Can't draw, ain't British.

So here we are, the large story winner. It has only been partially edited by Morde24. Migraines take even the hardiest of us sometimes, and he was only able to get about halfway through this chapter. He is still working on it, and I will update the chapter with the finished version once he gets it back to me.

Then again, this chapter itself is only about half the chapter I wanted. I wrote around 30,000 more words, but the scenes therein were not my best work, and I decided once more to cut the chapter in half. This time though, the next chapter won't be released right on the heels of this one. I will finish it and post it sometime in November.

Chapter 27: Egypt Tours: Offense

For a moment after he greeted Koneko Harry stood still with his eyes closed as he tried to find the origins of that night's magical assault. First, he attempted to do so through the underlying magic of Egypt, but his ability to push his mind out through that web ended at the limits of the Nile. So despite my ownership of the Nile, I can't press out beyond it. I guess that could be a limitation of my being a water deity.

Next, he tried various tracking and sensing spells from the wizard school of magic before trying a heavily modified Point Me but Deific style. With his experience in using Blessings, he held a piece of rubble in his hand and said slowly, "Point Me Pharoah..."

Unfortunately, the buildup of deific magic fizzled, and he growled, shaking his head. "No name, of course that kind of thing wouldn't work, and here in Egypt with all those remains, what was I thinking? Even if the bastard's magical defenses had fallen, it wouldn't have worked. Alright... let's try something more specific."

As Koneko and Cú Chulainn looked on, one bemused, the other amused, Harry went through the names of the snake deities he had learned about since starting this investigation. Having not seen any visual cue that could tell him which deity he'd dealt with in his battle for access to the Nile's magic. Only when he used the name 'Wadjet' did the buildup of magic not fizzle out. With that, the spell took and abruptly hammered into something before once again dissipating.

"COCK. So whatever magical means our enemy is using to hide **are** still in place. Damn it." He looked over at Cú, one eyebrow rising. "Don't suppose you know anything that could help us find the mind behind this madness?"

Snorting, Cú let the fingers of one hand trace some of his tattoos, the images of Tuathan runes like so many conjoined trees. "Heh, if you had the scent of him, aye, I could find this immortal for ye. There's more'n one reason I was called the Hound of Ulster. Or mayhap if he was near an oak tree planted in the lands of Ire." The spear wielder looked around, his eyes

widening in mocking confusion. "But would ya know, I don't think we're in the Green Lands anymore."

"Right. Hard way it is then. Why is it always the bloody hard way? Come on," he gestured Koneko and his new companion to follow him. "Let's get back to the others. If we're going to have to do this the hard way, there's a lot we'll need to organize."

Issei and the locals obeyed without a word, falling in around Harry and his two companions. For a few moments as they walked, Harry communed with Ddraig, glancing up occasionally at the bright silver and golden sun he had created earlier that night. Going forward, that creation would become ever more important, and Harry knew he might have to recreate or even enlarge it as needed. Yet after a few minutes of walking, his mind turned to the mystery of the man walking alongside him.

Glancing at him, Harry saw Cú just walking along, taking in the sights like any normal man. His spear was currently held crossways over his shoulders as the Irish hero took in the sights around him, muttering about how as a dog, he hadn't been able to see colors and how much Cú had missed them now that he thought about it. Yet even as he walked along, it was obvious this man was something beyond human in some indefinable manner, even discounting the woad tattoos, which gleamed to his sight with blue power.

Cú Chulainn, the most famous hero of Irish legend, having been somehow trapped in the body of a dog. The tales of whose deeds, just like those of most ancient heroes, were mixed, to say the least. Still, he seems calm enough, and, whoever thought of it was a genius, Harry thought with some awe. As well as, admittedly, having a somewhat scalding sense of irony.

Koneko too was watching Cú Chulainn carefully, although she wasn't looking at him like he was a fascinating puzzle that she wanted to solve like Harry was. Instead, she was looking at him as he was in danger. As a Rook, Koneko didn't have much in the way of magical senses, but she had been getting training in Senjutsu and chakra and so could easily tell that Cú Chulainn was powerful. Far stronger than she was, indeed, almost on the level of Rias, perhaps even a little more.

Issei, on the other hand, had something else on his mind entirely. "So, how much of yourself was there when you were a dog?" Cú and the others looked at him in some confusion, and he grimaced. "Er, I mean, did you have your human ability to think and everything as a dog?"

"Aye, I did once the mental chains Gwyn Ap Nudd put on me were broken. Ever since then, I've been meself, but with black fur and four legs," Cú answered with a chuckle.

"Eh!?" Issei waved his arms in shock. "But, but then, why didn't you take advantage of it, man!? Ya coulda gone into the baths with some of the girls, and they'd never have complained. Think of all the oppai!"

While Koneko and Harry smacked a hand over their faces in an almost choreographed moment of exasperation Cú laughed. "Eh, I thought of it, boyo, but I never got the chance. Most of the time I've been with you lot we've been doing other things, and never have I had the opportunity. Although watching the ladies swim on Manannán's island was interestin'."

He shrugged. "Still, I don't know how much fun simply seeing a lass's body would be. Tis always better to experience than just watch, aye?"

Where that conversation would have gone was thankfully interrupted by a loud cry of, "There you are!" from above, just as a shadow flashed over them. They all looked up at the shadow, realizing that Tiamat was now hovering above them, until she folded her wings, coming in to land first are behind feet and then her friend. When the front 2 feet touched down, her lashing tail smacked into a nearby building. "Blast it, stupid human cities and their small streets."

The street she landed on was actually a major thoroughfare. Tiamat was just that large in her normal body. Not that Harry was about to point that out. He had no desire to see if the normal female obsession with bodyweight crossed species.

"Why don't you change into your female form? Give us all a treat, eh Dragon Lady?" Cú Chulainn suggested, waggling his eyebrows suggestively.

At the new human's comment, Tiamat rolled her eyes, but before she could ask who the heck he was, the gauntlet that Harry was still wearing on his forearm spoke, the green jewel on the back of the palm bursting into life. "Watch who you're making comments about like that dog, or I'll make bosin tang out of you!"

"Hoho, so that **is** you, Red Welsh! I thought I had sensed you. I see the Christian God caught you, huh? How the mighty have fallen," Cú Chulainn quipped, showing no fear. Indeed, his eyes seemed to light up with delight at the possible challenge.

While his gauntlet continued to growl at Cú Chulainn, Harry turned back to an extremely amused-looking Tiamat. And is that some satisfaction there? I'm still having trouble picking out draconic expressions despite how often I've interacted with her and Ddraig. "Tiamat, ignore the idiot in the corner for now. What did you find out there?"

"Several gods who ganged up on me when I tried to contact a relatively intact army group stationed at a nearby base. They wounded me enough that I decided to return to the city with the nonmagicals, although we were helped along the way by several of the Auror teams who spotted us as we were moving." Tiamat briefly explained the fight that she'd had, during which Cú Chulainn sobered somewhat, and he and Harry filled her in on the demise of at least two of the three gods that it faced her in open combat.

"I think the last one was the goddess Wadjet. I fought her too, although only mentally through the magic of the Nile," Harry said, frowning thoughtfully. "She's still out there, at least,

although now that I think about it, where the hells did so many gods and goddesses come from? We were assured they were wiped out with the rise of monotheism."

"And why would they all be working together? Some of those gods should not be getting along," Tiamat added, nodding her agreement to Harry's question.

Harry shook his head. "They might not have been doing it willingly. After all, in the Egyptian school of magic, words and names have a lot of power, far more so than in any other magical system I've seen, specifically the idea of a true name. Perhaps the Pharaoh who we've been thinking is behind all this was somehow able to find their shades or otherwise enslave them. No, my main question is how they hid so well they were never found before being released on us like this."

Both Tiamat and Cú Chulainn shuddered at that, as the Irish hero's grip tightened around his spear. "Damn, that almost makes me feel sorry for my defeating that crocodile-faced fellow. I've spent far too long under someone else's enchantment not to feel sorry for someone else who died under the yoke."

"You mean you're being a doggie?" Koneko asked innocently, her lips curling slightly. "Seems fitting given how you chased so much tail in your legends."

"Bah! Don't mock me legend girl, else you might find yourself added to it," Cú Chulainn said quickly, his flash of ire coming and going quickly before he shook his head. "As to my being a dog, no, that was something else entirely. An attempt by me grandfather to hide me from the Morrigan's gaze. Hence his using a Curse."

"A Blessing rings around the world. A Curse is but a whisper, hiding in shadow," Tiamat mused, her thoughts echoing Harry's earlier ones. "Quite brilliant, really."

For his part, Harry was now examining Cú Chulainn more closely, thinking that the two of them would have to talk in the next few moments. Harry too could feel the magic from the man, and now, it occurred to him what that sudden jump in power might have meant for Rias. I can ask him about that in a second, first things first. Although if it harmed Rias in any way, this will not be a fun conversation. Setting aside that thought, Harry asked Tiamat to continue her report.

When he heard that this military force was fighting it out near the city's outskirts, Harry instantly knew that he would have to convince the soldiers to keep working with him. We need those troops badly. "Let's hurry it up. I want to get back to the others and then start Farouk looking for the family members of that army and the headquarters staff we're already in contact with. Tiamat, tell this Sala to direct his army towards the Northern Region's headquarters. They are probably already moving in that direction but getting them all in one place is a good idea. And news of their families, good or ill, might make them happier and more willing to continue to work with us going forward."

Koneko frowned. "You don't think they would be willing to continue to work with us?" She gestured around them at the ruined city. "They wouldn't want our help to rebuild?"

"That isn't what I'm thinking about. Whatever's going on, Koneko, it's going on throughout all of Egypt." His Nekoshuu daughter scowled at that, her ears flattening against her skull as she hissed, and he smiled humorlessly, pulling her into a sideways hug. "Exactly. We need the locals on side, firm allies, perhaps even willing to act under my command going forward. But I can't afford to rely solely on their common sense. After all, the human ability to ignore our common sense is one of our race's defining traits."

Cú Chulainn laughed at that, nodding his head. "Aye, we're stubborn race, tis true. It's a survival skill, you could say. Else we'd never have stopped being scared of the dark."

As Tiamat took off, Harry turned back to Cú Chulainn, crossing his arms. "Can you tell me if your sudden power up and return to your normal body will have done anything to Rias, Cú Chulainn?"

While Cú Chulainn might well have bridled at Harry's tone, he knew that the redhead who was his apparent master, whatever that meant, was involved with Harry, and so he decided not to push it right now. "I felt the connection between us withering away when the Curse ended upon my touching Gae Bolg. But, it's still there, which I suppose is a good thing."

The redheaded man shook his head with a wry twist to his mouth. "Despite my powers, I ain't immortal, and with the control of the Wild Hunt broken, I could once more be touched by time." Cú shrugged. "Whatever my freeing meself cost this so-called king of mine, I know not, nor care not. This Hound has spent far too long chained to follow one master already. While I am grateful to be alive, that does not make me any less unhappy about being chained anew."

Koneko and Issei both bristled, and Koneko growled, stepping forward, her clenched fists clenched. "Rias-sama is not bad! She didn't enslave you. She saved you!"

"Yeah, man, come one! She gave you a new lease on life, just like she did the rest of us. I mean, I know it's a pity her oppai belong to Potter but..." Feeling Harry and Koneko's looks, Issei stumbled to a halt. "Right, not the time, huh?"

"Hah! You got a one-track mind laddie that could get you far or in trouble. Sometimes both. As for the redheaded gleoite (cutie), she is still a devil, ain't she? And so too are ye bound to her. How can I take your words as truth?" Cú asked with a shrug, although Gae Bolg came down off his shoulders for the first time as he prepared for a fight.

"After being given a power-up by the shade of Aine Fand, whether or not Ria is a regular devil is up in the air. What she is also, is my wife," Harry announced firmly, getting between Koneko and Cú Chulainn, his eyes locked like lasers as they bore into Cú Chulainn's. "And while you might accuse me of being biased too, I tell you this true grandson of Lugh, Rias will not command you if you do not wish to be command. She welcomed you as a family member, not a

servant. That is the way Rias has welcomed all of the members of her peerage. Believe it or not, that is the truth."

Cú Chulainn stared into Harry's eyes, then slowly nodded. *This man's will... heh, High King in truth, whatever his origins*.

"That matches with what I saw, but it's still hard, knowing that you transferred one master for another no matter how gentle the new one might be. Still, I will agree to continue to be part of her and your family, your clan, in exchange for two things."

"Name them, and I will agree to them in Rias's place," Harry answered without any hesitation. He knew Rias would go along with any decision he made about this.

"I want to return to Ire. I want to know what the people there believe of my tale. I want to know how my name has echoed down the centuries!" Cú Chulainn announced proudly. "Do they still tell tales of the Hound of Ulster? I want to know, want to hear the tales with my own ears."

"Agreed. Simple enough."

Smiling at that, Cú went on. "My second demand is when you no longer require my service and my spear, you will release me to explore Danan."

Something in Cú Chulainn's tone made something in Harry's mind sit up and take notice, and he cocked his head to one side, one eyebrow rising in interest. "Are you looking for something or someone?"

Cú Chulainn grunted, looking away. "Mayhap both. But if so, it's my business."

Shrugging, Harry nodded. "So it is. And I can agree to that as well. Although we might need your spear and strength for quite a while."

"Devils are immortal, aren't they? Think I overheard something on that score. I've got time, now." Cú Chulainn chuckled, some dark thought passing through his mind at that moment as he turned away, continuing on their way.

Harry turned to look at Koneko. "Hmm... Considering that Rias no doubt had to put a lot of magic into sustaining their connection, I'm surprised that she didn't come through to Danan with Lily."

Koneko shrugged ignorance. "Asia and I were on call in Danan already. We both called in sick and came up with a story that Lily had come down with the flu and passed on to both of us yesterday while she was recovering. I've no idea what is going on back in Kuoh right now."

Laughing, Harry shook his head, both amusement at the tail and longing going through him. I wonder how long it will be before I only have to worry about such normal concerns? Will we ever be able to after all this? After the Statute comes down. Regardless, I can't leave. It's

only my presence keeping the sun going and my influence keeping the monsters from respawning. Still, I wonder...

It was with a start that Harry realized what was probably going on here. "The Interdict dammit! It's that powerful?"

Koneko looked at him in question, and Harry explained what the ICW had done to keep the secret of what was going on in Egypt from getting out to the rest of the world. The idea that the Wizarding World could create such a massive enchantment was astonishing to Koneko even though she had seen what Harry and Tonks could do with simple wizard-type spells.

That conversation brought them back into the safe zone, which had enlarged dramatically since Harry had left it to head to the Nile River. There were many people here, thousands spread throughout the rubble of a few buildings knocked down to provide fire lanes, up on rooftops and of course through the streets. Only a portion of that multitude was in sight as Harry reached the outer cordon, but more and more people appeared as he moved deeper. Among them, Harry was surprised to see that Fleur and Bill were there talking to Tonks and several of the police here on this edge of the cordon, along with Proudfoot. Farouq was also there, along with several people with Leprechauns on their shoulders. The police chief looked tired but quietly triumphant too, knowing that the fighting was over.

As he and his band walked towards them, everyone within sight stared at Harry. Wounded or not, magical or nonmagical, it didn't matter, Harry's unbound aura of divinity crashed over them like a wave. Many of them were entirely overcome, going to their knees. Even those in the armor Kiba had summoned felt it, though they were able to fight through the feeling, as were those who had personally met Harry before.

Fleur paused, one knee halfway bent, her eyes widening in shock, while Bill shook his head like he had just been headbutted by a leprechaun between the eyes. "Crivens, Harry. What the hell..."

However, the jubilation of the fact that the fighting seemed to have ended seemed to, thankfully, override the instinctual desire of the humans around Harry to submit. However, that didn't mean these men and women didn't know who they had to thank for their deliverance. As one, the majority of the crowd all around them, shouting out Harry's name. "Potter, Potter, Potter!"

For a moment, Harry quailed. The young boy Harry had been before he had become a werewolf, before Harry had decided that he couldn't run away from his destiny rose again, inside his mind at the looks of awe in their eyes, the unthinking adoration he could see there. But that part of him faded quickly, and holding up a fist, Harry smiled, if somewhat wanly, at the crowd. "Alexandrians, this long night is not over. We still have work to do. But the majority of your city is already in your hands once more. Continue to follow orders, continue to help as you can, and we will get through this together."

The cheering redoubled at that, while Fleur and Bill looked at one another, surprised, getting over their reaction to Harry's aura quickly. There had been a time even during the war against Riddle where Harry would have tried to downplay his role or accomplishments, would shirk away from the leadership role even as he took more and more responsibilities on his shoulders. That self-effacing aspect of his personality seemed to be entirely gone now.

By the time the two of them made it through the crowd who had surged forward to shake Harry's hands or touch him. Harry had turned his attention to Farouq, asking him to find the families and loved ones of anyone who was in the armed forces. "And your own loved ones as well. Cú Chulainn, Koneko."

Both his companions stepped forward, Koneko with some eagerness to get stuck in, and Cú Chulainn with a certain insouciant arrogance. "These are my best close combat specialists bar Kiba, who I'm assuming is a little too exhausted for anymore playtime at the moment. They'll put together teams of police and wizards and head out to both clear the areas still outside of our control and to find anyone's loved ones were still out there. That will free you up to start questioning the refugees we've already brought in. I'll also add in Loup when I can get in contact with him."

Farouk nodded, grateful. "My, my son and my wife are still out there somewhere. I haven't heard of them coming in yet. T, thank you for thinking of this, Lord Potter. I'll get right on my part."

Smiling, Harry grasped the other man's farm firmly, showing his faith in the man's abilities through his eyes and body language. It worked, and Farouq's back, which had been bent with worry and exhaustion, straightened as if Harry had given him a Pepper-up Potion.

Seeing all this, Bill smiled, thumping Harry on the shoulder. "Nice to know that you're still thinking like a family man Harry. Although I have to wonder why the urgency to get the loved ones out to this army that's coming in. Surely we should start rebuilding the city, and everything else..." Bill was broadly hinting at the idea of starting to erase memories of the people who had seen the monsters and everything else.

But Harry looked at him in confusion, then shook his head, glancing over at Proudfoot before looking back at Bill. "You don't know yet? When Bill and Fleur both shook their heads, he went on. "This whatever it is isn't just in Alexandria. It's all throughout Egypt! And we will need that army, hell, will need more than just that army, to start reclaiming Egypt for the living rather than the conjured and the dead."

While Proudfoot groaned internally, one hand coming up to meet his face, the others all stared at Harry in horror. "I thought that was just a nightmare, seeing all those red dots spread around Egypt. But I should've expected that it was real, given the ICW's willingness to use the Interdict across the entire nation."

"But, but, the Statute!" Bill whispered in horror. "An entire nation attacked like we've seen tonight? There's... By Merlin, the Statute could be destroyed!"

Around Harry, the other wizards and witches all shuddered, talking quietly among themselves, their tones just as stunned and horrified as Bill's. Even Tonks, who had just arrived from deeper into the cleared zone with Loup, looked a little dyspeptic.

Belief in the Statute was almost but not quite like a state religion. Wizards and witches didn't believe in it as if it spoke for a higher power or anything similar, but if you were a wizard or witch, you believed on a fundamental level that separating the Wizarding World from the rest of society was a good idea. Even the vast majority of muggle-borns believed that, believed that magic needed to be kept secret.

Hell, when it comes down to it, I think it should be kept secret too, simply because there's no way to predict what will happen when magic comes out. But I'm not going to fight a losing battle. Regardless, that is a problem for the future.

He repeated that aloud before clapping his hands loudly, using magic for a brief second to magnify the sound. "So let's be about it, ladies and gentlemen!"

For a few moments, Harry and Farouk talked about what was going on, organizing everything that needed to be done right away. First, the Himejima Clan continued their work spreading the anti-undead talismans throughout the city. The aerial forces were left in place over the city for now, while Kiba and his band of Knights were pulled off the line, the Knight being allowed to rest, his Balance Breaker, Glory Drag Trooper ending for now.

Loup was put in charge instead of a small force of leprechauns and police to continue to police the interior of the ever-expanding protected zone. Husukai and Proudfoot were put in charge of placing bands of quick reaction teams around the city's outskirts to keep any flyers from coming into the city again. Meanwhile, Koneko and Cú Chulainn led teams out into the zone beyond the current protected area, their teams both followed by medical witches, protected in turn by Fleur and Bill. They weren't healers, but they were known by all of the local magicals and known to Harry as decent combatants.

Tiamat was already gone, doing her part. The incoming army under general Sala would have teams of snipers ready to help against any aerial threat.

During this conversation, Yubelluna showed up, looking haggard as she hopped down from a nearby rooftop. Harry instantly moved to her, enveloping the purple-haired woman in a hug, which she needed quite desperately, leaning against his shoulder as she breathed in Harry's scent and presence. She laid her head there for several moments before speaking in a low tone. "Did Tiamat tell you about what was going on down at the docks?"

Harry shook his head. "She had other things she wanted to talk to me about. Why? What happened? You look like you went a few rounds with an Oni."

"I wish I did. That would've been much simpler than what we ended up facing!" Yubelluna barked out a laugh at that though there wasn't much humor in the sound. And she didn't leave Harry's arms even as the locals began to look at them somewhat in askance. After all, this really wasn't the time or place for displays like that, especially from the man who was undoubtedly the leader of the response to the current crisis.

That faded as Yubelluna pulled away slightly, explaining what she, Kala and Akeno had run into. Both Kala and Akeno were still being looked after by the healers in the aid station, news which caused Harry to stiffen with worry, but Yubelluna was quick to calm them down.

"Both of them are battered but still in one piece, and they haven't been injured in any way that the wizards and witches can't set right. Even if they were, Asia's on her way there. I passed her as I came to find you, though I only gave her a nod." Yubelluna assayed a small smile. "I wouldn't have interrupted that girl for love or money. I swear Asia's personality does a full one-eighty when she has people to heal."

