



Chapter 6: "Preparation"

The next day John, Mike and Milly went through their orientation and then reported to Sergeant David Christopher at the military base just outside of the academy. Paragon and Smushy as they were officially known were transferred over the following day. Using their own magic, Paragon and Smushy would separate their consciousnesses from their jet bodies and become Pari and Sammy to hang out with the twins on their off hours. Similar to Rick, they couldn't be sensed unless they wanted to be which made it easy to have hang out. About a week later, Kelli managed to finally get herself transferred from teacher to a monitor for the twins after many discussions with General Karthagg.

Almost another month had passed after things had settled down from the transfer when the door intercom buzzed to life as Kelli asked to be let in. A moment afterwards, the seven of them all sat down at the table to prepare for the next big step.

"Alright you guys, the paperwork is all finally finished officially. So what's the next step here?" Kelli asked.

John raised his left hand and the little ball of light given to them shimmered into existence. Various lines, symbols and images began spiraling around it in the air around the room. John pointed at one of the images showing a few million of Aavaria's fighters floating in front of what looked like a scar of red light in space surrounded by a semi-transparent sphere of white light. "That's the next step. You know what that is right?"

Kelli nodded. "That's the tear where our enemies attacked us from a few months ago when we all came together. What about it?"

"Another wave somewhere from twenty to fifty times larger is going to be coming through it in a few days. Just like last time, we need to put as big a dent in them as possible. The ones that become a threat to the solar system here can be dealt with by our friendly freeloading demon over there. Afterwards we should be commended again and get that much closer to gaining another rank." John pointed to another little picture showing a flowing pink and red tube-like structure filled with more centaur looking things with several standing out from the rest. "Those unique looking ones are the over gods and supreme gods being sent this time. As you know, supreme gods are just one rank below a planar god in general so we need to hope that the extra forces Aavaria's sent here can handle them or things are going to get very ugly."

"Can you tell if we have the necessary forces to pull it off?" asked Milly concerned.

"It'll be pretty close from what I can tell, but it's strangely hard to read the actual abilities of Aavaria's forces until they begin combat. If for whatever reason those supreme gods manage to overcome Aavaria's forces though we have two alternate course of action." John shook the little ball and another set of images floated out of it. "The first is the more likely, and that's to abandon this world and start working our way up over again. That one sucks, but it's the safest for keeping ourselves undetected."

Kelli slammed her fist down on the table causing it to crack in places and startling Milly half to death. "That is not an option. I understand the logic of the plan, but if you two are here to end this war then you need to find a better way than abandoning all the people in this universe. What's the other

plan?”

Mike raised both his hands in a carefree gesture then pointed at another image floating around the room showing another world filled with white light and silvery planets. “The second plan is to remove the restrictions on our jets or Rick and try to drive the enemy forces back into that planar tear and take the fight to their home realm. That's only an option though if we can do it without Aavaria's forces realizing what's going on. We just need to hope for the best since we need them to attack in order to fight back while Aavaria's troops are watching to gain rank.”

“I'm all for having those annoying restriction seals removed! Just let me at them,” purred Sammy.

Kelli stood up and fixed her eyes on Mike and John. “Whatever it takes, if our forces can't handle those gods then the second option is the only one that you are allowed to use. If you come up with any other ways please let me know as soon as possible.”

John nodded at Kelli, then tossed the little ball of light at her. “Take that with ya. It'll keep you in touch with us. Simply think of it and it'll be there. Remember that nobody else but us can see it or see you interacting with it. We got one for you too,” John said as he tossed another one to Milly.

Kelli nodded and left the room. Rick waited a second then stood up and opened a portal to leave.

“Where ya going Ricky boy?” chirped Mike.

Rick seemed to think about it for a second then replied, “To get some fresh air.” He then stepped through the portal and was gone.

Mike and John both shook their heads in unison.

“Why'd you both do that?” Milly inquired.

John leaned forward and said, “Anytime Rick says and does something like that it means he's worried about something.” John noticed the concerned look on Milly. “To elaborate a bit more, it's because he doesn't need air and if he leaves without mentioning something about food then something is on his mind.”

Milly looked over at the door then back to John. “It's about Kelli isn't it. She did seem a bit worked up.”

John nodded in response. “Good chance that's what caused it. Truthfully, Rick probably hates this situation more than any of us.”

“Why”

John leaned back while folding his arms behind his head and closed his eyes. “Because he knows that within a few days anywhere from a few million to a virtually unimaginable amount of people are going to be killed. There's also a very real chance that he'll end up being the one doing the killing. Even if it was to stop this invasion that shouldn't be, do you think you could shoulder knowing that you killed trillions of beings that were just following the orders of their creator?”

Milly looked down and sighed. “When you put it like that I can see what ya mean.”

Kelli walked briskly down the steel hallways of the military compound on her way to the elevator to the ground level where she was parked. As she rounded a corner, Rick was leaning up against the wall waiting. “R-Rick? What can I do for you?”

Rick turned to face her directly and waved his hands creating a portal behind himself. “I was just wondering if you have a moment to join me for a drink? I think we both have somethings to get off our chests.” He raised his right hand to her gesturing for her to come with him.

