

A bright orange sun sits high in the early morning cloud filled sky as the scout ship, Scavenger, with its beautiful reflective metallic white hull sits quietly and definitely out of place within the green grassy fields. A strong summer head wind begins to blow through the mountain side while the taller grass sways to its' will. Several rainbow colored leaves from the nearby forest dance in the air as they travel on the unseen wind currents. From over a small hill emerges two figures, Dra'con and Magma moving away from the ship and toward a small village in the distance. Magma stands above the ground levitating a sizable piece of earth. His upper torso glows brightly in the sun as he commands the mound of rock and grass beneath his feet, jockeying it back and forth all the while trying to maintain his balance. Bits and pieces of chunk of earth crumble beneath him, bouncing off of Dra'con who is flying below him. Glancing down as he motions his hand tilting the piece of earth, Magma sees his shadow playing chase with Dra'con. He smiles while moving the piece of terrain back level. His eyes widen as for a brief moment, he felt himself slipping forward uncontrollably. Dra'con seems to be more focused than the young Magma. Some would call him too focused. Dra'con is, or was known as a hunter. A short phase for bounty hunters who move throughout the galaxy hunting down those on contract. A lot can be said for what he has seen and done, but these are words that are hardly ever spoken. Sometimes, one's past is just that, their past. He maintains his

distance flying closer to the ground just above the grassy surface while pulling behind him a large levitating bronze colored container. The heavy container is pulled with ease as they move over the land. The items inside the opened container are covered tightly with a large gray cloth that hides the contents underneath. Rocks and dirt bounce off the cloth as Magma hovers over head. Magma has always marveled at how Dra'con was able to move through the air with what seemed like less of a thought. More like a bird in flight, elegant and effortlessly. Not like Magma, who has just recently taken to the basics of flight. This interesting yet very difficult ability has him both excited and scared. Rynos has on many countless occasions warned him that abuse of this ability will put a considerable drain on him mentally and physically. Earth Mages are under many cycles of tutelage before they can even attempt it. Most of them fail, mastering this type of magic is more than difficult and sometimes comes with a price. Rynos was surprised to see that Magma was able to do so without the proper training and has found himself working to help the young mage in his quest. But as he is always correct when questions about magic need to be answered, the knowledge of learning the Path of the Mage can be extremely taxing. Magma has passed out on more than one occasion from the strain of using this newly found ability. He still gets angry when he thinks about it. Mainly because whenever he fails, Tenia is always around. Flying around him mocking his

failure. So every now and again he will pull up a wall of earth in her path just to see her avoid hitting it. Thinking one day she will run into it, and that might just close that mouth of hers, even if it is just for a moment. That vision always brings a smile to his face. Rynos and his father Garum, always remind him that perseverance is the key. And by having that small bit of patience, he will master it in time.

“Wow D, that sure is a lot to carry on your own. You sure you do not need assistance?” Magma asks as he slowly lowers himself down over to Dra'con's side while holding his arms out trying to keep his balance.

“I am sure,” Dra'con replies.

Moving just over a small hill, Dra'con's eyes change color as his vision changes to telescopic.

“Looks like we have a greeting party,”

“I wish I could see that far!” Magma says while placing his hand over his eyes blocking out the sun straining to see in the distance.

“It can be useful sometimes,” Dra'con replies.

“How far can you see?”

“Unknown, I never put a distance to what I could or could not view,”

“So I am the first one to ask you that I bet! Sweet!” Magma says with joy.

They move over a small grassy knoll coming closer to a structure just on the outside of the small village. Standing outside the two large wooden posts is a priest in a dark burgundy robe. The Jarling priests are some of the most powerful mages and healers known around this sector. They are usually called upon when outbreaks are uncontrollably running rapid within a populated area because of their resistance to illness and plague. They closely resemble that of the canine family, a civilization that was close to being extinct because of hunters and the slave trade that once was strong within this sector of the galaxy. Their people are now scattered across the galaxy in small groups doing what they can to help others as they always have. The priest stands patiently with his hands behind him waiting for his guest. Shorter than most around him, he stands proud and sure. His beautiful white fur is incredibly clean with marvelous streaks of bright blue strands of fur running down from behind his large erect ears. His thick bushy white and blue tail sits high behind him waving slowly in the evening air as a sign of non-aggression. The hood less robe he wears has a few small designs on its' sleeves, but nothing that would draw immediate attention to its' simplicity. A small white belt is tied on his side with a single pouch just behind his hip. Just behind the priest are two rather large white horses with Jarling mages atop them. They too wear similar apparel, just white in color. Dra'con slows down as his feet touch down softly within the grass as Magma flies over the group just a small

ways. Pulling his hands closer together he begins turning his rock platform. The sides of it move up sharply against the open air as he begins to regain control. Slowing down, he carefully lowers the platform and himself just beside Dra'con. The chunk of earth begins to crumble as it touches the ground and is absorbed into the grassy surface as Magma steps down and looks at Dra'con with the proud look of accomplishment. Dra'con nods his approval as Magma smiles the largest smile he can.

"You are Dra'con I take it? Eeri said you would be here shortly and promptly, although I was not expecting such a speedy delivery of the medical supplies," the priest says as he approaches.

He reaches his hand outward as he and Dra'con shake hands.

"Welcome to Delmount, I am Roman, overseer of the Clerics,"

"Thank you Roman, as in your communication you stated that the need was dire so Raine manufactured as much as she could in the allotted time. I hope this is sufficient to help your people," replies Dra'con.

"Your help is greatly appreciated. The healers are overwhelmed and our situation seem to be becoming worse by each passing cycle. With these medical supplies, we can at least treat the waters that run through our village and slow down this plague at its' source. This will give us the time we need to provide aid to our people," Roman comments as he stands on his toes to get a look inside the large container.

“And who is this strong young man?” he asks as he turns to face Magma who stands beside Dra'con staring at the sight of the Jarling.

“This is the son of Garum, Magma. He asked if he could assist me in the delivery of supplies. Yet, I believe he has other motives for wanting to accompany me. I do not believe he has ever met a Jarling before,”

“Ah, a Ta'lorrian? I have never come across one I did not like. How are you my young friend? You are mage I take it?” Roman asks while greeting Magma with a bow.

“A Mage? No sir...I am just me I guess,” replies Magma while nervously scratching his head.

“Well, you could have fooled me. You seem to be a great and powerful mage from what I can see. It is a pleasure to meet you Magma, son of Garum!” says Roman while placing his hand on Magma's head.

Roman's laughs a jolly laugh as the two mages pull on their leather horse reins guiding them toward the container. The red and white fur colored mages lift their hands into the air as the leather bonds on the rear of the horses, like snakes, begin to lift upward by themselves making their way over to the container. Moving over the container wall and down into the inside, they wrap onto two large metal towing links on the floor with precision and as if being guided by an unseen hand. The thick bull knot tightens with a strain.

“We are ready my lord,” a mage says.

Roman nods as he turns back to Dra'con and Magma.

"Forgive me, I would ask you to join me and my family for dinner, but the quarantine restrictions have isolated us and the others from outside contamination. It grieves me to do so, but it is a necessary precaution," he says with grief.

"I understand," Dra'con replies.

"Please let Eeri know that I am in her debt," Roman says.

"No, anything we could do to help,"

"Thank you again for all that you have done Dra'con. Please send my regards to Eeri and your friends,"

"I shall,"

"Farewell my friends, peaceful journey to you," says Roman as he turns and begins walking back toward the village.

The two horses turn and with a slight tug begin to pull the on the lines that hold the container tight. With ease, the unit turns and moves over the dirt path leading into the Village. Roman's voice can be heard as the move away from Dra'con and Magma.

"Make sure you keep working on your studies son of Garum! You seem to be a well talented mage in the working!" he says.

Magma leaps on to the dirt path, waving his hand excitedly while watching the mages as they pass over a small bridge. Seeing a Jarling face to face is something he can tell his offspring about. Standing in the

company of one is a blessing, but being in the presence of three of them is something that is unheard of. The seriousness of the epidemic is overlooked by the young Magma as Dra'con looks on. For the Jarling to be seen at this village is normally a bad omen. They are indeed the last line before death begins its slow and steady walk down the vacant streets searching for new souls to fill his bottle. Dra'con knows, more than most, of the smell of death. His nostrils are filled with its stench as the air from the village flows over them. Yet, he also acknowledges that if they are to be saved from the cold grip of death's ever-reaching hand, it is the Jarling who are more than capable. Dra'con's white hair moves briskly over his face as he looks up at the evening sky to see several sinister clouds moving overhead, bringing with them a drop in temperature. He sniffs the air in two quick inhaled breaths.

“Interesting,” he says.

“Huh? Interesting? What is interesting?” asks Magma as his attention moves from the Jarling priests to Dra'con.

“I am unsure, but it seems that a storm is coming. I do not like the way it smells,” he says as he begins to pause.

His eyes change colors once again, trying to see what only he can view. This ability has been more than helpful; it has saved his life, and giving him exact information on where his pray was. It even allowed him to rescue a small child from an underwater collapsed cave. Begin able to

see the change in temperature is just one of the special abilities he possesses. Magma looks up at him as his eyes rotate within a color spectrum. Detecting heat, cold, energy, and even radio waves, he looks deeper into the clouds. Dra'con then sees what he was detecting by smell.

“We need to make our way back to the Scavenger, now!” he says strongly while reaching down to grab the container tow bar that was left by the priests.

The wind begins to try its' best to bend the trees to the ground as Dra'con and Magma move through the mountain side. There is a bright flash of light as thunder rumbles through the sky. A few rain drops strike against Dra'con's blue skin. Reaching up his fingers wipe the water droplets from his face. Sniffing the water on his hand he knows what he was fearing is true. There is no stopping it, or controlling what will happen next. Looking down at the tow bar underneath his arm, he sees that it too has a few drops of water on its' surface. The unassuming water droplets that fall from the dark sky begin to melt through the metal bar.

“Acid rain, we need to find cover!” Dra'con shouts.

“Huh? Acid rain? What is...” Magma starts to say.

Before he can finish asking his question, Dra'con quickly flies up to him and grabs him from his floating surface while dropping the metal tow bar to the ground below as it begins to turn into a liquid form.

“Hey!!” says Magma surprised as the base of earth beneath him falls from the sky without him in contact with it.

Falling to the ground in pieces the larger chunks roll breaking apart from the momentum. Dra'con flies into a nearby cavern he spotted moments ago with Magma being held under his arm like a bag of goods. It is at this time that Magma realizes Dra'con's true speed. It is unlike anything he has ever witnessed. He has seen Dra'con in countless skirmishes but was never really able to see what was really happening. The speed at which things happened was always too fast for him to follow. He would only see the beaten and worn bodies of his unfortunates lying at Dra'con's feet. He did not take life unless there was no other option, Eeri made sure of this. He should have known by the way Dra'con was acting back at the village entrance that something was awry. They land softly within the dark cavern entrance as the rain begins to come down in a heavy down pour. Dra'con places Magma on the ground beside him.

“Are you injured?” he asks while looking over Magma's body.

“No I do not think so. D, why the urgency over the rain?” Magma asks.

Dra'con turns to look outside of the cavern entrance. Magma, hesitant, takes a few steps to the edge of the entrance. From the safety of the cave around them, he sees several plants that line the ground

before the cave begin to dissolve into a lump of steaming green goo before his eyes. Magma unconsciously takes a few steps back away from the entrance.

“Ohhh,” says Magma as his eyes widen.

Dra'con reaches over and places his hand on Magma's shoulder.

“We are safe for now,” he says as he turns and begins to look back into the darkness of the cavern.

“Remain here, I will check this cave to make sure we are not intruding on someone's home,” Dra'con says as he disappears into the darkness within a blink of an eye.

Magma strains to see into the darkness within the cave. Try to see where Dra'con had vanished to. Before his eyes can adjust to the darkness of the cavern, Dra'con suddenly appears beside him. Magma is taken back by his sudden appearance.

“Just a few rodents, nothing hostile or that would cause you harm. I also checked the structure of this cave and it is sound. It will be more than adequate until the storm passes,” he says calmly.

“D, would this acid rain have done this to me?” asks Magma as he turns to view the fauna outside as they begin wilting and melting into nothingness.

“Yes, your biological make up is based on minerals, this type of rain would have...given you problems,” Dra'con says while looking down at the frightened Magma.