Breathing in deeply, Harry set aside his worries as a husband, then gently pulled away from Yubelluna, cupping her chin in one hand so that she was looking into his eyes. "Thank you for telling me that and for helping Kala and Akeno until Tiamat could arrive. I'm sorry you had to face that, but I am so proud of the fact that you were able to. But are you okay to keep going?"

"I'm uninjured, just exhausted. Give me a Pepper-up potion, and I'll be fine, Harry," Yubelluna said, smiling faintly at the amount of love and concern Harry's voice and eyes could convey.

"Good. For now, I want you to come with me when we meet with general Sala. I might leave you in charge of discussing what is needed to get the military side of things really armed and ready to move out quickly. We'll want them to have a lot of their modern equipment too, which is going to be a slog for our wizards."

Tonks chuckled dryly, shaking her head. "You're asking for a lot there, Harry. Using common repair spells can only go so far, and I doubt you'll find any of the wizards able to understand anything an engineer or machinist is going to tell them about what they need. Bullets, sure that we can understand, they only have a few parts to them, and they're small as heck. But parts of tanks or trucks? Who knows."

"Trucks for certain. We'll need them as we move out for transportation, if nothing else. Tanks, I'll admit, is probably asking too much, like helicopters, not that we need them with so many gryphons around right now. And thank you for volunteering, Tonks," Harry announced, clapping his cousin on the shoulder. "I'm sure you'll do an excellent job."

"Oh fuck you, Potter!" Tonks grumbled but still nodded her head. "Fine, I'll do it, right up until we're actually ready to leave Alexandria and push out into the rest of Egypt. At that

point, if you think I'm going to stay on the defensive side of things you need your bleeding head examined."

"What about me, Harry?" Hermione asked while Harry laughed at Tonks, giving her a one-arm hug. Hermione had arrived with Tonks and Loup but had kept to the sidelines of the ongoing discussion with Farouq and the others, sipping at a mild version of the Pepper-up potion she and Padma had devised years ago, one that lacked the impact of the original, but was far tastier. It had, after all, been several years since she had been in a battle, and even then, most of her actions in the war had been short, sharp affairs, not the kind of grind this battle had been. Even so, I can't believe it's only two in the morning. I wonder, has anyone ever written a book on the odd time-dilation factor combatants perceives during battle? It could be interesting.

Harry frowned, thinking before replying in a low voice so the nonmagicals still moving all around them couldn't hear. "Find Padma first, and then think about what we've seen tonight. Think about what we have seen, and then talk to some of the Auror officers who came in from the Nom reaction teams. I want to know what is going on out there. How much trouble were they really running into? Were they facing different kinds of enemies, were the enemies fighting differently, worse, better, whatever. Anything unusual they noticed, anything about what the locals are doing, were they still holding out when the reaction teams pulled out, etc." He smiled then, patting his old friend's shoulder. "You know the questions to ask, Hermione. You always do."

"Thank you for the flattery, although I don't think it's quite accurate," Hermione grumbled, although she nodded her head. That did indeed seem to be something that she and her wife could do.

Eventually, Harry was done with organizing things, and he joined the growing mobthere was no other word for it - of family members and loved ones who were going to move into the area around the Army headquarters. As he did so, Harry saw several of the nearby policemen talking to their own families. That was good. With worrying over their families out of the way, they would concentrate more on what had to be done going forward.

"This was an excellent idea, Harry," Yubelluna murmured beside him, seeing the same thing more and more often as they moved through the safe zone towards the distant Northern Army region's headquarters. "I don't think I could have come up with a better way to show we care than helping those who are fighting with us find their families."

Harry shrugged. On the one hand, it felt a little underhanded, as if he really was doing this just to get the army on side along with the police. But on the other hand, the reason why he had come up with it was because he thought much the same way as the men who made up the armed forces here in Egypt and indeed elsewhere. "Some things never change. People might be willing to sign up for the army or to fight and die for a cause. But most people fight harder to defend their loved ones. People might be willing to die for a cause. People want to fight and live for their families and loved ones."

Yubelluna smiled, shaking her head. Harry said it so simply, but it was a very profound statement and a kind of thinking that she knew few leaders really understood. *My lord and man is a very special sort, isn't he?*

"By the way," Harry began, his voice cutting through Yubelluna's thoughts. "Have you given any further thought about what you would like to do on a date? I still have forgotten that I owe you several once all of this is over, after all. Would you like to continue to explore Egypt, go back to Ireland, maybe explore Barcelona? I have to admit the idea of exploring Egypt has lost its charm to me. But with my water transportation powers, I wager I could take us anywhere you want?

Yubelluna blushed, shaking her head and taking Harry's hand in one of hers and squeezing gently. "Is this really the time to think about that kind of thing?"

"I don't think we'll get a better time tonight, and I can't think of any other topic I would rather spend my few moments of downtime walking with this lot thinking about." There'd be to think about violence and carnage and bringing retribution upon the Pharaoh who was behind all this later. Right now, Harry wanted just a few moments to himself and one of his ladies.

Shaking her head again, Yubelluna leaned against the shoulder very lightly before pulling away. Still holding his hand, Yubelluna fell into step next to Harry, falling in love with Harry even more at that moment as they talked about where they would go for their dates in the future.

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Sala and his army, or rather what remained of it, had pushed through the city with relative ease. At this point, thanks to all the attacks they had dealt with coming in, his men were old hat at fighting the monsters, regardless of which particular monster they faced.

A charge of cavalry out of a side street was gunned down. Swooping monsters were taken out by snipers or the accompanying wizards. The selfsame snipers spread out with the wizards and their allies to create a perimeter around the city as the rest of his men pushed on. The only thing that stopped them was a wave of scarab beetles, and even then, grenades and gas canisters, the explosions forcing the gas down onto the ground, saw them through.

In the lead truck of the convoy, Sala breathed a sigh, feeling a mixture of relief and resignation as his men reached the outskirts of the cleared fire zone around the Army headquarters. He was relieved at being out and away from the myriad danger zones a cityscape turned into during urban warfare. But at the same time, he felt sorrow at the number of flattened, burned-out buildings around the area. *Tiamat told us she did this for our fellow soldiers, and I know why it was essential. But I quite liked some of those buildings. Now they are gone forever.*

Holding up a hand, he signaled a halt as Tiamat swooped down, alighting in the cleared zone, smoothly transitioning to her human form. When she finished, his troops moved forward

once more. "Lady Tiamat, I trust there are no problems? Well..." His lips twisted into a grimace. "Current problems anyway."

"Not at all. Indeed, Harry and his fellows have gone out of their way to welcome you with a surprise."

At that, Sala's eyes widened, and he twisted around to stare in the direction Tiamat pointed.

Around the edge of the headquarters' original compound came a large mob. And among that mob were faces that many of Sala's men recognized. Indeed, Sala even spotted his son, looking a little shellshocked, but none the worse for wear despite that, standing next to a very tired-looking blonde foreigner.

He held up a hand, barking out "halt," then looked over at Tiamat. "What is this?"

"Harry Potter has decided that you and your army, and those of the men within the army headquarters, should be in charge of looking after your own dependents and loved ones. He also is a family man himself and knows the worry that all of you must have felt about those people being mixed up in all this," Tiamat replied.

Honestly speaking, Sala hadn't been able to spend much time thinking about that. He knew if he did, his ability to command would evaporate like mist on a hot morning. But it had been at the back of Sala's mind occasionally, and seeing his oldest son here, gave him hope for the rest of his family. But right now, I am very glad each army recruits solely from its area of authority. This will be a massive boost to the morale of my troops. And to me too.

Moments later, as the tail end of his convoy came out into the fire zone, he ordered his men to port arms and disperse, an order which was obeyed with alacrity. Sala himself hopped out of the truck the instant it stopped in the parking lot of the headquarters building, then with Tiamat next to them, moved towards where he saw Harry. Some things had to be dealt with first before he could set down the burden of command for a few hours.

"Well, this seems to have worked. Thank the powers that be, by which I do include you, Harry, yes, That Farouq was able to find as many of their family members alive." Yubelluna lightly teased.

"Ouch. If I was such a power, I rather think I would have prevented all this, thank you," Harry grumbled before returning General Sala's salute. "General."

"Lord Potter. I understand that we have a long night ahead of us, but thank you for this," Sala said, gesturing to where the crowd too had begun to disperse, little pockets of family members meeting up throughout the fire zone and beyond as still more refugees appeared from deeper in the city and people began to come out of the headquarters building.

Harry nodded, and introductions were given all around, with Sala bowing over Yubelluna's hand as Sala gave Harry a brief overview of his forces and vice versa. "But enough about that. I think we all need an hour's rest before we move on. But we will be moving on, General, and you and your soldiers are going to be a major part of that."

"I thought as much, given what Tiamat told us about what was going on here and elsewhere. Although I also agree that some downtime is desperately needed. So if you will excuse me?" With that, Sala turned, bestowing a beaming smile on his oldest son, the youth barely a year away from his mandatory time in the army himself. "Chala, come here, boy!"

"Father." The young man answered just as happily, stepping forward into his father's bear hug, returning it just as tightly, something that he wouldn't normally do in public. But after the night he'd had, Chala needed that reassurance. "It's good to see you!"

"Ha! It is even better to see you, my boy! What have you been up to, aye? I know you too well to think you'd just be hiding away with your siblings and mother somewhere." Sala's voice held a combination of concern and pride as he spoke that, looking over at the blonde man standing by his son's side.

"Kiba here gave us the ability to fight back against the monsters. He used some kind of massive magical spell to create suits of armor, complete with swords. We helped hold the line and even cleared out buildings, defending the civilians. All of your sword lessons came in handy for once."

"It's a pleasure to see you, sir. Your son came to lead one of our assault teams, fighting alongside several others of similar age, hence my presence here." Kiba would honestly have rather been sleeping, but when Chala and a few others asked him to come with them to meet their families, he hadn't been able to refuse.

"I taught you those as a way for you to build up your muscles. I never thought you would actually use them in a real fight. Still, I'm proud you stepped forward as you did," Sala muttered, shaking his head, but then he turned as a woman's voice shouted his name.

A woman around his own age, doughy of body but with a bright smile and luxuriant black hair, came forward, leading eight other children of various ages, including a young woman who was a little older than Sala's oldest son. At the sight of her, Kiba's eyes widened. It was the same young woman he had been talking to about belly dancing outfits! *This could get very awkward very quickly*.

Luckily for him, the woman in question had no eyes for anyone but her father, hurling herself into his arms just as the other kids piled in, nearly knocking the heavy-set General off his feet.

But Kiba's weren't the only eyes which widened, as Harry stared in shock and he turned from saluting a few officers walking towards them from the headquarters building to exclaim, "Holy hell, man! I know that Egyptians believe in big families, but nine kids!?"

Sala laughed, heaving several of his youngest into his arms. "Well, there is a saying that happiness in a marriage is defined by the number of children. I consider it simply a sign that my wife and I have never grown out of our passions for one another."

His wife blushed while Harry guffawed as a whimsical, almost longing look crossed his face.

On the other hand, Yubelluna was shaking her head and looking away. Nope, nope, nope! Rias and Yasaka can do the lion's share of that. I'll help raise any kids that come along, but one kid might be enough for me, let alone three or four.

At that point, the officers Harry had spotted moving through the crowd reached them. As they did, Harry saw that several of them were wearing the same rank tab as Sala or that of Staff Brigadier, and one of them had Major General rank bars. Seeing that, Harry smiled faintly before controlling his expression, affecting a serious mien despite the happy chaos around them. I suppose you can't beat a giant freaking dragon for diplomacy. Thank God I don't have to work with middlemen.

The Major General held out his hand towards Harry. His face and body language showed the same almost automatic deference as nearly every other person around them was towards the demigod in their midst. He was past middle-aged, and about as rail-thin as you could get this side of an anorexic.

"Sir, I am Major General Backar Abraxas. You would be Harry Potter, correct? We have you to thank for the sun that so weakened our enemies and sending Lady Tiamat to us. But despite your help, there are still many questions that I feel must be answered. Primarily, in the line of what in the hell is going on!?"

"Hell is right. It is as if hell itself has opened its doors after all this night," one of his officers agreed before introducing himself in turn.

"Heh, while that isn't quite accurate, it is certainly a bang-on description of events, isn't it?" Harry agreed, then began to briefly recount what he knew about events that night and who was doing it, watching the faces of his listeners. The idea of an immortal Pharaoh trying to take over the country sounded like a bad Hollywood movie, and yet they were living it live right now. That took quite a lot of the humor out of the situation and made them all understand that whatever they might have thought in the light of real day, tonight they had learned magic existed, for better and for very much worse.

That and the fact that a magical community had been living among them unknown to themselves and their government was not something any of the generals were happy about. A reaction, Harry knew, he would see again and again going forward.

But being military men and having been fighting for several hours at this point, they knew they had to get on with things rather than dwell on it. The news that this was going on all throughout Egypt galvanized them further, and they clamped onto the idea of having the wizards help them get ready.

At that point, Harry introduced them to Tonks who, had gathered up several of the nearby wizards and had been moving with the crowd just in case. "I might which to switch Tonks to something else once she helps iron out any issues between you and the wizards here. But right now, she's got my authority, and as a former Auror, she has some clout with the wizards too."

"Excellent. Joseph, show these men and women our engine park. What do you think we should concentrate on?" Abraxas asked Harry, differing to him like Farouk had previously. Nor was that only because of Harry's aura. Harry seemed to know what was going on better than they did, and well, he had created a freaking sun in the night sky, which had weakened their enemies and stopped them from spawning inside the headquarters building. It was hard to overlook that or the fact that was the only reason any of the high command had survived to get out of bed, let alone anything else.

"Trucks, crew-served weapons if they need any repairs, and mortars if they do too. Antiair guns, if they're portable, Harry listed off quickly. "Beyond that, I trust your judgment."

"How long of a campaign do you envision?"

Harry frowned, thinking. "I can handle transportation into the various cities along the Nile. But beyond that, I don't know enough yet to answer you, sorry. I'd like to say we can just move out in force and overwhelm everything, but while I'm certain we can, it might be a slow process depending on how mixed in the civilians are with the enemy and how much of the real estate we want to keep intact."

While many of the other officers winced at that, Abraxas simply nodded, looking over at Tonks for a moment then back to Harry. "Then you might want to think in terms of logistics on your end. If there is such a thing for you magic users. And I think we're going to need more bullets and other munitions than we have on hand. Lots more. But will you be part of that movement? That sun of yours will be a major factor too, as we don't have enough night vision goggles to go around, and compared to what your Englishmen are used to, they are primitive things. To say nothing of the uplifting nature of the feelings it evokes. But what exactly will be our objective? Simply defensive, or punitive?"

Harry noticed that the older man's attitude wasn't deferential any longer, simply analytical. It was clear that while his days leading troops in the field were well behind Abraxas,

he had still come to grasp how important magical aid would be in this campaign. That was good since that meant he would be fine with being left behind to take care of the logistics and everything else. Because Harry was very definitely going to be going forward with the army.

"The enemy... I was able to get a feel for them in their magic. That's the easiest way to put it unless you want me to bore you with a lot of details." As Abraxas shook his head with a grimace, Harry went on. "The immortal Pharaoh, whoever he is, is to the south of here. I will join whatever force we send south along the Nile River. And I'll send my strongest allies, Tiamat, and a few others, with whoever we send anywhere else."

"Because we will need to split our forces to do the most good," Abraxas nodded, seemingly thankful Harry recognized the necessity. After all, there were other cities to the west of here, along the Suez Canal.

All the officers nearby nodded along with their Major General, their faces grim. One of them spoke up now, speaking for a few moments about the other army groups: the Western, Southern and Central Military regions, the two field armies, and the East Military Canal Zone. Each of those armies was in charge of their portions of the country, somewhat autonomous units that answered to the Military Operations Authority in Cairo.

None of the army officers spoke about the other branches of Egypt's military, the Air Defense forces and Air Forces and navy. The reason had a bit to do with disdain for those branches but more to do with the simple fact those forces weren't as large and didn't have as many defenses against land-based assault. The Air force base in Alexandria had been overrun so quickly that even Harry's creation of his sun hadn't helped them. As for the Air Defense Force divisions, most of their equipment would have been knocked out by the Curse of Kek, and they were scattered in smaller bases around the nation's cities, with not enough men to defend themselves, but enough to be a target.

But any attempt to reach out to them throughout this already busy night hadn't worked. Every method of communication they had needed electricity to run them and had ceased to function, a product of the fear-inducing Curse Harry had shattered with his creation of the artificial sun. "But they could still be out there operating somewhere. Maybe you could get some of those flyers or the dragon to look for them?"

"The dragon has a name human," Tiamat growled, but Harry overrode her, shaking his head.

"When we get moving, that's certainly an idea. But at this point, how likely is it that any of those army units were able to hold out?"

All the officers there winced, remembering the frenetic combat inside the headquarters. The lights had gone out, the electricity gone, and with it came a primordial fear of the dark that had unmanned many a soldier.

And with that fear had come the beasts and undead, seemingly spawning wherever they had wanted. If the other military forces had dealt with that kind of assault, but with no Harry Potter and his artificial sun around or Tiamat to save them? There was a reason why the other mechanized infantry divisions belonging to the Northern Military Region hadn't checked in.

Indeed, even the headquarters had taken a pounding before Harry's uplifting message reached them. There had been the equivalent of three companies of troopers in the headquarters when the insanity began providing security and working in the motor pool or in the headquarters in various tasks, not including officers and civilian office workers, which added another few hundred. Now, most of those office workers were dead, and the soldiers' numbers were down to two companies or so, with many wounded and not enough medical equipment to help them.

"It's not very likely, unfortunately," Abraxas answered for them all.

Harry agreed, and the conversation ended on that somber note, the officers turning to the nuts and bolts of the logistics side of things to stave off depression and a sense of futility. If those army groups had died, what could the remnants of their own region do? Battered as they were to what the officers estimated as at best the size of a reinforced division.

Having nothing but empty words to keep their spirits up, Harry decided to bow out, for now, simply telling Abraxas to be ready for a formal meeting in a few hours. Sending Yubelluna to the city's outskirts to make certain their defenses would hold against any new aerial thrust from their distant foe, Harry headed back to the Nile River. There, he reopened the connection to Danan and stepped through for a moment, knowing he couldn't be gone for too long. Indeed, even that brief moment was enough for the sun to dim and the locals to start panicking, although Harry only learned of this at the meeting later that day.

At present, Harry smiled wanly at the sight of Luna sitting on a table by the fal stone, idly kicking her legs. The young Seelie Queen was festooned with dozens of fairies and several dozen more leprechauns, all of them arguing or joking with one another. The noise would have been enough to drive Harry to distraction, but Luna seemed to take it in stride, her eyes already on Harry even as he finished stepping through the Undertaking.

However, an even better sight than Luna was the group of dwarves who stood up as Harry turned to them. A hundred strong, the dwarves were armed with heavier armor and weapons than those written on the gryphons and tower shields. And as Harry appeared, they all grabbed up their weapons, their faces grim, the fairies flying away from Luna as the leprechauns too hopped to their feet.

"High King, we stand ready to serve," Luna said simply, curtseying prettily. The fact she wore a bright yellow sundress with moving purple and green flowers did nothing, oddly, to take away from the martial air of the rest of the Fae around her.

Smiling faintly, Harry ruffled her hair, then nodded at the dwarves. "Thank you. Your flying fellows have done an amazing job and are still doing one even now, protecting the city we were fighting in. But when we start moving on, your steel will be just as needed."

"That's what we're here for," the leader of the dwarves answered gruffly.

Moments later, all of them were through and moving towards the area that had become the emergency headquarters for the city in its current state of disaster. As they walked along the road, taking in the ruined, blasted city around them, Luna spoke. "I note that we haven't gotten any further supernatural aid. Is there a reason for that?"

"The Interdict. It apparently affects even devil and angel minds." Harry scowled. "Which is a major pity as I know that Rias had organized several peerages to help us out here. Including her combat-crazy cousin, Sairaorg."

Luna's eyes narrowed, and for a moment, her normal not quite there look faded to show the extremely intelligent Raven claw underneath. "From what I understand, the Interdict acts much like a rubber sheet. The more you push it, the more you try to break through and think about whatever is under the Interdict, the more energy you put into the sheet. The strength of the mind hardly matters, indeed the more magical or powerful the mind in question, the better the Interdict works."

"Not how I would put it, but I suppose so," Harry grumbled. "And then there's the series of curses out there. I..."

"Harry!" Hermione shouted from nearby, and Harry turned to see Hermione and Padma hurrying towards them. Hermione was holding a sheet on which Harry could see a few dozen lines of notes written out, a few of them underlined in red ink, which was so typical of Hermione that he had to fight back a grin. "We talked to the leaders of the Auror reaction teams came in, and there are a few things I think we need to talk about."

"Unless it's interesting enough to tell me twice, save it for now. I need to set up a formal meeting with the locals, get them all on board with what needs to be happening here in Alexandria when we move out."

Agreeing with that idea, Hermione exchanged hugs with Luna, while Padma simply nodded as her wife turned to Harry, one arm still around the shorter girl. "All right, but what should we do until then? And will you want me to come with you? I have to tell you that we haven't found anything from those observations that would point us in the direction of whoever is behind this."

Padma tsked under her breath, grabbing her lover's hand, squeezing it tight. It was very clear that she didn't want Hermione going anywhere.

But before Harry could answer, Luna spoke up. When the others looked at her, her eyes seemed to be glowing with all the colors of the rainbow, and she cocked her head to one side in

an almost inhuman manner as she looked at Hermione. "Great projects, like great evils, can all be felled by the acts of common men. You found such a thing, a common message hidden from the past. That is the clue."

