

Back to School

Early Spring

Avira. The city, the duchy, the kingdom. It is each and every one of these. The city itself was millennia old. Settled by exiled high elves during the Loreni Diaspora. When the coastal regions were invaded and fought over by their fellow elves, the Avirans sought refuge inland. They followed the valleys and the rivers until they came upon a plain alongside a point where two great rivers came together. A plain centered in a triangle of land between forests, mountains, and a large nearby lake.

When the Valeni were pushed back to their forests, the Avirans solidified their hold on their demesne and spread even further inward. When they finally met mountains, they turned around. By then the coastal regions had been all but taken. Kingdoms sat to the south and west of the Avirans.

So they did what any reasonable growing kingdom would do. They invaded. This did not go well at first. In fact, they lost a large swath of land to the Kingdom of Edimiss. However, time was on the Avirans' side. They continually built up their armies and settled into their defensive positions until their foe was worn out. The Avirans struck a deal with the brother of the king who withdrew support from the war. When the remaining Edimissan army exhausted their forces, the Avirans swooped in for the kill. It took only another year from that point, and thus the Duchy of Edimiss was created. The brother who betrayed brother would become duke. The former king would be executed.

This pattern of expansion continued for centuries. Eventually, the Avirans found themselves at odds with their rivals to the southwest of them. The Kingdom of Tiloral.

War broke out between the two nations. The Avirans, landlocked for centuries, finally decided to change that. While the Tilorals did not have sea access themselves, there were smaller coastal nations beyond. Nations the Avirans felt were ripe for the picking. The Tilorals had the advantage of position. The Avirans were surrounded by three Val Forests, which at that time were still openly hostile to the Loreni nations around them. Then there were the two dwarven exclaves. While neutral, they were fiercely protective of their mountain ranges.

This caused many setbacks for the Avirans, but after several decades of war, the Tilorals made a choice. Instead of continuing the war, and in a move that shocked everyone, they joined the Avirans. They then became a spear that helped the kingdom expand further.

They conquered the nearby Kingdom of Marsi which almost doubled the size of the duchy and gave the Avirans their first access to the sea.

Expansion continued for many more years and what would eventually become the duchies of Lis, Nieth, Levosa, and finally Soraya were added. While each of these newer duchies have changed hands no less than three—

Gwyn looked up from her book at Mr. Branigan.

“Why do all the duchies constantly change families that rule them? Why are Tiloral and Edimiss different?”

The old sun elf scholar regarded her with an almost sad expression.

“Edimiss’ ruling family has actually changed, the difference here is that the name was never about the family like it is in Tiloral. It is the name of the region of lakes and rivers that surround the capital of Roda Alia.

“The difference with Tiloral is that the duchy actually cares for its people. No, that isn’t fair. Let’s just say that the nobles of the others oftentimes care more for their own power and influence. There is a sense of duty within Tiloral that is different than the rest, and that comes from a very strong cultural identity. The people are proud to be from the duchy. They’re proud of their stability and strength.”

“But what about people like Marquess Angwin? He doesn’t seem like someone who fits that...”

“Marquess Angwin *does* care for his people. However, he is a staunch royalist. I do not doubt that his actions have the Crown’s hands involved. It is a reason the Polite War has lasted so long. It has pervaded every aspect of society within the kingdom, and those that have sought to change it have not lasted long.”

“Is that why the duke cannot help us as much?”

Ms. Maya lifted her head from where she was resting. Yawning, she glanced at her husband who nodded at her.

“The Crown knows that in order to keep their rule for as long as they have, they needed a way to control the nobles and the people. They use the Polite War as a way to check the power of

the duchies and other prominent nobles. Money and favors constantly change hands. Land is given. Influence and power gained. All to maintain what they have. It is too enticing to most nobles. There is a large faction that knows this and actively seeks to counter it. However, they too use the Polite War as a way to increase their influence. The nobles who wish to increase their own power at the expense of the royal family's authority."