“That is an understatement. D....thanks,” Magma says.

Magma reaches in and grabs his dark blue vest by the opening and pulls it shut. The magnetic clamps make a slight clicking noise while connecting together.

“Did it just get cold in here?” he asks as he rubs his bare arms with his hands.

“Negative, the temperature has not changed. It could be the effects of the rain on your person,” Dra'con says.

Looking at Magma, he realizes that his body temperature has dropped just under normal.

“Come,” he tells Magma as he walks away from the entrance and further back into the cave.

Dra'con reaches behind his head removing his sword from his back as the living skin pulls away and forms to his back. The sword grows in length as he plunges it into a large rock before them. The sword penetrates it as if it were as soft as the soil below it. Suddenly it begins to glow, radiating heat, a lot of heat. Turning a bright yellow from the heat it lights up the cave all around them with a brilliant glow. In amazement, Magma moves over closer to the sword with his hands out.

“Careful,” Dra'con says as he halts Magma's hands from getting too close.

Magma smiles as he begins to lower himself to sit. With a slight rumble, the earth beneath him pushes upward creating a flat surface as he sits.

“Here, I can make one for you too!” he says.

Again the ground rumbles as it pushes up a large lump for Dra'con to sit on. He looks at the earth seat for a moment, glances back at Magma who has somehow managed to smile an even larger smile than before. Dra'con lowers himself sitting across from Magma and his sword.

“Thanks for the heat! I did not know you could do that with your sword! It is awesome!”

“I have never heard it called...awesome before,”

“I am starting to warm up already!”

“It will take a moment, but your body temperature will return shortly. I have adjusted the heat accordingly to assist in raising your levels back up to normal,” Dra'con says as he looks around the cave.

“D, can I ask you a question?” Magma says while looking at the sword.

Dra'con turns to face him.

“How did you learn how to fight?” asks Magma.

Dra'con looks at him curiously, raising one eyebrow at his question.

“I mean, your skill set are unmatched! I have never seen anyone fight the way you do. Your sword is like nothing no one has ever come across even in legend. I have noticed Eeri watching you when you have to fight. She always looks almost scared in a way. She always seems to worry about you and stuff. My father does sometimes too, but I always tell them not to worry because you can defeat anyone!” he says with excitement.

“I would not say that, everything has a weakness. Everyone can be defeated,” replies Dra'con.

“No way, not you! You remember when you took on that giant lizard? All it took was one blow from your fist and it went flying! That beast ran off so fast, I can bet it never went up against anyone like you!”

“I remember, I also remember to never underestimate any adversary I come across. No matter what race, no matter what size. Once you have done so, you have already lost,”

“Really? But you are the exception, you never have to worry about that!”

“That is not true. Believe me when I tell you that I thought the same way once, until I was shown otherwise. A mistake that almost cost me my life,”

Magma looks at Dra'con in disbelief.

“What? I do not understand? What do you mean almost cost you your life?”

“Defeat is something that we all must endure. Neither warrior, mage, scientist, nor healer can escape the grasp of defeat. There are situations where we all have to face what we fear. From this, there will be only two out comes...either we grow from it, becoming stronger, or we fall. Broken by what we once believed could never be broken,” Dra'con says to Magma as he looks at him wide eyed.

“Defeat you? Not possible!”

Dra'con smiles as he looks into the bright yellow light of his sword, commenting on Magma's question.

“Not only did she, but she did it on more than just one occasion. Beat me to within inches of my life, and was one of the best teachers I ever had.”

“Wait, a girl defeated you?”

“Not just a female Magma, a true warrior. Do not ever let sex or race dictate what you cannot see within ones soul,”

I fall to the ground holding my ribs wreathing in pain on the soft grassy plain. This is a pain that I have never experienced. Looking upward directly into the path of the sun a massive shadow is cast over me. His broad and stocky build with green and brown scales reflect multi-color beams of light as the sun's powerful ray bounces off of their surface. The lizard man stands with his dark eyes facing forward looking curiously onward, is he unable to see me? No, most reptiles have the ability to adapt to their conditions around them and have wider cone of vision. But there is something more, I think he does not want to? He sees me as inferior, a waste of energy. As he speaks, he turns away from me. The battle scarred tunic is pushed aside by his large thick tail. I notice the other reptilians that stand around us watching this pitiful uneven match.

“This is what you bring back?! An elf?!” he asks angrily as waves of laughter erupt from the other lizard men that huddle around us watching him more than me.

My mind begins to flood with too many question, questions that I cannot answer. These things that I see before me are real. Real as can be. This is not a dream nor a mirage of images that is brought forth by some sort of strange drug in my system, but a real place. My senses are being bombarded by new smells, new sounds, and images I have never imagined. This creature that stands before me, a lizard man? How is this possible? I know I must put these thoughts from my mind for now if I am to

survive. He, the lizard man, does not seem to be interested in me no longer. I do not waste this moment, I slowly begin to stand. Doing so would show that I am not being aggressive. I hold my hand up, but my other hand is automatically gripping my side as I can feel the cracked rib beneath my skin. I lean forward spitting the blood that has collected within my mouth to the ground as the crowd begins to rumble.

“Look, it stands Mirth! I cannot believe you have lost your edge and have allowed the elf to stand before you!” someone shouts at him.

He suddenly begins shouting at the small crowd in anger.

“B'jin you seem to have a lot of energy this day! Maybe you would like to offer a better challenge?!” he asks growling as B'jin steps forward.

“Anytime!” he says as his thick tail slaps the ground behind him throwing dirt into the air.

“Wait, I mean no disrespect for I am new to your world!” I shout feeling the eyes of many looking at me.

More laughter echoes from the group at what I say. That is when I notice it, I am speaking in a different language. But how? This makes no sense to me. I know that I am different, but how am I speaking a language I have never heard before?

“It speaks?” says B'jin as he leans over looking past Mirth and glares at me curiously.

“Where am I?” I ask as I quickly begin to absorb over my surroundings, examining everything.

One of the masters I had learned from taught me to be aware of my surroundings. The air, the ground, the wind that blows over my body. Know what is around me, feel what is around me. I can hear the distinct sound of water rushing nearby, a river. I notice the weapons that they carry. Some different from others, spears, war hammers, swords or blades of some sort. All of them have something, something that could do damage to the flesh. I begin going over in my mind different ways to disarm one of them within the crowd. These lizard folk look to be quite powerful and this will be no easy task I know. I begin to narrow my thoughts must be more controlled, more balanced at the situation at hand. I begin to wonder while standing in this circle of death why am I still alive? This beast has not made any more moves to attack me. Is this some sort of gladiator tournament? Am I to be sold off as some sort of slave or am I to die at the hands of this beast? I notice something, something strange. I am the only one here that is different, human.

“This sickens me! I will not entertain you by killing an elf!! You could have found something larger, more capable in battle!” Mirth shouts.

He is loud that is certain. It seems as if he does not want to have anything to do with me, killing me especially. By the looks of his wears, the dark leather strap that crosses his massive chest, the leather wrist straps

that hold his wrists, and the dual wooden spears that sit snugly against his back, he is a powerful warrior. And a proud one at that. They seem to be intelligent, they have speech, and from what I can see some sort of hierarchy. Maybe there is a chance that I could reason with them. I lower my blooded arms, taking a non-aggressive stance I begin to speak. Before words can part my bloody lips he suddenly swings without looking my way. I instinctively throw my arms up and block his swing. It hurts, but I block out the pain and return the favor with a volley of my own. More than a dozen strikes to his massive uncovered chest. The scales are like small plates of armor as my fists cramp in pain. Flipping backward, I place as much distance between us as possible.

“Is that more to your liking Mirth?! This elf does seem to have something to offer!” Someone says followed by a horrible laugh that sends chills throughout my body.

Mirth slowly turns to face me. His eyes are darker than the caves near my home. They show no emotion what so ever. I can see the drool leak from his mouth as he smiles with sharp white teeth.

“I will not go down without a fight!” I tell him showing no fear in would could come of me saying this.

“Look at his teeth! He has fangs!” someone says joyfully.

“An elf with combat skill huh? You had better make this interesting elf! Or I shall ask the god of death to not let you pass so that I might kill

you more!" Mirth says as his tongue stretches up over his eye removing the debris that has gathered on its' surface.

"This might not be an easy fight Mirth!" someone shouts from the crowd.

I look into his eyes, warrior to warrior. I cannot comprehend his massive size. The bulk of the lizard man that stands before me. These creatures are cultured and intelligent, and this one before me means to do me harm. And from what I can tell, he will. This is nothing like the battles I had back home. Humans are...easy. If these are to be last moments, then I will do as the masters who taught me would do. Clear your mind, and die as a warrior would...in combat. I hold my stand, strong and ready as I breathe. My toes flush on the grassy plan below me. I relax my muscles and clear my lungs of air as I shift my weight preparing for what is to come.

"Mirth wait!" a voice shouts in the distance.

From within the crowd, I see movement. Someone approaches, but my eyes do not leave Mirth. I can sense them standing just behind me.

"Maybe, he should fight someone his size!" the female says.

I cannot see from which warrior it came from, but they all grumble.

I spit the blood from my mouth, thinking to myself that these guys smell, I mean really smell. Their scent is awful, the strong pungent smell burns my nose. There is laughter as I come to my knees. My head slowly rises to see a blurred silhouette moving toward me. It is a female. The hulking male turns and looks back at her.

“Death comes quick for this one!” he says with a smile.

He smirks at me and moves away as the female slowly advances, stopping just before me. She is smaller than the other muscular males around us. I can tell she is a fighter by the way she moves, her body language, the shoulder armor with leather straps, the calmness in her eyes. She looks at me with determination. The same determination you would have if you were going to destroy something.

“This is not good,” I say while standing.

Most conflicts, no matter how volatile can be avoided if one is willing, that is what the old man taught me. I believe in this logic, I have used it on many occasions when dealing in conflict on earth. I for some reason believe that this theory could work here also.

“Listen, I do not know what I have done wrong, but...”

She tosses a large wooden staff my way, my eyes never leave hers. As the staff makes contact with my hand, I am suddenly knocked off my feet by her charge as her shoulder blasts into my chest. I am stunned by her movements, she is fast! Faster than anything I have ever seen or

encountered, I never saw her move. I manage to land on my feet pulling the staff into combat position.

“Wait, I do not want to fight you! Any of you!” I shout.

Again she moves within a blur, her tail, at least I think it was her tail, slams into the small of my back. She is as strong as the large male that I faced earlier. But much, much faster. As I fall forward, I get a quick glance of her wooden staff coming down striking me against my head. She hits me several more times, leg, bicep, left chest muscle, my vision is good, at least that is what I like to think, but she moves so fast my eyes cannot get a lock on her. I can sense that she is searching for weak points, I just barely move out of her reach, rolling away as her staff just misses the base of my neck. I feel as if I am moving in slow motion as I swing my fist, catching nothing but air. It could be that I am not used to this atmosphere? This is my first time being on another planet other than earth. Whatever it is, I had better do something now or die. In a combination of moves, I strike out, attacking her. She does not go on the defensive, incredibly she moves around me as a snake would its prey. Her tail suddenly shoots up between my arms and wraps around one of my forearms. Then I hear it, a sound I have never heard before, but know immediately what it is. The sound of bone breaking as the muscles within her tail tighten around my arm. My eyes widen as I have never had a broken arm, or anything that I can remember. I do not scream, that is

what they want me to do. It shows weakness. As our eyes meet as I begin to feel strange. I notice that the tip of her staff is piercing through my shoulder. I can sense the strange smell of my own blood in the air as the nerves from my hand weaken and my staff slowly falls from my hand. The grounds around us is tainted with not the blood of my enemy, but my own. It is a strange and unknown sight to me, I have never seen my own blood before. I seem to be entranced by the sight of it. Even from when I was a child, I did not scar as normal children would. I quickly snap out of my dream state and grab her staff with my free hand, and with a deadly accuracy, I deliver several knee thrusts to her abdomen. Not surprisingly, it has no effect against her solid muscular body. This is the first time that I have felt...helpless, so vulnerable. I struggle momentarily, her slate blue eyes meet mine, and then so does her head, moving forward striking mine with a devastating impact. All goes black.

"Is he not dead yet?" a muffled voice says.

There is a loud humming noise that smothers the sounds around me.

"Oddly enough, no he is not," a voice answers as the humming begins to slowly fade into the distance.