Knowing that Luna was now speaking as a seer, Hermione's eyes blazed, and she turned to Padma, gripping her lover's hand in turn, the excitement of a born detective and researcher going through her. "You heard Luna, dear, let's get going. To the museum!"

With that, she turned away, racing off, dragging the more well-built and athletic seeming Padma behind her despite the Indian beauty's protests.

"Do you think Hermione realizes that she gave that phrase the same kind of emphasis that a certain comic book character would put on 'to the Batcave'?" Luna asked, then smiled as Harry laughed, leaning up in kissing him on the cheek, watching as he turned and took to the air once more, watching him go, her smile fading slightly.

So long as Harry kept laughing, then everything was all right. From what little feeling she could get from her Seer-sight, Luna very much feared that when the dust settled from all of this, it would take all she and his family could do to keep him from brooding over the impossible things he should have done to stop this incident before it started.

With that in mind, she shifted around wildly in place for a second and a tiny flower fairy came out from under her skirt, looking around with what Luna discerned was some disdain at the city around them. There was a reason, after all, why most of the Fae had not wanted to travel back to Earth or have anything to do with humanity. The proliferation of iron and cities was among those reasons. But more importantly, this little fairy had a belt made of red hair. Lily's hair, to be precise.

"You are certain you can find Lily no matter what distance lies between?" Luna asked without any preamble.

"Aye my queen, I can. With a bit of my Fae magic, a bit of dust to aid my wings, and this belt 'o mine, I can find the High King's daughter easy."

Luna nodded slowly, hope blossoming within her. The Fae did not, to put it mildly, think in the same terms humans did. Leprechauns and dwarves did, but Fairies, especially ones bound to flowers or trees, did not. So, the Interdict on Egypt wouldn't matter to the little fairy because the name Egypt wouldn't matter, a mere human label for an area that neither the fairy nor her ancestors had any knowledge of.

Now, that didn't mean that the fairy would convince Lily to come to Egypt. That wasn't the plan. Getting her to go to Danan and take Rias and Yasaka with her was. "How long?"

The fairy buzzed around Luna's head, frowning. "I be thinking a few hours. I might be knowing where to go, but I can't go by magic."

Luna thought about asking Harry to transport the little one for a moment, then shook her head. Already she could feel the enchantments at the edge of this city just waiting to push inward the moment Harry was gone. Darn it. Water transportation is amazing, but it is also limiting. And if he leaves, even Harry could be affected by the Interdict and not come back. That would be disastrous, and no portkey could go that far. Still, I've planned for this.

Then she smiled. "Here, have some Pepper-up Potion." The small thimble the fairy drank wouldn't have been enough to do more than make steam come out of a human's mouth, but to the Fairy it was equal to two doses. And while their minds and bodies were very different, Pepper-up potions effected the little Fae as much as humans, only more so.

The little Fairy's wings fluttered so fast they disappeared from view, and she darted around Luna like a hummingbird. "Ah, that's the stuff My Queen, can I go now, please I need to go, can I, can I!?"

Luna waved her off, then as the little Fae whirled away shouted out, "And remember, no stopping to play tricks, and no letting the normals see you!"

A moment later, the fairy was gone, flying out and away over the city skyline. Biting her lip, Luna shook her head. "Oh, why do I have a bad feeling about this now?"

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Upon arriving in Alexandria from Danan, Asia barely spent a few moments seeing to her father's wellbeing before she rushed via a borrowed gryphon to what was being laughably called the aid center at the moment. Being directed there by Auror, she let the gryphon fly off to rejoin his comrades and made her way through the refugee zone.

Along with the rest of the city, the hospitals had lost power. Even their backup generators were offline. Without any power, the hospitals had quickly become death traps as the conjured monsters and undead attacked, none of them being near where Harry and his group had started their attack.

Since then, several of them had been cleared out by the leprechauns and Kiba's knights. However, that didn't mean they had been cleaned, and like the houses where people had fought and died, no one wanted to keep wounded within them at the moment.

So instead, the thousands of wounded – no one had even begun to make a tally just yet - had been kept outside. The aid center thus sprawled out from one of the smaller hotels, whose owners had come through the night and had put the entire place at the disposal of the wounded.

Yet as quickly as they came in, the wounded had spread out so far they encompassed several streets all around the hotel, lying on conjured or borrowed beds, blankets or just the road in many cases. Walking wounded walked around the area or huddled in large groups, speaking in loud voices about minor things in an attempt to keep their spirits up, knowing there

was nowhere near enough medical supplies to see to them all. Even if the hospital equipment had been working, that would have been the case.

This was made worse by the fact that while several hundred doctors had survived the fighting, only one of the city hospital's administrators had made it through the night so far. And he was one of the wounded. Each group of doctors, aides, nurses or volunteer priests and mullahs worked together with those they knew, trying to take care of their own small patch of the growing list of wounded.

Into this chaos, Asia strode. She didn't really understand all that she saw, and even if she did, Asia knew she wouldn't have been able to organize things. Asia wasn't a leader, nor did she have that kind of mentality. Instead, I will do what I can to provide an example and start fighting back against the sheer number of wounded.

With that thought, Asia straightened her shoulders and moved into the chaos as fearlessly as any of her family members would face a battle, barely exchanging a nod with Yubelluna as she saw the woman heading the other way over the rooftops. For this, in truth, was her battlefield, and Asia refused to let her enemy win even a single skirmish so long as she could prevent it.

As she moved through the crowds of wounded searching for the most injured people in the mob of injured, Asia was spotted by one of the aid workers, a young man who actually knew something about dealing with wounded in disaster situations, having volunteered for Doctors Without Borders. Moving towards the young nun, he smiled somewhat wanly at her. While he was a Muslim, he still respected nuns, even if there wasn't a position like that in his own religion.

By the time he had reached her through the turmoil, she had already entered a portion of the street which had been reserved for the worst cases. Despite being brought in promptly, these were people who were still probably going to die, given the lack of sophisticated medical equipment. A few of the medi-wizards and witches were there doing what they could, but even they were overworked tremendously. For every one of them, there were several hundred of those worst cases, and that was only on this street.

Wincing, the young man made to gesture Asia away, knowing there was nothing she could do here, not even to ease their passing. There were already others doing that work. "Sister, if you're here to add another pair of hands, we welcome you. But I am afraid we already have priests and mullahs giving the benediction to those whose lives we will be unable to save..."

Asia didn't stop moving. Instead, she clasped her hands, bowing her head in prayer for a moment, and at her command, Dawn Healing appeared on her fingers gleaming with reflected glory on her fingers like fire. The man stepped backs, stunned, not having thought Asia was a witch dressed as she was, and the other witches and wizards around them also paused, not recognizing Asia or the rings she was suddenly wearing.

As they watched surprised into immobility, Asia bent down and laid gentle hands on two of the wounded to either side of her. There was a flash, and then one man's arm, which had been amputated at the shoulder, was back good as new, the blood lost since the horrid wound replaced. The other, who had been bleeding from a gut wound that had gone very bad, was suddenly healed as well, gasping, his hands touching his now healed stomach in shock.

As the stunned wizards and other helpers watched, Asia moved down the haphazard row, her hands touching men and women alike with a feather-light gesture. She spent no more than a few seconds with each wounded, simply tapping their foreheads or chests and closing her eyes for a brief second, letting Dawn Healing do its work. The instant Asia understood the nature of the wound, there would be a pulse of magic, and then whatever wound the patient had been dealing with would be healed or regenerated.

This included one man who had somehow survived being stabbed through his upper chest, a man who had been impaled through both thighs, his major arteries nicked very lightly, and a woman who had been stabbed in the side of the neck. The fact all of them were bleeding out didn't seem to matter. A man whose spine had been broken and whose guts burst inside his body, who had somehow continued to live up to this point, also found himself healed. It barely took Asia more energy than a wizard would use to levitate a feather.

With Dawn Healing, Asia's ability to heal had skyrocketed to that of a Deific Blessing in miniature. Indeed, everyone who she talked to about it, which included lord Sirzechs, believed that this was the dormant form of Twilight Healing's Balance Breaker form.

Soon, Asia had finished that row and looked over at the person who had first greeted her. She smiled politely, bowing her head to the young man. "I'm sorry, I was rather busy there for a moment. My name is Asia Potter. Could you please direct me to the other sorely wounded?"

The man had not stopped staring since Asia began her work, but now he shook himself and bowed from the waist, his own hands clasping together. "I will do so instantly, mistress. Please, follow me."

Wincing at the man's formal mode of address, Asia nevertheless nodded, choosing to believe it was because of her last name and Harry's actions rather than awe at her own. She was soon joined by a few Medi-wizards. They sure as heck were not going to question Merlin's will to bring someone like this to them. Instead, they asked her if the wounded needed everything after she was done with them and if blood replenishing potions would help.

To this, Asia replied that the wounded would need nutrients and lots of it. The blood replenishing potions would also be good for many since Dawn Healing would only replenish their blood enough to keep them alive after their wounds were dealt with.

With the magical medical personnel following her, Asia got through several more areas where the worst wounded had been before running into a group of holy men. These men had

previously been simply giving the last rights to the wounded, doing what they could to make their last moments comfortable. Many of these holy men were angry, bitter about the sudden revelation that magic existed and everything that had happened this night.

Asia simply nodded at them and then got on with her work. Perhaps that might have been a mistake, but Asia was busy.

And as she healed the first men in this area, the holy men looked on in shock. Some of them watched in growing delight and gratefulness, but many, shaken by the night's events, fell back on old certainties: that all magic was evil, a product of Shaitan or Satan, depending, but regardless of what type of magic it would always corrode the soul of both user and victim. Because of that belief, they had already run off groups of magical personnel, who left willingly, knowing there were other areas they could serve. Now one of them growled angrily at the sight of someone using magic on the wounded and marched over to Asia, his hands flexing in anger.

As he approached, he barked out, "Another vile magic-user, and this one is wearing the clothes of a nun! How surprising that demons care not what raiment they corrupt!"

Asia heard him but ignored the man's words, knowing that every second could mean the difference between life and death for one of their patients. Indeed, she found it a miracle from God that so many here had made it even this far and wasting time would serve no purpose. So Asia continued, laying her hands on two of the other wounded, healing them instantly from amputated limbs and horrible facial wounds.

Her actions and disinterest in their shouting seemed to incense people who already were glaring, angry and frightened, and one of them moved to stop her physically, pushing aside the nice young man who had been helping her. "She is in league with the horror a few streets over, the succubus with the ruined mouth!"

At that, Asia frowned, looking up, startled. "Excuse me? Who?"

"A Miss Akeno was injured as well, Miss Potter. We've already given her some potions, and she should be right as rain in a few hours. The same goes for her companion, Kalawarner, although she was not as badly injured as Akeno," one of the nearby wizards said, having just removed stasis stock charm he had placed on one of the wounded before he, like his fellows, had been run out of the area.

"Oh, that's good," Asia breathed a sigh of relief even as she touched the woman the wizard had been seeing to. The woman had been poisoned by one of the scorpions as well as impaled by the stinger in question, but while the healers had seen to the wound, the poison would have killed her regardless. "I know I shouldn't let my personal feelings decide who I should heal first, but if one of my friends was injured, I'm not sure I could've stopped myself."

With that, Asia continued, moving around the angry Mullah, ignoring him entirely. She had heard his words, but Asia had her work, and to her mind, he was simply lashing out due to

the 'impossibility' that had shattered his worldview tonight. Asia couldn't blame him for that. It was a very human reaction, if at the other end of the spectrum than all the wonderful men and women who were helping the wounded and had stood up to protect themselves and their families. But despite her understanding, Asia wasn't about to humor him.

Once more being ignored seemed to act like a lash on the Mullah and several others, including one priest who was also looking angry at her. "How dare you! How dare you pollute these men with your magical filth! You are staining them in the eyes of Allah, false Angel!"

As the Mullah spoke, the priest tried to grab her hand, but Asia batted his hand away, a faint frown on her face. "Angel? I have never said I am in Angel sir, I would never wish to dream so high. I am just a young girl, doing what I can."

It was rather like having a puppy dog frown at you, and it made several of the others who had also looked angry frown in turn. One of them, a Coptic priest, somewhat calmer now that Asia had stated she was no angel despite the rumors, spoke up now. "But you are a magicuser, and yet you also carry across and dress as a nun. You will forgive my... colleague's... intemperate remarks, but that is a strange juxtaposition, considering that one thing that all of our religions have in common is the fact that magic is a sign of Lucifer's influence."

"I know, which is somewhat silly considering the hidden histories of the church and the Faith. But as for why I still wear my nun's outfit and my cross? I believe that is all there is to it," Asia said, smiling prettily at the man, before turning away, placing her hands on yet more wounded, Dawn Healing flashing with her magic guided by her will.

"You believe, hah! I doubt that!" The angry Mullah snarled, trying to grab her hand once more and wrench it away from one of the wounded. "And stop that I say! You will not pollute these men further even if I have to remove you by force."

The growls from several aid workers, and one of the wizards calmly hefting his wand, said that would not be happening, and the Mullah's followers responded by lifting up their own makeshift weapons. But before anything could happen, Asia simply turned that same smile on him. "I'm glad that you doubt something."

That line seemed so out-of-context that the Mullah blinked, staring at her, and Asia went on, remembering the conversation she'd had with Irina and Xenovia, which had somehow convinced them both to return to the church despite their faith having been shaken by the revelation that God had died. Yet even if God is dead, his message is still with me so long as I believe, so long as I have faith and do good.

With that thought in mind, the glares and angry mutterings of the Mullah and his followers did not scare her at all. "I often doubt, in particular, I doubt myself. But in my doubt and searching for answers to that doubt, to what God requires of me, I find my faith. I do not find certainty, nor do I give absolute obedience to God. We, all of us, are His creations, not creatures. And I will continue to believe, whatever I see."

Asia then drew herself up as the man opened his mouth to shout at her once more. After all, absolute obedience to God was part of the Islamic faith. "I am not here to proselytize, I am not here to convert, I am not even here to speak of faith in general. I'm simply here to use the power that God has given me for good. Why are you here?"

That simple question delivered so calmly rocked many of the Mullah's followers as the crowd around them clapped or nodded in agreement. Now more than one of the men backed away, removing themselves from this confrontation. Several others looked around and realized that perhaps this wasn't going to go the way they had thought it should and did the same, following their self-preservation instincts instead of the revelation that perhaps they were on the wrong side of this argument.

But the Mullah and a group of his fellows still snarled at Asia, pricked by her words and tones. "No! I said I will not allow you to taint these men. What does the body matter!? It is but a pale imitation of the soul, and you damn them with every touch of your foul magic!"

With that, he raised his hand and was about to actually assault Asia as the others with him prepared to do the same. The nearby wizard and the young man showing Asia around moved forward to prevent this, but Asia spoke once more. She did not back away or show any fear, simply looking at the man sadly. "Do you wish to hit me because that is truly what you think God wants, or because in so doing, you think you will gain some measure of control once more now that everything you thought you knew of this world has been tossed on its end? Do you act in God's name, or your own need to lash out?"

Once more, Asia's simple questions rocked her listeners, and more than one of the Coptic priests now moved forward, barring the still angry Mullah. Indeed several of his fellow Mullahs did the same, and a shouting match began among the crowd as Asia turned away, moving on to more wounded.

The noise began to grow, the two sides practically coming to blows themselves. This wasn't the first confrontation between magicals and religious zealots, and the mass of refugees had been ready for a clash. Asia's humility and questions had robbed much of the antagonists of their numbers but not all of their fanatism.

But this stopped as a new voice, a female one which Asia had not heard before, interjected itself. "Gentlemen?"

Even that one word somehow was so sensual, so provocative that even these holy men, who mostly either disdained or disliked women, turned, panting like dogs. But when they did, they froze as they saw the individual who had spoken.

Potions-mistress-to-be Gabrielle had joined the third group of magical medical practitioners who had been sent out to help the non-magicals. While she was dropping off her newest batch of potions, she heard about the so-called Angel of Healing and wanted to see her in action. Now, the young Veela stood there, a fireball in either hand as she dared the fools in

front of her to keep causing trouble. "Le problem?" She inquired in French, but her tone and the word 'problem' at least came through easily enough.

While his fellows all froze, torn between two very different instincts, one of the Coptic priests shook his head, moving away from the others, and asked Asia simply, "Is there anything we can do?"

"I'm sure there are plenty of jobs around for willing hands Father," Asia said, smiling cheerily at the man before moving on to still others who need your help.

One of the other priests chuckled dryly, making the sign of the cross as he followed Asia, barking out a command to a nearby helper to go and fetch some water and food. "The least we can do is to feed them after they have been healed by Saint Asia."

He said the term with a self-deprecating and humorous tone, but deep down, he was wondering if perhaps Asia Potter was indeed some kind of Saint. Although he did indeed take quite a bit of amusement pleasure in the fact that her ears had just gone bright red at the mere suggestion.

Pleased to see the troublemakers now thoroughly cowed and backing away from the young brunette with the odd blonde streak in her hair, Gabrielle snorted and turned away. But then she paused as Harry flew down from on high. "Asia!"

At the familiar voice, Asia turned, her previous embarrassed, shy expression turning into a smile so warm it was almost blinding as she looked up at Harry. "Hi, dad!"

Asia would normally use the word father, but after just using it for a priest, it didn't seem right at the moment.

Gabrielle's eyes widened as she looked at Harry, and for the first time felt his divine aura. Instantly she bent at the knees, unable to stop herself, and thankful that she had worn both a long skirt and one that was about as sexy as a burlap sack at present, or else she might well have been embarrassing herself in several different ways. Harry's aura crashing down on her was like nothing she had ever felt before.

Nor was she the only one. Many of those nearby, wounded, healed, priest and helper also tried to fight the urge to kneel as Harry moved swiftly to Asia, enveloping her in a hug and asking her how things were going and if she needed any help. When that happened, the angry Mullah, who had been thinking dark thoughts despite not wishing to chance the scary blonde fire-wielder, paled, thinking he was about to die.

But Asia didn't say anything about them, simply saying they needed more supplies and more hands to help the wounded. "The ones I've healed can be moved someplace else to rest and recuperate, but they'll need food and drink, um, quite a bit, to get over the regeneration process. Er, I can only heal, I um, I'm not good at organizing, and it seems as if there's no one in charge of all this right now. It's quite haphazard, Dad."

Harry nodded, kissed her on the forehead and told her he'd get Yubelluna back here to organize things. But that she should be ready to talk to a group of local leaders soon about what was going on. "Either you or someone else who can represent the medical side of things. I'm afraid we can't really rest on our laurels here for long Asia, were going to have to push on to retake the rest of Egypt."

The two Potters hugged one another for a few moments, then Harry stepped back, moving to talk to Gabrielle, which caused her to have a little crisis. But Harry ignored her obvious distraction, asking her about the potions she could make, how fast she could do it and then handing her a bag of galleons from his mokeskin pouch.

Behind Harry, many of the priests slowly recovered from Harry's aura, and the angry one asked Asia incredulously, "And you don't believe in this one instead of the one true God? I can feel the power of him! The desire to submit. It is as if a great weight has come among us, one that rings of the holy."

Asia shrugged, looking at Harry questioningly, never having felt his aura one way or the other. But she knew about the phenomenon, so she replied. "Faith in my dad is one thing, faith in my creator is another. My dad is my dad, the head of my family, and I love him very much. But my faith is not in him as a divinity, that I only give to the Holy Father."

For some reason, Asia's simple words and the look in her eyes as she looked at him caused Harry to feel a little embarrassed, and he turned to look at the speaker, taking things in with a glance. Still, Asia said there wasn't any trouble, so I'm not going to make a big deal of this. "I am what some might call a demigod, and you're right that my aura is something similar to the divine. But I don't want believers, and I don't want to be prayed to. Right now, with the trials all of us are facing and will continue to face until this trouble is over, I would much rather have more people stand with me than kneel behind me."

At that, spines stiffened all over the street, even Gabrielle, who still hadn't recovered fully, having just stammered out some responses to Harry's words. Harry hadn't used his aura, a spell or anything similar, but his simple words, the sincerity, the grim determination in them, spread through the men and women around him even so. Many of the recently healed soldiers and policemen among them nodded at that and rose to their feet. One of them even stopped to thank Asia before he turned away. There was work to do.

Even the angry Mullah could not find it in himself to disagree. He still looked at Asia askance but allowed himself to be pulled away, and Harry gave Asia another kiss on the forehead before leaving her there for the moment. He had a certain black-haired beauty to find around here before getting down to organizing the needed briefing in earnest.

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Deep in the bowels of his hidden fortress, Akhenaten snarled, drumming his fingers on the lapis lazuli spheres, which allowed him control of the various enchantments and Blessings currently running throughout Egypt. Normally, feeling the power of the magic at his fingertips would give the Pharoah a sense of accomplishment, of joy at the idea that his and Nefertiti's long journey to their rightful place was coming to a close.

However, at the end of his journey, quite a large roadblock had appeared. Six of his deific servants, shades and full gods were dead now, permanently destroyed in a way that caused Akhenaten to fear for the future. Of the remaining two, one was licking her wounds from both a physical drubbing by Tiamat and a mental one from Potter. And Meretsegar was tied into the control and powering the Staff of Set.

Truly, Potter's power and his ability to find equally powerful allies was a horror to deal with. It made Akhenaten fear what would happen if Potter was able to find him. Should I do it now? Should I start the Harvest?

Unfortunately, as much as he wanted it to be, that wasn't a real choice at this point. Nefertiti isn't here, and I will not ascend on my own. That would be a betrayal beyond anything humankind has ever seen. Besides, it would be better to wait for dawn as was the original plan, which is four hours away. Without the dawn, more than a bit of the specific strengths we wanted to gain in our ascension would pass us by.

