

I don't own WoW or Potter.

This has been edited by myself with Grammarly, and Tomon has looked it over for me as well, since he actually plays the World of Warcraft game, whereas I only played the strategy games.

Oh, and a minor note. I use a lot of Parseltongue and tried to use § for a time to denote those spoken parts. However doing so was sooo annoying I stopped quickly. Just take it as a given that for a lot of the scenes after that point Harry is talking in Parseltongue. I only use it after that point if I have to denote a change from one language to another.

10/5/2021: this has now been edited to take into account issues pointed out to me by Beleriond and Tomon. Specifically I got some of my info about snakes wrong, and didn't think about how snakes ate in terms of how they would then fight afterward.

The subsequent chapters have also been edited by Tomon and Morde24.

### **Chapter 1: Master of Death? No one told HER that**

If anyone barring his best friends Hermione and Ron had seen him now, they would perhaps be astonished to find that Harry was smiling. Not only would it be surprising because Harry was in an intense amount of pain right now due to a curse that had gotten through his guard earlier that day, but because honest, happy smiles had become so rare in his life since his time in Hogwarts had ended.

The pain was indeed considerable. Slow acting but deadly curses were like that. But pain was an old friend to Harry. Indeed, upon reflection, pain was perhaps one of the constants in his life.

Looking back on it with Hermione after they graduated, Harry had figured out quite a bit of his life had been orchestrated, a play in which he had merely been the actor, not the writer. The honor of 'playwright' lay at Albus Dumbledore's feet, who had raised Harry to be a martyr, to sacrifice himself to kill Voldemort. Even now, Harry knew that he was a product of that upbringing, that his willingness to lay his life on the line for others so easily was highly unusual, his sense that he had to fight to defend others a bit too powerful for his own good.

*Or a lot too powerful. If only I had the sense of rebellion to tell the WW where to stick their Man-who-Conquered nonsense, maybe I'd have had a normal life.*

In any event, Riddle had acted just like the old man had thought, using the death curse on Harry and destroying his own Horcrux, the piece of his soul which had bound itself to Harry's mind and magic. With the rest of the Horcrux destroyed previously in various ways, Riddle had finally been vulnerable, able to die for real.

In his few charitable moments when it came to the old whisker-twisting bum burglar, Harry felt that Albus had assumed that would be the end of it. That without Riddle, his followers would fold, and the Wizarding World would start to change. Surely, after three Dark Lords in less than a hundred years, the boils of the WW had been well and truly lanced? The bigotry, lack of progress, the blood-related racism would become a thing of the past.

Wrong. Dead wrong for so many people. While many of Riddle's followers had indeed been dealt with in the final battle, Harry's victory against one Dark Lord had painted a target on his back from then on. One every government in the Wizarding World and every discontent in that world wanted to try his hand at. Harry hadn't become their boogeyman. He'd become their target. Worse, word of the Death Stick, the Elder Wand that Harry had taken from Albus, had spread, enlarging the target on his back further.

It began even before he finished his last year at Hogwarts. Pureblood extremists from Italy attempted to kill Harry just as he was getting back with Ginny. The attack on the Burrow failed, but Ginny had nearly lost her arm and had lost several fingers to a decaying curse. The other surviving Weasleys had also all nearly died.

At that point, Harry had, over Ron's strenuous objections, decided to distance himself from the Weasleys. The fact Ginny hadn't objected was rather telling to Harry at the time, and he had not regretted it since. Even Ron hadn't reached out to him since.

Harry's life went downhill from there. The problems of the Wizarding World never seemed to go away, always dragging him into violence, something which Harry was all too good at. Indeed, that was perhaps part of the problem, Harry thought now, somewhat ruefully. Unlike the general sheep-like law-abiding wizard, Harry was just as willing to resort to violence as the wizards causing the problems. Harry had slaughtered dark wizards left and right and never had a single nightmare about any of the lives he'd taken. His mind reserved nightmares for the lives he couldn't save.

The WW governments sought him out to fight the latest Dark Lord at least once every few months or to help convince this or that recalcitrant Wizarding government that they needed to toe the line and stop messing with the non-magicals. This was a much larger problem than Harry had ever dreamed it could be and kept him busy hopping around the globe, always in the public eye, being the poster boy for the good guys, even when that line started to blur.

Harry's sense of right and wrong would not let him do less. There were always those who equated magical might with being in the right, and Harry was always willing to show them there was always someone stronger.

The Pureblood issue never went away. Instead, about four years after Riddle's defeat, it was matched by the 'New Wizard' movement as Halfbloods and muggle-borns created their own extremist movement. That they held up Hermione and Harry himself at times as their role models never ceased to annoy him. When Harry was forced to use his fame to combat this

idea, he and Hermione both had been attacked, forcing Hermione to flee Europe with her family, heading to the USA. Harry did not go with her. MACUSA had it's own problems already, and Hermione had already been hurt too often trying to keep up with Harry. She had the scars to prove it, and every time Harry saw them, he could only curse himself still further for letting her try.

And of course, there were always simple Dark Wizards, vampires or werewolves who wanted to kill Harry to make a name for themselves. They had no great goal, no social agenda. They just wanted fame, never understanding the curse that came with it.

All told, Harry had never been able to have a normal life away from combat, away from death. Not a week would go by without him fighting for his life at least four times, sometimes more.

And eventually, even the most powerful mage will die, if inch by inch.

*Heh, just like a young Mad-Eye, I am,* Harry thought, looking down at his body as he reclined in a formfitting leather chair. It had been a gift from Hermione, a last gift it turned out, a chair that magically conformed to his body.

That body had been mauled over the years, despite Harry only being in his early thirties. Harry had lost an ear and had gained several new scars in the battle against Riddle. He'd lost his left foot when he took the battle to the Italian blood supremacists. A werewolf had torn out his right eye before Harry had sent a silver needle through its heart. The knee on Harry's good leg didn't work right anymore, and his glass eye made much like Mad Eye's, had been lost in the battle earlier today.

Today, Harry's wounds had just made him a little too slow when faced with a betrayal from someone in the band of Aurors he had been leading at the time in Nigeria against a group of local wizard-style drug lords. The curse that he had been struck by was a slow-acting spell that attacked the heart, and it was going to finally kill Harry. Of course, Harry had gutted the man who'd done it, using the man's entrails to choke another traitor with him, and had eventually won the fight. But the curse, which came from the Mediterranean, had no cure. His heart would just eventually burst. And Harry would die.

Now alone in his house, Harry found himself somewhat looking forward to it, really. This life had long since become a burden. *And maybe, just maybe, Albus will prove right for once? That death is but the next adventure? I've had my fill of this one. And maybe in death, the WW will stop bothering me.*

Harry looked around one last time at his house. Originally Shell Cottage had been Bill and Fleur's home. But the two of them had fled to Egypt after the New Wizard movement in the UK had declared them traitors to the cause. That fight had been one heck of a set-to, Harry reflected, one of the larger-scale battles he'd been in the last few years with real allies he knew he could count on. The Weasleys had come through it without any injuries too, and Harry, after

the New Wizard Movement in the UK had been crushed, had bought the place through Gringotts on the sly. Harry had then spent a lot of money to get the goblins to ward the place for him over the last two months.

"Hah, and I bet no one will ever think you can be the Secret Keeper, old friend," Harry said, looking over at Fawkes. Though bound to the headmaster position at Hogwarts, the Phoenix had become an off again, on again companion of Harry's. His song soothed the weary wizard a time or two despite Harry's own thoughts about his sense of morality being far more Grey than Light.

Now Fawkes crooned, his song turning almost lilting, laughing at the world as he flew the short way from his perch to land on the chair next to Harry. It seemed to stare into Harry's eyes with some kind of hidden message Harry couldn't quite understand, his songs turning almost challenging before shifting back into a soothing tone.

Discovering a phoenix was both magically strong and smart enough to act as a Secret Keeper had been very much a surprise a few days back. *Whoever said drunken ideas never pay off has never gotten drunk with a Phoenix!* Harry thought ruefully, a smirk on his face despite his heart now going as if he had been running for hours. "That was fun, I'll admit. Funny, you know, here, at the end, those memories are the ones I think about, even though the rest of this shite I call a life is, is hah, ma, making me long for, for the next adventure..."

He chuckled then, one hand going to his chest even as he chuckled through clenched teeth. "Hehehe, g, got the last laugh on the British Ministry, though. Bet they think they'll be able to get their hands on my gold with that 'dead vault' law. Heh, I, I transferred all my money to, to Hermione! Heh, all the Potter gold and jewels, even the remnants of the Black's riches, gone, off to a MACUSA citizen! Hehehe...Hah, hah..."

With that thought, Harry fell silent, thinking about his friends in these last few moments. Hermione, of course, ever-dependable, ever by his side, even at the cost that life demanded. Harry was glad Hermione had finally agreed to distance herself from him, as she too had been dying by inches, only both on the inside and out. *The life I led was not for someone right in the head. I hope you go on to change the world in your own way, Hermione.*

Luna was dead, killed by the New Wizard Movement. Tonks, dead in the war against Riddle.

But Ron. Good, bluff, semi-honest Ron. He had thankfully moved on, finding some measure of peace once the New Wizard Movement extremists in Britain were dealt with. Last Harry had heard, he'd bought the Chudley Cannons and was turning the team around. *Good on you, mate.*

Fleur and Bill had found a place they could live a normal life, and Fleur apparently was expecting again. Ginny was a Harpy now too, which Harry had thought hilarious when he first heard it, remembering her mother's temper.

From there, Harry's thoughts wound to Shackbolt and some of the other acquaintances he had made. None had been friends, simply people he worked with, who he could somewhat trust to have his back in a fight. *Heh, maybe, maybe in the next great adventure, I'll make more friends, and, and this time won't lead them into their near-deaths so often.*

Fawkes continued to sing for several more minutes as the curse finally overcame the potion Harry had taken to slow his heart down. Even the Draught of Living Death could not overcome the curse. And eventually, Harry's heart simply burst inside his chest. So Harry Potter died, passing away with a smile on his face.

Or... so Harry had thought.

Instead, as his body breathed its last, there was a bright, incandescent flash as his body burst into an intense flame from the inside. Fawkes, immune to the fire that burned hotter than even Fiendfyre, continued to watch and sing for a time as the fires spread out. It started from Harry's heart, slowly turning his body to ash, immolating the two wands Harry had on his chest, Harry's own wand and the Elder Wand, along the way. As the wood around it instantly turned to ash and smoke, the phoenix feather in Harry's wand flared, joining the fire, adding a new color to it, and then the Elder wand's core of thestral hair ignited, and suddenly there was a bit of black in the center of the fire.