My eyes open slowly. All that is around me is blurred and barely have shape let alone color. Then another sensation that I have not felt before, pain. The nerves in my skull seem to pulsate as my vision begins to clear. Looking up I see a figure standing. As the figure comes into focus I immediately recognize it, correction...her. Standing near me is the same female that I was in combat with, the lizard warrior. I will never forget her face, those slate blue eyes. The brown and green scales. She and another other female lizard look down at me, almost in disgust as I lay within the grass.

"Look, the elf seems to have some type of tolerance, I give him this. He opens his eyes without them being pried open? Strange, even though he truly looks like an elf, he does not heal like one, nor smell like one. His wounds are almost completely healed," the other says.

I wonder if I should move. Will she attack me if I do? Will they see it as a threat? Doubtful, if that were the case, I do not believe I would have been left alive. I slowly begin to sit up, I note that my wounds have been covered by some sort of green salve. I glance up at the two of them.

Knowing that they are the ones probably responsible for this. I respond accordingly.

“Thank you,” I say.

The other female turns to face the warrior female.

“Still not going to kill him?” she questions as she turns and walks away.

The remaining female warrior continues to glare at me.

“My name is...” I begin to say.

Almost as quick as a blink, her scaled face is directly in front of mine. As she talks, I feel the heat from her breath against my skin.

“Do you think that because you are alive that your name deserves recognition?! No elf, you live because I allowed it! When or if I feel you have earned the right to have your name spoken, I will ask, until then your life is mine to do so as I see fit!” she says strongly.

I do not say a word. She leans in and sniffs me several times with her large nostrils.

“I can smell your fear elf!” she says.

“I am not an elf,” I reply strongly showing no emotion.

“No...You are right, you are not! You do not smell of them, you do not smell of anything. Most elves have the scent of woods about them, and because your smell is unknown to me, it makes me curious, elf.”

“So if you have identified that I am not an elf will you allow me to at least tell you who I am?”

“No,” she says standing upright.

“May I at least know where I am?”

“No,”

“What am I to call you?!”

“Nothing,”

“What do you want me to do?!” I shout in frustration.

The lizard warrior turns and begins to walk away.

“Survive,”

I watch as she walks past several small dome mud huts and disappears into a larger one. I may be young, but I know when I am being toyed with. I can hear the other members of her tribe talking, chatting about war, combat, and kill strikes. Looking around I see all of them dressed in crude combat armor, leather like belts, small simple pieces of silver looking armor covering small parts of the body. An arm here, a chest there, nothing that would really do any good in a fight. But, I found out the hard way, it is not the armor that protects them, but their skills and tough hide. A few of them sit outside on the ground on what looks like a crude dirt path that cuts through the grass. A path made over time by warriors crushing the grass as they walked through these areas many times over. There are many small dome like structures which have

to be homes of some sort. No cities, no farms, no palaces or mega fortresses to be seen anywhere. This civilization lives almost prehistoric.

“Another planet,” I say softly.

I cannot fathom all that I see around me. Look around at my surroundings is like reading a novel or fantasy book, the ones my mother would read to me. Looking up into the night sky I notice a gigantic planet filling up the sky in the distance.

“Incredible,”

I am almost left without words.

“Maybe this is where I belong? Maybe these people could help me find out who I am, what I am?” I begin to mumble.

I notice that I am alone, sitting furthest away from the small village in a patch of field that is surrounded by large trees that line the outskirts of an impressive forest. Oddly, for the first time I am cold, not freezing, but cold. There is no snow on the ground, no real moisture in the air, it must be the atmosphere of this place. I was never this cold back home, even as I traveled the planet. Exhausted, I lay back down on the ground and concentrate on my breathing. Not letting the cold overcome me. I close my eyes and fall asleep.

I dream of my mother, our home, the farm, all of the many animals we kept on the land. I see the wheat fields, the tall trees near our home,

and the old gray stone well off in the distance. I hear my mother in the distance, calling my name.

“Richard! Time for supper!” she shouts.

Supper, what a strange concept. It still brings a smile to my face when I think of that strange word. I lean over and pet the small white goat that for some reason has taken a liking to me. Chewing grass, it looks off in the distance almost as if its' thoughts were of larger greener fields. Standing, take off running toward the house. Going as fast as my little legs can carry me. Overalls is what I believe she called them. Silly to think that people wore these things, or even wore clothing at all. I never understood that. But as a child, what do you know? Passing the old rustic wood and brick shed, I slap the side of it with a stick just to hear the loud bang of the wood. Something I would do just for fun. I round the corner and see our house. My pace quickens, just as jump over the small bucket metal bucket of water, I am suddenly hit in the face with water, a lot of it. I wake up surprised, eyes wide. I wipe my face as I am brought back to the present by a female warrior who stands directly over me.

“Prove to me you deserve to live,” she says looking down at me.

She drops the wooden bucket by my head just missing me and walks away.

“Good morning to you too,” I say as I sit up.

Good morning? Did I sleep all through the night? Time does not have any jurisdiction here. I stand and begin to follow her. Looking up to the sky, my white pupils adjust to the bright sun light. The sun here is larger, this I can tell, quite larger than earth's sun, but not as beautiful in my eye. Looking forward, I can see the lizard warrior walking just a few steps ahead of me. It seems that she is leading me away from the camp. We walk through a dense area of trees, stepping over broken branches and marching our way through a sometimes thick under bush. Suddenly, the forest opens up. We enter a clearing near a small cliff. The warrior stops as I walk past her over to the edge of the cliff and look down. The noise of the river beneath fills the area. There is abundant life here, creatures large and small. Plants that seem to move against the small breeze that tries to move them. Are they intelligent I wonder? The smell of moisture rises up as water quickly makes its way over smooth multi colored rocks. It almost brings a moment of serenity to my mind. Almost...

"It would be a quicker death," she says as if to tempt me.

"I prefer not to," I tell her.

"Not now," she says as she tosses a wooden staff toward me.

The staff hits against my chest falling to the ground. Her eyes lock onto the staff as it lay at my feet, she then glances up looking at me.

"If I had wanted to kill you..."

"I would have done so," she says suddenly behind me.

How did she move that fast? I do not show that I am startled, I stand fast. Nothing that I know of can move that fast and remain undetected, but I am not dealing with the known. Life forms that I never knew existed. It is then I realize that the skills I have, what I have learned during my time on earth...are at a level of zero.

"Pick up your staff!" she says with a stronger tone.

She looks at me with those cold slate blue steel colored eyes. Almost as if she is trying to look into my soul and snatch it from my body. I get the message, I slowly reach down and pick it up.

"You have honor I see," I say.

"What do you know of honor?"

"Where I am from, it was taught to me that honor and nobility is what makes a warrior. Not just strength,"

"Strength, you have none. Skill, you are lacking and would not survive the night alone. You know nothing of what it is to be or become a warrior. At best you are primitive, predictable, sluggish, and most of all unrestrained. To say that you have a foundation is to say that there are seeds in the ground that will someday come to blossom. Maybe in a lifetime, but you do not have that luxury. You live only because we are curious as to what you are,"

"What I am?"

“Elf you are not, yet you look like one. Warrior you are not, yet you seem to have the heart of one who tries to be. I have never seen your kind before. For the scouts to bring you here, they too must have wondered the same,”

“Scouts? Is that what you call them? They abducted me from my home!” I say.

“It was you who called out to them!”

“What?? I did not call out to no one!”

I say to her, then I remember, vaguely. Something happened to me while climbing the side of that mountain. I remember the winter wind, the blinding snow, the noise of a rock slide. I glance back at the warrior.

“How did I call out to them? What happened?” I ask more lost than ever now.

She looks at me, curious.

“I do not know, nor do I care. What happens now decides your fate. Live or die, it is your choice!”

I pause for a moment, I have so many questions. Questions that did not exist before. As I look into her eyes, I put my fear aside. These are warrior eyes. The eyes trained for combat. I begin to realize maybe she is not the one who can answer my questions.

“You know I will choose to live,”

“Yes, but that choice also belongs to me,” she says.

Suddenly, she attacks. But this attack is much slower than the one before. And as I could tell, less powerful. I can read her moves, I block them with ease. Why is she holding back? Why is this time different from the last?

"You are afraid! Why do you fear me elf? If you fear me..." she says while quickly sweeping my legs from under me.

Her staff slams into my abdomen before I hit the ground. That move I did not see. I lay on my back surprised.

"You are already dead," she says.

She moves away and turns to face me.

"On your feet elf!"

"I assume that you are not going to kill me?" I ask while standing.

Dumb question, she fires into me again. This time not holding back. Her staff blasts into the side of my head as her tail crashes into my chest knocking me to the ground dazed. No death blow. She could have killed me twice, easily, yet she has not. From what should be a normal wooden staff does not feel like. Instead, it feels lighter than wood, but packs the impact of an iron bar. Wiping the blood from my mouth, I know better than to test my luck a second time. I gather myself and stand before her.

"Attack me," she says with her back turned to me.

I do not question her. I immediately attack her from behind. Without a glance or as much as a flinch, she dodges my staff. I continue

the attack, swinging with a purpose. Yet this being dodges everything move, every kick, every punch with little to no effort. Not even raising her staff to block mine, it is kind of degrading. I become angry at this fact and try to step on her tail, I miss, what a surprise.

“Predictable,” she mocks walking away from me.

I leap upward, flipping over her head, landing on my feet, and swing my staff at her legs, then double back with my own to sweep her legs from under her.

“Slow,” she says while using her staff to catapult her body out of harm's way.

“I am moving as fast as I can!!” I shout.

Somehow she appears behind me, shoving me forward with her staff as her tail ties up my legs causing me to fall face first into the grass.

“I do not believe so. We have young offspring that would defeat you within moments. Your technique is not only faulty but also strange,” she says turning and walking away.

I stay on the ground. I know that more than likely I will not survive this combat with this being. Back on earth, I was the fastest, and the strongest they had ever seen. My masters would call me a phenomenon, an anomaly, out here is a different story. All of the hours and days training now seem futile. It was easy for me, I was different. And now I fear that being different means nothing, I know will not last long here. My mother

would sing to me these tales about a boy who was just a dragon in a child's body. A child that I found out was me. I quickly turn my head in the direction of the warrior only to see that she is gone.

"Damn it!" I curse myself for losing concentration and now she has disappeared.

"I do not understand, you speak as if you expect me to die! If this is so, why toy with me and not just kill me!?" I ask loudly.

"A warrior does not think about death, a warrior does not think about life. A warrior only thinks about the present. Following their code, no matter what the outcome. For me, there can be nothing better than dying in combat with a worthy opponent. Are you worthy elf?" she asks as her voice seems to echo from the dense forest before me.

I lay there, on the grass wondering, thinking. Then it comes to me as normal as it is for birds to fly. I slowly stand.

"I too have a code!" I say aloud.

I twirl my staff around my body.

"Survive, fight, and become stronger!" I say.

I ready my staff.

"You say I am slow, compared to you I know this to be true. Show me how to be faster!" I shout into the woods.

I stand motionless. Moments go by without a response. My heart races, but I keep listening. Listening for movement, anything. Then

strangely, I hear her voice from what seems to be coming from every direction.

“Close your eyes,” she says.

I am being more naive than ever. Trusting a being that I do not know. Doing what she asks of me without even thinking if it is right or wrong. I play a dangerous game, one that could end with my life. It feels as if she is moving, and quite fast. Faster than I can see. See, is that the key? I remember on master telling me not to see with my eyes, but with my soul. Hesitating for a moment, I take a deep breath and close my eyes.

“Your eyes are to remain closed. Strike me down!” I hear her say.

Strange, her voice is projecting from in directly in front of me. I swing my staff. It makes a swishing noise as it pushes through empty air. There is a sharp pain on my lower back as her staff strikes. Quick, hard, and powerful. It hurts, pain that I have never felt before, but I maintain my composure and continue to keep my eyes closed, concentrating.

“Even an elf would have sensed me by now,” she says from behind me.

I swing again, but this time in front of me, not listening to her voice. Expecting her to be there was illogical. I believe I did it out of panic, fear maybe. My staff again catches nothing but air.

