

# The Unified Theorem

A materials engineer reincarnates on Azeroth sometime before the First War. Naturally, the first order of business is figuring out why the hell his perfectly mundane technology insists on spewing self-defeating ritual magic everywhere. Clearly, the method to Arcane's madness was being deliberately obtuse. The Light, sadly, didn't seem to be in on the joke.

# Book I

A Materials Engineer Flees King Aiden's  
Court

## Chapter 1 – The Holy Light Nets a Reality Check

“- April 1, Year 579 of the King’s Calendar .-“

The very first time the Light filled you, it was a revelation.

*Probably not the sort of revelation I’m undergoing though*, thought one Wayland Hywel. Which is to say, myself. While I had no doubt that many of the people around me were attending the Archbishop’s visit hoping for some manner of enlightenment about their path in life, I doubted any of them experienced that revelation inwards and *backwards*. Certainly not so far backwards as to recall an entire eon of being happily dead, never mind a life before that, on a different planet in a different time that somehow turned the most grand and grim visions of Azeroth’s future into trite entertainment.

Not that I was one to talk, considering how much time I devoted to said trite entertainment before need and want made me grow out of it. After a decade or three. Out of a total of nine and change. It might have taken longer if the lore didn’t completely lose the plot mid-way through Northrend. The retcons and inconsistencies in literally everything reached critical mass and just kept going, to the point where even the eternally incompetent Bronze Dragonflight couldn’t scapegoat everything. And that was just the things shown on screen. By the time I stopped playing games, the entire lore of Azeroth had become a meme unto itself. Of the ‘this is proof we’re in a simulation’ variety.

Now I was inside the simulation, so to speak. Wasn’t that lovely?

I wasn’t upset though. I’d chosen this all by myself. I hadn’t been bored, exactly, but after an eternity of self-actualisation in the Boundless Ether – which did not, in fact, lend itself to the emergence of almighty interdimensional corporate slave traders or random omnipotent bastards with arbitrary capacity for unchallenged tyranny matched only by their childishness – I’d finally finished elucidating every last grain of inner meaning. I was ready to explore outer meanings again for a while. Why not by venturing into the neighbours’ burning house to help put out the fire?

Sure, these particular neighbours were the neighbourhood’s busybodies that peeked and snooped and stuck their nose through everyone else’s business until they convinced themselves they could shape the world to accommodate their desires instead of the other way around. But imitation was the sincerest form of flattery and the consequences of ignoring reality had already gotten the Titans killed, so I was willing to forgive them. You don’t kick a god when he’s

down. You especially don't kick a god while his soul is being tortured into post-mortem insanity by the one big disaster that *isn't* the sole consequence of his own actions, never mind an entire family of them.

"The sermon is over, boy."

A plated boot stepped into view... actually it had been there for a while. I suddenly realised I was kneeling in the middle of the... not *empty* street, Strahnbrad's streets were almost never empty, but positively barren compared to when Alonsus Faol was holding his sermon and casting his glowing blessings of wisdom on all and sundry from up on the church balcony.

Hours ago.

"Lad, are you alright? Do you need a hand up?"

I blinked and looked up at... "Knight Uther." That's right, Uther Not-Yet-The-Lightbringer *would* have had to be active for decades before paladins were first invested. And for him to be a direct disciple of Alonsus Faol, the man would have had to be in his service in some manner. Why not as a member of his guard? Though on that note... "How can I help you?" What I really wanted to ask was *what the heck are you of all people doing out here corralling a spacing out teenager?* But then I saw the man's face and realized he was barely in his thirties right now. He also looked positively taken aback, even *awestruck* for some bizarre reason. It was a jarring look on a face so manful and that beard looked positively exalted with not one shadow on it – oh. *I'm glowing.* The Light's Blessing that Alonsus Faol had cast on the gathered crowd hadn't left me. Or, rather, the Light had come back in force after it did. *This must be why everyone else is giving me such a wide berth,* I thought. *Though I think my parents, at least, would be different.*

They probably meant well, though. They weren't particularly pious, the people of Alterac were more materialistic than the other kingdoms in general, despite Tirisfal Glades being practically next door, but they *were* true believers. They wouldn't want to interfere with whatever work the Light was enacting upon their flighty only child.

