora asked. "Talking to the spirits sounds really neat! I want to try too, or at least see if she can do it."

"Oh, it does, does it?"

"Yes. Please can I dad? Can I?"

"Ask your mother."

"Come on!"

Korra laughed. "I guess it could be worse. We'll keep an eye on her, don't worry Tenzin. What could happen down here?"

"The mind boggles," he admitted. "And I haven't decided if I'll let her stay here."

"If you'll *let* me stay?" Korra bit off. "Don't forget, Tenzin, you serve the avatar, you're not my *keeper*. I go where I please, if it comes down to it."

"Yes, as you frequently remind me. Tell me, did you really enter the avatar state?"

"You really don't trust me, do you?" she asked a little sadly. She took a deep breath and closed her eyes, and when she opened them again, they were glowing.

"Oh. I see you did. In that case, yes, I have no problem with you staying here to try and contact the spirits. If you think it'll help you learn new bending forms, I'm all for it. Jinora, as long as your mother is fine with it, and Korra's parents agree to host you, you may stay also."

"Oh thank you daddy!" she cried, hugging him. "Dad affection whoosh activation!"

Tenzin mouthed this, looking quizzically at Lysanias.

"You had to be there," he explained.

Korra's eyes changed back. "Good to see you can be reasoned with, Tenzin."

"I wanna stay too!" Meelo told him, having come over a moment ago.

His eyes immediately became ice. "No chance. I don't trust you out of my sight, son. Maybe when you're older. Much, much older." He shivered, and it wasn't due to the cold.

"No fair!"

"Truer words were never spoken. You will have homework to do, by the way," he told Jinora. "I'll send Lysanias back with some books on the spirits. I'll expect you to be able to answer questions about them after the festival. And of course your normal studies will continue, I'll have those books sent as well."

"Yes dad," she said, sounding resigned, but still grinned after her back was turned towards him.

“Spiritually active locations around here?” Tonraq asked. “You do remember it’s the South Pole, right? Out there,” he indicated the outside, “is mostly ice. Some snow. But mostly ice. Great, flat expanses of ice.”

“There must be someplace,” Tenzin pressed. “I mean you have a spirits festival coming up, right?”

“Sure, but it’s not *for* the spirits. It’s for us. I mean if some wanted to come they’d be welcome, of course. But yeah, ice. I mean in the north we had the- well, never mind.”

“What dad? What about the north?”

He cleared his throat. “Well, there was a forest, once. But it got, uh, destroyed. But there’s nothing like that around here.”

“How do you know about it? Did you travel there at some point?”

“Not important, and I don’t want to talk about in any case.”

No, he’s not hiding anything at all.

“Okay, fine. Guess I’m on my own then.”

“Really, is one location better than another?” Lysanias asked. “I don’t know how your spirit world works, but on my world every point in our world corresponds to a point in both our higher and lower ‘spirit worlds.’”

“You have two spirit worlds?” Tenzin asked.

“Sure, one for good spirits, one for bad. Plus the intermediary layer, I guess you would call it, that separates them from our world.”

“Ah. We’re taught that no spirit is completely good or bad, so we only have the one. They all come from there. They can become more light or more dark based on how we treat the land, but none are ‘evil’ or ‘good’.”

“Interesting.” *So, wait, is it not an afterlife, like the heavenly realms? It’s a place like this one just with spirits instead of people? So the spirits there are the people? Do they consider themselves the real people, and the beings here spirits? Guess I’ll have to ask any I see.*

“In any case, there are certain kind of incense you can burn, and bells you can ring, to help bring the spirits closer. As there’s no point in us staying here at the infirmary if Korra, um, can’t be helped, we can fly the balloon over to the city and I can see what they have in stock.”

“I’ll get to see your house?” Jinora asked Korra.

“Sure thing. You and Amy can sleep in my room, if you want. Lysanias... can sleep on the floor outside or something. Like a puppy dog bear.”

“Poor Lysanias,” Jinora consoled him. “Born a boy, so he can’t sleep with us girls.”

“I can grow wings, you think I can’t become a girl?” he asked. “I could become a girl right now if I wanted. Long hair and everything. In fact I could look like you right now if I wanted.” *Think of the pranking potential!*

“Oh, that’s not really the same thing, is it?” she asked, an odd look on her face.

“No, it is not,” Tenzin assured them, with a look at Lysanias that said “I don’t care if you are mentally fifteen, you looka like a man, stay away from my nearly teenage daughter.”

Korra’s parents were delighted to have Jinora stay with them until the festival, as was Katara who said she would love to see more of her granddaughter during that time. So they all boarded the airship and made the short journey to the city, which Lysanias was quite impressed by. It was a city of ice, obviously carved out and maintained by water benders, and had an enormous ice wall around the whole place. (Apart from where the docks were, of course. They needed to load and unload ships, after all.) They landed the airship outside the wall so the people there didn’t think they were being invaded, like that would happen, and Korra’s parents led the way to their home. While they got settled Tonraq took Tenzin shopping, and they came back with whatever Tenzin thought they needed to more easily talk to spirits. He instructed them as to their use, and by that time it was getting pretty late and asked if they could be brought back to the island now.

“Of course!” Lysanias told them. “You and Pema will have to go by ward. I’m pretty sure I can pick the kids up, so they can just hang on to my hand.”

“What about the baby?” Pema fretted.

"There's no danger," he assured her. "Either person on the end can hold him. His weight is negligible, I'm not worried about it."

"And it won't hurt him, being 'teleported' like this? And I never thought I would be asking *that* question!"

"I've never suffered any ill effects. There's a bit of disorientation, suddenly finding yourself in a new place, but he's too young to even realize it, I'll bet."

"Well, if you're sure."

"I wouldn't have suggested it unless I was absolutely sure."

The adults safely tucked away in wards, Lysanias *shifted* and found himself not on the island as he had anticipated, but out in the snow far from anything. The group looked around.

"What happened?" Meelo asked. "If this is the island, winter has gotten a lot worse while we were gone."

"We didn't get far enough," Lysanias explained. "That's odd. But I suppose we are going pretty far, halfway around the world. It might take several jumps."

"So we're not stuck here forever?" Ikki asked, sounding worried. She was holding the baby in her left arm, while her right hand held Lysanias'.

"Of course not. I'll just try again. Hang on." He *shifted*, and wasn't actually sure they had gone anywhere. It was still endless white, in all directions. With a shrug he silently wished there was more plant life around here so he could hook into a ley line and *shifted* again, and this time was pleased to find himself exactly where he had wanted in the first place. The docks at the island.

"Ah, that worked!"

"Nothing to it," Meelo agreed. "Let's do it again!"

"What, cutting three weeks of travel time by airship down to three seconds once wasn't enough for you? Come on, let me get your parents out, your mom was pretty worried about Rohan."

"Give you fifty Yuan to leave them in there for an hour."

"How do you have fifty Yuan?" Ikki demanded.

"I'll owe it to him."

"He doesn't have it."

"I wouldn't have taken that bargain for any amount of money," Lysanias insisted. With that he released the two adults, who looked around.

"It really worked! What a strange place that was," Tenzin remarked.

"And Rohan is okay?" asked Pema, taking him again.

"He didn't even wake up, mom. He's fine."

"Thank goodness. Well, we're home much earlier than expected, even if the news isn't good. Thank you, Lysanias."

"My pleasure. I'll see you for the start of the festival."

"See you then." The kids waved and followed their mother down the path to the main buildings.

"I'll get you those books," Tenzin told him. "Now where exactly on the island- ah, this way then."

Loaded down with books and candles, plus some other types of incense he found, Tenzin bid him farewell. "Take care of Korra," he commanded. "I want to see her happy and healthy at the spirit festival."

"Don't come get you if she's sick or depressed. Got it."

"You know what I mean!"

"She'll be fine. But yes, I'll keep a close eye on her. If we can find something she can bend, anything at all, it'll be a big boost for her. That will show she *can* still bend, and get her excited about what other abilities she might have that she never considered. After all, it wasn't that long ago metal bending didn't exist. Who knows what she might discover now that she's forced away from the usual patterns the avatar falls into."

"Are you going to ask, you know..." He indicated the sky in a general way.

"That's an excellent- I mean, of course I'm going to ask. I thought of it days ago, I was

just waiting for the right time.”

“Of course you were. I’ll see you in a few weeks.”

“Right. See you then.”

Lysanias envisioned the inside of his cabin aboard the airship, a place he had been studying because he knew he might need to teleport back to it. He *shifted*.

Chapter 27

Darkness and Light

When: The next day

Where: Trudging across the snowy landscape

“Four thousand fifteen. Four thousand sixteen. Four thousand seventeen.”

“Are we there yet?”

“Four thousand eighteen.”

“How much further?”

“Four thousand *nineteen*.”

“We’re getting close, I’m sure of it.”

Lysanias spun on the girls and looked up at them, as they were riding Naga. He was counting steps, or at least trying to because the trio was talking and laughing and making it rather difficult. “Do you girls *mind!*?”

“We don’t mind. Do we mind, girls?” Korra asked sweetly. The other girls shook their heads. “We don’t mind.”

Lysanias sighed. “I’m trying to count here. You do want to see about talking to spirits, don’t you?”

“I do. Sorry.”

You don’t look sorry. “Fine. Because you’ve made me lose count, so we’re all going to have to go back and start over.”

“What? Oh no!” wailed Jinora. “We shouldn’t have done it!”

Lysanias looked seriously at them, then broke into a grin. “Only joking.”

“You jerk!”

“We’re here.”

“You said it was over nine thousand steps,” Amy protested. “And in fact you said it really weird too, like it was *over nine... thooooosaaaand!* Are you sure this is it?”

“No, it was four thousand something, that was my little trick played on you. This is the spot.” The group looked around, they were up on a ridge overlooking the space being cleared of snow for the festival in a few weeks. The fence was only partly put up, that’s how little progress had been made. But progress had been made, and that’s how things get done. One small step for a man, one giant leap when the deadline looms because you screwed around until the last minute.

“And this is the best spot to both meet a spirit and figure out a new kind of bending for me?” Korra asked, not buying it. “Why right here? This spot can hardly be important spiritually.”

“I’ve no idea,” Lysanias admitted. “I just asked the question, and was answered. Eight hundred steps in one direction, four thousand something in another. We have arrived at those coordinates.”

“I guess we better get started then,” Jinora announced, wrapping her arms around herself. “Because I’m freezing. I don’t know how you all live down here!”

“We eat a lot of seal lion blubber. Gives us plenty of fat to burn so we stay warm.”

Korra jiggled her belly. (Not that she actually could with her abs of steel, but she pretended she could.)

“Ew! Gross!”

“No way, you gotta try it if you haven’t yet! Frozen, put on a stick like a popsicle. Oh it’s so good!” She mimed biting into something.

Jinora looked green, holding her stomach. “I’m gonna be sick, cut it out!”

Lysanias licked his finger and held it up. “Wind seems to be coming from that direction. Amy, why don’t you put up a half dome barrier right here, that should cut the wind. Jinora, why don’t you heat the air up in this area and concentrate on holding it so the warmth stays here? I’ll set up the board and the fire stuff.”

“I’ll just stand and do nothing,” Korra volunteered. “With my no bending powers, because that’s all I’m good at now.”

“You get into a ‘spirit’ state of mind,” he told her. “Maybe a little ‘here, spirit, spirit, spirit’

action?" He crooked a finger while crouching down.

"They aren't kitten pigs!" Jinora protested. "You can't call them like that!"

"No? I must have been thinking of something else," Lysanias offered with a grin. He got out two contain wards and released their contents. One was just a flat board wrapped in blankets so they didn't have to sit on the ice, the other was a barrel full of wood Lysanias was going to light. "Hopefully spirits work the same way here as they do for me," he had explained. "When I chant for them, a fire helps to draw them in. I figure it can't hurt either way." *We can use the warmth.*

So the group set up camp, Lysanias lighting the fire with fire bending, which just made Korra sigh.

"I used to be the best fire bender," she complained.

"And pretty soon you'll be the *only* spirit bender or whatever," Lysanias snapped back.

"Yeah, at least you got to experience three of the four 'common' bending types," Amy told her. "I only get the one. How is that fair?" She completed her half dome of ice with a flourish, freezing the water in place as she bent it into a half circle.

"I guess it's not," she admitted reluctantly. "What's next?"

"Now I demonstrate the ritual chant I use to call upon the dragonfly spirit. I'll chant a few minutes so the influence of the spirit can be given to each of you, then explain spiritually what I'm doing, and you can try it. Naturally you should all be feeling out what I'm doing, you can all feel energy so that will help a lot. Jinora, Amy, you're welcome to try it too, but I wouldn't expect you to get a result. Who knows though? Then while under the influence of the spirit, reaching out to the spirits should be easier so we'll do Tenzin's exercises with the incense and the bells and whatnot."

"And just so I'm clear," Amy clarified, "what is the point of all this? We're not trying to enter the spirit world, are we?" She looked concerned.

"No. According to Tenzin there are spirits in this world," Korra told her. "Not many, but a few. They keep to themselves but hopefully we can attract the attention of any in the local area. As the avatar I should be able to talk to them, or maybe Lysanias can?" She looked over at him.

"If they have any kind of language at all, I should be able to," he agreed. "I was created before the concept of 'language' even existed. So I can talk and understand any sort of speech. Usually wanderers like me are given that ability, but Inari said I already had it. That's why I got the ability to go without food or breathing. Not that it's been that useful."

"You eat all the time," Jinora protested.

He held up a finger. "Ah, I don't have to. I would still get hungry though, if I didn't."

"I see."

"In any case," Korra went on. "We will then ask about any other types of bending I might be able to do, or see if they know who I might go to and ask. Spirits have been around forever, who knows what they might know. Failing that, if they know how to get my bending back. Maybe some kind of spirit quest or something. Basically I want their advice, that's all."

"That all sounds reasonable," Amy admitted. "Let's get started."

So Lysanias chanted, and felt he did reasonably well, directing the spirit of the dragonfly to settle over the girls. Jinora admitted it seemed a little easier to maintain the heat in the area, and after he explained it the girls tried it. Interestingly enough he felt something from Jinora, who stopped chanting and said that no, that wasn't it.

"But can I try something else?"

"Of course!"

"I felt something when you were chanting," she went on, thoughtful. "But it was specific to that spirit, I think. You're trying to attract specific help from a general spiritual presence, we want to attract physically any spirits in the area. It's a different thing, even though it relates to spirits in both cases. I mean learning that specific one could be useful, if we could do it at all, but that's not why we're freezing out here." They all nodded. "I think I see how I could modify the *idea* behind what you were doing to do what we want. So let's try this instead." She stood up and closed her eyes, then looked out at the frozen landscape around them. With that she started to sing, not words but more a scale, putting spiritual energy into the song which

Lysanias had to admit *did* seem more “generic” than what he had done.

I wonder if she has some sort of affinity to spirits? She seemed to grasp the concepts I was trying to convey if she’s already bending them to her purpose. Heh, bending them.

“I feel what she’s doing,” Amy whispered. “But I don’t think I could duplicate it. Is there any other way I can help? Send healing energy into the ice around us? Let any spirits know it’s safe to come and see us?”

“I don’t think it would hurt,” he admitted. “Back home there were certain dances the woman who was teaching us about the spirits said we could do in order to further catch their attention. I, uh, thought they looked silly so I didn’t bother learning any.”

“That was dumb!” she snorted. “That would have really helped here!”

“Yeah, well, didn’t know I would be out on the frozen tundra *on another world* to need them, now did I?”

“Shhhh,” Korra told them, standing and taking Jinora’s hand. She started to do the same scale Jinora was, who smiled at her. She offered her other hand to Amy, who shrugged and took it, joining the impromptu three part harmony. The girls stood here, Jinora’s energy bolstered by the other two, and suddenly she stopped. The other two carried on a moment but then looked over at her.

“Something’s answering!” she exclaimed, excited.

“How do you know?” asked Korra.

“I can feel it. Look around.” The girls did, and suddenly Amy pointed a finger out across the frozen ground.

“What’s that?”

Everyone looked in that direction, there was a dark shape seeming to blur across the ground, coming closer and closer. It was traveling a zig-zag pattern across the snow, but even then was approaching with frightening speed.

“I don’t know,” Korra admitted, sounding worried. “But it’s fast.”

“Is it spirit stepping?” Jinora asked. “I guess a spirit would know how to do that, it’s right in the name.”

It’s not running, the snow would be getting kicked up behind it. What in the world?

The dark shape got closer and closer. Blurring across the landscape towards them, and Lysanias felt a hostile intent from it as it came within range of his senses.

“It’s going to attack!” Lysanias cried, feeling the “danger” tingle from it. “It’s angry at something. Protect Korra!” The three stepped in front of her as the shape was nearly within striking distance. It had covered the intervening ground *far* faster than Lysanias would have believed possible, even for a spirit. And now Lysanias felt the energy it was giving off. Dark, with a specific purpose, radiating a cold that had nothing to do with the local temperature.

Spirit of the mountain, we’re going to need you!

I feel a powerful spirit nearby, and you’re right. It feels angry. I will help as I can.

The mountain spirit shimmered into existence beside the three, and stepped in front of the group, growing to match the spirit’s size which Lysanias now saw was at least twice as tall as a person.

The spirit was upon them. It drank in light, being a dark purple color, but the eyes in front glowed yellow with malice. Tentacles sprouted from the back of the creature, and the tail in back, as long as it was tall, whipped back and forth like an angry cat’s. Lysanias blinked and suddenly the creature was *behind* his spirit, whipping that tail at Amy and Jinora. Both tried to dodge out of the way but were hit and went flying, tumbling into the snow and not getting up.

How did it?

The mountain spirit went to slam it, figuring that would do more damage than just bending at it, spinning in a circle and attacking the spirit from behind. The spirit didn’t dodge, either because it didn’t see the attack coming or more likely given the surprised look it shot over its shoulder, didn’t expect an attack from a fellow spirit. But the impact staggered it, and it shook its head as if to clear it.

Okay, at least the mountain can hurt it. But it took half our fighting force out in one move, I can’t afford to mess around here. I have to go to the others, they could be dying as

we speak. And if I don't return Jinora in pristine condition, her dad really will kill me. "In the emperor's name I command you..." he began, throwing energy into a banishing and making the ritual gestures with one hand. With the other he grabbed an armor ward out of the dispenser and slapped it on himself.

Korra ran to the others, passing behind Lysanias which was fine with him, the more distance she put between herself and this thing, the better he was going to feel. With him in the way at least might go for him next, allowing him some kind of defense. *But with how fast it got around my spirit, distance doesn't seem like a factor.*

The mountain spirit pulled back, knowing what Lysanias was about to attempt. It simply went to grab the creature so it could be held in place and banished. Naga leapt at the thing as well, trying to knock it over, but the spirit seemed to move without moving its legs and was several meters to the left of where it had been. Both struck only empty air.

It went for Lysanias, one of its arms stretching and taking on the form of a claw, while the spirit tried to grab it again. It got ahold of Lysanias' head, and he flinched back as the ward activated, protecting him. The spirit meanwhile slammed into the side of the creature, and went nowhere.

You've got to be kidding me. Why can't my spirit ever knock anything over?

"They're hurt really bad!" Korra shouted, having reached the two girls. "Hurry it up, they may die!"

Yes, didn't need you to tell me that, thanks. Kinda busy here! "...depart from this world and never return!"

The spirit went crazy, deforming and hissing, retracting the hold it had on Lysanias and striking out at the mountain with all the tentacles it had on its back. The impact was tremendous, both the spirit and Lysanias staggering back, heavily wounded.

Of, of course it can hurt my spirit. Why wouldn't it be able to? Ow.

The mountain spirit tried to grab the tentacles as they retracted, but the spirit was too fast for it, and reared back for another attack.

"Hey!" shouted Korra, an aura of darkness surrounding her. The spirit looked over at her, and again while it didn't have a defined face, it had eyes. These widened as if it couldn't believe what it was seeing. "Stay away from my *friends!*" She whipped her arms forward and the darkness followed, lancing out at the creature. It tried to blur to the side but one leg got caught in the blast, and it staggered. Crouched low, it looked the opposition over. A darkness sprang up around Korra again. "You just try it," she taunted. A tense second later at the dark form took off back the way it came.

Lysanias wasted no time in rushing to Amy while the mountain spirit rushed to Jinora. It applied healing in the form of water bending while Lysanias got busy healing her with alchemy. There was a huge gash in the front of the jacket, and she was soaked in blood. But Lysanias still felt spiritual energy within her, so he closed the wound as quickly as he could.

"Grab some healing wards from the dispenser," he told Korra, as both his hands were on her wound trying to close it. "Third one over, yes, that one. Put it on her and will her to be healed. Then do Jinora."

"Right!" She did that, and the wound shrank even more as the blue fire helped in the healing process. Tense breaths later Amy opened her eyes, groaning.

"What hit me?" she asked.

"That's what I'd like to know," Lysanias replied. "How do you feel? You took a nasty fall as well as the gash. Are your legs okay?"

"Gash? Ah!" She looked down at herself, eyes wide. "How am I still alive?"

"It was a near thing. Look, I'm going to see how Jinora is doing, it got you both. You going to be okay for a minute?"

"I'll be fine, I can heal myself, I think." She gestured, and snow started to melt and collect around her leg.

"You're pretty low on energy, don't push it. I'll be back."

He went over to Jinora, who had a gash on her face that was closing up, and the spirit nodded. He pulled the water back and Lysanias took over, healing it up without a trace. She too opened her eyes, and after the other bruises on her back and legs were healed she

shakily got up.

"So we won, then?" she asked, looking around.

"Not exactly," Lysanias told her. "Korra drove it off, but it's still out there."

"Korra did?" The two looked over at her.

"Yeah, I'm not even sure *what* that was," she admitted, her dark aura gone. "It must have looked pretty cool though!"

"Let's go sit down on the wood, anyway. I think the fire barrel went flying but I can warm the air up. Are you two sure you're okay?"

They both nodded, and were helped over to the wood, sitting down heavily on it.

"Hey, wait a second, are *you* okay?" Korra asked, noticing Lysanias looked a bit pained as well. There was some blood spilling through his jacket as well.

"It got my spirit pretty good. Half that is also transmitted to me. But if you girls are okay I'll heal myself now."

"Do it, we'll be fine," Jinora assured him.

He nodded and set about closing his own wounds, wincing as he worked. Korra, meanwhile, was standing there flicking her hand open.

"What are you doing?" Amy asked.

"Trying to do... whatever bending it was I did," she explained. "It was a darkness. I threw darkness at it. I gathered energy inside myself, like Lysanias taught me, and I got this rush of power. I threw it at the spirit, who seemed kinda surprised, actually."

"Darkness?" Amy questioned. "Actual, literal, darkness?"

"That's what it looked like."

"Huh. Well, I guess the brow chakra deals with light and dark, you think that was darkness bending?"

"Brow? I wonder." She concentrated and suddenly in her hand a ball of darkness appeared, making her eyes widen. "It worked! I did it! I'm... darkness bending. Okay, that's just weird."

"Try light bending, it's the same place right?" Jinora asked.

"Should be," Amy agreed.

"Okay. Become the opposite I guess? How does it feel to fire bend and then water bend? Maybe if I do this?" The darkness flashed to light, and she was holding a blazing ball in her hand now.

"That's it," Jinora said, clapping. "You did it. You can light bend as well!"

"Great, what can I do with it?" she asked, passing her hand back and forth across the ball. "It's just light, it can't do anything but keep me from stepping on something in the dark."

"I have an idea," Lysanias offered, scooping up some snow. He compressed it into a ball, then concentrated. The ball shrank, and he held up a rather large clear piece of what looked like crystal.