Gwyn groaned. "And I need to know all of this because there will be people within the Royal Academy that try to get me on their side."

The high elf woman nodded. "Yes. They will seek to use you as a pawn. By allying with House Tiloral, you have already stated your intentions to oppose the Crown, even if historically the Tilorals were neutral. I fear Angwin's actions have changed this stance."

She felt her face twist as she considered what Ms. Maya said. "What will happen?"

The two adults shared a look before Mr. Branigan sighed. "Things may get dangerous. The school will be safe, and you will likely be safe, but your friend may not be. She is away from home, vulnerable. Others may seek to take advantage of that. Do you understand?"

Gwyn nodded. Anger was building up inside her. *Roslyn could be hurt? No.*

"I understand. I will keep her safe. I will get stronger and keep us all safe."

Ms. Maya looked alarmed. "Your Highness—*Gwyn*. You are a young girl. It is not your responsibility to keep everyone safe. You should focus on learning and growing up. Let us keep *you* safe."

Gwyn immediately shook her head. "No. I have magic and a responsibility. It is what a princess should do. I have to practice and get stronger. To gain more of the mana rushes. I will do whatever is needed to keep all of my people and family safe. And to find my mom."

She didn't miss the glances the husband and wife gave each other.

Gwyn simply ignored it.

I have a plan and I will see it through.

* * *

A light knock resounded at the door early the next morning. When it opened, Taenya's head popped in. "Gwyn? Are you awake?" she whispered.

Gwyn was back in her carriage. The other occupants of the wagon, her ladies-in-waiting, were all asleep. She was using a small stream of light from the curtain she had shifted to help her read. As they got closer to the capital, the urge to learn all she could about her new home became stronger. A lot was hinging on how well she did in school.

“Yes, Taenya. I am,” she said. Gwyn set the book aside.

“We are almost to the city. Would you like to come sit on the bench and see? Amari and Sabina rode ahead. We’ll stop before we reach the Queen’s Gate so that you can get back into the carriage.”

Gwyn nodded. “Sure.”

She followed the woman outside and squinted her eyes at the morning light. The caravan had left early so that they could have all day to get settled into their new home. The guards that were on horseback saluted her. The guard that drove the carriage hopped down and held out a hand.

She grabbed the telv’s hand and he carefully helped her step up to the front of the carriage. Thanking the man, Gwyn scooted to the other side. After she sat and got situated, he climbed back up and grabbed the reins.

With the caravan moving again, she got to look around. Everywhere around them was covered in fields. Elves and telv were out in large numbers working.

Many people stopped to watch as they passed. She smiled and waved at the ones that stared too long. One woman jerked and lifted a hand, which caused Gwyn to giggle. The guard driving the carriage laughed.

“They aren’t used to seeing royalty, Your Highness.”

That made her squint. “How do they know?”

The telv looked up at her head. Gwyn brought her hand up and gasped. She had left her tiara on and hadn’t realized it.

She found herself wearing it more and more as they got closer as it reminded her of Roslyn. Although, she was usually careful about putting it back up when she wasn’t using it for the way it helped her magic...

“Sorry. I forgot I had it on,” she lifted her hand to remove it, but he stopped her.

The man smiled as he shook his head. “Don’t apologize for being who you are, Your Highness. You should never have to be ashamed or embarrassed to be yourself. Be proud. I know we all are to be in your House.”

Gwyn smiled and dipped her head. The man’s words hit home a little more than he probably intended. “Thank you.”

“Look, we’re here,” she heard Taenya call out from behind her.

She instinctively turned around and looked at Taenya. The one was riding her horse alongside them and pointing ahead of them.

Gwyn followed her finger to the front and her eyes widened. She could not see much over the fields with farmers, but what she could see was really cool. A *massive* stone wall stood in front of them. It was one of the biggest and tallest that she’d seen. Even bigger than Strathmore’s.