Uther shook himself and seemed unsure whether to feel worried or amused. "I thought I'm supposed to help *you*, lad. Unless this isn't you prostrating yourself in a bid to be accepted as an acolyte? I dare say you've a fair chance of being accepted, though you might need to travel a ways if the local parishes aren't to your taste. I can't imagine any of them turning you away."

“Oh no, I’m going to be an engineer.” I made the decision on the spot because Enlightenment was useful like that. I rose to my feet feeling light and strong, the Light suffusing me with all the strength that could rise in mankind, before it finally began to fade now that Enlightenment was complete and *a-ta-ta-ta-ta, where do you think you’re going? We’ve not even begun to make a better future!*

The Light stayed.

Which was good because the enlightened thing to do *without* any power backing me up would be haring off into the mountains to become a hermit.

The glowing eyes were a waste of energy though. Better if it went to something more useful like enforcing the flexibility of the eye lens and the rest of the – there we go, at least my eyesight wouldn’t hold me back, and with more practice it may even get better. No small thing in this time and place when the dwarves and gnomes still kept to themselves. Did humans even have the notion of microscopes? In this world without the smaller races being forced to share their technology on account of being made refugees – never mind the various more advanced things humanity itself should have had by now, like electricity and materials science – telescopic vision and literal seer powers may yet bridge the gap. Well, one of them. A small one. Hopefully the Light’s utility didn’t need too many hoops jumped through to figure out, or I’d have a tough time giving mankind the technological edge in time for the orcs.

At least the Light had been quite intuitive so far. But then, it would have to be, wouldn’t it? The first paladins completed their training in just a few weeks, never mind the insane progression rate of ‘adventurers’. For all *that* could be trusted, which was not a lot considering the nonsense that was the so-called warrior class.

But this was just one of the theories about the Light’s mechanics that I needed to verify now that it wasn’t mere fantasy. I looked at the knight. At his familiar face. The complete lack of mystic glow and grey hairs had ‘opportunity’ written all over it. “Knight Uther, what is the Light?”

Sir Uther was surprised. He also thought my question was theological.

It wasn’t.

Neither were the next twenty five.

“- .-“

Not entirely contrary to what I had expected, Sir Uther did not, in fact, shoo me away in annoyance when my questions started going over his head. Instead, the man bid me and my awkwardly trailing parents to follow and led the way straight to the Archbishop himself.

Well, more or less. We had to wait for the Clerist Preeminent to finish his one-on-one meetings with his many petitioners. But that was alright, the Archbishop didn't visit Alterac every day, and Strahnbrad was ultimately just a stop on the way to Alterac City. Sir Uther 'distracted' me by asking me about myself, and the man was even willing to reciprocate for as long as it offered a reprieve from my 'dauntingly erudite approach to interrogation.'

His words.

I already knew that Uther would have been over sixty years old during the events of the Third War, so I was unsurprised to learn he was already a knight at the age of thirty-one. I *was* a bit surprised at how it happened, though. The man had been given by his parents to the Old Monastery in Tirisfal Glades – the eventual headquarters of the *Scarlet Crusade* – to live as a monk because they had too many children. It was practically the opposite of how Alexandros Mograine ended up there. Also unlike the future Highlord, Uther didn't stay.

“I don't begrudge my mother and father, and truth be told I'm starting to think I'll come around to that way of life, but as a young man I chafed. I left in search of adventure, and I soon found it. Mercenary work can pay quite well, and courier work was an embattled profession that soon acquainted me with the whole of Lordaeron and many of the people that keep it running under the surface, as well as the many elements that seek the opposite. I can only thank the Light that when I inevitably misjudged my patrons, his Holiness – still a mere cleric then – took pity on me and prevailed on the local marshal to enlist my 'help' to undo my foolishness. Unravelling a doomsday cult wasn't anywhere near what I expected, but it certainly gave me a better eye for who to take jobs from. Soon after, the marshal offered me a temporary military commission to put the mess behind me. His Holiness never said so, but I'm convinced he interceded on my behalf for that as well. That commission soon turned permanent and now, here I am.”

*Is that personal experience why you're going out of your way to humour me right now?* 'Adventurers' didn't come out of nowhere after the Third War, it turns out. “I'm surprised you're still a guard then, is the knight title as empty in Lordaeron as it is here? You could go to Stormwind though...”