"What's that?" Amy asked.

"Diamond, actually. Focus on this, and try to turn that ball of light into something that looks like this."

"Wait, you can just wish enormous diamonds out of nothing? How are we not better friends?" Amy asked. "I want to be a better friend to you, Lysanias. In fact, telling Tenzin? Forgiven. Now can I just see that diamond and can you maybe look the other way for a second for no reason?"

"You can have it later, concentrate, Korra."

"I am, if motor mouth over there can stop drooling for two seconds."

"I'm not drooling. Am I? Am I drooling?" She wiped her mouth off.

The ball flickered and changed, slowly becoming a replica of the crystal in Lysanias' hand.

"You can make diamonds out of light?" Amy asked, clearly shocked even more now. "Marry me! Lysanias, turn me into a boy so she can have my babies immediately!"

"I don't know if it works like that..." he hedged.

"Only one way to find out!"

"Uh, I need an adult?" Jinora hesitantly offered, raising a hand.

"I am an adult!" Amy insisted.

"If you can keep your pants on for two seconds," Korra explained, running her hand through the diamond. "It's still light. It just looks like that diamond."

"Oh."

"But don't you see?" Lysanias asked. "It isn't just 'light bending' in the form of 'oh hey I have a ball of light in my hand.' You can create illusionary objects now. Or heck, bend light around your body and become invisible."

Korra scowled and stared at the illusion in her hand, and it shimmered and became a stick, then a flame, and then a small doll. It vanished. "I guess there's some potential there. Anyway, shouldn't we be getting back before that spirit or whatever it was decides to come finish us off? We can play with light later."

"Naga is okay, right?" Jinora asked. She was laying down in the snow watching them.

"She's fine, didn't get a scratch. You three okay to ride back?"

"I'm pretty weak, but riding should be okay," Amy admitted.

"You lost a lot of blood, just healing you didn't fix that," Lysanias told her. "So both of you take it easy the next few days. Let's head back, we'll need to tell your father there's some crazy spirit wandering around out here. It'll need a dozen people to take it down, the way it moved."

"By the way," Korra icily said to Lysanias. "Thanks so much for dragging us all out here to nearly get killed."

"Hey, I asked where the best place was to meet a spirit, and get you another form of bending. Have I not delivered? Did you not meet a spirit? Did you not learn a new form of bending? Oh, you did, on both counts? Guess I did my job then. You want to meet a *nice* spirit, be more specific next time."

"He's got you there," Jinora agreed with a giggle. "Both those things came true."

"Yeah, well, the universe could have been a little more forthcoming with maybe a warning sign of some kind? Crazy spirit ahead? Something. And you, what was with that two seconds of warning? You gotta work on that, maybe get it up to five seconds? I don't know."

"I'll see what I can do," he deadpanned.

"You do that. Come on, Naga, let's go home."

Chapter 28
I'm Being Followed by a Moon Shadow
When: That night
Where: Dreamscape

In the dream, Lysanias was again looking at the pool with the two fish, endlessly circling each other, black and white. Around and around. Upon the surface of the water was the image of the moon, gently rippling with the motion of the two fish.

"Moon spirit?" Lysanias asked, wondering what he was doing back here. *Is Korra in danger again?*

"Hi," a cheery voice said behind him, and Lysanias spun. Standing far too close to him was a young girl with very long, white hair. She was quite beautiful, and was dressed in a formal looking sort of robe. He was so surprised he stepped back away from her, which was a mistake because the pond was right there. His arms pin wheeled about, trying to get his balance, and the girl gasped and tried to grab him.

He went into the water with a splash, which thankfully wasn't that deep. But as the girl had tried to pull him back she was now pulled forward on top of him, soaking both of them. He scrambled back, away from her, and she pushed herself up onto her hands and knees, water dripping from her now soaked robe. She raised her head and looked at him, then burst out laughing.

The fish, still circling each other, had widened their circle to go around the pair. Lysanias could have sworn they looked a bit indignant, but he wasn't sure how he could tell that. They were just fish, after all.

"The look on your face!" laughed the girl. "I really surprised you, didn't I? And you went right into the pond. Backwards! That was priceless. Wow, I needed that, I haven't laughed like that in so long."

"Yes, you did manage to surprise me," Lysanias admitted. "Who are you, anyway? How did you get here? Am I still dreaming?"

"Silly," she said in answer, standing up. She gestured, and the water fell away from her back into the pond. "Of course you're still dreaming. Am I really that unrecognizable?" She pointed down at the water, at the image of the moon now reforming as the water became still again.

"You're the moon spirit?" Lysanias asked, gaping.

"That's right," she answered lightly, giving a little hop and standing on the bank again. Once there she gave a little twirl, her hair flinging out behind her. "Not what you expected, huh?"

"Not exactly," he admitted, standing up himself. "Do you have a name?"

"Of course I have a name. It's... It's... Huh." Her face was screwed up in concentration.

"You don't know?"

"Give me a second, it's been at least sixty years since I heard it last. Yue! That's my name, Yue. Wow. I really am losing myself, aren't I?" She looked a little sad, head down.

"Maybe you should start from the beginning?" he pleaded.

"If I can remember it. Oh, come out of there, we can sit by the tree." Yue held her hand out, and as Lysanias climbed out of the pond the water left him, splashing back to not be lost. The fish tightened their circle, back to spinning opposite the other. *Something familiar about those fish, but I can't put my finger on it.* She led him to a silvery tree, and settled herself at the base, legs drawn up under her. "Well, don't loom. Sit down. I've got a lot to cover and I don't know how long this dream will last for. I've never really done this before, you know? In fact it's only your abilities that let me do it at all. Usually the most a spirit can do is a vague dream as a warning or piece of advice. Never a conversation."

A bit dazed, Lysanias sat across from her, the moonlight through the leaves dancing over her face as the wind moved them. He wasn't sure what to say, this tiny girl radiated such strength and assurance, almost seeming to glow like the moon herself, he was somewhat intimidated.

"So, from the beginning. I was born some time ago, but my body was weak. I was dying almost from the moment I was born, and my parents decided to try and save me. They

offered me to the spirit of the moon, who happens to live at the North Pole where I was born, and that spirit put a part of itself into my body. My hair turned white, and I became healthy. But some years after that the moon spirit was killed, and so I had to give that life back. Thus I became the moon spirit, and have existed in that state since then." She looked at him expectantly.

"I think you skipped the middle of that story."

She waved that away. "It's not important. What is important is what's happening now. The spirits have been watching you, Lysanias. Or I guess maybe judging you is a closer term to what they're doing."

"Judging me?"

"To see if you are worthy of help. You have to understand, spirits don't see the world like you do. To them, people are short lived little flames, eating up resources and doing nothing but consuming. But the spirit world is trembling, Lysanias. The spirits feel it, and they feel your passing through it as a force that can make it worse or better, depending on how things go."

"I'm only trying to help!"

"I know that. That's why I'm here, I've been the driving force behind getting you some assistance from our side. Basically I want you to help me, help you. I'm very young as spirits go. I actually had an earthly existence for a time, and that gives me a perspective they lack. I still feel urgency, the need to learn and grow and *do*. So I took up the task, and have been glad I did. Something is coming, something terrible, that's a danger to all of us, spirit and human alike."

"The shadow avatar."

"Whatever you call it. The spirit world senses it, like a fox rat gnawing at the edge of a tapestry, making it move. And now the avatar has lost her bending, she is weakest when we need her to be the strongest she can be."

"That does seem to have been part of the plan, according to Amon. If I could return her bending I would."

"I believe you. I know you're trying to help her, but that won't be enough. You're stumbling through the darkness, Lysanias. But there can be a light that can guide you." She pointed up to the moon, full and bright in the night sky overhead.

"You?"

"Yes. The spirits have, not exactly agreed, but at least given thought to what should be done. I can't wait for their unanimous agreement, not when this shadow avatar could appear at any time. You need to be trained so Korra can be trained in what she can do. The spirits aren't exactly happy about it, letting the avatar know she can summon them to her world, but they at least realize to not go and fight puts us all in danger."

"What exactly are you proposing? Teaching me to summon you?"

"That, and more. We spirits know much that humans haven't figured out yet. I'm no expert myself, having not been a spirit for long. But they can tell me what to teach Korra, including all the bending she can still do, like spirit bending. That will allow me, and other spirits that can help, into your world using living people as a gateway. You fought one, you know how powerful we can be."

"Yes, that spirit was unlike anything I'd fought before."

"And yet you still tried to banish it. All the spirit world felt that attempt, Lysanias. I would recommend not trying that again, in future. Not unless there is no other course open to you."

"It did seem to take poorly to it. But how should I have dealt with it? My mountain spirit hit it full force, and it hardly seemed slowed down."

"Sorry about that."

Lysanias looked over and was surprised to see his spirit out, watching them. He jumped away in shock, but realized what it was. "I wish you spirits would stop doing that!"

"My apologies," said the mountain spirit. "Startling you was not my intent. However, it is not good to focus on one thing to the exclusion of all else. We are linked, you should have felt my approach. But I admit the moon spirit has a nice tail."

"You can talk! Wait a second, tail?" He looked the spirit over, who was grinning. "Oh wait, now don't you start!" *Don and Everest were teasing me about the Amy on my world*

having a tail. And her two heads, because they thought I was just staring at her-

"I can, but this should be no surprise. I answer every time I hear your call."

"But that's, I don't know, it seems different."

"It would. I am inside you. In fact I'm a little hurt you haven't come to see me where I live, inside your soul. I wouldn't mind chatting about things going on out in the world."

"Really?" He blinked. "Well, I don't mind, I'd be happy to talk to you more often. You're right, we did talk before I called you out that first time, didn't we? It seems a lifetime ago."

"Indeed, it was. I do not blame you, the demands on your time are many. But there is much even I can teach you, if you wish to learn it."

"What?"

Yue nodded. "This spirit is not exactly like us, but we feel the potential in it. We believe you can empower your spirit further, give it additional abilities to aid in your fight. But the most useful thing will be combining with spirits you call, either the mountain spirit or others. By doing this, you will have the strengths of both yourself and the spirit, and Korra may learn this as well."

Lysanias shook his head. "Seriously? I never even suspected that. There is still so much I don't even know about my own abilities."

"Hence my coming to you in this way. What the moon says is true, there is much the avatar can be taught. But there is still much that can be done simply between us, as well. If you work hard, perhaps you can learn some of these advanced techniques before the coming of the shadow avatar. Every edge may make a difference. If I can keep you safer by combining our strengths in the way she proposes, I am fully willing to do so."

"I'm no stranger to working hard on my abilities. It seems even back home, before the flood, there was more we could have done if we had known." *Did the angels that taught us just not know, or did they withhold information?*

"Perhaps the spirits in that time had the same reservations as the spirits here. Making you too powerful, like the avatar may become if she completes this training. I cannot say, if I had that knowledge it was lost in our long sleep. I can only tell you what I know is possible now."

"And what is possible, exactly?" he asked, turning back to Yue.

"First, you must learn my chant, as you can already call the spirit of the dragonfly. I can increase her ability to learn things rapidly, and you as well, Lysanias. Or your strength or your cunning. Whatever you need when you call me out. But for the beginning, I will help you learn more rapidly. Then, you must learn to physically call me into your world, allowing me to directly interact with Korra and Jinora, who is also quite promising in her own way. Korra can then learn to call me, while you learn other spirits to call. We are offering you our powers, Lysanias, I hope we can trust you will use them well."

"I will. But calling you physically? Does that mean you would take the place of my mountain spirit?"

She shook her head. "No. You and the mountain spirit are bound together. While it is active, you may call other spirits as well. In my case there is only one moon spirit, so for example I could not be called by you if already bound to Korra. But the spirit of fire is everywhere there is a flame. That spirit could aid all of you, be in multiple places at once."

"I see." *Because there are lots of spirits that represent fire, or trees, or clouds. But only one moon, hence one moon spirit. What would the spirit of the chaos moon back home be like? Do I even want to know?*

"Of course there is a cost. Your soul can only support so much, and keeping us in your world will drain your spiritual energy."

Lysanias frowned. "Bet I could fix that. I could call you, then slap a ward on that allowed you to stay here and not be a drain on whoever called you." *Yeah, that would be perfect as a ward. And I haven't made any new ones in some time, I don't want to forget how.*

"You would know better than I in that regard," she admitted. "That would be ideal, if true."

"I'll think about it."

"There are techniques to allow us to be less of a drain, you and Korra must be taught them as well. It is only by binding us closely to your own souls that you will be able to fuse

with us, and truly awaken our powers in your realm.”

“Wait a second, some of this sounds fine, but how will I call you in my next reality? It may not have a moon spirit! Is some of what I’m going to learn only useful here?”

“I do not think so,” Yue guessed. “From what the mountain spirit has told me, and what we spirits have observed of your use of it, some part of the spirit comes from you.”

“Sure, I’ll get hurt if it does. And I’m using my energy to project it, because it tires me out when I practice.”

“Indeed. So while I specifically may not exist on another world, as long as it has a moon it should have a spirit of some kind to call upon. The procedure will be the same, though you get a totally different spirit. Naturally you may have to explain yourself to them before they will help you, but in a sense they will be you, as well. Your spirit energy given form, our power and desires. Wherever there is the feminine, wherever there is love, so too shall the moon spirit answer your call.”

“Just like calling the dragonfly spirit I suppose. Does this world even have dragonflies?”

“We do, but I suspect you would not recognize them, should you see one.”

“That’s fair. Say, until that time I’m good enough to bring you into the human world, can you tell me what I should tell Korra to practice? She must be able to use other forms of bending apart from the one she discovered fighting the spirit.”

“I can. And may the spirits forgive me.” She sadly shook her head.

“What?”

“Once she is reborn she will again have access to the four elements, *plus* whatever she learns in this lifetime. She has already discovered two “secret” forms of bending, but there are others. I can only hope learning the rest does not turn her future incarnations to arrogance. As you suspect, the crown chakra can manipulate space, time, and the senses. To this end she can practice a form of bending within herself that will allow her to see further, hear fainter sounds, even be granted a more acute sense of smell or touch. She could learn to bend space, teleporting herself to other places as you do or objects to or away from her. And finally, the ultimate bending- that of time itself. She could walk through a frozen world, having stepped between seconds. I trust you realize what that would mean?”

“She would be virtually untouchable unless taken by surprise.”

“Yes. Of course her energy is not limitless, and stopping time in this way would strain even her. Still, being able to perform this bending once a day could shift the balance of power in the world.”

“Can she learn that before the shadow avatar makes itself known?” *Because if she could take me with her into this “frozen second” while I watch how she does it...*

“I do not think so. It requires mastering nearly all the other forms of bending, space bending at the very least. She must be able to move through space with precision, to be able to shift herself into frozen time. She should focus her efforts on us, learning what spirits to call when, and how to do so. Better a half dozen spirit allies to attack all at once than stopping time for a fraction of a second once a day.”

“I agree,” Lysanias said with a nod. *I suppose it’s for the best. Still, I know it’s possible now, note it down in my book and I’ve got... yet another thing to work towards. Well, even if it’s twenty years from now, who cares? I’ll still be around, right?* He stood up. “Korra will be thrilled about all this, no doubt. For now, let’s get started with me so I have something to take back to her to practice tomorrow. The sooner we can get you to our world, the sooner you can start training her directly.”

“Indeed. To be clear however I can actually train all of you, and I am eager to begin. When I became the moon spirit I became the ultimate water bender, and can train Amy to the very pinnacle of the art. I have been talking to a variety of spirits, both big and small, learning how they could be called into the human world. Most are quite excited at the prospect, actually. I may be a very young spirit, but I’ve been learning all I can about how our two species can work together in greater harmony. And for Jinora, I think she is something special. She has a weight in the spirit world that I have never seen, her passing causes ripples there in a most peculiar way. I will be interested to see what she can do, as well.”

“Sounds like we’ll be keeping you busy. I really will have to make that anchoring ward in that case.”

“I look forward to it. But there is one more question of yours I did not get to answer. What should you have done with the spirit?”

“Oh, right, we got distracted by my mountain spirit.”

“The answer to that question relates to the energy techniques you have already been teaching the benders, so it is good they have been practicing them. There is a technique that can cleanse negative energy from a spirit, replacing it with positive energy. That will calm a spirit, keep it from attacking.”

“Great! Can you teach us that as well?”

“There is no need for me to do so. There is a person even now traveling by boat to your location. He will arrive by the time the festival begins, you may observe the technique from him and learn it that way. Korra and Amy may learn it as well.”

So, someone did figure the energy techniques out on their own. And then what, just kept it to themselves? Sounds like a really swell guy. “We’ll just have to hope it doesn’t attack anyone in the meantime. All right, that sounds like a plan. Anything else before we begin?”

She sprang up and moved into the moonlight. “I don’t think so. Now, I can’t exactly write this down so you’ll just have to practice it. The ritual chant for calling me, the moon spirit, goes like this...”

Chapter 29

Korra Rides the Soul Train

When: The next day

Where: Breakfast table

"I wonder if anyone can tell me about the moon spirit?" Lysanias asked as the family gathered around the breakfast table. Korra's parents had already left to do whatever it is they did all day, but Katara was mostly retired and was happy to serve them breakfast.

"Oh, oh, gran-gran can tell you all about the moon spirit!" Jinora gushed. "I love that story! It's soooooo romantic!"

"In a tragic play sort of way where everybody dies at the end," Katara clarified, as Lysanias looked over at her. "But I'm happy to tell the story. It began when we were just kids, and Aang was traveling the world looking for bending masters. He needed to master the elements, though now I see that was just silly, the avatar doesn't really need to master bending at all, do they?"

"I'm over it," Korra told her. "Just get on with the story. Why do you ask, anyway?"

"Am I getting on with the story or not?"

"Sorry."

"Right then. We had made it to the North Pole, and my brother, may his soul rest in peace, fell head over heels for Yue, daughter of the chief. Naturally, as it was my bother she was already promised to another. At the time Aang and I were learning water bending from a master there, though I had to knock some sense into him to take combat training instead of being put with the other girls in the healer's class." She chuckled. "Little did I know then, learning *where* to strike on the body would have served me well in battles to come."

"Like chi-blocking?" Korra asked.

"Exactly like that, my dear. But I digress. While we were training, my brother was out making eyes at Yue, but that was cut short when the fire nation attacked."

"I never understood that part," Amy admitted. "I mean it wasn't like the people of the north had any resources the fire nation desired. Expect ice, and any water bender can make you ice. Did they really just want to wipe out water benders?"

Katara nodded. "Just as they had wiped out air benders many years before. They didn't occupy the air temples. Didn't take any air bender resources. They just destroyed, like fire. In this case it was some general in search of glory or whatnot. In any case, during the attack general whatever his name was found his way into the place the spirit resided. And he took the spirit from the water, and watched as it died."

"Water bending everywhere was snuffed out in that instant," Amy told them. "It was a dark day, indeed. Well, it was night time. It was a dark night, indeed."

"Yes. We all thought water bending, and the moon spirit, would now be forever absent in our world. But then Yue chose to give back the life the moon spirit had given her, and in that instant, she and the Moon spirit became as one."

"Her brother lost his love, but his love was always able to look down upon the world and see him," sighed Jinora. "How romantic."

"You keep using that word, I'm not sure it means what you think it means," Korra told her.

"Shows what you know!"

"And so water bending returned, and the fire nation was driven back by Aang. But the question remains, why do you ask?"

"To verify her story. It matches up, at least what little she told me, so she's probably on the level and this is not some sort of plot by the shadow avatar."

Katara and the others looked confused. "Whose story?" Jinora was the first to ask.

"Yue. It seems we're going to get some help, now that the spirits know your injury is permanent. She's offered to come train you in spirit bending. Train all of you, actually. Amy in water bending, and while she didn't mention anything specific, she said Jinora had 'a great promise.' I'll be interested in what you can learn."

Katara shot up from the table. "*You* spoke to the moon spirit? How? Who are you?"

"Ah yes, we've never really been properly introduced, have we? You know my name,

but you probably thought I was just a friend of the avatar's. That's of course true, but it's not the whole truth. If I'm going to be staying around here you really should know, I suppose."

"He's from another reality, gran gran," Jinora told her excitedly. "A world apart from this one, that doesn't have bending, but does have magic. And he can do magic, at least a little, and way more too. You really talked to the moon spirit?"

"In a dream. She taught me the chant I can use to call upon her power, and gave me some instruction on how to physically bring her here into our world. You'll be practicing that today, Korra."

"What are you going to be doing?" she demanded, obviously not wanting to be doing all the work around here.

"Working on a ward to keep her here more easily. Pulling a spirit into our world will be a strain for anyone, even you. But once she's here, I hope I can anchor her with a ward so she won't continuously drain energy from whoever calls her."

"Wait, slow down. You're from where? What's a ward? Are *you* from another world?" Katara asked Amy.

"Nope, I'm from Republic City, though maybe that counts? I work in a library, or at least I did until it got shut down. I wonder if it'll open again, now that Amon is dealt with. Ah well, this is more exciting anyway."

"I'm too old for this," Katara announced, sitting again. "Now it's your turn to start from the beginning."

"Sure. It began when I was woken up by a dwarf named Don and a gnome named Everest..."

Some time later, Lysanias' story was done, and Katara was working on getting over her disbelief. Korra's new bending helped, after all if the avatar could suddenly shoot beams of darkness and create small illusions with light bending, why couldn't someone be from another world?

"So there's some sort of extremely powerful being that wants to suck all the potential out of our world in hopes it might cause them to evolve themselves?" Katara asked. "What stops it from just, you know, doing it?"

"Because you're all here," he explained. "All that potential is bound up in you. The true form of the shadow avatar would tear through this world like it wasn't there, like we were just drawn on a sheet of paper. But then the potential would be lost, you see? It has to I guess perform a sort of ceremony to properly take the energy of your reality. That allows people like me to step in and stop it. It's constrained in many ways, and it can be beaten back and made to flee."

"And you were told this by another being of the same type, who wishes to preserve our way of life?"

"That's right. It works through possession, someone or something on this world is now possessed, and working towards the end I've described. Unless I miss my guess, some kind of very powerful spirit, given what Amon said to me. This spirit told him how to remove bending from people, and basically aimed him at the avatar. Result, Korra can't use traditional bending anymore. Why it didn't strike directly itself is your next question. I have no idea."

"Didn't want to tip its hand, maybe?" Korra guessed. "The point is, rather than give up, I decided to fight and see what other types of bending I could use to defend my world."

"You decided?" Amy asked, and if she knew what air quotes were she would have been using them for that statement.

"That's right."

"So that night on the ledge, that was you deciding, was it?"

"Ledge? Oh dear, I kind of thought that's what it was, given your reaction the next day."

"Great, thanks a lot Amy. Now Katara knows too!"

"It's all right, I won't tell your parents," Katara promised. "It probably wouldn't have worked anyway. Aang was frozen in ice for a hundred years before I thawed him out. Probably something similar would have happened to you."

"Oh." Korra paused. "I hadn't thought of that."

"In any case, I'm getting on in years but I'll give you whatever help I can. Until the

moon spirit arrives I'm happy to critique your water bending, and give you some lessons in healing if you're interested."

"I would love that, thank you!" Amy gushed.

"She said I had a great potential, huh? What's she like?"

"As beautiful as the moon," Lysanias recalled. "There was such a presence about her, and she was funny too. She snuck up on me and made me fall in the water where the fish were. She laughed and laughed, seeing me there all soaking wet. But she had fallen trying to steady me and got just as soaked, so she was laughing at herself just as much. I liked her."

"And I'll get to meet her?"

"If I remember everything she told me about summoning her into this world. She said she wasn't that powerful a spirit, so supporting her shouldn't take much."

