

Bonus Chapter: At the Great Council

“Are you certain you want to do this, Your Highness?” asked Lady Gillian of house Ana nervously, trying to match the quick strides of Lord Prince Bevin through the corridors of the Great Hall of the Assembly.

“Can you think of any one better to propose my amendment?” stared Lord Prince Bevin, slowing his pace slightly.

“Perhaps someone from one of the other houses?” quivered Lady Gillian. “Forgive me, Sire, but as the queen’s consort, I fear the Council will consider you...biased!”

“Who do you aide for, Lady Gillian?”

“My lady is none other than Lady Councilor Juliana, head of our humble yet equally noble house Ana!”

Bevin met her eyes, “Would Lady Councilor Juliana propose my amendment? House Ana was, after all, one of the houses who forbade the ascent of daughters to their mother’s positions of leadership back on original home world! Gurun and Miyoo never held such a rule. We have no problem with female leadership!”

“And yet you are a knight of Ten-Ar and therefore subject to the tradition of your house,” countered Gillian. “How can you claim innocence on the matter when Ten-Arian blood flows through your veins?”

“I was not born of Ten-Ar, Lady Gillian. My knighthood is a matter of merit, not heredity. House Balister, recognizing the prowess of female archers, stood against grandfathering this...custom into our laws. Or so the records state,” asserted Bevin, his patience with this aide waning even as he turned the corner and approached the assembly chamber.

“Then who will you represent in chambers, my lord?”

“I represent the interests of all Beinarians, as is my duty as prince consort, particularly when I appear as her majesty’s proxy. I do so now to express our royal opinion regarding the succession,” declared Prince Consort Bevin, opening the heavy wooden doors separating the corridor from the council chambers.

A herald noted Bevin’s arrival, crying, “Please rise for Lord Bevin, prince-consort of Beinan and knight of Ten-Ar.” With a thunderous pound of one hundred ninety feet, the councilors all rose in Beinarian precision and unison, falling suddenly silent in their voices.

Formally Bevin processed into the council chamber, his head held high, his face stern. He bowed to the herald at the waist as he approached the podium used to address the assembly. The Honorable Lady Kalar of house Cashmarie bowed slightly to Bevin, the metallic white threads making up the sails on her green heraldic kirtle sparkling like silver upon the golden masts of the Cashmarie ship emblem, “Welcome, Your Highness, to council.”

Bevin acknowledged Honorable Lady Kalar with a bow from his neck and shoulders, “Your Honor...it is a pleasure to see you again. How fares the efforts to redact replica sailing vessels such as were used on original home world?”

“The efforts go well. Soon we shall master once more the ancient sailing arts, grounding ourselves in that which ennobled us long ago,” smiled Lady Kalar.

“Your Honor, may I address the council?”

“Of course,” bowed Honorable Lady Kalar, stepping aside for him.

“Wise councilors of the Great Council, I come to you now concerning the royal succession. As all of you know, five yen-ars ago, on BE 6321, beinor 1 Isabelle of house Gurun became our sovereign queen following the resignation of the crown by King Ejen. Her coronation came after our son, Anwell, legally ceded his right to become king after her in favor of our first born, Princess Anlei. This was well known across Beinan at the time of her majesty’s coronation. For five yen-ars this council has failed to solidify the succession. I come before all of you to ask for a vote to resolve this matter. Will you accept Princess Anlei as heiress to the throne of Beinan?” questioned Bevin resolutely.

Lord Esreile of house Shem approached Prince Consort Bevin, “We have postponed that vote, Your Highness, out of deference to her majesty...and her position as equal heiress to house Miyoo. High Priestess Wehe is no one to trifle with; her reputation precedes her as highly skilled in arts house Shem refuses to dabble in.”

“This matter concerns the future of Beinan. Let us not use the debate as an excuse to advance religious causes. I understand that house Shem disagrees with the high priestess on matters of religion and spirituality. However, her highness is not the focus on this discussion, nor are the differences in theology espoused by houses Shem and Miyoo,” asserted Bevin. “Rather, let us examine why a custom that predates the Great Migration and arose out of our bloody past should abide in this yen-ar of peace and diplomatic resolution of our many disagreements?”

“Very well,” conceded Lord Arthur of house Xing-li, “I am happy to entertain such debates. After all, we lose nothing by discussing the matter.”

“Thank you, Lord Arthur!” acknowledged Bevin with a slight bow to his head.

