

# Chapter 39: An Explanation

## Raimie

Disoriented, I woke up with a snort. What on earth had happened? I'd only meant to lay here for a little while, not fall asleep.

And why the hell was my hand already on a weapon's hilt? Had the last few weeks' dangers so thoroughly influenced me that my first instinct on waking up was to reach for my sword?

It... made sense, if they had. How many times had I almost died since finding Shadowsteal? Alouin, what if someone had come to attack me while I was sleeping? I knew I had Dath watching my back but... that didn't completely stop a sudden wash of fear from falling over me.

"You're safe."

I released a held breath like someone had punched me. That voice... it had only been a few weeks, and I already felt a sense of safety when I heard it.

"Rhylix," I sighed. "Thank Alouin you're here."

I had so many things I wanted to discuss with my friend, *so many*, and one of them had appeared at my side. Bright was hugging its elbows, chewing on its lip, while Dim was on all fours beside me. When the splinter saw me focusing on it, it let out a shaky breath, sitting back on its heels.

I reached out to reassure them that I was ok before remembering myself. Freezing, I craned my neck, trying to check my surroundings, but someone's hand on my knee stopped me.

"We're alone," Rhylix said. "I sent Dath to get some rest."

Ah. In that case.

I brushed my fingers along the edge of my splinters' forms, which had Bright crouching to meet me.

"Everything's ok," I said. "I'm... glad you're still with me."

And surprised as hell to mean it.

“You didn’t show up in Alouin’s world. I wasn’t sure if you’d be here, especially when you weren’t hovering after I woke up.”

“We didn’t want to distract you,” Dim said.

“And we thought that our presence might detract from your reunion with your father,” Bright added.

“But!” Dim interjected before I could reply. “We’re glad that you’re alive, ya idiot. Or I am. I’m not so sure about Ind. Prim here.”

It threw a thumb over its shoulder at Bright, who glared back.

“You’re only happy because you’ll have more chances to spread your mayhem,” it stiffly said before turning to me, “but I’m also glad to see you awake and breathing. More than I can say.”

Their relief hit me like a fist to the face, leaving me speechless. I’d known they were fond of me on some level, considering our past interactions, but this felt reminiscent of how my father had welcomed me back to the living, which made me a little uncomfortable. Could I return their affection equally, especially when they’d made such a significant change in my life?

“You don’t have to respond, you twat,” Dim said, rolling its eyes. “By *me*, you overthink everything. Relax.”

“And speak with the whole’s... with your friend,” Bright said. “I’m sure you have things to clear up with him.”

“But...”

I sat up, concerned when doing so took more effort than before. Shouldn’t sleep have dulled my weakness?

Shaking my head, I asked, “What I mean is, will you stick around? I’d like it if you did. Your presences could be useful, but I don’t want to discomfit anyone. Wouldn’t being here make you uncomfortable, Dim?”

The splinter blinked at me before snickering, although its attempt at derision seemed forced.

“I’ll be fine unless you make me manifest more fully on the physical plane. That... *person*,” it spat, “repulses me a hundred times worse than this strait-laced partner you’ve stuck me with, but it’s not so bad when a few layers of reality lay between us.”

Deadpan, I said, “You realize I understood about half of what you said, right? I thought you were more eloquent than that.”

“I-” Dim said, getting flustered. “How else am I supposed to explain it? You-”

It broke off when a smirk spread across my face, and Bright muffled a laugh with its hand.

"I don't have to understand," I said. "I only care if you'll be comfortable."

As it glowered, Dim's eye twitched, and it folded its arms across its chest.

"Just when I forget why you attracted me, you remind me," it grumbled. "You might want to be careful who you start a prank and tease battle with, insolent brat."

"I'll keep that in mind," I said with a straight face.

I turned my back on Dim's pleased sputtering, facing Rhylix.

"Sorry," I said. "I thought it best to calm them down before getting started with you."

"That's understandable," Rhylix quietly said.

I paused at the look on his face. He was holding his body loosely with a bland expression pasted in place, but something unreadable lurked in those gray eyes.

"What's wrong?" I asked.

Raising an eyebrow, Rhylix grinned at me.

