

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 43 Ocean's Guard 4

"Hmmmm! That hit the spot! Do you think I could just grab a nice man, fight him and bring him home, or would that make too much of a mess?"

Thani was stretching lazily in Harod's bed, feeling fresh and full of energy again. Today marked the third day after her injury, and the lasting damage caused by the divinity in her was finally healed. She had been so used to getting back in shape almost instantly lately and having nothing to do for a couple of days was boring her to death. Another benefit to her regeneration was the absence of any kind of hangover; getting drunk in itself had almost become impossible with the last boost to her prowess.

In comparison, Harod was using his only arm to shield his eyes from the morning sun seeping through cracks in his door, head still heavy from trying to match Thani with the bottle. At least, he wasn't part of the drake scavenging expedition and could sleep in for a bit. His throat was a bit sore from the night's partying, and his voice was lower than usual as a result, closer to 'normal' than his usual high pitch.

"Please don't... What happened flipped enough shit already. No need for another outcry, especially with that kind of thing."

"Well, it's not like they wouldn't want to, if I can believe my own blessings."

"That's not the point, is it?" Finally awake enough, he was taking in the sight of her dressing back up, then turning around with puffed up cheeks and a hand on her hip.

"But I'm bored!", answered her annoyed voice. It looked like his headache would stay for longer than anticipated.

Now that Alice was back, the trio could spend the day together while they waited for the expedition to do its job. Thani hoped that they could find some of her stuff in the process, she was especially fond of a mechanical lighter she had found while shopping in Ebb. But since worrying wouldn't change the result, she decided to help Alice come up with plans for her bow, and maybe replace her basic steel daggers with drake bones too. Their share of loot would be enough to outfit a whole gang, not mentioning two people.

Oakbud was happy that everyone was back and had taken his favourite spot back on top of Thani's head, watching the proceedings. Training magic all day, even if he had no notion of fatigue, was monotonous; taking a rest and using that time to learn

something new wasn't a loss either. He himself didn't need any kind of protection or weapons as he was.

The main topic was the bow: making it from scratch required time, especially the treating of materials. The bones had to be laminated and soaked in a special alchemical concoction to bring it the necessary suppleness, otherwise it would break as soon as tension was put on the string. The string itself was tricky too, as it was planned to use tendons from the beasts to weave multiple ones with different strength. The handle would be made from magical alloy and be the central piece to hold the arms of the bow, also featuring a slot for a magical core if they met another master smith in the future to engrave it.

Alice wanted it to be small as well to conserve her usual agile fighting style, but still packing a good punch for long distance shots. For that matter, they went looking for the grumpy Tembra, who was busy enjoying time with his family after the hunt. Bringing a bottle helped with his mood, and talking about archery in general had his eyes shine with interest. Under his careful guidance, Thani, Alice, and Oakbud learned of a delicate pulley system that would allow the shortening of the bow's arms while keeping the power intact. However, it would be harder to pull and wouldn't allow for the same shooting posture that she'd learned. In the eyes of the user though, it was a worthy trade-off.

Thani's dagger was a masterpiece and a good source of inspiration. Making Alice's out of drake bones would require finding the right master smith though, as the material was still a bit brittle and unsuited for that kind of weapon. It would have to be put on hold for now; keeping at least some of her equipment familiar would facilitate the transition.

Finally, the topic of armour came up. The stuff they had brought from Ebb was basic leather, enough for most situations already, but since all sorts of extraordinary things kept happening around Oakbud, an upgrade would be of help without a doubt. Thani would get enough hide, scales and other materials to make two full suits with some to spare, so they could afford to be a bit extravagant. They could just trade the surplus for the crafting fees of everything they planned and more.

Alice chose an average and common design for hers, but Thani didn't share her mind. Since she got bored the last few days, she wanted to customize hers a bit. The best part of her agreement with Harod was getting first pick for half the materials brought back : that would allow her to splurge and pick as many claws as she wanted for accessories (she really wanted a necklace), and even take all four horns to strap to create

weaponized gauntlets. Hitting people with bare fists felt great to her but doing it with class was on another level of satisfaction.

Luckily, Thani's camp was in line of sight with Ocean's Guard, even if its distance and height separated it, and the expedition made it back a bit after sundown when everyone was around the bonfires. The seven hunters had a good haul and managed to bring back a whole bag of teeth and claws, all horns, and heavy rolls of scaled hide. The hardest part had been the long march; only some more courageous scavenging beasts had come, and those only touched the meat, so there had been no conflict of interest. When they worked on the first drake, the beasts ate from the second, then they swapped. This way both sides were doing what they came for and cohabitating almost peacefully.

After the whole day of thinking and arranging meetings with the better learned craftsmen here, the choice was quickly made, and the actual manual labour left for the following days. The whole village was grinning after such a good haul, any previous problems and conflicts forgotten.

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"I really am the wrong generation of Child, aren't I?"

She sighed, contemplating her blue-purple webbed palm. She let herself be lulled by the deep currents around her, looking towards the light peering through the surface of the sea.

"I'm sorry to ask this of you, Ashirijen. But it's time, and I'm not sure how long I can go on with the split in beliefs that was initiated if it's not spread to the world."

"I guess the death of the Goddess of Suffering would be a big deal indeed... But why do I have to go up there?" She was lamenting herself, torn between her adoration for Kali and her hate of land-dwellers. "They're humans, damnit. Isn't there another way so I can stay down there? I'm a Nereid! They hunt us on sight for our horns, fangs and scales! Is it impossible to send Merfolk instead?"

"Isn't that a good reason for you to be my Child in the first place?"

Ashirijen stood 2.5 meters tall, covered only by her dark blue skin, purple scales and floating black hair, and had no answer for that last remark. Her hands and feet were webbed and ended up in very short, pointy claws. She also had foldable fins on her back, legs and forearms to help her underwater navigation. Completing her arsenal, her mouth sported fangs and a poison sac in addition to her very long tongue, and two thin horns sprouted from her forehead; from a young age, she had directed their growth to be straight so she could use them as both an ornament and a weapon, and even tried

her hand at carving light decorative patterns on them with her claws.

"I mean, while he was at it, why didn't the God who made my race give us more human features? It's like he just picked a few parts of fish and sea serpents to give us on top, not even speaking of Merfolk who are just half and half. Sure, the face is the same if you remove the horns, but what kind of human has gills under her boobs and no nipples? What was the God thinking? Nereids lay eggs, and we don't breastfeed. What was the point of giving us two lumps of flesh there?"

"We've gone over this already. To human standards, you'd be a great beauty, you know. Thogoss probably wanted to create resemblance to help with diplomacy. Please try and don't start a fight as soon as you go to the surface. Putting on a friendly front alone would prevent most incidents, if not all." Kali was fond of this Child; despite her more reclusive personality and racial status, she was strong and steady. Even though Ashirijen was complaining, being a predator to be feared in the eyes of others, Kali knew that she wouldn't shirk her duties.

"A beauty for perverts maybe. I don't own clothes, remember? Where do I get those if not from a ship?" She started fiddling with her favourite spear made of precious magic-infused coral and sea-beast's teeth. Her race needed her being a Child, and that meant going the extra mile for her Goddess; Kali was right, she chose her for a reason and wouldn't have picked someone completely unrelated to what values she incarnated. Her leisurely life was coming to an end, and her purple snake-eyes reflected her determination from behind her double eyelid. It was time for her to show mortals the true path of Kali.