There were two gatehouses side-by-side ahead of them. The larger one was decorated with flags and banners. The smaller one next to it had two tall statues of elven women with crowns on either side of it.

What really took her breath away was when they cleared the row of fields and trees. To their left at the river was the largest bridge she’d seen yet.

“What is *that*?” she asked with wide eyes.

The guard driving the carriage chuckled. “That is the Joshul Bridge. It crosses the entire span of the river.”

“Are we going over it?”

The telv man shook his head. “No, Your Highness. The other side of the river is the town of Aldon. We are heading toward those two gates straight ahead. Westerly Gate and Queens’ Gate.”

She looked back toward the gates, focusing on the one with the pretty statues. “Who are those statues for?”

“They are the statues of Queens Sirune and Alavara. The First Queen and the Golden Queen.”

Gwyn nodded.

The caravan followed the road along and they soon reached an intersection of roads. Off to the side were people on three horses. Gwyn recognized Amari the quickest with her red armor, but she smiled broadly as she saw Sabina with someone she hadn't seen in so long.

"Friedrich!" she called out as they reached the three.

The blonde Austrian man with his curling mustache and smart goatee smiled back at her. "Princess Gwyn! Welcome to the City of Bridges!"

Sabina glanced at the man and huffed. "Welcome to Avira City, Your Highness."

"Thank you! How are you? How is Roslyn? Is she around?"

The man chuckled. "We will get you settled into our new home first, yes? Then we can meet with her."

Taenya joined in the conversation. "Agreed. Let's go see the new home esquire Niles and Sir Friedrich acquired for us."

Friedrich nodded. "I think you will be impressed. House Tiloral was very helpful in finding somewhere suitable for a royal of your status, Your Highness."

Gwyn was confused. "What—"

Amari glanced at Sabina and the mind-mage knight nodded.

"Perhaps we can discuss it at our new home, Gwyn. This is not a suitable location," Sabina suggested.

Taenya nodded. "I agree. Let's see our new home. If you would please return to the carriage, Gwyn. We will arrive at Queen's Gate soon."

Queen's Gate turned out to be an entrance that only nobility and royalty were allowed to utilize. Gwyn got to see it from a window. Ilyana, Nora, and Lorrena had awoken while Gwyn sat outside. Like hers, their faces were smashed up against the two small windows of the carriage.

They spoke excitedly about the city, pointing out the little restaurants and cafes. Apparently, this entrance opened up into the more wealthy western part of the city called Hirwen Row—named after yet another one of the Queens. The shops and people walked around in their differently styled clothing. Everywhere she looked, she noticed how Avira was distinctly different than Strathmore.

One could say that Strathmore was more *traditional* in a way. By contrast, Maireharbora, the kingdom's port in the Tiloral Duchy, was even *more* progressive than the

capital. That city played host to styles from all of the neighboring kingdoms and cultures that came through it.

While Avira had its own distinct style, the city, though, was *old*.

There was no theme.

No rhyme or reason for the way things looked.

What there was though, was wealth. The road they rode down had perfect bricks. Buildings all were freshly painted and had big glass windows that showed off their wares.

That said, all the girls spoke about were the canals and the many bridges that crossed them. Gwyn was extremely excited about that. Back home, Venice had always been one of her favorite cities. If the city was even close to that, she'd love it.

The western side of the city sat on the 'mainland' on a series of hills. It was also the newest expansion of the city and played host to some of the richest neighborhoods. Once you got beyond that, you reached the true 'heart' of the city and its canals.

Gwyn saw all types of stores and businesses. A bookstore filled with shelves and shelves of books, a store that sold makeup, a tailor with pretty dresses in the window, a bakery with a large rack of bread and pastries displayed, and even a jewelry store were just a few of the ones that caught her eye.