Harry had intended that no one else would ever own the Death Stick after him. Harry had long taught himself to use most of his combat magic without the need for a wand, but the power and reaction time the Death Stick gave its user made the thing too dangerous to let loose, which was why Harry had kept it rather than have it buried with Dumbledore. Well, that and at the time, Harry hadn't been feeling very charitable towards the twinkly-eyed arse. It would remain here, hidden under Fidelius, until time itself turned the wood to dust.

When it saw that, Fawkes raised his beak into song once more, before flashing out, satisfied. He had done his job.

Seconds later, the fire was gone, and...Harry Potter gasped, sitting upright on the ground in the middle of a fire that blazed all around him. Not that Harry noticed the fire, too stupefied by the process of actually breathing. "Wh, what the... Fawkes, I thought your tears..." he stared around through the fire, not seeing his friend, then as one hand rose to touch his forehead, he stopped, staring at it. Because that hand was rather smaller than it should have been. Incuriously, Harry turned his gaze down to his body and stared.

For what was revealed to Harry was not the ruined adult body he'd had when his heart exploded, but a younger body. Looking at his body, Harry felt he might have been de-aged to sometime during his Hogwarts years. After a second, he noticed the giant scar on his arm, from when he fought the basilisk in his second year, which gave him some basis for how old he was:

twelve or thereabouts. Staring down at his chest and arms, Harry shook his head, a sudden thought occurring to him. "Cor, I was a right scrawny brat, wasn't I?"

Swiftly Harry shook his head, banishing that unimportant thought, looking around for his friend. "Fawkes, some kind of ex..."

Only now did the fact that there was a fire raging all around him register, a fire that wasn't moving. Nor did Harry even feel the heat. "Ok, what the bloody cocking hell!?" he stammered, jumping to his feet, uncaring of his nakedness as he reached a hand through the fire, feeling nothing and wondering what the hell was going on. After all, there was no one around to see him save Fawkes, who certainly didn't care about human nakedness.

This belief was proven false by a voice to one side, a female voice but one that was quite deep, almost sepulchral. "FINALLY. I MUST SAY, **MASTER**, YOU HAVE BEEN MOST ANNOYING IN YOUR DESIRE TO NOT MEET ME IN PERSON. PERHAPS NOW, WE CAN HAVE A CHAT."

Turning quickly, Harry prepared a spell in his mind but paused as he spotted the woman standing to one side of where he had died. She was clothed in black from head to toe, so much so that at first, Harry thought her to be a Death Eater, albeit one with a slightly better taste of cut than most. Black leggings, black leather boots that seemed to come up to the right below her knee, and a long black cloak concealing her form from view, though not enough to completely hide her feminine form. But unlike a Death Eater, this being didn't need a mask, for her face was, in fact, a skull already. A skull with dark purple light flaring from within its irises.

Moreover, the power this woman gave off was like nothing Harry had ever felt. It was like being back in school when Dumbledore let loose his aura but magnified a thousandfold. It tried to drive Harry to his knees, a mere mortal facing a power beyond his ken. But Harry refused to kneel. Not to anyone. And grimacing, he fought the woman's power until, finally, she seemed to rein it in, allowing him the ability to speak once more.

And after that display and her earlier words, there was only one thing Harry could think of saying. "'Master'...you're saying you're Death then? Or an aspect of it? Cock, I thought that part of the tale was made up."

The woman's skull face seemed to twist somehow in a sneer. "IT WAS REAL, THAT IS ALL YOU NEED TO KNOW. I BARGAINED WITH THE PEVERELLS. IT WAS NOT THE FIRST TIME I HAD BARGAINED WITH MORTALS, BUT AT LEAST THE YOUNGEST OF THE PEVERELLS PROVED MORE CLEVER THAN MOST. NOW YOU HAVE BROUGHT THE THREE HALLOWS TOGETHER, **MASTER**, AND I HAVE A PROPOSITION FOR YOU. A WAY FORWARD, IF YOU WILL, AWAY FROM YOUR CURRENT LIFE."

She seemed to sneer even more then, though her tone changed slightly, still deep and powerful but somehow less angry. "UNLESS, OF COURSE, YOU WOULD LIKE TO SIMPLY REMAIN HERE? I'M CERTAIN GLAMOURS AND OTHER FORMS OF CONCEALMENT WOULD ALLOW YOU TO HIDE AND LIVE SEMI-NORMAL LIFE. AS LONG AS YOU COULD STOP YOUR OWN INSTINCTS

TO JUMP INTO ANY TROUBLE IN SIGHT.” Death paused then, before going on. “INDEED I WOULD WAGER YOU COULD GO A FULL MONTH BEFORE BECOMING INVOLVED IN SOME KIND OF TROUBLE. BEFORE PEOPLE REALIZE YOU ARE STILL ALIVE, STILL AROUND TO SOLVE THEIR PROBLEMS FOR THEM..”

Narrowing his eyes, Harry stared at Death before sighing. Glamours and whatnot would indeed let him live a normal life, right up until he entered a zone warded against such, which many areas of the Wizarding World were these days. Or ran into violence. Or if someone just asked the goblins about his vault. He had no idea how their magics worked, no wizard did. The ugly little fear-eaters kept their secrets close. But they certainly would cheerfully tell anyone who asked after Harry that his vaults were still open, which would start a ‘witch’ hunt for him. *And it would ruin my last prank too.*

And really, what was left for him here that wouldn’t be ruined the moment Harry revealed himself? If his being alive became known, and the goblins at least would never go along with any ruse or subterfuge to keep that truth from getting out, any chance to reconnect with his friends would be ruined. And in general, Harry had long become disillusioned with the Wizarding World, the problems that came with magic. On the other side of the ledger, the nonmagical world didn’t really interest him either. The nonmagicals were just too... much. Too busy, too many people, too much noise, too much ‘me-first’ (just like wizards only in a different way) and not enough personality.

And there was something in Death’s tone. A tone of someone on a mission, someone who wanted something from him. It was a tone Harry hated, but he had gotten all-too used to it. *And despite the tale about the Hallows allowing one to master Death, it is obvious where the power lies here. Still, that doesn’t mean there’s no room to bargain. If she wants something from me, maybe she’s willing to pay for it.*

He began simply, asking, “Would it help if I said I never wanted to own all the Hallows? The only one I ever really wanted was the Invisibility Cloak.”

“PERHAPS. I WOULD INDEED TAKE THAT INTO ACCOUNT, BUT YOU HAVE USED THE DEATH STICK FREELY UNTIL YOU MASTERED WANDLESS MAGIC THIS PAST YEAR. AND YOU HAVE MADE USE OF THE RING TOO,” Death accused, before somehow snorting despite the whole skull instead of a normal head thing. “NOT THAT I AM AGAINST IT IN THE CASE OF THE SPIRITS YOU SUMMONED.”

Harry winced. He had indeed been unable to stop himself from using the ring. Harry had called up his parents once, to exchange words of love with them. He had not done so again, knowing it caused them pain. Yet Harry had used the ring to call up Salazar Slytherin, Godric Gryffindor, Dumbledore, and other learned magical masters to help him build up his magical abilities over the years. It had helped him hunt down numerous books, copies of which now languished in a nearby bookcase, mostly unread, while others Harry had devoured to help him become stronger, faster, and above all more learned in magical combat. It had been

Dumbledore who had helped him to master his wandless magic to the extent that his wands had become accessories to fool his enemies rather than necessary items.

Never Riddle's spirit, though. His soul didn't exist any longer. Having been split so often, it had lost all cohesion and simply ceased to exist. That was probably a good thing since Harry knew he would have enjoyed torturing it too much for no gain.

Unable to gainsay Death's point, Harry slowly nodding, but he still had something to say. "And what's up with this ruddy body of mine, huh!? How'd that happen?"

Death's eyes flared at Harry's tone, but her tone didn't change. "WHEN FAWKES USED HIS TEARS TO COUNTER THE BASILISK VENOM IN YOUR BLOOD, IT WAS ALREADY TOO LATE TO TRULY SAVE YOU AS A HUMAN. PERHAPS IF THE BASILISK WAS A REGULAR SPECIMEN, FAWKES' TEARS WOULD HAVE BEEN ENOUGH, BUT THAT BASILISK WAS ANCIENT BEYOND EVEN BEYOND THAT SPECIES' NORMAL LIFESPAN, THE MAGIC THAT KEPT IT ALIVE INFUSED ITS BITE WITH DARK MAGIC. SO INSTEAD THE PHOENIX TEARS THAT YOU INGESTED AND WHICH WERE SPILLED ON YOUR WOUNDS STARTED THE PROCESS OF CHANGING YOU BY MUTATING YOUR BODY SO IT COULD ABSORB THE BASILISK VENOM. YOU BECAME, IN ESSENCE, A CHIMERA. THE HUMAN PART REMAINED DOMINANT FOR A TIME AS THE PHOENIX ASPECT LAY DORMANT IN YOU, WHILE THE BASILISK VENOM MADE YOU IMMUNE TO ALL POISONS. THEN AS YOU DIED, YOUR PHOENIX ASPECT ACTIVATED, CAUSING A REBIRTH TO THE MOMENT YOU BECAME A CHIMERA."

Harry's eyes widened at that, but he could remember several times in his life that his enemies had assumed he'd been poisoned. Looking back on it, the most obvious was when Riddle had attempted to kill Harry via a spell which conjured up a poison cloud, only for Harry to come through it unscathed. And at another point, a vampire had bitten him, only to start screaming a second later. At the time, Harry assumed it had been the spell an Auror had hit the creature with but looking back, it was pretty obvious it was Harry's own blood.

On the other side of the ledger, Harry had always had an affinity with fire spells, and it would explain Fawkes's interest in Harry despite his not exactly being a poster boy for the Light. He looked around now, once more reminded of his friend, only to not see him anywhere. *Is that because he's actually gone, or because we're frozen in time or whatever?*

"YES, **MASTER**, YOU HAVE NOT BEEN HUMAN SINCE YOUR SECOND YEAR," Death's acerbic voice interrupted Harry's musings. NOW THAT THE PROCESS HAS BEEN COMPLETED, AND YOUR REBIRTH HAS ALLOWED YOU TO FURTHER ABSORB THE PHOENIX POWER FROM YOUR WAND AND MY OWN POWER FROM THE ELDER WAND, YOU MAY DISCOVER OTHER ABILITIES. TO SAY NOTHING OF A GENERAL BOOST TO YOUR MAGICAL STRENGTH. IT SHOULD BE INTERESTING," Death mused, her tone almost clinical. "YOU ARE THE FIRST CHIMERA I HAVE EVER SEEN WITH THIS KIND OF MIX."

