

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

16 Wild night 4

End of the fight. Power-ups, but don't expect anything incredible and xianxia-like (cough cough, Meng Hao in ISSTH, cough cough).

He was entirely focused on his act, not looking anymore, not hearing anymore, not thinking anymore, not feeling anymore. He kept pouring out his magic, waiting for anything to come. And when something came, it was both expected and not. Expected, because he already had managed to call for a God, even though it was through divinity in a statue. And unexpected, because he got way more than he asked for, four Gods manifesting their consciousness at once to watch over the fight.

They could only watch, and so as if a silent decision had been agreed upon, they began pulling on Oakbud's power, taking it as their own to make the most of the occasion. Oakbud could feel their general intentions, Theomars wanted to win, Kali wanted to resolve, Eludia wanted to have fun, and Monte wanted to reward.

The Goddess of Luck was the first to act, using the power she drew to close off the area of the maelstrom, creating an arena in which to fight. Then the Warrior God used his share to Bless his two devotees, choosing an appropriate power to give them an edge. At the same time, Kali chose to create a link with Thani and passed her knowledge on her powers, a boon only her Child was meant to have. And finally, Monte took the rest of what magic Oakbud had spent, and used it to restore the fighters entirely, then have the arena bend to them.

The fight was reset with new powers, new strength, and the earth itself at their back to arrive at a resolution. They could not miss, could not trip, and could not stop. They would be tested on whether they could adapt to the divine intervention or not.

Jamie, Frond and Thani felt the vortex around them solidify, and energy invade them, forcing them to stop for a short moment. In addition to being healed, the warriors felt themselves receive their second blessing, winning the approval of their God through their fight. The energy they usually stocked in their limbs to augment their explosive power could now be projected outwards, granting them greater reach and a new means

of attacking. Their own intelligence would decide how powerful and ingenious its use would be.

Thani had no wound to heal, but her fatigue was relieved and her magic refilled. She felt Kali at her side. Her Goddess had enough borrowed magic to whisper three words into her ears, infused with power and knowledge : Body, Heart, Mind. As information flowed into her brain, the understanding she had of her own blessings reached the limit of what mortals could fathom.

There was no wind anymore, and they felt as if the earth moved under each of their steps to best accommodate them. What happened they did not know, but they would end their fight before asking themselves why.

Action sparked simultaneously on both sides.

Jamie threw a punch straight ahead, way out of reach, and Frond rushed at Thani. The air burst in front of his hand, trying to create an aimed shockwave in order to disrupt their enemy. They had gained reach and the capacity for disruption in addition to their strength. Under themselves through the legs to accelerate or rupture the ground, through the arms in order to attack directly or even deflect projectiles or push people back. The possibilities were endless.

At the other end of the vortex, the two animated arm tattoos crawled back on Thani's chest and connected to the mark of the heart on her left breast, before bursting out again, maintaining a fine thread of blood between them still. Now they almost had a mind of their own, becoming another pair of multi-faceted limbs to do her bidding instead of tools. She also began accelerating her blood flow consciously, taxing her organism heavily to fight at higher capacity. However for her the risks were inexistent, her regeneration fixing any harm done instantly.

Life and death were determined in the first clash. The air blast had lost a lot of power through the distance and only ruffled Thani's hair. Frond had his greatsword at the ready and crushed the ground with magic on his penultimate step, making her lose balance before following up with a heavy slash.

Thani let herself fall a bit to the side, regaining balance by pulling onto the incoming blade with a tattoo. Using the momentum of his charge, her other tattoo whipped his legs off the ground while her hands blurred and cut at his knees and wrists before he could react. The effort left her sword- and dagger-wielding arms trembling, but at least she had taken one out of the fight. The fatigue would be gone in a few seconds anyway, while any injury they took would last.

She didn't have enough time to recuperate and reset her stance before eating another air blast, this time powerful enough to send her skidding across the ground. Her tattoos managed to bash the incoming sword down in the nick of time to avoid losing her head, instead taking a crippling injury to the left leg. Jamie followed up with a kick to the stomach, sending her flying. Thani slammed against the vortex, which dragged her around a bit and made her cough blood from the hits.