People walked around everywhere. She lost track of the number of parks they passed. Or even the plazas that reminded her so much of home. Statues and small shrines. Different places for the Guilds. Soldiers. There were so many things to see and Gwyn couldn't wait to explore it all.

The caravan made its way up and around a hill where they saw a bunch of fancy houses. The city had a bunch of buildings all crammed together, and the homes here were no different. Even the ones going up the hill made long lines alongside the road. It was very similar to Strathmore, but everything here seemed more... compressed. As they got closer to the top of the hill, the houses started turning into walls and she was able to see through the gates to really pretty homes.

Nora explained that they were now in Sterling Heights. A series of hills that sat near the outer canal. It was the area where the really wealthy nobles and aristocrats lived. Gwyn also learned that across the town, closer to the royal palaces was the Vermeil Highland neighborhood which was where all of the ducal palaces were. It was on the same island as the Old Town.

The Royal Academy was over there somewhere and situated on its own island. A massive area filled with the various schools, shops, restaurants, and dorms for the sprawling institution.

She smiled as Nora and Lorrena kept excitedly telling her all that they knew about the city. Ilyana on the other hand seemed just as amazed as her.

They all quieted as the caravan slowed and then came to a stop in front of a large gate and wall. Excitement brewed inside her as she noticed that the guards standing outside the gate were from her House.

She held her breath as the men opened the gate.

Sir Friedrich on his horse took the lead and the carriages and wagons followed the man through the gate.

The road was made of gravel and led to the side of a large three-story... mansion.

The carriage stopped alongside the building

Gwyn and the girls were led out by a guard and she gasped as she really got a good look at the home.

She saw Sabina and Amari directing guards to move the carriages and wagons. Her teachers and everyone else were getting out to help.

Friedrich and Taenya walked toward her.

The Austrian smiled. "Do you like it? It's very *English* I think."

"Let me get a good look!" She said excitedly.

She turned and started walking backward to take it all in, following a small stone path that led away from the building. When she got far enough, she gasped.

Gwyn's eyes were large. "It's beautiful!"

Her two knights smiled.

And it was. The big manor had five steepled rooftops with a single double window in the center of each. It was perfectly symmetrical, with the two ends coming out further than the middle of the house. However, there was an unassuming double door in the center of a part of the house that came out a bit further. That part reached all the way up where a tiny bell sat over the roof and was set in between two chimneys. Actually, now that Gwyn looked, there were a lot of chimneys. *And so many windows!* There were really long windows on either end of the building, then above that were two more, then the single double wide windows at the top floor.

In the center of the house were two windows that matched the floor above. The two center areas in between the entrance and the ends that jutted out looked like they could be houses on their own but were just sandwiched in everything else. *Just no doors.*

It was made of a light brown stone, with the stone placed to give the appearance of arches above each window and the entrance.

It was lovely.

Friedrich looked proud.

“It has ten bedrooms spread over three floors. A formal dining room that seats twenty next to a large fireplace. Along with another informal dining area. A formal sitting room, with two less formal ones. There are nine washrooms, with privys. There is even a sauna. Your room is especially large and I am sure you will enjoy it,” he said, sounding just like a real estate agent.

Gwyn just nodded along, not really paying attention.

When he finished, her grin grew. “Let’s check it out! Girls! Let’s go, we can choose your rooms!”

Friedrich just chuckled and moved aside for her. She rushed to go inside, but a guard quickly opened the door as she all but ran.

“Your Highness, slow down!” Aleanora called out from behind her.

She turned her head and glanced back, she saw Lorrena laughing and running to catch up, her dress blowing in the wind.

Ilyana just shook her head and walked with her back straight.

Gwyn smiled.

Home number two. I wonder what mom will think of this one!

* * *

Present

Taenya walked with Friedrich and Sabina into the formal sitting room of the manor. The Paladin Amari followed behind her. The two knights sat while both Taenya and Amari chose to stand.