"What makes you think something's wrong?" he asked.

"Don't do that," I snapped. "I can tell something's bothering you. Trying to hide it after I've noticed is just insulting."

Sliding his eyes closed, Rhylix heaved a sigh.

"All right," he said before meeting my gaze. "You have to be more careful. No one besides myself and Chela knows this, healers as we are, but it's a godsdamn miracle you're alive. Once Ferin and her friends pulled you out of sinking mud, she started chest compressions early enough to get sludge out of your lungs, and I gave you the antidote for the poison as soon as I reached you but... by the time Ferin and I got you back here, you were dead in all but name."

Rhylix bit his lip, looking away.

"I need you alive, Raimie, because you're essential to freeing my homeland, sure. But you're also the first real friend I've had in a while. Ferin and I... that relationship comes close, but this here--"

Waving between us, he firmly met my eyes once more.

"You cannot get hurt as badly as you were two days ago. You just *can't*."

Hell, Rhylix had gone from placid to intense far more quickly than I'd thought possible. He'd always seemed steady and implacable, but unnerving as it was to see raw emotion in my friend, I also

found it gratifying. It was proof that he cared.

“I can’t promise that I won’t get hurt,” I said. “Apparently, a lot of people want me dead, meaning something like this is bound to happen again.”

And wasn’t that strange? From a nobody to someone that a powerful mage was hunting down while also facing a conspiracy. It was almost as great of a disconnect as the idea that people might expect me to lead a kingdom.

But I wasn’t touching that topic right now.

“You’re helping me learn how to defend myself, a skill that seems more important every day,” I continued, “and I was hoping...”

I swallowed. Alouin, even having resolved to take this course of action, the request for it kept getting stuck in my throat.

“I was hoping you’d extend your instruction to magic use.”

Rhylix’s revealed hard edges softened.

“You want to become a primeancer?” he asked.

With a sharp laugh, I said, “Not particularly. But I already am one. I might as well accept it and learn what I can do. Leaving such a useful tool to rust seems unwise.”

Shaking his head, Rhylix let his lips curl.

“That was fast, not that I’m complaining. It will be nice to have a comrade in arms,” he said. “And of course I’ll help. I’d love to teach you what I know.”

“Great!” I said, scooching closer to my friend. “Because I was hoping we could start with a preliminary lesson now.”

Rhylix burst into laughter.

“Gods, aren’t we eager?” he said. “Fine, then. A first lesson shouldn’t stress you too badly, although you’ll have to forgive me if I go over your head. You know very little about primeancy, and it’s been a while since I touched the basics.”

A while? What was that supposed to mean? Rhylix couldn’t be more than thirty years old. If he couldn’t remember the simplest parts of his magic, how young had he been when he’d gained it? A toddler?

Then again, Rhylix was from Auden, a fact that I’d carefully trod around. I didn’t want to upset him or learn about that land in greater detail.

If even a fraction of the tales from Audish refugees was true, however, every day in that kingdom was a fight for survival. In circumstances like that, having the basics of a skill fade from one's mind was understandable.

"Makes sense," I said. "I'll let you know if I get confused."

Rhylix's pinched eyes relaxed.

"Good. In that case, we'll talk about the foundation that your primeancy is built upon before moving on to a more practical lesson," he said. "Sound good?"

"It sounds *excellent*," I said.

With a smile, Rhylix said, "When last we talked about this, you mentioned that primeancy is rooted in two forces of nature, and this is true. The people of this world call them Ele and Daevetch. We're not sure if they have a true name, although splinters—a subject I'll get to in a minute—usually don't like us giving these forces a name."

Clicking its tongue, Bright said, "Can you blame us? You lot giving names to... what you're discussing is comparable to if an ant defined you with a word like Ambivalent or Giant."

I, having raised a finger toward Rhylix, opened the eye that I'd closed, glancing at the splinters behind me.

"I could see how that might offend you, and I'm sorry you have to deal with it," I said, "but could you two move somewhere I can see you? Also, can you wait to speak until Rhy pauses in his explanations, which yes, Dim. I know that doing the opposite would be so much more fun, but if you interrupt, it'll make learning harder for me. You do want me to learn about primeancy, right?"