Lord Knight Eisiq of house Ten-Ar rose, “I have no personal grudge against Princess Anlei. All reports regarding her indicate a highly educated and politically engaged adolescent. She is perhaps one of the best candidates among us for the throne of Beinan. House Ten-Ar also approves of her bloodline among three great houses: Gurun, Ten-Ar, and Miyoo. She is the logical choice to ascend the throne.”

“Perhaps,” debated Lord Arthur, “but the law is itself quite clear on the matter. No noble woman may pass her power and authority to a daughter except for among the clergy. House Miyoo refuses to relent on *that* matter.”

“Perhaps wisely,” affirmed Lady Priestess Alicia, younger sister to High Priestess Wehe and a councilor from house Miyoo. “War and bloodshed are the pitiable heritage we are forced to endure from a time of virtual lawlessness and savage blood feuds. Let us always put aside our violent impulses in favor of adult discussion and logic.”

“A noble goal to be certain, Lady Alicia, but perhaps not always pragmatic. Only our egos truly make us superior to the other races we encounter when we travel through the stars in our star craft. Violence is a way of life...an almost universal quality among humans across the charted universe,” observed Lord Arthur.

“Must it be? Must we remain complacent and refuse to change when change is merited? This law from our past was not even a law before formation of the Great Council of Houses. It was a tradition, a custom maintained informally across tens of thousands of yen-ars by specific Beinarian houses, an outlet of patriarchal impulses interpreting females as inferior leaders of war,” defined Lady Alicia. “House Balister never maintained such a custom...and with good reason. Few Beinarians of any house, even Ten-Ar, can match the accuracy of Balister ladies with a bow of any sort – heritage or modern.”

Bevin smiled. Alicia’s words reminded him of the long forgotten yen-ars he’d spent living with his mother, a house Balister lady of particular skill with a laser crossbow. That was before he met his first knight of Ten-Ar...before he made the decision to attempt to earn his place among Ten-Arians and pursue knighthood. “My mother was such a lady. I can affirm through first-hand experience the skills of the ladies of Balister. They are truly the best archers among our people, earning them leadership roles across our culture’s history. Balister is wise to make leadership about merit, not gender.”

“No one says that women are not effective leaders, Your Highness,” declared Lord Arthur, “but that is not the question for us here and now. Rather it is whether or not this beinor is the beinor to make a dramatic change in our laws. As much as I respect Princess Anlei...I cannot find a solid legal imperative to change the law at this time. Right or wrong...this is a custom, a law, which has stood since before the Great Migration.”

“I concur,” agreed Lord Esreile. “This is not the time to change this law. Unless house Gurun can find a more pressing reason to overturn the law, I cannot endorse such a change.”

Lady Kalar took her place as council chair, “Let us vote on this matter. Shall we overturn the law as requested by Queen Isabelle through her proxy, Prince Consort Bevin? Or shall we retain the law in all its strengths and weaknesses? How vote you on the Gurun resolution? House Ana?”

“Nay.”

“House Shem?”

“Nay.”

“House Cashmarie?”

“Nay.”

“House Balister?”

“Yeah.”

“House Ten-Ar?”

“Nay,” answered Lord Knight Eisiq.

“House Xing-li?”

“Nay,” answered Lord Arthur.

“House Gurun?”

“Yeah,” answered Prince Bevin.

“House Miyoo?”

“Yeah,” answered Lady Priestess Alicia.

“House Slabi?”

“Nay.”

“Resolution denied six votes to three. The law will remain as it was. This council will hear further debate on how to handle the extant succession crisis on BE 6326, beinor 120, shir-or 9.50,” proclaimed Honorable Lady Kalar. Bowing, Lord Prince Bevin took his leave of the council. Upon the closing of the massive wood doors, his eyes misted. Lengthening his stride, he controlled his composure until he was able to exit the building before letting his tears flow. The board was now set, the crisis now inevitable. Anlei would pay the price for the council’s decision, one way or another.

Chapter One: A Legal Problem for Princess Anlei

“Your highness? Your highness? Please, milady. You must get up. Your mother has summoned you to court,” squealed RK6, the crown princess’s droid as she floated and paced nervously around the young princess’s curtained bed.

Princess Anlei was forty five yen-ars old, hardly a child, but not quite of age yet. She still had five yen-ars to go before anyone at court would acknowledge her fully grown. With the looks of a 13 year old Earthling and fair, porcelain skin, she was 52.8 cun (寸) tall when she held proper posture. Her fine, dark brown hair waved ever so gently down to her small, developing breasts as she opened the bed curtains with her delicate fingers and stuck her head out, slowly crawling out of bed and navigating her long, full, green night gown. “Court? At this shir-or? What does mother want NOW?”