"Not a powerful spirit?" Korra protested. "She's the *moon*."

"She's a human that ascended into becoming a spirit when she died," he countered.

"She's still human at the core. The way she explained it, in a fight between her and that spirit we fought yesterday, it would win. She's not that fast or powerful. But she's learning, and she knows things as a spirit she's willing to pass down to us. I guess it's a matter of what powers the spirit has we have to support, how physically powerful they are that makes them easier or harder to sustain in this world. That makes sense, right?"

"I guess, I'll take your word for it. Let's get started!"

"So what do I have to do?" Korra asked, now standing outside with the others. Amy had again made an ice dome to cut down on the wind, and Katara was there already mentally reviewing her technique.

"Wait a second, I almost forgot," Lysanias told her, holding up a hand. He brought out one of the disks he had made from the mecha tanks and a sphere of light out of his pocket. "I wanted to see how long a chain I would need to make. Broke this off that orb you were holding before, figure a large piece will work as well as a small one."

"Chain?"

He stepped over to Amy and looked her over. "What?" she said, blushing a little.

"About that long then? Fine." He concentrated on the disk and lifted a fine chain off of it, which he threaded through a hole in the sphere. "Now if I can just remember how to make the clasp, it's been a while since I last made one of these." He concentrated and worked it out, then handed the whole thing to her. "Just in case. And now you can't say I never get you anything, either. This might equal an airship, what do you think?"

"What's that?" Katara asked.

"Moonlight," he explained. "Full moonlight, to be specific."

"Oh no," Katara said, taking a step back, the look on her face telling them she knew exactly what that chip of moonlight meant. "I'm not teaching her that! Even if the world is ending!"

"I've already used it," Amy explained. "And a good thing I did, too. Korra might not be here if I hadn't. I know it's frowned upon, and believe me, I'll only use *that technique* as a last resort."

"What? Korra, is this true?"

"It's true," she admitted with a frown. "Personally, I approve. In fact, we should take it another step further if we can. Lysanias, can you show her how to destroy chakra centers?"

"No!" insisted Katara. "Blood bending goes too far, but to go even further than that? What you're talking about is evil!"

"Indeed, if used the way Amon was using it," Lysanias agreed. "But was my use of it, to stop Amon taking the bending of anyone else evil? I'm not so sure."

"If this 'dark spirit' has told others how to do it, we could have more than one Amon on our hands," Korra told her. "We need someone on our side to balance that scale. Lysanias won't be around forever and I've lost water bending, so I can't do it. She's the only one who can."

"I, I don't know," Katara stuttered. "To even know I knew how to do such a thing... And you can do it, along with everything else you showed me?"

"Any fool can destroy," Amy told her. "It's knowing how much to destroy that's the hard

part. How do you balance a madman roaming around causing trouble against solving the problem? What if I could have handled Amon from the start? Lots of people, Korra included, would still have their bending. Would it have made me evil? Better than just simply killing Amon outright, wouldn't you say? Because to be sure he never broke out of prison and started taking bending from people again, that's what we would have had to do." Katara looked serious, as if trying to come up with a counter argument. Amy turned back to Lysanias. "Teach me."

"I can tell you the theory, it's going to be impossible to actually practice."

"That's fine. Korra should hear it too though. Her next reincarnation may need to know."

"Agreed."

Amy solemnly put the moonlight chip around her neck and turned to Katara, tucking it under her shirt. "I feel the weight of it, believe me. I consider this," she tapped it, "a sacred trust. Isn't that what the moon spirit is choosing to do as well? She revealed herself to Lysanias. She offered her knowledge and skill to us. Even to fight by our side when the shadow avatar makes itself known. Are you wiser than a spirit? Wiser than the being that sent Lysanias here? He can do it, and more besides. Is he evil? No. Because of how he *uses* his gifts. Just the same as me not walking down the street freezing people in place because I can. Blood bending is no different."

"Doesn't mean I have to like it."

"I don't disagree. But right now we need every edge we can get. If you're still willing to help?"

"I'll teach you healing and regular bending, you'll have to do the other on your own."

"Meaning you *could* teach me blood bending? So we're not so different after all, are we?"

Katara gave her a dark look, but relented, looking down. "No."

So Lysanias chanted for the moon spirit, willing Korra to learn things more easily. He chanted for several minutes, then explained what the moon spirit told him to do. She seemed to understand, it was simply a minute of chanting while manipulating your spirit energy in a certain way. She just had to figure out what that way was, not unlike what she had done with darkness and light bending. Instead of drawing a spirit's influence to a person, as Lysanias did with his chant, she had to try putting that energy *over there* and make the spirit manifest using that energy. With that done he chanted for the dragonfly spirit, hoping to make it easier for her, then said to come get him in an hour.

"I'll put the spirits back on you and see if I can spot any mistakes you're making with the ritual. Not that I've seen it more than a few times myself."

"Maybe I can help," Jinora told them. "I did attract that spirit yesterday, after all. Maybe I can tell if she's doing it right."

"Shoot, speaking of spirits, we didn't tell my dad about the dark spirit that attacked us!" Korra swore.

"I'll go find him, you girls practice," he told them.

So he went to do that, then got started working on a ward to anchor a spirit to this plane using the ideas Yue had offered the night before. Every hour he went and put the two spirits influence back on Korra, who said with the moon spirit on she could become ghostlike.

"Really?" Lysanias asked, a bit shocked. "I never noticed anything like that with the dragonfly. How strange."

That repeated, Lysanias even going into a meditation to discuss various ideas with his mountain spirit on what might work, and put the moon spirit on himself wishing for better ideas or faster thinking. That didn't actually work, he found out, the moon spirit only able to be called once, and for one specific thing at a time. *That figures. Too bad my mountain spirit can't talk, it could probably support another 'copy' of the spirit. Or maybe not, as it's actually me? Ah, who knows?*

It was two hours after lunch that Jinora came tearing into the place, excitedly calling Lysanias to come out and see. He got up from his work and got his jacket, following her outside. There stood Korra, smiling broadly, while just as he remembered her from the dream

Yue floated beside her. "You did it!" he exclaimed. "Korra that's wonderful!"

"Hello again, Lysanias," Yue greeted him. "You remembered the dream, that's a relief."

"I did. It's good to see you here."

"It's good to *be* here," she agreed. "I have a physical form again, thanks to you and Korra. As agreed, I'll train you in other spirits and water bending as I'm able."

"I helped," Jinora told them all. "I was able to tell if she was making any mistakes and correct her chant. The energy stuff too!"

"That's great, Jinora."

"She really does have an affinity for spirits," Yue agreed. "Even if she can't call them herself, and I think there are things *only* she can do, her insights seem to be correct."

"I'm glad my dad let me stay here."

"I am too." The two smiled at each other.

"So I have a question," Amy asked her.

"Of course."

"We've proven at least three additional types of bending exist. Darkness. Light. And now spirit. But everyone that can bend up to this point has just used the main four."

"That's correct. But it's not a question."

"My question is this- all the people of the world, are they *all* benders? Could someone be taught darkness bending but we just never considered it? Is that where the chakra knowledge came from? Maybe people could bend other things before, but that knowledge was lost or worse, suppressed?"

The others looked shocked, obviously they had not considered that possibility.

"I can only tell you what I've learned since I became a spirit," Yue told her. "I would have to ask a spirit older than myself that question. I could, if you really wanted to know."

"Easy enough to check," she realized. "Just get a bunch of people that supposedly can't bend and see if they actually can bend something apart from the four elements."

"That would work."

"That aside, Lysanias, have you finished any wards yet? She's draining me pretty fast."

"Not yet I'm afraid. I need a few more hours of trying things. I've been sticking some to my spirit, but they just burn up. In theory when I get it right it'll stay, though not really do anything because they aren't maintained in the same way. But you're both spirits, so I think it's a good test."

"I'll have to let you go, Yue. I'm sorry."

"Oh, don't be. But before you do, let me explain how to keep me here without being so much of a drain. You can only practice that while I'm here, after all."

"Okay, as long as it isn't too long."

"Here," Lysanias offered her a battery ward. "That should help a little."

"Thanks."

She explained how to further use spiritual energy to tie her to the world, and Korra tried a few times before she was forced to give up and release her.

"Goodbye for now, I'll see you all tomorrow?" Yue asked hopefully.

"Count on it," Korra promised, smiling.

"It was nice to see you again," Katara told her.

"And you. Again, I'm sorry about your brother. I watched him growing up, it wasn't exactly the same as being there to share his triumphs and his losses. But it helped, a little. I'm glad you both had a good life."

"You know, we did. We really did. I'll see you."

The two embraced, and Yue was gone.

"So, any regrets about us saving you now?" Lysanias asked as the group made their way back to the house. Training was over for the day given Korra had exhausted herself, and Katara had offered them all hot chocolate and homemade cookies as a reward for their hard work.

"No. I was being pretty stupid, wasn't I?"

"You felt what you felt, Korra. That isn't stupid. I'm just glad you're putting it behind you."

“Well, you summon an actual spirit into the world, moving rocks around or whatever seems a little tame in comparison. I mean, am I right?” They both laughed. “Still, this is just the beginning isn’t it?”

“That it is,” he agreed. “Once we can keep her here the real works begins.”

“So get busy!”

“Yes, *ma’am*.”

Chapter 30

Learning a few Things

When: Dinner that night

Where: The Korra household

“So you actually called down the moon spirit, and she manifested herself?” Senna asked.

“That’s right. I can show you later if you want mom.”

“No, I believe you. And... you all saw her?” Her face was screaming “please don’t let my daughter be mad, please oh please oh please.”

“I’m not crazy, mom.”

“I wasn’t saying you were, dear,” but she looked somewhat relieved anyway.

“You sort of were,” Tonraq admitted.

“We all saw her,” Lysanias assured them. He snapped his fingers. “Actually that reminds me. Do you know who’s coming for the spirit festival?”

“People come from all over, can you be more specific?”

“Maybe. It was something Yue said to me in the dream when she first came to me. With everything else going on it slipped my mind. She said someone was on their way right now, by boat, to the South Pole. Someone who could help us with that rouge spirit we fought.”

“It hasn’t been seen again, has it?” Amy asked nervously.

“There were no reports of a dark spirit hanging around,” Tonraq assured her. “I’ve suggested a guard be placed on the site of the spirit festival.”

“That’s for the best, but make sure they know how dangerous it is. Don’t attack with less than eight or ten experienced water benders. Keep your distance from it and come get us.”

“We can handle one unruly spirit,” he scoffed.

“No dad, you can’t. The way this thing moved, it was crazy. We were lucky just to drive it off.”

“I see. Well, to tell the truth there is probably a person coming by boat that could help us with that spirit. My brother.” He snarled the last word.

“Don’t get along, huh?” Jinora asked.

“That would be an understatement. He’s good with spirits, don’t get me wrong, but honestly I can’t stand the sight of him.”

“Well, in that case I’ll steal his technique and he can be on his way,” Lysanias told them. Her parents looked a little confused and one was probably going to ask what he meant. But Lysanias went on. “Wait a second, that doesn’t make sense. If he can deal with this spirit why can’t you?”

“He’s made the study of spirits the focus of his life,” he explained. “I don’t know how he does what he does.”

“Can you describe it?”

“I guess. He uses water bending to surround them, then the water starts to glow and their negative energy dissipates. I’ve seen him do it a couple of times.”

How does one practice such a technique? Roam around looking for dark spirits? Maybe he knows a friendly spirit who let him practice it. The spirit wouldn’t have to be dark, just there. As long as the energy is transferred they know it’s working. Huh. That’s a chilling thought, if dark energy can be pulled away from a spirit leaving light energy, why couldn’t light energy be pulled away using the same technique? Turn a friendly spirit feral. Of course then it might just decide to attack you, as you’re nearest to it. So yeah, that’s probably a bad idea. Still, to not share your findings with anyone. “And no one else knows how to do this?” he blurted. “He didn’t say, ‘hey everyone, I just discovered this great new technique that can help you out of a bad spot if you’re attacked by an angry spirit! Let me show you how it works!’ I mean, really?”

“Not that I know of. He certainly didn’t tell me how.”

“To keep knowledge like that to himself. Sounds like a real great guy. I can see why you don’t get along,” Korra admitted with a shake of her head.

And it brings up a larger issue. What other techniques have people discovered over

the years, not told anyone about, and which died with them? Maybe that's how information about the other chakras came to be, bits and pieces of lore that someone let slip that have been compiled over thousands of years.

"Even before we knew you were the avatar, he wanted to take you away and train you up north," her mother added.

"Seriously? I knew I was the avatar when I was like six. He really wanted to take me away from you guys before that?" They both nodded. "Well, thanks for making sure that didn't happen."

"Of course. I wasn't going to let him just take you."

"If you think of anything else he may have let slip about this technique, let us know," Amy requested. "We can ask Yue about it, just in case that spirit attacks again. And I'll look through any books on the spirits I can find around here, see if any mention anything like that."

"You kids are certainly keeping busy," Senna remarked.

"Trying to save the world? Yeah, I should think so mom."

The next day Yue was pleased to receive a brand new ward of binding, allowing her to remain in the human world without being a further drain on Korra.

"And why is she just draining me?" Korra had asked. "You could learn that skill. Heck, you *should* be learning it. If we can only call one spirit a piece, you learning it too would mean the spirits have been doubled!"

"I can learn it later, once you've got the technique down a bit more," he explained. "The chant is nearly identical, it's mainly a spiritual energy difference from what Yue said to me. For now I'm going to focus on my own spirit, and hope I can combine with it before the shadow avatar makes a move."

"But isn't that worse?" Jinora asked. "I mean it removes a combatant from the field, right?"

"From an outside perspective, sure. But think about it from my perspective. When it's running around out here that doubles my chances of being hurt. If I could combine with it our physical attributes will be combined, as well as our skills."

"It can't get hurt most of the time though," Amy protested. "So it's really a judgment call depending on what type of fight you're in."

"Right. If I was fighting people that couldn't see spirits, the obvious thing to do would be combine with it, and be completely out of danger."

"I see," Korra allowed. "So what's next?"

"Next I explain the other types of bending you can practice, and then work with Jinora a bit."

"I already know," she protested. "Space, time-"

"Ah, but what does that mean?" Yue asked, holding up a finger. "You would just try to bend space and teleport yourself, wouldn't you?"

Korra's eyes shifted back and forth. "Maybe."

Yue shook her head. "Before you can try that, you have to practice bending space in a way that won't rip you apart if you get it wrong. Rather ironically, it will involve what on the surface resembles ripping other things apart, but you'll just have to trust me on that one. Learning to walk before you learn to fly, and so on." She indicated herself, still hovering above the ground. "This will be your first task." She gestured and some snow lifted towards her hand, forming into a sphere of ice. She handed it over.

"What am I supposed to do with this?"

"Bend the space the ice is stuck on, tearing it apart."

"I can do that?" Korra's eyes were wide.

"Indeed."

"Wow." She paused, looking the ice over this way and that. She looked up. "How do I do that?"

"I don't know, I'm not a space bender. The way it was explained to me is this; imagine photographs pinned to a wall. You can take the photo down and tear it in half. But you can also smash the wall down, destroying the picture that way. That's what you have to do to the ice. You can't water bend, don't make that face I know you've accepted it, so you'll know

you're bending space when you tear it. And no cheating by just tearing it with your hands, either. Think of the ice as 'pinned' to this physical reality. Just as spirits are 'pinned' to the spirit world, and that's why they aren't here. Break the wall that the ice is pinned to, *not* the ice itself. Do you understand? I see by your face that you don't."

"Who would understand that?"

"Humm, I'll have to think of another way to explain it. If you don't want to start on that, there are three other areas we can explore. Lightning bending, because the spirit chakra and the fire chakra are separate so you should still be able to do that. A lesser form of spirit bending that will simply allow you to gain impressions from nearby spirits rather than summoning them here. And finally enhancing your own senses using the crown chakra so you can see and hear better."

"But could she smell better?" Jinora asked, waving her hand in front of her nose.

"Oh, I'll smell you better!" she promised, lunging for Jinora who laughed and skipped away.

"Actually she could, but I didn't want to say that because I knew *someone* would make a joke out of it. And I was... they aren't even listening are they?" Both were laughing and throwing snow at each other by this time.

"No, I don't think so," Amy told her. "I'm fascinated though. Why do you think fire benders get to use two chakras? Do you think I could learn to use two chakras? Which two? Could I use more than two?"

"Yes, I do," Yue told her, holding up a hand to forestall more questions. "As you'll learn from, you said it was Korra's uncle who's coming?"

"Her father said it was probably his brother, yes. Don't you know?"

"I know a person with great spiritual abilities is on the way, yes. His relationship to you all, I would have no way of knowing. Anyway, her uncle must use the throat chakra when calming spirits, as that is the energy pathway relating to them. As a water bender you should thus be able to do it as well."

"But the throat is spirit and electricity," she protested. "That doesn't make any sense!"

"Why wouldn't a water bender throw lightning?" Yue countered. "Fire isn't lightning, any more than water is healing. You can't heal a wound by drinking a glass of water, now can you?"

"No, not usually."

You could if the water was magically imbued to do that, or created with alchemy or artificing. But I don't think that's what she meant.

"There you are. You're going to have to keep an open mind if you want to realize your full potential."

"I'll do that. But for now I think I should just stick to trying to become the best water bender I can. You said you could help with that, right?"

"I can. If you two are quite finished, then?" She looked over to the other two girls, now laying down in the snow after their romp.

"Sorry, sorry, all set again!" Korra told her, getting up again.

Yue shook her head. "It's a wonder Tenzin kept his sanity as long as he did," she muttered.

"What about me?" Jinora asked, also coming back over.

"I have a special idea in mind for you," Yue told her. "I believe that you have the potential to walk the line between the spirit world and this one. Let me explain. What I feel from you is the ability to unpin your spirit from your body but leave it pinned to this world. Many humans can allow their spirits to enter the spirit world, and I'm sure you can too. But more difficult is only going part way. This would allow you to, in essence, act as a spirit. You could travel quickly, and no wall or door could bar your sight."

"Wow. You really think I could do that?"

"I really do. Would you like to try it?"

She nodded. "Very well. Lysanias, why don't you apply my ability with your chant, and we can get started. Perhaps with her ability to learn augmented, Korra will understand my explanation about space bending a little better?"

"I hope so, because that was a bunch of nonsense as far as I'm concerned," Korra

repeated.

So Lysanias chanted first for the dragonfly, putting it on himself, and then chanted for the moon spirit, putting it Korra and the others. Naturally he had a fire going, to provide all the extra help he could get. Yue then began instructing the others, giving them various exercises to perform while she watched and critiqued them.

At lunch the group sat and Yue looked longingly at the food they were unwrapping.

“Would you like some,” Jinora offered.

“Oh, I would love some,” she gushed, “but I can’t really eat anymore. You know, being dead, and all that.”

“How do you find it?” Amy asked. “Being dead, I mean?”

“You get used to it, I suppose,” she replied after a moment’s thought. “It’s hard to explain being a spirit to someone who isn’t. I mean I’m not really dead/dead am I? I became a spirit and left your world, which is like dying, but really it was more of a change in being. I’m just glad Lysanias came along, I wouldn’t have been able to contact any of you others even in dreams. And so I would never have been able to come back here.” She put her hand in the snow. “I still can’t really feel cold, or warm,” she indicated the fire that was still burning. “But on the other hand I know everything that goes on under the moon.” She looked up, but the moon wasn’t visible yet. “So it’s a trade off.”

“I guess,” Jinora admitted. “Can you feel this?” She got up and hugged Yue, who smiled and hugged her back.

“I can feel the intent behind it, yes.”

“Hugging you feels kinda strange,” Jinora admitted, pulling back. “I’ve never hugged moonlight dancing off a still pond before. But that’s what it felt like.”

“I have to try it!” Amy announced, bounding up herself.

“Wait, I get to first, I’m the avatar!”

“Now now, girls, there’s hugs for everyone.”

“So what spirit would you like to learn next?” she asked as the others ate.

“Whatever that spirit was that tore the four of us to pieces like it was nothing,” Korra suggested without hesitation.

“True, whatever that spirit was, I want it on my side the next time,” Amy agreed, touching her chest. “I didn’t even see it move and the next thing I know I’m waking up with my chest slashed up.”

Yue pursed her lips, thoughtful. “You say it moved fast, it could be a lightning spirit, or a wind spirit. Neither is that much of a drain to keep around, you should be able to support at least one fairly soon, if you practice spirit bending rather than relying on this to keep me around.” She pointed to the ward.

“We can do that, but you said the stronger a spirit is, the more spiritual energy it would take, right? That’s why you’re fairly easy to keep here. You may be a water bender, but so are a lot of people. I don’t see you moving like this spirit did.”

“Exactly,” she agreed. “That should give you some idea of just how weak that spirit you fought was, in an absolute scale.”

The others looked at each other, horrified at the implication.

And so under the watchful moon the group trained in their respective skills. She told them what she could, and the others helped each other as well. Lysanias could help all three with feeling and manipulating energy, and Amy now had four water bending teachers if you counted Korra’s dad. Jinora poured over her books on the spirits at night, looking up good ones they might want to call, while Lysanias spent time talking to his spirit and flying about making sure that dark spirit wasn’t in the area causing trouble. He had to modify his jacket to allow for the wings but that was fine, and at night he made armor wards or battery wards if he wasn’t too wiped out.

The group decided on a wind spirit to learn next, so Lysanias and Korra practiced the chant for that. Lysanias found when the spirit was on him from the chant he was far faster than he would normally be, and when Korra managed to summon one physically it was more

than happy to help.

“But there’s thousands of us,” he explained. “Unless you try to get me every time, we’ll probably never see each other again.”

“Can I do that?” Korra asked Yue.

“I don’t see why not,” she replied. “I’m not sure if it would be easier or harder to call a specific spirit to you. On the one hand it’s like calling out to someone in a crowded room. They’re going to perk up when they hear their name. But I can see it going the other way too, because what if it’s closer to a party in a mansion and you have to shout loud enough to be heard from the front door?”

“There’s really no way to quantify it,” Korra mused.

“I guess only performing an experiment would solve the issue,” Amy suggested. “We do a summoning fifty times at random and fifty times trying to get a specific spirit. Whichever type succeeds most, without putting extra effort in mind you, is the easier method.”

“A hundred times? You want to kill me? I wouldn’t be able to do fifty in a day!”

“I didn’t say all in one day.”

“But there’s a flaw in your plan,” Lysanias told her. “After twenty five times let’s say she would hopefully be better at calling that spirit than she was when she started. You get better at what you practice, right? So really even that wouldn’t be completely fair.”

“Oh, you’re right. I wonder if we could design an experiment that could take that into account?”

“I’m still not doing it fifty times in a row!”

“Not even for science?” Amy asked, a little put out.

“No, not even then.”

“Spoilsport.”

Time passed, nearly a month as the spirit festival rides, games, and food vendors arrived and started getting ready. The dark spirit wasn’t seen again, but when the moon was in the sky Yue said it was still out there all right. Almost as if it was waiting for something. Finally it was the day Tonraq’s bother was set to arrive, and Unalaq made the scene. With his enormous boat.

And hugs. So many hugs. For everyone.

Chapter 31

Unalaq Makes the Scene

When: Day 102 in the Korra universe

Where: Docks

“Are you okay?” Korra asked as the huge boat pulled into the harbor. There was quite the crowd there, making Lysanias a bit uncomfortable, but that wasn’t the reason he looked troubled. “You don’t look too happy to be here.”

“It’s fine. I just had a dream last night,” he replied, worried. “There was an egg sitting on the table, and two hammers stood next to it, one to either side. I was walking around and carelessly bumped into it, sending the two hammers toppling into the egg. It smashed apart and a dark bird flew out of it, which tried to peck out my eyes.”