Her thigh was almost lopped off, and she couldn't move the leg anymore. Her regeneration, accelerated forcefully, had already begun mending the wound, but it wasn't something she could heal in less than a few hours. She used one of her tattoos as an exoskeleton instead, choosing to continue the fight with a handicap.

As she faced Jamie's charge, Thani's free tattoo raked the earth to make a dust cloud, cutting vision. However it was instantly dispersed by an air blast, and his piercing eyes were locked on hers again. Her mind had cleared in the meantime, and she focused on her blessing of emotions. The words Body and Heart let her understand how the Goddess herself used the arts of Blood, but the word Mind made her discover that her emotion sensing had also been reinforced before and could work both ways.

She chose to show him the pain of almost losing her leg a few seconds ago, making him fall down and add his wails to Frond's who was squirming helplessly on the ground. His charge was broken, and the initiative was back in Thani's hands. During the time it took Jamie to get back up and check the pain had no associated injury, she was already inside his preferred greatsword range. He repelled the tattoo coming at his face strongly with a magic-covered hand, sending it flying far away, and jumped back to get his ideal spacing again.

"Every hit you give me from now on, you will also feel in full."

"But it won't break me! And when you die... I will only feel the achievement and grace of my God."

"How about self-inflicted injuries then? Do you see all the scars I bear? Let's see you bear them too, AND ALL AT ONCE! AHAHA~~~~~" Thani herself didn't know if it was possible, but it was a bluff, and so she made a show of closing her eyes to focus.

Jamie took the bait and rushed at her before she could complete her spell. He knew his mind would shut down under so much pain at once, the phantom leg pain still fresh in his mind. In his precipitation, he forgot her regeneration, and that because of it not all the wounds she took had left a scar. He also forgot that she could feel Frond's current pain and Gramor's despair.

He howled, feeling the fresh stomach pain of the previous wound left on both Felicity and Thani, but his charge didn't stop. She opened her eyes, and ran her thumb across

her neck. He could feel it too, and fear crept up as he imagined her doing the same with her dagger. He swung his two-handed greatsword, preparing a magic blast to break off the exchange afterwards, but was interrupted by pain in his wrists and knees. He lost his footing, and saw Thani slice her eyes with her dagger while a wave of anguish hit.

He couldn't restrain himself this time, and dropped his sword to grab at his intact eyes, almost crying from the accumulated pain.

"Too bad you never learned to shield your mind with magic, I guess? Send my regards to Theomars."

The last thing he saw before dying was Thani's thin smile under her already healed eyes. Her weapon ran across his neck, putting an end to the fighting. She sat down, and her tattoo released her leg to carry the weapon. She immediately stopped overfueling her body, almost fainting from the stress, and laid on her back. Thani only maintained enough magic to let the tattoo carry her sword to finish off Frond on the ground, Gramor through the visor of his helmet, and back to her arm. Her magic ran out as her second tattoo finally managed to come back after being sent flying off.

She was void of any energy, incapable of moving while bleeding out from an almost-sectioned left leg. But she won. "Told you I'd be alright."

AUTHOR'S EXTENDED NOTE : Remember that believers choose a path and can only discover it gradually, it is not their own creation, hence the possibility for quick but limited progress. Blessings may get overlapping enhancements, however some types have their own limits. Taking Dravin as example, shadows manipulation only has two levels : cloaking, then invisibility.

After that, it is the experience the user has and his understanding of the powers that counts. Jamie and Frond are pretty much brutish bird-brains, while Thani is accomplished but had overlooked many things before.

Note that some self-training like Mark to shield his mind would have made it possible for Thani to lose to Jamie. Yes she has versatility, but she lacks the power to land heavy enough blows, only able to win through trickery. Frond was caught unprepared by her new speed so it would have been useless, and Gramor knew how but couldn't shield his mind anymore under Oberon's curse.