“With all due respect, milady, you want to question a direct order from the sovereign of all of Beinan? A summons from her Most Royal of Majesties, daughter of High Priestess Wehe and King Ejen?” squirmed RK6, raising her soft, angular head and changing hue from pale blue to deep lavender.

“Yes, yes, yes. And grandmother is supposed to do some silly ritual over me when I come of age in a few yen-ars. Who believes this stuff? It’s just some superstitious nonsense,” scoffed Princess Anlei as she reluctantly grabbed a blue-lavender bliaut and a pale blue kirtle from her closet and moved behind a dressing screen to put on first the narrow sleeved kirtle, then the billowing, gossamer bliaut.

“You had better not let your family hear you say that, Your Highness,” warned RK6. “Princess or no princess, I think your mother would do something dreadful to you if she heard that. Your younger brother is only seven yen-ars younger than you, remember?”

“You mean ‘Anwell Unready?’” laughed Anlei, as she finished what she could with her dress. Moving in front of the screen she turned her open back to RK6 for her to fasten the kirtle. RK6 extended her robot arms and dexterously secured the dress in a few xiao-shirs.

“Anwell is NOT unready. He just lacks interest in ruling an entire planet.”

Anlei pulled her bliaut over her head, “Meaning, he would rather play around than seriously prepare him to assume the throne like a responsible prince,” Anlei rolled her eyes and shivered at the thought of her brother holding any real power, then looked in the mirror. Putting a brush to her fine hair, she quickly tried to untangle the night’s small snarls. “Okay...Mother will not wait for me to do this properly. So this will have to do. Throne room, then?”

The throne room of the great palace in the Beinarian capital of Hejing glittered in silver, gold, and white. Elaborate knot works of inlaid jewels adorned its many columns and its many alcoves. The head of the hall contained a low dais upon which the royal thrones were situated. Behind the thrones glittered massive stained glass windows in sparkling pastel colors and featuring elaborate geometric shapes. Beinarian passion for fractal geometry was famous across the known universe, as was their joy of complex mathematics in motion. Each window pane reflected an advanced knowledge of geometry and calculus, expertly applied to the real world, so much so that the windows seemed to come alive with color and geometric splendor. So many beautiful angles to calculate and play with...so little time. During the daylight hours the windows projected sheets of dancing light, filling the faces of those on or near the dais, as it would in a few short xiao-shirs when dawn filled the sky with rosy green light.

Darkness still filled the windows, casting an eerie shadow upon the thrones and their occupants. On the right hand throne (left from the vantage point of court) sat Queen Isabelle, her father, King Ejen, and her mother, Queen Wehe, High Priestess of the temple of the triple goddesses of Banumu Hehe, Abka Biya, and Abka Gahun. The dark-haired and grey-eyed queen was arrayed in a soft white, gossamer bliaut with large bell sleeves that hugged her willow-like body and flowed into a very full skirt. Her consort, Lord Prince Bevin, was not beside her, but both her parents, the tall and red-haired King Ejen, and the willow-like, dark-haired Wehe, sat near her on smaller chairs on the floor off the dais. Heavily cloaked guards darted back and forth from behind the columns, some with laser spears and others with even more deadly weapons. Other, more elite protective forces protected the throne room unseen from various alcoves. This was a safe place for the royals, no matter how crowded.

With the early morning summons the throne room still lacked the normal number of nobles, politicians, and other interested folk that normally concealed the massive size of that massive hall, making it feel empty even though, in fact, about thirty Beinarians rummaged around with excitement. Princess Anlei, followed by RK6, barely noticed these normal folks in their bright court tunics and embroidery as she expertly navigated the hall at the sort of quick pace that only one who grew up in such a palace could create. Despite being her parents' first born, she minded no protocol as she strode to her parents' throne, turning those at court quite pale as she treated this room, of all rooms, as if it were no different than the private family chambers she was accustomed to. Who was this girl who saw that imposing woman in white as merely a woman and not the sovereign of an entire world?

When she reached hearing distance of the dais, some 1.44 zhang (张) from her, Princess Anlei looked her mother straight in the eye with neither bow nor bended knee, "Well, mother? What in all of Beinan do you want at this unseemly shir-or? And why

here of all places? If you needed to speak to me, you know exactly where to find me,” Noticing her grandparents she turned and offered a respectful curtsy and bow of her head, “Good to see both of you again, grandmother, grandfather.”