This time her staff hits me from the side. I wince in pain. Her strikes are getting more powerful each strike. Suddenly, she grabs me by my hair, twisting me down to the ground as her staff sits tightly against my neck. My eyes instinctively open. What was I thinking, the only thing that I see next is the warrior's claw coming down, scraping across my eyes. She releases me as I roll away, coming to my feet quickly I stumbling backward. I can feel the blood running down my cheeks, then the warmness from within my eyes. I try to open them, but I am unable to see, I have been blinded.

"Why use such useless motions of your staff? If you are not using them as an attack or defense it is unnecessary, wasted, and as you can see deadly,"

"I cannot see!"

"I said close your eyes," she replies.

Again, I ready my staff.

"Interesting, you have the will to fight, it just seems as if something is missing. Maybe the threat of death elf?"

"I am not afraid to die! And I promise you this, I will be the worst meal you ever had!" I say.

"Meal? Do not flatter yourself elf,"

"You continue to call me elf, are there elves here?"

"Elves, and other beings you could not understand,"

“Try me,” I say trying to keep her talking.

“The elves are as old as we are. My people are the A'nor. An ancient warrior race. We live to fight!” she continues.

I can sense her circling me now. And for the first time, I can truly sense her. Almost like a vibration of energy that cannot be seen with the eye, but with the mind. I am unsure how this is happening, but even though it is extremely blurred and clouded...I can somehow see her!

As she moves, she notices that my head turns with her. There is a sudden rush of air as I feel her tail wrap around my waist, pulling me toward her. I kick my feet up, meeting her torso stopping my advance. Not sure, but I can imagine this may have surprised her somewhat. I try to push away, but her tail is powerful. She throws me to the ground with such force that my staff flies from my hands. The weight of her body is quickly on top of mine as I can feel her hand across my face forcing the side of my face into the grass.

“Clever,” she says pushing down harder.

“Know this, it was either take your vision or your life,” she stands making sure to put all of her weight on my head.

“Interesting, you resemble on of the dark elves, but you do not have their abilities. You are a strange one elf,”

I come to my feet quickly, not showing any weakness, I stand strong. My breathing slows as I concentrate on where I last heard her

voice. As I do, I begin to feel that strange energy again. A difference in the air surrounding us. A burning from within that I cannot explain. The forests noises suddenly go silent as that tingle is felt throughout my entire body. I hold my staff strong and ready. Then without even a thought, I turn to face her. She looks perplexed.

"I take it you are trying to figure out not only who, but what I am? That is what this is about. No more than a test! I will not be your animal in a cage! Nor will you train me to obey or do tricks, I will die before I become anyone's slave!" I tell her strongly.

We slowly move together, like a slow deadly dance.

"Good, I see you are beginning to use your natural abilities. Abilities an elf would not have,"

"What are you talking about?" I ask.

"Again, you are slow to adapt or comprehend. Can you not see that you are beginning to evolve?" she says while lunging forward.

In a sound that echoes around us, our staffs clash. This is the first time I have parried with her. It surprises me but does not seem to surprise her. We quickly separate, whatever this ability is, she seems to know something of it.

"You know what is happening to me?" I ask.

I feel her moving around me. Testing if I can keep up with her location, I do. Without an answer, she strikes again. I duck before the

end of the staff can slam against my skull. Dodging left and right, I then leap backward keeping my distance. She is extremely quick, I have never seen anyone move this fast. It is almost irritating to a point.

“Why are you doing this? I ask.

Suddenly I feel the grip of her hand around my neck. She squeezes tightly while bringing my face close to hers.

“Because I can!” she answers.

She swings the staff against my head, knocking me unconscious.

I can see her as she stands at the kitchen window. Turning around to face me she smiles.

“Sweet heart, you can go outside you know,”

“I do not want to,”

The tall beautiful woman walks over to her son, and sits down beside him. She reaches over and gently caresses his hand.

“Why not my child?” she asks.

“The others, they are afraid of me!” the little boy says as if he is angry because they are.

“No sweetie, they just do not understand you,”

“Why do they not see me as you do? When I look in the mirror, is this not what they see?” he asks while rubbing his blue skin.

She strokes his beautiful white hair, moving it from his face. She then leans over and kisses his face.

“They see what they are supposed to see my child. The wonderful human boy that has blessed my life with his existence,” she says with a large smile.

Her little blue skinned boy smiles back, and begins to laugh as she reaches over and tickles him. Reaching over she grabs him and pulls him into her bosom.

“I love you Richard, never forget that,” she says stroking his head.

“I love you to mother,”

I awake to a blurry dark star lit sky. I live through another day, how fortunate I think sarcastically. My head throbs from the thrashing I received earlier, it seems to be a pattern, a pattern I really dislike. I now know that this warrior wants me alive more than dead. I believe this more than ever now, but the question is why? Why does it seem like a trial by fire? As my mother would say to me in times of hard ship. The warrior has proven that I am weak when it comes to her kind, so why keep me alive? Turning my head, something gets my attention in the distance. Not too far off in the darkness I see a few small fires. Campsites perhaps, there seems to be a few warriors sitting near each one. That is when I notice it, I can see!

“Wait! This is not possible?!” I reach up to feel my head wrapped in some sort of cloth.

The cloth covers my eyes.

“I did not put this on, someone else must of...” I look up again at the campsite.

This is not possible? How can I see those fires? But not as I thought they were. Upon closer examination I note that I see the heat coming from the fires.

“Heat signatures?” I say surprised.

How is this possible? How am I able to see heat signatures? I believe that there is a possibility I could be in some sort of dream state. Maybe suffering from the hit, a concussion perhaps. But as I turn my head around looking at my surroundings, I begin to identify the blurry shapes that surround me. The silhouettes are not clear, dark and seeming to fluctuate in and out constantly changing. But maintain their form. A tree looks like a tree, a rock looks like a rock. The profiles of the numerous types of wild life that live in these woods...I can sense them also. The stimulation is overwhelming, I begin to snicker, and building up to a gaudy and almost senseless laugh.

“Did you know this would happen?” I ask as I sense the female warrior coming up behind me.

“For a moment I thought it was still night, but it is the day time is it not? I could sense the stars in the sky, then I realized it was not their glow I saw against the darkened sky, but the energy each of them gave off,”

My mood changes as I ask this next question.

“What am I?”

There is an uneasy silence from the warrior. She drops a short sword before me.

“Come, let us see if you can earn to live another day,” she says.

I grab the sword and begin to stand when I sense her directly before me. She reaches up and rips the bandage away from my head.

“Open your eyes,” she says.

I slowly open my eyes. The bright light from the sun covers the land around us as we stand face to face.

“Hmm, I see. You are not surprised?” she asks.

“Neither are you,” I reply as I stare back.

“I realize that there is a lot you are not telling me. But if there is one thing I am learning...is patience,” I say to her knowing I will not get a response.

“Really? Patience? Let us find out how patient you are elf,”

I honestly do not know how long we were locked in battle. Hours, minutes, the days are much longer here than on earth. And the weather could be a lot harsher at time. From thunder storms, pouring rain, to incredible high winds, there was no real warning when it would take a turn for the worse. Yet, the warrior would not cease. I felt it more and more each passing day. She kept pushing me, harder, her attacks, each time longer and stronger than before. There were times where I felt I was making progress, progress in using this strange ability. But each time it felt as if I were just a bit slower, or rather she was just too quick, always that critical one step ahead of me. She introduces me to a plethora of weapons. Each of them cleaned, sharpened, and well taken care for. From short and long swords, to staff, to blinding spear, to what I called a knife because I could not pronounce what she called it, we battle on. I have not slept for days, I think. I have lost count. Without food, without water, I continue point of exhaustion and hunger. I do this because if I do not...I die. My body aches and cries for rest, but we continue. I am becoming slower, weaker, my mind unclear. Suddenly her tail slip past my guard, knocking me to the ground. I am more than defeated, this is where I die. Slowly come to my feet, this is when I notice that the warrior does not advance.

"You have earned another day to live, for now," she says.

“You sure you do not want to go a little more? You know, while I am still alive,” I reply sarcastically.

“I could, the problem is you,” she says as she turns and begin to leave.

She does not tire. I begin to wonder if her kind ever experience fatigue as we know it. I begin to follow her. Just as we pass through the thick under bush, I sense someone nearby. Suddenly, I two large brutes pick me up my each arm and walk with me into camp. I am too weak to fight them. They walk with me for a moment, then suddenly drop me to the ground.

“This is where you stay the night elf!” one of them says.

The warrior leans in closer. These guys are huge. His wide muscular body blocks out the other one behind him. He then speaks with his teeth showing while looking into my eyes.

“If it were up to me, I would have ripped your spine out by now!”

I look right back into his and show my fangs as well.

“But it is not up to you, is it?” I reply calmly.

I do not show fear, the female warrior told me she could smell it on me. But not this time, I do not fear them. There is a moment where I did not know if he was going to reach down and snap my neck or not. We continue looking into each other's eyes, waiting for the other to look

away. But that does not happen. I hear the other warrior let out a loud laugh as his massive hand slaps the other on his shoulder.

“I like this elf,” he says as they turn and walk away.

“I am not an elf,”

Funny, I do not think I look like an elf, but maybe to them I do. Not the friendly Santa's helper's kind I suppose. From what I have been told, they have seen them, crossed paths on a few occurrences. Not sure their relationship is one of best friends. Sitting here on the ground with tattered clothing, dark blue skin and pointed ears, I guess to them it does scream Elf! I reach up and rip off what was remaining of my shirt. Looking at the shredded material in my hand, I begin to think.

“This definitely would not be to my mother's standards,”

Looking over beside me sits a large wooden bucket. The last I remember, it was turned over on its side. Now it sits upright. Upright and filled to the rim with water.

“Water?”

I focus my attention to the bucket as the water within seems to call to me. Causing me to realize how thirsty I have become. Reaching over, I dip my hands into the water, cupping the water with both hands, I smell it, then take a sip. Clear and clean water from a nearby stream, I can taste the minerals in it and I am reminded of home. Home, I begin to wonder will I ever see it again. That thought is thrown from my mind as I

look around at my surroundings. The large thick trees, the mountains far off in the distance, and one of the two large moons that seem to always fill the sky day and night. It is then when I realize, this strange land, this is my home now. And it is doubtful that I will ever see earth again...and I begin to think I am okay with that. I hear someone approaching from the darkness. It is the female warrior. She holds in her hand some sort of rope. Draped from this rope is what looks comparable to the fish back home. Stopping before me, she drops them on the grass near the bucket.

“You will need your energy for tomorrow,” she says.

I am sort of surprised. I would have figured that she wanted me to find food on my own. But maybe, in some strange way, they want me to stay alive.

“Thank you,” I say as she turns and walks away.

A smile comes to my face, which is something I have not done in a long time, quite a long time. I stand, looking over my surroundings, I make my way over to the edge of the woods. There I find several dry branches that will do. Like a kid, I begin to run around picking up dry branches for a fire to cook with. Gathering as many as I can, I begin to make my way back, when I notice four very large warriors going into the dark forest. Each of them carrying a weapon of some sort. They disappear into the darkness, but I can still sense their energies as they move further and further away. I look toward the small village, expecting to see some

disturbance of some sort. Nothing, the others seem to be going about their own routines without any sign of panic or urgency. So I do the same. Sitting down, I begin to rub two sticks together before the pile of wood I have created. I begin to get frustrated when smoke starts to come from the friction between the sticks.

“Thank you,”

I takes a moment before a fire begins. Moments go by as the fire begins to grow. I place one of the sticks through a fish and hold it over the fire.

“Hmm, actually smells pretty good,” I say.

Suddenly, I hear a scream from deep within the woods. I stand, looking into the darkness. I glance back at the village.

“What is going on? Did they not hear that?” I question.

A few tense moments past, when I see their heat signatures appear. But I only see three heat signatures returning.

“Wait a second...this cannot be right?”

I rub my eyes, then shake my head as if this will help. I look again.

“Three bodies,”

As they exit the dark woods, I notice that one of the warriors appears to be walking with a noticeable limp. While the other looks to be holding his arm up close to his body while slowly coming up in the rear. The third one seems to have an arrow pierced through his shoulder. They

look as if they had just come from a huge battle. Beaten, battered, and missing a comrade, they approach the village. As they walk through, other warrior's turn and watch them limp in with looks of defeat on their low hung faces. None of the warrior's respond, they do not act as if this a something that needs immediate attention, but something of the norm. I stand there staring, in awe and shock with fish still in hand wondering what did I just witness? Turning back to the darkness of the woods, I see nothing but the usual mammal like creatures. I see nothing out of the ordinary, then again, everything here is out of the ordinary to me. For a group of them to go into the woods at night is not strange, but come back with one of their comrade's missing, that is the part that sets an alarm in my head. That makes me think of one single question.