“Lovely,” Jinora told him, making a face.

“How would that work though?” Amy asked. “If you bumped a table wouldn’t one hammer fly off the edge while only one smashed the egg? I mean they would move in the same direction, right?” Everyone looked over at her. “What? It’s basic physics!”

“I don’t think it works like that in dreams,” Jinora offered.

“Oh, you’re probably right.”

“You think it has something to do with my uncle arriving?”

Lysanias shook his head. “If it doesn’t, the timing is hard to explain. The man doesn’t share techniques? His brother seems to hate him? Just who is this guy?”

“You’ll be able to see for yourself soon,” Tonraq informed them. “The ship is docking.”

And what a ship it was. More like a luxury cruise ship than anything else, it sported a wing motif, was gleaming white, and most troubling of all had a very odd “hole” in the front. The boat was huge, bigger and taller than the airship the group had used to get there, they could clearly see the comparison as it was also tied up nearby.

“That can’t be right,” Lysanias said, rubbing his eyes and looking at it again. “There’s a hole. In a *boat*.”

“Yeah, never understood that,” Tonraq told them. “You want a boat to be as water tight and structurally sound as possible. You don’t usually go putting holes in them, unless you want them to sink.”

“I think it’s more about showing off,” Amy suggested. “Like, ‘oh, we’re water benders. We can put holes in our boats and we don’t even care.’”

“That could easily be it,” he admitted.

The ship glided into the harbor and docked, extending the plank that several figures dressed in heavy robes descended on. The first two were guards, holding spears, but next up was Unalaq himself, followed by his two kids. Tonraq’s face was twitching from trying not to scowl, but Senna looked like she was trying not to grin at his discomfort. Unalaq himself, however, broke into a wide grin and rushed to his brother, throwing his arms around the man.

“Tonraq!” he announced, obviously pleased. “It’s so good to see you again!”

“Huh, what? What’s... what’s this? Hug? Going on? What’s going on!?”

“And Korra!” he went on, letting his brother go and sweeping her up into a hug as well. “You’ve gotten so big! Oh, in more than one way too!” He winked.

“Uncle!” she gave him a playful shove and crossed her hands over her chest.

He laughed. “That’s right, I am your uncle. By the spirits, you’re a beautiful young woman now. If we weren’t related... And is this Senna? You’re looking radiant as usual!” He stepped over to her and kissed both her cheeks. “I’m glad to see you’re doing well, all of you.”

“Oh!” she managed, clearly out of sorts. “And you.”

“Yes, I’m doing quite well, though I needed a break.” He stretched, throwing his arms in the air. “I wish my wife could have been here to meet you but she seemed to be coming down with something right before we left. Poor thing. I insisted she stay home and get better, but I’ve been fairly worried about her. Normally I wouldn’t have come with her feeling out of sorts but it is the spirit festival. I can’t miss that. What’s wrong brother, you look like... well, that time I dared you to swallow that minnow, alive! Remember that?”

“Unalaq?” he managed.

"Of course it's me. My my my, a lot of people showed up to see me arrive, didn't they? You mustn't hog me now. Hello everyone!" He waved to everyone, and they hesitantly waved back. "I'll meet with you all sooner or later, don't you worry. Plenty of time, there's no need to worry. Let me catch up with my family for now, we can meet at dinner later. Go on now, I won't go anywhere for weeks. I'll give everyone a chance to talk to me."

The crowd started to break up, and he turned back to the group. "You of course know my two children, Desna and Eska, but who is this?" He indicated the others.

"These are my friends," Korra told him. "Uncle, may I introduce Amy, she's a water bender from Republic City, and Lysanias, my spiritual adviser. And this is Jinora, she's Tenzin's daughter."

"Wonderful to meet you all!" he gushed, taking Lysanias' hand. "Oh, what interesting eyes you have. Hardly ever see red. Spiritual adviser? We'll have to compare notes sometime, and I'm just tickled pink she *has* a spiritual adviser. I tried to fill that role you know, but can't dwell on the past, now can we? And Amy, was it? Very nice to meet you." He kissed her hand. "And you as well, Jinora. An air bender, I take it?" He formally took her hand.

"Yes, I am."

"Splendid! We simply *must* get together so you can show me some air bending. It's the only style I really haven't been able to study in person, if you catch my drift."

"Sure, I'd be happy to."

"All right, what's going on with you?" Tonraq finally demanded. "You're up to something!"

"My dear brother, please, you wound me." He had a hand on his chest. But then he became serious again, letting out a deep breath. "I know, we've had our differences in the past, and the spirits know I've antagonized you enough when we were kids. It's only natural you would be suspicious of me. But the truth is, I'm not getting any younger. Neither of us is. I felt maybe it was finally time to let go of my old, negative ways of thinking, and maybe connect with the family I have left. I mean, haven't I pushed you away enough all these years? I was so... stupid."

"Uncle, you're not sick, are you?"

"What?" he laughed. "Oh no, it's nothing like that. Just feeling my mortality a little more than usual. You'll understand one day. I get so few chances to see my family, all the way around the world. Haven't we done enough fighting for one lifetime, Tonraq? Let this be the year we put all that behind us." He held out a hand.

"You... I... You want to... I can't... I have to go. Check. Festival. Yes, check it. Have to-" He looked like he was being pulled in two directions at once and finally wandered off in a daze.

Unalaq sighed, putting his hand down. "Guess we'll just have to give him some time. I have been fairly horrible to him in the past. It's only natural he might resent me." He darted behind his own children, who were probably about Korra's age, and threw his arms around both. "But come, say hello kids! You remember Korra, don't you?"

"Hello Korra," said one of the twins.

"Hello Korra," said the other.

Wow, they must be twins. I can't really tell them apart, which is weird. One of them sounded like a girl while the other sounded like a-

"Dad!" Jinora suddenly shouted, and looked off into the distance. Everyone looked, and there was the sky bison, growing larger in the sky. Moments later the air bending family landed and Jinora was scooped up by her parents, laughing.

"You see? Now that's family," Unalaq remarked. "Why can't we have that?"

"I believe it may be too late for that," one of the twins remarked.

"Yes father, I am much too big to pick up in that way," remarked the other.

With several hours to go before the start of the festival the families got reacquainted, Jinora talking a mile a minute about spirits and learning to leave her body. To which Tenzin simply said "Did you?" like he didn't believe a word of it. She wisely left out the part where she nearly died in a spirit attack, because she's not stupid, and the group sat down to an informal meal before the main feast later that evening.

“Uncle, sorry to talk business after you’ve just arrived,” Korra began, “but we need your help.”

“My help?” he asked, clearly curious. “What can you need my help for?”

“There’s a spirit lurking around the festival grounds, and my dad said you might know a technique that can help stop it before it rampages through the place. Our way certainly didn’t work.”

“A dark spirit?”

“Yes.”

“I see. How do you know that? And what do you mean, ‘our’ way?”

“It, uh, made itself known to us when we were out trying to contact any local spirits in the area.”

“Made itself known? That’s an odd phrase to use.”

“That’s not important. The point is, we drove it off but we need to make sure it doesn’t hurt anyone else. Anyone. Doesn’t hurt anyone.”

His eyes narrowed. “Ah, made itself known meaning it attacked you?”

“What’s this?” asked Tenzin. “Jinora didn’t say anything about that.”

“No, no, there was a, uh, brief scuffle I admit, but it was fine. Lysanias drove it off. We didn’t want to seriously hurt it, of course, so we let it go.”

“It’s fine dad,” Jinora assured him.

Yes, it didn’t nearly kill half our group.

“I see. You were right to come to me. We’ll have to head out there, the number of people at the festival will surely draw it. But to answer your question, yes, I can use my bending to calm it. I would be honored if you would allow me to teach you the technique before I leave, Korra.”

“Oh, yes, I would love that!”

Wait, according to her father he never offered to teach anyone. He’s not turning out to be the person we were told. But would the shadow avatar be so... nice? He doesn’t seem like the type to want to end the world. Tonraq must be biased because of being the younger brother. Right?

“It’s settled then. After we finish here we’ll see about finding this spirit of yours.”

“I can find it,” Jinora promised. “I can show you what I’ve been working on, too!”

“That’s excellent.”

“I’m coming too,” Tenzin insisted.

“Of course,” Unalaq agreed. “I think you might find the technique interesting, Tenzin. I’ve often wondered if air benders could do something similar. I might finally get my chance to find out!”

“Is this all your friends?” Eska asked Korra as they got up to leave.

“Strange question, but yeah, basically. I mean if you don’t count Naga, but her table manners are terrible. That’s why she has to stay outside. Why?”

“I am unsure.” Eska looked around the room. “I have the strangest feeling that there should be another here. One I could claim as my own. I do not wish either of your friends, they have made no advancement towards me.”

“Well, you can’t have either of them,” Korra told her. “I’ve already claimed them.”

“What has gotten into you?” Desna asked Eska.

“I do not know,” she admitted. “But something... tears at my heart. It is a most peculiar feeling. Like someone is missing, someone that should be here. And these two should not.” She pointed to Amy and Lysanias, who looked at each other.

Uh, what? She’s right though, I shouldn’t be here. But by being here I’ve changed the destiny of Amy, Korra, maybe others. She can tell that? Is she the shadow avatar but yet unawakened? I’m going to have to be careful around all of them, it seems. But the bigger question is, has the destiny of those I’ve... displaced... been for good or ill?

“It is probably just heartburn. This southern food must not agree with you.”

“That is no doubt correct.” She went out the door with him.

“The door is this way,” Unalaq told Jinora, pointing.

She giggled. "But we need to know which way to go, first. Come with me. Dad, you can see what I've been learning too." She went into the next room, followed by most of the group, and settled herself on the floor. "I can only stay away a few minutes, but it should be enough. When I'm back we can head out."

"Back? Where are you going?" Tenzin asked.

"You'll see dad. Okay, here we go." She relaxed and started breathing evenly, and Lysanias felt her spiritual self leaving her body. Even he couldn't see it, Yue said in time she would be able to actually show her spirit to anyone, but for now vaguely sensing it was about all he could do.

"Good luck," he said to her, looking up at where he felt she was.

And she was gone.

"What is happening?" Tenzin insisted. "What is she doing?"

"Jinora's spirit has left her body, though it hasn't passed into the spirit world," Lysanias explained. "In this way she can rapidly fly around the area looking for the spirit. It doesn't move around a lot, we've been tracking it on and off for a couple of weeks."

"She's done what?"

"It's perfectly safe, as long as she can find her body again," he assured him. "We've watched her do it dozens of times."

"Jinora?" he hesitantly asked. "Jinora? Are you... really gone?"

"It's okay, Tenzin," Amy also assured him. "She made short trips at first, obviously. But she's been further and further. In this form she's very fast, she can cover this whole area in minutes."

"Astonishing," breathed Unalaq. "Can she enter the spirit world as well? Go all the way?"

"Not yet," Lysanias answered. "Besides, we felt we should learn more about that world before she went flying off there on her own."

"Thank goodness for that."

"Korra's been trying to learn the technique, but she's been focused more on the, ah, destructive arts than this one." *Plus she really doesn't have the patience to sit around meditating for the time required.*

"You can teach her all about that world, right Tenzin?" Korra asked, smacking him in the arm. "Then you can show her around!"

"Er, yes. Of course."

"Great. So, about this technique..."

Unalaq hadn't managed to describe the technique in any detail when Jinora opened her eyes again.

"I know where it is," she announced.

"Great, I'm looking forward to a rematch," Korra told them, smacking her hands together.

"Jinora, are you, well, are you all right?" Tenzin asked.

"I'm fine dad. You wanted me to learn spiritual stuff, right? You can't complain when I do."

"I meant out of books. Book stuff. Stuff about spirits from books. I didn't mean to become a spirit yourself."

"Yue says I have a great talent for it. It's fine dad, I'm careful. Nothing can hurt me like that, you couldn't see me could you?"

"That's not the point. I can't protect you when you're out doing that."

"I don't need protecting, I'm not a little girl anymore!"

"Yes you are!"

"As much as I hate to interrupt," Unalaq said, stepping up. "Shouldn't we have this discussion later? We should confront that spirit before it moves, or attacks the festival. You know crowds always gather to get in very early."

"Fine," he agreed somewhat angrily. "But we are talking about this later, young lady."

"Fine." She rolled her eyes.

"Also, who's Yue?" asked Unalaq. "I didn't meet anyone by that name, and Korra said this was all her friends."

"Oh, she's not around right now. She's the moon spirit. Come on." Jinora hopped up and ran to the door, pulling her coat on.

"The moon spirit. Of course."

Everyone wanted to go, and Lysanias was glad of the help in case Unalaq's technique proved to be not "all that." The two brothers and Tenzin got ready, and of course Amy wasn't going to be left out. The twins were nowhere to be found but Korra hopped up on Naga, followed by Jinora. "This way!" she pointed. Now out in the snow the bundled up group, eight in all, followed Jinora's directions to where the spirit was, which leapt up to attack them again without hesitation. But Unalaq was prepared, catching it in a spiral of water which engulfed it. The water started to shine, and the spirit along with it.

Naturally, Lysanias was "recording" every second.

This is amazing. It's an energy transference technique all right. He's basically grounding out the negative energy, literally putting it into the ground. He's replacing it with energy from his own body, positive energy. That's calming the spirit and making them stop rampaging. But I see other applications; with this I could pull energy from anything! People, lines, wards I don't need anymore. I could even reshape something with my abilities with alchemy, pull out the remnant of energy left within, and then use that object for a talisman. I'll pull the energy out of my shield cover, maybe start putting something into it. This is going to be a very important skill on my journey. Maybe the most important one, and certainly the thing Inari wanted me to learn here. The combat stuff is fine, but this is a whole different thing. I just know it.

His eyes closed and the pain went away.

And now I'm blind for hours. Great. Oh well, at least I can still sense it.

"Uncle, that was amazing," Korra gushed. "You have to teach me that!"

"As I've already said, I'd be happy to."

"What's going on?" asked the spirit, looking around. "What am I doing here?"

"You were driven to anger and in your rage, were attacking people," Tenzin shouted up to it.

"Was I? I don't even remember that. I didn't hurt anyone, did I?"

"No, it's fine," Korra said, a little too quickly. "Spirit, we have a request of you!"

"Oh?"

"Please, can we call upon you for help? I know how to summon wind spirits like yourself, and the way you fight? I've never seen anything like it. You were so strong and fast. We may need your skills to fight the shadow avatar."

"The what?" Unalaq asked. "And did you say *summon*?"

"I'll explain later, uncle," he hissed.

"Hummm," the spirit considered. "I am strong and fast, aren't I? But honestly in the world of spirits I'm not all that great. You would want a stronger spirit than I."

"But I might not be able to support a stronger spirit," she countered. "And I would rather deal with spirits I already know, so if I do call they don't waste time asking why."

"A good point. Wait a second..." It leaned over to look at her. "You talk like you know how to do spirit bending. Do you really?"

"I do. The moon spirit has been teaching me because I lost access to the other elements. I'm the avatar."

It cocked its head. "A bold statement, but easy enough to prove. Show me."

"Fine." She opened her hand, and a ball of darkness sat there, then with a flick it was replaced with an illusion of the spirit. "Amy, ice," she asked, and a ball of snow froze and rose up to her hand. The illusion winked out and ice started to vibrate. Korra scowled at it, muttering "come on!" and suddenly it blew apart. "Does that satisfy?"

The spirit seemed impressed, the others were slack jawed. "You have proven your identity to me. My name is Zeleafu. You may call upon me at any time, avatar Korra."

"Thank you."

"I must return to the spirit world now. With my rage gone I feel my hold upon this world slipping. Be aware, my form will be quite different if you call upon me with spirit bending. But it will still be me."

"Very well, thank you for telling me. If you can, speak to the moon spirit. She'll catch you up on what's going on."

"I shall. Farewell for now, all of you." Lysanias felt it vanish.

"That's what we've been doing down here, daddy," Jinora told Tenzin. "I hope you approve."

"Korra, what was the bending you just demonstrated?" Tenzin blurted.

"No, what is more important is what is this shadow avatar you mentioned," butted in Unalaq. "I think I know something about that. The spirit world has been very uneasy of late, this might explain why!"

"No need to hang out in the cold," Korra told them. "Come back to the house and we'll tell you everything."

"Yes, that's for the best," Tenzin admitted. "Come on."

Lysanias reached out a hand to Amy, who was nearest, and took it. "The way is clear," she told him. "Just snow in front of you."

"Are you okay?" Unalaq asked him. Lysanias felt his concern, and he nodded.

"I'll be fine. That's part of what we need to explain. Little too cold to go around barefoot here, right?"

"I guess?" He just looked more confused then ever, not that Lysanias could tell.

Now an hour or so later Unalaq and Tonraq were sitting, stunned, at what they had been told. "Our entire world in danger," Unalaq finally managed. "It just seems so... so..."

"Unbelievable?" Tonraq asked him.

"Exactly. But I can't discount what I've seen you do, Lysanias. And you're sure your sight will return?"

"It always has. I don't see why this time would be any different."

"You have my full support, Korra," Unalaq told her. "My kids too, they're excellent water benders. Where did they get to after lunch, anyway?" He shook his head. "We're all behind you, and if you can learn my technique even though you can't bend water anymore, maybe it'll mean anyone can. I'll be happy to try and teach all of you, if you would like. Amy and my brother will have the easiest time, of course."

"I think I can explain it well enough to teach anyone," Lysanias told them. "It's an extension of what we've already learned about manipulating our own internal energy. So it must be possible, if you can do it, those that use other chakras may be able to."

"Just relating to our own bending forms," Tenzin muttered. "Yes, I'm eager to see if it would work."

"That's excellent," Unalaq told him. "But I think I have one more piece of important news. You're trying to gather strong spirits, right? To be able to fight off this shadow avatar when it appears? I know of a very strong spirit, one that was imprisoned a long time ago *because* it was so powerful. I've read about it, anyway, and where it still is being held. If we could go talk to it, I bet in exchange for being let out it would be more than happy to help us. Yes, from what I've read it might just be one of the most powerful spirits out there. And letting it out will mean it can come here, you wouldn't need to use your spiritual energy to anchor it with this 'spirit bending' you spoke of. If this shadow avatar is as dangerous as you say, I would want it on my side for sure."

"What's it the spirit of?" asked Jinora. "Maybe I've read about it too!"

"My dear, the spirit I'm thinking of is the one and only spirit of darkness. It goes by the name 'Vaatu.'"

Chapter 32

Considerations

When: Just after the dark spirit was named

Where: Korra's house

"A spirit of darkness?" Tenzin asked, looking worried. "I don't like the sound of that."

"Oh, come now Tenzin," Unalaq scoffed. "Don't tell me you're one of those people that hears 'spirit of darkness' and immediately thinks 'oh, must be evil.'"

"Yeah dad," agreed Jinora. "Spirits aren't good or bad, that's what all the books say. They respond to us, just like their world does."

"That's right, Jinora," Unalaq praised. "A spirit of darkness is no more 'evil' than a spirit of light would be 'good.' They simply represent some aspect of our world, like the moon, or wind."

"I suppose," he admitted.

"His feeling may be influenced by my calling the force I'm trying to stop the 'shadow' avatar," Lysanias admitted. "It isn't a shadow, it's a being like Inari. The agents it used on my world just happened to be like shadows, that's all."

"And so the name stuck?" Korra asked.

"Exactly. We were calling him the shadow king, because he was directing them, but then avatar turned out to be more descriptive because of it taking people over."

"Do you know where it is?" Amy asked.

"I'm pretty sure I do," Unalaq boasted. "And we can get there fairly easily. In fact, now that I think about it this is an opportune time, with the avatar being here and all. We can take care of several things at once!"

"Like what?" Tonraq asked, eyes narrowing.

"For one, how would you like to get rid of that pesky Everstorm that goes on in this area?"

"What?"

"What's an Everstorm?" Jinora asked.

"A couple of days travel from here is this big storm," Korra explained. "It's always been there, we all just thought it was a natural phenomenon. Are you saying it's not, uncle?"

"That's exactly what I'm saying. I believe it's because of angry spirits that reside there."

"You think we can pacify the number of spirits it would take to create a storm that huge?"

He laughed. "No, no, although that could work, in a pinch." He looked thoughtful, but then went on. "Would take a while. No, we'll need to repair the damage done a long time ago, that should calm them all at once."

"Damage? What are you talking about, Unalaq?" demanded Tonraq.

"Yes, damage. According to my research there used to be a portal at the South Pole. A portal to the spirit world! There was one in the north as well, but there were more spirits here in the south so the reaction was greater. Once it was closed the spirits grew angry at our behavior, and they've been rampaging in the area around the portal ever since. It's been so long you would think they'd have gotten bored and left, but once a spirit starts something, by golly they're going to see it through to the bitter end!" He laughed.

"So let me get this straight," Tonraq clarified. "You want to go into the Everstorm, a place of inhospitable weather and below freezing temperatures. A place you suspect are dozens if not hundreds of angry spirits. At the center we *may* find some mystical portal to the spirit world, but it's been closed. We somehow get it open, that calms the spirits, which calms the storm, and we can go to where this spirit of darkness has been trapped, and ask it for help."

"Exactly. It'll be a piece of cake!"

"Have you started making cakes differently up north?"

"Come on, it'll be fun. Where's your sense of adventure?"

"Where did you find a sense of adventure?"

"It's a chance to see if my studies about this region are correct. How could I not take the chance? Besides, if I'm right this whole area will become safer, and you'll have a spirit

portal. Why not go see if we can do it?"

"Korra, what do you think?"

"You're really asking me?" She seemed quite shocked.

"Why not?" asked Unalaq. "I would value your opinion as well, Korra."

"Wow, thanks. Um, let me think." She pondered a moment. "Can my answer wait a few days? If we're going to be traveling through an area with a lot of angry spirits I would like to at least get a little practice in the technique to calm them. You can do it now, right Lysanias?"

"I can."

"So he can help teach us too. Not that I don't think you can handle it, uncle, but being attacked by a dozen spirits is a far cry from just one. We need as many people who can perform the technique as we can get. If everyone around this table, I mean not you, Senna, obviously, but everyone that wants to go, if they can calm spirits I would be much more inclined to say yes."

I wonder if Yue could learn to do it? She's a spirit now herself, but she's a water bender too. If they express the technique through bending I don't see why she couldn't. Hummm.

"That sounds perfectly reasonable to me," Unalaq agreed. "Why not take tonight and enjoy the festival, then for the next few days we'll work on the spirit calming technique? It'll take us a few days to get to the Everstorm, but there's no rush."

"We might make better time if we can simply turn the spirits bright again rather than fighting them every step of the way," Jinora suggested.

"Why yes, that's true!" he agreed with a smile. "What a smart girl you are!"

"Thanks," she mumbled, looking down. But she perked up again. "What closed the portals in the first place?"

"Why, I don't know. Must have been people, given the spirits' anger in the area. Possibly they were afraid of Vaatu's power, and worked together to make sure he couldn't bother them anymore. Records from so long ago are nearly non-existent."

"Too bad."

I wonder if the avatar was around during that time? Korra might be able to ask her past selves if they know anything about it. Worth a try, I'll have to mention it.

"I suppose asking this spirit if it was willing to help wouldn't hurt anything," Korra mused. "We can always close the portal again, right? I mean if someone in the past did it, we should be able to do it. We'll have it to study before we open it, and we'll make sure we understand it before we do anything."

"I can ask if we can seal it again after opening it," Lysanias offered. "Maybe even get some information about how, if you can come up with some yes or no questions."