“I’d be lying if I said that didn’t figure into things, but in truth I find more meaning serving among people than against trolls and beasts of unknown lands. Besides, though I’ve certainly mustered the grit for it, I do not actually want to leave Lordaeron.”

Achieving the Knight rank technically elevated you to nobility, but Lordaeron – like most of the other Kingdoms of Azeroth, as the continent was currently known – had long since parcelled away its territories, so it was just an honorary title these days. The only exception was Stormwind, which was the only human kingdom not entirely surrounded by sea or allied polities. Conveniently for the Wrynn line, this practically meant that the most competent men of every generation got a big parcel of land on the frontier, which they then spent their own blood, sweat and gold pacifying of beasts and trolls and murlocks and whatever other dangers. A lot of young men left the other kingdoms in hopes of better prospects down there, and they in turn were dwarfed by the ambitious locals, and so Stormwind grew larger and more prosperous with each man that climbed through the ranks. It was a shining story of success that no one had expected of such a far-flung country, especially one whose closest neighbours were Gurubashi troll tribes and Dark Iron dwarves.

It was also a story that the other kingdoms’ nobility was doing everything they could to make sure wasn’t repeated at home, because every new noble meant a threat to existing holdings. Also, ennoblement via the military path meant their loyalty was to the Crown first, not any other lord. Which meant the King of Stormwind had much more power in practice than all the other human kings.

The irony was not lost on me.

“Is that what you’re thinking of doing?”

I came out of my introspection. “Pardon?”

“Stormwind, lad, are you thinking of seeking your fortunes there? The dwarves and gnomes are on the way if you’re serious about taking up more unusual crafts, though I’d still recommend a ship.”

“Not at the moment.” In fact, despite my nebulous overall aims, my mind was considering more eastward directions as well. Also... “I need to make a few things to leave for the family, and build up some coin.”

Uther looked between me and my hand-wringing parents that continued to not muster enough courage to barge into our conversation. “That’s more thought than I put into things at your age.”

Since I was only thirteen, that wasn’t the ringing endorsement Sir Uther clearly intended. Then again, fourteen was apparently old enough to be a guard at the Stockade. On the one hand, questionable age of consent for job hazards. On the other hand, this world was clearly better about not forcing its youth to waste our best years regurgitating information we’ll never use in real life, while shut in a room with a stranger who controlled everything about our lives up to when we get to sit, stand, speak, eat, sleep or take a shit, in a mockery of the system of indoctrination that the greatest fallen civilisation in Earth history only forced on slaves.

No, those weren’t unresolved issues. You can’t achieve enlightenment if you still have unresolved issues. But the thing about resolved issues? They’re still issues if no one does anything about them.

*For better or worse, that issue, at least, is well out of my hands now.*

Too bad Azeroth had even bigger issues looming on the horizon, most of which would be made worse by the very kingdom I was reborn in. In the immortal words of Terry Pratchett, in Alterac there were two types of people. One, the peasants, craftsmen, artists, bards and even the rare noble who had to do things and were often quite human. And two, the other lifeforms. Unfortunately, the other lifeforms controlled everything. It was impossible to exaggerate their baleful stupidity. And Kind Aiden Perenolde was practically the worst of the lot, for all that he could still pretend humanity. Deathwing’s mind magics would barely need to do much, when the time came.

Not that you were allowed to say any of that.

*I can’t stay here, I decided. The world doesn’t have time to waste on oppressed underdogs.*

Movement ahead. Uther stood from the pew where the two of us had been sitting and waiting. “Your Holiness.”

“Uther. And this is the child from outside?” *Seems that kneeling in the middle of the street for hours gets around fast.* “You were right about him being an aspirant then?”

“No, Holiness, he... Actually, you should just talk to him.”

“Indeed? Then I shall.”



Finally, the Archbishop of the Church of the Holy Light stood before me. Alonsus Faol. He was a short and stout man with a large, groomed beard and a friendly face. Light brown hair that would probably seem blonder if not for the contrast to the golden shimmer in his hazel eyes. The only reason I couldn't see him playing the part of Greatfather Winter was because his beard wasn't white yet. But then, some flour could fix that right quick. "Archbishop." I bowed my head but maintained eye contact and didn't kneel. "I didn't request this but am thankful nonetheless that you are willing to giving me a moment. I might need a bit longer than that, though, so if you're short on time I'll just leave you be and go home."

"I always have time for meaningful petitions, especially those so well-spoken."