“What happened out there?”

The morning comes, bringing with it what looks dark like rain clouds over head. I could not sleep, my thoughts were still clouded from the vision of the three returning warriors last night. So many question flood my mind. It is this curiosity that I fear most. A curiosity that brings with it a type of anxiety. Nervously, I turn to see the female warrior approaching. She walks with a silky subtleness while carrying her spear. She stops before me.

“Come,” the warrior says as she turns away.

I stand and slowly begin to follow her through the woods. We head in a different direction, just as before. I know she does this on purpose. Not letting me get used to my surroundings. Changing them each time. We walk through the waist high grass close to the area the warriors' disappeared through. I look on the ground and notice that their path is still visible. We make a sharp turn away from their path and toward a different area. My eyes begin scanning around. Looking for clues to what could have happened. But we move purposely away from this area. Passing through some large, thick brush, I cannot hold my peace any longer.

“There was a disturbance last night,” I say.

We continue making our way through the woods. She does not acknowledge me.

“I saw some warriors enter the wood. One of them, did not return,”

Again, nothing. Yet I am used to her not responding to any questions I may have. Time passes as we come into a crowded area. I note the broken trees and large stones that litter our surroundings. The thick denseness of the leaves on the trees above shade the area making it much cooler. The air also seems heavier than other places we have been. The warrior stops suddenly and turns to face me.

“You were stagnant from your past surroundings it seems. Unable to release your true abilities. How you survived is unknown to me,”

“Stagnant? Wait, are you saying I was born with this....”

“What I am saying is that you somehow survived without them. That is more impressive to me,” she says.

The way she looks at me now, seems different. Have I somehow impressed her I begin to wonder?

“So did you know of this before blinding me?” I ask.

“No,”

“No!?”

“It seems that your natural senses came to surface because of the injury. What I did may have just triggered it. Your body adjusted on its own accord. From this there was only two conclusions, you would either adapt or die,”

I look at her momentarily stunned. Then, I realize she is correct. The things that have happened to me most recently could have never

happened while on earth. My stunned look turns into one of enlightenment.

“I guess that would have been the only logical outcome,” I reply while coming to terms with what had happened.

There is a moment of silence between us.

“Now what?” I ask.

“Let us find out what else you can achieve. Find me,” she says.

“What?”

Suddenly, the warrior vanishes before my eyes.

“Wait, what just...”

Without warning, her staff cracks the back of my legs. I drop to my knees. I quickly roll away and pull the rope that holds my staff across my shoulder releasing it from my back. Standing ready for combat I realize that my life is pretty much at her disposal. Fighting an opponent that I cannot see.

“You can hide yourself from detection?!” I ask as I spin around trying to find her location.

“I can do a lot of things,” she says as her fist suddenly makes contact with my jaw.

Moving backward I continue to look around.

“That hurt,” I think to myself.

She is attacking me with more strength than before. The frequency of her attacks have been steady rising. Stronger and faster each attack, each move, each blow. I realize that if I continue to fight her like this, where she has the advantage, she will tear me apart. So I had better do something pretty quick. I suddenly remember the words that had been told to a young student long ago.

“A ninja always makes use of their surroundings, they become undetectable. Blending into what is around them, use what is around you to your advantage,” the old man would tell me.

I immediately take off running, running as fast as I can into the woods. I move quicker and faster than I ever have before. Strange, I never was able to run like this. This fast, this agile. Objects around me seem to slow down. My senses are heightened, smells, sounds, and my vision are now heightened beyond what they were before. I do not need to look behind me to know that she is giving chase. How has she done this? Realizing I do not have time to contemplate this issue, I continue advancing through the woods. I build up the nerve to try an experiment. I close my eyes and listen, listen carefully. Moving through the woods and great speed, I am still able to leaping over and around trees. I sense the wind blowing, the leaves being picked up by air currents, obstacles in my path, and the animals that fill this forest. There is the sound of a river nearby. The normal sounds of water flowing, hitting against the rocks that

stick up through to the surface. Normal sounds, then that is when I sense it. Something different. Something that should not be there, a disturbance giving resistance to air moving quickly past it. I can identify it as some sort of metal, the warriors' shoulder pad! I quickly turn and make my way onto the sandy edges of the river. I then isolate the strange almost whistling sound, it begins to move closer. I pace myself, trying not to let her know that I am slowing down on purpose. My breathing slows as I begin to count the distance between myself and the sound. With my eyes still closed, I feel her presence nearing, moving closer, and closer. Opening my eyes I strike. I dig my staff into the sand, forcing it deep as I can, pushing my body upward into the air. Turning my body around to face the location where the sound emanates. I pull the staff out, forcing dirt into the air behind me, it collides against her unseen body. The invisible is invisible no more.

“Got you!” I shout.

My staff comes down hard and fast. At the last second, she blocks it with her own staff. I land behind her. We stand facing one another as she once again is visible.

“Lor'na'rah,” she says while dropping her guard.

I look at her curiously.

“This is my birth name,”

"I am called Richard, but my mother told me this was the name she gave me. My birth name is Dra'con," I say as I too lower my guard.

"Dra'con? I like elf better," says Lor'na'rah.

"I could get used to it," I say.

"Shall we continue?" I ask.

Lor'na'rah nods, and then moves in quickly. Every now and again she vanishes. But my senses find her, I am now using them without even trying. She pushes me, again and again. A few quick strikes, the sound of our staffs colliding. Then I feel it, Lor'na'rah's weapon slipped through my defenses and the blade on the end has drawn blood. She looks at me with a sly look of satisfaction. Not letting up, she continues to attack. For some strange reason, I believe she is counting how many times she makes contact with me. A game to her perhaps? I move in closer, spinning over her swing I land and return the smile. She looks down at her leg to see it now has blood coming from it. Her smirk vanishes. Seems to me that she does not like it. My hair, a bit longer than it has been, hangs over my face preventing her from seeing directly into my eyes. Yet, I can see hers clearly. As we attack one another, sparks fill the air from the metal tipped staffs clashing. For the first time, I seem to be holding my own. She spins away from me, her body almost blurred by which the speed she moves. Her tail makes contact with my mid-section. But this time I am ready for it. Using the momentum from the blow, I swing my staff and land on my feet

before her. Lor'na'rah has also turned and faced me. That is when I see it, blood coming from her left shoulder. A strike, this one seems substantial. As she approaches, I can see her moves. She swings, her staff whistles past my head several times as I easily move away from its' path. She swings downward, just missing me. I lift my leg and place it over the wooden head of the staff, forcing the blade into the ground. Raising my blade, I place it at the edge of her throat.

"Checkmate," I say looking into her steel blue eyes.

"Checkmate?" Lor'na'rah asks.

"You have no more moves, when you have exhausted your moves, on earth it is called checkmate," I reply.

"My moves are exhausted when you have killed me!"

"That is not necessary,"

"Your opponent will not feel this way, they will not stop until you have killed them, or they have killed you. Either way, you must make the kill before they do!" she says as she tries to yank her staff from the ground.

I force it deeper into the ground while she continues to jerk at it. Harder and harder each time. She knows just as I do, I have become stronger. My senses have become more acute, picking up every detail around me. Sounds, smells, heat signatures, even small details in the air itself. My speed and ability to react is beyond anything I would have dreamed of. I would now even dare to say even quicker than Lor'na'rah.

Something is happening to me, not just mentally, but physically. I cannot help but to think that she knows something. Something that I do not. I look at Lor'na'rah, and with just a small twitch of my leg I snap her staff in half.

“We are done!” I say as I remove my blade from her neck.

Suddenly, she reaches down, picking up the broken blade in her hand and begins to charge.

“Lor'na'rah, what are you doing?!” I ask while dodging her advances.

The edge of the blade catches nothing but air as it passes by my face. I reach upward, swiftly grabbing her by the wrist and twisting her hand. The broken blade drops to the ground. Her free hand comes up toward my face, claws exposed. I drop my staff and raise my other hand to block her claw from scratching off my face when suddenly, a blast of fire streams from her palm. I tilt my head away barely as the fire strikes the ground behind us. I look into her eyes with surprise.

“You are mage?!” I say with disbelief and release her.

She suddenly vanishes before my eyes. She has gone invisible, blending into the environment once again. My head turns as I can still sense her.

“Lor'na'rah, stop this!! This is not logical!” I shout.

A real Mage! Ironically, I never believed in magic. I did not even like the tricks that the local carnival magician did because I knew what he or she was doing. Sleight of hand tricks, but this is not simple sleight of hand tricks. This is a real mage, one who seems to want to kill me. The whole atmosphere of our combat has changed. The air has become thicker, heavier than before. Every move, every step now seems to be in desperation for survival. Lor'na'rah is going to kill me, if I do not kill her first. I roll away from where I can sense her, lifting my staff from the ground I never let my eyes leave from her energy. I see her starting to approach, but I move toward her first, blocking her hands from getting a direct shot on me. The fire balls strike the ground around us, exploding on impact.

“Lor'na'rah, this is senseless! Please cease your attacks!”

She quickly reaches out and grabs my staff. Her hands glow as the wooden staff ignites into flame. Feeling the heat from the fire, I quickly release the staff and leap backward creating distance between the two of us. The smell of wood burning fills the air as the ashes of my staff burn and slowly fall to the ground. Strangely, for some unknown reason, I begin to sense an unexpected warmth that tingles from within the depths of my stomach. As with any normal reaction, I look down to see if I have been burned, but there is no sign of tissue damage. This is when I notice a soft arc of electricity jumping from in between my fingers.

“What is this?” I question.

I can feel Lor'ra'nah approaching. Looking up, I see the red hot flames flowing from her hands. As I look into Lor'ra'nah's flame covered hands, my mind unexpectedly begins patch with visions. In these visions I see a figure, it is my mother, standing inside our home. The home that caught fire many years ago. That horrific fire that I watched take her life. I can hear clearly the fire sparking from the burning wood. Then the scream, the scream that haunts my dreams. It comes from within the burning house. Flames leap from the breaking glass windows as I pass. Suddenly, I am directly on Lor'na'rah. Before she knows what is happening, my elbow digs deep into her abdomen, throwing her backwards. Moving faster than before, I come up in her rear. My hands lock around her out stretched wrists, pulling her arms tightly across her breast. I wrap my legs around her waist as we fall backward to the ground, her body on top of mine. Something in me took over. Instincts maybe, no matter what it was, I hold her fast.

“Why do you do this?!” I ask angrily.

I tighten my grip. She does not answer. She does not need to, I know she wants, she wants me to finish the battle and kill her. Kill her. No, I will not.

“Combat is done!” I say.

I can sense the heat buildup before it comes to her hands. I quickly remove her hands away from her face as an arc of flame shoots upward

to the sky. Instinctively, I hit her on the nerve along her long neck. As my hand makes contact, I see the arc of electricity surrounding my palm and fingers. The electricity comes into contact with her scales where it dances over both our bodies. Lor'ra'nah's eyes widen for a moment, then I feel the struggling cease as her body goes limp. Her head flops back next to mine as we lay still on the soft sand.

“Combat....is done! Damn....stubborn...lizard!” I say breathing heavily.

Looking up at the evening red sky. I feel her breathing, subconsciously I match her breathing. I can still sense the incredible amount of heat that was being released from her relaxed hands. I slowly lift one of her hands to see a symbol carved in the center of her palm. The exotic symbol is carved on both of her palms, exactly the same. I have never seen anything like it. Placing her hands back down on her body, it is at this moment, I realize how weary I am. Relaxing, I look upward to catch a bird flying overhead as I stare into the red sky. The smell of burning wood fills the air. Small pieces of ash and red hot amber float past us both as we lay there, motionless.

The potent smell of smoke rushes through my lungs as I take deeper breaths. I seem to be moving in slow motion as I advance toward my burning home. I fall just before the wooden steps as the loud sound of timber is heard falling from inside. The wood seems to scream as the

flame pulls out its' soul. Looking up, I can see massive amounts of heat and flame rising into the air, flumes of smoke follow darkening the sky. Fighting to get to my feet, I run up to an unbroken ash covered window. My small hands lay pressed up flat against the hot glass, but it does not burn. Peering inside, my eyes strain to look past the high towers of flame and smoke. The light from the fire plays tricks on the eye. Casting shadows of demons dancing on the walls and ceiling. But the shadow I see moving toward me I recognize. From within the heart of the flames, it takes shape as it moves closer.

