

EARTHS G MAGUS 91

91 Silhouettes

However, the deafening shout from Gregory the Giant reverberated in their bones, giving the rest who had stayed courage to charge in.

Still it was difficult to see with only the torches as well as the bonfire; the darkness also made it difficult to gauge how many humanoid silhouettes that had beasts heads were there exactly behind the trees.

Emery drew his sword raised and kept calm. After all, he had been to the Magus Academy, seen absurd magical creatures, spent time with a dragon for six months, even he, himself, had a transformation relating to his Fey bloodline. He didn't charge in though because the duty assigned to him was to protect his employer, Luna. Not to mention, Emery felt a faint connection to these men with beast heads, as if he knew them for some reason. Although that was what he felt, it didn't stop the humanoid with a beast head to try and stab him with a bone spear.

The bone spear sliced into the air with great speed and power; Emery twisted his neck, dodging it barely. This half-human, half-beast clearly was a cut above the large marauder he had fought in the rundown house back in Lionarch. Still, that was before and this was now. Emery had improved several points in battle power due to the increase of his spirit force, which meant his overall speed, strength and endurance couldn't be compared to his previous fighting prowess from before.

Emery deflected the bone spear, and when he saw an opening, he quickly struck the beastman with the blunt hilt of his sword. The beastman collapsed on the ground. Emery then grabbed the head of the beastman but the head slipped, revealing that these half-human, half-beast were in fact humans in beasts clothings!

"They're humans!" exclaimed Emery, raising the deflated beast head.

The remaining paid fighters and guards became fiercer because it wasn't as they had initially had thought. These weren't monsters, rather, these were savage people with tattoos wearing animal carcasses to strike fear into their hearts and minds of the ordinary people. Still, even though the paid fighters and guards fought harder and regained some of their spirit, it was a fact that these savages were ferocious warriors who were as strong as knights of a kingdom, probably stronger based on Emery's estimation.

The fighting stopped, giving them a room for breather. Kastan immediately took command and arranged those who were injured to be inside the circle formation..

"What are they?" shouted one of the wounded paid fighters.

"They're like more of a beast and not human! How come they strike so hard and so fast?"

"There are so many of them also."

"Sister Luna..." said Silas. Before he could say more words though, Luna ran to him and gave him a big hug.

She took him by the shoulders and looked at him with teary eyes but that didn't last long as her affectionate gaze was immediately replaced by an angry glare. Luna said, "Silas! You shouldn't have come here!"

"But Sister... I am the man of the family! It is my duty, my job to—"

"Fool, that's what you are!" Luna sighed. She added in a calmer tone, "Regardless of your intentions, it is not wise to come here not prepared. You should know that! I have been so worried..."

"I am sorry sister Luna..." said Silas, almost in a whisper.

"We need to head back to town as soon as possible. We can return here once we are ready," remarked Luna. She turned to Kastan and said, "We are leaving now"

"But Luna, I—"

The loud hum echoed again. And this time, the ground seemed to tremble as well as the silhouettes of the savages wearing different kinds of animal heads ran in circles around them behind the trees.

Silas spat on the ground and said, "These damned Chrutin! Can't they just leave us be in peace?"

That word caught Emery's attention. Chrutin, it was the same word that Fantumar had called him just a day before his family's estate had been raided by Padraig's marauders. Actually, he had asked several travelers he had met on the way, including the former residents of Mistshire, however, not one of the people he had inquired seemed to know what the word meant. Now, however, he inferred that Chrutin referred to these people they were fighting with and he had blood of a Chrutin, which his late-father had confirmed.

Emery's view of this battle changed. He hadn't fully decided yet on what his next course of action would be, but he decided to at least show he was enacting his duty while being careful to not kill any of these so-called Chrutins.

Silently, Emery used his understanding of the elements, particularly the plant and earth elements. From the vibrations on the ground and disturbed energies of the branches and shrubs. He estimated they would be facing about an equal number of Chrutins with the people he had come with. It was also a no-brainer for him to understand that if these Chrutins came to take their lives, their chances of survival were close to none.

Kastan stood before Luna and Silas, and said, "Don't fear! Circle formation, guards! We will hold them off by keeping the formation tight!"

He then looked at Asur and ordered. "Light another torch and throw it on the ground."

"Kastan, do you think we can win?" asked Luna, her face brightened by the growing fire, providing lighting in the area.

"Don't worry, Ms. Luna. Please just stay close to me," said Kastan.

The fighting started with waves of arrows and spears being thrown at the expedition group but the guards made sure to protect everyone with their large shields. After the wave of spears ended, the Chrutins then proceeded to charge at them with melee weapons.

Gregory the Giant pushed one of the guards and went in front, swinging his mace crazily. However, the reaction times of the Chrutins he had swung his mace toward managed to dodge his attacks. One of the Chrutins got close to Gregory but Emery had noticed it and deflected the bone spear with the sword on his left hand.

Chaos ensued, similar to their situation from earlier. Emery managed to parry and counter with the hilt of his sword the incoming attacks from the Chrutin, saving Gregory countless times. He then went around their circle formation, as ordered by Kastan, to fend off the other Chrutins and knocked them out one by one.

Although Emery decided not to kill these people, that wasn't the case for some of his current comrades, especially Gregory smashing the heads of the Chrutins who had been knocked out by Emery.

"You sure are a great fighter, Merlin. But don't show mercy! It's kill or be killed!" Gregory then continued screaming and swinging his mace in hope of finding more Chrutins to smash.

Emery retreated back in the circle and observed their surroundings. There were around forty people after the merging of the brother and sister's forces, but a dozen of these men were beginning to take injuries and some ended up dead, particularly paid fighters Emery had come with while the soldiers in the white and gray uniforms kept their ranks and protected Luna and Silas.

The fighting abilities of these guards by the Quintin family were better than Emery had initially thought. Especially the head guard, Kastan. His fighting abilities could possibly match the strongest knight Lionesse Yvain.

With the help of his understanding of the elements, Emery felt disturbance of the scrub behind a line of trees. It looked like there were still a lot of Chrutin warriors staying hidden. While fighting with his sword, Emery realized the Quintin's guards were moving bit by bit. And based on the direction they were heading toward, he figured they were planning to break through the line of trees wherein Emery had felt the disturbance.

Emery jumped and rushed to the group of guards who were about to break through.

"Miss. Luna! Don't go there!"

92 Standing Alone

However, Kastan blocked Luna's and Silas' path. He said to their dark-skinned scout, "Asur, check behind trees."

"What? Why are you listening to that beggar? Let's go!" ordered Silas, taking the lead by moving forward. It was at that moment though that a rain of arrows flashed behind the trees they were about to head to. They all turtled behind the shields they were holding, however, one of the arrows passed through the gap and pierced Asur's shoulder.

"Back! Back! Tighten the formation!" roared Kastan, protecting Luna beneath his shield. Slowly but surely, the expedition group's casualties were increasing over time, especially within the numbers of the paid fighters. All they could hope for now was a miracle to arrive. "Forgive me, lady Luna. My inadequacy caused us to be trapped."

Emery was fighting on the front lines side by side with Gregory, however, a stray arrow pierced Gregory's leg, causing the giant man to fight with one knee on the ground. Emery did his best to fend off the incoming attackers all the while not killing them. However, battling with the intent of only rendering the enemies unconscious was much more difficult than striking the vitals.