Akhenaten ground his teeth together, gathering his frayed nerves with both mental hands. No, I will wait. Potter is at least predictable in his actions, if not in his abilities. He will push out from Alexandria, and he will be coming south. Even knowing the direction, though, the force Potter would control as he came south was something the Pharoah couldn't predict. But I do know what resources I have.

Thankfully Akhenaten had dodged a bullet in that Potter hadn't been able to find his exact location. Thanks to his deific nature, Potter had a home-field advantage in the water and now controlled the Nile River, but his ability to see the magical background of Egypt beyond the riverbank of the river was nonexistent thanks to that very nature and the various obscuring spells that Nefertiti and Akhenaten had embedded in the rest of Egypt's magi-sphere.

That was good, but it was best to prepare, just in case.

With that in mind, Akhenaten turned his attention to the physical defenses of the fortress, both within the fortress and above in the city Amarna. Several dozen prepared illusions began to pop into being. Before, the Wizarding World's wards would have spotted that much magic, but now that wasn't an issue. Equally as many magical traps, long prepared in idle moments but not powered up until now, also flashed into being.

As he was doing that, he summoned a Ushabti and then spoke. "Release the giants and the various enhanced Mummies and Infreri."

As a final touch, Akhenaten also summoned Wadjet and Meretsegar and gave them orders. "You are to act as my emergency reserves. If the enemy breaches this pyramid, you will step in and defeat them."

Both cobra goddesses writhed on the floor, trying to fight his control. But neither had the will left to do so, and even the Meretsegar answered in the affirmative after only a few moments of mental combat. "We obey, oh Pharoah."

Wadjet headed off, physically making her way through the doors, her mind still battered by the fight with Potter even though her body had healed from the wounds Tiamat had caused her. Meretsegar merely disappeared, becoming part of the Blessing from the Staff of Set again.

If it comes to it, I will have to be ready to summon more monsters into being to make up for the loss of control over the undead Meretsegar pulling out of the enchantment will cause.

Still, that is a small thing.

With his own defenses secured, Akhenaten reached through the enchantments, taking control of the forces in Damanhur and began to prepare his defenses there. I have to keep Potter's influence on the plan as small as possible, and slow his advance however I can. I will make Potter bleed and his allies fall. The slower I can make them move, the better. Thankfully. Potter hasn't destroyed more of the columns. The number already destroyed by his forces before the Harrowing started is already too much. It cost us all of Alexandria and more besides.

Like his enemies, Akhenaten had also learned throughout the night. No longer did he bother with conjuring scorpions, scorpion men, or even many hordes of beetles. All of those had been good at spreading terror, but in actual combat, their ability had proven less effective. Instead, he concentrated on pulling up undead janissaries and other undead human forces. The jackal men too, had proved their worth in how they could move around a city quickly, being able to hop from one place to another and also blend into the shadows. That last could be important depending on if Potter could recreate his artificial sun spell.

For aerial forces, Akhenaten conjured more flying snakes. The harpies had proven almost ineffective for much the same reason the scorpions had: they had to get close to do any real damage. The flying cobras at least had their spit, which wasn't much admittedly, but it was some kind of long-range attack.

Of course, Akhenaten didn't control each individual creature as they appeared. He couldn't have concentrated on the sheer numbers of such he was using. Instead, he situated them like a general, moving various companies around Damanhur. First, he pulled them back from the river, particularly the flying snakes, but he left the harpies that had already been conjured into being in place. They would serve as an early warning system of Harry's assault.

The rest would be lying in wait within the city's buildings mainly, ready and waiting to bleed Potter and his forces whatever they were. Other forces would be waiting close by the protected zones, attacking the police and others who attempted to leave the protected zones,

particularly in Cairo. The Exorcists were, despite being pinned there, still causing a lot of trouble, in particular Dulio Quatra. But they couldn't leave the city, which was good enough for now.

As he continued to work, Akhenaten felt something trickle from beneath his mask to drip from his chin onto his pristine robes. Raising a hand from one lapis lazuli sphere, he wiped at it, noting idly that it was blood which had dripped from his nose, a sure sign that he was pushing his mind to its limits and well beyond. But he did not care. This was the final act, the final moment of the greatest gamble of the greatest plan any human had ever devised, and Akhenaten would see it through. You will not stop me, Potter! You will not stop our Ascension!

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It took Harry some time to find Akeno. As one of the least injured walking wounded, she had been allowed to leave the makeshift hospital zone and instead, Akeno had headed back to their hotel.

Well, that and her presence had proven to be quite divisive among the locals. Injured as she was, Akeno hadn't been able to hide wings, and they and the fact Akeno and Kala had both been seen fighting in the air previously had an impact on the way the locals saw them and, perforce, the other magicals. The issue that Asia had run into might've been the frothing tip of the wave, but there had been other incidents. Not as many as there might have been in other circumstances, but even one was enough.

Thus Harry found Akeno lounging on the sofa, propped up by several large soft pillows, and trying to read a book, her body wrapped in a loose bathrobe. At that sight, Harry feared she was more injured than Yubelluna had said, but Harry realized that this wasn't the primary reason why she was here. Out of sight the moment he rounded the sofa to get a better look at her face. It only lasted for a moment before Akeno raised her hands and covered her face with her arms, shaking her head in a very obvious 'don't look at me' response, a low whine coming from her lips.

But that look was enough to show that on top of giving her some Skelegro for her broken and missing teeth, the medical wizards had set her jaw using a kind of ugly cage-like device.

The sight of it made Harry wants to slap his forehead. It was exactly the kind of thing that one would expect in the Wizarding World: an immensely specialized magical potion able to do what no current medical technology could, paired with an extremely simple, ugly device, probably because no one had ever considered anything different.

"I'm not going to tease you, Akeno," Harry said gently, sitting down beside her legs and touching her thigh with one hand, running his fingers lightly over her skin until he felt little goosebumps appear.

Akeno looked up at him, shaking her head. Then she raised a finger and used a flame charm to create words above her head. Her finger marked out the letters, but otherwise, it looked exactly like the spell Tom Riddle had used in the Chamber of Secrets incident in Harry's second year at Hogwarts. "I know you're not going to tease me, Harry, but that doesn't mean I want you to see me when I'm looking so ugly!"

Reading this, Harry slowly shook his head, reaching out and gently touching Akeno's forehead, then running his hand from there back to her ear and into her hair. "Love, you could never be anything less than gorgeous. That thing is bizarre true, but you're not the one that decided to stick it on your face. Although, I'm wondering why they decided it was necessary?"

Akeno leaned her head very lightly against Harry's hand, keeping it away from her jaw and the strange contraption holding it in place as her finger once more carved out flaming letters in the middle at the air between them. "They gave me Skelegro, which is making my mouth itch horribly, although I can already feel teeth beginning to grow there. But I was told that using more magic on my face would interfere with the growth of the teeth, which is apparently quite finicky, so my jaw has to be kept in place. Thankfully before that, they had healed my jaw and banished the ruined teeth, so at least I'm not in as much pain as I would otherwise be."

Then Akeno seemed to pause before looking at Harry firmly. "I should be right as rain in a few hours. I was told teeth grow back faster than larger bones. But until then, I'm going to be taking it easy."

"That's fine, although what else did you hurt?" Harry asked, gesturing down to where one hip and her stomach could be seen between the flaps of her bathrobe. Both were covered in wrapping, which, oddly, didn't take as much away from the erotic sight of Akeno so deshabille as it probably should. The jaw thing does ruin it a touch.

"A few ribs and my hip bone were broken during the fighting, although I never noticed it right up until the end. let's hear it for adrenaline, hehe," Akeno wrote out before asking a question of her own. "What has been going on since I was injured?"

Harry filled her in on his own part of the battle and what was going on now before shaking his head ruefully, his tone both whimsical and grim. "Normally, I'd ask Asia to come and help you heal. I'm pretty certain Dawn healing could ignore whatever rule the Medi-wizards think is stopping them from using further magic to make you comfortable or speed up the healing process. But there are so many wounded, even if you just count the ones at death's door or who have been delimbed, that Asia's going to be busy for hours yet."

This was a simple truth. Alexandria was a massive city, one of the largest in Africa, and the second-largest in Egypt, with a population of near to three million. While Harry's intervention with his Solarus spell, aura and everything else had saved the majority of the

population, hundreds of thousands had still died, and thousands were still wounded in the struggle.

Akeno nodded, understanding, her finger flashing with flame once more. "I probably would refuse it. As I said, I should be up and about in a few hours. The same is not true of the nonmagical wounded."

Harry nodded then asked if she would be up for anything offensive later tonight. She answered in the affirmative, and he smiled at her. "Good. I'm afraid I might get bogged down in my own offensive, and I'd like you to join our latest acquaintance on a head-hunting expedition if so."

If she could smile, Akeno would have done so at that. Instead, she reached out with both hands and squeezed Harry's before lifting one hand away from that touch and into the air. "You know just what to say to a girl, don't you, Harry? Well, this girl anyway. I am greatly looking forward to the screams of agony of whoever is behind all this. It might not be as fun as certain debauched things you and I can do in the privacy of our own room, but it will be pleasurable all the same."

"That's my Lightning Babe," Harry laughed. "And then, when all this is over, maybe there will be time for just the family again. Where I can look forward to doing those debauched things with you."

<u>"You shouldn't tease me like that, Harry,"</u> Akeno said, although, by her body language, she wasn't exactly annoyed by it. Quite the opposite, really.

"You're right. I shouldn't tease you like that. I should instead tease you like this." With that, Harry leaned over her as if he was going to kiss her on the lips, which would be a very bad idea at the moment. But then, he instead began to kiss at her collarbone, pulling at Akeno's bathrobe, which she had switched into when she returned to the hotel room, it being more comfortable than her regular clothes. Slowly, Harry pulled it apart just enough that it was barely covering her nipples before kissing down from her collarbone to right above the top of her bathrobe. There he bit down hard on her left breast, giving her a hickey, causing Akeno to moan, low and almost pain-filled. But Harry knew that the pain would only add to her enjoyment of that moment.

After suckling at that spot for a bit, he stood up, smirking at her. "That's the way I should tease you. And you can take that mark as a promise to follow up on more in the future."

<u>"Promises promises,"</u> Akeno 'said', before waving Harry away. <u>"Now go out there and be a hero again, Harry Potter, my husband~~."</u> She actually drew out the word 'husband' smiling with her eyes in the way she couldn't with her mouth at present, the sparkle there just for Harry. <u>"I'll be joining you as soon as possible."</u>

OOO{from here on, the chapter has not been edited}OOO

Dodging out of the way of an Incendio spell, 'Miltani' rolled into cover several yards away. A second later, she popped up and lashed out with a Reducto, which blew the man into bits of offal. *That was a bit too close.*

Around Nefertiti, the smoke and fog of the battle wafted its way through the streets of Oslo and everywhere, fires still raged, a black and orange flame with faces occasionally showing up within its flames while in the sky the last dragons two dragons sent down fireballs at anything moving. At the same time, spellfire could be seen here and there through the city, and if had enhanced senses, like Nefertiti did, you could hear the shouts of wizards using spells.

'Miltani' had led her gathered Aurors into this battle, but the wizards driving the dragons forward had come out of the woodwork in support of their creatures. Shouts of 'Hail to the Dragon lords' and 'down with the ICW' and her personal favorite, 'the Dragon Lord comes, he comes to cleanse with fire', had thrown her people into disarray. Nefertiti's followers had added a bit more theater to it by favoring fire spells, particularly Fiendfyre. *That was a magnificent touch*, she reflected, from the safety of several blocks away from the fire, which a team of a dozen Aurors was slowly beginning to get under control after killing the magician who had created it.

That last moment hadn't been the only close call tonight, which Nefertiti was somewhat apathetic about. After all, her tools among the 'Dragon Lord' worshippers didn't know her in this body and had attacked her as just another Auror. So how could she expect any different?

But still, everything has been going quite well so far. Perhaps a few hundred non-magicals had died despite several spells forcing them to stay inside and not notice what was going on outside, and more importantly, many of the Aurors and Hit Wizards, who really were just Aurors without the investigative skills. In fact, dealing with all of the dragons let loose had gutted the International Confederation of Wizardry's strategic reserves and their normal forces. The separate nations still had their Auror forces, but the ICW was now crippled as an extranational police force.

That is good considering our continued activities within the Wizarding World. Now, if only we had the same type of agents among the Devils. We have agents within the Church and Islam, but not the Devils or Judaism, not that the last is worth much, but with our long-term goals, a few agents in the Devil-side of the Underworld would be a major help. Our two Fallen agents can only tell us so much, after all.

Seeing there was no one but a few Aurors nearby, Nefertiti glanced up at the moon, the different time difference between here in Egypt easy to calculate. She had no idea how well things were going in Egypt, and indeed, it was only due to the fact her name as Miltani was on the exemption list in the Ivory Tower that she could think of Egypt at all. As a member of the ICW's own workforce, Miltani would obviously have to know about the Interdict and why it was in place, like the Chief Mugwump, Miltani and the representatives to the ICW.

But if everything was going according to plan, they had barely three before dawn, and that was the time that she and her husband had long since agreed that the harvest would occur. It was hoped that in so doing, they would perforce be taking the power of revelation, rebirth and the sun's traditional powers of purification and defense against the dark. *Mmmm, I've always thought of myself as more of an afternoon person anyway, so that works very well for me. Soon... soon...*

A sudden gasp from nearby drew Nefertiti back to the here and now from her pleasant dreams of the future when she would finally claim her rightful place. Looking around, Nefertiti saw one of her troopers staring at her, a frown on his face and his wand in his hand. "W, what's wrong?" she asked

The man continued to frown, pointing at her. "Did someone get you with a prank?"

For a moment, Nefertiti didn't understand, then she looked behind her at her rear and sought to her horror that despite the metamorphic powers that she had used to assume her new identity, her tail, her new tail, a sign of the cat demon powers she had stolen, had popped out. What, how? Am I still unused to my new appendages that they can pop out like this?

That had proven a problem in the days since she had taken everything from Kuroka that had made her so unique, but Nefertiti had thought she had it beaten. But I never tried to control it in combat! My Nekomata powers must have acted up when I leaped out of the way of that spell a second ago!

Panicking, she whirled on the man who had spotted it, one hand going to her head only to find that yes, her ears were there too. *Blast it!*

It was at that point that Nefertiti made a mistake.

It was a simple mistake and one that many people would have made. It was a very rare spy who could roll with his or her cover being blown after all, even in such a minor manner. Perhaps if she wasn't tired from a long night, keyed up on a Pepper-up potion. Perhaps if she hadn't just gone from a state of near euphoria about thinking of the future to suddenly having this thrust in her face, she could have responded better. She could've played her off, saying that someone had indeed played a prank on her.

But she didn't. Instead, she flicked her hand out towards the man, her hand, not her wand, and a bolt of plasma, an old Pharaonic spell, flew from her hand, her face a rictus of hate and anger. The man's head disappeared as the flame-seared through his head and into the wall behind him, killing him before the man could even scream.

And nearby, a few other Aurors who had been watching the sky for more dragons saw this through the smoke of the burning city. Now attacks came in from all directions towards her, as a shout of "Impostor! Someone has replaced the Auror General!" rang out.

Nefertiti, of course, hadn't replaced Miltani. She had created this identity from the ground up. But that really didn't matter right now with spells flying towards her. Especially since more than one person had seen her use her hand to launch that spell, something that was believed impossible for normal wizards and witches. Oh well, time to cull the herd a bit, and if my Nekomata powers have already come out, I might as well use them!

With that, she bounded forward, allowing a bloodthirsty yowl out as she did. The yowl startled her former companions and let her close with one of them. A swipe at his face removed much of it, sending him to the ground screaming, while a spell lashed out from her other hand, slaying a nearby witch with a gut exploding curse, taking out a nearby Auror. Three more Aurors died, their spells being batted aside or just avoided, as Nefertiti bounded around the battlefield, putting her Nekoshuu agility to good use.

However, more and more of the Auror were moving towards this disturbance, shifting their attention from the few remaining 'Dragon Lord' followers, having slain the last dragon who had crashed down in the nearby Tøyen Park. This sudden shift was a sign of the battle against Riddle in Britain. Too often in those wars had the good guys been infiltrated by the Death Eaters. The Aurors of the rest of the world were very, very prepared to react violently to any hint of such subterfuge, knowing it could hurt them far worse than any direct attacker.

Alas, it had already done so here.

Ducking under another incoming spell, Nefertiti cursed as she was forced to create a shield to protect from another spell. Snarling, Nefertiti stamped hard on the ground, her new Senjutsu strength causing a crack in the concrete that rushed towards one of her attackers, dumping him on the ground and burying him a moment later. Another attacker died as she twirled, lashing out with a hand. From her claws, long ribbons of cutting magic flew, slicing the attacking Auror into ribbons.

But her concentration on her own offense had perforce let her shield fade, and now four more spells flew towards her. But to Nefertiti, it was like they were moving in slow motion! "Hahahahah!" She laughed as she danced between them, lashing out and killing both Aurors with each spell. If this is what it was like for Kuroka, my God! She laughed aloud again in sheer amusement at that thought, as she reflected, Humans will always be the same whatever they do. They will always feel the need to pray to some greater deity.

Reminded of that, Nefertiti flashed her hands to either's side and shouted out an attack spell, adding more power to it in doing so. "Reducto!"

The building she targeted, a large apartment building, exploded, hurling dust and rubble down into the streets. This undoubtedly killed the people inside, given the spells making certain the muggles kept inside their buildings. But that was a minor consideration to Nefertiti as the same attack sent the rubble down on top of seven Auror who had been rushing into the battle. Hah! That means there's only what, twenty-two remaining? Less? I could kill them all and...

Nefertiti's thoughts broke off as her magical senses tingled, her bloodlust, which was somewhat unusual for her, ebbing out at the realization of what she was feeling. Someone was attempting to set up anti-portkey and apparition wards. That wouldn't do at all. Being trapped here was not something she was willing to put up with, no matter how enjoyable it was to finally use her powers to their full potential.

Attacks lashed towards her, and she ducked and dodged through them as she pulled out a necklace around her throat underneath her clothing. The next second, a curse smashed into her back, a Disillusioned Auror having gotten downwind of her. The spell broke bones, and she yowled in pain but still activated the portkey within the necklace, pushing her own power into it. The ward wasn't fully set up yet, and the portkey smashed through what was there, and Nefertiti appeared in the hidden temple, stumbling slightly, cursing as she tried to touch her lower back, wincing at the pain of the hit. It hadn't crippled her thanks to the natural magical resistance of Nekomatas, but even so, it hurt like blazes.

Nearby waited one of the Ushabti, and she nodded to it. "Get me a change of clothing. I will need one momentarily. And get me a bone repair potion and a burn salve."

For a moment, she thought to luxuriate in a full bath but decided against it.

Nefertiti knew that her husband had been dealing with Potter without her, and Potter was... a threat. Oddly, Nefertiti didn't feel any heat or annoyance at that thought, simple acknowledgment of fact. True, Potter personally infuriated her with how he had gained power, but in a way, Nefertiti also respected him. After all, you could say that Potter is precisely what my husband and I wish to become. But whereas he is far too interested in family and being a 'nice guy'. My husband and I will do it right. Humanity will have a god and goddess worthy of the name. We will be noble, mighty and terrible all in one package.

Shaking her head, Nefertiti banished that thought. Do not tempt the Fates. We need to keep pushing forward, working towards that goal instead of simply dreaming. And, and what was with my bloodlust in that battle? Could it be something related to Senjutsu?

The servant returned at that point, interrupting Nefertiti's worries, handing her more clothing and the medical potions she had asked for. Taking them, Nefertiti undressed right there, then strode through the inverted pyramid. Before she reached the ritual chamber, though, Nefertiti heard her husband cursing and sped up her steps, almost tripping as her tail wound itself about one of her legs. Nefertiti glared down at the appendage as she opened the door to the central area of the ritual chamber. I will have time to train myself with you later. The fiasco tonight will not happen again.

As she entered, Akhenaten looked up, and relief flashed through his eyes. "Get over here, wife."

Nefertiti hurried over, placing her hands on the lapis lazuli orbs on her side of the central ritual array. What she found when she pushed out her mind into the enchantments

astonished her. Several of their servants had been slain, including her own personal pet Wepwawet, which annoyed her. But the loss of Alexandria was worse. "What do you need me to do?" she asked, tossing aside her earlier exuberance.

Her husband smiled at her underneath his mask, and although she couldn't see it, she could sense it and shook her head, seeing where his eyes had rested a moment. "Later for that, let us finish this."

Akhenaten nodded, his lips twisting into a sly smile underneath his mask. "Yes. A thing is not great until it is finished, to quote a certain conqueror. Take over the defenses and be ready to control them as best you might, just in case. Use the two goddesses still have retained as a final line of defense. Once you are done, help control the ongoing Harrowing while I concentrate on preparing for Potter's advance. He's certain to come south for us soon."

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Even though he had been part of organizing this meeting, the crowd of people that awaited him in the hotel's conference room was quite a bit larger than Harry had expected. At least fifty men and women were sitting to one side of the room, leaving a table and further places at the table open. Before arriving in Alexandria, he might've been surprised by given how misogynistic the Islamic faith was known to be and how intolerant religiously Egypt was supposed to be as a whole.

But that was before he arrived in Egypt and learned how truly diverse Alexandria the city was.

Although, that didn't seem to have spread to the more important leaders at the table. Three of the seats at the table were taken by the army officers, all meant. The others sitting there were a doctor with a haggard expression and twitching hands, Proudfoot, and three men Harry didn't know. Two of them looked like technicians of some kind. The third was an unknown, and Harry couldn't tell what he was supposed to be. The only woman at the table was Akeno, while her aunt Suzaku and Husukai sat with the larger group at the back with a few other magicals, several of whom were witches.