Queen Wehe, high priestess of Beinan, rose from her seat and walked up to her granddaughter, her crimson bliaut flowing as she moved, its huge bell sleeves expanding by more than 19 cun (寸) when she raised her arms just a little. Smiling sweetly and preening Anlei’s hair like a doting grandmother, she looked into her grey eyes and with a soft voice few could hear, “Anlei, you are in open court here, not private chambers. This is not a family meeting you are asked to and none of us are merely your family. You know this. You have been taught how to behave. You are hardly a child who needs to be reminded or given some harsh punishment for breaking protocol. You are heiress to all that is around you and to a great heritage that has been part of our family for five thousand yen-ars, since the Great Council asked Lord Balar to ascend to the throne as the first king of our Gurun dynasty. Would you throw this all aside with your rude behavior and evoke a punitive response from the Great Council? They can always put a different house in charge of the monarchy. You know that. You have been taught. Or...would you prefer another civil war?”

“No, Your Grace, I would not,” she replied with a bow. Taking several cautious steps backward in practiced protocol form and with a bowed head, one hand carefully manipulating the back of her blue-lavender bliaut so she would not fall upon it, Anlei counted and put herself back into proper position. Ten...nine...eight...seven...six...five...four...three...two...ONE. In position, she took a step forward, and then bowed as a proper heiress to the reigning sovereign. Two steps, another such bow. Three more, a third and final bow, “Your Majesty. I have come to answer your summons to court. What service may I offer you this morning?” In her heart, Anlei despised the ritual. But her grandmother was merely trying to help. If chaos, anarchy, revolution, or worse was the alternative to lip service to her mother...then for her people’s sake she would just have to endure saying words she absolutely did not mean.

Queen Isabelle smiled, recognizing her daughter’s strong will in her own self, “Well done are you, Princess Anlei, to retract your comments of before...in the interests of peace and prosperity for our people. Come, my child...and sit in your father’s chair that I may speak with you. I request it.”

A request...my my...what a strong word...a command certainly, but more politely issued. Once uttered by a sovereign of Beinan, it must be obeyed. Anlei had never received a “request” before in open court. Carefully and with her tutors’ lessons playing in her mind, she minded her pace, stepped up on the dais, and, as “requested” sat down in her father’s big chair. It felt strange. “Where is His Highness Lord Prince Bevin, Your Majesty?”

“Asleep, Anlei. He was with the Great Council late last night trying to negotiate a resolution to a very serious problem that must be addressed before it explodes into a crisis.

“As you know, it is our custom that the eldest or the best, should the eldest prove to be unfit to rule, should always ascend to the throne, male or female. And for this reason, I was crowned queen five yen-ars ago when my father knew he could no longer handle the responsibilities of ruling wisely and well. For me, this was an easy matter, for I am the royal daughter of a sovereign king. But you, my child, are the royal daughter of a sovereign queen and this, my daughter, puts you in a difficult predicament.

“What predicament, Your Majesty?” asked a puzzled Anlei.

“Tens of thousands of yen-ars ago on a world far away in another galaxy our people formed the clans that became the great houses. For over twenty thousand yen-ars they feuded with one another, meriting most to prefer male leadership even while accepting the occasional female leader among most of the houses. So rarely did our ancestors expect to require female leadership that all but the matriarchal houses forbade ascent of the daughter of any female ruler.”

“But that was thousands of yen-ars ago. When our people fled old home world the houses chose a king to serve as chief executive. Surely the old clan laws did not survive creation of the monarchy,” exclaimed Princess Anlei.

“Oh, if only they had changed the old laws, Anlei. But they never did. It would seem that no one on the Great Council felt amending the law was necessary. Now, my daughter, it imperils us all. The law remains. You are not allowed to ascend the throne. With your brother’s sworn abdication of his birthright under law before the Great Council, that leaves no one to take my place when it is time for me to step down.”

“But why groom me to serve as the future queen if the law against it remains? I do not understand, Your Majesty.”

“I was hoping the Council would recognize the wisdom of changing the law. It was very late when Prince Bevin arrived home; perhaps he made progress last night. To that end, I charge you to consult with him to find a solution to what I hope does not become a crisis of succession,” commanded Queen Isabelle.