"I guess we have our plan then!" Unalaq announced excitedly. "Let's head down to the festival and walk around, shall we? Then I believe there's some sort of dinner in my honor later tonight?"

"Yes, that's true," Tanraq agreed.

"Great, that's just great. Come along, everyone!"

"Will you be okay?" Amy whispered to him.

"I think so. It shouldn't be too much longer until my vision returns. I won't bump into anybody because I can feel their energy. And I can tell where other stuff is using my mental senses. But I wouldn't mind if you stuck close."

"Of course."

"This time of year sure has changed, hasn't it?" Unalaq remarked, walking around. They had been touring the grounds for a time, long enough for Lysanias to get his sight back. He was entranced by the lights, sounds, and general bustle of the place.

"Oh, here we go!" his brother grumped.

"What? I'm not saying it's a bad thing."

"You're not?"

"Not completely. But you do have to admit, dark spirit activity has risen in recent years. Just look at the number of ships attacked by spirits in southern waters. Something is making them do that."

"That could be the doing of the shadow avatar," Lysanias cautioned him. "Not anything

the people here are doing.”

“Indeed, that’s why I hesitate to blame this festival.”

“Which he loved to do in years past,” Tonraq told them. “Like a festival dedicated to spirits that promotes a lot of positive energy is somehow worse than the city acting like some favorite signer died.”

“What’s this?” asked Jinora.

“This time of year used to be a time of reflection and meditation. It only became a festival recently, the last thirty or so years. There was more fasting and less stuffing a whole turkey hen into your mouth.”

Everyone looked over at the turkey hen booth, and the guy behind the stand perked up at the attention. But his face fell as he indicated his wares but they kept walking.

“That sounds depressing,” Korra agreed. “I agree with my dad. If spirits really do respond to our energy, shouldn’t an upbeat, positive festival like this be *better* at making sure spirits are positive too?”

“I... Hummm. I never thought of it that way. Still, something is disturbing them. I just hope it’s this shadow avatar and not something we’re doing. Or not doing, as the case may be.”

“I wonder if we should do something about those spirits attacking ships though,” Korra went on. “Did you see any on your journey here?”

“I was, no in fact I shouldn’t say that. I’ll say I was unlucky not to see any. If I had, I would have been able to calm them. Still, perhaps if you decide to open the spirit portal they too will be calmed? We can always go out afterwards and see if any are left in the area.”

“Jinora might be able to call to them, like she did with that wind spirit. I don’t know her range though, and the ocean is pretty big.”

“I’d be willing to try,” Jinora assured them.

“Let’s not get ahead of ourselves,” cautioned Tenzin. “We don’t even know if Korra is going to open this ‘spirit portal’ of yours, brother.”

“But we should deal with the angry spirits one way or another,” she protested.

“Yes, I suppose we can’t have ships being attacked.”

“Enough gloomy talk!” Unalaq decided. “Kids, why don’t you run and do some festival things until dinner?” He handed Ikki a small sack of coins.

“You’ve only got an hour or so,” Tenzin cautioned. “Don’t ruin your appetite!”

“Say thank you,” put in Pema.

“Thank you!” chorused the kids, then took off running into the crowd.

“Ah, to be that young again,” Unalaq sighed wistfully.

“You were never that young,” grumped Tanraq.

“I can scarcely recall. You may be right, brother.”

At dinner, Unalaq stood and said how pleased he was to see people enjoying themselves, and how that positive energy was sure to bring positive change to the spirits as well. He winked at Korra as he said it and she grinned. He went on, praising how the south was doing and hoped everyone would have a wonderful festival.

Everyone clapped, and a singer was introduced. She was a young looking girl with long black hair, wearing a white dress with pink boots and gloves.

“For your entertainment tonight,” announced some unimportant guy with a weird mustache, “the lovely Miss Minmai!”

Music began to play...

*You smiled at me and shyly looked down
Like an angel in the middle of the song*

*(she looked at Lysanias)
(she spread her arms like wings)*

*I will see....
I'm watching you
everything that you do*

*(she put her fingers to her eyes)
(she put them out towards Lysanias)*

*You are there
5 feet away from me
But I'm aware
You're still far away from me*

*(she held out a hand)
(she turned away)*

*I will see....
Maybe I'm just day dreaming now*

(she put a finger to her chin)

*The great wall of people
I'm lost in the crowd
We're squeezed into the steeple
I need to send a ray of light out to you
Like a breath of air
I want to tame your heart
Like a candle flare
I want to flame your heart
Like a stream of water
I want to touch your soul
Someday.....**

*(she spread her arms to encompass the room)
(she hugged herself)
(she rocked back and forth in a most interesting way)
(she threw a hand up to the ceiling)
(she blew a kiss)
(she put her hand over her heart)
(she snapped and made fire)
(as she walked towards the table, skirt swaying)
(she poured water out of the pitcher on the table)
(she set it down and clenched her fist before her)*

Uh, is she singing to me, because it seems like she's singing to me. She's singing about bending, and angels, and how the shadow avatar must be watching me, and how it's close to me but I'm still far away from it. It must know I'm here, right, but I don't know where it is. Because it's "lost in the crowd," it could be anybody. Is that girl the shadow-

Nah, I'm just getting paranoid.

But the girl was nowhere to be found after the dinner was over.

Somewhat shaken, Lysanias tried to enjoy the festival that night but couldn't get Minmai out of his head. He caught Amy humming the song she was singing, and asked about it.

"Yeah, Linn Minmai. Super great singer, wasn't she? That's one of her best songs," she explained. "Odd title though, it's just a single letter. I forget which letter though." She looked thoughtful.

"You *know* that song?"

"Sure. Been around a while. Never thought I would get to see her in person though. Wasn't she great? She was so beautiful, and her voice could win any war, don't you think? I just wish I could have gotten her autograph. She has a boyfriend though, some kind of pilot I recall reading about. Just in case you were hoping to run into her around here." She bumped him with her elbow.

What's a pilot? "Oh. I see. That's so strange."

"What is? What, do you have that same girl in your reality or something? How weird would that be?"

"No, it isn't that. It just felt she was, I don't know, singing about me somehow."

She scoffed. "It's not all about you all the time, Lysanias. It's about bending, all that air and water and fire stuff. Come on, you must have picked up on that. There's a lot of songs that work bending into it somehow. We're sort of big on it around here? You may have noticed."

"I'm sure there are. I don't know, just that stuff about angels, and watching me... She looked right at me!"

"It's the beard," Korra playfully told him, tugging it. "Didn't your dwarf buddy tell you it was a babe magnet, and that's why you should keep it?"

"He said no such thing! Just that a dwarf's beard was his pride!"

"Come on, forget the shadow avatar for a night. Come ride the Ferris wheel with me!" She grabbed his hand.

"With *us*, you mean," Amy clarified, grabbing his other hand. "We're still double dating, remember? So forget about Minmai!"

"Guess I'll have to, won't I?" The two girls, laughing, pulled him towards the spinning machine of metal and dreams of flying.

The next day the girls gathered around Lysanias and Unalaq to begin learning the spirit

technique. Tenzin, Katara, Eska, Desna, and Tonraq were also there, figuring they would see how things went and try to learn it too.

“So how shall we do this?” Unalaq asked. “You probably have a better idea how to teach Korra and Jinora. I only know how to focus the technique through water bending, which of course they can’t do.”

“I had some ideas last night,” he admitted. “But first everyone needs to do a little bending of their own. Outside you go, don’t bother with your coats you’ll be back in here in just a second.” Confused by willing to try anything they somewhat exhausted their inner energies for a moment, then Lysanias called a stop to it and brought them back inside. “Great. Now, I want each of you to come take my hands, and I’m going to give you some energy. In that way you can feel what it feels like, and then you can practice trying to give up your energy to someone else.”

“Oh, that’s why the bending,” Jinora realized. “We needed to have less internal energy so you could give us some.”

“Got it on the nose,” he told her, beeping her nose. “You want to go first?”

“Sure!”

“But what does this have to do with turning dark spirits back to normal?” Tenzin asked.

“You have to replace what the spirits have lost,” Unalaq explained. “I see where he’s going with this. Honestly, I never really broke down what I was doing, I just sort of worked it out. You cleanse the negative energy, then you provide your own positive energy. He’s doing the second step first, as it’s probably easier to *give* someone energy than it is to *take* it. But the principal is the same, so if you can do the one, you can probably do the other.”

“As long as you know what you’re doing.”

So the group sat in a circle and held hands, then tried to pass energy to the person on their right. As everyone could feel energy and two people there knew how to transfer it they could critique the others. When they got tired of that they went back to their individual interests, Jinora talking her father through the projection technique she had been learning. Lysanias went outside to try and work on the spirit techniques from the book Iniri had provided to Jinora. He felt he had absorbed enough additional knowledge of internal energy manipulation to give them a try. But the rest of that afternoon he tried without success.

“Still no luck?” Korra asked, coming out to see him about an hour before dinner.

“No, it’s just not working out,” he complained. “I can feel my energy moving as though it should work. I should be standing over there now. I don’t get it.”

“I’ve got an idea. Let me call Zeleafu, maybe they can offer some pointers about how to get it to work.”

“A fast spirit like that? I bet they might!”

So a few moments later the spirit appeared, and Lysanias slapped a ward on them so Korra wasn’t being drained. They looked Lysanias over.

“You seem to be fast enough, I know a speedy thing when I see it. You say it doesn’t work for you?”

“I haven’t been able to do it. I take a step, put energy into it, but I don’t get anywhere.”

“Odd. Let me see what you’re doing.”

“Okay. Here goes. I want to be right over there.” He took a step, but as expected when nowhere.

“That’s strange. How fast can you run? Do a little jog for me, just around here.”

Lysanias did, and the spirit shook his head. “No, no, not like that. You’re faster than that, I can tell. Push yourself, show me your full speed.”

“That is my full speed,” he protested. “My body remained motionless for thousands of years. I’ve been training with Korra a couple of months now, and I don’t think I’m getting stronger at all. I think whatever you see right now is what you get.”

Zeleafu considered. “I think you’re holding yourself back somehow. That can’t be your full speed, it just can’t. But until you figure that out, I don’t think you’re going to have much success with this technique. Your energy feels right, I think you have it otherwise.”

“I see. I’ll think about it, thanks for your help.” *What in the world could they mean? Holding myself back, why would I do that?*

“No problem. You want me to stick around?” They looked over at Korra. “Get some

combat training with a real spirit in?”

“Nah, we’ll be eating dinner soon, and I’ve been moving energy around to different people all day. I’m beat. Thanks for coming, maybe I’ll take you up on that offer tomorrow.”

“Sure thing. Spirit bending. Who would have thought?” They leaned over to let Korra take the ward off, and vanished.

“Sorry you can’t learn it.”

“That’s okay. Tomorrow I’ll try the other technique that requires mastery of moving your energy around. The aura. At least then I’ll know for sure it’s not my ability to manipulate energy that’s lacking, but my speed.”

“But why does speed factor into it? You should just appear where you want, right? That’s what the book says.”

“I don’t know, honestly I think you’re right that it shouldn’t matter. I mean I’m being propelled by my spirit energy, not my legs. So why does how fast I could potentially run be a factor? But that’s what the spirit said, so I trust it.”

“Well, come in and eat. Oh, in the next day or so would you mind teleporting me back to the city? Actually Amy wants to check on her job at the library, see if they’ve opened it again. So she would like to go too.”

“I don’t mind. You need to get something from there? I could just get it, then you wouldn’t have to go in a ward.”

“That’s not so bad. But no, I have to go. Apparently Tenzin says there’s a lot of rumors flying around about me, because I came down here right after, you know, Amon. I want to reassure everyone I’m doing okay. Have a press conference, maybe stop in and say hi to Chief Beifong. She should know I’m doing okay too.”

“That does make sense. Sure, I’m at your command.”

“Thanks. I don’t know, maybe I’ll do the portal thing first so I have some big news to share? I’m still considering it.”

“Whatever you want.”

“Thanks. Come on, go wash up and come to dinner.”

“Sure thing, *mom*.”

Both of them laughed and went to go eat.

Chapter 33
Thinking With Portals
When: Day 106
Where: About to leave for the South Pole proper

The days passed swiftly for the group, which practiced the energy cleansing technique under the watchful eyes of Lysanias and Unalaq. Unalaq discovered the water bending that he believed was associated with the technique was more to confuse and restrain the spirit being cleansed rather than a direct part of the ritual. Also the closer they were to the thing they wanted to cleanse, the easier a time they had. They practiced on each other, both sending and receiving energy, and found a multi-pronged approach seemed best. While one bender kept the spirit rooted to the spot by surrounding them with an element others could start cleansing them. As none had the time Unalaq had put into perfecting the technique working together was the only way they could reasonably get results.

"But I think you'll get results," Unalaq had told them the day before. "Of course, without actual dark spirits to practice on we can only guess at how effective each of you will be. But what do you think, Korra? Want to see about opening that portal?"

"We can have both Yue and Zeleafu with us, thanks to Lysanias' wards," Amy reminded her. "We wouldn't lack in fighting power if all of us went."

"Or we could just take the airship, and anchor it down once we come to the edge of the Everstorm," Lysanias told them. "Wouldn't that cut a huge amount of time from our journey?"

Foreheads were smacked. "I forgot all about that thing!" Korra admitted.

"Going by air does have certain advantages," admitted Unalaq. "It would be much harder for dark spirits to track us. If we can land it, then proceed on camelhorseback we could probably get there in a few hours, rather than a couple of days."

"I can land it," Amy told them confidently. "We found a flight manual I've been looking over."

"And we'll have at least three air benders," Tenzin mused, pulling his beard. "That would help."

"Does that mean I can come?" Jinora asked excitedly.

"I have to admit, what you managed to learn in just a month is fairly impressive. You're really into this spirit stuff, aren't you?"

"She's more into it than me, and I'm the avatar!" Korra joked.

"I just like reading."

"So do I. Pro bending scores and the weather report."

Amy looked out the window. "Cold. With a chance of snow."

"You know what I mean."

"Anyway, yes, you can come. Opening this spirit portal is probably a once in a lifetime event. And if we can go through it, into the spirit world? You'll always have a place of reference if you get lost there."

"So we're agreed?" Unalaq asked Korra. "We're going?"

"I'm all for it!"

The others all nodded and Unalaq seemed relieved. "That's excellent news. We can get an early start tomorrow and be back the next day. Hopefully with a new spirit to help us in our fight against this shadow avatar!"

You know, come to think of it, this guy accepted my story pretty readily. And I notice how suddenly it's 'our' fight. I mean sure, he lives here too, but isn't that a little presumptuous, I guess? Still, Tenzin is coming and he's a supposed expert in all things spiritual around here. If he doesn't see anything wrong with opening this portal, it can't be directly harmful. And the shadow avatar wouldn't have picked something locked up, right? Nor would they have picked someone like this, when there are far more powerful spirits they could choose from. He's a decent water bender and he handled that spirit, but in terms of fighting power the avatar, pre-Amon would have been the better choice. So it can't be him. Right?

So the team suited up; nine humans, two spirits, and one polar bear dog. The spirits had been invited along because Jinora thought Yue at least would be interested to see the

inside of the airship. She suggested bringing the wind spirit, as it would probably enjoy flying, something it couldn't do naturally. This had proven correct, with Zeleafu excitedly hopping from one foot to the other by the window. Amy stood at the controls of the airship, getting it safely lifted off and pointed in the right direction.

"We won't be getting far enough south that the compass won't work," Tanraq told them. "So just point the ship in that direction and we'll make it in no time."

"Got it. Full steam, such as it is, ahead!"

Hours later the Everstorm came into view, with a twisted landscape below and rings of clouds above. The airship was starting to get bogged down as winds whipped at it, and lighting of all things flashed in the distance.

"Lighting, or spirits flying about," Unalaq told them.

"I don't think we're getting much closer," Amy informed them. "I'm landing. Water benders, when we get near I'll drop the lines. Freeze them into the ground please, we don't want to be walking home. Air benders, anything you can do to reduce the turbulence around here would be great."

"I'll use metal bending to shove the cables as deep as I can," Lysanias offered. "I can air bend until then."

"I'll get out here, make sure there are no dark spirits below us," Zeleafu suggested.

"Can you survive a fall like that?" Lysanias asked him, concerned. "Or do you not take damage from falls?"

"I'll just jump off the air and work my way down that way."

He paused. "And you can teach me how to do that?"

"Oh yeah! Probably should have mentioned that, when we were trying to get you to spirit step. I call it Air Step, the closest I can get to flying despite being a wind spirit. Lame, I know, but what can you do?"

"Very descriptive name," Eska told them, speaking for the first time in hours.

"One wonders how you came up with it," Desna agreed.

"What would you call stepping on air? Anyway, I'll see you down there." They opened the door and jumped out, disappearing into the storm below.

"I will go as well," Yue told them, floating out. "And I can start putting an ice shell around the airship, just in case any nearby spirits get curious."

"Good plan, thanks Yue," Amy told her as she too dropped out of sight.

"You're a natural leader," Unalaq told her. "And you worked in a library? Maybe you could come and work for me, in the north, instead."

"She's just bossy," Jinora told him.

"Trying to concentrate!"

With the ship down and somewhat camouflaged by the ice the group set off. Taking no chances Lysanias called out his mountain spirit, which had no trouble hearing him thanks to the practice the two had been getting in. It walked next to Naga who was carrying Korra, Amy, Lysanias and Jinora. The others were on white animals, strange looking beasts in Lysanias' estimation, but they seemed to not mind the cold. Snow and wind tore at the group as they moved into the area surrounded by the Everstorm. Luckily it only took about two hours to reach the center, a glowing mass of ice, seemingly lit from within.

"There it is," Unalaq exclaimed. "That must be the site. Look at those formations!"

"I'm looking at those clouds," Tanraq told him. "I don't like the looks of them."

"They'll be gone soon. Come, let's get inside and out of this wind. The portal should be at the center, I can't wait to see it."

The group entered the ice "forest" and tied the animals to the ground, again making an ice shelter for them so they were out of the cold. With that they carefully made their way forward past huge chunks of ice, just wide enough for two people to walk shoulder to shoulder. Almost immediately they were attacked by dark spirits, but with so many people that could feel spiritual energy and attack at long range they worked together and turned them golden again. None stuck around, simply vanishing once their negative energy was cleansed. Finally they reached a wide space in the center, and formed a ring around Korra who started

probing at the sealed gateway with her senses. Lysanias aided her, while the others kept a watch out for more spirit attacks.

“What do you think?” she asked after a moment.

“I think I couldn’t duplicate this. Not without seeing how it was done,” he admitted. “I can feel energy sealed away, that’s obvious. But not how, or how to undo it.”

“I was afraid of that. Are we just going to have to hit it with stuff?”

“A lot of spirits are coming!” Tenzin announced, “Korra if you’re going to do something, now would be a good time!”

“Did you do this? A past avatar, I mean? Bending wouldn’t have done it, right? You must have left yourself some sort of key, in case a future you wanted it opened again. Ask around, or feel it out! I have to go help the others!”

“Okay... I’ll try.”

Lysanias turned to help, as the battle for the portal had begun. His spirit was pinning another spirit down so he started draining energy away from it, running over there. The others were working in groups of two or three, pinning the spirits and cleansing them. Unalaq was getting several at once, Lysanias felt he hadn’t absorbed all the skill he could have from watching him before, and wondered if that meant his potential had finally run out. But they held the spirits back as Korra’s eyes glowed and she put her hands on the dome of energy covering the portal.

The battle went on, the dark spirits unable to overwhelm the group because of the limited number of entrances to this chamber and the number of people defending it. Suddenly Korra *twisted* something and Lysanias felt energy begin to build up near the center. “Korra, get out of there!” he yelled, shielding his eyes. “Everyone, it’s going to-“

There was an outrush of energy in the form of a beam of light piercing the clouds above. They blew away, and power washed over everyone in the room. When Lysanias opened his eyes he saw all the spirits were gone, and blue skies above where there had been only angry clouds before. Everyone was blinking away afterimages and asking if anyone was hurt, but it seemed everyone was okay. He looked up at the beam of light, once again going cold from the inside out. Minmai’s voice echoed in his head. *I want to send a ray of light out to you.*

“Wait, where’s Korra?” asked Tonraq, looking around.

“She must have been caught in the portal when it opened,” Unalaq guessed. “Come on, let’s get through and see if my books were correct.” He jogged towards the shaft of light, and vanished into it.

“Is it safe?” Amy asked.

“If it’s not, we’ve lost both Korra and my brother,” Tonraq reasoned. “But this is the reason we came, we might as well get to it.”

One by one the group entered the shining beam of light, stepping into another world. The area was barren, only one tree was visible, but there was a small stream running through the place as well. Korra was there, looking around with wide eyes.

“I did it,” she told them, looking back at where they were coming through.

“Way to state the obvious,” Jinora quipped.

“Oh hush, you. Did the storm go away?”

“It seems to have vanished,” Tenzin told her. “Well done, Korra.”

“Did anyone get hurt? What happened on the other side?”

“Same as this side,” Unalaq said. “A shining beam of light. And we’re all fine.”

“That’s good. So where’s this spirit, do you think?”

“That tree seems a good place to start looking, as it’s the closest thing around.”

“Sounds good to me.”

The group made their way over there, finding the tree to be mostly trunk, no leaves and not many branches adorned it. The tree was fairly huge, both tall and thick, and there was a gash in the front where it seemed something had been stuffed. As though looking through glass a dark colored form perked up as they approached.

“I don’t like the looks of this,” Yue remarked, looking up at the tree. She was hovering nearby, almost seeming fearful of the spirit that was stirring inside the prison bubble. It was

hard to see, being more a dark smudge than anything defined, but they heard the voice from inside clearly enough.

“What’s this?” they asked in surprise. “Visitors? I never get visitors!”

“Hello up there!” called Unalaq. “You wouldn’t happen to be the spirit of darkness, Vaatu, would you?”

“My goodness, you are well informed,” Vaatu praised. “That is my name. Tell me, what brings you to this lonely place?”

“Korra? You want to take the lead here?” Unalaq asked her.

“Oh, sure. Vaatu, my name is Korra, I’m the current avatar. I’ve come to ask for your help.”

“Not sure how much help I’ll actually be,” Vaatu admitted. “Being stuck in this tree, and everything. Not really up on current events either. If you have questions about the distant past though, I’m your spirit. Uh, by the way, what’s an avatar?”

“What’s an- how long have you been stuck in there?”

“I didn’t really count, plus we don’t really have “days” here in the spirit world. I can’t say. I can say it’s been pretty boring.”

“I can imagine. Look, we need your help. If you’ve been locked away longer than there’s been an avatar I’m pretty sure that’s long enough. You promise to help us fight off a being from another world that threatens to destroy our entire reality, and we’ll try to get you out of there.”

“Being from another world? That sounds interesting, you’ll have to tell me all about it. Or not. Honestly, I’d swear to be your personal pet if it got me out of here,” Vaatu admitted. “You humans at least have the luxury of sleeping sometimes. I’ve felt every second of my imprisonment. You’ve got a deal.”

“Uh, one second,” Unalaq cautioned. “Why were you put here in the first place?” He turned to the others. “We don’t want him to get through helping and then turn on us, after all.”

“Good point,” Korra said back.

“Spirits were afraid of me, back in the day,” Vaatu explained. “I’m one of the original spirits, and I’m fairly powerful. I see you have the moon spirit there with you, she’s young compared to me. So maybe it was jealousy, who knows. I mean you no harm, if that’s what you’re worried about.”

“He doesn’t seem feral, like I was when infused with dark energy,” Zeleafu remarked. “I still feel uneasy looking at him though.”