“I know you all are busy, but I wanted to go over some details for the near future,” Taenya said. She took a deep breath, recalling everything.

Summer had come and gone. A fact that Taenya was grateful for. Somehow the city was even more humid than Strathmore.

They had spent the entire season locating and bringing in new members of the House. Servants, guards, and support personnel of all types were needed. It was a task that she and the two House scholars had taken on. Or at least for a while. Quinn Branigan had... a hard time holding his tongue in front of many of the interviewees. It seemed that the old sun elf had very little patience and high standards for anyone who would join a Royal House.

Maya Rolfe had taken over the process after reining in her husband's... eccentricities.

By the end of the season, the House was sitting in a good state. She had sent word back to Siveril giving him an update. The process took a long time, but their correspondence was at least somewhat regular.

Gwyn's birthday the previous week was a small affair. The Tilorals were invited along with a few notable people.

She looked between the two knights. "Gwyn and Lorrena will be heading to take their entrance exams tomorrow. Ilyana's is next week. With the three of them moving into the dormitories for the Academy, we will all be split up. Quinn and Maya are renting an apartment within the neighborhood Scholar's Rest just south across the bridge from the Academy. And House Tiloral's steward assisted us in acquiring a townhouse in Old Town.

"It has enough space for myself, Sabina, and any of the girls who wish to stay there during weekends. I imagine that they will want to stay near their friends. We will have a small staff and at least one of our teams of guards."

Sabina nodded. "It will be a good location. It allows us to stay closer to the girls in case any issues arise. There have been murmurs of the Crown Prince moving elements of the military north toward the border."

Friedrich's bushy brows knit together. "What is north of us?"

"The Turest Order and the Vlaredian Empire. However, Turest is directly north beyond the Duchy of Levosa," Evocati Amari explained.

He nodded. "The Vlaredian Empire is the one currently at war with the... Sovereign Cities?"

"Yes. Although that is further to the west," Taenya said.

"Thank you. I am still learning," he said.

Sabina glanced over to the knight sitting next to her. “You have done very well, Sir Friedrich.”

The man nodded his thanks.

Taenya looked at the terran man. He *had* come far and was indispensable. “Friedrich, you will take on the stewardship of the manor. I need you to assume all of the duties needed to keep our House supplied and running here in the capital. I am going to focus on our connections and meeting with the various nobility. Sabina, keep your ear to the ground.”

She glanced at the paladin.

The woman crossed her arms. “I will deal with the temples and coordinate with Evocati Khalan. As a paladin, I also have greater access to the Academy. I will be able to attend to the princess’s safety on the grounds as needed.”

Taenya nodded. “Good. I will have guards available to be with her whenever she is not within any parts of the Academy itself.”

“I have heard word of a group of terrans moving into the town. I would like to meet them. Perhaps you could join me, Friedrich?” Sabina asked.

The man nodded. “I will. I have hopes that at least one of them will be from where either Her Highness or myself are from.”

Taenya sighed. “We can only hope. Now, let’s get to work. Tomorrow, I will escort the girls to the Academy.”

Things are about to get busy again.

* * *

Gwyn sat quietly in the carriage. All of the stuff she’d learned was running through her head. They would soon be at the Academy, then Taenya would escort them to the exam hall where a test would be given to them. A test that would determine whether they could even attend and if they did, where they stood in ranking.

No pressure...

Across from her, Lorrena looked nervous. The girl had been working nonstop, and everyone but her thought she was ready. Gwyn had taken the time over the summer to try and

learn all she could about her Lady-in-waiting. What she learned was that Lorrena had really bad anxiety. Lorrena also really loved and missed her family, and she did not want to let them down.

She placed a hand on the girl's bouncing knee. "Relax, Lore. You're going to do great."

Lorrena's leg froze and she looked up at Gwyn. "I know, Your Highness. I just... Yes... I..."

"Lore. It's okay."

The girl nodded, but then the carriage stopped and shortly later a knock sounded.

