

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

2 The Will of the God-Tree

When the Spirit took its first steps away from the tree, following a trail left by pilgrims, it began to feel something tug at itself... as it stepped further, now out of view, the feeling became more precise : it was hunger. But hunger for what? The only thing it had left was the leaf of the God-Tree, consuming such a treasure would be a waste! So it ate some scraped-off bark, a piece of bush, blades of grass, some fallen fruits, anything it found. But the feeling got stronger, and nothing could satiate it.

At this moment, the Spirit made its first encounter with a creature. A daring snake ignored its instinct pushing it away from the Stalwart Oak, baited by the power of the leaf. It lunged at the little Spirit from a branch, only to fall flat on the leaf, crushing the Spirit underneath. Confused at not finding its prey, but greedy, the snake prepared to swallow the leaf immediately. The Spirit reformed itself in front of the snake, opened a glowing white, jagged mouth-like rift under its eyes, and screamed in anger ; the snake only saw its prey reappear, and had no time to move before it felt as if a mountain crashed upon its head. Feeling the greed in the stunned snake in front of it, the Spirit was furious and grabbed it with its tendrils. Activating a power it did not know it had, leftover from the power the God-Tree created his inheritor with, the snake began to hiss and flail around. But it was to no avail, and it could only bite through its foe, enduring pain as magic began its cruel work. The Spirit's power fueled its magic and the snake began to turn into plants! Blades of grass covered it, its body turned brown and hard like a discarded piece of wood, and flowers bloomed where its eyes were.

Once it calmed down, the hunger came back haunting the Spirit, but with it also came fear, fear of losing the leaf. Crumbling under the gripping feelings, it decided to eat the leaf.

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As soon as it finished swallowing it, the Spirit fell asleep.

In the dream, the first thing to appear was the Stalwart Oak, who began talking to him :

"So you ate my leaf, little one... I created you to bear my last will and my heart, and through this leaf I will give it to you, satiating your hunger for eternity. It will grant you powers, and it will also let you recognise my friends if you accept to meet them. Now watch, learn, and remember!"

Scenes began flashing by the Spirit's consciousness.

The Spirit saw itself screaming, and creatures falling to the floor around it.

It saw itself turn weak or injured creatures to inanimate plants.

It watched as it crawled into a helmet, using it as a shell, then as it slid into a dead bird and took flight.

It learned, as it gave its power to a gem, and a golem was born of it.

It understood, as it helped nature grow, that it could feel the will of every plant around it helping it back.

"My friends, they are asleep, they have been for so long that I can no longer remember... But they are Gods, and they share their dreams and mind with mortals they choose, the Children of the Gods... This is the last thing I can give you, little sapling. You have no roots to shackle yourself with, so go freely into this world of the Three! Look at them, as I remember them, feel them, and maybe you will find them."

Then, slower, after the last flash went off, three figures appeared. The first looked like a mummified elven corpse, two meters tall and emaciated, with its characteristic long ears and silver hair, dressed in rags and sitting against a gigantic tree. Next to him stood a pint-size grass doll, barely coming up to the elf's knee, pouring power into the same tree. The third was a human-like mass of everchanging power, with a ball similar to a miniature sun where its head would be, at shoulder height of the elf.

The Spirit felt itself drift off to sleep, digesting all that he saw in those few moments...

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At the same time the leaf was consumed, the Three who were woken up when the Stalwart Oak died, opened their eyes and took over their Child of the Gods to think.

The God of Time was underground, buried in an ancient ruined city. It currently possessed a very special undead, the Mad King, who prided himself of his time magic when he was alive. At the end of his mortal life, he expressed his lingering regrets, and in an insane fit, challenged the God of Time itself. He pledged to turn back time, for he wanted to die with no regrets and fix his mistakes. The Mad King used his whole city and its inhabitants to fuel his grand spell, turning it to ruin and passing dust. When the spell finished powering up, to his delight, time froze and began to turn back. However it was destined to fail, for going against a God of Creation was folly. Time turned back and flowed again in the middle of the ritual, creating backlash on the caster. The city

was ruined, its inhabitants dead ash flying in the wind, as its King saw himself wither to a skeleton. His rage and despair ignited his soul flames, blue sparks burning brightly in his skull. But the God of Time was not enraged by his defiance, he got interested instead, in this mortal who walked the path of Time farther than any before. Withering its previous host, it made the Mad King its new Child, to ironically grant him Time, the Time he never could touch, and make him repent for twisting the world. But the former king only sat back on his throne, blue sparks flying around his regal clothes, waiting. Now time still around him as the soul flames turned pitch black.

"So it was you who woke me up, old friend... you vanished but I feel you again, but it is not you either... Maybe it is time I take a new look at what my brothers and I created."

Time flowed again, the skeleton trembled, and the flames turned blue again, while leaving small black points in his eyes, showing its new purpose.

The God of Nature resided in a stunned dryad, living in a shrine of the Three. It melded into the tree which grew above the roof, and reappeared on its crown, feeling terrible not knowing why, looking far beyond the horizon. But the God inside her knew, that the death of the God-Tree shook its host just like it shook the God. The dryad murmured in a sad voice that wasn't completely hers : "Even a mighty existence like you couldn't bear the loneliness nor the parting at the end of the line it seems... Just like you I am rooted in this life.

So come, Old Friend, come and see me again,

Meet me once more to be free of your pain

Just like you we yearned for a friend,

But it seems none could last in the end."

Upon a frozen mountain laid a dragon, covered in brown scales, with a fiery mane and transparent wings. It got up and roared, shattering the glaciers around him, his maw spitting a tempest of sparks and snow. He turned his head to look down the mountain range, his yellow eyes like miniature suns cut in half by vertical slits. "Why did you wake us both up, old Creator? Tell me, what has shifted in your world that startled you so?" said the dragon, laying back down with his head on its front legs.

"An old friend has passed away without saying goodbye, but why did he leave himself to die? With the powers he was granted, his life was guaranteed..."

"Is it the little oak you told me about?"

"Yes... but I feel him still, he severed his root to pass his will, a life for a life in a trade. It is not him anymore."

"Then let me find him for you, and play this game of tag, it's been a few centuries since I last exercised a bit, the little ones below might even have forgotten me!" The dragon got up and flapped his pair of wings, a grin on its monstrous face and a glint in his eyes, a tempest circling around him from this simple movement.

"Do you even remember where little Oak's forest is?"

The dragon's talons tensed and crushed a few rocks under him. "No. But it wouldn't be fun otherwise, would it? How about using this little chase to meet a few of your eight new friends you made after the little tree?"

"I don't care. They are like us Three, slumbering and watching through mortals, I won't interrupt them if they don't reach out to me."

"Now this is getting more and more exciting, I hope we meet Theomars on the way, I haven't had a good brawl with him since you came to me..."

"Just don't overdo it and ruin his host, alright? If it's the one I remember he's pretty attached to it."