Kastan called for Emery. And once the young man was within the encirclement, Kastan said, "Merlin, it seems you have better vision than any one of us do in this darkness. I'll leave the protection of Lady Luna and Master Silas to you as I lead the enemies away. I know I don't have to right ask you to lay down your life for them, but please, lead them to safety and back to the mansion. I am sure Master Quintin will reward you handsomely. Can I trust you with this?"

"No," said Emery in a heartbeat.

"I see..." Kastan's face fell.

"You ungrateful beggar!"

"Silas! Stop with your prejudice!" rebuked Luna to her younger brother. She remained calm and proceeded to ask Emery the reason for his rejection. "Why? Do you have something else in mind, Merlin?"

"Yes, I have a plan where Mr. Kastan doesn't have to sacrifice his life." Emery then pointed behind another treeline. "I have something on me that'll create a distraction. Once that's done, Mr. Kastan, please lead the way in toward that direction and keep running."

"That's opposite the direction of the exit! Are you in collusion with these damned Chrutins, beggar? If so, I'll kill you right—"

A slap whipped across Silas' face. Luna snapped, "Stop! Don't forget we're here because of you! If you're not going to say something helpful, then keep quiet!"

Silas still in disbelief as he rubbed his cheeks.

"Master Silas had a point though, that's leading us in not outside," said Kastan.

Kastan and Luna exchanged glances. Once Luna nodded, Kastan stood up and said, "Prepare to retreat, men! On me!"

The guards and paid fighters started gathering in a central location and made their circle formation smaller except for one person. That person didn't conform with them and proceeded to stand alone in the middle of the expedition group and the Chrutin warriors.

"Merlin, what are you doing?" shouted Luna.

"Creating a distraction," said Emery as-a-matter-of-fact, not looking back.

"Hmph, again at least that beggar knows his place. Luna, Kastan, let's go! Let's leave him" beckoned Silas.

"No, Master Silas. Let's wait for his signal," said Kastan.

A single, one-armed, man standing alone certainly stopped the relentless attacks of the Chrutins. That didn't last long though as an arrow from behind a tree flew straight, whistling in the air, to Emery.

"Watch out!" cried Luna. The shattering of wood answered her call. Everyone became silent as the stone arrowhead thud on the ground.

"He's not hurt!" exclaimed one of the paid fighters.

The Chrutins then started making animal noises as if they were communicating with each other and proceeded to fire more rains of arrows. Still, no matter how many arrows they had released against Emery all of it simply deflected on his body.

"How is that possible?"

"It's likely he's wearing metal armor underneath his mantle."

Speculate all they want but they would never guess Emery had used the spell [Stone Skin] making his skin harder than the average rock. This skill didn't completely take the sense of pain though, underneath his scarf, he was gritting his teeth.

Seeing how ineffective the arrows were, the Chrutin warriors proceeded to charge Emery with their primitive weapons. Of course Emery didn't simply stand there and took the stabbing and hackings of the Chrutin warriors, such attacks had greater behind compared to the arrows, so he dodged them but of course he wasn't able to parry all of them. Some attacks from these warriors struck him.

Luna, Kastan and the rest expected Emery to fall, however, they watched in disbelief, just like the Chrutin warriors to see the situation was still the same. Emery was fine despite the countless hits he had been receiving.

Emery then raised his left hand, and out came a huge cloud of black smoke covering the entire area around him.

Kastan figured this was the signal Emery had been referring to, so he shouted, "That's it! Retreat!"

The [dark smoke] spell rendered everyone inside it unable to see except what was literally in front of them. With the cover darkness of the night as well as the dark smoke, the expedition group led by Kastan escaped toward the direction Emery had pointed them earlier.

"Kastan! What is that just now?" Luna asked.

"It appears that Mr. Merlin is a wizard," said Kastan.

"A wizard?" Luna repeated. In the world of normal people, being labelled wizard and witches would normally strike fear as they were usually seen as people who brought great disaster with them. However, for Luna, not a sign of fear traced her face, instead a smile appeared.

When Emery had heard Kastan's command to retreat, Emery started to unleash his real strength against these Chrutin warriors. He didn't transform but since there were no people for him to consider protecting, Emery tried to knock unconscious as many Chrutins as possible. He knew that some of these Chrutins would continue chasing the expedition group and ignore him, but his plan was never to defeat

all of them single handedly. Rather it was to give the expedition group a larger space to fight as well as regroup and reorganize themselves so they could manage the smaller number of enemies.

After he had defeated about half of the Chrutin warriors, Emery proceeded to dash toward the direction he had asked the expedition to head to.

Unfortunately, increased physique, didn't mean increased agility. To get through this dense forest as fast as he wanted to, he needed to have more agility to easily pass the obstacles blocking in his way. So, as he ran, jumped and slid, he thought about training this trait too once he had the chance.

Emery followed the tracks left by his comrades and Chrutins. And based on the increasing number of dead people, both Chrutin and the expedition group, he had been passing by, he knew he was getting closer.

Soon enough, his path was becoming clearer with lesser obstacles and he began to run in a straight line, picking up speed; however, in the corner of his eyes, a giant shadow of something appeared to be running as fast as him!

"What is that!" Emery exclaimed.

v 93 Downstream

"You, and you, hold them off!" ordered Kastan to two guards. The two guards in white and grey uniforms obeyed without question and proceeded to break off from the group and buy the expedition group some precious time.

The group kept on running, but their numbers were becoming thinner every time Kastan heard the human made animal noises were getting closer. Somehow though, the dispatching of guards paid off. The noises eventually disappeared as they exited the forest and in front of them, they were welcomed by a gentle rush of water coming from a small river.

There were only a few dozen guards and a few mercenaries left with them, less than half of the original number they had first come here. As they made their way to the small river, some of the mercenaries threw their heads in the water and drank as if there was no tomorrow. The Quintin guards, however, only stood still in place until Kastan gave them the go signal before they went ahead and scooped the water to drink.

Kastan had a waterskin on his waist and first gave it to Luna, who was still trying to catch her breath. After she drank from it, she looked back to the forest.

Silas had also just finished drinking water from his own waterskin, noticed his sister's gaze and said, "Luna, don't worry about the guards. It's their job to protect us and if they have to die in doing so, then so be it."

"I know, Silas," said Luna. Once more taking a sip of water before handing it over to Kastan. "It wasn't the guards I'm hoping to see though. It's Merlin."

Silas's brows twitched. He said, "Why do you care so much about him?"

Luna sighed and said, "This is why father is not giving you authority over his businesses, Silas. Didn't you see how good of a warrior was he and on top of that, Merlin's a wizard! He's one of a kind. Do you know

how rare it is to find a magician within the seven kingdoms? I bet Merlin's the disciple of a wizard who had closed himself on the world."

"I see." Silas's brows relaxed. "I guess I'm still too inexperienced. Anyway, take a look at this."

Silas grabbed a pouch from his back and showed it to Luna. He didn't open it but clearly there was something alive inside that opened a pouch on his back and showed something that made Luna smile.

"Did you really? No wonder the people of the forest are chasing us," remarked Luna.

A couple of minutes had already passed and fortunately, no attacks happened after. Asur came back from scouting despite his shoulder being injured.

"Yes, based on the general location we have ended up and the two mountains on the distance, I believe this river leads on the northwest of Venta, we just have to follow the downstream of the river and I'm sure we'll eventually find our way back." said Asur.

"Any sign of Merlin?" asked Luna.

"My apologies but there's none," said Asur, bowing his head.

"Good work, Asur," said Kastan. "Everyone, gather up. We'll head south and follow the river!"