Alonsus Faol's presence was... actually very pleasant. Just watching him created a sense of peace and clarity. He was no poser. It seemed that the Church of the Holy Light really was no false doctrine put in place just to mentally and spiritually enslave the populace for self-aggrandisement and coin. The Light was deeply invested in this man. "Let me preface this by saying I am not here to question the theology of the Church of the Light, so if it sounds like I am it's not my intent."

"Even if you do, that is fine as long as your own ears are not closed."

Not an ideologue either. "All the same, I'd rather not waste time with dogmatic debate that will not change anything, I already believe that you are not as prone to confirmation bias as the local preachers, but you also have the advantage of reading ahead."

Alonsus Faol sent my parents a glance far too commiserating, but when his gaze returned to me it was neither indulgent nor reproachful. "I will endeavour to let unintended slights pass. The Light, in the end, is a power of peace."

Cannibalistic ogres, blood sacrificing trolls, Dark Iron dwarves and Odyn begged to differ, but I easily let that go. Napoleon may have been right about the churches of Earth when he said they were there just to keep common people quiet and prevent them from rising in revolt. But that didn't apply here. For all that people in my previous life loved to deride the Light as amoral and hypocritical zealot fuel, they also loved to deride the Church of the Holy Light for being pacifistic, even blaming the massacre of the Northshire priests on that instead of, oh, the psychopaths who butchered them. But see, it wasn't pacifistic. It never had been. The founding values of the Church of the Holy Light were sacrifice and courage, the Three Virtues were respect, tenacity and compassion, and the librams that Alonsus Faol gave to the first five

Paladins of the Silver Hand weren't just the two about holiness and compassion, but also of *protection, justice and retribution*. Two out of three, three out of five, four out of seven, seven out of ten, those were actually pretty good slants for self-determination and anti-tyranny.

What the Church was and *had* always been was *non-militant*, and honestly, I was fine with that. The fact that the religion *wasn't* spread at sword point was the main reason why I didn't hold it in contempt like all the organised churches on Earth. And it wasn't like Azeroth had invalidated this non-militancy – even opposing war sides that *weren't* human avoided harming priests, like in the Gnoll Wars.

It said a lot that it would take an army of literal *alien invaders* to wreck that balance away from virtue and towards ideology. Honestly, the very idea was offensive.

“Do take your time, lad,” Alonsus Faol dryly told me.

*An eon spent dreaming real dreams has left me prone to them even awake, it seems.*  
“Archbishop, what is the Light? Is it a form of matter, energy, or a force? Some of them? All of them? None?”

The Archbishop's eyebrows climbed right up. “I understand your preamble now, but that is something – child, can you read?”

That the man could so earnestly ask that without it sounding insulting or even awkward was frankly impressive. “Yes.”

“I see, apologies then, I wasn't sure because the answer to this question is the first thing related in the Holy Book. The Holy Light is the Primal Force of Creation, the endless, shimmering sea of energy situated outside the barriers of reality, the most fundamental force in the cosmos from whom all things were born. Before life began and before even the universe existed, there was only the Light, a boundless sea of living energy, swelling across all of existence, unfettered by time and space. As the ever-shifting sea expanded, pockets of various shades and brightness appeared, until the Light's shades manifested as the many realms of the Cosmos. That is why there can be no pure Light in the world without unmaking it, but shades of it can nonetheless manifest in the form of the holy arts. So, to answer your question, the Light is equally matter, energy and force, as you were right to suspect.”

Sounded like the Chaoskampf if you started reading it in the middle, after the gods or whatever came out of the Ginnungagap already went through the big bang, or whatever other word you