Harry was pleased to see that none of the magicals in the larger were being shunned or avoided, people moving their chairs away and looking at them warily and so forth. Even Akeno, with the jaw cage thing still on her mouth but otherwise healed, was only getting sympathetic glances, not hostile ones. Indeed, even though it was known she was a magical, the looks sent Kala's way seemed to be about her blue hair rather than anything else.

And even though a part of him regretted the need for this meeting, Harry knew it was necessary.

Despite rumor doing its normal magnificent job, explaining away the events of this night to the hundreds of thousands of people in Alexandria, they still needed some more information

to keep them from panicking now that the immediate threat was over with. Not just about why this had all happened, but also what was going to happen moving forward. Did the sewer system work? Would more food and water be needed going forward? How long would this disaster last? When would power be restored? And so on.

Attached to those concerns, the civilians needed to be organized to a greater degree to make certain there were as few friction-type incidents as possible. Harry certainly wasn't going to be doing that, and he refused to assign anyone else to it. The only one with the organizational abilities to pull that kind of thing off would be Yubelluna, and she had her hands full now with organizing the medical side of things despite Asia and further magical assistance from Lighthouse Lane.

Walking toward the table, Harry did his best to rein in his deific aura, but since he had to also keep the sun going outside, there was a limit to how well he could do that. There were some murmurings as he entered, but most were positive, and none attempted to rise from their chairs to kneel or curtsy, which was a start, anyway.

No one looks like they're going to attack me, even the Mullahs and priests at the back there. That one man at the table whose job I can't identify is glaring at me, and so are a few others, and Proudfoot still looks like someone stuck a bur under his bum. But I can deal with all that.

The was offset by Kala being there, and Harry sent her a very speaking glance as he moved to stand at the front of the room, looking around the others. As he did, he noticed that Proudfoot's glare had transferred itself to a few women sitting with open notebooks in the front ranks of those sitting at the back end of the room. Secretaries? Huh, so Proudfoot's still thinking about the Statute and not my leadership? I suppose that's fair enough, but I'm not about to give him any leeway there. Facts are facts, and we need more boots on the ground than we have at the moment.

Instead of objecting to the row of secretaries, Harry spent a brief second amused by the fact there weren't any men among them, although two were wearing Junior officers' uniforms, sending them a brief smile before speaking. "Gentlemen, ladies. For those of you who had not met with me for this, my name is Harry Potter."

There was a rustle of something like a chuckle at that since everyone there, like everyone else in the city, had heard his voice before. But this was perhaps the first time that almost all of these people could put a face to that voice. "I have become, through both personal power and my combat skills, the leader of the magicals within Alexandria. I..."

To Harry's immense surprise, the unidentified man at the table puffed himself up and shouted out, "And that is something we must talk about! Magic is real, and an entire society of you people hide under our very noses like so many rats! All of this madness was caused by you people and your secrets!"

Harry looked at the man thoughtfully. I wonder, is it willpower, ego, or anger and fear that allows him to ignore my aura? A part of me is glad of it, but the rest... "And you are?"

"My name is Zosar El Brak! And I am a Senator to our House of representatives! And as the most senior governmental official here, I have to ask, no, I demand to know why you are acting as if you're in charge!? why the hell are we listening to you, and what the hell happened!?" Zosar bellowed. Then his anger seemed to find a new target, and he pointed over Harry's shoulder to one of the corners of the room. "And why the hell is a drunk even allowed in here!"

Glancing in that direction, Harry saw Cú propping up the corner. Gae Bolg was leaning next to him, and the Irishman was drinking from a twenty-four pack of local beer, with six cans in a trashcan at his feet.

Honestly speaking, Harry would probably have asked Cú to leave. He doubted the man would have anything to contribute on the strategic level, and Harry knew the man well enough already to know he would get a kick out of disrupting things.

But before he could say anything, Cú smirked, tossing his can down into the trash at his feet. "Screw you, ya feckin' shite, I ain't a drunk. I'm Irish."

Somehow, that caused a ripple of laughter around the room, and Sala boomed out, "Senator Zosar withdraws his intemperate remark."

Shaking his head, Harry regained the room's attention, addressing the crowd as a whole rather than the men at the table. "Setting that aside, did you think that just having magic would automatically mean that the human soul changed? There are criminals and megalomaniacs among our magical races just as much as there are among nonmagicals. Unfortunately, when paired with an ability to hide through magical means, you can create a nightmare. It is just that this time, that nightmare splashed over into madness that has engulfed Egypt from one end to the other."

Instead of sitting down, Harry placed his hands on its back, looking around at the rest of the people in the room, examining them more closely now. Even with the sun he had created bolstering their spirits, too many of those faces looked worried and concerned. There is no reason they shouldn't be worried, but it needs to be directed, and we can't spend all night doing it.

"That 'one end to the other bit' is the most important fact. This meeting is necessary to help you and those you lead get organized. We **must** move on quickly. What happened here in Alexandria, ladies and gentlemen, is happening everywhere, and if we don't, thousands, perhaps millions will continue dying."

"Why should we believe you," Zosar blustered, pounding one hand on the ground. "Why should we even believe anything! Hell, as far as we know, all of this could be some kind of elaborate plot by you."

Harry's eyebrows rose, then he very deliberately turned away from the man to look out the window, and out at the sun in the sky above, and then back to the man, one eyebrow still in the air. "If you really believe that, I believe there is a patch of desert I would like to sell you as prime real estate. What possible reason would I have to do that?"

"You're a magic user," the man huffed, while small chuckles wound around the room at Harry's words. "There's probably some magical reason or other behind all of this."

"If you're talking about the attack, undoubtedly, but it isn't one I know. For now, I will lay out what we do know, and then we will move on," Harry said firmly. Gone was his previous dry, almost humorous tone. In its place was the voice that Harry used in battle to give orders. "Have too much to do to spend hours talking."

"Agreed," Abraxas said, with his words being aided by the voices of the other military officers. Their people and the wizards helping them might need this time to prepare, but everyone knew they had to push hard, to get out there and help more people.

One of them, the one Harry hadn't been introduced to, even went so far as to point at Zosar. "Sit down, Senator."

Zosar blustered for a moment, but a rumble grew from the crowd representatives, and one of them stood up. He was an older man, but still quite fit-looking, with the tan of someone who worked outside. "For my part, I at least trust you, Lord Potter," he said formally. "You and that bushy-haired friend for yours saved my family and me, and your sun, what it did last night to, to dispel that fear we were all feeling, that cannot be denied. But..." the man went on, almost glaring at the politico before turning his attention back to Harry, "As much is it pains me, Zosar has a point. I think we have a right to know what happened tonight, and not just in broad terms."

Harry looked at the man and then nodded his head very formally. "You do. Which is what I was going to tell you before I was interrupted."

Zosar growled, but as everyone at the table glared at him, he sat down, and Harry said his piece. He told everyone about what they had discovered so far, touching very briefly on the Wizarding World in general and why it hid from the rest of the human population. But mainly, he concentrated on what they might be up against. And like it had with the generals before, the news the person behind this was an immortal Pharaoh caused as much consternation as incredulous laughter.

"And we're supposed to believe you!?" Zosar barked. "We might not know what went on, but this is sounding more and more unbelievable with every word out of your mouth."

"Then tell us, sir, what do you think has happened tonight? Do you have any explanation? Or are you just speaking to hear the sound of your own voice?" Kala drawled, running one of her hands through her hair. "All you have said is that you do not believe what we are telling you. That is, to put it mildly, unproductive."

Zosar blustered, but Kala slowly shook her head, ignoring him now. "We do not have time for this. You have had your explanation. You know now why we need to get moving and why it happened. My Lord Potter has formally apologized, even if he was never in any position to truly control these events. You're owed nothing else, sir. And if you keep on making trouble here, I will personally deal with you."

While Sala looked at Harry, wiggling his eyebrows in comic amusement at hearing about his relationship with Kala, Abraxas nodded brusquely. He looked over at one of the women taking notes and addressed one of the two dressed as army officers. "Lieutenant, I believe Senator Zosar is overwrought. Please, summon a few troopers and escort him to one of the hotel rooms we've had ready for those who need rest."

As the lieutenant left the room, Zosar puffed himself up in indignation once more, but the general looked at him coldly, and he subsided quickly.

The position of the military in Egypt was a very strange one to Harry's British sensibilities. They were not just a military force. They had direct political and industrial power, with many people in the government having served previously in the Army in some fashion to a far, far greater degree than in the UK. Thus, while Zosar might've been the most highly placed survivor of this night's disaster, he didn't have the same personal or political power as the Major General of the Northern Region, particularly not in Alexandria.

Within seconds two troopers followed the lieutenant back into the room and moved towards the Senator. They weren't armed, but both appeared fit, no-nonsense sorts. And looking over the crowd, Zosar saw he had no support from that quarter either. Scowling, he stood up, blustering once more. "I, I will make a recording of this to the Senate and the President himself."

"If they are still alive during all this, then I suspect so, yes. Until then, I doubt I have cause to worry," The Major General replied dryly, showing no fear.

With a final scowl, the career politico turned, walking out the room with as much dignity as he could muster. Which wasn't very much to most of the people in the room.

With that done, Abraxas looked around the room, one eyebrow rising. "I believe at this point, and with the need for haste Paramount, we should move on as quickly as possible. Before we do, I have to say formally that this whole idea of using memory charms to keep magic a secret will not fly after tonight, Lord Potter. I will not be submitting myself nor my soldiers to any such thing."

Proudfoot stiffened, but Kala grabbed his arm under the table, squeezing. While Proudfoot had proved himself a very good Auror commander, he was also very hidebound and reactionary. Yet Kala's warning squeeze stopped him from saying anything.

At the same time, a murmur of agreement rose around the room for the Major General's words.

Harry raised a hand, gaining silence instantly. "I know. We will cross that bridge when we come to it, and for my part, I have honestly no idea what we are going to do in the long run. Frankly, I am very, very afraid of what will happen after all of this is finished, one way or the other. The last thing I want, and I pray that the last thing any of you want, is to see a war between magicals and non-magicals. Such a thing would be devastating, and...I have no idea on which side I would even fight," he admitted, shrugging shoulders. "But that is a problem for later. We need to concentrate on the here and now."

Many more mutters answered that mutters of discontent this time, but eventually, the crowd subsided, understanding Harry's point. Further, many were pleased to know that at least Lord Potter, the man who had almost single-handedly turned the tide against the monsters and undead, wasn't rushing to erase their memories. And it also had to be said that despite not many of the men and women in that room being connected to the international scene, they were by no means stupid. They all understood how horribly the revelation of magic being real could go.

Sitting quietly, Proudfoot still looked annoyed but didn't say anything. He was still convinced that it was best to erase the minds of everyone involved, no matter how many people there were.

Harry, however, knew this genie was out of the bottle. There was no chance of any kind of cover-up keeping everything bottled up after this large event, not if the wizards were working on their own. Maybe, **maybe** if they brought in teams of Devils and the gods of India, they could get away with it. But that was a big maybe, and even then, he wasn't certain that larger a cover-up would be able to stand for long.

Thankfully, the meeting went on much faster after that point. People started talking about the industrial sector, the work being done by various wizards and engineers to start getting power running in the city and working water. Working water was a must, although a team of wizards had recently begun to simply use the Aquamenti spells to create as much running water as they could. Tonks and the previously unnamed supply officer spoke about work on the various military projects. The work on getting trucks rolling had also yielded fruit already, with several dozen trucks and crew-served weapons ready for use, while a few trucks were ready to be turned over to the city for work around Alexandria.

A few of the hotel managers were there, and they spoke about the need to start clearing out houses for housing. There were still far, far too many people out streets, even for a

city like Alexandria. Even with the losses tonight, the city had a population in the millions. They needed to spread people out more, perhaps even forcibly, before fraying tempers and nerves started to cause problems.

Farouk and the police would have to be the ones handling that, but they were also already dealing with something else, the proof that the magicals really didn't have a monopoly on villainy. Even during the fighting, there had been looting and worse going on. Now that it was over, the criminal types and people who simply saw an opportunity were taking advantage of things.

Luckily, the various leaders were willing to step up and control their people, and Harry just had to provide a place to jail the looters. There were even a few rapists and murderers, but most of those had been 'killed while resisting arrest'. Normally Harry might have wondered about that, and there being too much mob mentality in their deaths, but as it was, he couldn't bring himself to care. The others would be imprisoned for now. Depending on how long this disaster lasted, they might need to think about something more permanent, considering how many cells were now full throughout the entire city.

That topic was an extremely sober one for everyone involved, but it had to happen, and thankfully it was over somewhat quickly, everyone agreeing that in this time of crisis, they couldn't afford half-measures. To help the meeting regain a more upbeat feeling, Harry turned the discussion onto the issue of children and how they were being kept out from underfoot.

The idea that whole buildings had been turned over to house the children of the city, watched by parents and a few Shinsengumi with toys being provided by the Aurors amused everyone. Thankfully many of the youngest children were able to fall asleep when given a chance. Regardless of the artificial sun and everything else that had happened, it was still night after all. Still, they had to be watched, and several witches had volunteered for the duty, transfiguring small teddy bears and other toys, imbuing them with cheering charms to keep the kids' moods up, and dreamless sleep potions for those who just wanted to sleep. Further aid was provided for mothers and babies from the various hotels at the center of the controlled portion of the city.

When that topic was done, the conversation moved on to an even easier topic, the medical side of things. The doctor at the table spoke about the problems facing them, thanking Proudfoot profusely for the magical aid sent, which mellowed Proudfoot out even more than the meeting had thus far, and he even joined in the quiet laughter when Asia's efforts came up, as well as her nickname of the 'Angel of Healing'.

"Without Miss Potter, we would be in a far worse way than we are. She and Mistress Yubelluna. None of us have any skill in organizing, and many could not look past working only with those other medical professionals we knew before this disastrous night. But while Miss Potter has been healing the worst wounded, Mistress Yubelluna has been organizing everything else."

Finally, the discussion centered around the city wound down, but one of the leaders, a block leader who had been leading his large family and their neighbors during this crisis, spoke up. "You spoke at the beginning about the Wizarding World. Is it possible that we could see further aid coming from that quarter?"

Harry shook his head, then looked at Proudfoot. The man reluctantly got to his feet and explained about the Interdict, as well as the fact that other problems were going on elsewhere that he had been informed of in his last communication with the International Confederation of wizards before the Interdict had been activated. "I'm afraid we won't see anything coming from the rest of the world because of that."

This did not make any of the locals any happier with the wizards. Yet, in a way, his openness on this score also made them all realize that Proudfoot and Harry had no part in setting that up. One wag was even heard to mutter, "well, if evil and megalomania cross between the magical and nonmagical world, we would be foolish to think that stupidity couldn't."

Harry was extremely grateful for the young man who said that and nodded his way as a burst of laughter wound around the room. "Exactly. However, I think at this point..."

He looked at the Major General, and Abraxas nodded his head, standing up and looking around the room. "We will have a brief question and answer session for anyone who has specific concerns they want to raise in front of the entire group. And then, I will ask the civilians to leave. We have a country to reclaim."

The question-and-answer session went on for about 15 to 20 minutes, by Harry's estimate, but it was a very... not sanguine but determined group who exited the room, leaving the military members and the wizards to plan the offensive operation.

"All right, now that that is over let's get down to real business." At Harry's word, Proudfoot instantly pulled out a magical map of Egypt, Enlarging it and placing it along the inner wall of the conference room. It wasn't responding any longer to magical outbreaks, but it at least showed the entirety of the nation, as well as their area of control. The generals then filled the map in first with known military bases as Proudfoot did the same with the locations of other magical communities. There weren't many of those last ones, but much like the military bases, if they had been unable to respond to communications, Proudfoot was forced to write them off.

Staring at the map, Abraxas and his fellows had to fight through thoughts of dead comrades, of the fact most of the government stayed in Cairo and might well have died there. The army's bases were just too spread out for mutual support, and if they had faced the same kind of 'spawn everywhere' type of combat... "I think we all need to know more about what we are running into out there. I don't argue with our priorities. We need to push out quickly, but

we need to know what kind of enemies we will run into beyond the undead and the monsters. Going in blind will save no one."

"I'm concerned about exhaustion being an issue. For some reason, that sun of yours, Lord Potter, has revived my men to a certain degree, but we have still been fighting for more than half the night, and we have no idea how much longer we will have to fight when we push out towards Cairo or even Damanur and the rest of the Nile Delta," Sala added.

"Agreed on our need for more information, Abraxas. I asked some of our magical researchers to look into that. I'll get them in here now to discuss their findings." While Hermione and Padma understood why they would need to make this presentation, neither had wanted to be involved in the political aspect of the meeting and so were in a room nearby going over their notes on the odd graffiti that Hermione had found.

When everyone nodded, Harry sent off a Patronus, watching the awed, uplifted faces of the people around him. *Good, they will need their morale rock solid going forward.*

As the Patronus disappeared, Harry turned to look at Sala. "As for your concerns, Sala, I believe we can do something about that too. We have a magical potion called a Pepper-up potion. A single sip will give you as much energy and vitality as several cups of coffee."

"Hah! I will have to see that for myself," Farouq barked a laugh. It was well known that the Egyptian police, like police the world over, lived on coffee. Despite that, everyone agreed that it was time to talk about what the magical researchers had discovered.

Soon Hermione and Padma stood up, and Sala, ever the gentlemen, stood up, bowing towards them as several of the other locals did the same. "And who are these visions of loveliness?"

Padma curtsied prettily towards him, smirking a little. She recognized an old roue when she met one, but at least this one had manners. On the other hand, Hermione looked a little conflicted, and Padma decided to speak up for both of them. "My name is Padma Patil, and myself and Hermione," she nodded towards her lover were in charge of investigating what we might all run into out there. And I'm afraid the outlook wasn't good."

With that, Hermione moved and began to speak about each Nom Reaction Force, in turn placing markers on the map with a wand. Hermione crossed out several of the small outlying towns as she went, marking them as completely overrun. This was particularly true with the few settlements that weren't on the Nile or the Suez Canal.

At that point, Proudfoot took over, creating smaller green and red triangles in the center of the Noms whose reaction teams had not retreated. Thankfully there weren't many of these, and he was done quickly. "We have to assume that those teams are dead, but enough retreated to give us a decent fighting force. But as Mrs. Granger will tell you, we will be running into the same kind of threats out there we did here in Alexandria."

Hermione took over the discussion again, running down the tale of each reaction team. At the same time, Padma began to use magic to create life-sized versions of the various undead. She then began to mark out portions on each monster, showing weak points. The same kind of lecture was currently being given to each company of soldiers by Kiba, Loup, and several of the others. The armor of the jackal men would prove annoying, but not overmuch given the legs and head weren't covered by it, and the undead, in the main, were only dangerous in numbers or close range.

However, as she continued, Hermione began to talk more about the nonmagical defense each of the reaction teams had seen in the various cities. And then, with a glance over at Harry, finished by saying, "Yet as strong a defense as some areas of the various cities were putting up, every Auror commander reported that they felt it was only a matter of time until they fell. Except for the fact they were willing to use the columns with the Sun God Ra's symbol on them."

"Columns?" Sala mused, frowning in confusion. "Would these columns be the same ones Tiamat attacked a few times on their retreat to Alexandria? She never told us why she was destroying them."

"In our investigation, we were able to discover several ancient Egyptian columns. They all seemed to still have magic in them from the time of the pharaohs. Given our mission and the information we found about who was behind the small-scale attacks we were dealing with, I decided that those represented had ordered their destruction, moving out from Alexandria."

"Why?" Abraxas asked.

"I couldn't tell you a real reason, just a feeling. Those columns were too uniform. They had too much deific magic in them. I just could not see them as being disconnected from the problems we were facing. But the way you mentioned them, Hermione tells me something else was going on."

Hermione nodded at Harry's words. "Right. I think that maybe those columns were made by someone who knew that there was some kind of underlying problem or.. well, I don't know, I don't like to guess without having enough facts to back me up. But what is clear is that we might well have been in error on the purpose of those columns, Harry. Because in each report that mentions them, those columns have created a large-scale safe zone where the monsters and undead can't go. Indeed, when they tried, they were destroyed by the magic in the columns. This was seen by a few Aurors, but we don't have any detailed reports on how long they lasted, what the overall impact o the people

"Nice of you to say we, Hermione, but it was my call." Harry took the responsibility of that on his shoulders without hesitation, scowling as he looked down at his hands.

Looking between Harry and Hermione, Sala frowned. "Do you think that they are still involved in some way with the enemy, Lord Potter?"

"We can't read the magic within them," Harry answered, not looking up from where he was looking at his hands thoughtfully. "I was able to detect the Aura of the Blessing on them, but we couldn't tell what it was supposed to do. And I was then and still am afraid we could run into the same issue with those columns that I ran into in the Nile River: A Curse hidden underneath a Blessing."

As he mentioned that, Harry shuddered, and from where he leaned against the nearby wall, Cú Chulainn did the same. "That's fecking horrible," the son of Lugh growled, speaking up for the first time since his small altercation with the Senator. "The very idea of using a Blessing to cover a Curse, or to even have one near the other is something that I've never run into before and is something that no Tuathan would ever feel comfortable with. I could see one deity Cursing something and then another Blessing it or vice versa, but deliberately doing so? No chance."

"Yet, that **is** my concern with the columns," Harry said, shaking his head. "And I still think we should destroy as many as possible."

The generals all looked at one another, then Abraxas decided to speak up. "Well, if we run into trouble because of those columns, I suppose we will have to deal with them then. But at the moment, they are helping our people, Lord Potter. That means we cannot destroy them until we can secure the areas they previously covered. And it could also mean we could maybe find some allies out there."

"...Hopefully," Harry admitted with a slow nod thinking about the churchgoers in Cairo specifically. "I'm still not happy about the idea of using them, but you're right. If they're doing what is being reported, we might have a chance to bring in some more allies. At the very least more people. Heck, we might find far more people alive out there than I feared..."