The guards from the Quintin Family stood and readied their gears. However, the paid fighters were a different story. They all looked at each other, looking dispirited.

"Strong men of Venta, I promise that if you stay with me and protect us until we reach Venta, I will triple the fee I have already given you earlier," declared Luna. However, the men's spirits were totally broken. They didn't stand as they kept their heads down.

"Money's no good if we die! How sure are you we'll come back alive?" asked one of the paid fighters.

Kastan moved forward and drew his sword. He pointed it at the man who had just spoken and said, "All I know is that we're alive. And I would like to keep that way. Either you stay here and die weak or you fight with us and you might either live or die fighting. Which is it?"

Kastan then offered his hand, pointing the sword away. The man who had just spoken grabbed Kastan's hand and said to Luna, "You've promised. Three times."

Luna answered, "I keep my promises as the daughter of the Quintin Family."

The expedition group once again marched along the river banks. As soon as they started moving however, the noises of the savage people once again resounded in the area.

"Hurry, they are coming! Get in formation!" commanded Kastan.

A dozen Chrutin warriors emerged from the forest, carrying bone spears and bow and arrows made out of stone. The long range skirmish started as the Chrutins threw spears and shot their arrows. The expedition wasn't able to retaliate because they didn't have any long ranged weapons. But their walls of shield blocked the incoming projectiles, making them safe.

The formation stayed true as they tried to retreat from the Chrutins. However, another party of Chrutin warriors appeared near the direction of the river stream, finally surrounding the expedition group.

The Chrutin warriors nearby the river's stream charged in, but the moment they had done so, the steady rush of water swirled and rose from the banks, creating a thick snake-like body, smashed into the charging warriors.

[Whip splash]

Another figure jumped out of the trees. Seeing him, Luna exclaimed, "Merlin!"

"To the ri..."

"What?" Luna shouted back as a feeling of panic rose within her.

"Cross the river! Something is coming!"

Finally, his words were complete in their ears. And due to how he had proved himself earlier, there wasn't a soul who questioned Merlin's words.

They scrambled to the river, and Emery used whip splash once more to repel the incoming Chrutin warriors from both sides. Not long after they crossed the river, Luna and the others were all shocked to see a monstrous figure coming out of the forest.

It was a giant wolf with fur of black and red. Its body was twice the size of the average man and the giant fangs appeared as if it could rip off the head of a person with just one bite.

Everyone had widened eyes except for Emery, who could feel a stronger connection compared to the people he had been fighting with.

Since this was a mythical creature, Emery used the special symbol on his hand. An information entered his mind that said:

[Fey creature]

94 Negotiate

Now that the Chrutins warriors were out of the dark forest, and with the extra light, Emery could finally see the Chrutin warriors clearly.

Behind all the animal ornaments on their backs and heads, they also had weird dark tattoos all over their bodies. Emery realized the dark tattoos were similar with the one that appeared on his body after transforming. And with the arrival of the fey creature in the form of a giant wolf, Emery confirmed these people were related to him one way or another.

The expedition group's gazes were transfixed on the giant wolf. Emery, however, had seen worse looking creatures back in the Magus Academy, but for the rest of the group, each time the creature moved a step forward it seemed their heart beat stopped. Fortunately, the wolf-like creature remained standing in place while a huge man moved next to it moving forward to the water.

This mighty man shouted loudly and then several other fighters followed him and ran through the river. Each and every Chrutin warrior took a step inside the river, Emery threw them back with his whip slash

but apparently the bald man was able to withstand the water whip as if he had stones tied to his legs while he kept going.

"That seems to be their strongest warrior. If we take him down, I'm sure their morale will crumble," said Kastan as he rushed forward with sword in hand.

Kastan was able to fight with the bald man. The battle between a skilled swordsman and an axe wielder erupted. Unfortunately, after a few exchanges it appeared Kastan was being pushed back.

As much as Emery wanted to help Kastan, he was busy keeping the other from crossing the river.

At times like this, Emery wished he had much stronger offensive spells. Although whip splash was a useful spell, only now he had found out that it wasn't as powerful as he had thought because the Chrutin warriors kept coming back up. Still, it was better than nothing because some of them had been knocked unconscious.

Emery was starting to catch his breath as well his vision was blurring. He knew he was about to run out of magic inside of him, similar to how he had once experienced back in the spatial space, so he yelled at Luna, "You should go! I don't think I can hold them for much longer!"

Luna looked hesitant for a while but then made her decision and said, "We should use this opportunity to leave, Kastan and Merlin can follow later."

Silas, however, shouted in pain. "Aghh! Sister, I don't think I can run.. my leg.. I can't feel my leg!!"

Luna was speechless, not sure what to do with her brother. "We can't run away carrying you, Silas."

The next thing Luna did shocked everyone, especially her brother. She snatched the bag behind Silas and ran to the river close to Emery.

"People of the forest, please hear me. My name is Luna Quintins, I am the daughter of the richest merchant of the Vinta city, your neighbour. I know what you want." Luna put her hand in the bag and withdrew its content. She was holding a little animal by the ears. It was a silver-furred rabbit. The act put a stop to everyone involved, the Chrutin warriors trying to cross the river and the fight between Kastan and the bald huge man included.

"I only came here for my brother who had come here because of his love for our father who is sick. We have known about this rabbit's existence and how it could rejuvenate a person's body. We also know that this animal is sacred to you, hence, we are sorry that we have angered you all. But please, I beg you. We will give back the rabbit if you let me and my people go. If you kill us here, my father and the whole kingdom will come to bring fire upon the forest, but if you let us go and we, hereby, swear not to trespass your lands again."

Within just a couple of sentences, she was able to figure out what the other side wanted to happen and threatened them at the same time. This was Luna's speciality, since she was leading her father's businesses, her main skill was negotiation, In fact, this was the only way she could think of that could save herself and the people who had come with her. "So, what's your answer?"

Apparently though, none of the people in front of them answered as they looked at each other with confused faces. That was until an old man appeared behind the treeline they had exited from.

As the old man moved forward, the black and red furred wolf also moved with him. It appeared the wolf had been following his order from the start.

"Stone-dweller, most of the people here can't speak your language, but I can. I will accept the offer you have proposed that you'll release the poor creature and promise not to return. However, I have one more condition. You must give up that man who is responsible for the theft," said the old man.

Luna glanced at her brother, although he was an idiotic and a troublemaker, he was still her only sibling. She couldn't let him be taken.

"There must be something else we can do."

"You have no more say in the matter, stone-dweller. I need to uphold the way of our people. And that is to punish those who have done us wrong," said the old man.

Seeing the terrified face of her brother Luna answered "No! I can't accept that"

The old man gave a nod to the creature next to him and suddenly the huge wolf ran on its four heels with eyes set on Silas. However, it wasn't able to close the gap when a one handed young man blocked its way.

95 Indebted

Due to his stone skin spell, unexpected burst of speed and battle power of 24 (17), which roughly equated to three times the normal prowess of a warrior in terms of strength, speed and endurance, Emery received the upper hand in the bout against the fey creature, throwing it five paces away from him in the middle of the river. Although the wolf lost that round, it didn't appear hurt at all as it quickly stood with its four limbs.

It turned its ferocious gaze against Emery coupled with great snarling that reverberated inside the bones of the people listening. Somehow, it understood that if it wanted to accomplish the order it was given, it had to defeat this one handed human first.

Raising his sword, Emery dash toward to fight the giant wolf when Luna yelled, "Any other condition we will accept!"