“See what I mean,” Vaatu told them. “That wind spirit there doesn’t even know me and already they’re against me. It just happens, I guess. Nobody likes the dark.” He seemed a bit sad when he said this, but then brightened (as much as a spirit of darkness can) again. “What about you, oh moon spirit? You shine in the dark, don’t you? Without my darkness your beauty would be lost, so is the dark all that bad? Are you against me on sight as well?”

“I don’t know,” she answered. “I’m actually not the original moon spirit, so I know less about you than I really should.”

“Not the original, eh? Replacement moon spirits? Otherworldly beings? You humans have been busy since I got put in here. I bet you all have some fairly interesting stories. I’d love to hear them.”

“Later, perhaps. It’s a little hard to talk to you where you are.”

“Of course. Still, having someone to talk to is amazing. How did you even get here?”

“We opened the spirit portal,” Korra told them as she pointed her thumb back at it.

“Did you?” The dark shape shifted, trying to get a glimpse of the energy. “Well, I’ll take your word for it.”

There was a moment of silence. “So, we get you out, you agree to help us, and when our reality is safe we go our separate ways? You don’t make trouble for us. That sound like a good deal?”

“That sounds totally fair. I give you my word as a spirit, those terms are acceptable.”

“Can spirits lie?” Jinora asked Yue.

“The sky is green,” she replied.

“Ah.”

“Okay.” Korra shrugged, looking at the others. “All opposed? Yue, Zeleafu, anything

concrete apart from vague feelings?" No one had any real objections. "It is what we came to do. Be silly to go through all this trouble and just walk away now. The spirit does seem genuine, at least. Okay," she shouted up to it. "Any idea how to free you?"

"Not a clue," they replied. "You think I haven't thrown everything I could at this barrier?"

"That's going to be a problem," Unalaq remarked. "Maybe we could energy drain it?"

"Pretty far away, but my mountain spirit could lift us up there," Lysanias offered.

"I don't think that's going to work," Jinora explained. "Can't you feel it? The tree is somehow supplying energy to the barrier. That's why it was placed here, I think. We would have to kill the tree, but that means chopping it down or something. Don't you feel the ley lines here? It probably absorbs from them."

"One second." Lysanias shifted power to his eyes, taking a look at the energy in the area. Then his eyes bugged out, she was right. There were some major energy conduits in the area, and the spirit portal was radiating them like crazy as well now. Scanning the area he caught sight of another feature of note, and pointed off to the right. "There's a lot of energy around here, all right. Say, Vaatu, is the other portal nearby? The one in the north?"

"Sure is!"

Thought so. I see some faint energy there, more potential than realized. Opening the other portal would probably activate them. In fact, maybe the lines were helping reinforce the barrier?

"Of course, the other portal," agreed Unalaq. "Wait, it's that close? Amazing, I guess distance doesn't mean much around here."

"Is that tree even still alive?" asked Amy. "It doesn't look alive. We could easily burn it down."

"I think it's more the spirit of a tree than a tree itself," Tenzin offered. "I don't think it needs leaves to be alive. As for burning it, I don't think it's wood, either."

"It feels alive," Jinora told them. "I guess if it is a spirit itself, fire wouldn't work, or would make it attack us."

"That too."

"So what other options do we have?" Korra asked.

"All that energy," Lysanias mused. "Why not use it? We're all fairly good at manipulating energy now, right? We hook into it, gather what we can, and throw our bending at a single point on that barrier. If that doesn't crack it, nothing will."

"It's true, we wouldn't be moving around," Korra agreed. "We could easily attack it from here."

"Now just wait a second," Vaatu nervously called down. "What if you miss, or get through and you don't stop your attack right away? I want to be free, not dead!"

"Can you flatten yourself? How much of that barrier do you take up? We can aim high!"

"Aim high she says. Well, I suppose being dead would be better than being trapped here for all eternity. Go ahead, if you think that'll work."

"Guess we should find some good spots to stand," Unalaq suggested.

"Wait, what about the other portal?" Lysanias asked.

"What about it?"

"There's energy coming from the first portal. I bet more would come from the other one, too. The more lines we can each stand inside of, the more energy we can devote to this. Should Korra open that one too, so we have all the resources we can get?"

"I don't see why not," Unalaq decided. "We've got the one open, after all."

"Korra?"

"I don't mind. I can head over there, I think I remember what I did so it should be easier."

"I'll just wait here," Vaatu joked. "Good luck."

The group moseyed over there, looking the sealed portal over from all directions.

"Seems about the same," Korra told them. "I'll get it open, probably end up at the North Pole, if we get a repeat of what happened here. I'll just come back through. You all better back up, if you don't want to get caught in it." She put her hands on the barrier and her eyes started glowing again. She concentrated, but suddenly Yue yelled out.

"Wait, stop! Don't open that portal!"

Chapter 34

A Stinky Past

When: Still day 106, seconds later

Where: Spirit world portal area

“What? Are we under attack?” Korra cried, taking her hands off the sealed portal and looking around.

“No, it’s nothing like that,” Yue explained. “I just have the most horrible feeling about opening that portal!”

“Why? It’s just a portal, like the other one.”

“I don’t know,” she wailed, wringing her hands. “I don’t know anything. I’m just a girl from the north that became a spirit. But I beg you not to open that portal until we know more.”

“My dear, how are we going to do that?” Unalaq asked. “I’ve spent my life gathering books about spirits and I’ve only seen this place mentioned in one or two. There’s no one we can really ask.”

“But there is!” she insisted. “Old spirits. There must be some old enough to remember when Vaatu was imprisoned here. And why. I can go ask them.”

“That’s right,” he agreed. “I never thought of that. It will take a bit of a mental shift to remember the avatar can just call up a spirit now. And that spirit can go talk to other spirits. Humm, you should learn how to get the spirit of knowledge, Korra, they might know.”

“You mean Wan Shi Tong?” Jinora asked.

“Exactly. You know about them?”

“Sure, they’re mentioned in a couple of books. Usually with warnings he doesn’t like humans very much anymore.”

“That may be true. Well, if it will make you feel better, we’ll shelve the idea of opening this portal, and by extension freeing Vaatu for now.”

“Thank you.” She looked relieved. “Take this ward off so you can summon me back, and give me a day to find someone.” She went over to Lysanias, and he did.

“We can get back here pretty easily,” Lysanias figured as it burned up. “Even if we have to take the airship the whole way now. But if you can bring a spirit here, Korra can come talk to it by stepping over to this side.”

“Or I could come here,” Jinora told them. “I wonder if I can cross into the spirit world through the portal in my spirit form.”

“Probably? We can try it. If you think you can choose where to appear when crossing all the way over you can shoot for this place as well.”

“Meanwhile, I’ll stay here and talk to Vaatu,” volunteered Zeleafu. “Tell them about what’s been going on in the world, that sort of thing. Maybe get a sense if they’re hiding something.”

“If they do just crave company, maybe that’ll be enough for now,” Unalaq agreed.

“How disappointing,” moped Desna.

“Yes, it hardly seemed worth the trip,” agreed Eska.

“Now now, you two. You’re standing in the spirit world, how many others get to do that?”

“But this place is so boring and empty,” Desna protested.

“Let’s go back,” Eska pleaded.

“We are.”

“Or are we?” Lysanias asked. “We can head back to the airship, bring it closer to the portal, but why go all the way back? Let’s just stay here for the night. The ship is big enough, warm enough with the amount of benders we have, and we can rig some beds up. It’ll save us coming all the way back out here if Yue finds a spirit to tell us more about Vaatu tomorrow.

“I suppose one night isn’t so bad,” admitted Eska. “You will entertain me, with stories and demonstrations of powers from other worlds.”

“I will do no such thing.”

So the group told Vaatu what was going on, and they seemed to sigh. “Nobody can trust the spirit of darkness. I tell you. I wrote a song about it, if you wanted to hear it?”

"No, not right now," Korra hastily assured them. "Look, we'll get to the bottom of this, reassure Yue, and have you out soon."

"I hope so. But it's been great just having someone to talk to. You have no idea how lonely it gets here."

Everyone looked around. "I think we have some idea. If all goes well we'll see you tomorrow, okay?"

"Very well. And Korra? Thank you."

"Of course."

It was a somewhat subdued group that made their way back to the airship, minus the two spirits that had stayed behind. Subdued, that is, until night started to fall and the skies lit up.

"What is that?" Jinora nearly screamed, running to the window.

"The southern lights, I don't believe it," Tanraq managed. "They aren't just a myth."

"You see?" Unalaq boasted. "I do know what I'm talking about. The Everstorm is no more. Spirits now once again dance in your skies."

"Humph. Sometimes. I suppose."

"Can we really not put the past behind us?" he asked, looking down. "Is the gulf between us really that wide? I have only your best interests at heart, doesn't this prove it?"

The group looked out at the sky, now shimmering with a spectacular aurora in all colors of the rainbow.

"I don't know, brother. I don't know."

The night passed uneventfully, the airship now parked next to the ice "forest." The water benders had taken down some of the ice pillars to make it easier to get to the portal, just for something to do while waiting. There were no dark spirits in evidence, and after everyone got tired of watching the skies they went to sleep.

It was after noon the next day when Yue came through the portal, marveling to be back in the real world on her own after so long. She said Zeleafu had told her that in the hours they had spent with Vaatu they seemed quite cordial. If their attitudes were an act, it hadn't slipped in all the time they had spent together. So Zeleafu had no problem letting Vaatu out, but Yue still wasn't convinced.

But of course, if they've been here as long as they say, that would be plenty of time to practice the 'character.' So it could very well be an act. I would want to be as nice as possible to the people that could get me out of jail.

She guided the group back to the area with Vaatu where she said an old friend was waiting. They saw a tall spirit standing on the other side of the portal, arms folded. The spirit was covered with brown fur and had backwards facing knees. They seemed to have hands for feet, and wore a bone necklace around their neck. They had a white, animalistic face, yellow eyes, and huge ears. They smiled when they saw Korra.

"Stinky? Is that you? It is, isn't it?"

Everyone looked to see who the spirit was addressing.

"Oh, come here and give me a hug, you old kidder!" Korra found herself in the arms of the spirit, it having teleported over to her.

"You were talking to me? Who are you? Do I know you?" she managed at last.

"What are you talking about Stinky? It's me, aye-aye. Your old friend!"

Korra made a "don't know what you're talking about" face.

"You really... don't remember me? It's really been so long that you've forgotten our time together? I see." The spirit's face fell.

"Who did you know me as? Maybe I can ask," she suggested.

"Wan, of course!"

"Wan Shi Tong?" Jinora asked, having been reminded of that spirit the day before.

"What? That old stick in the mud? I'm talking about Wan, my friend! Wan!" He was pointing to Korra frantically. "Though I agree they have a similar name."

"Never heard of an *avatar* Wan," Tenzin admitted. "How long ago- that's a stupid question isn't it?"

"Sure is!" aye-aye agreed. "It's tough, being forgotten," he went on softly. "You really have no idea who I am, do you?"

"I'm sorry, I don't. But I'd like to change that. I'm learning about spirits now, and since this portal is open I can learn about your world too. I *want* to learn."

"In between pro bending scores and the weather report, anyway," Jinora clarified.

"Jinora!" both Tenzin and Korra admonished at once.

The spirit laughed. "Wan was never a deep thinker, I'll give you that. I guess that hasn't changed? Still, I suppose I can trust you, given the company you keep." He indicated Yue and Zeleafu, who had joined them by this time.

"I've only been studying spirits a short time. I hope to meet many more. And not just to ask their help against the shadow avatar. I mean so I can really be the bridge between our two worlds."

"Sounds like a good idea to me," aye-aye told her. "I was pretty surprised when Yue herself came to see me. I mean is she a spirit? A human? A human spirit? A spirit human? A spriman? A hurit? A spimanit? Do I like her or hate her? I have no idea!"

"I think she's just herself," Unalaq told the spirit.

"I wonder. Still, she told me a bit about your plans and what you're facing. At least what this human here says you're facing." He stood in front of Tanraq and stared at him.

"Oh, no, aye-aye, this one. Over here." She indicated Lysanias.

"Ah, right. Wait, *him*? You've got to be kidding me! I could break him with one hand, look at how skinny he is."

"You're skinny," Lysanias protested.

"I'm the way I need to be," aye-aye told him. "When I heard of this mighty warrior naturally I assumed this big guy here. What's he going to do?"

Lysanias put a hand out, balancing flame on it.

"Big deal."

The flame went out and snow melted below him, flowing up into water and then into his hand, which he then froze again in the shape of a ball.

"Wait, did you just-"

He tossed the ball up into the air, then smashed it with air bending.

"How are you-"

Giving a shout he activated his new aura, powdered snow blowing away from him as energy surrounded his body.

"Okay, okay, I was just asking! Cut it out already. That makes me feel all tingly, whatever it is." They rubbed their arms as they looked at the energy now surrounding Lysanias.

"Satisfied?" Lysanias asked a bit smugly, dropping the aura again.

"I suppose. She didn't mention that, I thought only you could do that, Stinky."

"Why do you keep calling me that? My name is Korra."

"Sorry, old habits die hard, I guess. Okay, Korra. You've got my attention. Yue said you wanted to know about Vaatu, but I thought she was kidding. But if you don't remember me, maybe you don't remember them, either." He indicated the tree in the distance. "You want me to start at the beginning or what?"

"Could you? That would be really helpful I think."

"Okay, well, the first time we met you were half dead, having been banished from your village for some reason or another some time before."

"Once a trouble maker, always a trouble maker," Tenzin muttered.

"You better believe it. Wan wanted to get into my spirit oasis to rest, but of course I couldn't trust a human so I told him to take a hike. He could only throw fire at that time of course, because he was from a lion turtle city that gave out that kind of bending."

"What's a lion turtle?" Jinora asked.

"You know, if I have to explain every little thing, I'll never finish!"

"Please, go on," Korra prompted.

"Anyway, he finally persuaded me and befriended the spirits, but after a time grew restless and decided to see more of the world. It wasn't long before he came upon Vaatu and Raava. The spirits of light and darkness. Naturally he screwed that up too, and got them apart

which upset the balance of the world.”

Tenzin stared knowingly at Korra.

“What? That wasn’t me!”

“He tried to restore balance though,” aye-aye admitted. “He and Raava teamed up to try and get their battle back on track, but Raava was growing weaker as Vaatu grew stronger.”

“Wait, what does that mean?” Lysanias asked. “Vaatu growing stronger?”

“Vaatu can corrupt spirits just by being near them,” aye-aye explained. “As Raava waned, that power reached further and further. When they were locked in combat with Raava that didn’t happen, so naturally Raava took great pains to never be apart from Vaatu. It was Wan who separated them, I think he had been tricked into it by Vaatu, actually. Like they were the victim, not the one that needed to be under control.”

The others shared a shocked look.

“You really have no idea all this happened? How long has it *been*?”

“Longer than we might imagine,” Tenzin admitted. “I should really be writing all this down.”

“Yes, you should. Where was I? Oh right, with Raava weakened, Wan decided to visit other lion turtles and get control of the elements from them, hoping that with all of them at his command, he might surprise Vaatu and take him out. Then Raava could grab them and get them under control, their endless battle continuing. But there was a snag. Raava would have to fuse with Wan’s soul in order for him to be able to use all four at once. You know that part, at least, right?”

“Uh, no?”

“What? How do you think the avatar reincarnates, anyway? It’s because Raava, the light spirit, and Wan’s spirit fused together because they stayed fused during the battle for so long.”

Shock rippled through the group. Lysanias was the first to speak. “Remember what I asked you when I first got here? What you were the avatar of?”

“Yeah, I do. This is what I’m the avatar of. Raava. The light spirit. Wow!”

“You people are hopeless,” aye-aye shook his head. “Anyway, he was the first avatar. Sealed Vaatu up in the tree in time, and that was that. You were really going to just let Vaatu out? Are you crazy?”

“We won’t now, of course,” Korra hastened to assure him.

“I should hope not. It was bad enough the first time, spirits going dark, running amok. Why do you think the portals were closed? So no one was stupid enough to come here and try to free him!”

“I guess it’s all my fault,” Unalaq insisted. “I was the one who brought it up. My information was really lacking, it seems. Everyone, I’m sorry. My books have let me down.”

“Don’t feel too bad,” Tonraq told him. “We all make mistakes. At least yours was stopped in time.”

“Yes, I suppose I should be grateful for small favors. Should we seal the portal up again? Could you even do so, Korra?”

“And get the Everstorm back?” she gasped. “No more dancing spirits? No more easy access to the spirit world? I don’t know.”

“That’s up to you,” aye-aye told them. “I’ve told you what I know. That’s all I can do. But hey, learn how to summon me, or come visit some time. I’d love to catch up, and I can be at least some help when this shadow avatar shows up. I’m not as powerful as a wind spirit, by the way, at least in terms of combat. So wait until the shadow avatar stuff is over.”

“Okay, I will. Thanks. You’ve given me a lot to think about.”

“Actually, if you wouldn’t mind, I have a lot of questions,” Tenzin interrupted. The two went off to the side, and Korra pulled Lysanias a little ways away.

“Now what?” she asked.

“What else? Keep training. I’ll take you back to the city, though best not to mention this portal, in case you decide to close it up. Maybe look for any dark spirits left in the waters around here. The shadow avatar will make a move sooner or later.”

“I suppose. Imagine, my soul is fused with a spirit of light!”

“Which answers our question why you can use all forms of bending. I wonder if you

could learn to project it, like I can with my mountain spirit? But I'm not really fused with the spirit of the mountain..."

"That would be amazing! Would I still be able to bend?"

"I can still use my powers. You're connected, remember I get hurt when it does."

"Right. Man, that spirit gave me so much to think about. The first avatar! And lion turtles, what was that all about?"

"The spirit said lion turtles gave people bending," Jinora interrupted. "But we're taught in school that people learned water bending from watching the moon. And earth bending by watching badger moles. And fire from watching dragons. Air from watching sky bison. Is that wrong?"

Korra shook her head. "I guess it must be. But how would *turtles* give people bending? Where did they go? Did they die? And how was it passed to kids if it wasn't something we started with? If my spirit is partly the spirit of light, could I give people bending? Could I access the spirit's powers in other ways? Arg, it's all so confusing!"

"You really are going to have to sit down with the early avatars and write up some sort of world history. Who knows what else we got wrong that only you can correct."

"But what's the point? So it was turtles and not the moon. Does that make a difference to us today?"

"I suppose not, but I don't like living a lie, either."

"No, I guess you're right. Maybe when this whole shadow avatar thing blows over."

"Yeah."

"So, are we going to tell them?" Unalaq asked before they left the spirit world. "Oh, sorry chap, changed our minds about freeing you, what ho. Hope you aren't too broken up about it. Must dash. Tootle pip."

"Who talks like that?" Jinora giggled.

"I don't know, but the question remains, right?"

"It would be fairly cruel to raise the spirit's hope, get their word, and then walk away without explaining why we left," Korra decided. "I'm the avatar, I'll go tell them."

"They may not even have control of turning spirits dark for all we know," Tenzin wondered. "We may be condemning this spirit for something it can't even help."

"How's it going?" Vaatu asked hopefully as Korra got near.

"I'm told you can corrupt spirits just by being near them," she called up to them.

"Ah. I suppose that is a thing that happens, if I'm being totally honest about it. I'd promise to not leave the area until I was sure I could control that part of me, but I'm not sure you would want to take that kind of risk. I'm not sure I could control it, and I'd have to corrupt spirits to know, something they probably wouldn't want."

"I'm afraid that's probably the case. I mean you didn't mention that when we asked you about the reason you were here."

"There's nothing to really mention," Vaatu protested. "It's like you breathing, or your hair growing. You wouldn't walk up to someone and say, oh, by the way you know my hair grows, right? It's not important."

"That's actually fairly important!"

"To you, maybe, but not to me. Like time is important to you, but not to me. We see things differently, Korra."

"I can't argue with that. Look, we'll be leaving the portal open for now, I haven't decided to close it or not. It's just such a useful thing. So at least there might be more traffic through here. That's something, right?"

"It is. And if I must content myself with that, so be it. If you change your mind though, you know where I am!"

"That I do. We're leaving for now, but we'll be around later I'm sure."

"Of course. I'll see you later then. Thanks for at least considering it."

"Bye."

Everyone sadly waved goodbye to the spirit, and walked back through the portal.

“If only there was some way to make them safe,” Unalaq sighed. “Maybe we can find another less powerful but less dangerous spirit to help? I’ll think about it.”

“Thanks for trying,” Korra told him. “Your heart was in the right place.”

“Guess there’s nothing to do now but head back.”

“Yup. Amy, we’re counting on you!”

Chapter 35
Uncomfortable Questions
When: Day 111
Where: The South

With the most successful spirits festival in recent memory over, Tenzin took his family back to Republic City. As it turned out, everyone loved having the aurora in the sky and that made the festival super popular because even those that wouldn't have gone otherwise decided to show the spirits their appreciation and turn up. But all good things must come to an end, and Tenzin said goodbye to his mother and made preparations to fly home. Korra offered travel by airship because it was more comfortable flying there than on a bison, and she needed to head back to the city anyway. Unalaq decided to tag along, saying he would love a look at this city he had always heard so much about. He made it a point to remind Korra they needed to return and make sure there were no dark spirits left around her home before they could truly say the job was done.

"If you decide to leave the portal open, I mean. If you close it, well, there won't be much point to purifying spirits because more dark ones will just show up to take their place."

"Don't worry, I'll be heading back there," she assured him. "You're right, I need to decide about the portal, and what my next move is. Though I'm sort of in a holding pattern until this whole shadow avatar thing is taken care of."

"Indeed. The great thing about air travel is you can still train while on the move. So at least we won't lose any time that way."

"Good point."

The group continued to practice, and Lysanias got a few lessons on jumping off the air, just in case his wings weren't available or he was wearing his armor or something. He learned it the old fashioned way, feeling he would save his remaining potential for spirit summoning or any other ability that came up before he left this world.

Having radioed ahead the council set up a press conference for Korra soon after she landed, and she nervously took the stage in front of the somewhat rebuilt council building. Naturally Lin was there, along with several officers to keep the crowds back. The event was fairly well attended, with reporters standing below the podium area ready to jot down notes. Lysanias and her friends were off to the side on the stage, Lysanias liking being up there in front of all those people not at all.

But at least I don't have to actually talk to them. I can't imagine how Korra does it. She looks pretty nervous, which is weird given what she's been through.

"Hello, everyone," she began. "I called this event together to assure you all that I was okay, and put to rest any rumors I had been killed by Amon or anything like that. As you can see, I'm totally fine."

"Are you still the avatar?" someone shouted.

"Yes, I'm still the avatar. In fact, I can confidently say I'm more an avatar now than I was. My whole life before Amon was all about combat training, which I'm coming to realize was someone else doing my thinking for me. I had convinced myself that being the avatar meant being the best bender in the world, and those like the white lotus were all too happy keeping me thinking that. But I've been talking with my uncle, and some spirits, and I'm realizing I need to take a very different path. I've recently learned the origins of how the avatar came to be, and what it means to be the bridge between the spirit world and our world. So I'm really focused on that right now. Sorry for the long winded answer." She gave a sort of nervous laugh and looked over at Tenzin. He nodded.

Actually you're not though. You're still doing combat training, just with different types of bending. I mean, yes, it's all for the goal of protecting your world, but isn't this just more of the same? I suppose opening her eyes was the important part, she has to figure out what being the literal avatar of the light spirit means. It isn't just a title anymore, it means something. A spirit gave up existing so the avatar could be born, that demands a certain level of commitment to seeing that trust was not misplaced.

"You've spoken with spirits?" another shouted.