“Mother?!” I scream.

I can just make out her lips moving, saying something, but I cannot hear her. I quickly run over to the door, grabbing the handle pulling on the handle as hard as my little body can. This time, my skin sizzles as I grab it. Releasing it, I try again. Each time it seems to get hotter and hotter.

“Mother! The door, I cannot open the door! Mother!!” I scream looking in to view a huge burning beam blocking the entry way.

Looking through skinny rectangular view port cut into the door, I see her slowly walking up to me.

“Mother! Move the beam! You have to get out!!” I say as she looks into my eyes.

“Its okay baby, its okay!” her soft voice pierces through the roar of the fire.

She looks at me through the glass window. She shows no fear while looking into my eyes.

“No!!” I shout.

I reach up and hit the glass with my fists for what felt like a thousand time. I hit it as hard as I can, yet it does not break. Then everything goes quiet. Our eyes meet as tears roll down her cheek.

“I love you,” she says as the fire engulfs her body.

“Mother!!” I scream.

I do not know how much time passes before I get up the nerve to move. The night has crept over as we lay here in the darkness.

“This would be a really bad first date...I am laying here with a giant lizard. My mother would be proud,” I say sarcastically as I carefully pick her up, and begin to make our way back toward camp. Making my way back toward the village, I begin to think that this may not end well on my behalf. What am I to say? Her I am carrying Lor’na’rah, one of their own, how will they react once they see me? I emerge from the darkness, passing my humble little fire pit I made on the outskirts of the village. Walking up past a few lit torches tied to large wooden sticks I see one lone lizard man on the path before me. Almost as if he were waiting. I take a deep breath and walk toward him. Stopping on the path just before him with Lor’na’rah in my arms. This huge warrior looks battle worn. A few scars on his body, the thick leather strap across his torso is too weather beaten and scarred just as he is. My eye instinctively lock on to the giant silver axe strapped to his side. His large golden eyes look over us both. Then he holds out his arms. There is a moment where I for some reason pause, then reluctantly hand him Lor’na’rah. Holding her, he turns and walks away. Without even a sound, grunt, something. Looking around, this is the closest I have been to the village. I get a better look at the dome clay like homes that litter the area. Glancing up to the night sky, I see a few very large flying insect looking creatures with warriors on

their backs. Soaring high in the air, the insects look to be domestic as they have some sort of harness strapped on their backs. The multi colored creatures' wings beat at an insane speed buzzing as they pass over head. Normally I would be astounded by a sight such as this, but exhaustion settles in on me. And in this place, nothing really surprises me now. I turn and head back to the little green area I would call home outside of the village. This small piece of land, a tiny human size square is place I call home, it is nothing like the warm and comfortable farm house we once had back on earth. I remember the beds, the fresh smelling blankets, and fresh food that was prepared daily. Have I eaten? It has been some time since the fish dinner I made for myself. Strangely enough, I do not seem to be at a state of starvation. Maybe it is the minerals in the water, or the fish I feasted on. Unsure, I chuckle while sitting down on the grass. I noticed that a lot of the lizard warriors sit outside. Day and night. No matter the weather. Speaking of, a light drizzle of rain begins to fall from the night sky. I am unsure of what has awoken in me, but my vision has changed drastically. The darkness does not hinder my ability to see clearly. I reach over and pull the wooden bucket up in front of me and reach my hands into the cool water, taking a drink.

“What am I doing here?” I quietly ask as drops of rain fall on my face.

Trying to find a way to survive. I feel a presence and glance over to see a familiar silhouette approaching from the light of the village. I am beginning to really like this sensory thing. From the darkness, Lor'na'rah walks up to my side. I can tell she is staring at me as I glare out into the darkness, looking into the mysterious part of the forest where those warriors walked into. She sits quietly beside me. Neither of us saying a word. A few moments pass, when she slowly raises her hand to display a very large green and brown mushroom. I turn to look at it curiously. She nods, I reach over and take the offering.

"I would assume the big guy is your mate?" I ask while taking a bite.

"He is Barr, and yes, he is," she says as she rips off a large chunk of her mushroom.

"That was very....impressive. How did you know, to control it that is?" she asks.

"I am uncertain, just then, I think,"

"Interesting,"

I bite into the mushroom.

"A mage huh?"

"Not quite," she replies.

"You could have told me you know," I say as I turn to face her.

"Expect the unexpected," Lor'na'rah replies sternly.

We both sit quietly for some time, eating and looking into the darkness of the night. The light rain is the only sound heard around us.

“You should have made the kill!” she says strongly.

“No, it was not necessary,” I reply.

“But next time it will be necessary,”

“What do you mean? Lor'na'rah, I will not kill you!” I say angrily.

She turns and looks at me.

“You are but a child, a child in an unknown and violent realm. In this world, if you cannot take a life, it will take yours, without hesitation, without prejudice!”

I look down into the mushroom.

“Prejudice, my planet had plenty of that to go around. As I become more aware, I could comprehend the wickedness and greed in those around us. Even though I never spoke of it, I knew it to be there. She would read to me stories that were passed down to her. Modern and historical histories, math, cultural events, and those nursery rhymes...I never quite understood them. After her death, I traveled abroad for some time. Soaking in whatever knowledge I could, from all races. I began to associate myself with those of ancient arts, the art of combat. I lived among them, learned their ways, and moved on. This is when I knew, I felt drawn to combat. She did not want me to experience this, I know she would be...disappointed. She would tell me how human I was acting in

doing so. Human? Funny, that word really sounds so foreign to me now. So distant. I am not sure what or who I am anymore. It eludes me. I fit in more with you here than were I was. You can see me for what I am. How, I guess only she was privileged to do so," I say as I look down into the water bucket at my reflection.

"Maybe, I am an elf,"

I reach up feeling the small white boney protrusions that line the back side of my jaw.

"Hmm, she said they were part of my personality. I always found them to be dreadful. I want to know what I am. Where did I come from? The all-encompassing question. Being here, her with your people has given me a new perspective, you could say,"

I turn to face Lor'na'rah in her silence, who just seems to be staring at me with an emptiness expression on her face. Her eyes slowly blink a few times at me.

"Did you understand a word I just said?" I ask in frustration.

"Never mind," I say.

Look at the mushroom in my hand, I stare at it for a moment, then turn to face Lor'na'rah.

"We do not consume meat," she tells me.

I turn and smile.

“Now that is amusing, massive lizard folk, with razor sharp teeth...that do not eat meat. Why am I not surprised,” I reply.

Lor'na'rah turns and looks at me curiously.

“You have any offspring?” I ask.

“No, once you are committed to this path, you cannot bare offspring. For they must be raised and nurtured, a warriors' life does not allow this,” she says compassionately.

“My mother...she was a warrior to me,”

Lor'na'rah looks over at me, almost in a compassionate way.

“You are not going to cry on me are you?” I ask jokingly.

For a brief second, I thought I saw a smile come to her face.

“When the sun rises, we will continue with our exercises,” she says seriously while standing.

“Does it ever end? The exercises, the learning?” I ask look up at her.

“Never,”

As I lay there, I hear movement from within the village. Normally, this would be of no matter to me as they seem to never sleep. But the sounds of footsteps are moving away from the village and toward the forest. I crack my eyes open to see four lizard warriors making their way to the same path that the other group of warriors traveled that night. One of them carries a wooden torch as the smoke smolders above them. They do not seem to be sneaking to their destination, the knack of hiding seems obvious. The others march tightly behind him as they make their way into the forest. They seem to be overly armed for just a casual midnight stroll. The torch light vanishes over the hillside as they enter the darkness of the forest. I sit up for a moment, close my eyes and I listen. I listen to the sounds of the forest. Slowing my heart rate, breathing slower, feeling all around me. That is when I hear, in the distance, the sound of war! My eyes open as I reach over and grab my knives and quickly make my way into the forest toward that sound. I cover a lot of ground. Making my way into a clearing, I look over to see the torch on the ground without its owner still burning. Around me I see bodies. One warrior lies with a third of his body missing. The flesh still sizzling as it melts away.

"Acid," I says softly.

Another lays still just a few yards from me. Beating and broken as his tongue hangs from his mouth and one of his eyes appears missing. The third, hangs from a nearby tree. A broken branch piercing through his

chest area holds him in place. My eyes slowly begin to move upward to a strange pulsating form of energy near me. My head pounds as my senses are overwhelmed by whatever force seems to be calling out to me. But the eerie silence of this place sends a chill down my spine. From within the darkness, the creature stands before me. My senses have somehow allowed me to see clearly in the pitch blackness. It is massive. Five times the size of the lizard warriors. Long dark stringy hair hangs from its large cranium. Looking up in to the pits where the eyes should be, I begin to wonder what is this deadly creature? Looking down, there is blood on the ground everywhere. Lots of blood. I cannot tell if the fiend is alive or the undead. What worries me more I think is where did it come from? Why does this area seem worn from past battles? Surrounding trees have been broken over time, the ground worn down from being stepped on over and over again. The fiend stands tall, the empty eyes look at me. I stand my ground. I do not show fear. Then I notice movement. From within the grip of the beasts' hand is the last living warrior, being held tight by its' long boney rotten fingers. He seems too weak to do any serious damage has he hits at it with a broken bow. The fiend seems more focused on its new target, me. Maybe it was a subconscious thought, but I move quickly toward my target. Running toward it the fiend seems to lower its shoulder, I leap upward flipping just out of range of the fiend's massive hand. Landing I turn and strike! Swinging my knives several times,

chopping away at its' flesh. I attack the point that I needed to, the joint at one of the fingers that holds the warrior tight. I move quickly out of harm's way as the joint snaps free and the warrior falls to the ground with a thud. The fiend screams, but not a scream I could comprehend. The scream was more of a moan, the moan of a ghost that tears at the soul of ones fears. I leap backward, making space for another attack. My blades in hands, ready. It moves. This thing is faster than I thought, much faster. I move, ducking and leaping over the wild swings. Cutting it at every opening I get, then I make a move. Taking two steps, I leap up, placing both feet on its decaying torso. Trying to use my momentum to knock it back. The creature does not move an inch. Quickly, I strike, my blades ripping away at the fiend's flesh and tattered covering. I flip backward into the air, my eyes never loose contact of the creature. I notice everything around me beginning to move slower. The air seems to move slower than before. This is strange. Is there something wrong with me? Has the fiend hexed me somehow? I land, just as my feet touch the ground, the fiend leans forward opening its skin ripped mouth releasing a stream of green acid. I jump as high as my legs can carry me, clearing the stream as it strikes the ground below me. The grass melts away as the sizzling noise echoes in the air. Knowing I am exposed while in the air, I cross my arms covering my chest tightly for what is about to happen. And it comes with a fury. The fiend's boney outstretched hand hits it mark.

Knocking back with a powerful impact. The slapping sound rips through the air as its sharp fingers slice my flesh sending me air bound directly into a tree. The blow hurts, hurts more than anything I have ever felt. Laying at the foot of the tree, I quickly stand. It moves in, the dark rags that cover most of its body move in a ghostly hypnotic fashion as it advances. Again, things seem to slow down. I roll over the swinging hand, spinning over its' surface while my blades cut chunks of flesh. Like a cork screw, I somehow maintain velocity. Suddenly, I stop, landing on the fiends' shredded arm. Running upward, I leap over its head. Holding my blades tightly in my hands, I pull them back, back as far as my arms will allow. Once again I can feel the heat erupt from my body. The arcs of blue electricity cover my hands and the blades just as I implant them deep into the back of the neck of the fiend. We are both covered by the electrical blanket as it lights up the night. Then with a collapse of energy, I am thrown from its back, landing on the dirt face first as I roll several feet. Then there is silence.