Emery looked at her then the old man. He noticed that the old man was looking at him.

The old man answered, "Perhaps we can come to an agreement, Stone-dweller. I am interested in that person. If he wins, I'll let the thief live."

Emery stared at Luna who seemed to be in deep thought. Of course, anyone would find it difficult to believe that a human would be as strong as and be able to win against this terrible monster.

Luna said, "Merlin, if you can win the fight, the Quintin family will be indebted to you."

With a smile, Emery answered, "Okay, I'll count on it."

This time Emery took the initiative and proceeded to rush the giant wolf. He did a wide slash, making the wolf jump back a bit, and followed up with another swing. It was out of his expectation though that the wolf would jump to meet him and bite his sword. He pulled back his sword but it felt like it was stuck

inside a rock. He tried once more with a stronger force only for the wolf to chomp harder, finally breaking the sword in half.

Emery jumped back, but so did the wolf. He hastily called for the water element to execute whip splash, which he barely made on time, narrowly avoiding the sharp claw of the wolf. Once more he used the water to create a barrier between them.

With his sword gone, Emery thought about what else he could use. He wasn't about to fully commit to fighting this monster unarmed. Then, he spared a glance at the wolf, the expedition group, and the Chrutin warriors, wondering to himself if he should do that. Before he was able to make a decision though, the monster pounced on him again, he would've been able to dodge this, however, that moment of hesitation made him unable to dodge.

[Moon knife - tier 3]

Blood splashed on Emery's face as the wolf issued a yelp. Hearing how it had yelped, Emery's mind fell into disarray. He felt bad for having done so. He then stared at the black dagger and stabbed the dagger on the ground.

"What are you doing, Merlin?" shouted Luna from the back.

The action really shocked Luna and everyone around him, even the wolf itself seems surprised. He then stood still on the spot as the black and red giant wolf circled around him, seemingly waiting for the right moment to attack. The moment Emery slumped his shoulders, the wolf jumped, and he issued another spell.

As black smoke exited his palm, Emery jumped away. The dark cover though wasn't able to escape from the wolf's keen sense of smell, but no matter, that wasn't Emery's plan in the first place. He stopped debating whether to use it or not because it wasn't the time to hesitate.

Emery tapped into his legacy and underwent a magnificent transformation himself. His body became larger, grew fur, wolf-like ears as well as circular, wavy black markings on his body.

[Fey bloodline activated]

[Battle power increase 10 point]

[Battle power 34 (24)]

Emery now had the strength of five adults. He felt like he could crush a rock with just his bare hand.

The black smoke disappeared and everyone saw his transformation. Luna and her expedition group were shocked, but it couldn't compare against the Chrutin warriors watching from the side.

The old man's eyes appeared to gleam as well as the giant wolf. He gave another nod to the wolf and the beast responded with greater viciousness. Its speed now, however, couldn't compare to Emery who seemed to have disappeared and reappeared above it.

Emery landed on the beast's spine and proceeded to wrap his one arm around the giant wolf's neck. It struggled to break free but Emery strengthened his arm and after a few moments of thrashing around, the wolf stopped moving around, finally passing out.

Silence filled the atmosphere of the two opposing forces. Particularly the Chrutin warriors. Emery let go, when he was about to do a battle cry of victory however, he turned his gaze back at the wolf; the beast was no longer there. Instead, from where the wolf lay was a naked, unconscious young girl who looked to be around his age.

Emery removed his mantle and covered the girl's body. A moment later, his form started to become that of a normal human. He carried the girl on his shoulder, walked toward the old man and then gently laid her down.

The old man said, "Thank you for not hurting her."

The girl opened her eyes.

"How do you feel about losing for the first time, Morgana?" the old man said.

96 Morgana

At first, the forest people wanted to trade with them but as more interactions occurred, the greediness of humans happened and soon, the hundreds of tribes had found themselves with one foot beneath the grave due to the overpowering might of the people who lived on stones. The tribes then united under the leadership of a woman, which some said was a mythical creature, until they managed to drive back the invader of their lands.

The forest people lived in the Evernight Forest or more commonly known as Forbidden Forest by the people living in the seven kingdoms became one of the most infamous locations due to its harsh terrain, mysterious beasts, and savage inhabitants.

It was said that the light from the heavens could never penetrate its dense vegetation of towering trees, creeping grass, breathing bushes, amongst other things to bring illumination to its ever damp soil.

Many stories circled the people of the seven kingdoms on how the Forbidden Forest was a monster itself that devoured the wanderers who got lost in its bowels and if they who came back with their tales of monsters, barbaric inhabitants, moving trees and the like, got branded as people who became maddened by the forest's evil nature.

Depending on which side was asked though, the tale of the forest would become a different story.

The bushes and grasses swooshed as a black and red furred wolf chased a blurred silver light deeper into the forest's darkening woods. The wolf left great trails of large animalistic tracks on the ground wherein if a hunter found these paws, he or she would be able infer the size of the wolf to be twice that of an average man.

It, however, wasn't alone. Beside the great wolf were its pack of different colored wolves, brown, gray, and yellow. Then the black and red wolf stopped, it howled, causing the brown and gray wolf to go to the flank of their prey, the silver furred rabbit, in order to make it run in a straight line.

The silver furred rabbit did as its predators had predicted. However, with it hopping straight, it somewhat gained speed as it beelined toward a fallen tree. It went underneath the log and tried to change directions, but it never knew an ambush was waiting for it on the other side. A white wolf caught the silver furred rabbit with its mouth the moment the rabbit exited under the tree. The silver furred

rabbit was still alive but no matter how much struggling it did, it couldn't break free from the maw of the white wolf.

Night was fast descending upon them, so the pack went away with the silver rabbit.

They were about to enter a village where the warrior guarding nearby didn't seem to mind the fact that a pack of giant wolves was about to come into their midst. On the contrary, the guards seemed to treat the giant wolves with great respect as they bowed in greetings to the great pack of wolves. That wasn't surprising though because the local residents of this place was called their village Felaenalion, home of the forest people and fey creatures.

The village didn't appear anything like the human villages in the seven kingdoms. The places of residences where the people lived were made out of hide, makeshift wood, and the tents and huts were scattered everywhere without a clear pattern. Some residences were also situated on the huge branches of the tall trees with wooden ladders coiled around the tree trunks, hence, enabling the village to house around more than a thousand residents.

Finally, the pack of giant wolves arrived, welcomed by about a hundred of the villagers with great clapping and shouting after seeing the silver furred rabbit in the maws of the white wolf in the middle.

The red and black furred wolf went inside of one of the tents first followed by the white wolf and then the rest. Once they were inside, they began to transform into that of a human woman before proceeding to pick up the clothes that had been prepared on the ground.

"Sister Morgana, thank you," said one of the girls holding the silver furred rabbit on her hand. She placed the rabbit tight into one of the hide bags before she jumped and hugged the red haired girl, Morgana.

Morgana didn't say anything as she simply smiled and patted the back of the girl with pale white hair.

"Ahh, the hunt is always enjoyable whenever sister Morgana leads us," said a girl with an amber hair.

"Agree, agree," said a girl with hazel hair.

"Now that we have the silver rabbit, you can finally be officially ordained as the fifth member of our pack, Glita. Ah, I wish I could experience that ceremony for me again, but anyway, I'm so happy you," said the gray haired girl to the girl with white hair.

"Thank you so much, really, everyone," said Glita, holding up the bag, which stored the silver rabbit.