“Well, thank you, I’m glad I will be of bloody interest to you,” Harry grumbled, turning back to the Avatar of all things entropic, but he wasn’t backing down. “But you wouldn’t be talking to me at all unless you wanted something from me. I’ll admit that I probably would not be able to go for long in the Wizarding World without being found out.” Like a werewolf, Harry’s chimera blood would cause him to be ostracized the moment it was discovered, even if he could keep his identity a secret, which he wouldn’t be able to thanks to Gringotts and his will there not executing itself. The only ones he could think of that would look past it would then be targeted by people who wanted to kill Harry, the list growing now by more than a bit. “But you haven’t said what.”

“IT HAS ALWAYS BEEN YOUR INABILITY TO TURN AWAY AND LEAVE OTHERS TO FEND FOR THEMSELVES THAT HAS GOTTEN YOU INTO TROUBLE CONSTANTLY, YOUR PEOPLE SAVING THING, AND YES.” Death smiled as she sat down on nothing, her tone turning almost gentle. “THAT PHRASE SHOULD BE PATENTED BY YOU, **MASTER**. YET I WISH TO MAKE USE OF THAT CHARACTER FLAW.”

A snape of her fingers showed a world, utterly unlike Earth beyond the fact it was a sphere. There seemed to be only four continents pretty close to one another, certainly closer than the Americas and Europe. But in between them was a massive swirling area of water, like a giant undertow or some kind of vortex.

“THIS IS AZEROTH. SIX THOUSAND YEARS AGO, IT WAS ONE CONTINENT. IT WAS SHATTERED IN A WAR THAT WAS CAUSED BY THE BURNING LEGION, AND THE FALLEN TITAN SARGERAS. AND THIS IS THE NUMBER OF FUTURES WHERE THE EXISTENCE OF EVERYTHING IN THE MULTIVERSE WHERE LIFE AS YOU UNDERSTAND IT CAN EXIST IS IMPACTED, OR ENDED, BECAUSE OF EVENTS ON THIS WORLD.”

Billions of lines representing uncounted futures, small, large, barely changed to horrendously changed, flashed out from the world in every direction, so many it seemed like a solid sphere was coming from the image. And as Harry watched, many of them ended, then more, and more. “THE TITANS ARE, YOU WOULD CALL THEM THE CREATORS OF THE UNIVERSE. BEINGS OF SUCH POWER THAT THEY CAN INFLUENCE EVERY-WHERE YET IF THEY INTERFERE DIRECTLY WILL CAUSE UNTOLD HARM REGARDLESS OF THEIR DESIRES. THEY...I...OTHERS... WE HAVE BEEN AROUND SINCE THE CREATION OF THIS UNIVERSE. AND WE HAVE...ENEMIES.”

One image appeared, followed by another. The first was of a massive demonic creature, its size, shown by the land it was striding on, more comparable to a mountain than anything else, its horns so large they dwarfed a skyscraper. From its eyes, a fell green glow flowed as an aura of flame surrounded it.

And when Harry looked at him, for the first time since he had discovered magic, Harry felt fear. Real, visceral, helpless-to-fight-it fear. This creature, this Fallen Titan, was so far beyond Harry he was less than a bug in its eyes.

The next image Death showed him was.. nothing. There was nothing there in the image, just darkness. An absolute nothing, but a nothing that seemed to almost reach out through the image for Harry, causing him to shiver and turn away.

“SARGERAS, LEADER OF THE BURNING LEGION. YOU WOULD LIKEN HIM TO LUCIFER, A FALLEN GOD WHO HAS DECIDED THAT THE ONLY WAY TO PROTECT EVERYTHING IS TO DESTROY IT, TO BURN ALL LIFE FROM PLANETS LIKE AZEROTH SO THAT IN THE FUTURE, THE UNIVERSE CAN REBIRTH LIFE WITHOUT THE CORRUPTION OF THE OLD GODS. AND THEN THERE ARE THE CREATORS OF THE OLD GODS, VOID LORDS, CREATURES BEYOND REALITY WHO CREATED THE OLD GODS IN THE FIRST PLACE.”

“I, you can’t be asking...” Harry began, shaken to his core.

“NO, I AM NOT ASKING YOU TO STAND AGAINST VOID LORDS. MUCH LIKE MYSELF, MOST OF THE TIME SUCH POWERS CANNOT INTERACT DIRECTLY WITH THE WORLD. SARGERAS AND THE Old GODS MUST USE AGENTS FOR THE MAJORITY OF THEIR ACTIONS IN THE MATERIAL PLANE. AGENTS WITH WHICH YOU CAN BATTLE. YOUR TYPE OF MAGIC, YOUR ABILITIES, POWER, AND ABOVE ALL ADAPTABILITY WILL SERVE YOU VERY WELL IN AZEROTH. AND ALL OF THEM, TO A GREATER OR LESSER DEGREE, ATTEMPT TO TAINT **MY** MAGIC, **MY** SPHERE OF INFLUENCE.” Other images began to appear, enemies which Death felt Harry could deal with. They ranged from Demons, smaller of stature than the Titan, but numerous, to a massive dragon with what looked like metal plates fused into its black scales.

“THEN THERE ARE THE TRUE UNDEAD, CREATURES MADE OF NECROTIC ENERGY, POWERED BY MY MAGIC, TWISTED AND CORRUPTED AND...” Death seemed to freeze for a moment, her hands clenching and unclenching. “THEY ARE LIKE, LIKE HAVING BILLIONS OF TINY MITES CRAWLING ALL OVER ME, STEALING MY POWER, AND TAKING THOSE SOULS WHICH SHOULD GO TO THE WHEEL, TAINTING THEM IN TURN. VILE BEYOND EVEN THE HORCRUXES OF RIDDLE AND THOSE BEFORE HIM.”

“And you’re saying that Azeroth is the center of this conflict against this Burning Legion and its ruler, and the Void Lords and their servants? Why?”

“TITANS ARE BORN VIA THE AWAKENING OF A WORLD-SOUL. FEW PLANETS HAVE SUCH. FOR EXAMPLE, EARTH DOES NOT. BUT AZEROTH DOES. EVENTUALLY, IF LEFT UNTAINTED, IT WILL BECOME A TITAN, A LIVING ONE TO RIVAL SARGERAS OR PERHAPS EVEN MORE POWERFUL. IF TAINTED, IT COULD BE THE WEDGE THE VOID LORDS NEED TO FINALLY COME INTO THE PHYSICAL PLAIN. IF TAKEN BY SARGERAS, HE COULD BECOME SO POWERFUL HE MAY HAVE THE POWER TO END ALL LIFE, WIPING THE SLATE CLEAN TO BEGIN AGAIN IN HIS OWN IMAGE.”

“So you expect me to do what? To stop your power from being corrupted? To hunt these beings down?”

“YES, ESSENTIALLY. BUT DO NOT RUSH. THESE BEINGS ARE POWERFUL, AND THE TROUBLES THEY CAUSE SPAN ACROSS THOUSANDS OF YEARS. AND JUST BECAUSE THEY ARE POWERFUL DOES NOT MEAN THEY ARE INVULNERABLE. YOU, WITH YOUR ADAPTABILITY, WILL SIMPLY LIVE ON AZEROTH, LEARN DIFFERENT MAGICS, AND THEN YOUR VERY NATURE WILL LEAD YOU INTO CONFLICT WITH THEM. BUT YOU, UNLIKE ANY OTHER HUMAN ON AZEROTH, CAN PERFORM AND LEARN ALL SORTS OF MAGIC WITHOUT LOSING YOURSELF IN THE DOING. ADAPT, GROW, BECOME POWERFUL.”

Death shrugged, a bit of amusement coming forth in her tone. “AND THEN THERE IS THE WHOLE REINCARNATING UPON DEATH ASPECT OF YOUR CHIMERA BODY. I WOULD BE CAREFUL OF THAT SINCE YOU WILL ALWAYS REINCARNATE TO THE AGE YOU ARE CURRENTLY. WHICH I DOUBT WOULD BE GOOD IN MID-COMBAT.”

Harry thought about it for a moment, and the image changed to show the world as if from a human’s perspective, moving over the ocean, then into a jungle, a forest, up a mountain and then out into a plain, through a city and then up into the air. And as it did, Harry felt something he hadn’t felt in years, a desire to explore, a desire to simply go and discover things, maybe even meet new people, maybe make new friends. Friends who wouldn’t hopefully be targeted just for knowing him, who he wouldn’t put in danger just because of who he was.

*But I’m not going to go into this starkers.* This thought was quite literal. Harry’s clothing had all turned to ash during his rebirth. “I...agree. But there are a couple things I want. One, I still want the Invisibility cloak.”

Death nodded. “YOU WERE WEARING THE CLOAK WHEN YOU WERE REINCARNATED. LIKE MY POWER FROM THE DEATH STICK, IT HAS MERGED WITH YOU. YOU CAN PULL IT OUT AND WEAR IT WHENEVER YOU WISH. INDEED, IT IS THE FACT YOU WERE SO ABLE TO SURVIVE THAT MERGING THAT ALLOWS US TO SPEAK NOW IN FACT. ALL YOU HAVE TO DO TO USE THE CLOAK IS WILL IT INTO BEING, AND IT WILL APPEAR.”

Blinking, Harry did just that, imagining the cloak into being. The cloak instantly appeared, and Harry wrapped it around himself so that only his face could be seen. “Huh. That’s handy.”

“INDEED. AND YOUR OTHER REQUESTS?” Death asked, mildly curious as to what Harry would ask, pleased that he had agreed. “REALIZE THAT THIS IS A FROZEN MOMENT, AND YOU CANNOT INTERACT WITH THE WORLD BEYOND THIS ROOM.”

Death very carefully said nothing more on that point. But her thoughts, for just a moment, had become almost human as she thought, *IT SHOULD BE JUST POTTER, BUT I AM CHEATING LIKE A BITCH RIGHT NOW. AND GETTING AWAY WITH IT, SINCE THE OTHER ETERNALS ARE JUST AS WORRIED ABOUT AZEROTH. ELSE FAWKES WOULD NOT HAVE BEEN INVOLVED IN THIS AT ALL.*

Harry winced, then looked around the room, his eyes narrowing. "Can I take anything with me? Anything physical, I mean? Er, and where did Fawkes go?"