"Yes, I've been in close contact with Yue, the moon spirit, as well as some others. That's how I learned more about my own history. It's actually pretty interesting-"

"Can you still bend?"

She looked annoyed at being interrupted, but answered. "Yes, I can still bend. Not like I used to, Amon did that much to me. But I am still very much a bender, believe me."

"When are you coming back to Republic City?"

"Soon, I hope? There are still some things I need to take care of back home, but I do want to call Republic City my home at some point in the future."

"How do you respond to the claims made by that nutty fire bender that he's your boyfriend?"

"What? This is the first I've heard of it!"

"Yeah, he said you were a pro bender, did you wear a disguise?"

"Disguise? I've never been a pro bender. What are you talking about?"

"So are you saying you've never played for the Fire Ferrets?"

"You think I did what?" Her face was a picture of shock, literally as cameras were going off left and right.

"No more questions," Lin shouted, grabbing Korra and pulling her offstage. "Thank you all for coming."

"What was that all about, Lin?" Tenzin asked, the group now just inside the new building.

"Some publicity stunt or something," she replied, waving it off. "We picked up some drunk fire bender a week or so ago in a bar fight. Said he was the avatar's boyfriend, that she was a part of his pro bending team and they were supposed to have won the pro bending tournament. Of course the media got hold of the story, because there isn't actual news to be reporting on, and here we are. Poor kid regrets it now, of course, said he didn't know what came over him. He's been trying to keep a low profile but the press has been hounding him. So naturally his team is in the news, ergo a publicity stunt."

"You know," Korra said to Lysanias, "if you've cost me a boyfriend I'm going to be fairly upset with you."

"Humm, let's see," Lysanias offered, putting his hands out as though weighing something. "Totally new types of bending, energy skills, meeting Yue and other spirits, meeting Amy, double dating her and me, helping save the freaking world from Amon *or* a boyfriend." He moved his hands up and down. "Which is the more important thing?"

"He's right, you'll always have me," Amy pouted. "What do you need a *boyfriend* for? You have a girlfriend."

"Gee, that's a good point. Would I have met Amy if you weren't around?"

"Probably not," Tenzin admitted. "Because you wouldn't have set foot in a library."

"I guess it's fine. This boy though, is he cute?"

"Down girl, we have a world to save," Lysanias reminded her.

"Yeah, if this thing ever shows up."

"What's wrong Tenzin, you look even more surly than usual," Lin remarked to him. "It can't be the news of some weird fire bender."

"I am not surly! I was just thinking a press conference was probably the wrong idea in the first place. What we should have done is a radio interview. It would have gotten the message out directly, and we wouldn't have 'Avatar Korra ducks questions about fire bender boyfriend' headlines tomorrow."

"Are we going to have those headlines?" she asked fearfully.

"Very probably," Lin admitted, rubbing her temple. "Sorry kid, I should have warned you. Obviously being gone you wouldn't have known."

"I suppose it's too late to have the interview anyway?" she asked hopefully. "Head them off the pass, at it were?"

"Probably."

"Ah well. I said my piece. If they were more worried about some guy raving about being my boyfriend than my work with the spirits or my new bending, that press conference was over anyway."

"I thought we had agreed to keep your new bending abilities secret for now?" Lysanias asked.

"Sure, but I would have liked a *little* intrigue. You know, 'oh, I can't tell you because it's super secret but it's so cool I wish I could tell you.' That sort of thing."

"Right. Because that would go well."

"The public has a short memory anyway," Lin assured her. "By the time you get back again they'll have moved on to some other poor sap- I mean fluff story about unimportant people- I mean-"

"Anyway, Amy, you want to head to the library? Obviously Korra can't just walk around now but we can."

She shook her head. "I don't know what I want to do. I was thinking of taking Unalaq up on his offer to come work for him in the north. I could be a trainer, and he is the chief up there. He said he could use a person like me to keep others in line. But then Korra said she wanted to come back here to live. Would I rather work at a library but be near her or have a more interesting job with Unalaq but be apart from her? It's a tough decision."

"But an unneeded one," Lysanias said with a grin. "Have I showed you my shield?"

"That one you have in the ward on your bracer there? What about it?"

"You've only seen it with the cover on. Get some water and I'll get out it."

"Okay..."

They headed to a bathroom and got some water, meanwhile Lysanias got his shield out and unhooked the front cover. "I made this to store some people I didn't want to hurt," he explained. "Hasn't been that handy since, but maybe it will at some point? Anyway, throw the water at the shield." The girls did, becoming more animated when it vanished.

"Where did it go?" Korra asked, looking the blackness of the shield over.

"Careful, don't touch it," he cautioned, snapping the cover back over the void. "It's essentially a coin that I made back at home that serves as an entrance to my personal dimension. Another thing I haven't really been to recently, but we've got your airship so I didn't need mine. The water would have touched the portal and gone there, splashing to the ground."

"You have your own airship?"

"Yes, I have my own- wait." *They're focusing on entirely the wrong thing, here. They should be focusing on my own... you know what, it doesn't matter.* "Airship? Yeah, my friends and I built one. It's a far more simple affair than yours, just a basket hung on a balloon really, but it works. I've got it parked inside near the entrance."

"Can we see it?" Amy asked.

"Eh, it takes ten minutes to get the door open, I'd rather not have to go through all that right at the moment." *In fact, maybe I should make an item to speed that up somehow. And practice it, not that I can ever forget the spell, given I used Skybourne magic to make it.* *Priorities.*

"Oh. What does this have to do with anything?"

"That's easy. I can make you one, too. A portal that can open between here and... oh wait, no it won't work. Shoot."

"What?"

"Let me think a second. Shoot, no. I was going to say it could open between wherever the object was and the spirit portal location. But the one for the north is still closed. I was thinking you would want to go to the south, I guess. That's the closest place I've seen, as I don't want to take a trip to the north. I suppose I could before I left..." *Inari implied relative time was meaningless between realities. I could stay here for years and still appear at the right time in the next reality. My not aging makes that possible too.*

"Even if you went there, nearest city in the north is probably a day away *by airship*," Korra reminded him. "Just going to the north wouldn't help. She would need to go to a specific location in the north."

"There's that too. Maybe I can come up with something else? Something that can let you teleport? You can go see it, then just go between the two places."

"No need for that!" Korra said brightly. "We know I can learn to bend space, remember? Once I learn that, I can bring you to where you need to go, or come get you. You could work

for Unalaq and still live here, you know, with me. If you wanted, you know, a roommate or whatever." She was blushing and looking away.

"You would do that for me?"

"Of course I would."

"Oh my gosh, Korra! Thank you!" She threw her arms around the avatar.

"Guess I'm stuck for it now," she deadpanned. "Have to get plenty of practice in."

Amy laughed. "You better."

That's right. She's been blowing up snowballs to practice space bending. Forget there was the possibility of her learning to teleport.

Jinora once again talked her father into remaining in "Team Avatar" for the duration, saying there was still a lot Unalaq could teach her about spirits. He had to admit what she had been learning was fairly impressive, and she had handled herself well during their "trial" separation.

Only because he doesn't know about the spirit attack that almost killed her, but how many times in her life will that happen?

"We do want you to come home at some point," he protested.

"When Korra goes back, she can bring me," Jinora told him. "I'm keeping up with my regular studies, honest."

"She is," Lysanias added. "At least, it isn't just spirit books I see her reading at night."

"Don't tell him about the romance novels!" Amy stage whispered to him.

"You're letting her read what?" he demanded to know.

"I'm just joking Tenzin. Honest."

"You better be. I suppose there will be plenty of adults around back at the south."

"My parents don't mind having her around," Korra assured him. "In a strange sort of way, we're kind of family."

"What?"

"I see what she means," Amy told him. "Korra's your dad, so her parents are like Jinora's great great grandparents."

"Korra's not my- oh. Er... wait, does it work like that?"

The girls were laughing as Tenzin tried to work this out.

"It can't be for much longer," Jinora told him as that died down. "Yue says the spirit world is preparing, like they know something is coming. She doesn't think it'll be long before the shadow avatar makes a move."

"Very well. A couple of weeks at most, all right?"

"Thanks dad."

Leaving Tenzin behind the group headed back to the south, deciding to take care of any dark spirits on the way. They simply waited until nightfall and Yue was able to guide them to any spirits too far from the portal to have lost their rage, but too close to the shipping routes to ignore. Bringing the airship low Jinora repeated her song calling any in, and the group purified them. It was good practice in several skills; feeling energy to pinpoint them, calling spirits, and energy transfer.

With that threat gone and the group now back at Korra's house the girls looked through their books for another spirit to learn.

"I'd love to learn how to summon the spirit of knowledge," Jinora pined. "But given their reputation they probably wouldn't appreciate it very much."

"Not without new knowledge to appease it," Korra agreed. "Actually, the fact the avatar is learning to call spirits would be new knowledge," she mused. "I wonder if that would count."

"Either way, we should be focusing on spirits that can fight," Amy put in. "And there's only the one knowledge spirit. We need something we can each get." Her face darkened.

"Though if one of us has Yue, another will have to support Zeleafu, and whoever is best at this takes the strongest spirit, probably whatever we learn next. We can each only keep one at most around, after all."

"Good point," Jinora agreed. "But then couldn't I learn Wan Shi Tong while you and

Korra learn something that will fight?"

"But we should all learn the same thing. At least for now. We need to support each other and make sure one of us isn't learning it wrong."

"Fine," she sighed. "Did you have something in mind?"

"Something that can fly I think," Korra decided. "I mean Yue is all well and good, but there's only one of her. And our wind spirit can jump on air and is fast, but that's not really flying. This way we'll have one strong ground fighter, one strong air fighter, and Yue can sort of do both. Within reason, there isn't much water in the air, so I count her more a ground fighter that can float."

"There's the spirit of the hawk," Jinora suggested, leafing through her book. "It's a fighting spirit too. Fairly proud, and probably within our reach." She spun the book around, showing the description of it.

"Sounds good to me!"

Two days later the girls had managed to bring the spirit of the hawk into this world, which was a huge birdlike spirit that was looking around in surprise.

"Now how in the world did I get here?" it asked no one in particular. "I don't recall wanting to go to the human world."

"That was us," Korra called up to it, and the birdlike face bent over to take them in. "Sorry if we startled you!"

"You're full of confidence, anyway. Why go through the trouble? What do you want from me?"

"We wanted to know if you would like to fight?"

"What, you four?" It looked the group over.

"No, not us! Not with us, I mean *with* us. At our side."

"This is quite irregular, who are you people? How did you bring me here?"

"I'm avatar Korra, and these are my friends." She introduced everyone.

"I am Tonicate. Since when does the avatar have the ability to summon spirits from our world into this one?"

"That's a long story. The short answer is my bending got taken away from me by a guy named Amon, so I learned some new tricks. We're gearing up for a fight against an evil force that wants to destroy our world. So are you in, or not?"

"Is that what all the excitement is about in the spirit world? I wondered. So, you want my help, do you?"

"If you can fight."

"If I can fight, she says. All my kind are fair warriors, I suppose. And to have a shot at showing up my brethren... yes, that could be very nice indeed. Very well, are we leaving right away?"

"We don't know when it will come. We're just practicing right now, making sure we know how to get the spirits we've learned to call here when we need them."

"That's awfully good thinking, for a human I mean. Very well, I'll be happy to assist you."

"Thanks."

"Can you tell us about what's going on in the spirit world?" Jinora asked. "You said there was some excitement?"

Good thinking, Jinora. Yue may have an incomplete understanding of the spirit world so far, she admits she hasn't been a spirit long. Relatively speaking, anyway. Getting the thoughts of another spirit could be helpful.

"We have been jumpy, of late. Spirits typically roam all over, we don't live like you humans do. So usually you'll see groups of all different kinds of spirits hanging out, and then they'll go their separate ways and join new groups. Comes of living so long, always wanting to meet new spirits to keep things interesting. But now spirits are sticking to their own kind more, and not welcoming other kinds of spirits into their groups."

"That's silly," Amy told them. "Or should I say dangerous?"

"Dangerous? How so?"

"Wouldn't having a variety of different spirits in a group be better? What if something

that can fly attacks a group of spirits that can't? They could get picked off one by one with no way to fight back. Having a flyer or two in the group could make a big difference."

The spirit considered. "I could see that. Right now distrust of other types of spirits is stronger than the common sense idea of diversity being strength. I wonder if I could convince anyone of that?"

"At least get them to travel nearby spirits with complementary abilities," Jinora suggested. "Even if they're not going to trust other spirits, there's only one shadow avatar. Once it shows up, all other spirits can be deemed safe. With suspicion gone they'll want to come together quickly, I would imagine. Can't do that if you're scattered all over the world in groups of your own kind."

"*Shadow* avatar? I thought we just had the one? Er, what did you say your name was?"

"Korra. That's the name we've given to the thing that's coming," she explained.

"Ah. I see. Well, I'm just one spirit, but I'll mention it if I see any groups while I'm flying around."

"If you mention Yue, or the wind spirit Zeleafu, they're also fighting with us," Korra told them. "That might make your job easier. They're supposed to be spreading the word and keeping an eye out in the spirit world."

"I'll do that."

"Then I guess there's not much else. Do you mind us bringing you here a few more times? We need the practice."

"Not at all, I wasn't doing anything really important."

"Thanks."

So the group continued to practice, and several more days passed. However, a worried looking Unalaq came to see Korra and the group one morning at breakfast.

"I need your help," he began. "I just got word my wife has taken a turn for the worse."

Chapter 36
Phantom Message
When: Day 118
Where: Korra's house

Unalaq threw down a piece of paper, and Korra grabbed it, spinning it around.

"Telegraph?" Tanraq asked, and he nodded.

"You really need to get decent phone service down here somehow," he complained. "Of course, I suppose the same can be said of the north."

"Message Tanraq," Amy read over Korra's shoulder. "Wife health failing. Return ASAP."

"That seems clear enough," Korra agreed. "But what can we do?"

"Easy. Lysanias, I've heard you mention that you can simply ask the universe a question and get an answer. Is that right?"

Did I mention that while he was around? I haven't done it in awhile. Guess I must have.

"It's true, I can. Around here it's more like the spirit of the world answers, or sends a spirit like avatar to provide information, but it's the same thing."

"Then I would like you to ask 'will opening the spirit portal to the North Pole release Vaatu?' That is what we were afraid of, right? Why we stopped? But I think it has nothing to do with those portals. Like aye-aye said, they were sealed to keep people nosing around there. But think of the harm that did the world! Yue was worried you would use the ley lines in the area to break him out. So let's just *not do that*, and everything will be fine. In any case, if you get a no answer, Korra, would you be willing to open the portal and save me a month of travel time?"

She looked at the note, considering. "I do have to come to some decision," she admitted. "And having only one spirit portal does create an imbalance in the world. I'm supposed to strive towards greater balance. We either need them both closed, or both open. As I've opened one, the damage is half done either way. If I can't close it- imbalance. If I open the other one but can't close either, fine, at least it'll be balanced again. If I can't close the one, I can't close the other either. But if I can, and this is an emergency, I could always do so later if it proved to be a problem." She stood up. "I'll do it."

"Thank you Korra," he gushed, hugging her.

Oh again with the hugging? her face said. "That's fine, uncle. Let's get ready to go."

"I can teleport us back to the site," Lysanias offered. "We can be in the north by the time an hour has gone by."

"I'm coming," Tanraq insisted.

"Of course," Unalaq told him, letting Korra go. "Did you think I would try to stop you?"

"Oh, uh, no, of course not." He didn't sound convinced. "It's just, in case something does happen in there, I'd like to be around."

"If something does happen, I'd want you to be there!" Unalaq told him. "I'd want every strong fighter I could get to be there. I don't want that spirit to get out, you think I'm crazy?! I've spent my life learning how to turn spirits bright again, I don't need some spirit that can just get near them and turn them dark running around."

"Right, no, of course not. I'll get some stuff around."

"Now then, join hands," Lysanias told them, standing outside the house. "This may feel a little weird, but it won't hurt you." He had put the spirit of the moon on himself, increasing his strength, and the spirit of the dragonfly, for obvious reasons.

"Wait, aren't we going by ward?" Amy asked. "That's usually how you do it."

"I can afford to be wasteful with energy now," he explained. "I know we're going to a place *packed* with ley lines. Even if I spend all reserves now, I can just hook in and replenish myself. And I know a technique that can help me spend more energy. Two techniques, the aura and just doing it directly. So I should be able to lift all of you the split second it will require to get us all there."

"Whatever you have to do," Unalaq told him, stepping up and taking his hand.

Oh, I would have preferred one of the girls, but whatever. He "lit up" his new aura, concentrated on spending more energy in a second, envisioned the outside of the portal

(there was really no place on the planet like it) and *shifted*. The scene changed, and energy drained away from him, but he was pleased to see the pillar of energy before him.

"Well done," praised Unalaq, looking around. "And you say Korra could learn to do that too? Astonishing. Let's get inside out of the cold." He stepped forward and went through the portal.

"Someone's eager," Tanraq remarked.

"His wife could be dying this very second!" Korra protested. "Cut him some slack!"

"Fine. He certainly seems to have turned over a new leaf, but I still don't trust him. Watch your back."

"Like he said, why would he want Vaatu out? It wouldn't make sense. He's been nothing but kind and supportive of us since the moment he got here. Don't let your history with him undo the good he's trying to do now." She stomped off through the portal too.

"We really can't be sure," Lysanias agreed. "He could be the shadow avatar, I have no way to tell. But his concern feels genuine, there's no faking that. I think. And whatever showdown is going to take place will take place. The shadow avatar wants this world's energy, so it isn't a question of if, it's a question of when. So keep that in mind."

"Very well."

The group entered the portal, and Lysanias spent a moment refreshing his energy from the abundant lines in the area. He had the bright idea to call out to Yue again, shifting his bonus from strength he didn't need anymore to his insight, so he could more clearly interpret the spirit's answer. Then he settled down and asked the universe:

Will Korra opening the portal free Vaatu?

No.

His eyes opened. "So far so good," he reported. "But let me do one other thing. Haven't done this in a bit, let me see if I remember..." He walked over to the sealed portal and touched it, concentrating and trying to look into the future. He got nothing at first, but kept his mind open for any impressions that would show themselves. A moment later he had an answer. "I saw us going through the portal. We weren't dead, everything here seemed normal. I think it's safe. At least nothing will immediately happen."

"Is that enough?" Unalaq asked Korra. "Is there some other question you want asked?"

"No, that's good enough for me," she agreed, and motioned everyone back. "Stand back, this one may react more strongly, given that the other one is already open." The group stepped back and Korra went into avatar mode, willing the portal open. She succeeded, and again a ray of energy shot into the air, making her vanish. Everyone held their breath and looked back at Vaatu's tree prison, but it was fine.

"Let's get through, I guess," Unalaq told them, stepping through himself.

"Guess it was fine," Tanraq remarked, looking around. "How about that, a shortcut halfway around the world."

"Yeah, too bad it just leads to a similar land of ice and snow, instead of a beach someplace," Amy joked, and headed through.

The others went though, standing at the North Pole and looking around.

"New problem," Unalaq announced. "How do we actually get to my village from here? We can't exactly walk!"

"We get to see your balloon after all!" Amy squealed, clapping her hands.

"I guess so," sighed Lysanias. "At least I can replenish myself again. Just a minute."

He tore open the entrance to his personal dimension and flew the balloon out, setting it down in the snow.

"Interesting construction," Amy told him, walking around it.

"Why is it covered in wards?" Jinora asked.

"They're armor wards, so it doesn't get knocked out of the sky with one hit," he explained. "I suppose I should update them, now that I'm a bit more practiced at it. Ah well. Everyone get in. It doesn't move all that fast but it's better than walking."

So the balloon lifted off and as the moon happened to be in the sky Lysanias could ask Yue which way the nearest village was. He got an answer and commanded the ship to move in that direction, which it did. Some time later they reached civilization, once again carved from the ice because that's really all these people had to work with around here. To save time Lysanias simply put the balloon in a ward, and they entered the city on foot. Unalaq led them through the streets to his home, and walked in like he owned the place. (To be fair, he did.)

It was the house of the chief, so it was fairly large and well decorated. Several servants rushed over, and he demanded to know where his wife was. They told him in the dojo, making him scowl, but he said "come on," and took the group through the house. Throwing open the doors to the dojo there was his wife, caught by surprise in the arms of another man. She hadn't expected him back so soon, after all. Her eyes were wide looking over at the group.

"Hyaa!" said the man, throwing her to the ground. "Well that was dumb," he said to her. "Why did you loosen up? Oh. Hey chief, you're back early!"

"Welcome home honey," his wife said, standing and rubbing her butt. "Did you have to throw me that hard, I'll all sore now!" *Is she standing like that to draw attention to where she's... she's someone's wife, stop staring.* She was dressed in blue, like everyone else around here, and had her hair tied up. She was in a sort of workout suit that was fairly tight, and she had dark hair and eyes. "I didn't expect you back for weeks yet." She went over to him and embraced him. And kissed him. And kept kissing him.

What an affectionate woman.

"Mother, please," Desna scolded after a time.

"Not in front of the guests," Eska agreed.

"Guests?" she broke it off, looking over his shoulder. "Why, Tonraq, is that you? Isn't this a surprise!"

"Malina, this is avatar Korra and her friends Amy and Lysanias. Everyone, my wife, Malina."

"Hello," everyone greeted her.

"Nice to see you again, Malina," Tanraq told her.

"And you."

"I'll see you tomorrow?" asked Malina's instructor, realizing this lesson was over.

"Yes, that's fine. Thank you," she absently told him, and he bowed and walked out.

"How did you get back so fast? Did you not attend the festival at all? But you must have, if you have the avatar with you."

"It's complicated. Look, are you all right?" He looked her over, putting a hand to her forehead.

"All right? Of course I am, why wouldn't I be? Oh, stop fussing I'm fine!" She playfully knocked his hand away. "Of course if you wanted to look over my 'injury' from that throw..." She raised an eyebrow playfully.

"I expected you to be in bed, or worse, everyone in mourning because you had died!" He got out the telegram, shaking it. "I got this telegram your health had taken a turn for the worse."

"What? Let me see that." She looked it over. "I didn't have anything like this sent. As you can see, I recovered weeks ago. It was just a flu, nothing to really worry about. No one mentioned sending anything like this, and I really was in no danger. How odd."

Ah, right, water bending probably can't heal disease. It's not damaged tissue, so if they got sick they would just have to wait it out like anyone else.

"This doesn't make any sense!" Unalaq protested, looking back at the group. "If my wife is fine, who sent this note?"

"Some kind of distraction?" Tonraq asked. "Get the avatar here so that... something... can happen in the south?"

"I can go check," Jinora told them. "I've wanted to see if I could go through the portal in spirit form anyway. If spirits can do it, I should be able to."

"You won't get lost?" Unalaq asked her. "I don't want to have to report to your father I lost your soul."

"Don't risk it," Korra cautioned with a shake of her head. "I feel like something terrible might happen if you leave your body right now. Besides, this being a distraction doesn't even

make sense. If you want to cause trouble, just do it where we aren't. It could have easily started here, rather than there. I don't buy it."

"What else could it be?" Tanraq asked.

"I don't know," Unalaq insisted. "I'm getting the servants together, maybe one of them did it as a joke!" He stalked out of the room.

There was a moment of silence.

"Ah, so, uh, welcome back, I guess?" Malina told Tonraq.

"Place hasn't changed much."

"It is ice," she agreed with a laugh.

"I'm going to my room," Eska announced.

"Yes, we'll probably stay here," Desna agreed.

"The whole trip was somewhat of a let down," Eska went on.

"Hardly worth the effort," Desna agreed.

"Glad you're all right, mother."