Although these five girls called each other sisters, they were not related by blood, rather they were girls chosen from the many tribes that inhabited this forest and raised together as sisters by the head priestess of the forest people. The young ladies' ages ranged between fourteen to eighteen but the most respected from them wasn't the oldest, instead it was Morgana.

Her four sisters looked up to her because she held the most charisma between them, as well as being the strongest and fastest among the pack. Hence, her being of the pack was cemented in stone and none of the other fey wolves dared challenge her authority.

The girls were selected by the high priestess because they had shown signs of one particular unique trait since birth; they carried the legacy of the Mother Earth. From a young age, they were able to transform

parts of themselves into a beast and the moment they were able to fully transform into the wolf, it also meant they had matured. And if that happened, a ceremony would take place as recognition of their unique ability.

"Morgana, the High Priestess said you are to follow the chief tonight," said the grey haired girl.

"Then does that mean you'll not be able to join the ceremony?" said Glita, disappointed.

She was silent for a while before answering, "It is the will of the High Priestess, I must comply."

She then exited the tent and proceeded to head to the center of the forest where the chief lived nearby.

Morgan and her sisters were part of the priestess faction. Their objective was to understand and convey the will of mother nature led by the High Priestess. Aside from them was another group called the Akavi Warriors.

These Akavi Warriors were all male members from various tribes who also had a gift similar to Morgana and her sisters, but instead of being able to transform into a beast, the males received increased strength which was evident by the black markings on their bodies. The more marking they had, the more powerful they were. Hence, the forest people call them the protector of the forest.

There was also one more faction, but it was more of a leadership instead of a faction. They were the elders of the tribes, they ran the day to day living of the people, managed disputes of the locals, set what production should be focused on such as food, clothing, etc. but most importantly, their main task was to lead the forest people.

Morgana, being a member of the priestess faction, was adored by the people due to not only being the strongest fey wolf, but she had proved her physical prowess in a human form against the male members of the warrior faction. She was in good relation with the elders as well, since the strong belief of the people, including the elders, from the High Priestess transferred over to all the members of the priestess faction.

She found it quite odd though why the High Priestess had ordered her to follow the chief tonight. In fact, Morgana wanted to attend her sister's important day, but instead she was given a task to follow the chief who would be soon making patrol in the forest for any outsiders that may have lost their way. Nevertheless, she placed that thought in the back of her mind, because to follow the High Priestess was to follow the will of Mother Nature and she shouldn't question that.

Now that she was out on patrol with the Akavi Warriors, a sudden news arrived from one of the Akavi Warriors from the village.

"The silver rabbit was taken by an outsider!" said an Akavi Warrior.

"What? How is that possible?" exclaimed Morgana as she immediately transformed and began tracking the thief who stole her sister's silver rabbit. Finally she found the thief, but among the thief's group, was a young man whom her blood immediately boiled the moment her eyes laid vision on him.

The young man had one arm, a thin body, and was not tall. However, she had seen him fight multiple members of the warrior-guard faction and defeat all of them. He had also used magic, which reminded her of the High Priestess.

She wasn't exactly sure what to make of it, but when she was blocked by him on the river and received a nod from the chief to fight the young man, it felt like her whole body was burning not from rage, rather from excitement, as if she wanted to prove against this young man that she was on top, that she was the alpha.

She proceeded to fight him and during their fight, she finally understood why her blood was boiling this whole time. She was like him, a fey who could transform. However, how could that be? All the males with the same gift had no such abilities. And in that moment though, her recklessness became her demise as the young man managed to jump on her and things became blurry. The next thing she knew, she was wearing the young man's mantle and awoke. The young man had changed back to his human form as well and was standing before the chief.

97 The Village

The old man nodded with a smile. He turned to the Chrutin warriors and said in a foreign language, "Engle canne gelaefa!(They can leave!)"

Without any hesitations, all the warriors near the river retreated to the Forbidden Forest's treeline except for the huge bald man with a great number of dark markings on his body. He didn't move until the old man repeated his order with greater force. The huge bald man clenched his axe one last time before walking with gritted teeth, stepping near the treeline.

The second instance the old man had spoken in the foreign language, Emery belatedly noticed he could understand the language of the forest people. He had never heard or learned this foreign language before, but he guessed it was because of the symbol on his hands similar to how he had suddenly understood the language of all people from the Magus Academy despite coming from different planets and cultural backgrounds. Emery initially opened his mouth wanting to speak, however, he withheld himself back feeling it wasn't necessary to say anything since this could be handy in certain situations.

Once the Chrutin warriors were at a distance, Luna and her faithful bodyguard Kastan stepped forward to speak with the old man. First, she looked over the bag that contained for a good few seconds before hesitantly handing it over. She said, "With this, our deal has come to a conclusion."

"Yes," said the old man, taking back the silver furred rabbit. "You may leave now and keep your promise to never return."

Luna, however, didn't leave.

"Is there something else?" asked the old man.

She said, "Could you please, allow us to look for survivors."

The old man gave her a look from head to toe before saying, "I'll allow it, but you only have until dawn to leave. Also, I'll have some of my warriors accompany you."

"Thank you," answered Luna. Her eyes kept glancing on the hide bag and mutteringly said, "A-about the silver rabbit..."

"No, Stone-dweller. You should go now," the old man said. The tone he used though wasn't angry, instead he sounded like the figure of authority that he was.

Luna let out a big sigh and said, "Merlin, let's leave."

The old man stomped his wooden staff on the ground and said, "This young man is not leaving."

Luna looked as if she wanted to raise an objection. However, Emery gave her glance and shook his head. With that, she backed down and said, "Merlin... if you want, we can still—"

"I'll be fine, don't worry. Also, I would like to talk with them as well. I don't think they have any malicious intent," said Emery, striking a glance at the old man and Morgana still keeping quiet on the ground.

Again, the old man tapped the ground with his staff, turned at Emery and said, "Merlin isn't it? My name is Brennus, The High Priestess would like to meet you. Let it be known that we are honored to welcome you into our village."

After that, the two opposing groups parted ways. The old man Brennus delegated some of his warriors to watch the expedition group from the distance and a single warrior to go with the expedition group and search for any other survivors who might still be alive.

At first, the Chrutin warriors and Luna's expedition group seemed as if they were about to clash again, however, with the authority of the head figures, Luna and the old man, the hostility was dispelled.

Luna's expedition group took the path in which they had come from while Emery took a different path following the old man.

As they walked through the dark forest guided by the light of heavenly bodies in silence, Emery's gaze fell on the girl with the red hair whom he had fought earlier. She hadn't spoken a word nor made any small noises as she just simply tightly wrapped his mantle around her body. And now that he had thought about it, he had no idea where they were taking him, so Emery took this opportunity to break the cold silence by making small talk.

"Morgana, that's your name right?"

She didn't reply and continued walking.

"My name by the way is Emery—" Emery placed a hand in his mouth. His moment of weird familiarity with these forest people made him slip out his actual name. He stopped fixating on his careless blunder, which still didn't issue any response from the girl called Morgana. He then looked straight and said, "I guess you don't understand a word I'm saying."

In the corner of his eyes, the girl looked at him for a moment then said, "I do..."

"Oh, so you can speak and understand me. That's good, so where are we heading?" Emery replied.

The girl was silent again, however.

"you don't speak much do you?," said Emery.

"I do," answered Morgana.

"..."

From the looks of it, Emery felt like this girl was a bit weird. She walked in confidence, but didn't seem to talk much. Or maybe just because she doesn't like him much.