"AS A CREATURE OF LIFE, FAWKES CANNOT BE IN MY PRESENCE AND HAD TO LEAVE BEFORE I FROZE THIS MOMENT. SINCE I WILL BE TRANSPORTING YOU PHYSICALLY, YES. BUT YOU CANNOT PHYSICALLY MOVE FROM WITHIN THE FLAMES, THOUGH YOU CAN PULL ANYTHING TO YOU MAGICALLY FROM WITHIN THE ROOM," Death responded.

The fact Death instantly agreed should have made Harry leery, but instead, he simply nodded, thinking quickly. The room he was sitting in upon his rebirth was not a well-stocked family library or anything similar, instead, well it looked like a packrat's den in many ways. There was an expanded library trunk, one full of several books Harry had never had time enough to read all the way through, the burnt front six inches of his latest broom, scattered clothing that Harry had dumped here on occasion after he had begun to use the cottage in the past few months, a few dozen wanted ads with their mugshots crossed out, some plates showing the refuse of food, and several more important items.

"The sword of Gryffindor, its absorbing properties and the poison already on it should be useful. Clothing too, like I said," he muttered, pulling the items to him as he named them. "Shrinking charms on the clothing I suppose will have to do, cor was I skinny... hmmm, ooh and that, and um, no, it wasn't that good a broom in the first place, and there isn't enough to repair anyway.."

This went on for some time as Harry opened the trunk and dumped items into it one after another, with death watching, expression never changing. Eventually, Harry was finished ransacking the room, and he nodded. "I, I'm ready. Although I think this is well beyond what Dumbledore thought when he saw Death was just the next adventure."

"IT IS, AND IT IS TIME FOR YOU TO BEGIN IT. I WILL SEND YOU TO KALIMDOR THEN. FOR THE NEAR FUTURE THAT IS THE CENTER OF EVENTS. THE NIGHT ELVES MAY ALSO PROVE TO BE YOUR ALLIES. I ALSO SUGGEST," Death smirked as she raised a hand. "THAT YOU WATCH THAT FIRST STEP."

"Wait, what?" Harry asked, just before Death clicked her fingers. Instantly the frozen moment ended, and as the fire raged around him, Harry disappeared through a magical portal from Earth, never to be seen there again.

**OOOOOOO**

When Harry came out of the portal, realized something at once. *Yes, every freaking type of magical transportation hates me. Or maybe Death really didn't like the whole 'Master Death' thing that was tagged on the Hallows. That, or she's just a bitch.*

This observation was more than fair in Harry's opinion, since the moment the magic had deposited him in Azeroth, he had found himself falling through the air towards a tree, it's green

capped boughs reaching up for him promising a very nasty fall. Several small branches whipped his face and upper body for a second before Harry, with the natural reflexes which had made him such a good Seeker, grabbed one branch slowing his descent for a second. The branch slid out of his grip, but Harry was able to do so twice more before he could concentrate enough to cast an Arresto Momentum spell halting his descent.

Harry's eyes were wide as he crossed them to look at the jagged piece of tree limb that was about an inch away from his face, shaking his head. "Ooh, that was close." After the life he'd led brushes with death were somewhat normal. *Still, must remember to get back at that woman.*

Shaking his head at that thought, Harry hit himself with a Levitation charm, canceling the Arresto Momentum. Now weightless, a quick move from one hand allowed him to grab another branch, and Harry moved himself in that direction until his body hovered directly over an even larger tree limb then he slowly canceled the spell and tried to take stock of where he had fallen, grimacing a little at the impact on his thighs.

What he could see, was tree, fifteen stories tall maybe, wild with limbs and leaves, their bright green verdancy defeated any ability he had to look past it. Harry looked down towards the ground, then up, and deciding "Well, I'm closer to the one than the other, might as well get on with it," Harry began to climb his way up. *Besides this way I'll be in a better position to get a bird's eye view if I need to.*

After about ten minutes, Harry estimated he had climbed at least six times his own height. But his limbs had begun started to tremble, and soon, he could barely support his own weight long enough to get from one limb to another. "Good grief, I really didn't have much muscles when I was younger, did I?"

Harry knew that was overly harsh. Given his life up to this point, his body was actually in pretty good, if somewhat malnourished, shape. Less than two years of going to Hogwarts hadn't yet offset years of being underfed. Still, Harry felt his core muscles were okay, and his leg muscles were powerful enough for his age thanks to spending so much time on a broom, and his forearms too, due to how he'd had to twist the broom through the air. But the rest of his upper body, especially his arms, were not nearly as strong as he could wish. "That needs to be worked on," he mumbled, as he continued to climb another few Harry-lengths, his arms now a mass of soreness. "And transfigure some clothing too."

Despite getting more tired along the way, Harry soon pushed his head up and out of the tree. There he paused for a second, before, his eyes went wide and Harry pulled himself upwards until he could sit in the Y-shaped top of the tree, holding onto one side as he stared around him.

Harry had spent a lot of time in forests hiding from Riddle or hunting down dark wizards. But rarely was he able to just take in the sight from a top of a tree. And never had Harry seen a

forest like this. Not even the Forbidden Forest, which he had never seen from the top of the tree admittedly, could possibly come close. Even there, Harry could have seen Hogwarts, the lake, or Hogsmeade from nearly every point if he wanted to. And every time before he had been in the forest, it had been, well a forest in England, or in Europe where the local trees and everything had either survived the coming of human civilization or were planted by humans.

Here? Just looking at this forest Harry could tell that humanity had never touched it. There was just a feeling in the air a sense of wellbeing and the power of nature that said humans are not welcome here. This was exacerbated by the sound of animals, birds and other things all around him, whereas in most forests at home, the majority of the animals would go silent when man was in the forest, evolution having seen to it that those animals that didn't give humans a wide berth became lunch.

But here, Harry could see some kind of small fox-monkey creatures in a nearby tree, one of them in particular looking back at him just as curiously as he was looking at it. He could see dozens of different birds and hear the sounds of even more animals nearby.

And the colors! Harry was, admittedly, used to the idea of forest equaling green. But not this kind of green, not this kind of bright, vibrant, emerald-hued magnificence. It was crazy. Harry had never seen anything like it, and he loved it. There was just something about this place beyond the sights and sounds, some kind of heady feeling of life and magic in the air.

"Okay," he whispered, so there is a distinct upside to this whole Death's chosen bung-boy if I can see sites like this." He then chuckled to himself shaking his head, nodding towards the little creature, who had leaped over to his tree and was now staring up at him from about a foot away. "I didn't know I had a bit of a tourist in me, although thankfully for your eyes and my sense of fashion it hasn't made me dress in a Hawaiian shirt like."

The little creature skittered back as Harry spoke, then seemed to size up Harry from a different angle, before leaping away.

"Right. Man has entered the forest, and he's a bit of a dim bloke," Harry muttered to himself, then laughed wildly, a tension he hadn't even noticed lifting from his shoulders. The ten plus years of near-constant combat, of fighting a seemingly never-ending battle against the worst the magical world had to offer left him.

This went on for some time, but eventually, Harry got himself under control, and, feeling mentally and physically better than he had for years, minus his throbbing arm muscles, began to think once more. First, he looked around, then spotted a piece of a dead branch laying between several of its still-living fellows. "Right, first, see if there are any threats nearby. As bloody brilliant as all this is, there are certain to be dangers somewhere, that's just how my luck works,

A series of spells later, Harry was hovering on the ungainly bit of dead branch, feeling it slowly bucking under his body, staring around him. But for a moment, Harry didn't care about

that. Instead, he simply stared at the expanse of green that, even some ten stories above the tree-line, went from one horizon to another. It was an awesome sight, but also showed Harry that, if there were any threats here, he wouldn't be able to see them for the trees.

With that he laughed and used a reversed Accio spell to pull him back down to the tree. After all, if Harry had just canceled the spells on the dead branch under him, he would have simply begun to fall out of control once more.

Soon, Harry was down on the ground, having made use of spellwork to assist his descent. Even so he was still in pain, and Harry grimaced as he held his arms one after another, shaking his head. "Right, upper body exercises." He looked down at his stomach, patting the flat, but not toned area, and smiled impishly. "Along with other exercises. Beyond that..."

Harry thought about it for a moment, then smiled. Death had told him a bit about what the enemies here were like, but had also encouraged him to live his life, and at the moment, Harry somehow knew just by looking around him that the forest he was in was not subjected to any kind of violence or magical concerns, not anywhere near anyway. There was just a feeling in the air of peace, serenity and the unchanging nature of trees, whose lifespan was measured in the centuries rather than years that filled this forest, hence his tension-releasing laughter before.

He patted the tree he had landed in, then with a flick of a hand, conjured up a piece of paper, frowning as a pen appeared the next second. "Going to have to practice that. I'm too used to using combat spells and combat-based transfiguration. Imagining a working pen shouldn't have taken that long."

At that, Harry patted the small chain around his neck, upon which he held the shrunken space-expansion trunk hanging there, smiling faintly. "And do some reading. No one trying to kill me should let me have the time to actually finish one of those books I've started. Damn pity that I couldn't do more than grab the books I had in the cottage's main room. But at least Bill and Hermione had always made certain I'd had enough and a very varied variety of books. And they even gave me some music to listen to as well. Hmm. I wonder if I can figure out how to make those tapes work anyway."

He looked around himself, taking in the sights once more, before staring up at the sky. "It would be nice to travel via the air, but that would be too much to ask at present. Maybe I can recreate the enchantments on a broom, maybe not. Still I think I saw a river that way, and since one direction is as good as any other..."

With that, Harry marched off through the trees. As he did so, he looked at the parchment he'd conjured, then managed to enchant the pen to follow his words, and the new Dicta-quill began to work as Harry turned his attention away. "Lists to oneself" he murmured, the Dicta-quill working earnestly in the air next to him.

“First, explore! Consider this an ongoing effort. Second, transfigure clothing to make it as hardwearing as possible to cut down on overall spell use and maybe, eventually blend in with the locals. Third, read up on runes. For too long I’ve not had the time to work on them beyond the occasional few pages here and there. Arithmancy... not so much. I already know that it’s only really important in long-term, large enchantments or rituals. It is the image and the intent that makes the spell. Ooh, work on the spells to create a nice, well-protected and comfy sleeping bag. Work on spells to help in the woods, but also on actual woodsman skills, I think Hermione gave me a book about those. Get into better shape. This is important.”

As Harry continued to hike through the trees, he continued to speak, making a list of things he wanted to do, in order to better himself and to make his stay in this world more pleasant. Some of them he could start on right away. He transfigured the clothing he’d been wearing into a kind of Indiana Jones knockoff: a hard leather jacket which could see off brambles or anything of that nature, and a pair of cargo pants, although he was concerned they would probably not last long unless he used repair spells on them. “Pity I don’t know enough about denim to transfigure them into that material.”