"How big an area did these things cover, Mrs. Granger," Sala questioned.

"They might vary, but the areas seemed to extend at least several blocks away from each column. That includes the houses and buildings within that area, of course. In one report from the Fayum, there were two close enough to one another that the edges of their areas of domination touched, and that seems to have empowered both further." Hermione frowned, thinking hard. "If the people within get very friendly, packed in like sardines except at the edges... each column could be protecting as many as three thousand people. We have no idea how many columns there are across Egypt, however."

The generals muttered among one another, then a plan was put forth: the columns would be left alone until Sala's assault or Harry's reached this protected perimeter. The people would then be approached. "If those columns have simply defended our people, it will be a major boon on several levels. But if not, we can remove the people from around one such column, then destroy it or whatever," Abraxas said, scowling a bit. "But right now, we need them."

The meeting went on, with Hermione detailing a few other things that she and Padma had discovered questioning the survivors of the Nom Reaction Teams. And then Husukai and Kala spoke up, talking about what had worked, what hadn't and so forth.

The number of flyers reported in each AAR was a worry considering the losses the Aurors had taken, but the Tir Na Nog gryphons and dwarves had made those losses good and then some. As the locals knew, they would also help the people on the ground keep their spirits up. The Gryphon was a symbol of kingship and authority in Egypt, and even in an event like this, that kind of symbol would bring some relief to the embattled civilians. Beyond that, messages were sent to Bill and the supply officers to concentrate on getting more anti-air guns ready.

The main mobile antiair gun of the Egyptian army, a soviet KS-19, was not very modern, but they would hopefully be more of a help than the useless junk that was most of the modern anti-air gear. Heck, even if they had worked, the modern weapons would be of limited effect. After all, what was a missile designed to shoot down a plane worth against a flying cobra or harpy?

With that, the meeting turned onto the military side of things. The two initial targets were chosen. General Sala would lead an assault on Damietta. Another port city, Damietta was home to a field headquarters of the Northern Military Region, which would hold at least a brigade of troops. It was hoped some of those men might be alive. It would also give them another portion of the Nile Delta to spread down in the future and military resources to repair and reuse.

Meanwhile, Harry would lead an attack on the city of Damanhur. It was the next city along the same portion of the Nile that wound through Alexandria and would take them south, toward where Harry knew their enemy lay, even if he still couldn't discover their exact location.

Harry would provide the initial push in both and the transportation and decided that instead of trying to launch the attacks simultaneously, it might be best to stagger them. "The Pharoah can control his forces to some degree. We saw that in how he kept on sending in aerial troops from right outside Alexandria. We need to start making him react more, pull his attention one way, then the other."

Units and resources were assigned to both attack forces, a somewhat difficult operation on the nonmagical side of things. It was decided that only a few of the mechanical assets, six trucks and four anti-air guns, would be assigned to Harry. With them would go an infantry brigade, led by a colonel. That would leave two brigades and the rest of the mechanized units to go with Sala.

For the magicals, it was somewhat simpler, considering their lower numbers. Of the six-hundred-twenty Aurors, ninety-four Shinsengumi and eighteen Himejima clan members, roughly around three-hundred and seventy Aurors survived, while thirty-four Shinsengumi had

lived through the night. Added to this was an intact force of sixty-two medical personnel and around a third of the medical-type potions they had started the night with.

The majority of that force would be split between defending Alexandria and going on the attack with Sala.

So too would the Danan troops: three hundred gryphons and their riders, two hundred dwarven infantry and some hundred (it was very hard to get an accurate count of the little blighters) leprechauns. And Luna, of course.

While Proudfoot made the decision on what type of magical support would go with Sala from his end, Harry placing Bail Stonebreaker in charge. He would lead the majority of the gryphons in helping the assault on Damietta. The dwarven infantry would go with Harry, as would most of the leprechauns not assigned to provide communication for all the disparate units. Since that meant one leprechaun per twelve flyers and one per nonmagical company, that meant a force of around thirty leprechauns, considering how many would need to be left behind to provide the same ability for Alexandria's remaining defenders.

He also decided that Tiamat and Kalawarner would go with Sala, and Kiba to fight on the ground. Eighty Aurors and a third of the surviving Shinsengumi would be assigned to that assault, along with two-thirds of the medical personnel. The Himejima clan would be split down the middle, with Suzaku going with half her clan members to support Sala and the rest operating under Harry.

A hundred and eighty Aurors and sixteen Shinsengumi would stay in Alexandria providing aerial defense, although as militia personnel was outfitted and trained on the use of anti-air guns, that number would decrease. Similarly, once the airspace or Damietta was secure, Tiamat would be pulled out of that to start flying between the trio of cities, burning their enemies out of the sky.

From the Kuoh natives, Yubelluna, with her ability to use her bandrui and Bombardier powers to attack targets well away from her, would remain on defense in Alexandria. Asia would obviously remain to be called forward if need be. At least two hundred mixed

Harry also felt that Issei should stay, ostensibly to watch over the young nun. That was a major consideration, true, but Harry felt Issei was showing signs of having a bit of a breakdown before this meeting began.

Harry would keep Loup with him to help clear buildings, along with a much smaller magical component, but with Harry, there personally to make up the difference. With his help, hopefully, that attack wouldn't be lacking for magical firepower. It would also let him keep moving in the same direction as the feeling he'd gotten of where the Pharoah could be found.

"But, considering the chaos that we're going to be walking into, and the fact I have no idea how much extending my influence is going to cost me, I think we need to keep back a

reaction team. A group that can take the offense at any time." That won some nods of approval from the military men, and Harry turned his gaze towards Cú Chulainn.

"That will be you, Cú Chulainn, and you, Akeno," he nodded to her, his newest wife's eyes widening in surprise. She had stayed in the room along with the other military-type leaders from the rest of the room, but had remained silent up to this point, and not just because of the wire cage around her jaw. "Along with Koneko."

"What!?" Cú Chulainn bellowed, pushing himself upright from where he had been leaning insolently against the wall, crushing the bottle of beer he had been drinking from. He tossed it aside and glared at Harry. "What do you mean you're sidelining me!?"

"I'm not sidelining you," Harry said softly, but there was nothing soft about his eyes as he glared back at Cú Chulainn. "The generals just finished speaking about how they'll need me to extend my influence to give us any hope of actually claiming new ground against the enemy. That and more artificial suns. Night vision goggles could only do so much after all. But while we're attacking, Hermione and Padma will be continuing their search for anything that could lead to us finding whoever is actually behind this. When they do, I might not be able to pull myself away from the front."

In fact, Harry was pretty certain at this point he wouldn't be. The fact was, even with Sala and the officer groups of the Army headquarters being relatively intact, they just didn't have the manpower necessary to control even Alexandria without Harry's Aura making certain that the enemy couldn't just respawn troops right within the city. But the more area Harry tried to protect in that manner, the more it exhausted him. Alexandria alone wasn't all that big a drain, but could he keep that area thus protected and then create further zones of control? or would he have to extend the area around Alexandria to include the target cities? I just don't know, blast it!

"Which means we need a force ready to move," Harry continued. "I'll keep the assaults South along the Nile going, but it will be up to you, Cú Chulainn, Akeno, to actually attack whoever is behind this unless I make enough headway to find them first."

Cú Chulainn grumbled, but his anger had mostly subsided at the idea of being sidelined now that he understood why. "Fine. But if it turns out that you do run into whoever is behind all this and don't call me in, I'm going to be pissed, Potter!"

"What, no more 'High King'?" Harry drawled, and Cú Chulainn laughed.

For her part, Akeno smiled, squeezing his hand, wordlessly telling Harry she would do her part, come what may. Harry squeezed back, then ran his fingers along the back of Akeno's hand, smiling slightly at the shiver that she tried to suppress. With their own roles in the discussion finished, the two of them sat back and let the meeting continue around them, concentrating more on the feel of one another's hands as the meeting turned back to more important matters, taking time just for themselves for just a few precious moments.

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Seeing no point to subtlety, Harry began the attack into Damietta with all the power of an artillery barrage. "Shock and awe," Harry had called it. "Not that our opponents are going to feel anything, considering their monsters and undead, but it might help rally local people to us."

As he came out of the water of the Damietta distributary into the city of the same name, Harry roared, transforming into his werewolf form as he thrust his hands upwards. His power flashed out from the waters, wiping out the undead near its banks. A second later, a second new sun appeared in the air. "SOLARUS!!!"

With that done, Harry concentrated on his aura, trusting Luna and the other people who had come with him to protect him for this moment to do so. A few seconds passed, and then with an audible grunt of effort, Harry's aura spread out once again, covering Damietta. With it in place, the enemy could no longer conjure monster troops into being, and the undead nearby had already been slaughtered.

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"WHAT?!" the Pharoah bellowed in the confines of the enchantment room, unable to comprehend what had just happened.

"What happened?" Nefertiti asked quickly, breaking out of her own trance.

"Potter's not coming straight here. He tricked me," With that, the Pharoah turned his attention to Damietta, desperately pulling up more Janissaries out of the ground, stuffing them and Roman legionnaires into the various buildings.

But with Harry already launching his assault, he didn't have much time to work with and knew it. That means that Damietta will also fall under his control. Curse it! But I might be able to move my human servants there fast enough to make a difference. Perhaps attacking near the end of the battle there will also give them the benefit of surprise.

"How is he doing this?" Nefertiti murmured, mentally reaching forward into the various Blessings and Enchantments permeating Egypt, frowning at the extension of Potter's aura. "Mmm... there must be a limit to how far Potter can stretch his aura, and it can't stop our undead forces from appearing within that area either. I suggest we prepare land-based forces, undead obviously, nearby as well."

His wife's calm tones worked to soothe Akhenaten, and he nodded. "And... hmmm... there might be an opportunity here. After all, the people of Alexandria have been lost to us for days, given the destruction of the Pillars within the city. Instead, if we can gather an appropriate force, then the civilians within that city can be a weight around Potter's neck."

Nefertiti nodded, though she doubted that would work as well as he expected. Nothing had, not since Potter and his allies had arrived in Egypt, after all.

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For a moment, Harry reeled a bit at the impact to his magical core. Two of the damn things seem to be a bit much, and this time, I didn't have Ddraig to help. However, he'd had two hours to rest since the end of hostilities in Alexandria, and they had served him in good stead. "General, come on through."

{Play We will Rock You (any version)}

Trucks moved out of the water all around Harry, bursting out of the bubble that had carried them through the water like a train on a rail. With them came Sala, who instantly ordered the trucks towing the KS-19s into position, pushing through a moment of sheer shock and awe at what had just happened. A hundred-and-seventy-eight miles in under a few minutes by Allah! "Spread out, spread out! I want a perimeter here! Kiba, take your knights forward into the buildings, clear them out! Machine gunners forward too. I want you set up in those buildings an hour ago."

But despite the fact no one was firing at them from the nearby buildings, which here were directly alongside the river that gave the city its name, the troopers had only a few seconds to situate themselves before the sky almost darkened once more despite Harry's new artificial sun being in the air above them. Angered at not anticipating Harry's movements, the Pharaoh now threw all his available creatures in the surrounding area. There were so many harpies and flying cobras, their mass obscured the magical sun.

But before the majority could get into position to attack, Tiamat and the gryphons arrived, flying out of the water transportation bubble along with a large number of the Aurors and Shinsengumi. Tiamat's fire burned a lance of fire into the guts of the attacking mass, while behind them,

Kalawarner followed, shrieking her fury as she flapped her wings up into the harpies and cobras, dodging spit and claw with inches to spare. Her Holy Spears stabbed, slicing several of her enemies out of the sky, as she began to conjure so many that it looked like a porcupine had suddenly launched all of its pincushions all at once in every direction. The effect was like a bomb had gone off, letting the Aurors get organized a bit while the gryphons charged forwards, snapping and slashing. They lost out in terms of maneuverability to the flying cobras, but their dwarven riders were just as deadly with their magical hammers.

This was nothing to Tiamat, though. While the attackers were almost ignoring her to attack the still emerging infantry, She roared and flamed through the mass, killing hundreds of snakes or in the same breath.

With the airspace cleared for a moment, the Aurors moved up into it, pulling out their flying carpets, creating floating platforms on which machine gun-armed soldiers set up their crew-served weapons. Now they fired into the masses all around them and then down into the ground occasionally.

"Press out, purse out, move it, move it!" Sala shouted. "We are near the Field HQ. I want to reach there in forty minutes. Remember your building clearance training and remember to let the Knight Brigade take point! I will dishonorably discharge any son-of-awhore that forgets fire discipline."

"General," Harry's voice came, crisp and clear despite the amount of distance, and looking down through the water, Sala could see Harry readying his own assault. "Tell me when."

The general looked around, and the last of his assigned troops came in. "We're through, Lord Potter. Good luck."

"To you as well, general. And, although it is somewhat wrong of me to say it, God bless." With that, Harry disappeared back into the Nile, reappearing back in Egypt.

Sala chuckled and then began to bark out commands as Kiba moved towards him, and Sala nodded. "Clear out those buildings for me."

"Rules of engagement?"

"If you find a survivor, call it in with your little friend. Otherwise, clear those buildings. I want them as cover moving forward. But if you think the opposition is too strong, pull back, and we'll level the buildings. It won't be the first time Damietta was destroyed."

He gauged the violence above him for a moment as Tiamat landed nearby, scowling. "Hmmph, with that initial push done, it does not look like I am needed up there right now."

"Perhaps not, but I pray you wait until we have a perimeter set up, Lady Tiamat. Beyond that, I have no doubt you'd be of more use heading out and intercepting any flying type reinforcements. All I would ask is that you take one of the leprechauns to provide communication."

"I be willing to ride ye, Lady Tiamat," a leprechaun, a middle-aged man who had come through from Tir Na Nog with Luna, volunteered from the group that had come along with this assault to provide a semblance of organization in case the repaired radios didn't do the job.

"Something about the way you said that sounded perverted, worm. Be very, very careful with your words in the future," Tiamat snarled, even as she laid her head down on the concrete, letting the leprechaun scramble into position behind her head.

With the leprechaun in position, Tiamat waited until the last of the antiair guns got set up, and the gryphon riders started to push out from the zone Harry had cleared on his arrival before hurling herself back into the air. Moments later, she was away, winging off out of the city, moving in a lazy circle around it.

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Not thirty minutes after the first attack had left, the attack force Harry would lead was ready, and he once more opened the water transportation tunnel, letting everyone get situated within

As he appeared in the Nile where it moved through Damanhur, Harry lashed out with a burst of power once more, followed by several large-scale enchantments. A third artificial sun blazed in the sky above and in the distance. At the same time, the undead and monsters near the Nile faced eternal night, Harry's power wiping them out one and all.

With the way cleared, Luna and her companions came through, and Harry again concentrated on pushing his aura out. Here, however, he ran into a problem. As Harry pushed his aura out into the Damanhur, he could feel it waning in Alexandria and Damietta. "I fear we're at the limit of how many disparate areas I can control with my aura..." Harry ground out through clenched teeth, still in his werewolf form. "I need to do something here."

"Can you connect them?" Luna asked, hopping from within the water transportation to the distant shore twirling like a ballerina. Of course, most ballerina wouldn't then launch a spell through a nearby fourth-story window that exploded in red and blue within, but that didn't detract from the appearance. "Hmm... there were some of those musket users you warned us about in there."

"Not good. Remind me to tell Colonel Flavius about that. But as for your question, yes, I think I can, but it is going to take a lot out of me." Harry grimaced, then breathed in and slowly pushed forward with both hands as if directing his magic through the gesture.

"Think of it like pizza dough," Luna smiled winsomely, enjoying Harry's grunt of mixed confusion and exasperation. "You're attempting to use your limited 'dough' to cover three different areas. But aura comes from who we are, and who we are can only be in one place at once, connected to us personally. When you attempted to cover Damanhur with your dough, the other areas, which were already feeling your loss like you were pushing dough through a straw, found themselves losing the dough that covered them. You need to even the dough out over the areas of the three cities and between them. In a triangle shape, I think, I can't quite recall from the map I saw."

Harry grunted again, this time thoughtfully, and though Luna's attempt at an allegory did nothing for him, eventually, he was indeed able to spread his 'Aura' between the three cities, covering a great triangle now carved out of the Nile Delta. This drained quite a bit out of him, and now the city's original attackers made their presence known in a huge mass of flying cobras. Nowhere in that mass did Harry see harpies or the undead sphinxes.

"Shit, the enemy really is learning," Harry noted that new mixture with some trepidation. "This might get bloody very quickly."

"Duh. Never underestimate an opponent Harry, you told us all that back in the war with the Death Munchers," Luna quipped, then launched her next spell into the air. An anti-snake spell her mother had created for when the family went on their expeditions, the conjured snakes suddenly found themselves repelled and feeling dizzy for no reason. This made them somewhat easy targets for the other magicals with her, but there were so many flying snakes coming from every direction they still posed a serious threat.

Yet, it was a threat they had a plan to deal with. Letting Luna and her team fight off the flying cobras, Harry recovered from his brief round of tiredness. When he did, Harry reached into the Nile, reopening the water teleportation and bringing in the armed and magical forces assigned to him. "Come through!"

With that bellow, the army units and the Aurors came through quickly, the Aurors mostly rising directly into the ai over the Nile. They instantly moved to repel the wave of flying cobras and a few harpies attempting to attack the beachhead.

The army appeared in Damanhur in the form of six large trucks towing antiair guns, whirling to either side as more trucks and marching men appeared. To these men, much like the magic-users before, it simply seemed as if they had been marching through a short watery tunnel, covering the distance between the two cities, no time having passed instead of having to march there.

Following the plan made for this moment, the men in the trucks instantly went to work while their fellows spread out, preparing for an assault from the surrounding buildings, an attack that didn't come. The antiair guns' stabilizing legs were pulled apart, and hydraulic pistons lashed down into the concrete. A moment later, a man hopped into the gunner's position, and a second after that, the guns fired.

Once more, the flying snakes were faced with modern weapons that worked. Sort of, anyway. Rockets would have been useless against such small targets. Instead, the fragmentary rounds of the guns sent flak out so thick it looked like smoke, wiping out droves of flying cobras.

Meanwhile, Harry barked out a command, and two of the Aurors in the air above them dipped down. On the ground, the two men went about casting Protego shields around the guns and trucks,

The man in charge of the Egyptian army side of this assault was a Colonel named Gerard Flavius, who Harry had learned was of French decent despite his last name sounding Greek. He was known among the Egyptians as a cool customer and had proved tonight that wasn't hyperbole.

Arriving on the riverbank, Flavius sent his men forward, setting up portable defenses and securing the nearby buildings. Once his men were moving, Flavius moved over to where Harry stood at the edge of the Nile. "What do you think so far, Lord Potter?"

Harry nodded to the man then launched an attack up into the air. "Kaji." The dragon of fire swirled around in the air, helping to clear the area over the Nile. "I think the enemy might

have learned from past mistakes. I suggest you prepare to take long-range fire when you go forward."

The man blinked, then shrugged his shoulders. "Understood."

Hearing that, Harry didn't think the man did understand what he meant, but Harry wasn't going to jump on the man just yet.

Keeping the water transportation open, Harry could still send off a few idle Reductos or cutting spells as more troops, this time consisting of Shinsengumi and Aurors, came through. These broke up into eight groups of four, setting up several flying carpets, on which soldiers in turn set up crew-served machine guns. Meanwhile, more troops came through, setting up mortars to give some indirect fire to the infantry forces going forward.

They came in handy almost at once. From nearly every direction, Mamluk cavalry appeared, their dead bodies soaking up the fire of the infantry, forcing them to fall back. While Harry and Luna dealt with the groups that got too close, the mortars began to fall among the rest while the infantry retreated. The charge didn't last long, and then the infantry was moving forward, and Harry, listening in on Flavius' communications, decided that portion of the battle sounded like it was under control. Instead, he turned his attention back to the flyers, seeing more of them coming down from much higher in the air than the antiair guns could fire.

First, we take control of the air, Harry thought to himself, lashing out with one hand magically. A new fire dragon appeared, and Harry controlled it, sending it straight up until it was hard for Harry to see in the light of the nearby sun he had already created. Once it started to hit the mass of flying cobras, he clenched his hand, and the dragon burst, sending spears of fire in every direction, burning hundreds of flying cobras to ash.

Even as the flying cobras spread out to not provide a large target again, Harry began to organize things a bit here at the edge of the Nile while still more troops were coming through in the form of the last two infantry battalions. "Luna, Loup, prep one of the nearby buildings for wounded. Then I want you out on the roofs, Luna. Move forward in support of the infantry. Loup, wait here for a moment. You'll be moving forward to help clear out buildings if need be. Shin, I want..."

As the troops moved out past the zone cleared by his magic, Harry's concerns proved well-founded. As the men moved out of sight of the river, there was a crack of musket fire, and men fell, screaming. While many of the soldiers wore modern armor, and while their chests were lined with the local equivalent of the well-known Kevlar, unfortunately, the sides of their bodies weren't. Two men fell to shots in their sides or smashed down from on high at an angle into their shoulders.

Their helmets were decent enough and kept one man alive who was struck in the head. But another man's face didn't have similar coverage. His face and the skull underneath disappeared into mush, the man not even having time to scream. Arms and legs likewise were

not armored, which was proven when three, albeit primitive-looking, grenades landed among a fire team. The entire team went down, alive for now but horribly wounded.

Similar ambushes happened elsewhere, and only one platoon was able to keep itself in order. A career soldier, he knew the only solution to this problem and shouted out, "Get to cover, and remember your training!"

That cover, of course, could only be found in nearby buildings, and the platoon commander knew how deadly clearing buildings could be, even if they hadn't needed to do so yet this night. One of his troops instantly entered the store on the first floor of one such building, slamming through the door. When he did, the man found himself gun to chest with several Roman legionnaires. He fired instantly, but two of them were already stabbing forward. The two undead monstrosities were nearly cut in half by his Maadi assault rifle's fire, but he still fell, one sword having punctured straight through the side of his body armor.