He was about to say something when his eyes took notice of what looked like the most beautiful sight he had ever seen. He stood frozen in place. Brennus and Morgana led the way and stepped on log, which emitted a glow of light; the leaves of various shaped plants seemed glowed with wondrous bluish and green lights, providing a warm atmosphere.

He tested if the log would also do the same if stepped on it and indeed it did, a light rippled underneath him. Moving his other feet forward, it repeated the same thing, sending waves of joy at the spectacular sight.

Not being able to hold his curiosity any longer, he went up to what appeared to be a vine that was emitting a violet glow and used a spell from his plant spirit to inspect what kind of plant it was.

[Universal Flora - activated - analyzing flora ...]

[Analyzation complete]

[Level 2 - Unidentified medicinal herb]

[Unknown properties]

[Register to database for ten contribution points?]

"Yes!" exclaimed to himself. The first plant he checked was already a level two unique plant. And looking at the plant next to the vine, the one he had checked was just one of the many variations it had. It seemed that the forbidden forest was a great place for him to find unique plants. So, he couldn't wait to want to use fragmentation on these plants one by one and know more about their properties.

He became caught up in his world but immediately got pulled out of it as he noticed the stares of the villagers as well as Morgana and the old man. Letting out a great heave of air from his lungs, he took control of his excitement and proceeded to walk behind them.

Brennus continued walking as the rest of the other warriors that had accompanied them disbanded except for the huge bald one and Morgana still walking beside him as they went deeper into the forest area. Eventually, they arrived in front of a cave that had two tall men holding spears and had a lot of black markings plastered on their bodies, which seemed to be no less than the amount of markings of the bald man beside Emery.

"Greetings, Honored Chief. The High Priestess is conducting the ritual as of the moment," respectfully said one of the guards.

"I am aware. The High Priestess is expecting us," answered the old man who was apparently their chief.

"Understood," said one of the two tall men as they let the party through.

Based on this interaction, although this chief seemed to be the acting leader of the forest people or at least the warriors, the high priestess' position appeared to command more authority and respect than him. And before they went in, Old man Brennus asked Emery to leave his weapon as they were about to

enter a sacred place. The bald one had already handed over his weapon, so Emery didn't have an issue in doing the same.

The cave was also filled with glowing mushrooms and moss, and Emery noticed that it was a bit damp. The tunnel wasn't long as well, and when they neared the exit, Emery noticed the interior of the upcoming chamber was lit with a bright light and a faint singing entered his ears.

When they exited, that was where Emery saw a giant tree standing in the land at the center of the cave's chamber surrounded by a lake. The roots on the ground and the hanging roots of the giant tree glowed beautifully, including the grasses around it. There were a couple of rootlike-bridges on top of the lake and beneath the towering tree were dozens of women sitting in a circle formation touching the backs of each one with one hand as they sang in uniform.

In the middle of the circle were two people; a young girl with long white hair and a beautiful fair-skinned, half-naked woman covered only by what appeared to be leaves.

The beautiful woman said, "Geita unc nu bearnlest, Gaia."

98 Lady of the Lake

While Emery, Morgana, and Brennus stood at the entrance waiting, the chanting became stronger, urged by the lady dressed in leaves, as it echoed in the whole cave. The group of women started waving their bodies as another woman made her way inside the circle and handed over the silver furred rabbit to the white haired girl. The white haired girl then presented it to the giant tree before the woman dressed in leaves and struck its head.

Emery fell into a trance at what appeared to be a holy ritual where the beautiful flawless skinned woman dressed in leaves welcomed the white haired girl after the rabbit had been sacrificed. As he observed them in a transfixed state, the white haired girl emitted the same sense of familiarity similar to Morgana and the warriors with the black markings. However, the feeling of familiarity in his guts became stronger as his gaze fell on the woman dressed in leaves, it was like as if she was family.

After the leaf-dressed woman blessed the girl with white hair, the singing started to fade and the waving of the women became weaker. Soon enough, everything came to a stop and all the women who were sitting, stood and exited the tunnel in silence, leaving only the woman dressed in leaves and the girl with white hair before the giant tree.

Once there were only the five of them left inside the cave's chamber, the white haired girl stood, walked barefooted on the root bridge and hugged Morgana with a slight jump.

Brennus, the old man, took one step forward, bowed and said with a solemn voice, "High Priestess, I have brought the young man you have requested."

This was the biggest question Emery had in mind. Why was he singled out in the earlier encounter and what was this feeling of connection between him and the people living here, especially from the woman sitting beneath the giant tree?

She then opened her eyes and looked directly at him. A warm and gentle whisper reverberated in his head. It said, "I have been waiting for you. Come here."

It looked like he wasn't the only one whom she had asked to come closer. Morgana, the white haired girl, and Brennus bowed at the same time as they crossed the root bridge in order with Emery being the last person to step on the root bridge. As he walked on it, he couldn't help but wonder if she could also speak to the black dragon, read his thoughts, or knew the existence of the black dragon inside him. Still, Killgragah hadn't spoken, so it was probably asleep again.

The ground trembled and the lake's water rippled; a huge shadow peeked behind the tree and revealed itself. As big as a house, a brown bear with countless green spikes on its back took a seat beside the High Priestess. No longer speaking to his mind, her lips moved as she said, "Let me introduce you to Artio, the Guardian of Gaia."

The bear roared, making Morgana, the white haired girl and Brennus simultaneously kneel. Emery was also affected by the enormous pressure the gigantic bear had conveyed through its deafening roar, however, he kept his head straight and stood his ground, barely standing however. He wasn't about to just kneel because something powerful had put pressure on him. No.

Contrary to his expectations though, Nimue let out a smile not a bit offended while the bear quietly stayed still beside her. She said, "I am sure you have many questions, Emery."

"Yes, High Priestess. The first question I have in my mind is how do you know my name?" asked Emery, still shaking on his legs.

"You were mentioned to me by your mother, Vivian. In fact, she was a priestess and my niece. However, she had fallen in love with a warrior from the world outside. It was regretful that we have lost her, but destiny had allowed it to happen, hence, it is what it is," answered Nimue with no hint of hatred or anger in her voice.

Emery had put the pieces together that his mother was similar to Morgana and he was related to them in some way or something. He had deduced that from the information whenever he transformed, just like how the symbol on his hand had identified Morgana to be a Fey creature. However, this confirmation only showed how much he didn't know about his own lineage.

More questions started popping in his head as he wanted to know more about himself and his mother, but he didn't know where to start. Starting to get confused on what questions he should be asking, he went back to one of the earlier questions he had. Emery said, "Then, what am I?"

Nimue stayed silent for a while before answering, "That is what interests me too, Emery. I have witnessed many of my male clan members be born with the same power of the females, the power of transforming oneself into our ancestor's image in my time. However, the power was too strong for the males to handle, so they were not able to live past fifteen years of age because their body started deteriorating from such a young age.

"Unfortunately, it was the same situation for the maleborns when my sisters copulated with the locals of the forest. Fortunately, in our desperate times, we were able to find a way and turn the blood of our ancestors into the black markings in a male's body such as the one from Chief Brennus. I wonder, what makes you special..."

Nimue then waved her hand, creating green blobs of light, hovering around Emery. At first Emery became wary and readied himself, but the green lights simply circled him before going back to Nimue and disappeared.

"Hmm... there's something inside you, but I can't tell what it is. That must be your good fortune as to why you were able to activate our ancestral power and lived past fifteen years. I'd very much like to know what it is but Gaia asks me not to pry further," said Nimue.