He traveled for several hours in this manner until his stomach started to rumble, of then started to look around for fruits or mushrooms or anything else that he could eat. He quickly found several different kinds of mushrooms, and, after using a spell he had once discovered in an old potions book, found two that were edible. Not that Harry was concerned about poisons, simply nutrients and taste.

A quick fire-lighting spell, and he charred the mushrooms until the juices were popping off them, eating as he continued to walk. He stopped however, when he came upon the stream he had seen from the air. It was wide but looked to be shallow for most of the portion of its length that was within view and he could even see fish swimming around within it. “Not my favorite, but it will do.”

At that point, Harry performed an act he had learned from his mother’s ghost, in their one conversation, which had helped to make Harry so dangerous in a fight. He modified an existing spell to perform an action that was a bit outside its normal range. In this case, it was an Accio spell, but instead of being imagined as a line to grab a single object like a tossed rope, Harry imagined it as a net, flashing through the water and grabbing multiple objects at once. “Accio fish,” he intoned, smiling slightly. He didn’t need the words, but it certainly made it easier, and in noncombat situations Harry felt he could be a bit lazy.

A second later several of the fish flew out of the water, plopping them down on the ground to one side. “Hmm, one to cook now, the others to store I think.”

As Harry spoke, there was a deep rumble from the undergrowth across the river, and Harry looked up in surprise, as a giant bear trundled out. It was extremely big, at least seventeen feet long, maybe more, Harry couldn’t tell exactly, but it was a big brown bear. It growled at him, the sound reverberating all around, perhaps in anger at Harry stealing its fish.

Shrugging, Harry used another modified spell, this one a Leviosa, and sent two of the fish he had caught out over the river to the large bear.

The bear took one fish in a single snap of its jaws, beginning to rend at the thing, never taking his beady eyes off Harry though, and Harry kept watching it in turn, a cutting spell prepared in his mind, which had quickly shifted into the same kind of combat mentality it had evolved into over his life.

However, before the confrontation, if it would've involved into one, could continue, there was another rustling nearby, and a second bear rumbled out. It was slightly smaller than the first and bumped its head into the side of this first one, then growled angrily at Harry.

"Right, this is your stream, I'll just move on." With that, Harry tossed two of the remaining fish across, picked up the last one, and headed downstream. This wasn't in the direction he'd been going, but stream equaled fish, which was protein filled food, not a small consideration. Transfiguration could create food, but not nutrients. Yet if Harry started from a good source of protein like fish, he could make quite a lot.

Not chicken for some reason. That had never been fully explained to his satisfaction but changing fish directly into fowl or beef was not possible. It was one of Gamp's Laws of Transfiguration. Still, he could make it into a meal with ease.

The two bears seemed pleased enough with the fish that they didn't bother him as he walked off. The next animals Harry met were not so biddable. This turned out to be a wild boar, which took one look at Harry and instantly decided it hated him. Coming out of the brush in front of Harry, the wizard had only a brief second to spare before the boar charged him, its tusks looking like they would gore him just as easily as any sword.

A hasty Protego bounced the thing off, but in his haste the spell wasn't very strong, and cracked on the impact. An instant later the snorting boar continued its charge. A cutting spell however, dealt with the animal quickly enough but as the pieces of the animal splattered on the ground, Harry grimaced. *Bugger me, but I'm too damn used to using deadly spells in every situation. There wasn't any need to kill the poor creature. I'm going to have to think about that in the future. Animals after all aren't people making a conscious choice to attack me.*

With a sigh, Harry began to create a small steel javelin out of a nearby branch.

By the time evening began, Harry estimated he had arrived sometime in the morning, Harry had recourse to use his spears. A second, even larger example of the breed had surprised him, coming out of the forest to one side and charging almost too fast for Harry to get a spell off. As Harry had made his spear steel, it was enough to hold the beast at bay for a second before Harry ducked to one side. At that point a cutting spell killed the boar before it could turn and gore Harry with its massive tusks.

Alas, Harry then had to skin the boar the old-fashioned way, a number of spells having failed to remove the boar's hide. The fact "Accio Boar Hide!" had Harry ducking out of the way of a flailing boar corpse was particularly galling to the boy (once-more) wizard.

Harry's first night in the forest was loud. If Harry had thought that the noise of the forest before was intense. At night, it became even worse. There were growls and howls in the distance, and as Harry bedded down in one of the trees, having transfigured the top of the branch with a subtle transfiguration spell that changed the nature of one of the larger tree limbs into that of a mattress on top while keeping the bottom solid, Harry was not surprised to note several scavengers moving around the fireplace he'd used to cook the meat from the second boar.

*Fun* he thought to himself, grinning as he leaned back. *This reminds me of that story Hermione once told me about in America, Tom Soil, I think it was? Or was it Hacking Berry Tin? Whatever. Still fun.* Indeed, Harry found himself having more fun now living off the land and on his own than he'd had in years for any extended period of time. He was in fact finding out why he'd always been entranced by magic once more, using it in various ways throughout the day, and only to kill in direct self-defense.

By the twelfth time day in the forest, Harry had developed a routine. He would get up, forage for food, usually fish thanks the stream, eat something then spend a few hours reading through one of his books before trekking downstream again. He was in no rush after all. During the day Harry would often stop to look at interesting plants, or some of magnificent trees. During these stops, Harry tried his hand at drawing, something he had always been interested in, along with runes, something Hermione had always tried to get him into during Harry's very infrequent down time. He wasn't very good at it just yet, but he was trying.

Lunch time would be a smaller meal, more about stopping to read than anything else, and experiment with runes wishing to create an anti-animal warding array to set it up at night so he could sleep more soundly. It had taken only being trodden on once by the fox-monkeys to make this a priority.

By the fourth day however, Harry's shoes were starting to give out on him, and not really having any idea of what kind of material to make new shoes out of that would last longer, he repaired them. But then decided to leave the area of the river for a time to look for a downed tree. *After all, if I'm going to follow the river, I might as well use it as actual transportation.*

A Point Me spell took him to where four trees had been downed in a single area by what looked like a series of lightning bolts. It didn't quite look natural, but Harry, using a spell he'd learned from the ghost of Dumbledore, couldn't detect any magic in the area after so long. But here again, Harry found himself faced with local fauna that were not exactly happy to meet a human.

As he came out of the trees, growls erupted from nearby, and Harry halted, moving to put his back against the tree, one of his prepared spears at the ready while his mind readied a simple cutting spell. His steel javelin was knocked out of his hand but slowed the wolf which had just so easily surprised him. *I'm used to hunting people, not being hunted by animals! How the buggering heck can they move so silently?!*

Setting aside such thoughts, Harry ducked aside, lashing out at its side with the sword of Gryffindor, as the familiar blade filled his grip, apparating there from his shrunken trunk. The wolf dodged most of it, but as other wolves raced in, it toppled to the side, howling in agony.

Seeing their pack mate screaming and clawing at its side as it convulsed and began to froth at the mouth, the rest of the wolves backed off, before fleeing with their tails between their legs. Wolves were not so blood-thirsty they would keep attacking a creature that could poison them with but a tiny wound from his 'fang'.

Staring down at the wolf as it whimpered in agony, Harry sighed and, now feeling very guilty, cut its head off with a single cutting spell, putting it out of its misery. "This is getting ridiculous. I have to remember to use nonlethal means. They're just animals, no need to kill them all."

Because that was what the other aspect of his routine had become: being attacked by random animals. The wolves hadn't been the largest threat he encountered, that dubious honor lay at the hoofs of a series of giant boars. But even they hadn't truly been a threat, but Harry had yet to overcome his trained instinct to use lethal measures when attacked.

With a sigh, Harry buried the poor animal, then began to work on one of the downed trees, frowning as he thought about what he wanted to create. Then he began to hack at it, not with magic, but manually. He had yet to start training his upper body, and this place looked like a good place to set up camp. He stayed there for several days working, creating what amounted to extremely primitive rafts, which, one after another sank, while being silently watched by the wolves, glimpsed only occasionally through the woods, though they did not attack him again.

This perhaps led to him finally throwing up his hands as he stood once more in the bank and saw his latest effort sinking to exclaim, "Okay, what the hell am I doing wrong?!" Shaking his head, he pulled off his necklace and enlarged his expanded trunk, looking at the titles of the books within. "Right, is there anything here that can help me?"

Another week passed, but Harry, no longer taking so much time on the raft, spent this time much more effectively. He started work on creating intent-based warding arrays and practiced with several different, interesting spells that he never had the time to learn before. Of course, with the life Harry had led, he could see that many of them could be turned into combat spells, but a few were just simple charms to help with building something or around the house.

A joiner spell, for example, that allowed him to mold pieces of wood together after cutting them out. That helped immensely in his little project of the boat, although the ships still didn't really go very well in the water, the shape of them was all wrong. The expansion charms to use on a tent was another, even if Harry didn't have the material to make the actual tent yet. Spells to create different cooking equipment and then enchant them to shrink and be weightless at the same time quickly became a favorite, allowing Harry to expand his list of available meals.

Most of these spells came from a book that Hermione had given him from the time she had been in Australia. The book was titled, 'G'day Mate! Spells you need to get through your day in the outback.' The others from books Bill had given him, the Curse Breaker having been an expert at wards and knowing what books were good and what were rubbish in that field.

However, during this time Harry did discover a bit of a problem: he was talking to himself too much. "I mean obviously there aren't any other people around but talking to yourself is not a good habit to get into," he mused, as he stared at yet another sinking boat, slowly this time. "Okay, so now I know it isn't anything to do with the wood or the keel I think it's called, it's got to be the fact that the sides of my canoe are too low." He pulled the boat back, then put it back in the water immediately, watching it closely, and nodded to himself. "For certain. Back to the drawing board."

As he went, Harry once more spotted a wolf watching him through the woods, but Harry ignored them. Over the past two weeks he had just gone from the downed tree to the river and that was it, so whatever the wolves were guarding was nothing to do with him, although he wondered idly why the pack hadn't just moved on when a bigger predator had moved in. "Maybe the wolves here haven't learned to do that, or maybe they are just confused because while I have poison, I'm not a predator they recognize."

Blinking, Harry sighed. "Yes, talking to myself. Never a good habit." Back home, Harry never really had any downtime to be able to develop that kind of a bad habit. Before things went really bad, Harry had friends to talk to, like Hermione or Ron. After that, there was always someone, more often than not a work acquaintance around, and the WW had never understood that Harry needed downtime, so the Ministry and its counterparts had never ceased in their demands on his time.