As he fell, more of his fire team entered, clearing the store with head and heart shots and moving towards the back, losing one man to a Janissary whose sword took his head off his shoulder as he stepped out behind a shelf. The rest of the platoon fell back from more concentrated fire from Janissaries above them in the stairwell, none of them dying, but several falling to injuries. Their friends carried them along, and the platoon commander pushed two more fireteams up and through the building's narrow stairway.

As this was occurring, dozens of jackal-men moved in groups of five over the rooftops, intent on jumping down at the already beleaguered platoons still taking fire below. But the wizards saw them coming and cutting spells, and their aerial machine gunners blew them into chunks before even the mortars could fire. Harry also ordered the aerial fighters to start spreading out, aiding in this endeavor by launching two more Onmyodo-style fire spells into the air, which hovered well above the other aerial combatants, helping to clear the air zone.

He then nodded at Loup. "Go."

The other werewolf nodded, transforming and charging forward, his chosen fire team and two Aurors with him following quickly. At Harry's raised fist Shin too moved forward on the other side of the Nile. In his case, he and two of his fellow Shinsengumi summoned up Oni to take the lead in breaking into the various buildings around them.

With aid on the way, Harry turned to Flavius. "I suggest, Colonel, that you start listening to my advice from now on." He looked over to where Sadie, matronly leprechaun lass, led a band of leprechauns through the water transportation, while behind them came the dwarves. "Leprechauns forward, transport the wounded back here."

Now somewhat cowed from his earlier self-assurance, Flavius added, "We could also use the leprechauns in among our companies, not just to fight but to help communications. Something is starting to interfere with our repaired radios."

"Good thinking. I also want people on the lookout for the magic columns." Harry gestured to a group of policemen and others who had died nearby. "Obviously, there isn't one near the Nile, but we should be seeing them sometime soon.

After a second estimating the aerial battle, Harry called down thirty Aurors, ordering each of them to join a platoon, fifteen to each side of the river, a leprechaun going with every sixth Auror. "Concentrate on protective spells but watch out for beetle swarms. If I was our enemy, I'd have them hidden in the buildings or rubble too."

"Fucking nightmare fool there, my Lord," one of the American Aurors grumbled but obeyed.

Meanwhile, Loup had led his people in their own building assault. In his werewolf form, he barreled into the first floor of a building six stories tall and seemed to be part restaurant, part office building somehow. It was also a relatively new-seeming building, although not as new as others in the area, and seemed connected to other, much older buildings on the second floor, growing out and over into the other buildings for some reason.

Loup found himself in the establishment's kitchen, the smell of the place hitting him slightly even as he saw several janissaries crouching behind counters and workstations. They fired as soon as the werewolf burst through the door while two undead legionnaires on either side were blown off their feet by the force of his entrance. A second later, he sent a cutting curse towards the janissaries, grabbed one of the undead, and tore its head off before kicking out at the other one, sending it out the door, where it was gunned down by the fire team he had added into his strike force. The musket balls of the Janissaries struck but did nothing to the werewolf.

All around Loup, leprechauns leaped, bouncing from one place to another as they made their way forward, ignoring the last few undead in the room to push forward. They soon disappeared into the next room, where the sounds of violence could be heard. As the last two enemies fell to fire coming in from the fire team, Loup leaped forward over several intervening tables, smashing into the door there and charging through to grab the back of a janissary, tearing him in half, before looking around as he realized leprechauns had already dealt with several of the others.

Only one leprechaun seemed hurt, and he gave Loup a thumbs up. "I wasn't able to jump away in time from the grenade of that feller you just killed. Still, it ain't nothjin' milord."

Another, older leprechaun spoke up then. "Let us take point for a bit. If they get grenade happy, the Infreri Janissaries can slow you down, but they can't do the same to us so long as we can feckin' dodge, unlike that young idiot amadán (idiot)."

Loup nodded but added the caveat as he pulled up a large portion of the door he'd smashed apart. "But let me take care of the door first."

They cleared the first floor with relative ease after that, only finding more Roman legionnaires in the actual restaurant portion, and then heading upstairs. There, Loup hurled his makeshift weapon into the door with such force that it exploded off its hinges, crashing back into the room beyond even as he ducked to one side.

Shots were fired, and a grenade was loved out towards them, but Loup had already backed away. The explosive went off, and then the leprechauns hopped forward through the smoke, their odd hopping magic shifting the smoke around in odd ways before they were through it and attacking.

Loup charged in on their heels while the fire team knelt there at the top of the stairwell, aiming down the hall, guarding their back. This type of assault worked very well, and they continued to use it throughout the building and through two more in quick succession, while behind them, the Himejima clan members placed the talismans down on the roofs, making certain no undead could spawn there once more, as Harry had done already with the monsters and his aura.

Only once did they get in trouble. As the team cleared out the third floor of their fourth building, one of the leprechauns heard a hissing from an air vent above them. "Look out!"

That vent and several others opened, and dozens of cobras fell down on top of the team, fangs gaping.

"Defend the nonmagicals!" Loup barked, even as he swiped at the cobras above his head, crushing and slashing with his claws, biting, howling as the cobras bit into him. He was a werewolf, and although not a full phoenix werewolf, he still had the breed's regeneration. No nonmagical poison was even going to slow him down.

The same could not be said for the fire team, who would've been in serious trouble if not for the leprechauns. They disappeared from the floor where they'd been walking among the team to reappear on heads and shoulders, leaping upwards leprechaun and snake met in midair, with the snake most often the loser, being tied or tossed aside by their tiny string grapnels or meeting a hammer coming the other way.

Only one leprechaun mistimed his leap and subsequent attack, spinning in midair from the force of it to be bitten straight through by the cobra. He fell, spasming, dead before hitting the ground so small was his body and so deadly the poison.

Not that the snake lived long enough to enjoy his triumph. Even as the snake attempted to remove his fangs from his victim, one of the men knelt down with the knife, hacking at the snake cutting it in two right behind its head.

"Next time, we lob a grenade or two up there, I think," Loup growled, looking up balefully at the air vents. "We'll need to be on the lookout for similar attacks."

Loup would deal with two more such traps, not losing anyone else in those strikes. But other teams were running into much worse trouble. No longer did it seem as if the enemy was going to contest the open streets, such as they were here in Damanhur. Instead, the vast majority of its combatants were in the buildings and in the air above.

The janissaries of the Ottomans were not a modern military force, but they had good fire discipline, most of these undead monsters were expert marksman, and that was very much the point. They were marksmen. They didn't have to charge into close range any longer to hurt you. That, and the undead legionnaire's discipline and close combat skills, meant fighting through the city a much tougher proposition.

With Harry helping against the massive force in the air and then shifting his attention to anything moving over the rooftops, the wizards and soldiers had to clear each building as they moved forward, lest they continue to be attacked from behind and their flanks. That was always a danger given the way the cityscape broke up their advance and the fact their enemies could spawn wherever the Himejima clan had yet to set up their talismans.

Worse, while troopers in Egypt were trained in room clearance, almost every trooper was a draftee. They had the training but little of the years of experience similar riflemen in European volunteer armies would. None were afraid or would willingly pull back from the battle, but they would make mistakes.

An example of this was seen when the leading fire team of a platoon clearing an office building found themselves under fire as they ascended the stairs. Clearing the way was hard, and the men were now rattled and anxious. When they achieved the third floor, one group moved into an office.

The lead man entered, spraying fire in one direction as he charged in, remembering not to linger in the doorway, which could be a deadly trap. But as he moved to the side, the second man in, unfortunately, fired into the same area. This left half of the room free of their fire, and even as the men turned, musket fire crashed. Both men fell, the hits not fatal, but knocking them off their feet or into the inner wall of the office. A second later, the Janissaries finished both men off with small hand axes. They were soon gunned down in turn by another group of troopers, but then a snake dropped from a ceiling vent, biting another soldier, who died screaming, followed by several more.

Three more men died before that one, albeit large, the building was cleared.

Yet without the fight outside going their way, doing so would have been momentary at best. Harry's aura, after all, could only stop the enemy from conjuring up monsters.

Thankfully, outside, things **were** going far better. The aerial battle was entirely finished over the Nile River, and as Harry used his powers whenever he could, the area the humans and their allies controlled was growing quickly.

Harry also protected the men in the air occasionally with Protegos, and he had done the same for the flying carpet teams. This let the wizards, who were spreading out and thus had a much clearer picture of the front, concentrate on the battles below. Himejima clan members, either riding brooms or clinging to the backs of Aurors, began to dive down to the ground, placing talismans on rooftops as they went. With them and Harry's presence in the city already pushing back against the spell to conjure monsters into being, that meant the enemy couldn't reinforce so quickly. And with the mortars and Harry, any group of monsters, mostly undead cavalry and scorpions, died quickly.

Still, even with the help of wizards, the battles in the buildings were grinding the Egyptian forces down. Admittedly, the soldiers were not dying on a one-to-one basis. They had much better equipment and slightly better training for this kind of activity. But their opponents were undead and conjured beasts. Undead were hard to kill, and more than once, a man gunned down a legionnaire and then charged into a room, only to be stabbed in the back as the legionnaire got back up to his feet, the bullets had missed his heart or brain.

Even the wizards Harry had pulled out of the aerial fight started to take losses. They didn't have much training in this kind of fighting, unfortunately, not being used to fighting through the hodgepodge mix of semi-modern and ancient maze-like buildings in Damanhur. It was a very different environment than Alexandria.

Such occurred to a platoon clearing a building near where Luna had set herself up for the moment, dueling with a few Jackal men who had taken to cover among the air conditioners on a nearby roof.

Inside the building, a fire team was leading the way, now extremely wary, as their fellows who had gone from somewhat well-trained but raw troopers to veterans in one night, were watching every angle, each man assigned to a different sector, and sticking to it now. Two of them were even watching the air vents.

And that was why any of them survived the next ambush. One man noticed that on this floor, the air vents were on the floor, whereas before, they had been in the roof. He pointed this out to his companion, and both of them were watching the air vents as they moved forward. And as the two men in the lead reached them, the watchers saw movement in the vents. "Halt, back up, back up, incoming!"

The Aurors and troopers all obeyed with alacrity, and one of the wizards instantly put up a Protego, thinking they would be dealing with snakes. It was dangerous to be sure if they could get close but easy to deal with if you saw them coming. Instead, what came out of the fence was a tide of scarabs.

"Dammit, and here I thought we were getting lucky on not seeing that kind of tactic!"

One of the Aurors grumbled, even as he used an Incendio spell. The flamethrower-like spell did
its work, torching hundreds of beetles, but more appeared, along with from ahead of them

janissaries. These undead warriors hurled grenades toward the Protego shield while scarab beetles appeared from behind them, coming up from other vents they had already passed.

For just a moment, the nonmagical troopers despaired, then Luna smashed through a nearby window, using an anti-bug spell on the horde from behind. "What are you lot waiting for," she asked whimsically, dancing in place and sending out spells into the rooms they had already cleared, where undead had been spawned once more under the Pharaoh's control. The same thing had occurred in dozens of other buildings as the Himejima clan members retreated under the threat of a renewed aerial assault. "Get firing!"

With a jolt, the troopers obeyed, firing at monsters in front and to the sides while Luna and the two Aurors dealt with defense and the scarab hordes. For a moment, it was all the group to fight back and defend themselves, the two wizards using Protegos, as bullets zoomed past them, slamming into the janissaries heads and hearts, the only places where you could put an Infreri down for good. Eventually, they downed the janissaries, who had wasted their grenades on the Protego that was already defending from the front, but one of the Aurors had fallen, struck by a snake's bite as it slithered forward, unnoticed by any.

And not everyone was as lucky as this group to have aid so close. The dwarves, too, had moved forward, taking over clearing more buildings from the humans. They faced the same types of threats, but...

Two dwarves smashed their shields into the doorway, smashing it off its hinges, then charged forward, shield in one hand and axes that looked as if someone had taken a pickax and a battleax and fused them together into one horrifying whole in the other. These weapons slashed at the two nearby undead legionnaires, taking them down with ease while their shields were more than a match for the accompanying janissaries' musket balls. Even their armor, thicker and stronger than anything a human could even lift, much less move in, shrugged off the hits. The dwarves just continued charging forward like little battering rams, getting in close before hacking and slashing.

Behind them came still more, half of the twelve-man squad assigned to each building they were currently clearing. Here, the scarabs were on the first floor, and they now skittered forward.

The dwarves saw them coming and formed a shield wall across the room. Then one of them shouted out a command. One dwarf in the center of the line knelt, turning his shield sideways so that his fellow could strike down over his shoulder at the ground. This was a tactic they had developed long ago in fighting in tunnels against the vampire dwarves.

The scarabs charged forward, and the man struck the ground with his weapon. Fire erupted from a small gem on the weapon's shaft, and he staggered away, gasping, shaking his head. "Be damned, those enchanted jewels take it out of you!"

"That's because you're still young yet," said another dwarf as he entered the room, moving to the shield wall as it parted to watch the death of the scarab beetles. The other half of the squad followed up, stomping on the still burning scarabs, then moving on. "Still, you did rights to use it then. But rest for a bit. We'll clear the rest of this hovel."

The janissaries and legionnaires were no match for the dwarves. Their armor and full, face-covering type helmets were proof against anything they could dish out, including the scarabs and the snakes. They didn't lose a man and were quickly buildings at twice the rate that the humans had been able to before they arrived, so fast that the Himejima clan had trouble keeping up.

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Overall, the strategic gambit of attacking one target after another had worked. Much of Akhenaten's attention had shifted to Sala and his assault into Damietta, and he had been moving his own followers, the living wizards and witches who gave their allegiance to him and his wife, to it. They were thus out of position when Harry struck at Damanhur, and his attention was away from the defenders there, letting Harry and his men gain aerial control quickly before he could shift his attention back there.

Worse, most of his and his wife's living followers were caught in the air by Tiamat and slaughtered before they could retreat. Not even an AK from a normal wizard would more than blacken her scales for a moment, such was the difference in power.

Now, Akhenaten turned his attention back to the original city he thought Potter would have to assault. The effect in the enemy formations in Damietta was instant. They weren't spawning nearly as much, and the mind directing them was now gone, leaving the undead and monsters to their own devices. Nor did they inhabit the buildings nearly as much as the positions Akhenaten had prepared in Damanhur.

Sensing that lack of control, Sala pressed on all the harder and soon reached the Field HQ, having used Tiamat liberally to burn away any large force of monsters and undead between him and his initial target. Once his own forces were within sight of the Field HQ, he released Tiamat to burn wherever she wanted beyond the city's outskirts.

Built somewhat like a police station but with antiair guns on the roof, he found a company's worth of holdouts. They were shell-shocked and stressed, and none of their officers had survived. The group was composed of the survivors of several other commands, but the sight of the magic sun had given them hope. Now they fell in with Sala's men, filling in holes of men lost to the battle so far.

And it was Sala's army that reached the first of the columns.

By the time Akhenaten fully removed his awareness from Damietta Kiba had finished clearing out the buildings around the Nile. With that done, two companies were ordered to set

up an initial perimeter while the flyers, commanded by Kala, continued to push out and further out. With them, Suzaku, once more protected by Zhūquè, the Himejima clan forward. Each and every building they came to as they pushed forward was given a set of talismans to stop the enemy from spawning once more.

Now, Kiba led the way forward once more, on one side of the river. Sala had ordered that they would only spread out in one direction at first, letting him link up to the local headquarters. "We'll finish liberating this segment of the city, then do the same on the other side," had been Sala's thoughts.

As he moved around a corner in the road he was rushing along, Kiba found himself entering an intersection and from all three directions came a wave of undead cavalry. They looked like Mamluk cavalry he had seen once in a history book the history of cavalry, with heavy barding and heavier chain mail with semi-pointed helmets. Their lances were large and pointed, the tips gleaming with some kind of magical spell.

That, however, was all Kiba could notice because the group of cavalry came on, already moving at a full-on charge, timing their attack perfectly. "Spread out, get under cover!" Kiba shouted, even as he charged to meet the attackers coming from their left flank. His flame sword spoke, burning down half the attackers on that side and creating a firewall between the rest and

Then he was in among the Mamluks charging in from the front. Unable to bring his magic to bear now, he lashed out physically, cutting horses and men into undead chunks with his flaming blade and Holy Eraser. He routinely aimed for the head, so only once did the Mamluk Infreri not die from an attack. That time though, the man barreled his horse into Kiba, knocking the knight off his feet.

Elsewhere, too many of his men hadn't been able to duck behind stopped cars or among the rubble, and they too were knocked off of their feet by the group of attackers coming from their right flank. Lances stabbed down, and even magical armor wasn't proof against lances with so much weight behind them and whose own tips were also magically hardened and sharpened at this point. Men died, but they fought back hard, using what limited swordsmanship they had to hack at the horses of their enemies.

For his part, Kiba summoned up another blade, and now twin swords flashed, ending the undead life of his own attacker, kicking the burning corpse off him to stand up, slicing the horses out from under several of the other undead. All the undead fell but quickly rose as the horses tried to bite and kick him, before he ended their lives by cutting off their heads as he had previously.

Meanwhile, the platoon assigned as long-range backup to his knights fired into the mob, indiscriminately. Kiba's Glory Drag Trooper armor had proven to be immune to modern weaponry so there was no damage of blue-on-blue deaths. The undead started to die in droves,

while janissaries in the buildings around them took them under fire. However, they were in turn being attacked by other troops smashing their way into the buildings and up into them.

The entire battle ended almost as abruptly as it began, but several of Kiba's men were dead by that point. Staring at a few of them as he dismissed their armor, Kiba shook his head, thankful that the youngest of his volunteers back in Alexandria, like Chala, had been replaced by older men, people who had gone through their needed time in the military. *That makes it somewhat easier to bear that lead them to their deaths.*

Wearily, Kiba pushed himself to his feet from where he had closed one of his trooper's eyes, his armored form still covered with gore but otherwise unharmed. "Form up," he ordered quietly. "We've got to keep moving."

He then looked over at his leprechaun companion. The young redhead had leaped clear when the cavalry struck and had darted into the fight, tying down several of the Mamluks and then blasting apart the heads of others with her magically imbued hammers.

Wordlessly, she held up the button, and Kiba spoke into it, his normal calm, knightly manners gone for a moment. "Damn it, you lot just missed a major force buildup that then took me and mine by surprise! What the hell are you doing!?"

"Don't blame us, Blondy," one of the Auror commanders retorted. "This damn city has so many overhangs and buildings that kind of merge together at the second floor or above that it's almost impossible to see what's going on down there unless we come down far enough to give the height advantage to the damned snakes and Harpies." Unlike Damanhur, Akhenaten hadn't changed the composition of the monster/undead forces found in Damietta. "And don't get me started with the awning and sheets blocking our view."

Despite not having any skyscrapers as would be found in London or another, more modern city, like most Egyptian cities, Damietta was a mix between semi-modern and ancient. Most buildings didn't pass more than three stories, with a few ten or fifteen-story buildings spread throughout the city. But like Alexandria or Cairo, a lot of those buildings had been enlarged haphazardly, one building bumping into another, and the whole city was covered by awnings, even at 'night'.

"Fuck..." Kiba cursed another unusual thing for him. "You can at least try. If those had hit any of the other units, they would have mauled the entire unit if not destroyed it outright."

"We'll try," came the voice of one of the Aurors, his clipped British tone doing nothing to calm Kiba. "We've been running into more and more aerial fighters up here, and with them a few enemy wizards. It won't happen again."

"It better not, or I might have to seek satisfaction from you personally," Kiba warned.

The man on the other end of the magical communication gulped audibly at that as Kiba disconnected. However, a second later, it was the flyers and General Sala who contacted him.

"Kiba, there is a reason that defense has been so strong in your area. You're almost within sight of one of the magic columns, though I think you've got at least two more blocks before you reach its outer edge. The flyers in your area are all reporting that, and a massive buildup of their aerial opponents," Sala reported via one of the Glory Drag Troopers Kiba had left behind with the general.

They had attempted to integrate the leprechaun method of communication into the armors, placing a button inside the helmet, which could then link to any of the others, but it hadn't worked. For some reason, the armor of the sacred blacksmith blocked any signal from getting out, except for the signal that the armors themselves produced. This made communicating kind of complicated, but unlike the nonmagical communication, they weren't being disrupted at least, something reported here just as much as in Harry's area of influence.

"Roger, what do you want us to do?"

"I'm calling in mortar rounds on your position. Call it in, and we'll knock every building between here and there down. Then once the way is clear, you're to wait nearby. The flyers report... well they report there are thousands of people squished into those few blocks, and they are all seemingly worshipping the column."

Kiba frowned, hearing the somewhat disturbed tone in Sala's voice, but understood. A moment later, as he and his Knights dealt with the largest mass of scarabs they had yet seen, the platoon leader called in the mortar rounds. The buildings in front of their current position were hammered and started to collapse, then the men moved forward.

Soon enough, he too spotted living people ahead of them. They did indeed seem to be quite cramped. There were at least a thousand men and women in sight, with children moving around their feet. Kiba could also see faces in the windows of several nearby buildings. *I wonder how large this area is?*

Decided to solve that mystery, Kiba split his knights, sending them to either side, calling in a force of leprechauns who had just joined them, having pulled back from a flanking position they and a group of soldiers had held previously. He backed away, moving around some of the rubble of the blasted-out buildings. There, he gestured the platoon commander forward. "I think you should do the talking."

The man looked Kiba and down and then smiled politely. "Yes, sir, I expect that would be best."

Kiba snorted but realized he probably did look a sight, his summoned armor and weapon covered in undead gore. "If you would please get on with it then?"