Luckily, she had misinterpreted it. Indeed the spatial space of Khaos and the black dragon, Killgragah were inside him and she was talking about them, however, Emery knew his first good fortune came from the Magus Academy. Nevertheless, it was better for the High Priestess to misinterpret it since he wasn't allowed to speak of the academy anyway.

"Come closer," said Nimue.

Emery had no reason to reject, so he did.

She gave him a lovingly stare and said, "You look like your mother..."

Nimue then touched Emery's shoulder that had the missing arm and chanted. A warm sensation filled his right shoulder before it vibrated and out came a root like from the tip of the scar. It grew and grew until it was at the same length of his other arm before finally twisting itself and forming a hand. For a moment it was still the color of wood, but when he moved it, it turned to his skin's color and when he moved it, it felt like he hadn't lost his arm.

"Think of it as your coming home present," said Nimue, smiling.

Emery waved it around with his eyes beaming. He was so grateful to her that he gave her a bow and said, "Thank you very much! High Priestess!"

Nimue chuckled. "I am sure you still have other questions, so feel free to ask and stay with us for as long as you like."

Still not raising his head, once again he exclaimed, "Your generosity is truly appreciated."

After that, Nimue mentioned she needed to rest, so Emery and the others left the cave. Brennus, the Chief of the village, guided him to a tent near his personal tent and left not long after.

When Emery lay down on his bed made out of wood, Killgragah finally spoke. "Hmm. I didn't expect there would be a magus in this world."

"You sure kept quiet earlier, huh," Emery replied.

"That's because I'm considering whether to show myself or not," retorted the black dragon.

"Yeah, even when she spoke in my mind you didn't speak. Were you able to hear her?" Emery asked, sitting up his bed.

"I heard her, I'm not talking about that chick. I was referring to the tree behind her. She called the tree, Gaia. It's only faint but I can feel that Gaia is as strong as Khaos, so imagine my surprise. Anyway, this is a

wonderful discovery. As for the place of power, I can say with certainty it's not in this place since the one here is already occupied. But there should be one more nearby, east of here," said Killgrahah.

"Okay, I'll see it tomorrow. For now, I need to get some sleep," answered Emery.

New places, new plants, new people. He couldn't wait to explore more once he had awoken for the next day.

99 The Fey Sisters

After an hour of practice, he realized he could use both left and right arms with the same level of expertise. An idea then came up in his mind, what if he used two swords on both arms, would that be a good idea? He had never heard of any knights or any warriors using two swords, doing so might be good. Hence, he decided to check that out once he returned to the Magus Academy.

Finishing his practice, a red haired girl approached him from the front. It was Morgana, the person whom he had fought last night in the form of a wolf. Emery laid down the long twig beside his tent and said, "Good morning, Morgana, right?"

She was silent again and only gave a gesture to follow her, making him think she was still mad for losing to him last night. No matter, Emery followed her as requested and arrived at the largest tent he had seen in this village so far. Morgana walked straight to the large table that at least ten people could dine on.

"Seat," said Morgana, watching him.

As Emery stood confused in the entrance, a girl with brown hair tied into two halves approached the table, looked at him from top to toe and said to Morgana, "Is that him?"

Morgana nodded.

The girl with the brown hair then walked up to Emery and said, "Hello, my name is Tyra, the eldest of my sisters. I'm glad you could join us for breakfast."

Tyra then pointed at the table where three other girls were already sitting. Emery recognized one of the girls, a girl with white hair from last night's ceremony who had hugged Morgana after everyone had left.

As he made his way to seat, the girl with the white hair got up from her chair and started sniffing him.

"You smell nice, mister," said the girl with white hair, startling Emery.

"Glita, don't be rude," exclaimed Morgana to the girl with white hair. She then turned to Emery and said, "Please don't mind her."

She then gestured to the two other girls seated and said, "These are Lilith and Leilith. They're twins."

Emery was quite surprised that Morgana was taking the initiative to talk. He had tried to get her to speak last night and earlier, barely getting any responses, but when the topic was about her sisters, she was different.

"Go ahead and take a seat, I'll serve breakfast in a bit," said Tyra, walking away.

"Don't flatter yourself, they are curious about you. After all, you're the first male able to transform," said Morgana with her arms crossed.

"Wait, so all of you can?" Emery said with eyes widened in disbelief.

"Brother Emery, can you show us your transformation?" exclaimed Glita, her hands clasped together.

"Who are you calling, brother?" said Morgana, she had her brows furrowed.

"Well... The Lady of the Lake told us we are sort of related. I hope I haven't offended brother Emery, have I?" Glita answered looking at Emery with a worried expression.

Emery shook his head and said, "Okay, later I'll show you."

Tyra set down the food on the table. They were mostly cooked meat and some were boiled vegetables. The rest of the young girls started eating with their bare hands, making Emery feel awkward. Then he realized, although it was a bit late, that there weren't any utensils, it'd be weird now to ask for any of the sort since they probably didn't have any specialized craftsman or it wasn't at the top of the list of priorities.

Anyway, Emery decided to try it with bare hands and as he ate, he wasn't sure if it was him or the people chatting beside him happily or eating with just hands made the food exceptionally tasty despite the meal looking so plain and simple. Truth to be told, he wasn't feeling hungry this morning because as his spirit force and battle power increased, it made him less dependent on resting and eating. He was getting a bit of sustenance from the elements albeit minute. But of course there were multitude other reasons why a person would eat food other than filling the stomach.

Glita suddenly said, "Brother Emery! Do you like the food? Sister Tyra is our best cook here. Don't you think she's the best candidate as a mate?"

Emery nodded. He said, "Indeed her food is great... wait... did you say mate?"

"Glita! You are not supposed to say that!" said Tyra, her cheeks turning as red as the meat.

Glita, however, ignored her older sister's remark and continued, "Brother Emery, what are you looking for in a mate? We have eldest sister Tyra, a great cook; sister Morgana, the strongest; Lilith and Leilith are the fastest; and me, the prettiest?"

Emery started laughing nervously when Morgana's chair suddenly groaned as she stood up. She grabbed his arm and pulled him out of the tent.

"T-thanks," said Emery. He breathed out, feeling she had just saved him from such awkward and sudden questioning from Glita.

Morgan had her back facing against him and said, "What do you wish to do today? The High Priestess told me to accompany you wherever you want to go."

"Oh, you don't have to. I can—"

"No, the High Priestess has given me her command, so I have to fulfill it," Morgana interjected adamantly.

Emery could tell from her tonality that no amount of arguing would work. So, he said, "Okay. Then, I'd like to take a walk around the forest. To the east, perhaps."

"That's not fair, sister Morgana. You want to keep brother Emery only to yourself," said Glita, exiting the tent with a grin. She added, "We want to join too."

"It's better to go in a pack than alone," said Tyra. The two twins nodded in silence.

Emery looked first at Morgana who still had her face away from him before looking at the other four and saying, "Alright."

The five girls went back inside the tent and when they came out, they were already in their Fey form. Five giant wolves twice the size of a normal man. They walked out of the village with all eyes on them but not a single villager had a look of fear in their eyes, instead it was admiration.

They started heading east of the village and once they had found a small clearing, Emery tapped into his bloodline and transformed into a half-beast, half-human. He had wolf-like ears, small fangs, hairs on his face, chest, arms and a bit on the legs. The black wave-like markings, similar to the Chrutin warriors, were all over his whole body.