“Yes, Your Majesty. I will speak to him and we will find a legal answer to this problem,” bowed Princess Anlei. Just then, the first rays of dawn broke over the horizon. Light sparkled through the eastern stained glass window and onto Anlei’s face, casting a lavender and pink hue onto her skin. The blue-white Beinarian sapphires sewn to the bodice of her bliaut sparkled green-gold from the light.

“Success to you, Crown Princess of Beinan,” smiled Queen Isabelle.

“And to us all, Your Majesty,” bowed Princess Anlei. She ritually made her three requisite bows to exit, then turned and strode out of the throne room with RK6 in tow.

“She is finally learning,” remarked Queen Wehe.

“She would make a capable queen, more capable than I was at her age,” added King Ejen with a smirk in his wife’s direction, acknowledging the role she played in transforming him from an irresponsible playboy to a wise and kind ruler.

“IF somehow the conflicts in the law can be changed or worked around. We are twenty five thousand yen-ars since those dark beinors when we were trying to kill each other over petty land disputes and resource allocation. Mining rights, trade rights, animal management rights. We were as savage then as some of these primitive star systems we have charted,” exclaimed Queen Isabelle.

“Savage...perhaps. But our past informs our present, as it does for all sentient races. From our warring yen-ars on our former home world came forth the Great Council of Clans, the precursor to the Great Council of Houses. We rule in service the Great Council – never forget that daughter. If they choose, another house will rule Beinan after you instead of our descendants. This was one reason why I watched your father from afar ten yen-ars before we were formally introduced at my elevation to high priestess. My mentors in house Miyoo understood the danger we faced back then by irresponsible conduct of a certain heir to the throne,” warned High Priestess.

“Was that why you were chosen as high priestess, darling? The house elders wanted a high priestess sensual enough to gain my...attention in hopes of luring me into matrimony?” puzzled Ejen suspiciously.

Wehe flirted back, “Being beautiful enough to catch your eye...and your...physical interest certainly did not hurt, did it? After all, my influence did put you on your throne....”

Ejen put his arm around his wife and kissed her, “It did at that.”

Queen Isabelle eyed her parents with slight disbelief. They were still in open court, after all...not exactly the place for such romantic...musings. With her razor-sharp psychic sensitivity, Wehe felt her in daughter’s mind annoyance at the breech of protocol and removed her husband’s wandering hands, “So many choices we made along the way...the choice to make Lady Priestess Cordelia my protégé, the choice to educate her son so he could grow up controlling his Miyoo blood instead of being controlled by it...even the choice to consent to your little sister taking off in that star craft to D425E25 Tertius...this is my fault, daughter. I could have stopped this.”

“How could you know, Mother, that I would be the only surviving heiress of your body? How could you anticipate any of this?”

“I am high priestess. That supersedes the royal title of Princess Consort. The great council only made me ‘queen’ because they are smart enough to realize that religious authority

surpasses secular authority and that, for all intents and purposes, I am was your father's co-sovereign...at least until we passed the power to you. My...duties require me to foresee the unforeseeable, understand what all others fail to see. Perhaps if I had kept my focus where it belonged – in temple – and deferred nurturing you and your siblings more...is all of this my fault? Is the triple goddess of many names whose faces are Abka Biya, Banumu Hehe, and Abka Gahun punishing me for my lack of faith and my lack of focus? What if, my daughter, this house falls because I could not equal our foremothers in strength and power? What if Beinan should fall in the fires of despair and hatred because of something I did or failed to do? I know I've projected a countenance of omniscience, Isabelle, but I am far from it!" confessed High Priestess Wehe.

Queen Isabelle clasped her mother's hand affectionately, "Perhaps you are right, Your Grace. But perhaps not. Perhaps the goddesses wish for all this to transpire. Perhaps, when history judges us in a new era of sorts they will call you the wisest of all who led house Miyoo."

"Perhaps...but not this beinor. This beinor we must work with last night's decision by the Great Council. For all our sakes, I pray they chose to avert what I fear is about to start...."

Queen Isabelle rose from her throne and stepped down from her dais, "The shir-or is still early, peers of Beinan. Let us all return to our beds. I will return to the business of Beinan at shir-or 6.0."

"This closes the court of Isabelle, daughter of King Ejen and High Priestess Wehe, queen of Beinan," cried the herald. Queen Isabelle processed out of her throne room for her private office adjacent to her apartment as the herald cried, "Make way. Make way for her royal majesty, Isabelle, Queen of Beinan."