They walked out.

"You know, that's the most I've heard them say at one time," Korra told her.

"I know," Malina remarked sadly. "They certainly didn't get my exuberance, or their father's passions. Or my passions." She looked Lysanias over with some approval. "Or really any passions. Still, I wouldn't trade them for the world. But enough about that, Korra, it really is nice to meet you. I've totally forgotten your friend's names, introduce us again!"

So the group made small talk until Unalaq returned, still scowling.

"No one admits to sending the note," he growled. "And I've talked to all the servants, they're all here. I really don't understand it." He was staring at it again as if it might hold some clue, clearly at a loss.

"Could it have been sent to you by mistake?" Amy offered. "I mean it seems like something that was relevant, yes, but it just says 'wife' not 'Malina.' Could there be another Unalaq and someone just assumed it was meant for you?"

"Another Unalaq with a wife in ill health? I don't know about that," he countered.

"I admit, the chances are pretty slim."

"I could ask," Lysanias offered. "It's no trouble."

"We'll never get anywhere just guessing," Unalaq agreed. "Go ahead and ask, let's get to the bottom of this."

"Very well." Lysanias settled himself down and again opened himself to the wisdom of the universe.

Who sent the telegram that said Unalaq's wife was getting worse?

???

"What?" His eyes popped open again. "I got back a confused shrug which makes no sense at all!"

"A what?" Amy asked.

"The answer doesn't have to be word. It can be a feeling, an impression of a scene, that's why it sometimes takes two or three tries. The universe responds, but my understanding of that answer may be incomplete. Or I may miss it because I was itchy or something."

"Or gassy," Jinora suggested.

"Yeeees. But this was a clear result, I felt it. But the result was like it didn't know what I was talking about."

"Would holding it help?" Unalaq offered it.

"No, I don't think so. I asked about the telegram that said your wife was getting worse, and it was like it didn't- let me see that!" He grabbed it and felt it, looking it over. "No, it's not supernaturally or magically active that I can tell. So it can't be a ward and thus hidden from my power. I can touch it, it's not an illusion. I don't know, I'm sorry. Wait a second..." He concentrated and tried to see into the object's past, but he couldn't get a clear picture. "No,

never mind. I see it being carried around but not where it came from. How long ago since you got this?"

"I got it maybe an hour before Korra woke up," he replied. "I figured she would be up soon, so I wouldn't just barge in on her. With my luck she would be changing or something."

"Which I appreciate," Korra told him.

"That's how we met!" his wife exclaimed. "You sly dog, I'm surprised you didn't use it as an excuse to try and catch a little peek!"

"Malina, please, I'm not sixteen anymore."

"Huh. Then I don't know. Sorry." *Great, the guy with all the powers is once again useless. I guess I've been training my fighting abilities to get my spirit out more reliably but not the more nebulous skills of looking through time and asking the universe stuff.*

"That's all right," Unalaq told him, taking the note back. "The question is, what should we do now?"

"I should head back, I'm not really supposed to be here," Tanraq announced.

"Don't be silly, I'm chief now," Unalaq scoffed. "You're fine."

"What's this?" Korra asked.

"Not important, never mind," Tanraq said a little too quickly. "Let's head back, I still think it might be some kind of trick to lure us away from the south."

"Wait," said Unalaq, holding up a hand. "Korra, you need to decide. Are the portals staying open, or are you closing them? I'm here now, my ship can return without me. If you're closing them I'll just stay. You've got the technique I can teach you down, it's just practice at this point. I'd like to stay here, just in case."

"I don't suppose you could ask if the portals will cause trouble in the future?" she half joked to Lysanias.

"Those gloves made by the equalists caused trouble," he reminded her. "There isn't anything in the world that doesn't cause some ripples. Consider this- the portals being open *was* the natural state of the world. Them being closed is unnatural. Energy radiates out from them, in this realm and the other. That may mean more growing things, may even mean the ice shrinks in the poles. While you are supposed to be a figurative bridge, these are a literal one. Is tearing them down right after building them up really the way to go? You saw the Everstorm. The spirit's anger lasted how long? Do you want them to be double angry with *you*?"

"I guess not. Okay, it'll stay open, at least for now."

"Then I shall return with you, and see this whole thing through," he announced. "Korra, the spirit world thanks you."

"I'll take it. In fifty years or so once I know the long term results of what I've just decided."

"I hope I'm still around to see it! Malina, I must again leave you for a time. But the portals are open, and we can use them to go back and forth whenever we want. We'll have to build a rail line or something from here to there if we really want to use it to the fullest."

"On some kind of elevated track?" Amy asked interested.

"Yes, that might be best, I wonder..." He trailed off.

The group said their goodbyes, Eska and Desna choosing to remain behind, and the group joined hands again after Lysanias called upon the spirits for a moment.

"I'm going to go right in front of the house," Lysanias explained. "That should save us a lot of time." *I didn't feel like I needed to spend so much energy trying to boost my strength. And there's two less people this time. Let's give it a try.* He *shifted*.

The group appeared right in front of the house, and things were fine. Tanraq raced off to check with his people, and Unalaq stretched. "That was odd," he remarked, looking around. "Things seem normal here, though. Wonder who I would talk to about a rail line on this side?"

"The cost of it though," Amy protested.

"Ah, but the benefit!" he protested with a raised finger.

"Wait a second," Jinora told them. "What if you built it on a ley line? Then you wouldn't have to raise it off the ground."

"You mean... of course. Have two water benders clearing the way. One rests and

recharges from the line using my technique of energy redirection and Lysanias' technique of hooking into the line in the first place. When they get tired the other one takes over. Because the line is on the track itself they can move and draw energy at the same time. Brilliant!"

"Thanks."

"I may have to offer you a job too, when you're old enough. Anyway, thanks everyone, sorry it was a false alarm or whatever."

They all said it was fine, and the group got back to training.

Then, nearly four weeks later, Vaatu escaped.

Chapter 37
Out of Box Thinking
When: Day 139
Where: Training area as usual

“Have you seen Unalaq today?” Tanraq asked the group, walking out to the training area. This was basically a cleared out area with an ice dome over it on one side to cut down on the wind. It was mid-morning and the group was, as usual, doing their own thing to train their individual skills.

Everyone looked around but no one answered.

“I thought it was odd, he usually shows up by now,” Korra told him. “You need something?”

“I just didn’t see him this morning,” he admitted. “As that’s something out of the ordinary, I thought I would check here.”

“You still don’t trust him, do you?” Amy asked.

“If you knew our history, you wouldn’t either. Lysanias, would you mind?”

“Not at all.” He chanted for the moon spirit, then sat down to ask the universe where Unalaq was. He got a very specific answer.

“The universe doesn’t know,” he replied, opening his eyes. “I got that same sort of shrug as I did before.”

“Is he dead?” Jinora asked, hands over her mouth.

“I suppose I asked where he was, I don’t know if that would mean his body or his soul. Let me ask where the last place he was, instead.”

Another tense few minutes followed.

“He entered the spirit portal,” he announced, eyes opening again.

“What? Without telling us?” Korra yelled. “You better get us over there.”

I suppose if this is showdown day, we should move fast. It’s not like these guys have anything to really prepare.

“I guess. Grab hold, everyone.” Lysanias *shifted*.

“We should summon our spirits here,” Amy suggested, “before we go in.”

“I’ll take Yue and Zeleafu,” Jinora told them. “You can handle Tunicate, right?”

“I think so.” While they chanted Lysanias got out his own mountain spirit, three anchoring wards, and looked at the beam of light shooting into the sky. “Does it look different to anyone?” he asked.

“I never really stopped to study it,” Tanraq admitted. “Why?”

“I don’t know. I just get a weird feeling from it.”

He stuck armor wards on everyone, including himself, and wondered if he should get his shield out.

Moments later the spirits were there, looking around. Yue seemed the most out of sorts.

“Thank goodness you brought me here,” she said just after arriving. “Something is happening in the spirit world!”

“Bad something or good something?” Lysanias asked, dreading the answer.

“Bad something I think. Has anything happened here?”

“Does the portal look different to you?”

“Maybe. Come on, we better get inside.”

The others agreed and stepped into the other realm, where predictably Unalaq was waiting for them by the tree.

“Unalaq, what are you doing here?” demanded Tanraq.

“Why nothing, dear brother. Can’t you see I’m just sitting here?”

“Hello!” Vaatu greeted them. “Your brother and I were just talking. Passing the time, as it were.”

“What have you done?” he went on, ignoring the spirit.

“Why is everyone always accusing me of things?”

“Something is happening,” Yue confirmed, looking around nervously. “I can feel it.”

“Indeed, but it’s nothing I did,” Unalaq confirmed. “It’s just harmonic convergence, that’s all.”

“The what now?” Korra asked, never having heard this.

“Harmonic convergence. It only happens every 10,000 years, so you should be thankful you get to see it in your lifetimes. Strange that you would all turn up just as it was beginning. Odd.”

“But what is it?” Amy asked.

“Oh, just all the planets in the solar system lining up.”

“Huh?” Everyone seemed confused. “That sounds made up,” Amy scoffed. “There’s no way the orbits could coincide that completely. Not every planet in the whole local area. And why *exactly* every 10,000 years? That’s far too round a number to happen by accident, it’s made up. Forget it.”

“You’ll be able to see for yourself,” Unalaq told them. “It should happen any minute now.” He paused. “Any minute...now. Any minute. Now.”

Nothing continued to happen.

“Are you sure?” asked Jinora, not buying it.

“You feeling okay, uncle?”

“It’s a thing, you’ll see.”

“Sure, sure. Meanwhile, how about I just go over and close the northern portal for a little bit? We’re not using it, right?”

“Don’t you want to know about the telegram?” he stalled, waving it. “I solved the mystery.”

“What about it?”

“There was no mystery. It wasn’t even a telegram. It was a message I typed to myself before I even left. See, Vaatu came to me in a dream and told me to do certain things. I wasn’t sure about them, but I got here and you were here, Lysanias. So it was all true. Everything Vaatu said. It was easy to get you to open the portals if I seemed friendly and helpful, rather than my original plan of invading the whole place. They said that would just turn people against me, so I should just wait, bide my time, and let you dig your own graves. And you did!”

Great, just like they told Amon information. “That’s why the shrug from the universe! I asked about a telegram, I should have said ‘piece of paper’ or ‘message’ or something.”

“Live and learn, right kid? Oh, and here’s another thing you screwed up.”

“Just the one?”

He smirked. “That I know of. You took my question instead of coming up with your own. See, you asked if opening the portal would free Vaatu. Obviously not. You should have asked ‘will the result of Korra opening the portal be Vaatu going free.’ See, then you would have gotten a yes answer, not a no.” He laughed and spread his hands above his head. “It’s happening now!”

Everyone looked up, but nothing had changed.

“Uh sure,” Tanraq said, like he was trying to calm a barking dog. “Korra, about that portal.”

“Right.”

As she turned to head over there the portals changed, almost taking on the appearance of lighting as they changed color and merged, directly over the tree of time.

“Now that’s the stuff!” Vaatu cried as the energy filled him and he burst from his ten thousand year prison. “Now this world will fall and I will take it for myself!” Everyone got into a fighting stance, Amy pulling water from the convenient stream nearby.

“What?” cried Unalaq. “You promised to fuse with me, so I could be an avatar and start reincarnating as well. I got you freed, keep your promise!”

“Hold up, hold your horses, hold all babies, hold everything!” Vaatu cried. They had risen up, a huge dark spirit that almost seemed to disappear if they turned to the side, that’s how flat they were. But now Vaatu looked down at the human who would dare to command them. “You really believed that, didn’t you? Wow, are you gullible or *what*? Is he gullible or what?” they asked the others. “Come on, tell the truth.”

“You were lying?” Unalaq shrieked.

"We're dealing with a real mind here. Look, dude, can I call you dude? Dude, let's take a step back and work this out logically all right? Why would I, even if I was still only Vaatu, want to fuse myself with a stupid little human? I mean give me *one* good reason. What's in it for me? Go on!"

"Uh, because... uh..."

"Exactly! I was the spirit of darkness. Raava fused with the first avatar because they were desperate, and never intended to fuse permanently. I mean look at me!" They flew up to show their full size, then swooped back down. "I can fly, I have spirit powers, what possible benefit would there be for me to essentially die so that you can reincarnate? You wouldn't be able to use all the elements like the avatar can, you're a water bender. I can't change that. It was a special circumstance with those stupid turtles that made that possible. It would be madness! I just told you that to get you to work with me, and you did. Stupid, really."

"They've got a point," Tanraq agreed. "It was pretty stupid. Plus, Korra isn't Aang. It wouldn't be *you* that reincarnated. Just your soul, not your personality. Not even your memories, given how Korra knew nothing about Vaatu in the first place."

"Yeah, you can't even say you were tricked, that's pretty lame," Jinora told him. "So, Vaatu, is it? Or do you prefer 'shadow avatar?'"

"What's this? Politeness? That's odd," Vaatu turned his attention to Jinora. "You wish to be spared, don't you?"

"Oh, no, I'm sure we'll win," she said confidently. "But that's no reason to be uncivil. It isn't every day you get to meet a being from a higher dimension. The things you could teach us... I can't even imagine."

"Ha! You're right, you can't. In that spirit, get it, spirit? In that spirit, it's nice to meet you. Most beings that encounter me give me their own name, which suits me. So Vaatu or shadow avatar is acceptable. Now let's see what else we have here." Their gaze swept over the group. "Two water benders, that's a total of three, and three spirits. Charming. But you!" They gazed at Lysanias. "You're not from around here, are you?"

"Like you don't know," he said up to them. "You sent that singer to me somehow, didn't you?"

"Singer? I don't recall any singers."

"Don't play coy. She was singing about how close you were, but how I didn't realize it. And about bending, and even about the ray of light this portal produced. You were taunting me!"

"I wasn't. I felt someone from outside arrive here, but behind that energy barrier I couldn't tell exactly who. I didn't even know you- wait a second, I recognize you now. You disrupted my operation on Pyre. Pyre, wasn't it?"

"That's right."

"Ugh, you became a wanderer too? That figures. Curse that Inari. Actually this singer sounds more like her style, not mine."

Lysanias blinked a second. "You're right, it does."

"Anywho, shall we get this fight started? I'd like to get out of here, maybe start covering this world in darkness or whatever? Sort of a thing I do?"

"I've been told it's the only way to get rid of you," Lysanias replied. "So why not?"

"Great. Unalaq, you okay there buddy?"

"I'll take you apart!" he promised, shaking with rage. "You made a fool of me, and after I forced myself to be nice to my brother and everything. Implemented your plans instead of mine. I can't believe this."

"Wish I could have seen it," Vaatu boomed, rising up. "Now we fight!"

The hawk spirit acted first, racing towards Vaatu and slashing out with talons that they had on their feet. The spirit scored, though Vaatu tried to twist out of the way, and a darker gash appeared on Vaatu's face (he was mostly face after all).

"First blood!" cried Tunicate, wheeling away again.

"I'll have your head for that, little spirit!" Vaatu promised.

The mountain spirit was only a split second behind, ripping rock out of the ground and hurling it up at Vaatu. They turned back just in time to get a chest full of rock, staggering them

back.

“Wait, is so many to one fair?” they asked.

No one bothered to answer, all flinging stuff at Vaatu as they were able. For their part Vaatu just hung there, and let everything hit where it would. Surprised, everyone stopped, except for Korra who was a step behind because she had been charging up a lighting attack. She let it fly, also striking him, and he looked down at the group.

“Is that it?” they asked, sounding bored. “I was hoping for more. Ah well.” From their “face” design swept a beam of darkness, meters across which everyone had to defend against. Yue was near Jinora and threw up an ice dome, while Lysanias and his spirit pulled up more rock to try and deflect the beam as well. The other water benders had the same idea, throwing multiple barrier between themselves and the blast, which only managed to smash through some of them.

They now had plenty of ammo, and shot ice shards at Vaatu, who again basically ignored them. They were being hit, and Lysanias could see it damaging them, but Vaatu was more interested in Tunicate at the moment. The bird had come in for another strike but this time instead of trying to dodge, Vaatu tried to grab the spirit with their whiplike arms.

“Hey, let me go!” insisted Tunicate as they were grabbed out of the sky.

“Sure thing. But first, ah, this must be the thing tethering you to that human over there, isn’t it?” They yanked the ward off, and suddenly the spirit turned dark. “Why not go play with them over there?” Tunicate was released, and looked back at the group.

“Oh great, we just lost a spirit,” Lysanias yelled to the others. He looked back at Vaatu, then did a double take. *All the damage we’ve done is gone. They’re fine again. That’s why they didn’t dodge, in a second they can simply not be hurt anymore.* “He’s regenerated, we need to damage him faster!”

“I don’t think we can,” yelled Korra, throwing darkness at the spirit that was now coming for her. It dodged, forcing her to dodge out of the way as it now swept a claw through the air at her. She managed to, coming up again and tracking it as it swooped away.

“I’ll try and keep them busy,” Zeleafu told them, jumping onto the air after Tunicate. “At least then I won’t get my ward ripped off by Vaatu.”

The group and Vaatu traded blows, Lysanias trying fire bending between raising more earth to defend against that dark beam. He hoped that kind of attack would keep them from regenerating. It didn’t. *That’s it, that’s every kind of attack we’ve got. We’ve tried all forms of bending and they just shrug it off. What are we going to do? I don’t have any other long range attacks at all, and I doubt I can touch them and try to change their fundamental nature. Is it hopeless?*

The group, now cowering behind thick earth barriers layered with ice shot elements at Vaatu, who shot darkness back at them. The two spirits were now locked in combat, at least Zeleafu was as good as his word there, wind spirit against hawk spirit.

“We need a plan!” Korra insisted. “I don’t think we can win this way!”

“You could just give up,” Vaatu suggested.

“Never!”

“Wait, let’s talk about this,” Amy suggested. “Is surrender really off the table?”

“What?” Both Vaatu and Korra mirrored each other.

“Look, I don’t think we can win,” she went on, peeking out from behind the wall. When she didn’t get blasted she stepped out. “You’re too big, and obviously we can’t hurt you permanently. And I feel your *energy* is great, you can shoot those *energy* blasts all day. If I have to die, I want it to be your hand, such as it is, directly.”

Wait, is she trying to tell us something? She’s building up energy inside herself, what’s she up to?

“Amy, what are you doing?” Korra screamed. “We can beat it! Don’t just give up.”

“Yes, just give up,” Vaatu told her. “You’re the smart one of the group, that’s for sure.”

“No energy beams. I want you to come down here and finish me yourself. You owe me that much! Right here.” She indicated her chest.

“You’re offering yourself as a sacrifice? Or has my presence simply broken your mind?”

“Amy come back here.” Korra was trying to pull her back behind the wall.

“Either way, I suppose I won’t waste the opportunity. Prepare yourself.” Vaatu swooped

down, spearlike arm ready to deliver a fatal blow. As they descended Amy threw both hands up when she was inches from death and water, unnoticed on the battlefield in a puddle, sprang up around Vaatu. They smashed into it, but it held as she swung her arms around.

"Now!" she screamed. "Hold him, it's our only chance! Lysanias and Unalaq, energy drain him, you're best at it!"

The others were shocked but didn't let the chance go by, adding their bending to the prison of water around Vaatu. Yue and Tanraq added more water while Jinora swept a column of air down inside it, making it rotate the opposite way as the water to perhaps make it harder to break out of. Korra kept him busy by destroying space where Vaatu was, making them regenerate but be unable to bring their full strength to bear on the swirling elements. Every time they tried, Korra was there blowing them apart.

Unalaq and Lysanias did as they were instructed, coming as close as they could and energy draining Vaatu. He first replenished his own supply, then sent Vaatu's energy into the ground, a trickle at a time. Vaatu tried blasting his way out, but Korra had the idea of simply bending his attack, which was after all the same darkness she could generate now. It harmlessly went into the air, costing Vaatu more energy he could now not afford to lose. More and more ice surrounded Vaatu so he couldn't even be seen now, so Korra started draining energy as well, further speeding the process up. Finally they burned away, Lysanias feeling the body of Vaatu vanish within the ice and his connection to the spirit broken. *You can't absorb energy from something that's dead, after all.*

The hawk spirit also immediately reverted to normal, and stopped fighting with Zeleafu. They started apologizing but Zeleafu waved that off.

"Is everyone okay?" Tanraq asked.

"I'm not," Zeleafu complained. "That stupid bird spirit really packs a punch."

"I'm right here. And thank you!"

"I'm not sure I can heal spirits," Lysanias told them.

"It's fine, we'll heal on our own. Is Vaatu really gone, then?"

Lysanias got out his bag of marbles, reaching in with the intent to check this world. The marble he pulled out shone brightly.

"The shadow avatar is gone," he confirmed, putting it back. "Your world is safe."

"Party time!" Amy yelled.

"You!" Korra burst out, hitting her in the shoulder. "Don't scare me like that!"

"Sorry, sorry," she said, laughing. "I couldn't exactly explain."

"Coming up with a plan to drain his energy on the fly like that," Unalaq praised, "I'm impressed."

"You!" Tanraq growled, spinning on his brother. "This is mostly your fault!"

"Peace!" Lysanias offered, stepping between them. "I don't know what your history is, or how far back the shadow avatar started manipulating events here. But look around." He did, the spirit world was going back to normal as the convergence ended. But this time, there was a new brightness to the place, now that the spirit of darkness was gone. "You have a new beginning, here and now. Put aside what happened, and build a new future, together. Your cities are close by now, if you can get that rail system put in. Goods and people can go back and forth, and there's no more spirit of darkness to worry about. You two need each other if you're going to make that work."

He grumbled something, but Unalaq seemed relieved he wasn't going to have to fight his brother.

And so the group left the spirit world triumphant, and events came to a close in the world of the avatar. There were a few loose ends to tie up; Lysanias got Jinora home to the island, and Korra settled in the city with Amy. He got told of a few really nasty benders by Tenzin, and when he learned they had tried to kidnap Korra as a baby he had no problem going to their individual prisons (in secret) and taking their bending away. That made sure they couldn't try again, and probably saved her a lot of hassle in the future. Who knows? He practiced bonding with his spirit, but only managed it once, meaning he still had a way to go before using that technique with regularity.

But finally he watched Korra and the others summon spirits, after learning, and noting in his book, the basics of the other bending Korra could do. With that, fully six months after coming into this reality he knew it was time to go. All his friends gathered on the island to wish him well, and the next morning after the party he looked out over the water with the next marble in his hand.

"I wish you didn't have to go," a voice behind him said. He turned.

"There are other worlds that need saving," he told Korra. "Other pretty girls to rescue."

"You never rescued me!"

"No? A certain cliff springs to mind."

"Okay, okay, maybe the once. I've said it a million times, but I'll say it again. Thanks for everything."

"Thanks," said Jinora.

"Thank you," said Amy.

"Of course. Go out there and do some great things, okay? All of you."

"We will," they chorused.

"Oh, there is one more thing," Lysanias realized. "Just a second." He got his trunk out of the carrying ward, then rooted around in it. "Ah, here it is." He drew out a pouch that jingled and dug out a coin. He flipped it to Jinora who caught it.

"A flame?"

"Look on the front." She did, and the emblem of Pyre, the shield, stared up at her. "You have to be the shield now," he said, putting the pouch and then the trunk away. "Protect your family and your friends, just like you know I would."

"I will." She hugged him, followed by the others.

"I am glad to have known all of you," he managed, starting to choke up. "Every time I bend I'll think of you. Turn around now, okay?"

The girls did as they were instructed and he took one last look at them, and the island. *Farewell, world of the avatar. Be safe, my friends, and use what I have taught you well.*

And he was gone.