The white wolf, Glita, once again sniffed him. He backed away when her voice suddenly resounded in his mind.

"Brother Emery, you really smell just like us!" said Glita in her wolf form, her tail wagging.

"Let's go," said a stern voice that was clearly Morgana's.

In that afternoon, they ran together around the Forbidden Forest. The wolves were on all four while he ran on two feet. Despite running with only two limbs like a human, Emery was still able to keep up with Morgana, Tyra and Glita except against the twin sisters, Lilith and Leilith whose speed looked like a blur.

Emery couldn't help but feel joy rising from his heart. He was bonding with people whom he shared his bloodline with. And as more time passed, the sense of being able to feel their presence even when they were far away and spoke telepathically grew stronger. Eventually, he was picking up some of their habits and an information popped in his mind.

[Fey Bloodline Innate Skill learned]

[Wild Hunt]

[Increases the sense of hearing and smelling in tracking a prey]

This ability was shared among the pack, which strengthened the success rate whenever they hunted. It could be used when alone or in a pack.

They went further east of the forbidden forest until they finally stopped before a hill where there were gigantic stones arranged in a circle on the ground. Some of the stones were on top of two stones, making Emery wonder how could such a thing have been built. And it was at that moment when Killgragah's voice sounded in his mind.

"This is the place, kid!"

100 Warrior Trial

He stepped closer thinking to himself how was this possible; the stones looked so mighty and heavy that he could only imagine someone like Killgragah, a mythical dragon, would be able to move something like this. However, the bigger question was, what was the purpose of these stones?

As if Tyra had heard his thoughts, she walked up beside him and spoke directly through his mind, "According to the High Priestess, this was an old shrine. But how and when it was made, were also the same questions she had because these rocks had been here even before they had settled in the forest."

He gave a nod and proceeded to walk up the hill and touch the stone. Once he confirmed that the five girls in wolves' form were out of sight, Emery tried to contact Killgragah.

"Can you hear me?" Emery asked.

Killgragah voiced his thoughts to Emery. "Yes, kid. Good. This is the place. There is something that I'll need you to do."

"Okay, but let's do it later. I'll come back when it's dark," replied Emery in his head.

"The quicker the better. Don't make me wait too long!" answered Killgragah.

After spending a good few minutes touching the rocks and walking underneath some stones that had another stone on top of it, he went back at the foot of the hill and asked the rest of the girls to guide him back at the village.

The moment he walked in at the village, however, the group of the warriors he had fought with last night as well as a dozen others were waiting in front of his tent. The huge bald man who had battled with Kastan stepped forward, raised his axe and declared, "Outsider! We, the Akavi Warriors, do not welcome you as one of us! Come and prove to us you are trustworthy!"

Shouting erupted as the dozens of warriors struck their wooden shields.

The five girls had gone to their tents first and when they got back, they were already wearing clothes. They went up to Emery and Morgana said, "This is the Akavi Warriors trial. You don't have to prove yourself to them since the High Priestess already considers you as part of us."

The eldest sister, Tyra, said, "Morgana, don't tell you're worried he'll take your title of the strongest, are you?"

Morgana turned to her and answered, "No, but I find this trial to be unnecessary and silly."

"Outsider! What say you?" challenged the huge bald man while waving his axe that split the air.

"So you're not a coward, outsider," said the bald man with a grin.

The rule of the trial was simple. Emery, the challenger, would stand in the middle of the circle that the Akavi Warriors formed in the center of the village. Those who wished to challenge Emery may step forward for a one on one duel. This would continue until no warriors from the Akavi group steps forward or Emery falls unconscious.

Emery readied himself and raised the two swords on his hand, one of the front while the other overhead. The first warrior approached holding an axe.

There was no signal when they should start but since the warrior was already circling him, Emery took the initiative and dashed to swing his swords.

It felt weird for Emery using the swords to block and attack at the same time, this was his first time doing this after all. As more exchanges occurred between them though, he was getting used to swinging the swords from different angles, which barely left room for the first warrior to block. Eventually, the first warrior surrendered, cementing the first victory for Emery.

The next man Emery would fight was a spear and shield user. He decided to take this one more cautiously because the spear had a longer reach. His opponent struck the first blow this time, forcing Emery to be on the defense this time. Although the opponent was using a spear, each strike behind it had a heavy weight that was much stronger than all the fighters he had encountered. Still, Emery just needed one opportunity to close the distance.

Spear was a staple weapon because of its long reach, however, its strength was also its weakness. Soon enough, Emery parried the warrior's spear and knocked the enemy down by crashing himself at the enemy's shield before he pointed the sword at his enemy's throat.

"Wow! Brother Emery is so strong!" cheered Glita from the sidelines. That, however, attracted more enmity from the warriors around him. He had been so focused on what was in front of him that he hadn't realized the village's center had been filled with spectators both old and young. The village's chief, Brennus was also there but didn't say anything as he continued watching.

He could see from the spectators' eyes they were curious about his strength while these Akavi Warriors still emitted malicious intent. Nevertheless, Emery thought this was still necessary in order to gain their trust. After all, he was indeed an outsider, he had been raised not from here, even though he shared the same blood with these people.

The bout continued, Emery defeated the third, the fourth, and after he defeated the fifth warrior, his arms were starting to stiffen.

He waved his arms, trying to shake off the unpleasant feeling when Morgana stepped in and said, "That's enough. The trial is only supposed to last three duels at most. He has proven himself already."

"He is an outsider, he must prove himself!" shouted the bald man.

"This is not right, Cavvi! Chief Brennus, please ask the Akavi Warriors to back down. He already had en—
"

Before she was able to complete her sentence, Emery patted her on the shoulder and said, "I'm still okay."

"Did you hear that? The outsider says he's still fine, let's continue!" declared Cavvi, the huge bald man.

Morgana gritted her teeth and went back to where his sisters were watching.

The sixth warrior stepped in and Emery readied himself once more. He very much would like to transform right now but as a respect to tradition, he decided against it and held himself back from using

any spells. He convinced himself this was a good experience in improving his fighting skills and a great opportunity to know what his limits were.

After defeating the sixth warrior, Emery got on one knee and gasped to catch his breath. Some of his sweat was burning his eyes and he felt like hot air was exiting all over his body. This was probably his limit, he believed, but he had to make for one more push. He raised his head and sword and pointed it at the person named Cavvi. But to his surprise, the bald man simply grinned and sent another of his allies to fight him.

The seventh warrior charged and attacked relentlessly without giving Emery a moment of rest. It was a one sided bout, fortunately, Emery still managed to find a weakness at the seventh warrior's attack pattern and he exploited it. And with that, Emery claimed the seventh victory.

He then stabbed his two swords on the ground, trying to support himself. His arms and legs were shaking, throat as dry as a drought, and the feeling of hot air exiting body earlier now felt like a blazing flame inside him. Emery's vision was blurring and his hearing was starting to emit the buzzing sound.

He could barely lift his head but Morgana's voice still entered his ears.

"Cavvi! You are shameless! Fight him at his best!" Morgana screamed.

Based on that, he understood that the huge bald warrior had stepped forward. Forcing himself to stand up with one of the swords as the support, indeed that warrior with the most black markings on his body was making his way forward.

Emery closed his eyes first and breathed in a large amount of air to collect himself. The pounding of heart was reaching his ears but after exhaling all he had taken in, he felt a bit better. Readying himself for his last fight, he grabbed the two swords and waited for Cavvi to come closer.