A weak smile crept across her face as she took his hand and they stepped into the portal. They emerged a split second later in empty space that could easily contain a small planet. Circling the perimeter of it flowed a tempest of glowing green clouds. Above them a moon sized red symbol sealed away part of the room from sight. Kelli flailed about wildly for a second then latched onto Rick since she was not ready for the vast emptiness they appeared in. Rick pulled her close and held out his hand

creating a floating tray with two filled wineglasses.

“Sorry about that, forgot for a second that you're probably not used to this weird stuff yet.”

Rick handed her one of the glasses then plucked the other one for himself. “This is my collection room of sorts. It's safe to stand here too, albeit a bit disorienting at first.”

“O-Okay,” Kelli whimpered. She slowly stretched her feet down and felt that there was solid ground there even though she couldn't see it. “You might want to let people know about that first step beforehand. Maybe hang a little sign up. So this is your collection room?”

Rick nodded as he gulped down the drink then made the glass disappear. “This is where I keep my swords at with the exception of the few up there,” Rick gestured up at the massive seal on the top of the room. “Anyhow, back to the reason for coming here. When John mentioned us possibly leaving this world if Aavaria's forces couldn't stop those supreme and over gods you got pretty upset. Since we're going to be working together for some time it'd help if we knew more about each other and the reasons for being here. If you'd prefer I can go first.”

“If you wouldn't mind. My heads still kinda spinning I'm afraid.”

Rick stretched out his right hand and in response, billions of swords flew from the green clouds spiraling around the room and formed several spheres slowly orbiting them. The swords all had different shapes and sizes. Some blazed with light, others were surrounded in storm of energy. Some could hardly even be called swords at all, appearing almost as if pulled out of a dream itself. Kelli's eyes just raced from back and forth across all of them in awe.

“Every one of these swords came from a world I've visited. Some were acquired as a reward and others taken from fallen enemies. Each of them has a tale to tell.” A six foot long blade of utter darkness with a hilt and handle made of twisted red light descended in front of them. “This blade I took from a fallen god who was caught up in a similar situation as we are right now. The planar god had lost track of it's purpose. Since gods are created by the elementals to fulfill a purpose, if they lose track of that purpose then they must be either set back on track or erased. So I was asked to step in and try to manipulate the situation from behind the scenes and restore the gods purpose. As you may have heard from the twins, I'm not actually a fighter. My older sister and brother are outstanding warriors, but all I have is a good grasp on swordsmanship and the ability to move undetected. I tried my best to steer the god back on track, but my best wasn't good enough. Ultimately that god found out about my existence and once a god knows there's other forces beyond their own curiosity kicks in and they will pretty much never complete their purpose as intended. My older brother Joseph ended up coming to my rescue and destroyed the god. In the instant the planar god died everything it had created died. In the aftermath I fashioned this sword from what little remains I could muster. Sort of a sign that the god at least existed and had a purpose. Even without making that promise to you and Milly, ultimately I would have lent my help to the twins to try and stave off as much destruction as I can. These kinds of conflicts should never exist. So that's why I'm still here.”

“Well if you recall back when you first revealed yourself to me, how I mentioned that I was a failure. In order for us provasapien's to combat the gods under Kalim'Tur's command we are infused with massive amounts of divine power, so much that if wielded incorrectly we could easily be just as much threat to Aavaria's forces as any of the invading gods. So to test us, there is a series of tests that we have to endure with each one twice as hard as the previous. Those of us that can't pass the tests are released from active duty and generally serve in back office roles since there's no way to take the divine power infused into us back apparently. Unfortunately when I was doing the thirty-eighth test I couldn't take the stress... and killed the small detachment that was with me. I was recovered in space sometime later, and was immediately sent away essentially labeled a failure. That was something like fifteen years ago when I was sixteen. Since then I've taught at the academy and seen my students graduate and go into the military. I've watched them go out into those battles against various gods and be slaughtered alongside my old comrades. I just can't stand it and if you guys really have that kind of power to end this war then I want you to exhaust every possible option before letting anymore of our

people die.”

Rick smiled at her. “One more thing before I take you back then.”

“What would that be?”

“Is that your wish?”

Kelli looked at Rick funny for a moment. “Is that my wish?”

“To exhaust every option before letting anymore of your people die?”

Kelli then returned his smile when understanding what he was getting at. “Yes. I wish that you do everything in your power to protect the people of this world and prevent this situation from getting worse. Even more so than your promise to protect me.”

Rick stood up straight and even though he was only a few inches taller than Kelli, suddenly seemed to tower over her. From behind his sunglasses the burning red glow of his eyes peeked out sending chills down her spine. Then suddenly he did a low sweeping bow. “Then I, the demon Rick Aggamare, shall do everything in my power to fulfill that wish milady.” Rick stood back up and another portal opened behind him as he extended his hand to her. “I know it's hard to understand them at times, but I'm sure Mike and John don't want to see any unnecessary deaths either. Even though they are a bit more restricted than myself, believe me when I say you can count on them when the chips are down.”