

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 23 Daily life in Ebb 2

When Thani and Oakbud arrived at the Twin Hammers the next day, a worker was waiting for them at the entrance of the shop to guide them as soon as possible to Auri. The sun was barely up, but both parties knew the final process of infusing magic into the weapon took time.

They were ushered in Auri's personal workshop, and the final details still needed to be discussed. Thani previously wanted to focus on sharpness and hardness for the basic magic engravings, and that was already done ; what was left was the blood crystal and her own magic, and those would need further debate depending on what the weapon would be used for.

"Take a look at the weapon base. Reinforced drake bone, double-edged blade, little to no guard, and the engravings are under the leather grip. It's thirty centimeters long total, twenty for the blade, classic one-handed hold. It should be able to resist any clash as long as it's not against a weapon specialized in destruction."

The master smith threw the weapon lightly and explained his work and the results to Thani while she was fiddling with it, getting a feel for her newest acquisition. She couldn't resist trying it out, even if it was unfinished, and cut herself lightly. Sharp indeed! She could definitely make a close shave on the hairiest of bears without ever sharpening it during the process with that. Thani threw the weapon up, and Oakbud caught it.

"It's perfect, I didn't expect any less from you, master Auri. Should we talk about the infusion?"

"Definitely. I know you follow Kali, and that you definitely lack range ; that's no throwing weapon either, so you must have something in mind already?" He was paying rapt attention to her movements and reactions, trying to get as much information as he could. Thani herself was by no means a simple person, and that strange creature with her was a wonder of its own. He had seen the creation of the incredible crystals, and also the golem outside.

"Trust me on this, range is not a problem for me. And yes, I know how I want to complete the weapon. The infusion should be simple, with only the capacity for magic channeling and alignment through my blood crystal. The aim is for me to be able to shape the magic and combine it with my blood arts. The weapon itself is more of a handle for what I have in mind, and a trusty backup should I run out of magic."

She had a smile and glittering eyes on her face, but the beautiful face looked more like a hungry predator to Auri. She was telling him things most people would hold secret, but it just made him want to hear more.

"Who exactly are you, telling me all this. I know the big heads of the temple of Pain here, and you're not related to any of them. It's not all, is it? By Monte, I will do my best for you here, but tell me more. I swear on my faith this won't get out. No one would be crazy enough to ask me about a customer of mine anyway."

"I'll tell you while you prepare the final engravings, just don't let your hand slip."

Oakbud, who was playing with the weapon since Thani finished examining it, got the signal and handed it back to the smith. Auri clamped the weapon solidly in a vice, got his carving tools from the wall, and began the second to last step. First, he grooved the circumference of the guard as a base for infusion, before slowly tracing up along the center of the blade on both faces. Not needing to create complicated runes was a definite time saver, but the process still took almost three hours. Thani sat down to meditate, while Oakbud, being as curious as ever, was exploring the room in great detail. After deliberation, although the underside of the forge crucible was comfortably hot, Thani's head was still his preferred spot.

"Alright wake up, the dagger is ready to be infused." Auri waited until his client made her way to his working table before continuing. "The aim is to smelt your blood into the grooves I've made into the blade. Compared to simply fusing the crystal somewhere and having the magic flow through a circuit, it will be easier to channel your arts and less wasteful. Now, I need you to do the smelting, while I'll guide and fuse it to the weapon. You need to keep its structure and force it to become liquid at the same time ; but it shouldn't be too hard for you since you're able to make crystals."

Since he had sworn secrecy, Thani disclosed her full identity and demonstrated her blessings to Auri before they began. He was shocked, but it would help him understand her powers and fine-tune the infusion better.

--

The sun was high in the sky, and both the smith and his client were tired and feeling empty, but satisfied. The magic forging had its own way of taking its toll, be it on magical reserves or the mind.

Oakbud and Auri were watching as Thani began learning to use the weapon, channeling what was left of her magic. She was able to create some sort of sheath with her own blood or one of her tattoos, and could also shape it further, extending the reach of the weapon multiple folds by creating a longer blade or a whip, or doing the opposite and layering a shield over it. With this new armament, she would be able to harness any blood spilt in a fight to use it as a weapon, not depending completely on her tattoos anymore.

After making sure everything was fine with the masterpiece, and inviting the master craftsman to a meal to thank him again, the duo made their way to the entertainment district in the afternoon.

-----

"Everyone pleaaaaaaase make some noise for this afternoon's 2+ blessings tournament! As usual, no killing is allowed and our healers following Time and Deva are here to remedy any type of injury! The prize is a big gold coin, worth 50 gold! Anyone interested only needs to register for five one gold! And if you are feeling lucky, bets will open when registration ends in fifteen minutes!"

In-between the barracks from the central city and the entertainment quarter stood an arena, roughly fifty meters in diameter. It could accommodate a few thousand spectators, and was one of the most attractive places for gamblers. Tournaments, beast fights, challenges, flashy shows, in this place anything goes as long as money flows. An emcee was in charge of the daily events, and was trying to heat up the audience.

"Hey Bud, how about we get down there and have some fun? The card deck got us some good change, and I really want to see what our little Godly lessons brought to the table." Thani was sitting in the spectator stands with the little Spirit on her head, watching the show underneath and the file of people registering.

"Thani recuperated your magic already? Me's fine!"

"Nah, I'm still around half out, but I can take the handicap or it'll be plain bullying, you know?" She was spinning her dagger in her right hand, showing her eagerness to get down and break some bones.

"How me fight?" Oakbud's interest was piqued, since his only fight until now was against bandits. This kind of environment would allow him to discover more in relative safety.

"Good question... I don't think they'll let you in with your current appearance. Can you change a bit, or make a golem to get inside of maybe?"