used for the primordial Chaos. Seemed that the Church didn't know or didn't admit knowing about the Void to just anyone. Probably the former, or there would have been more tensions or cooperation with Dalaran, perhaps enough to put up an actual fight when Archimonde broke it. "What kind though? In matter form I guess it would be crystals or reagents, but energy and force? Radiant energy is a given, but the Light can literally undo sprains and bone warps, and can affect emotions and cognitions and *be* affected by them, so if it can affect biology all the way to neuroplasticity, is Light energy also kinetic, elastic, chemical, electrical? If it's a force, what kind of force? Creative, generative, motive, transformative, regenerative? There are spells to purge swellings and infections, which basically means the Light is breaking things down and *accelerating* the chemical reactions of tissue purge, does that mean it's also a destructive force? And since it's a force, what does it act on? Matter, energy, other forces? How much does it use existing potential energy as opposed to itself? Does the Light just tell reality to sit down and shut up, or does it transform into other forms of matter and energy to make things happen within natural law? If I use the Light to enhance my strength to – dad, give me that cane, will you, you haven't needed it in months, thanks – if I use the Holy Light to overcome my natural limits and do this." The hardwood cane snapped like a twig. "Does that mean the light just unlocked my biological limits and I was always technically capable of doing this? Was it just a mental trick, or did it transform into adrenaline? If it wasn't just biology, did I do more than my best self would have managed? Did it unleash the potential energy I already possessed, or did it turn into *additional* potential energy? And if the Light can heal something as complex as a human body without you knowing what you're doing, shouldn't it also be able to repair things if I throw it at this cane and want it fixed up really hard?" I was going to have to try this at some point, why not in the most controlled circumstances I was likely to see for a while? I *wanted* the Light to cast forth and heal the cane.

The Light cast forth in a flare of gold.

The snapped halves, alas, remained separate halves. They did look very pristine and polished now though.

Everyone was staring at me, which was just as well. "If the Light responds to emotions and can heal something so much more complex like a living organism, why didn't this work? Believe me when I say I feel *very* strongly about this."

Alonsus Faol, bless him, gaped at me. Briefly, but it happened. The man closed his mouth, looked in something very close to amazement between my parents and me, cleared his throat and said. “Perhaps your faith is not strong enough.”

“Irrelevant, the Light is a provable and verifiable reality, faith is unnecessary.” Now everyone was torn between being astounded and aghast. “And if the failure was on my end, then why did it beautify the wood? Does that just happen and the Light has a personal sense of aesthetics? I suppose it’s not out of the question, probity and beauty are tightly entwined, ugly art is the first sign that culture has been given into the hands of degenerates. If faith isn’t strictly required and certainty is already in supply... maybe the key is to have a real *need*?” The Light within me swelled. “Well, a starting point at least.” I looked at the positively fascinated Archbishop and held out the snapped halves. “Could *you* fix it?”

Alonsus Faol shook his head in bemusement, a reaction much more contained than the naked shock of almost everyone else there. “I’ve found that certain material tools and symbols can serve the Light or help one call on it for various purposes, but I’ve yet to see the Light serve crude matter in turn. It has been theorised that the Light can heal the living because we are more than crude matter and the soul retains a memory of the body’s wholesome state. But I’d be wary of anything that assigns limits to the Light, especially human ones. Your deduction about the catalyst being true need is a better path to walk.”

Maybe morally, but practically? Odyn didn’t *need* to cause all-destroying blasts of disintegration to ‘test’ the adventurers that were only there to solve all his problems. “Well, at least I got one thing right.”

“... Perhaps more than one.” The Archbishop turned away and I was expecting him to end my ‘petition’ right then and there, but instead the man gestured to the nearby pew. “Uther, Turalyon, please turn one of the pews around, it seems we shall be here awhile.”

“Yes, Your Holiness.”

Turalyon too? *That’s* who the Archibishop’s constant shadow was? I didn’t recognize him at all. Granted, he at least was a priest from the start, but really? I guess I can also confirm that the Holy Light works atemporally because Synchronicity is the only logical explanation for this. And now I had to wonder just what I’ll get up to in the future that would resonate backwards so blatantly.

“Now, child,” Alonsus Faol said as I took the seat across from him. “Since you put so much thought into your queries, it behoves me to equal the effort. I’ll need you to begin by explaining to me the terms you are using. I believe I can deduce most of it, but it serves to be sure. Before that, though, I do have a rather important thing to ask.”

“Okay?”

“Are you aware that being able to wield the Light without undergoing our Rite of Investment is literally unheard of?”

Oh dear, that **was** rather unheard of before the Second War, wasn’t it?

*Wait a second, am I a heretic?*

“-.-“

Fortunately, the Church turned out to not be in the habit of rounding up potential threats to its monopoly on Holy Power to burn us at the stake. Or maybe forcefully induct us into the cult. At least this Archbishop wasn’t. Possibly because there hadn’t been a precedent, though the notion seemed unlikely to me, how was there a first prophet or saint or whatever if you could only have Light powers given by someone else? Was it all just the Naaru from Mereldar’s dream micromanaging everything? Did the talent exist in humans only because Tyr gave it? Did it trace even further back through the vrykul to Odyn? All of the aforementioned?