Lorrena started hyperventilating.

Gwyn moved to sit next to her as Taenya opened the door.

"Breathe, Lore. You're going to do fine."

"Lady Lorrena, deep breaths. In-and-out. Focus." Taenya asked.

The girl nodded her head quickly.

Gwyn spoke softly and talked to her as she calmed down, finally Lorrena took a deep breath and sat up straighter. "I am ready."

With that spark of determination, Gwyn and Lorrena followed Taenya onto the school grounds. They walked along a path, and she noticed a bunch of others going that way. Children her age and older were escorted by adults, and Gwyn noticed that when it started to get more crowded, Lorena's nervousness returned.

Her focus on her companion, unfortunately, meant that Gwyn did not get a chance to observe their surroundings. *It's okay, we'll be here for a while. I can explore it all later.*

They approached a building where the children were left by their accompanying adults. Gwyn took a deep breath.

Taenya pulled them to a stop before they reached the crowd and took them aside.

"I will be leaving you here. The staff will direct you to where you need to be. I have faith that you both will do well," Taenya said.

Gwyn and Lorrena nodded.

Taenya leaned closer to Gwyn. "Remember, you are a princess. No one here is above you, but show respect and support for those lower. Others may treat some poorly because of where they come from, but you come from a different culture. Don't fall into the trap of doing what they do. You are the head of your House. We have taught you all that entails.

“Amari is getting authorization to be able to come onto the Academy grounds. You will likely see her later. I will see you at the week's end,” Taeyna explained. Her eyes were tearing up and the sight of it made Gwyn's start as well.

She rushed forward, enveloped her adopted aunt and knight in a hug, then squeezed tight.

“Thank you, Taenya. I'll make you proud,” she said quietly.

Taenya huffed while patting the back of her head. “You already have.”

She pulled away and gave Lorrena a hard look.

“Lady Lorrena, look out for Her Highness. I leave her in your care. Be her confidant, her support, her *friend*.”

The elven girl nodded. “I will, Ser Taenya.”

The woman returned the nod before looking over both girls. Brief farewells later, and the knight was gone.

Gwyn looked around. There were a lot of people lining up. It felt like a good place to start.

“Let's get in line, Lore.”

They moved through the crowd of other people saying their goodbyes and settled in to wait... for whatever was to come.

Gwyn distracted Lorrena by quietly speaking to the girl about inane small talk. Making sure to sneak in jokes that caused the girl to let out hesitant laughs.

The line moved along at a slow pace and she eventually started looking around at the other students. Most were high elves, but there were a bunch of telv as well. She noticed a handful of sun elves and one or two moon elves and raithe. She didn't see *any* dwarves or orkun though.

Her eyes went wide though when she saw something she hadn't been expecting.

She tugged on Lorrena's arm. “Look! Over there,” Gwyn said, pointing out two people standing off to the side near the back of the line.

Lorrena followed her finger and Gwyn heard the girl's breath catch in her throat. “Your Highness, two terrans!”

There were several gasps around them and she felt people staring at her, but she ignored them.

She was about to tell Lore that they should go meet them when she heard an adult call out behind her.

“Next.”

Gwyn turned around and looked up at a stern-looking high elf man.

She pointed to herself. “Me?”

He looked at her. “Yes, miss. Please, right this way.”

Gwyn and Lorrena made to follow him but he stopped them. “Please, wait your turn, miss,” he told Lorrena.

Turning to her companion, she whispered, “I’ll see you soon! You’ve got this. Good luck.”

Lorrena’s eyes widened but she managed to bob her head in an approximation of acknowledgment.

Gwyn followed the elf into the building.

They made their way down a hall and into a large room where five people sat at a table with several stacks of papers in front of each of them.

The man guided her to a point in the room and had her stand centered on a large sunburst star.

