

《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

52 Now What ?

Oakbud felt calm.

No thinking, no fighting, simply living for a bit and forgetting his mission. Each subsequent encounter pushed him to re-think his position further. One thing was for sure, he wasn't strong enough to go looking for Nidhögran yet; now that he thought about it the dragon admitted to being a Child in the end, and what better fit was there than the God of Elements? Time had gone... somewhere, waiting for him to grow more too as another layer of challenge.

Wasn't that good though? That meant he could go on travelling with Thani and Alice, learning more and more until he was ready and didn't need to wait for the Gods to lower themselves to him.

One problem was completely overlooked by the little spirit during his reflections: he and Thani were already far out of the bounds for what could be considered "normal". Only Alice fit that description, but she managed to more or less keep up with her blessings and that prevented him from seeing the point entirely. A God-candidate and a kind of multi-elemental mage: both were exceedingly powerful and rare at the same time, not even taking the divinity they could wield into account.

The daily life in Ocean's guard was a simple and straightforward struggle for everyone and disallowed slackers. Still, that was a good kind of pressure compared to the last few weeks, one that let him calm down and consolidate what he'd learned. As it turned out, his golems created via copying another thing were way better than the ones he'd create without models but making himself a real body was unattainable for the moment. Even with all the drawbacks it would bring, seeing other beings be they human or beast mingle together made him long for a sense of touch with emotion, rather than his current simple sensation of 'contact'.

He couldn't stay here forever though. Even if he picked a destination at random, he met plenty of interesting people along the way. The few leads that they had didn't end up with meeting a Child, but what about the next? And the one after? There was still so much more in this world to explore.

Maybe it was time to backtrack and try to meet Nyx... Having her wait for too long couldn't be good either. Yes, that's it; he'd meet Nyx at sea next. Having come to a decision, Oakbud planned to tell the girls that night so they could start moving again in the next two or three days and focused back to the task on hand: weeding the orchards.

At first, he wanted to avoid hurting any plant, be it 'good' or 'bad'. That resulted in him using earth, water and nature magic to move and preserve the herbs. This method was devised after multiple iterations while using his nature sense to check on the plants' wellbeing. The plot it was applied to ended up perfectly devoid of weeds as he was asked. To the dismay of the person checking on him though, every weed was in the end simply relocated outside of this part of the orchard: close by in the forest, on the road, or even in the neighbouring plot.

"No no no! That's not good little guy... I know you don't like it, but we have to kill the weeds, not just pluck them." The woman in charge was Tembra's wife Manille, put there by Harod. With a sigh, she continued to speak: "I thought you'd know best, being a user of nature magic. If you leave them around, they will only come back faster and in greater numbers. How do I say this... We must make a choice between the two: dead weeds or dead fruit trees. We can't always get what we want or what we need without a little sacrifice."

That was a notion he could only agree with but still had trouble coming to terms with. Thani considered "that's how it is, just like everything. Get a grip, Bud.", already jaded to this kind of everyday dilemma. In the end, under Manille's gentle push, the little spirit agreed to burn the weeds to help the trees flourish even if it left him a bit uncomfortable.

While Oakbud tended to his latest routine (that would last a few days more because the orchards were large), Alice and Thani had also found theirs.

The gem on her chest didn't bother Liezel's follower anymore, used to its presence after a few days. She would train her marksmanship with her new bow in the mornings, go into the forested mountains in the afternoon to try and stalk unaware hunting teams, and brawl in the dusty arenas after dusk to maintain a balanced training regimen. In the last few weeks, she had made remarkable progress with the bow, enough for Tembra to allow her to begin using magic to augment her shots. During her roaming she would sometimes warn hunters of dangerous places or beasts while practising her stealth, or guide prey towards them if everything was fine. She felt that she was very close to getting a third blessing from the Unfettered.

Thani's everyday life on the other hand could only be described as hectic. She woke up whenever to fly up the mountains with the bare minimum equipment to go and explore things for days, coming back only when her bag was full or if she had enough. Her armour found its use quickly, and many scrapes and marks had begun covering it bit

by bit. Some were from rocks or branches, but most came from fights with wildlife.

Unwilling to provoke Repose's ire again and guessing he was watching her, she limited her initiatives to exploration and digging. Fighting was a last resort, and absolutely not the stupid beasts' fault for falling for her taunts, not at all... The content of the bag she sold for alcohol when she came back often told its own story. The nights she came back were livelier and saw "the good-looking ones" dragged to the arena by the tipsy and grinning God-candidate for a bout or two, before pulling them somewhere else for another kind of bout if the first performance was satisfactory.

As bad and hedonistic as it appeared, Thani was only living the life she never could during the years she wouldn't get back from the confines of her temple. It didn't prevent her from working on her own magic and researching the dichotomy between herself and Kali further. The way of "Blood and Life" was decided already so she did things at her own pace. The "Blood" part was the easiest one to work with as it was the one she was most used to. It was also linked to "Life", but the fighting part was taking shape at least. On the other hand, she was completely stumped by the "Life and Healing" part and hadn't made any progress. Even in all her exuberance, she tended to keep things to herself because she didn't want to burden others with that kind of hard thinking.

"Aaaaand this goes there. That one over here." Nyx happily waved her Child's hands around, directing magic as if it were a full orchestra. "Finally done!"

She was in her room inside the palace her mermaid Child was the princess of, working on a new piece of decorative clothing by assembling a mix of magic crystals, deep sea jewels, corals and other base metals.

One would tend to think of the result as a powerful relic however that wasn't the case: this one was purely for the sake of decoration, a solid half-necklace inlaid with gold and jewels meant to hold something like a cape, cloak, or even serve as border for a wide-necked piece of clothing. The torrent of magic she used was purely for the sake of making its creation faster and making sure it'd stay strong and glittery for the longest time.

The Goddess of Art cared for very few things outside of her domain, and that reflected on both her attitude and her followers. The fact that her Child had relinquished control of her body to the Goddess didn't help either: Nyx relished in the life of mortals, but that prevented her from gaining access to the global divine information gathering from prayers.

Perfect appearance, perfect manners, perfect speech and voice, perfect craft, perfect

ear and pitch, peerless appraisal talent, perfect mastery of her body and magic; all aspects of Nyx she could learn or better reached the peak. Her mind on the other hand had a few weaknesses, like forgetfulness or being overly proud and arrogant.

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Contrary to Oakbud's expectations of her, Nyx was completely oblivious to the storm she had started on the continent and happily humming while starting to plan her next piece. After the initial shock, the death of the God-Tree was now in a far corner of her mind.