"Ere, now. I'll be going with ya, Lieutenant." The redheaded leprechaun leaped over, landing on the trooper's boot, where she disappeared from sight. "This way, Sala and the others back at the field HQ will be able to hear everything that happens in real-time."

That caused Kiba to start, and one of his hands rose as if to stop the little lass from going, but he let it fall back, shaking his head. "Just be careful."

"Hah, that's another reason why I'ma going with the Lieutenant, pretty one. Remember, we leprechauns can take others with us when we bounce," Ysabel replied.

Without further words, the platoon commander moved forward, his weapon slung at his side as he held his hands out in front of him. He walked down the street, staying silent for now, but he was grateful to note his sergeants, career officers both, had moved the men forward into places within the blasted remains of the buildings behind him. He could also see a few Japanese people, the Himejima clan he thought they were called, landing there and throwing around their talismans.

So at least we won't be attacked from behind. Good. When I play RPGs, I always hate going over the same territory and getting attacked again. Screw those spawn everywhere games, man! The Lieutenant was a young man who had at one point wanted to be a game programmer, only to find programming wasn't nearly as fun as playing.

He marched forward until he was within three yards of the outer edge of the protected zone. By that point, of course, the people within the zone had spotted him, but to his surprise, he couldn't see any great joy or delight at the sight of a soldier, which should have been enough to tell them they were now safe. Instead, none of them moved to leave the column's area of protection, waiting for him to come to them.

Reluctantly, he crossed another yard or so before stopping, examining the faces of the people he could see. They all looked slightly frightened as if they were afraid of being where they were or perhaps frightened of him? "I'm getting a bad feeling here," the Lieutenant murmured, wiggling the boot where the female leprechaun perched. "Tug on my shoe twice if you agree, and if General De Mar is listening.

Sala was indeed listening, and one of the Himejima men was using a far-sight spell to give him the eyes of a black kite. With that, the Japanese man was able to examine the faces of the people in the protected zone and was reporting much the same thing via another Leprechaun.

Hearing this and remembering Lord Potter's concerns about those columns, Sala ordered. "Order all troops to pause where they are if defensible, if not fall back. Reserves are to move forward and surround that area. We'll clear the area and then destroy the pillar as Harry wanted. I still am not certain I agree with the decision, but you all are the magical experts around here, not I."

"I would just like to point out that I am most decidedly not a magic expert, but I take your point, general," Kiba replied with a slight chuckle.

While this was going on, the men nearest the young Lieutenant had finally decided to respond to his presence with more than stares. "Have you come to worship at the pillar as well, brother? It is amazing that you fought your way to us. And the holy sun comes with you as well, truly the pillars are amazing."

"But what are those armored creatures with you?" another man asked.

The questions were asked politely but firmly for all of that, but the Lieutenant was struck by the lack of response to Lord Potters magic sun. When he had first seen it in the sky over Alexandria, the young man had broken down crying in delight and hadn't bothered trying to hide it. The night had been that horrible up to that point, and the feeling of renewed hope and determination the sun gave off that welcome.

But to these people, it seemed as if it was just a thing? And something they put down to the pillar they were worshipping? Weird and somewhat disturbing. *Disturbing things are piling on disturbing things here.*

It took all his self-control not to back away. He was on a fact-finding mission and would do it. "Er, the armored creatures are armored knights. Where they come from would take a while to explain. Um, can you tell me what happened here? We were out on patrol and had to fight our way through the city against those monsters and undead. How many of you are er, being protected by the holy pillar, and do you need medical attention?"

"None of us need medical attention. We have seen to that ourselves. The night's events... none have any idea when it started, but the monsters and undead appeared, attacking everywhere at once." Fear was now stark on the speaker's face and those of his fellows. "Hundreds died, and then, we began to find the holy pillars. They.. activated for want of a better word, filled with the power of the true god. And as we came to pray, so too did we come to believe."

The second man snorted, a sneer appearing on his face. "Most of us, anyway. We rid ourselves of their presence as it should be."

Oh fuuuuuuck... That sentence sent a shiver down the Lieutenant's back, but not a moment later, he felt a tug on his boot, signaling that Ysabel had heard it too and that she wanted him to keep the locals talking, despite the very creepy crawling sort of feeling even being near them was now giving him. "Er, my superior officers would probably like a bit more specifics than that. Maybe individual stories?"

Those took some time and, thankfully, weren't all that creepy compared to the look of near ecstatic zealotry that everyone in the area showed. After four stories of running, seeing loved ones dying and terror, the Lieutenant felt sorry for these people, but no less wary inside. "That's good enough to give me an idea of events around here. We'll probably learn more as we push forward and talk to the people living in the other protected areas. But you, you

mentioned something I need to follow up on, um, what did you mean when you said you er, rid yourselves of the false believers."

"At first, they tried to tell us that the columns were from Allah. Allah is dead," the first man said simply. "If he ever existed the first place."

"After that, they attempted to convince us the columns were evil, that we should only use them like one would a stone or umbrella, but to not believe. Pure falsehoods and stupidity that, when the Holy Columns themselves spoke into our minds with his message, demanding we believe to be saved," the second man added, his eyes nearly rolling back in his head as if in the throes of a drug-induced haze.

"Our true God is not yet given us his rightful name, but we are certain it will come so long as we keep believing. The pillar will keep us safe, and so we expunged those who did not believe. Some we stoned, others we pushed out beyond where the creatures of the dark were more than willing to feast on their flesh. When those same monsters attempted to attack us again, the pillars struck them down, showing that we were right. The Pillars protect us so long as we believe. And now it even brings us the sun, so we no longer have to fear the dark."

The Lieutenant nodded, getting a picture of what had happened and really not happy with the image he was painting. "And," he gulped. "And how many false believers were there?"

"No more than a dozen..." the man across from him paused, then looked at the soldier closely. "But you have not answered the most important questions of all: have you come to pray as well? Pray, and you too can partake in the peace of the pillar, instead of the false safety you might have one yourselves. it is only a matter of time before more undead or monsters appear to tear you apart as they have too many."

It hadn't occurred to any of them that actually, it had been too long without more monsters or undead appearing. With Harry's sun in the air and the Himejima clan spreading out their talismans, neither the undead nor the monsters could spawn in this area any longer.

"I'm afraid as a soldier, I don't have time to do so, sir. Although, once we clear the area, I'm certain that myself and my fellows will be back," the Lieutenant replied. That's right, cool, calm, then back away from the crazy folk slowly...

"Good. The unnamed God will accept your service and your prayers. And in so doing, you will be protected too."

The soldier faked a loud laugh, which seemed to surprise the man, but he went on before anyone could take offense. "I am uncertain, but I don't think being safe is written anywhere in the soldiers manual. But we will see, sir."

The man nodded, but none of the others even cracked so much a smile. Instead, they simply turned away, getting back on their knees and genuflecting towards the pillar. Them and several hundred other men around them.

All told from the reports, Sala estimated possibly as many as two thousand men and women in sight. With more in the buildings within the pillar's influence.

Clearing out the area around the pillar was almost a breath of fresh air for the Lieutenant but his words, and the fervor with which these men believed in the pillar, told Sala that maybe Harry's were warnings on that score had been accurate. "Are we looking at some kind of brainwashing?"

"If we are, destroying the pillar might break the brainwashing, but it might also provoke a reaction," Suzaku answered slowly, with Kala nearby nodding her head.

Kiba wasn't there. He and his Knights had pushed around that first pillar for more than a mile and had run into three other 'pillar areas'. Each of them protected several thousand people, which could multiply as they went further and found more of them. Frankly, Kiba wondered how much of the population could be found in those areas rather than holed up elsewhere. All told, they had only found four hundred people holed up in various places beyond the survivors of the Field HQ. But the pillars, well, no one knew how many of them there were. Eighty, ninety in this city alone? More? Who knew?

"The way they spoke, the cadence and obsession... That sounds like an odd mix between PTSD and religious fervor. Whatever it is, it's bad news," Kalawarner opined. "I think that destroying one of the pillars is a good idea. It might provoke a reaction, but those pillars obviously do something to the people within their area of influence. And finding out what will happen when we do destroy them is important now.

"We're doing pretty well pushing deeper into the city, and correct me if I'm wrong, but we haven't seen any sign of reinforcements?"

"Not from the air," Kala agreed. "It's obvious at this point that the immortal Pharaoh has bigger things to concentrate on elsewhere. We're still seeing flyers coming in, but nowhere near the amount we saw in Alexandria. I think the aerial forces can pull off, say, two dozen Aurors? With three teams of Shinsengumi and their machine gun companions."

"And a mortar team just in case," Sala nodded slowly. "You're right. We need to know if it will cause a reaction. If it's just a matter of religious fervor, that's one thing, but if it's an actual example of being brainwashed..."

Soon enough, the Aurors and their fellows were in position. "Kiba, do it," said one of them, having been put in charge by Sala, who had the rest of the operation in this city on hold for the moment.

Kiba nodded and moved to a nearby rooftop where he could see the pillar. There, he drew back his sword, which disappeared from his hand, to be replaced by the sword Flame Delete. A moment later, the attack lashed out towards the distant pillar. The spear stuck there, and almost instantly encased the pillar in ice, which shattered into dozens of pieces.

As it was destroyed, the pillar released a blast of magic that hurled the nearby worshippers away. But the moment the pillar was destroyed, every man and woman within the area who hadn't been knocked out, even the children, shrieked in a fury. They looked around for targets and found several of Kiba's Knights.

Instantly they charged forwards towards Kiba and every other foreigner they could see. One of the knights was close by, hiding behind a car, and staring through the shattered glass, he saw their faces. Where before they had been dull, marked by religious fury, now they were as mad as any mob he had ever seen on the streets of the Fayum, his original home. The sight caused him to shiver and race away.

Yet even as he did, the Aurors all around them shouted out, "Stupefy!"

Coming from all sides, the Stupefy spells washed over the people who had been protected by the pillar. All of them collapsed, coating the ground with bodies for a moment, but these were still alive at least.

"Sir, I regret to inform you that the individuals who were defended by the columns may lash out against anyone having anything to do with them," Kiba reported via the returned Ysabel's enchanted button, shaking his head. "Still, they were quite mindless as they did, and I think that they can be dealt with easily.

"It would be if it was an isolated incident. Instead, other groups around the other pillars we've seen so far are also attacking," Sala retorted grimly.

Luckily, the preponderance of Aurors with Sala allowed him to deal with that the Other two-pillar communities were knocked out, then slowly transported back to the riverbank under guard, their hands and feet manacled together as if they were part of the world's largest chain gang.

And the rest of the city was still drowning in monsters. Even if the other pillar communities had felt the same need to lash out, they weren't up to leaving their protection to face the monsters that they could see directly beyond their protected community. Still, it was a worrisome sign, made worse by the sighting of a mass of flying cobras and Harpies moving in to reinforce the rest of the city against Sala's campaign. "Damn it, why can't anything this cursed night be simple," Sala muttered, causing Suzaku and Kala to chuckle in rueful agreement.

scene break

Sala's words were truer than he knew, for, at that moment, Hermione barged into the headquarters' main operations room looking as if she had run a mile. "We have it, we have it!!"

Although the vast majority of the equipment was useless, and they were using several leprechauns to contact the two assault forces and their own defenders, Abraxas and the others had still decided to use this building as their headquarters. It gave them a bit of a relief, something similar to what it should be in all this madness.

Farouq, Abraxas and their officers looked up from their conversation about Sala's discovery to stare at her, while behind Hermione, Padma and several elderly, professorial gentlemen walked in at a slightly slower pace. Some Abraxas recognized, having seen them at this or that formal soiree over the years. The others he didn't, but that wasn't a surprise given how large the academic community in Alexandria was.

Before any of the high command could comment about the interruption, though, Cú pushed himself off the wall, tossing his can of beer towards the pile of cans in the corner around the trash can. The Irishman hadn't stopped drinking for longer than it took him to retrieve another twenty-four-pack of beer since the meeting hours back. Yet when he spoke, his voice was as clear as it had been then. "Please tell me ya lasses have found a target. I'm goin' stir crazy here!"

"Agreed," Tonks and Akeno spoke as one, then laughed, shaking their heads. Unlike Yubelluna, the two of them and Koneko, who was outside checking on Asia at the moment, hadn't much to offer at the moment. That might change if Alexandria was attacked once more, but that didn't seem too likely.

"We might," Padma announced, taking Hermione's hand in her own, squeezing briefly to tell Hermione to let her talk. At the moment, Hermione was too keyed up to explain in such a way that someone who wasn't a magical researcher would be able to follow. "Before all this began, when we were trying to discover who was behind this chaos and where they were, Hermione found what we at first thought to be simple graffiti from a historical source near the great pyramid of Giza. It has turned out to be an actual historical document, but we had a lot of trouble translating it because it wasn't any of the languages we knew. Rather, it was in Persian, or, as it is more officially known, Farsi."

"I take it that is where you gentlemen come in," Abraxas asked.

"Help in that and quite a bit of other ways, actually. It's actually quite fascinating, Hermione burbled, interjecting herself. "The message was written by a magical thief-taker. You could call them the ancestors of our own Aurors. He had heard of some magic-user sacrificing children here in Egypt. The rumor didn't turn out to be quite what it was. He wasn't sacrificing them, but while investigating that, this man discovered the changing of the symbol for the sun God into the symbol for this other God. It didn't start overtime or weakly as it should have, and whoever was changing them was unearthing historical sites to do it before burying them again. He was also using magic to hide his steps."

At first, he thought it was someone magical looking for something, looking for the tomb of Alexander, in fact, but it wasn't. It was this person changing the symbols. The thief-taker never actually saw them doing it, but one day he would visit ancient sites, and the symbol would be one way, and then the next day, it would be changed. But soon, the thief-taker started to be followed. At first, by local magic users who apparently were working for the man doing this and then by Infreri. He retreated to the great pyramid because he knew an ancient

enchantment on it against the undead leaving their tombs, but then he couldn't escape. He didn't have any ability to create a portkey or anything else to teleport away. He started to run out of food and then decided to leave this well, this journal of his adventure in Egypt. He had no idea of the significance, but he and his nonmagical companion..."

"They were lovers," Padma said, smirking at her wife.

Hermione huffed. "That is sheer supposition. You're using one line to..."

"Ladies," Akeno interjected, interested but wanting to move on quickly. "You can discuss whether or not this thief-taker and his nonmagical companion were lovers another time."

"For my part, I will say that the idea does appeal to the Arab poet in my ancestry," Abraxas mused. "But you think these symbols being changed means something?"

"Yes," one of the historians answered, striding towards the table and setting down what looked like a small binder's worth of handwritten notes. He was an odd-looking fellow, quite overweight, but with a tough sort of look to him, and the gleam in his eye said that despite everything, he was actually quite upbeat, a surprise considering events in Alexandria this night. "My name is Jon Bar Salam, and I am the head of the foreign language department at the Alexandria College of history."

"Good to meet you then," Tonks said, smirking slightly. "I take it you helped our Indian delight and the frizzy-haired beauty over there to discover this secret?"

While Cú guffawed, Padma blushed rosily, shouting out, "Tonks!"

Hermione did not help matters, ignoring with the ease of long practice Tonks' comment about her to mutter, "Ahem, **whose** Indian delight?" Something which caused Padma's blush to deepen quickly.

The people with them laughed, but their spokesman went on quickly. "You see, the individual who wrote that warning, and it was a warning, and so cleverly hidden, wrote down what hieroglyphs were being changed."

"This has to have something to do with the pillars," Akeno mused, ignoring the humor of the moment and moving on quickly. "We've already been running into issues there, a mix of possible mind-control induced religious zealotry and simple madness."

The men who Hermione and Padma had worked with all frowned in confusion at that, but Hermione nodded. "The sun symbol on those, they do not match the real image of Ra."

All the Egyptians who had already been in the room when the newcomers arrived frowned at that. "That's crazy. Ra is one of the principal Ancient Egyptian gods! That image is literally throughout all of Egypt."

Dr. Baram, the man Harry, Hermione and Padma had met answered. He pulled out a picture, a hieroglyph of Ra. And then he pulled out an image of the sun linked in Egyptian mythology to the Sun God, both of which Hermione enlarged so everyone could see them. "This is the image that we all think of as linked to Ra. But we are wrong. This image was actually added later, and pre-existing images were changed as this historical archive says to match that later image. This..." He pulled out another paper with a single enlarged image on it. "Is the actual sign that is supposed to be to the sun god."

The two images were indeed very different. Both were of the sun, but one was a spherical disk, with bits of sunrays popping off of it from all angles. The other one wasn't. Instead, it was the sun, a full circular side view perched on the falcon-headed man's head.

"All right, that is a large difference I'll admit. But why is it so important? From an archaeological and historical perspective, I understand it is a big change, and I don't mean to denigrate what you're saying. But Mrs. Patil said this was actionable intelligence that could give the spear-wielding lush over there and the other superpowered individuals among us target," Abraxas questioned, looking towards Padma. "Right now, you've just given us yet another reason to destroy the pillars as soon as we can and defend the people they protected."

"Because not only do we know what was changed, but we know what it was changed to. That image is dedicated to Aten."

The others didn't get it for a moment, and Tonks frowned before the name registered. She racked her mind as she went over all the conversations they'd had since arriving in Egypt and before that in Ireland. "...That was the God that is supposed to be the first example of monotheism, correct? Brainchild of... Akhenaten, right?"

"The one called the Vile and the Disturbed?" Abraxas frowned pensively. "I understand that he is one of the pharaohs that was most disliked by his people because he tried to push this new religion and moved capitals..." He trailed off, frowning.

"That's it exactly!" Hermione exclaimed enthusiastically, the joke at Padma's expense and her response to it having calmed her down somewhat. "Akhenaten tried to create a religion based around a single god, suppressing all of the other faiths of Egypt in favor of that one god. It worked to a certain degree because it broke the power of the various high priests, who before that had been almost as strong as the Pharaoh. Yet, when he died, the priests' strength to challenge the pharaohs didn't come back even though the other religions, or sects, did. But I think we can all assume that the individual performing this creative revisionism of a specific aspect of history had something to hide..."

"So it is Aten himself we've been dealing with. And he did this deliberately," Farouq guessed before cursing. "Fuck me."

A scowl appeared on Hermione's face, although it had nothing to do with his cursing, something she would have been greatly annoyed by when she was younger. "Agreed. But his

reasoning for doing so still eludes me. It has to be something, something we haven't yet discovered, but those pillars are central to it."

Abraxas frowned, following their reasoning. If that symbol had been changed by someone, it stood to reason it was indeed the immortal Pharoah who was behind the attacks. After all, even knowing magic was real, having two immortals moving around behind the scenes was stretching believability beyond the breaking point. Or two groups, since the wizards are pretty certain that this Pharoah isn't acting on his own. But this symbol being changed means that Lord Potter's concerns about the pillars was right. Yet... "Yet you still can't tell us what those pillars are for."

Hermione and Padma paused, looking at one another then shaking their heads. "That's unfortunately true. There's no way that they could be connected to the monsters and undead specifically, since we have eye-witnesses to the fact those columns are killing the monsters and undead, they couldn't also be summoning them into existence. So whatever else they are doing is something we have yet to discover."

"I would recommend sending cutting out teams to destroy any pillar we can," Hermione added. "I was wrong to question Harry's instincts, those things... they have to have a lot more to them than just protecting those nearby from monsters who Akhenaten has himself summoned forth."

Abraxas rubbed at his face, then shook his head. "We can't, not yet. Those pillars are still protecting millions of people nationwide and thousands each. Destroying them would mean the death of hundreds of thousands, at the very least. We can push forward in Damanhur and Damietta, but that is all. Still, Mrs. Patil was right. This gives us a possible target."

Everyone looked at the general in confusion, and he smiled thinly. "The ancient capital that Aten created. It's on the Nile River, correct?"

"Yes!" the elderly professor from the museum said instantly. "That is what we meant about having a target. Amarna is a historical site because it shows a good deal of how daily life was like back then and how large it is. But for archaeological wonders, it doesn't have much to really attract people." His voice trailed off, his eyes narrowing. "Oh, considering what we just commenting on, could that be deliberate too?"

Bill, who was there as a representative of the Wizarding World with Proudfoot out with Sala, held up a hand. "Er, not to throw cold water on your enthusiasm or anything, but if this sight is so important, why didn't they just put it under a Fidelius? These people, this Titi woman and Akhenaten, are supposedly immortals who have been interacting with the Wizarding World just as much as the nonmagical. Surely they would know that spell."

"The Fidelius spell was only developed in 1935. By that point, this place was quite well known?" Hermione questioned, looking over at the archaeologists, all of whom nodded. Amarna had been found in the 1880s, after all.

"In that case, knowing the spell and having the power to use it would become a very different story. The more people know of a site, the harder it is to put that site under Fidelius," Hermione began. "A single house is simple enough. A historical site? One that I was upon thousands of people know about? That would take someone on the power of a Dark Lord like Tom Riddle or someone like Harry was before he moved to Japan. And even then, it would probably fail. Too many books mention it, too many historical dramas, so on and so forth."

"Right. And at the moment, it is the only clue we have going forward. And that's enough for me," Cú growled, with Akeno nodding firmly in agreement. "Let's do this."

"Agreed," Abraxas announced, surprising everyone who thought he would try to rein in Cu's desire to act so quickly. But when he went on, everyone understood. "And I also think we might have a deadline. Whatever those monoliths are doing, they might be connected to something revolving around the sun, correct?"

Hermione nodded firmly. "Yes. That much is certain." Then she paled, the implication hitting her. "Oh."

"Yes, oh. if that is the case, we might be working under a timeline." He looked over at Cú and Koneko, then began to bark out orders to some of his men, who raced out of the room. "Put together your team quickly, then get with Bill here. You'll need all the magical aid you can get. Then we'll want to pass this on to Lord Potter. I want his opinion on all of this."

End Chapter