A drop of blood rolls into my eye as my face is covered in dirt and filth. I blink slowly, clearing the blur that it caused. Laying there, my eyes focus on the fiend's smoldering body just before me. Unaware of what may happen next, I do not move. Continuing to maintain focus on the fiend, I lay still in the darkness. Time passes, the creatures' of the night slowly begin to make their normal nightly cries and howls once again. Moving as if not to wake a sleeping child, I slowly push myself off the ground to where I can sit up right. I dig the knives into the soil bracing myself. Looking at them, I see the brown leather straps that are wrapped around the handle are burned and mostly gone. One blade is completely shattered as the other seems to have melted. Leaving only two damaged handles in my grip. I begin to look around me, the carnage, and the incredible destructive power of this creature. The countless lives that were taken. This all presents more questions than answers for me. There is movement near a tree not too far from my position. The only surviving warrior begins to stir. He lifts his head and looks up at me, and then suddenly he nods. I smile in return. Without a word being spoken between us, we both come to our feet. Weary and broken. I slowly walk over to the warrior. Stopping before him, I reach down grabbing a war axe on the ground and hold it out to him. The gray axe shaft is cracked with blood on its edges. Plain and unassuming, the axe belonged to one of his brothers. He looks down, glancing over the

weapon in my hand for a moment. There is a tense moment between us before his hand reaches up, tightening around the wooden shaft as I release it. We both turn away and begin lifting up the bodies of the dead to take them home. I cannot leave them here, they are warriors that deserve a decent burial. Placing one of the warrior's body over my shoulder, I look back to see that the other has one over his back while dragging the half acid dissolved corpse behind him. Bending down slowly and noticeably in pain, he picks up the torch that some remained lit throughout the activities of flying bodies and debris. As he stands, the light reflects off the surface of something that I had not noticed before. Sitting alone on the ground is a gray stone block that stands about two feet tall with a strange symbol carved into its surface. Somehow I managed to miss it as I was a little busy with other pressing needs. The weathered stone fixture sits, alone, and unassuming. If I did not know any better, it would seem that the grass around it seemed to avoid growing too close to this strange looking monument. But looking at my surroundings a bit more cautiously now, I see two more of the same type lonely stones. Both with the same symbol deeply carved into the front surface. The stone blocks are spread out pretty wide, but from my estimates the same distance apart. I look up at the starry night sky and notice the tree line.

"A perfect triangle," I whisper.

We walk in silence, away from the opening in the center of the woods and back toward the village. Emerging from the dark forest, we come to a group of lizard warriors standing on the path. I quickly identify Lor'na'rah standing with them. The look in her eyes is one that I have not seen before, one of anger.

"Sorry about your knives," I say while holding out the destroyed hardware.

Lor'na'rah slaps the handles from my hand angrily. They hit the ground with a thud.

"What did you do?!" she shouts.

"What do you mean?" I asked confused.

"Going out into the forest at night is foolish! Those warriors are trained to hunt to kill!"

"I assisted in..."

"You interfered!"

"Interfered? I do not understand?"

"They are warriors Dra'con! This is what we do!" she replies.

"The other night something killed one of your people Lor'na'rah! When I saw another group of them leave, entering the same area were the others went, I could not just stand by and watch them die!"

"You should have stayed your ground no matter what you heard or saw!"

“Wait...you know about that creature? Four warriors lost their lives to that thing out there, and you knew of this?”

“That is what they do! That is what we do,” Lor'na'rah says proudly.

“That is what they do? They all would have died out there tonight!”

I reply.

“Then let them die! It was their choice,”

“Their choice? Lor'na'rah, I do not understand! Why?”

“They knew what they were doing Dra'con! It was their rite of passage. To come home as fine warriors or find their place beside the gods!”

“I am sorry Lor'na'rah, but my faith in the gods is less than zero! If these so called gods are as peaceful and forgiving as people thought, then they would not have let those warriors' perish...not like that!” I say pointing back at the dark forest.

“We have our beliefs, just as you have yours! Just because you do not understand them, does not mean they are erroneous. Why do you judge them so?” she asks calmly.

“I judge them no more than you, I just released that belief long ago. The same belief my mother had, the same belief that was taught to me. I realize you have your beliefs, and I respect them. I just could not let them die out there, because it seems to me that your gods did not want to help,”

“The rules and guidelines you once followed, do not exist here. Remember when I told you that you either survive or die? That is what we do every cycle of the sun,”

“Lor’na’rah, I am sorry that I misunderstood you laws and your ways. I just do not know what...”

And for the first time, she lays her hand on my shoulder.

“Have comfort that they gave their lives for their beliefs and what they strived to be. For you going there, risking your own to save them, those unknown to you. They would have seen you as a brother, and laid down their lives to protect yours. Remember this,”

I look up into her eyes, and a strange wave or feeling of peace comes over me.

“Thank you,” I tell her.

Lor’na’rah looks at me confused.

“For understanding,” I clarify my words.

She turns and walks away with the other warriors’ as they make their way back to the village. Mirth, the huge brute I had fought before, places two of the bodies over one shoulder with a flick of his wrist. I turn and walk back out into the darkness. I see the area that I claim is my home and sit within the grass. The grass patch that I am glad to feel beneath me. Sitting down hard on the ground and stare at my hands wondering what happened to me back there? How was I able to create

electricity? I go over that battle again and again in my mind unlike a reel to reel film, only in darkness. The sight of the fiend, the bodies that were surrounding the area. I envision the electricity running over my blue skin as if it had a mind of its own. Arcing and shooting through the sharp knives and then into the fiend. The question now burns with more energy than before, what am I? Leaning over I grab the wooden bucket near me, dragging it closer and notice it has been refilled with fresh water and there seems to be what I would call a wooden spoon sticking out of the water. Lifting the spoon, I place it up to my lips, once, twice, several times taking several large sips of the refreshing water. I begin to wonder how I am still alive. Leaning back against the soft grass, the fragrance overwhelms me while a simple breeze seems to sweep over my body cooling it down. My eyes slowly close as I fall asleep quicker than I ever have before.

“Dra'con,” a soft voice says in the distance.

I open my eyes to see that it is still dark. Extremely dark, a darkness that seems mystical the way it forms around me. My eyes begin to focus as I find myself upright sitting on a chair. A wooden chair. But how is this possible? The chair that I sit in is from one of the wooden chairs I remember as a child. Back on earth.

“What is this?” I question.

I cannot move, my hands bound behind me and the chair. The more I look around, the more this seems like a dream to me. Yet, my senses are either unaware this is a dream, or I am somewhere I should not be. Looking up, I notice an odd looking circle that emits a light that shines over top of me. Shinning down, placing its' beam directly on me and me alone. My body begins to feel energy, an energy that is not mine. I am not alone. Whatever it is, it sits just out of my field of vision in this darkness.

“Who is there?!” I say strongly.

That is when I hear them. Voices, I hear voices, but I do not understand the language that is being spoken. Soft and in many directions around me. Closing my eyes, I begin breathing slowly, sensing them more carefully now as I concentrate on just the voices. Five, there are five voices. Female, different but somehow the same. They are speaking to me, saying things I cannot comprehend. The voices are blending in with one another as they shift from close to far and back

again. The five entities surround me. Speaking nonstop, engulfing me with an unexplainable energy that rattles my soul. Looking off in the distance, I see movement. One of the entities approaches, coming closer than the others. Within the darkness, all I can make out is the silhouette. I can tell it is female, which stands in the darkness with no intention to allow me identify her. Then all voices then begin to somehow manifest from her location. Becoming one single voice. Suddenly, I see her eyes begin to glow white as arcs of electricity begin forming over her body. This strange powerful energy...I know of this. It is the same that somehow erupted from my hands in the woods. This same power, now somehow begins to flow through me as the warm sensation from within returns. I can feel it escaping through my eyes, I see the arcs of energy dancing around the edges of my eye lids. It is at this time, I sense fear. That fear is my own. Suddenly, that flow of power that moved through my hands, now burst forth from my body. I open my eyes. Startled, I sit upright and begin looking around at my surroundings. The electrical current slowly subsides but not before scorching some of the grass around me. I look up to see the village, just as it was. Quiet and unassuming. I feel myself breathing heavily from this event. Who were those women?

“That was no dream,” I mumble.

From over the forest tree tops comes a red hue as day break begins to make its presence known. Knowing that I could be a danger to those

in the village, I stand and make my way through the still dark forest following the path toward the river. Bringing my short sword with me to practice with, but with the strange creatures on this planet, one cannot be too safe. Once I exit the forest, I take in the view. The clear water, the feel of moisture in the air. The shadows of the tree line on the ground behind me. Not too different from the rivers of earth, but also completely in structure and life. For the first time, I am at peace. Just the sound of the river rolling by at a steady pace, so very soothing. I wiggle my toes in the sand, and for the first time...I smile. Thoughts of a time not too long ago, but for me, it seems like ages. Traveling the world was nothing to me. I now realize why everything was so easy. Earth was my home, it was where I was raised. Where I was loved and feared. Looking up at the sky, clouds roll over head and the thought of earth's location crosses my mind. Would I ever return? What would the simple old town I lived in be like now? My thought process is broken by a strange looking bird that flies over head.

"Now time for business," I say softly.

Looking into the palm of my blue hands, I concentrate. I sense the energy from inside me begin to stir. Strangely enough, it seems easy to manipulate, too easy. Closing my fists, the energy continues to build. Dancing across my skin as I look deep into the bright light. What I sense is strange, I sense...nothing. It is a sense I have never experienced before.

An emptiness, a bottomless pit that stems from the depth of my soul. It flows around my body with a controlled motion. Then, with just a simple thought, I direct the blue hue arc away from my hands and into the water before me. With a small explosion, the water separates from the blast, showing the river bed, then quickly returns.

“Interesting,” I say.

I begin manipulating the arcs of electricity within my hands. Like a kid with a new toy. Rolling it across my fingers, down my forearm and back up to the tips of my fingers before making it vanish. I am more astonished than anything that I am able to control such power. Suddenly, I reach up to stop an arrow only inches from the side of my head.

“Are you trying NOT to make any noise? If so, you are going need to try much harder,” I say while turning to face her.

I see Lor’na’rah standing in the distance with a bow in her out stretched hand.

“Very good,” Lor’na’rah says while approaching.

“Very good? You could have killed me you know?”

“Yet, here you stand...with arrow,” she says while grabbing the arrow from my hand.

“I take it you are not disappointed with me?” I ask.

“Disappointed? Why?”

“Because of the events of last night. My ignorance could have caused the death of the warrior and myself. I am truly sorry for...”

“There is no need to be apologetic. You did not know what you were doing. I would be more upset if you did,”

“The stones that surround the area, what are they?”

“Just stones,”

“No, they had symbols engraved in them. Similar to the one engraved into your hands,”

“You noticed them did you?” she asks.

“Yes, I mean...”

“They demanded your attention. The stones are weaved with a casters' spell. The spell brings forth the creature that you call fiend,”

“Magic?” I ask even more confused than before.

“Yes, have you not heard of it?”

“I have, but nothing tangible. I mean, where I am from, let me just say, it is nothing like this,” I say while looking at my hands.

“Lor'na'rah...what is happening to me? Did someone place a spell on me?” I ask concerned.

“No, what is happening to you is your survival skills are starting to awaken. Stirred from past events, or something unseen. I do not know. But what I would like to know, is how you felt when you faced the fiend?” asks Lor'na'rah.

"I...I do not know...I cannot remember if I felt anything," I reply trying hard to remember my thought processes during that time.

It feels so strange not being able to tell someone how you feel or what you felt. Maybe I am a victim of shock? The initial battle happened so quickly that I could not comprehend it perhaps.

"Instincts, something that was already there," she says.

"Instincts? That is not possible. I have never been able to do anything quite like this. It just is not plausible,"

"Really?" Lor'na'rah says while pulling another arrow from its quiver.

"Let us test how plausible it really is," Lor'na'rah says as places the arrow in the draw string.

Suddenly, with a smile on her face, she releases the arrow. I duck, allowing the arrow to pass harmlessly over my head with plenty room to spare. Lor'na'rah begins to circle me, unloading a barrage of wooden arrows. The sharpened stones tied tightly to their tips, quickly litter the air. Leaping, rolling, dodging, and diving out of their paths, I never let Lor'na'rah out of my sight. She is quick, running around me, not staying in one place. A streak of yellow haze can be seen as she moves. Following her as she leaps up into the trees behind us. Jumping branch to branch, she continues the assault. Suddenly, just as it started, the arrows stop. Lor'na'rah begins walking toward me.

"I would say that was fun, but that would be a lie," I tell her.

She places the bow over her shoulder.

“Looked easy to me,” she says.

“Easy? Ha, I am just fortunate that you did not vanish like before. I do believe that would have been very bad for me,” I say with a smile.

