



Dear Brian,

The year is 210 AG. Fourteen years ago, the Avatar Korra passed away peacefully, marking a new change in the cycle as the next Avatar, an earthbender, was set to be born. However, no earthbender appeared with the potential to be the Avatar. The nations were worried, hoping against hope that the Avatar hadn't disappeared again, as Avatar Aang did nearly two centuries prior. However, unbeknownst to the four nations, the Avatar was very much alive. What they could not have expected was that this Avatar was no earthbender. Nor were they a firebender, or any of the four elements. In the northern part of the United Republic of Nations, the Avatar was being hidden away, for fear that the bending they possessed would come to create a schism among the nations, and the possibility of another century-long war.

For centuries, nuns at the abbey on the shores of the Mo Ce Sea had kept in isolation, preferring to stay out of conflict and stay neutral as they could. Even when Fire Nation colonialism came to their shores, they persevered, and as the Hundred Year War ended, and as the Avatar passed and Korra emerged, they stayed neutral. But now, it seemed all too fitting that the new Avatar would crop up there, and would have to be kept in shadow, as the secluded nature of the abbey was a perfect hiding place for the very first shadowbender.

Shadows, I feel, are a very odd 'element' that is sometimes quite overused, and other times very overlooked. Oftentimes, you'll see shadows utilized as a form of teleportation, where shadow creatures can 'sink' into the murky darkness and reappear somewhere else. They're almost always aligned with villainy, and in the few cases they aren't, it always ends up as some sort of vigilante justice, like Batman. The story I began to weave above is my take on shadows as a medium of supernatural ability. Whether magic, bending, or a superpower, I think shadows tend to get a bad rap, and I think ATLA is a perfect world for the brightness of the shadows to come out.

Of course, by nature, shadows are dark, so the "brightness of the shadow" isn't necessarily apparent. I want to paint a picture of rising from the darkness of shadows and using their power as a light for the world. My shadowbender Avatar will forge his own kingdom among the other four nations throughout his story. Throughout his first few years, he already began to exhibit an uncanny trait to move the shadows around him, playing with them as if they were toys. His parents, maybe rightfully so, thought it to be the work of spirits of chaos, leaking from the spirit portals sealed so long ago by Avatar Wan. Fearing for their child's safety, but more so their own reputation, the couple

left the young bender in the hands of the abbey. As the boy grew up, the nuns fostered his talent. They would soon learn that it was a bending art, rather than chaos spirits as the boy's parents thought years before. He was renamed at the abbey, and given the name Innei, using the characters for 'light' and 'shadow'. It was a fitting name, foreshadowing the future of the young Avatar. This backstory, abandoned by his parents, isn't uncommon. But it is often associated with darkness, and a history that is considered 'ugly'. Instead, Innei likes to reflect on the purity and love that were nurtured in him by his new family at the abbey. A shadow cannot exist without a light, but for Innei, these shadows would become his light, leading him to a place where he'd be able to blossom into a powerful Avatar in his own right.

Even so, the nuns still kept Innei in hiding. Despite the war being over for many decades now, they knew that the knowledge of a new bending art would bring too much attention to the child. But as Innei reached his fourteenth birthday, they realized the true nature of the orphan they had raised. It came after a visit from some Earth Kingdom citizens to the abbey, wishing to practice their bending in a calmer area, rather than in the elements. Innei knew he couldn't yet talk to the people from outside the abbey, but wrapped in shadow, he studied the foreigners' movements, committing them to memory. The technique he'd practiced, using shadows to wrap himself in a cocoon of sorts, made him unnoticeable. The pitch dark absorbed the waves of light, similar to how enough refraction can make someone invisible. With this cloak, Innei studied these earth benders, and later that night, he went to practice by himself. He knew that he probably couldn't, but he had little else new to do. A nun passing by in the waning evening hours saw the boy practicing, and turned to leave, slightly chuckling. At that moment she heard the cracking of the ground, and as she turned around, there was Innei, bending a small chunk of rock. Only enough to lift it slightly out of the ground, but bending nonetheless. Innei was the Avatar.

Innei's journey is a fitting one which, in a way, mirrors that of Avatar Wan's own journey. For the first time, an element so closely related to the spirits of darkness and chaos that Wan and Raava had defeated had become the Avatar. A child of the shadows had become the new light of the world. Over the next few years of Innei's life, he leaves the abbey for the first time, under the guise of being an earth bending student. Of course, he couldn't go and ask for education in the other elements without revealing himself as the Avatar, but when the time came he claimed to be an earth bender from birth. Innei's birth parents weren't exactly wrong about his bending, though. His ability came from chaos spirits feeding power into the human realm. As Innei grew stronger, the seal weakened. Innei's journey culminates with his light, and a newfound bond with Raava, uniting to re-seal the spirit portals. But with so much power already in the human realm, shadow bending was an art that stuck. Other benders in hiding flocked to Innei, and together, they built up the new shadow bending kingdom, accepted by the four original nations as a new part of the Avatar cycle, and the benders which helped save the human world once more.

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Head Men's Basketball Coach