The Archbishop did have some very intense questions for me though. The talk stretched into late afternoon, then into the evening, then my father awkwardly extended an invitation to continue this at our home since the pews and stares of the loitering bystanders were getting mighty uncomfortable. The Archbishop instead invited the whole lot of us to join him in his lodgings at the local parish and had everyone wine and dine while our talk continued into the evening. Much befuddlement encroached on the local clergy, but the Archbishop handled that by turning my ‘petition’ into an open debate that stretched deep into the night.

The general consensus was that the Light was anything and everything, which was sort of right, but also not because then why did it need rituals and symbols to cast its spells? Technical answers were few and far between, which was not unexpected of a dogmatic organisation, but I still had enough to start experimenting on my own later. To my surprise, Alonsus Faol was actually quite interested in my perspective and seemed ready to stay up until morning, and to be honest so was I, the Light was helpful like that. That Alonsus Faol, of all people, found our

talk so engaging that he didn't care about the slanted looks I was getting from the other clerics for being a thirteen year-old maybe-heretic was honestly flattering.

He did get around to asking me *why* I wanted to know all this though. "What *do* you seek by these questions?"

"I don't know yet," I said honestly. "But I'm getting closer with every answer."

Alonsus Faol seemed accepting. "Well, far be it from me to impair dawning enlightenment. In the end, we are all inadequate vessels."

Inadequate vessels. That... felt important. And not just because I knew about the supposed curse of flesh.

Alas, the talks got bogged down because nobody else understood what I was even saying half the time, so I had to keep explaining things. The Archbishop eventually decided on an indeterminate recess while everyone familiarised themselves with the copious notes that Turalyon, of all people, had spent the entire time jotting down.

I myself had a few of papers, full of the practical details I was planning to follow up on later, but the deacon? The man had somehow filled a small book, his writing speed was phenomenal and his shorthand was shockingly legible too. I could see why the man would experience such a meteoric rise through the ranks in wartime, he'll probably become a general by the simple expedient of doing all the war's logistics in an afternoon.

Then I found out just how the Archbishop intended to follow through on that follow-up, because it wasn't empty words at all.

"Child, how would you like to join the Church?"

*Please don't say I was wrong about forceful induction.*

"Will you come with me and learn more of the Light? I've already got my eye on an apprentice, but as outgoing and virtuous as he is, he's also terribly self-effacing. I'm worried he can't properly appreciate the true value of the life he's lived, the wisdom and experience he can himself impart. He could use an understudy to fret over, and he especially could use living proof that the Light will answer the right soul, regardless of accolades."

Was Alonsus Faol seriously offering to make me apprentice to *Uther*? Him calling me the right soul left me honestly touched. I was actually reconsidering my life's path now! Truly, authentic

priests have the most incredible charisma. “I am seriously considering it.” I said honestly, pretending not to notice my parents’ desperate miming for me to go ahead and accept right now. It was good I was so close to my fourteenth birthday because otherwise they might have made the decision for me. “Are you sure though? I already told you, I’ll never muster the faith you lot have.”

“Because the light is a provable, observably true reality, yes, but you do realise that puts you ahead of the majority?” I could already guess that from being able to wield the Light when some priests actually couldn’t despite whatever rite they used for empowerment, and I was sure some even lost their abilities later. But the ease with which this man could speak so honestly about his own organisation was amazing. “Besides, you might be surprised by what faith can achieve even then, or what can happen to make faith necessary to endure this life.”

*Sally Whitemane and all the zealots she brought back from the dead would tend to agree.* Faith was so flimsy, though, and so easily used to twist your purpose to that of someone else, and it didn’t even work to make the Light protect you consistently. The Light somehow didn’t stop even the most faithful bug, man, priest, saint, prophet, god, *titan*, even reality itself from being mindfucked by vague tentacles of effects and BDSM into becoming enemies of all creation. Even from *lower-tier* threats. Despite the Light's main thing including *breaking mind control*. The Light within me weakened.