Lor’na’rah looks at me with a seriousness.

“I was invisible,”

“What?”

“Your eyes, they changed to an almost orange shade. I thought maybe it was the reflection from the sun rise. But clearly, I was incorrect. The way you were able to track me, I should have known,”

My head turns quickly, looking in to the woods.

“Something...is different,” I can sense it.

I wish I could explain what I am feeling. A strange sensation, almost like the ripple of a rock being dropped onto the glass like surface of a calm lake.

“Something is out there,”

I slowly begin to pull up my short sword. Then suddenly, a hand gently guides my hand downward, lowering my weapon slowly. I turn to face Lor’na’rah. Feeling that she knows what is happening around us, I relax. I hear someone walking toward us. Turning I see an elderly female lizard. Slowly she moves, shuffling through the sand. Her burgundy robe drags on the surface of the sand as it covers all of her body and head.

The gold trimming tends to make the robe look royal in a way. As she approaches, the morning sun reflects off what seems to be a crest of a multi-colored dragon with five heads. She moves with a grace I have never witness before. A silky steady movement, almost as she were floating toward me. Her face slowly moves from the darkness of her robe as she stops just before us. Looking into her orange eyes, I immediately sense she is different from the others, much different as a strange aura surrounds her body.

“Mage?” I ask respectfully.

“Detect magi without using a detection spell is a unique ability. Very unique,” she says while reaching out a long boney aged hand touching my bare chest.

“Impressive, I was not wrong in choosing you as her apprentice,”

“Apprentice?”

“Oh yes, she is one of our best. And you have witnessed her tenacious ways first hand. What impresses me most is that you have done more than just survive, you have become one of our own,” she says while walking around me.

“Dra'con, this is De'nah. She is my master and what we call a War Mage,” Lor'na'rah tells me.

“A War Mage?” I question.

“There is so much you still have to learn young one. I only hope you survive long enough to do so. In time, things will become clearer, maybe even more than you may wish them to be,” De'nah says.

She places her arm within mine.

“Walk with me Dra'con,” she says.

We begin slowly walking down the river side.

“I know you have questions, ask them,” says De'nah.

“Why am I here?”

“Ah, good, straight to the point. You are here so that you may choose your own destiny,”

“My own destiny?”

“Yes, nothing more disappointing than the truth, huh?”

“All this that is happening to me, am I cursed?”

“Cursed?”

She looks me up and down for a moment.

“No, what would make you say that? These gifts that you have, should only be seen as treasures! Treasures no one other than you may have or control. Surviving has just made what you already had come to surface, that is all,”

“It is I who requested that you live, but by our rules. Lor'na'rah would have it no other way,” De'nah replies.

“I do not understand,”

“We, I needed to see for myself if you would survive the combat trials, and surprisingly you have. You have the skill of a warrior, and the heart of a killer! There is so much for you to learn, but I am afraid not here,”

“Wait, what is this?” I say as I stare at the large battered ship.

Several lizard men walk past us carrying large wooden crates. As they pass they move toward a ship sitting alone on the river bed.

“Your time here is complete, you must leave,” De'nah says sternly.

“Leave? Why? Have I done something wrong?” I ask.

“Wrong? On the contrary, you have grown and done nothing but the correct things. When you risked your life to save the others, you opened the doors to your own destiny. Choosing your own trial, deciding to push yourself beyond what we could have done. A stimuli that freed your mind and body had to be earned by the one carrying a burden,” she says as we walk past a rocky enclave.

“Burden?”

“Yes, you do not need magic to notice my child,”

The mood changes to a somber one. I now realize that I have been more than bothered by my mother's death. I know now that her death and my future have scrapped at my being since I walked down that path leading away from home. Hiding who I was...what I was, just to fit in.

Turning to De'nah, I ask the question that I know she could provide an answer for.

“De'nah...what am I?”

“Ah, the question of questions,” she replies as we stop.

De'nah reaches up and grabs my face gently. I can feel her fingers slowly stroking the small white spike like structures that exit my lower cheek bone.

“I wish I knew my child. The goddess, Fate can sometimes be a little...fickle in her ways. She will always place before you a path that is destined, even though it is not always clear. You will have to choose what to do with it when the time comes. Here with Lor'na'rah, you have been given the tools you will need to survive beyond this planet,” De'nah says.

We continue to walk down the sandy bank, turning by a small bend that tightly squeezes around a small cliff of jagged rocks. There, in the distance, sitting in the mist is a large object. My eyes widen as I now get a better grasp of what I see. It is a ship, an actual space ship. Dark, gloomy, and battle damaged ship. Repaired time after time, the ship is about the size of a small home. The substantial landing gear finds itself partially in the rivers' way. There are plenty of rust patches on the ships' metal hull that blends in with many scratches, dents, and burn marks caused by something striking the outer surface many times over. We stop just before the metal textured ramp that leads into the front of the ship.

Just before the wide ramp stands a large lizard warrior. It is Mirth. He looks down at me sternly, but with respect. Almost like an over bearing father figure, that is something I am not used to.

“Whose ship is this?” I ask fearing the answer I will hear.

“I believe you know the answer to your question child,” De’nah says.

I turn and look into De’nah’s eyes.

“Can you read minds?” I ask.

She smiles back at me and does not answer. I have never met a mage before. I only heard stories, tall tales of wizards and witches to frighten children before bed. De’nah was real. A war mage, nothing I have ever heard of. Looking at her old and fragile face made me too smile. I knew she did not read minds, her knowledge is her most powerful magic. Lor’na’rah stands before me while directing two other warriors carrying large open top crates past us and into the ship. She then turns to face me.

“Dra’con, I can instruct you no more. Your skills are more than adequate, but you are still young, unpredictable, and still have much to learn,” she says.

“Thanks for the strong vote of confidence,” I reply.

“Where am I to go?” I ask as I look up to the giant vehicle.

“That is for fate to decide,” says De’nah.

"Fate," I mumble while looking up at the ship.

Lor'na'rah places her hand on my shoulder.

"You are a quick study, I believe you can handle it. Or you will prove me wrong and collide with the moon above," she says with a smile.

As the last warrior walks down the ramp empty handed. He looks at me as he approaches. It is the warrior from within the woods. The one who's initiation I botched. Standing before me in light armor he speaks.

"Barr!" he says strongly.

"It is good to meet you Barr!" I return with the same strength in my voice.

He walks past after our brief exchange, De'nah laughs.

"That young one does not speak to anyone much. Looks like you have gained an ally,"

"He respects you Dra'con, they all do,"

"You have ample supplies on board. The ship's navigation systems will direct you to the nearest outpost. From there, I suggest that you learn more about space travel, for you will probably be doing what most warriors do and try to expand your knowledge. I hope with this, you will find those answers that create the many question you will and shall have,"

"I wish...I wish I did not have to leave,"

"It is the only way, a warriors' way. Live strong, fight stronger!"

I walk up to the ship's doorway. Turning back to see De'nah, Lor'na'rah, and Mirth looking up at me. I smile at them. They are, in some strange way my family. My friends. The two sets of metal doors begin to close as I enter. I have never been inside a ship before. Not that I remember anyway. There seems to be plenty of head room before walking up to a brightly lit control section. Looking outward, I can see the morning clouds through the thick cockpit glass. The dual pilots' chairs sit just below the giant window along with a huge control panel that runs the full length of the glass. Slowly, I place my hand on the pilot's chair. Making my way over the middle console, I sit in the chair. There is almost a strange familiarity sitting here. Looking up at the strange lights, the buzzing of electricity making its way through the badly updated wiring. It will need quite a bit of work, repairs that I do not know how to complete. But it looks like I will have time to learn. My hand passes over the chair soft material and along the metal frame that holds it in place.

"Name please?" a male voice booms from above my head.

Startled, I regain my composure and reply.

"Excuse me?"

"Your name please. It needs to be uploaded into my security files,"

"Oh, my name...my name is Dra'con," I say with a child-like confused look on my face.

"What is your name?"

"I do not have one,"

"What? You are a computer correct?"

"Yes, I am designation KL-417, cargo class," he says.

"Cargo class? Excellent! Well, KL-417, looks like we will be traveling together, companions if you will. But I do need something to call you...how about KL?"

"KL? Agreed, uploading name into data center,"

"Where to KL?"

Placing my hand over the chair controls, a rumbling shakes the cockpit as the engines start.

"Coordinates are established, engaging auto pilot," KL replies.

Outside the ship, sand and water are forced into the air as the thrusters glow brightly while lifting the ship off the ground and into the sky. Streaking upward, I can feel the momentum as the ship begins moving through the clouds. Within seconds, the stars are surrounding my view and I am astonished by what I am blessed to see. Stars, millions of them. I feel like a child, wanting to press his face and hands against the glass to get as close as I can to them.

"Prepare for hyper gauge," says KL.

As the ship vanishes from view, De'nah eyes follow. She motions her hand in an unassuming wave, from behind them, a small invisible dome reflects the world around it before it vanishes exposing three bounty

hunters. Concealed from view by her enchantment, now stands a female dark elf, a half man, half robot cyborg, and large muscular red brute lizard man.

“That ship very was expensive mage! And very personal to me,” the dark elf says as she places her hand on the handle of a holstered blade strapped to her side.

Lor'na'rah glares at three bounty hunters.

“I would filter your voice hunter!” Lor'na'rah says.

She does not approve of their presence. They have no moral code, only to better themselves by stealing and killing all they can to retrieve wealth and fame. She does not know why De'nah had them summoned, bringing their filth to this territory. This is the only time she has ever questioned her. But for her people, her brothers, she shows restraint, then speaks.

“Pay them!” she says displeased.

A female lizard walks up, armed with a dual bladed spear strapped to her back, and drops two medium sized brown tattered bags from her hands at the dark elf's feet. She then turns and walks away. The cyborg, heavily armored and cautious, leans over and picks up the bags with his mechanical arm. He lifts the bags weighing them, his arm adjusts to the weight. A moment later, he nods at the dark elf. She stands with her green colored hair pulled back and through a three holed ring, pulling on

her leather weapon belt. The tight leather dark brown top she wears has scars on its surface just as her skin. Tall black boots with tight pants, she favors not the traditional look of the elves.

“The child will be dead within a one solar cycle you know? If that long. You should have killed him here at least that would have been more merciful. Strange, I never would have thought you people were the sentimental type,” she says while rolling a small gold octagon shaped coin between her fingers.

“If none of you had the ability or how shall I say, aptitude to do so, I would have done it for you gladly...for a price of course,”

“Of course,” Lor’na’rah says with a sneer.

The dark elf stops the coin between her fingers, flips it up and catches it. All the while looking into the eyes of Lor’na’rah. They stare at one another momentarily. The dark elf turns and begins to leave. The other two hunters follow as the three of them vanish into the woods.

“You should have let me kill them!” Lor’na’rah says angrily.

“They have served their purpose my dear, let them go on their way,”

“Mirth, see to it that our guests have an uneventful departure,”
De’nah asks.

Mirth nods and walk off following the bounty hunters.

Lor'nar'rah glances upward toward the sky. There is a look of worry that comes across her face as De'nah walks up beside her. Placing her hand around her arm.

“He will survive Lor'na'rah. He will survive,” De'nah says softly while looking up at a few gray storm clouds over head.

Looking outside the cavern up at the gray storm clouds, I see that the acid rain has begun to stop its' deadly assault on the land. The warmth of the sun has started peeking through the clouds overhead repairing the damage that was done. Leaning down, I reach out and remove my sword from the stone on the ground. The heat and light that it radiates quickly dims as I return the sword to my back. The black thick substance that bonds with my body quickly covers over the blade and holds it in place.

"What?! They left you to die?" Magma asks shocked.

"No, they gave me life," I reply while standing.

"Life? I do not understand,"

"Without them, I would have perished long ago. My development matured, I learned what it was to become a true warrior,"

"D, is that where you got your sword? From that ship?!" Magma asks with excitement.

The stones that we sat on return back into the ground.

I walk to the edge of the cavern glancing upward, then turning to see Magma standing by my side with a smile on his young face.

"No," I say while returning with a smile.

I slowly lift upward and begin flying toward the clouds. Magma's torso begins to glow as he motions and the ground beneath him gives

way creating a large platform of earth that he stands on. Hovering for a brief moment, he streaks upward, following me as we head back toward the Scavenger, and head for home.