"Damn you for knowing how to stop my antics already," Dim huffed.

But the splinter joined Bright in circling into view. Meanwhile, I grimaced.

"Sorry, Rhy. Bright started talking over you," I said. "The last thing I heard was about how splinters don't like us giving Daevetch and Ele names."

The confused expression on Rhylix's face smoothed out.

"Ah. That makes sense," he said. "You have them sorted now?"

I glanced at Dim, who was flicking flecks of shadow toward Rhylix, and Bright, who was softly growling under its breath.

"For the most part," I said.

"Then, let's continue," Rhylix said. "So, what you don't know about Ele and Daevetch, the most vitally important part of them, is how necessary they are to reality. Lying beneath its surface, they

underpin everything. *Everything*. One—Ele—encompasses everything that we mortals consider moral while Daevetch... you can guess what that force involves.”

“But how do you know that?” I interjected, unable to stop myself from asking. “How do you *know* that Daevetch is evil and Ele is good?”

It was a genuine question, coming from multiple sources. For one, I’d always found people who believed in absolutes nauseating. Humans and Esela weren’t perfect. Given that, how could a member of either species believe that their viewpoint was flawless?

Secondly, I had my splinters to contend with. If one of them was associated with Daevetch, did that make me evil as well?

My question seemed to have stolen the breath from Rhylix. I’d never seen a man so thoroughly rattled as the one who sat before me now, but with a shake of his body, the Eselan gathered himself.

“I’ll let you judge Ele and Daevetch for yourself, but let me finish explaining before you do,” he said. “Each of these forces of nature, these *primal* forces, is comprised of many different aspects, and ‘pieces’, splintered from these aspects, are what a primeancer attracts to themselves.”

With one of my splinters shuffling in place, I raised a hand to my friend, and when I looked at it, Bright let pent-up pressure burst from it.

“Something else you should know about us. We’re only active in a select few iterations, those judged the most vital in our Eternal War,” it said. “For the most part, our aspects are what influence a nation or a people or a world, not us.”

“Since you’re here, I have to assume that this... iteration is one of the special ones. Why?” I asked, crinkling my brow. “Are the others so different from it?”

Giggling, Dim said, “Hardly. But unless things drastically change... unless Bright and I fail, this will be the final battleground. Eventually.”

“...Great.”

So helpful. Why had Bright shared information that would only confuse me?

Returning my attention to Rhylix, I gestured for him to continue with an apologetic grin, one that my friend waved away.

“You can judge each primal force through its aspects, or that’s how I’ve always done it,” he said. “Some examples of Ele’s aspects include Growth, Purity, and-”

“Order,” I breathlessly finished.

When I pinned my eyes to Bright, the Ele splinter inclined its head to me, and after switching to Dim, the Daevetch splinter flourished a bow.

“Which makes you of Chaos,” I said. “And conversely, Purity’s match would be something like Corruption, and Growth’s Decay. I’m guessing, of course.”

“That’s it exactly,” Rhylix said. “Do you understand Ele and Daevetch’s alignments now?”

No. To me, with my limited perspective, both primal forces seemed necessary, nothing good or bad about them.

Without Decay, Growth would overwhelm the world. For example, the perpetuation of the aged would leave no room for the newly born, and without Chaos, Order would make a society too rigid, leaving no concessions for creativity.

Considering how Rhylix had responded to my earlier uncertainty, however, I wasn’t sure how fervently I could repeat my doubt. So, I lessened it as much as I could while remaining truthful.

“Not really,” I said, “but my beliefs aren’t important right now. Please, continue your lesson.”

This answer didn’t get me a better reaction than my initial question. Rhylix looked as if his world had shifted in an unpleasant way, so I cleared my throat, hoping to jar him from it. I hated having caused him discomfort.

“Yes. The lesson,” Rhylix said. “We should get back to that.”

## **TTS Chapter Thirty-Nine**

---

Revision #2

Created 21 August 2024 02:03:39 by FatalisticFable

Updated 18 March 2026 22:03:09 by FatalisticFable