In the middle of the group was a high elf woman. She was flanked by two elf men with impassive expressions. A man at the end on Gwyn’s left held a smile and dipped his head at her.

It settled her nerves.

A second woman at the opposite end represented the only non-high elf of the group. The telv woman with dark blonde hair had a contemplative look and seemed to be examining Gwyn with interest.

The woman in the center, a high elf who looked quite old with streaks of grey in her black hair and piercing green eyes, peered down at her. Unlike other people Gwyn had met, the woman did not seem affected even in the slightest by Gwyn not being an elf or telv. She was clearly in charge.

“Name?”

Gwyn took a deep breath. She shuffled slightly in her chair to sit straighter and placed her hands on her lap. “Princess Gwyneth Reinhart.”

That made the group pause and glance at each other.

The man to the woman's left, Gwyn's right, flipped through a stack of papers. He pulled one out and handed it to the central woman.

Everyone remained silent as the head lady took her time to read it.

Finally, she looked up at Gwyn.

“House Reinhart. From the Duchy of Tiloral. A *terran*.”

Gwyn wasn't sure if the woman was asking or telling her.

She nodded. “Yes, ma'am.”

The woman raised a brow as she ignored Gwyn and continued to read. “*Magic wielder. Exempt from Kingdom Royal Decree by status as an Honored One as proclaimed by the Archpriestess, herself.*”

A couple of gasps sounded from those at the table.

Mr. Smiley's head whipped toward the central woman.

The attention Ms. In-charge gained from what she read was ignored.

“What do you have to say about this?” the woman asked Gwyn.

Gwyn tilted her head. *What is there to say? Does she want me to talk about magic?* With a mental shrug, she tossed the verbal ball back to the woman.

“I do not know what you expect me to say. I just want to attend your school.”

One of the elf men in the center let out a breathy laugh which garnered a glare from the Ms. Too-Serious.

The woman returned her gaze to Gwyn. After what seemed like *way* too much time that had Gwyn very deliberately not fidgeting, the woman spoke, “Very well. Welcome to the Royal Academy of Avira.” She grabbed a stamp and slapped it down on the paper. Everyone's eyes went wide.

Gwyn froze.

Everyone else froze.

Gwyn channeled red mana to heat back up.

The woman looked up from where she was writing. “You may go, Ms. Reinhart.”

“But... what about my entrance exam? My rank?”

The woman paused. She tapped her quill on the inkwell before placing it inside and folding her hands together on the table.

“You are exempt. Your rank will be placed accordingly. You are officially on academic probation. It will be explained to you later. Please proceed so that you can be processed and given guidance. We have many other prospective students to examine.”

Sucking in a breath, Gwyn nodded once. Murmurs broke out amongst the others as she walked around the table and away from the examiners. At the back of the room was a telv man who gave her a small wave.

He gestured through the door.

Gwyn’s eyes went wide at the sight on the other side.

A massive amphitheater-style auditorium stood before her. Tons of students were already seated and talking excitedly to each other. Students of all ages and races. Even ones she hadn’t seen in line for processing such as orkun and dwarves.

The man turned and smiled at her.

“Welcome to the Royal Academy. Your progress will be followed with great interest,” he said before he returned to the room.

Gwyn hesitated. *Did he just quote...*

She shrugged and looked around. There were so many people that she was not really sure where to go or sit. *Should I wait for Lorrena?*

“*Gwyn!*”

Her head jerked toward where she heard her name. A small blonde figure across down toward the front was waving at her.

A smile grew on Gwyn’s face.

Roslyn!

She took a deep breath. Then she started toward her friend. Confidence filled her, and she walked with her head high.

Gwyn had no idea what her rank would be, or how meeting other terrans would go. Or even how interacting with *real* nobles from Avira would be.

But Gwyn knew that she'd have her friend at her side.

And Lorrena there for support.

Finally back in school.

...In another world.

Gwyn smiled. She felt mana flowing through her.

Let's do this.