"Me likes golems! Thank Thani fairy!"

Once the decision was taken, they both got down on the dusty arena floor and queued quietly at the registration. The wait was short, but Oakbud had enough time to make himself a golem with stone debris, on-the-spot-grown plants and a bit of dirt. It was shaped like a wolf or a dog, and Oakbud had made himself a little nest in its head. When their turn came, Thani registered without trouble, but was disappointed because her enchanted dagger was banned from use ("We might as well give you the big gold right now", the man in charge said.) ; The clerk was surprised at the golem's appearance, and rules had to be set for his defeat because of its reconstructibility and state of body substitute. Healing it was allowed until the head was crushed or separated from the body.

Surprisingly, besides the gold coin, only a name and rundown of their blessings was needed, and nicknames were accepted too. Oakbud chose to stay true to his name, announcing earth and nature magic, while Thani chose 'Blood Angel' as her pseudonym, referencing her obvious faith and blood armaments.

"Thank you for your patience ladies and gentlemen, the competition will start soon! Since twenty three people have entered the contest, an supplementary first round will be set up before going through duels! Fighters please draw a number from the box being brought to you, if there's a number from one to nine, congratulations on advancing to the second round, and please leave the space so the others can fight it out!"

The person bringing the urn was a follower of Eludia, and she would feel any attempt at manipulating fate during the draw. Both Thani and Oakbud got lucky draws and got back to the seating area to watch the first seven fights. Because his golem was unable to pick a paper, he was left for last.

As in every tournament, the first rounds showed the most disparity of strength, and were concluded rather quickly, no fight taking more than a few minutes. One was even an instant-ko by a follower of Liezel ; as soon as it started, he melded into shadows to reappear behind his opponent and knock him out cleanly. Flashy and strong moves weren't used much because of the need for secrecy for the coming rounds. With 16 fighters left, one would need to win four consecutive duels to win, and disclosing their full strength right off the bat would spell their early demise.

The table for the real first round was the following : Harod vs Fabrice, Crow vs Roland, Oakbud vs Torque, The Wall vs Ellen, Wild Fairy vs Blood Angel, Ulyne vs Roman, Alice vs John, Tristan vs Bone-Crusher. Just like Thani, some people preferred giving a nickname.

The first fight featured unusual powers, Harod being a follower of Time and Fabrice of

Monte. Although he was able to speed himself up and slow his opponent's sense of time, he couldn't triumph quick enough and was defeated when he ran out of magic. Fabrice moved in an unhurried way, but every one of his movements struck true. The flow of the fight was under his foot, and the arena seemed to dance around him.

In the second fight, Crow knocked Roland into the wall almost instantly, breaking multiple ribs. His strength of a follower of Theomars let him catch and send the lithe apostle of Nyx flying.

Oakbud's foe was another War God adept, Torque. The first earthen walls made by Oakbud were broken down and their debris used as projectiles, and the first knocked the golem to the ground. This gave Torque the time to close the gap and try to smash Oakbud flat, but he was slowed down by vines gripping his feet. In the end he wasn't able to free himself in time and got buried under a cocoon of plants.

"The Wall" was obviously a follower of Oberon, and Ellen who was facing him was surprisingly a water elemental. She crushed a water crystal she'd made to release a first wave of water, while Wall rushed straight ahead with his shield in front. His nigh infinite stamina and great muscle power allowed him to close in while bearing the brunt of crashing waves of water. However Ellen was obviously prepared, and her flowing attacks gathered growing momentum, eventually washing him away.

Thani the Blood Angel faced the "Wild Fairy", inciting Oakbud's ire when he heard the name. Thani's adversary proved to follow Eludia and could manipulate fate to an extent. The Blood Angel would trip or miss attacks closely when it was seemingly impossible, while the Fairy danced and pummeled randomly, hoping for Fate to guide her hits to critical targets. The fight ended when Thani received a major injury to the neck, taking the trade to grasp her foe with her tattoos before using her injury transfer spell. The medics were called, and the follower of Time accelerated the regeneration cast by his colleague praying to Deva. Thani herself focused her magic on her wound and healed in a matter of minutes, scaring all the other contestants silly. How do you fight an immortal? What was the spell she used to get a hold of the Fairy?

Ulyne possessed the same advanced feelings blessing as Thani and some regeneration, which he used to harass and trade with Roman, who followed Oberon. However Roman's fortitude surpassed Ulyne's by far ; even though he could heal, every heavy hit from shield bashes and Roman's mace rattled him. Ulyne ended up forfeiting, unable to stand when he got too dizzy after a hit to the head. Not being able to take the initiative to attack was his undoing.

Alice was the follower of Liezel who KO'd her matchup instantly during the preliminary. This time she was faced with John, a thunder elemental. The first thing he did when he saw her fade out of sight was creating a lightning burst around him to try and reveal her. The move was calculated though, and he lost focus when he saw it

didn't bear fruit. His following spell had no available target and fizzled away. Alice had bluffed well enough this time, and used the lapse in John's concentration to end the fight in the same way she did her first, sending him to the land of dreams in one clean hit.

Tristan and Bone-Crusher followed Oberon and Theomars respectively. The perfect sword won against the sturdy shield, using the same force externalisation blessing Jamie and Frond obtained before their death. Tristan was unable to defend on multiple sides at once and was made to bite the arena's floor by the powerful shocks and sheer might Bone-Crusher sent through his body.

"Congratulations to the fighters going to the second round. May the losers not be disheartened, for there will be many more occasions to show your might and continue learning! The second round will begin in half an hour, please use this time to place your next bets and get some refreshments, the show will only get more exciting from now on!"