Thinking about it for a moment, Harry smiled sadly. What he wanted was someone like Hedwig to talk to. She had never said anything, but good god, could that owl get her opinion across! It had been more than a decade since her death, and though it still hurt, it was a small wound, and Harry had learned to dwell more on the times they'd shared than her death.

"I wonder, I have seen a few snakes around, maybe it's time to start using that old trick of mine." With that, Harry once more made use of a spell he had long since learned to modify, the intent in his mind changing the Serpensortia spell into a more defined summoning spell. He had used the spell several times during large-scale fights. It was amazing what you could do in

a fight against fifteen people who suddenly realize that there are poisonous snakes moving around their feet. *I still have to wonder why Riddle never used that kind of thing. It is so simple after all.*

*I want a snake that is intelligent, magical, and of sufficient size to look after itself,* He thought, closing his eyes briefly as he sat on the last log in his little makeshift camp.

An instant later, a giant snake about as long as Harry was tall appeared, plopping to the ground. It had a somewhat wide body for its size, looking almost like a python, but with long fangs, and what looked like small quills along its back. The thing had also been camouflaged to look like a stone before Harry's spell had transported it here.

Hissing in annoyance, the snake's eyes snapped open from what must've been a nap. Coiling around, it saw Harry and hissed at him "§What manner of thing are you!§"

"§Greetings, my name is Harry Potter§," Harry spoke calmly, unafraid of the snake's ire.

The snake froze. "§You speak the tongue of serpents... And something is telling me I should serve you. What would you wish of me, Speaker? §"

He then froze, his tongue flicking back into its mouth. "§You smell of ancient power and poisonous strength. You are not wholly what you seem.§"

"§I agree§," Harry answered blandly.

The snake, who had yet to introduce itself seems to hiss in amusement. "§Why have you summoned me speaker? I was having a dream of a nice fat piglet.§"

"§Companionship§." Harry shrugged. "I noticed I was talking to myself, and I figured I probably shouldn't get into that habit. §"

"§So you summoned a creature to talk at§," the snake deadpanned as only snakes could. "That makes some sense I suppose. §"

§ "So tell me about yourself? You're large enough to be a constrictor kind of snake but you have those quills, and you could also be poisonous. The camouflage trick was interesting too.§"

The snake drolly looks down its own its own body. "§Well would you look at that, I am.§" Looking back at Harry the snake went on. "§I am a Needlespine Shimmerback. My poison is not so much as of yet but will become more paralytic as I age. But I am strong, fast, and yes, quite intelligent. My race evolved near the Elven wellspring of power, and the magic of that place has imbued us all with intelligence beyond normal snakes, to the point where we can pass on information from one generation to the next. It has not however changed our nature. We are still ambush predators.§"

“§Interesting§,” Harry mused, scratching at the scar on his forehead thoughtfully. It, like many of the scars he’d had before and during the meeting with the basilisk, had appeared on his body once more after the rebirth. “§So you weren’t surprised to speak, only that I was speaking to you.§”

“§That is correct. My race have long been able to speak to one another although admittedly, there are not many of us. §”

“§Why?§”

“§Once fully grown, my kind become alpha predators, like tigers. At that point we need a large range, and we rarely speak with our fellows afterwards.§” The snake cocked its head to one side, tongue flicking in and out. The more it talked to Harry, the clearer its thoughts became, which was quite interesting, and the more he smelled the pink-skinned being, the more the snake could tell that outward appearance hid a true monster of a serpent somehow. “§So you simply wish me to be your companion? Speaking to you is interesting, and yet, I will require food. And I am not a mindless beast to be simply commanded.§”

Harry shrugged. “§Food I can do. Have you ever tried fish? §”

“§Fish, scaly creatures in the water§,” the snake mused, then did the snake equivalent of a shrug, its whole body shivering. “§No, I have not. §”

About 40 minutes later, the snake announced that the fish was interesting, but Harry could tell that the snake was trying to be polite and he rolled his eyes. “§Here, let’s try some pork instead.§”

“§Pork? Boar? §” The snake hissed in delight. “§Yes! I have not eaten pork in several turns of the moons. Making the transition from a one type of hunter to another has been difficult, §” it confided. The snake had told Harry that his molting had occurred recently, and after that, he had found himself unable to hide well enough to hunt the animals it would have been able to take unawares before.

For a time, Harry allowed the snake to talk, thinking about what he had already learned, and what to do from here on, then he asked, “§So, do you have a preference for staying in one place or moving around?§”

“§As I am young, I have been moving around for much of my life, trying to find an area which is not already been claimed by alpha predators, or those dratted wolf packs. Tigers and bears will leave snakes alone, wolves will not, having strength in numbers. They are like those pesky ferret creatures who attempt to fight my kind all the time. §”

“§I think the one wolfpack around here learned quickly to leave me alone,” Harry said dryly, “§but I take your point. They do seem to not get a hint quickly. §”

The snake hissed in amusement, bobbing his head in reply. “§Wolves should know my kind are poisonous to eat, and yet they will still attack. I have been driven off twice by such. A single wolf is not too difficult an opponent to deal with in various ways since my last molting, but a group of them are very difficult. §”

Harry nodded, then asked a few more questions about his species, which was an interesting discussion. Then he asked about what other animals the snake had seen in his life, and it turned out that the young snake whose name Harry hadn't asked yet, hoping that the serpent would introduce himself, had seen quite a lot other animals over the years. And it always been interested in observing them going about their business.

The snake then became wary for a moment staring at the pink-skinned creature who reeked of a powerful serpent of some kind. “Yet you have not said anything about yourself. Where do you come from? You are not from around here. Your smell tells me you are dangerous, yet your body makes that assessment seem questionable.”

Harry laughed at that, shaking his head. “§Tact isn't something you're at home with is it? §”

“§Why would snakes need to be polite to another species? §” The snake asked, understanding the meaning of the word somehow when Harry said it, hissing in amusement at the very idea. “§We rarely converse with such, after all. §”

“You have a point I suppose,” Harry shrugged his shoulders, understanding that this snake was probably quite young, and yet also possessed a sense of humor, something most snakes did not possess. “I'm human, but you're right, I'm not from around here.”

“Human.” the snake shook his head. “I am unfamiliar with that species.”

“I don't think were from this continent.”

“Continent? Giant area of the land,” The snake mused, flicking its tail up and nibbling on the end of it in thought. “Interesting.”

Harry was amused by that. This snake was easily the most intelligent and personable he had ever met. *Mind you, I only met a few magical species, and most of them were arrogant self-centered snobs.* “Anyway, I was sort of sent here on a mission, but one that is so long term I don't have to think about it for many, many seasons. At the moment, I am just enjoying life and exploring this amazing forest.”

“Ashenvale is the name of the forest. Or at least, that is what the Kaldorei call it. You're almost like one of them, but your skin is ugly pink and your nose so small they must be the next best thing to useless. Yet I too would find it pleasant to explore. As long as food is not a problem curiosity can be allowed free rein.”

Their talk continued throughout the night as they got to know each other, and finally Harry could not stop himself from asking what the snake's name was, only to be disappointed. "My species do not give names to one another. We know who we are."

"True, but I need something to call you. Some name other than 'snake' or your species." Harry thought a moment, then said, "What do you think of the name Quetzal? It's a short form of a name of a race of snakes that were once thought of as godly in a nation where I came from."

The snake nodded thoughtfully. "Yes, I like that name. Quetzal it will be."

Harry and his new friend spent several weeks simply traveling through the forest, following the river at first, until they reached a series of deep river rapids. Harry stared at them, his head cocked to one side thoughtfully. Then he looked over at where he had beached his canoe, then back again, a wild grin suddenly appearing on his face. *Heh, this is most definitely something to knock off my bucket list.*

Quetzal's tail whacked him lightly in the rear. "No," he said firmly. "Or if you wish to do it, you will be doing it yourself."

"Bah, where's your sense of adventure, my fine reptilian companion?" Harry chuckled, smirking at the snake.

"Right here, alongside my brain, which is telling me that this is a dumb idea," Quetzal replied snarkily. That seemed to be his general attitude, which actually made this journey more fun.

Before Harry could answer, a rustle from nearby caused Harry to turn, and a boar charged towards them.

"What, again?" Harry didn't even bother moving, conjuring up a protective shield, and watched as the boar bounced off it, before grabbing it in a levitation spell. He waited until its legs stopped moving and the boar snorted, staring around it, before gently letting it fall to the ground. The boar instantly charged again, and Harry performed the same spells only this time held it longer.

The second time at least the poor beast seemed to get the message. It's beady little eyes glared at Harry for a moment before it huffed, trotting away to seek something else to take out his anger on.

Quetzal shook its head, hissing in amusement. "You shouldn't play with your food like that. Especially when you're not intending to eat it in the first place."

"Killing is all too easy when it comes to those beasts, and we have more than enough boar meat right now." Harry sighed. The past few weeks, he had toned down his spellwork to

the point where he didn't kill everything that attacked him at last. It wasn't the animal's fault that they thought he was easy pickings or an enemy after all.

Turning, he looked down at the river, scratching at his chin thoughtfully. "Yep I'm going to do it." With that declaration, Harry began to put a few spells on the canoe so that the canoe wouldn't shatter, and then started to work on a new paddle with a double end rather than the single ended paddle he'd been using.

Quetzal watched all this, twisting around into a little bundle on a rock, sunning himself and smiling faintly in amusement. "Can I ask why you think this is a good idea?"

Harry shrugged his shoulders. "I told you a bit about my life, but I don't think I quite got across the fact that at first, I was one heck of an adrenaline junkie."

"Adrenaline. What does that mean?"

Harry frowned in thought. "It means I sought out adventure and fun, the kind of fun that gets your heart pounding, that makes you really push your body and come alive."

The snake thought about it, then slowly nodded. "Like wishing to challenge another alpha predator, wishing to prove yourself against the world," Quetzal hissed, then nodded firmly. "Yes, I can understand that. Especially since you are so young."

Harry laughed, shaking his head. "You still don't believe me about my whole rebirth thing do you?"

"I believe you yes. I however think that your physical youth has quite a bit more to do with your mental thinking that you seem to," the snake said, shaking his head. "It is easy for me after all to see how much smarter I am now than I was before my last molting, and equally so since you started to speak to me. Body has much to do with how you act."