Now why would it do that? These were facts, as far as I knew them. Even if I were to dismiss everything not directly written by the first lore writer as wild fancies of people who didn’t actually glimpse into this reality, that was still a lot of evidence. Even if I disregarded everything from the Third War onwards, the Lich King, the Nathrezim, the Old Ones and Frostmourne were already in there. Was I supposed to put all the onus on Arthas for his choices when the Light *hadn’t* left him? If no, then the Light didn’t protect him from brainwashing. If yes, the Light was not entitled to an opinion on what it was used for. Which was already debatable in itself, the investment of the Paladins of the Silver Hand involved a bunch of priests infusing the power of the Light into other people. Conversely, Uther could later strip the light from Tirion Fordring through excommunication. Tirion’s desperation eventually overrode it in a pivotal moment, but those were still contrary, entirely human choices. Like Whitemane’s resurrections, they were wholly *mortal* rulings the Light fully enforced.

The Light within me stalled.

And what about everything from as early as the First War, how many times was Garona bathed in the Light and *still* stayed under the Shadow Council's mind control? What about Medivh? What about *Deathwing*, he masqueraded as a high noble for years, how many Church services did he attend, how many times did the Light enter him? How many times was he in the presence of Alonsus Faol and the Light didn't bring back Neltharion? The Archbishop literally went around casting blessings of wisdom and clarity on people who came to see him walk the street, even an instant's worth of clarity for the Aspect of Earth would have changed *everything*.

The Light wavered again, but in a different cant.

*Screw vessels being unworthy, that's just false modesty, I'm going to figure out how the universe works to make a future that actually makes sense and you're going to help.*

The Light settled firmly within me, warm and here to stay.

I relaxed. In the end, as good as faith and zealous conviction were at pulling the Light forth, factually justified certainty was just better. It was just common sense. "I'm afraid I must still refuse. I have some things to do here, I need to..." And yet my refusal *still* stalled in the face of that earnest, encouraging gaze. I would have suspected mental influence right now if it were anyone else. When I latched onto the Light to purge me of anything of the sort anyway, there was nothing. Not *incontrovertible* evidence, given the various aforementioned failures of the Light to deal with such things even in people so full of it that they glowed in the dark, but still. Then it struck me. "Does this offer have a deadline?"

Alonsus Faol actually looked disappointed, but understanding all the same. "I cannot speak for any limits the Light may or may not place on its grace periods, but there are no arbitrary limits on mine."

"... I have *very* important things to do as a layman." *Here, as soon as possible, ideally without supervision, while my time is still my own.* Well, relatively speaking. First I needed to bulk up, I was already taller than most people after my incredible growth spurt of early spring, the Archbishop himself had to look a bit up to meet my eyes, but a gangly teen does not a worthy man make. I needed some proper muscle if I was going to be building engines and generators. "But what if I go looking for you in Lordaeron in, like, a couple of years maybe?"

"Then you will be welcomed."



“It might not be to sign on even then, though. Or if it is, it may be, say, as a means to pursue a borderline *mercenary* approach to charity.”

“Perhaps you should leave it at that, child,” Alonsus Faol said, amused. “Unless these mysterious plans of yours are something I should be aware of?”

I opened my mouth, closed it and watched the man thoughtfully. “I *might* have a favour to ask. As a good parishioner, if not a particularly faithful one.”

“Not particularly faithful he says,” the man muttered, then rubbed his beard and smiled ruefully. “Go ahead, child, lay it on me.”

“If you, entirely hypothetically, ever hear about, say, lightning being harnessed for various uses like creating light, making fire, turning wheels and forge hammers and what have you, maybe even relaying words from coast to coast in an instant with no magic whatsoever, could you have it checked to see that the Hywel family name is firmly attached to all of it? And maybe steam power too, those are the main ones off the top of my head. I’d hate for my parents and I to be dumped in a filthy ditch somewhere by some unscrupulous opportunist without any reprisal.” I almost capped it off with ‘*and maybe harness the motive force of fiery explosions*’ but I thankfully managed to stop myself *before* I inadvertently insinuated to potential time dragons that I was planning to introduce the internal combustion engine.

Assuming the dwarves and gnomes didn’t already have it. They had oil platforms and tankers during the second war, even flying machines, but they looked made of wood, and the specifics of the technology were always nebulous despite oil platforms being among the objectives of the orc campaign. Gnomish mounts would all use clockwork and steam too, when they finally happened, despite Gnomeragan being chock full of (electric?) lighting and vents spewing *nuclear fallout* everywhere. Did this world skip past internal combustion straight to nuclear power? But then what was oil even used for that it was still treated like a strategic good?

... Only during the second war. And briefly in alternate Draenor, if I recalled right.

Hmm.

Not that I’d ever find out if I ran afoul of the local underworld the moment I was out the door. If it was likely to happen anywhere, it was Alterac.

There was no levity in the Archbishop's face now. Only calm resolve. "I promise to do so personally." Wait, really? That was a lot more than- "In the meanwhile I will pray for your success, young man."

Not 'child' anymore? "Thank you, then. And I'm sorry to disappoint you."

"My disappointment is and will remain just that, mine. The Light walks with you, Wayland Hywel. And you, sir, madam, go with pride in what you have achieved."

"Goodbye then." "We will, Your Holiness, thank you."

"Uther, it's very late, please see them safely home."

"Of course, Holiness."

The night was dark and full my parent's terror that we'd trip over a rock and fall in a pig sty. Of which there were many, most of them vacant because the pigs were allowed to roam all through the night in order to clean up the filth. Yes, that was something cities did before plumbing and plastics. And possibly muggers too, the Archbishop's visit had pulled a lot more people and their coin purses out of their homes at once. I ended up leading the way because Uther was not a local and the Light improved my senses as if I'd gruellingly trained them since birth. Also, I had night vision now. Alas, though supremely useful, it did not prevent the other three from stumbling into mud and crap every fifth step, even with Uther's lantern. It was a new moon night, unfortunately. Eventually I just gave up and told the Light I very strongly needed my eyes to glow like a pair of searchlights.

"This has to be some kind of heresy," Uther grunted, then stepped on a piglet. It squealed. Loudly. "Then again, the Light knows its agents best."

"I'm surprised you're not doing this yourself."

"The Light doesn't answer just anyone, lad, never mind for something so trivial, and I've not been invested any more than you, I'm not a priest."

"So you people keep telling me, but I thought – aren't you the Archbishop's disciple?"

Sir Uther cast a long gaze across town to where the church's tower rose above the homes, barely visible in mere starlight. "His Holiness has made the offer." His gaze turned back to me, intense and meaningful. "After today, I think I will accept."

*This has gone way past the point of sharing old stories.* But I didn't insult the man by asking why. The Light was no trivial gimmick in reality, being able to channel it was seen as the literal blessing of divinity upon the world. I didn't consider myself holy, but I didn't consider myself *not* holy either. That it took some sort of ritual to allow new people to call the Light at all was something generally consistent across all races and cultures too. Still, wouldn't Uther become a cleric at Faol's invitation anyway? "Don't misplace any credit, I'm sure you don't let chance encounters rule your choices. If this is your right path, you would have chosen it regardless."

"Perhaps, but not today."

Well.

Good to know my first world-shifting change was a positive one.

Finally, we were home. "Thank you for coming all this way, Sir Knight," my father said, finally back on the familiar ground of playing the host. "Would you like to come in for a spot of rest and refreshment before you go back?"

"My thanks, but no. Be well sir, madam. It was good talking to you, lad. Maybe we'll meet again someday."

"Goodbye, Sir Uther. Let the righteous know peace, and the unjust know the back of your hand."

"Ha! I'm stealing that!"

*Go ahead, it was yours to begin with.*

Finally, I was alone with my parents. My mother, Agnes, who fell upon me with the blubbery wailing hug of stressed mothers everywhere. And my father, Domar, who shambled over to the pantry with all his beer gut and rheumatism and arthritis, drank a whole mug of beer in one go, poured himself a second and shambled back with it in hand to flatly tell me. "What the *hell*, boy."

"Father." I cast Holy Light. Relations immediately improved. "How much does a cobbler's son get as allowance?"

It was the first of April in the Year 579 of the King's Calendar, thirteen years since I was born, thirteen years before the Dark Portal's opening. Not the most auspicious timeline, one might think, except that random Azerothian citizens had the leisure to walk entire continents, cull

every last foodchain into submission, master their might, master their craft, get rich, uncover conspiracies, kill all the monsters, kill all the demons, space travel, dimension travel, even kill *gods*, all in the space of a year.

Thirteen years ended, thirteen years started, the first of April here and now right in between, and my birthday was another twelve days from now on a Friday.

I was going to be the biggest and best joke ever played on this world.