Harry frowned at that, staring down at the canoe's paddle that he had just finished carving out, with an actual carving knife he'd created, rather than spellwork. Harry was trying to cut down on the number spells used on a day-to-day basis, wanting to teach himself some honest work woodcraft just in case. It also helped with his muscles, which Harry was determined to start building now. "You might be right," he murmured at last. "I'm certainly happier than I was before I died, and I don't think I'm thinking as clearly as I was."

But, I still want to do this," Harry added after a moment's thought.

The snake shrugged. "Then do so, just know that if you screw up, I will laugh at you. Quite loudly at that."

"Duly noted, and I think that's actually kind of your job as my companion," Harry chuckled.

"Oh excellent, does that mean I get paid?"

“Do you want to keep eating?”

The snake hissed in amusement, and the two of them smiled. Yes, Harry reflected as he hopped into the canoe, summoning Quetzal had been one of the better ideas he'd had in years. He certainly wasn't a familiar, not like Hedwig had been, but he was a friend, something like Fred, George and Ronald all mixed into one animal, with a healthy dose of snark added in. *Hmm, was there any snark in my life before this? I think there should have been.*

Hopping into the canoe, Harry set himself down, then after a moment's thought, used the sticking charm on his rear, and a bubbleheaded charm around his head. Quetzal saw this and hissed in amusement once again. “At least your thinking ahead in some fashion.”

“Wish me luck?”

“Snakes do not believe in luck,” Quetzal shot back, almost spitting the word. “We believe in planning, patience, and cold calculation.”

Laughing again, Harry's used the paddle to push himself off into the river, where the fast current took him before he could blink.

*Perhaps I didn't think this through clearly enough,* he thought as he hit the first rapid, and then Harry was too busy fighting for his life against the current, twisting the boat this way and that pushing it through several rocks, then up and through another group of rapids, before whooping in delight as he actually got some air for a second before slamming down into the water again and then rushing through several large rocks, twisting this way and that, injury if not death at every move.

Staring after his human friend, Quetzal slowly blinked, then shook his head. “I'll just let him come back to me shall I?” he hissed to himself, coiling up in the sun.

Later that day, Harry did come back, wet from head to toe, the bubbleheaded charm having collapsed at some point, sore, bruised in several places, and with the canoe somewhat cracked despite his earlier spellwork. It turned out the Impervious charm wasn't all it was meant to be. But Harry was also quite jubilant. He tossed a few more fish down in front of where his friend was still sunning himself.

Quetzal opened one eye, rearing up slightly to look at his human companion. “You look like a drowned rat.”

“Have you actually ever seen one of those?”

“No, it just seemed the appropriate term.”

Harry chuckled, then glanced around them, deciding that this place would be a decent area for a camp, beginning to put out the rune stones he'd been making painstakingly over the last few weeks. *Cocking Nora, I wish my handwriting was better, I would think that would carry*

*over to runes.* For every one ward stone he had been able to create Harry had gone through at least seven failures. "Do you think you can find us some mushrooms and some other herbs?" he asked Quetzal. "You've seen me do it often enough."

Quetzal nodded, and stretched, sinuously quite pleased with how much heat his scales had taken in from the sun. "I will do so, are you set on fish though? If you are I will hunt for myself."

Harry waved his hand. "I can hardly hold you to the same measure of non-lethality that I can practice, I've got quite a bit bigger bag of tricks."

Quetzal hissed in amusement at that extremely droll statement, and slithered into the woods, his scales slowly disappearing under their camouflage.

Moments later, he was back, shaking his head in some amusement but Harry couldn't help but notice that his body was a little distended. "I found a vole. I will not need fish thank you. You might also wish to summon one of the local snakes. I saw the tracks of a few. We could get more information going forward."

This worked very well as it had several times before. Snakes didn't talk to one another, or at least one species would not talk to another, but they would all talk to Harry. Indeed, most evinced the same obsequious awe of his abilities that the snakes back in his own world had. But like Quetzal, several of the species here were somewhat intelligent before the Parseltongue worked to magnify that. Putting enough of them together allowed Harry to get a decent idea of the area of the massive forest they were going to be entering.

A second later a small snake dropped into the grass, quailing before Quetzal and Harry spoke up quickly. "What can you tell me about the area downriver?" Harry said cutting through the formalities.

"Speaker," snake hissed in worry "it is not safe. I hatched downriver several moons distance away for my kind. I know not how fast you and the large one can travel but beyond the area where the river is so tumultuous, it becomes placid, widening quickly and becoming several streams. There it becomes dangerous. There are creatures there. They look like turtles, but of tremendous size. Size enough to eat you, master, and the large one."

"Do they communicate with one another, do they talk?"

The snake seems to think about it for a second, then answered. "I know not, master."

Harry frowned, looking over at Quetzal who shrugged ignorance. "All right, we'll take our time heading down them. No more using the river I think, we'll still follow it, that'll give me time to examine the trees again and will let us hide better if we need to."

"I do not understand your fascination with them. They are just trees," Quetzal grunted, although he approved of the rest of the plan. With his and Harry's ability to blend in or turn

invisible, with the forest around them they would be the next best thing to invisible unless they attacked.

“And yet you still can’t feel the magic around us like I’ve started to,” Harry said rejoined, shaking his head. At first, Harry had been too overwhelmed by the physical side of Ashenvale to use his magical senses which he had begun to develop over the years. But once he did, he couldn’t forget it. “You’re used to it. The trees here, everything here, they radiate magic like nothing I’ve ever seen before. It’s like, like I was...” he frowned thinking how to put it. “Like I was raised in an area without a lot water, and now find myself swimming.”

“If you were raised in an area without water, how would you know how to swim?” Quetzal asked dryly, to which Harry laughed.

He thanked the snake, gave it some of the fish, and then banished it back to where the summoning spell had found it. Over the next few days though, Harry was true to his word, spending at least half of the day instead of traveling hiking through the the forest to simply examine some of the trees around him.

Most of those trees looked somewhat familiar, there were noticeably beeches, oaks, elms, fir and so forth. But each of them were distinctly different too, enhanced, stronger, larger, their wood harder, magical in some fashion Harry couldn’t quite understand. But one thing he and Quetzal agreed on, was that the views they offered were just amazing. Every morning Harry would always levitate the two of them up into a tree, to stared around at the forest. The untamed beauty of this forest, and the sheer magic Harry could feel made Harry fall in love with the place more every day.

In this fashion, Harry had also seen several of the other denizens of the forest occasionally.

He saw a few giant-bear like creatures, but standing on their back legs, and wearing clothing. They seemed to value beads, and were generally peaceful seeming, although not very observant as they hadn’t seen Harry in turn. In contrast, Harry had barely seen momentary glimpses of two other groups of forest dwellers.

One creature looked almost like a woman as it flitted through the trees just out of sight, but not quite. Certainly faster and more sure-footed than any woman Harry had seen. Indeed, so brief a glimpse was it that Harry couldn’t even tell if it was a woman, or just a very strangely shaped green tree. Others looked almost like deer but again not quite, although they bounded through the forest like them.

Regardless of those sightings, soon enough, the forest shifting into a more jungle-like atmosphere, the trees changing, the ground changing slowly as vines and creepers started to become prolific all around them. And the fauna too. Gone were the dears and boars. In their places, more snakes, more frogs, squirrels, birds.

Yet the dominant type of animal seemed to be a kind of snapping turtle. And just like the snake it warned them, they were massive. As large as a car from back home, and just as lumbering as they moved through the jungle, roaring and snapping their large, serrated beaks at one another or to tear up various vegetation. Their armored shells looked at least a foot thick, and their paws were large and webbed, allowing them to move over the swamp or through it.

“Well, they are herbivores, that’s something,” Harry mumbled, a little in shock at the sight of the creatures.

“I doubt it,” Quetzal said dryly, shaking his head. “I think we should turn back.”

But Harry wanted to try to talk to the creature. “I want to see if Parseltongue will let me talk to lizards as well as snakes. Back home it didn’t, but this creature, it’s got some draconic properties so maybe.”

Quetzal shook his head, swiftly hiding once more his hiss a whisper on the wind. “If you wish to stick your fool head in the trap, please do so alone. I will be nearby ready and waiting patiently to help you get out of it. How else would I be able to tell you I told you so?”

Rolling his eyes, Harry moved towards the creature that the two of them had been observing. It saw in him coming and bellowed a warning. It’s bellow was like that of a foghorn, loud and echoing, but didn’t seem to be a word or anything similar.

Wincing a deciding this probably wasn’t Harry halted in place, holding up his hands as he readied a spell. He then began to talk quietly, making certain that his Parseltongue was activating. “Hello big guy, I...”

That was as far as he it got before the thing’s eyes widened, and it roared in fury, charging forward, slowly. It was like watching a giant charge, there was a kind of unstoppable nature about it, it’s snapping turtle like mouth open as it boomed a battle cry.

“Ah, didn’t work then.” Harry nodded slightly, then disappeared, apparating back to the tree where he had left Quetzal. The creature paused, staring around them itself, then roared in victory, having chased off the creature that had so challenged it with dragon speak.

“That experiment failed,” Harry announced as if he hadn’t been nearly trampled a second ago. “So turning around, right?”

Quetzal hissed in amusement, coming out of its hiding spot, and then moving along beside Harry as they turned back.

They traveled backwards for another day or so until they were well away from where the forest had shifted into a jungle. There Harry picked up a stick, twirled it, and then shrugged his shoulders as it pointed in an entirely different direction. “That way.”

Quetzal hissed in amusement again, moving along beside Harry in this new direction. "The way you make decisions amuses me."

"Do you have someplace you want us to go?"

At that, Quetzal paused, thinking. Then he shook his head. "No, no place to go, but while it is the middle of summer at the moment we will need to worry about finding a place to make a den when it starts to get colder. Autumn and winter are never fun for my kind."

"Ah, but you have a wizard beside you my fine scaly friend," Harry snorted.

"Yes I do, but what does that have to do with what I said? It would allow you to make a fine den, but we would still have to stop traveling, unless you think you'll be putting one of those ridiculous pieces of clothing around me. Your attempt to make a tent recently did not fill with confidence."

Harry winced at that. None of the books he had covered how to actually make the physical tent. The spells to enlarge it, to make it more durable and everything, yeah. Build the tent, no. Just like he had found spells that were specialty cutting and animal husbandry spells but couldn't figure out how to cure the animal hide. He had to rely on transfiguration for that and couldn't do that when it came to a tent, lest the spell of the transfiguration interfere with the rest of the enchantments.

"No, but you've seen me play with fire. Is it any stretch of the imagination to think that I could simply create a heating charm for you?"

Quetzal blinked at that. "A heating charm," he hissed slowly, then smiled as only a snake could. "Have I mentioned I love you Harry Potter?"

Harry rolled his eyes, but still smirked at the snake in amusement.

They traveled in the new direction for several weeks. During this time Harry realized that he was starting to see a real change in his body from all the exercise he was getting. Where before, Harry had a somewhat decent Seeker's body, small, wiry, his legs powerful enough to cling onto the broom for hours on end. But that wasn't the same as being well-built, although his core muscles had been decent enough, thanks to Oliver Wood and his training, which this body had gone through to a certain degree.

Now however, his upper body muscles and arms were slowly becoming more built, actual, if small, muscles beginning to appear there, baby fat disappearing almost entirely. His skin too was now slowly becoming tanned, ruddy with good health instead of somewhat pale from all the time he'd been forced to spend indoors at the Dursley's, and then of course during winter at Hogwarts. His endurance too was well up from where it had been. He could hike all day, even run for a while, with Quetzal hovering in the air behind him with a mixed Leviosa and Accio spell that acted like a lasso.

Quetzal was a little bemused the first time he did this. But soon he seemed to take a certain amount of delight in flying even if it wasn't under his own power.

Perhaps a month, or perhaps a little longer it was hard to tell, after they had shifted direction, Harry and Quetzal started to travel through an area of the forest that looked somewhat more lived in than the rest. Here and there Harry could see spots of people that said that people had lived there long ago. There were no signs of current habitation, no people, no houses or anything, but Harry was certain there had been someone here.

He asked Quetzal around about it, and he suggested summoning up another snake. That snake, a pit viper, was eager to answer the speaker's question, although it seemed to sneer disdainfully at the larger Quetzal, until the Needlespine Shimmerback hissed at him. "What are you looking at, midget!?"

"Enough of that," Harry quickly got between them, hands out in either direction. *Snakes. They think they're so cold-blooded, but they're just egotistical little swats, the lot of them.*

"This area was a site of many small settlements of Kaldorei. There have long departed, my sire once told me about a war of some kind between them and another two-legged species. They abandoned this area, allowing it to grow back naturally, but you can still see some remnants of their being here," the cobra said, ignoring Quetzal entirely now.

"What did this other species the Kaldorei were fighting look like?"

"I do not know master. My sire simply said they were two legs, furry two-legs, not like yourself with your smooth skin." The snake seemed to shudder.

Harry's lip's quirked. One thing that most snakes didn't seem to get used to when talking to them was the fact that he didn't have scales, and Harry found it amusing. "Thank you. Is there anything in the area we should be warned about?"

The viper moved its body up and down in a full-body serpent-type shrug. "I have not traveled much master, in my territory, there are the normal other animals that you should be leery of, and I have seen perhaps two two-legs nearby, moving through the forest a few days ago. Beyond that had my knowledge fails."

Harry nodded. "One thing every snake had in common was that they wouldn't speculate. A snake would tell Harry what they knew, and that was it. It made them decent scouts and sources of information, but somewhat limited in scope. "Thank you. Would you like some of our boar, we killed it this morning." The thing had attacked them the day after they had finished off the last bit of stored, and Harry had killed it. Since then, he'd skinned it and made jerky out of a lot of it before putting the rest under a stasis charm.

Harry and Quetzal traveled for several days more and Harry noticed as they did that the signs of habitation hadn't increased or decreased. He could still see occasionally signs of the Kaldorei, and their opponents. An arrowhead here, a tree that had grown around a wound

there, carvings scattered across this tree, a bit of stone piled on top of one another here and there. Nothing tremendous, but enough to say that people had once fought, and perhaps lived, here.

However, on the sixth day traveling into this area, Harry and Quetzal discovered that it was not quite as uninhabited as they had thought. Because they were attacked.

Both Quetzal and Harry were moving through the woods openly, not thinking they were in any danger, with Harry's spells available, when there was a sudden screeching in the trees above. Harry looked up in surprise, and several women with wings for arms flew towards him from out of the trees. At first Harry thought they looked a little like Vella, they were certainly good looking enough, and he had seen Fleur transform to a similar form in the past. But their eyes and faces were wild, and they were shrieking what sounded like epithets, even if Harry currently couldn't understand them. Their feet were bird claws, and instead of attacking him with magic, they dove down on him like hawks, their talons extended.

While trying not to let his adolescent eyes stray too far from their faces, Harry quickly threw up a Protego, halting their attack as he looked to Quetzal for information. The bird women screeched and struck at the energy shield, seeming infuriated further by being stopped, not a one of them having enough native intelligence to realize what the shield meant. "What are these things?"

Hissing angrily, Quetzal reared up, his maw opening wide to show his fangs as the bristles along his back stuck up for the first time since Harry had met him. "Harpies, they can be no other! Winged filth! Part bird, part woman, all annoying! They destroy and taint wherever they live. My sire told me of them, and said they were a great threat to even the most well-grown serpent."

Frowning, Harry conjured spell that allowed him to translate the words, a Lingua Franca spell which working with the ICW had given him. Their words were a cacophony, each of the harpies trying to drown out the other. "Kill it, kill the creature! Weak, pink-skinned young looking thing, capture, capture! Sacrifice. It will let the corruption grow."

Harry didn't like the sound of any of that, and since these creatures were seemingly intelligent, rather than mindless animals simply acting on instinct, the gloves came off instantly. "Keep an eye out for any threats behind us Quetzal."

As the snake watched, Harry twitched his hand upwards, his eyes becoming flat and cold, a spell chain forming in his mind, a series of spells one after another. "Bombarda."

A Bombarda spell hit one of them, splattering the others with bits and pieces of bone going at speed enough to knock them out of the sky. A Reducto spell turned another's body to paste, and the next instant, a Stupefy spell hit a final survivor, causing it to crash to earth. The spell was so strong even that impact didn't wake the harpy up.

But this little fight had apparently drawn attention, and at a hissed word of warning Quetzal Harry turned to look through the trees to one side of them as several other creatures charged. They were two-legged beings, their legs like those of goats, the fur covering their legs and waists, with more on their shoulders and arms, which were human-like save for their talons. One of them had hands which seemed to be gleaming with purple and black magic around its hands, and Harry hissed in surprise as he thrust those hands forward, and a fireball rocketed towards Harry

Shifting around the Protego he'd already created, Harry watched as the spells shivered under the impact, frowning slightly. *Huh, I know I didn't put much power into that shield, but still.*

A second later, the others had charged forward, coming at Harry from several directions through the woods and Harry was too busy fighting to wonder about how powerful that spell might've been. The sword of Gryffindor was in his hand again, and Harry slashed it to one side, redirecting one strike. Although he made a mistake as he did, having forgotten that his young body didn't have the strength of his adult one, and found himself nearly knocked off his feet. A hasty conjuration created a tiny needle and another modified Leviosa sent the needle up through the chin of a second goat-legged man's chin and up into his brainbox.

The first one's spear shattered at the impact of the sword, but instead of being dismayed, Harry found the creature trying to grapple with him. Yet a single cut from the sword was enough, and the creature started to spasm almost at once, the spasming knocking Harry, already off-balance, off his feet.

He used the things body as a shield from the stabbing blades of two others. One screamed a second later as Quetzal struck. His fangs sank into one, while he wrapped himself around the leg of the other, upending it right beside Harry. A quick cutting spell sliced the furry-legged being in two, and the next second Harry tossed the dead body of the poisoned one off in time to catch the magic user's next blow on another shield.

Another cutting spell lanced out, and the spellcaster proved not to have any defensive spells of his own. One moment it was throwing magic at Harry, the next it's body and hands were falling in four different directions, his eyes dimming in death.

Harry's own eyes narrowed thoughtfully, somewhat annoyed with his own performance there. *Eesh, I have lost a step for certain. Need to work on my reflexes, I never realized how much better they had gotten over the years. I could track what was going on, but my body just wasn't able to move fast enough to say nothing of my general strength. Cocking young body, and I thought being so short and having noodles for arms was the main problem with it.*

With a scowl on his lips, Harry moved around the trees to where the harpy that he had stunned earlier had crashed to earth. Quetzal soon joined him, having pulled away from his

own victim after tearing the creature's throat out. "Those were satyrs, in case you didn't know," the snake opined, his tongue flicking out and over his lips.

"Yeah, I had gathered. Do you know what that kind of magic was the lead satyr was using? It looked like a fire spell I know, but not quite." Fiendfyre was black and orange, this fire had been purple and black, although it did give off some of the same feel to it, Harry felt, if massively underpowered in comparison to the nearly sentient flames of Fiendfyre.

"What are you going to do with it first?" Quetzal asked curiously as Harry knelt down next to the bird-woman.

"Information," Harry said, frowning as he looked at the creature. He bound it tightly with conjured ropes, making certain to keep its claws firmly entrenched in the ground and its wings pinned behind it. "And then I'll kill it."

Quetzal nodded at that. He certainly had no qualms about killing anything that attacked him, and didn't think it odd at all, although Harry knew that his human friends back in his old world, would have been horrified at the idea of simply killing a prisoner all out of hand. Harry enervated the harpy, and then said slowly. "Greetings, Harpy. I have questions you will answer. It is in my power to kill you quickly, or very very slowly. Do you understand?"

The creature still screeched in its language at him, incensed that a being it could tell was barely more than a hatchling would threaten it so, uncaring of the proof of Harry's power laying scattered through the trees around them. After attempting to get through its brain once more, Harry decided that he wouldn't get any information by simply asking. There was madness and hate in this creature that reminded Harry of Bellatrix Lestrange, only even more so. *This isn't my favored method for a variety of reasons but needs must. I am not going to continue on my way unknowing of the dangers around me.*

Looking deeply into the creature's eyes, as he held it by the chin, and ignored the part of his preadolescent mind that there told him to call at the naked breasts underneath, Harry said slowly, "Legellimens!"

Instantly his mind thrust out like an auger into the creatures, which was completely undefended. It was splintered that mind, and dark, darker and more insane than any mind Harry had ever touched, and whatever madness in it tried to flow back up that connection, but Harry's will was such it couldn't do so. How long Harry was at it he didn't know, but by the time he was done, the creature's mind was fully broken, turning the harpy into a mindless vegetable, and Harry, gasping and falling back, had the information he wanted. "I, I found it, found the information I wanted. But that, that was far harder than it should have been."

In his invasion of the Harpy's mind, Harry had learned that this was a forward scout group, part of a larger warband band. The warband had been on a raid against a group of creatures that were apparently called Furbolgs. These were the name of the bearlike creatures that Harry had seen on occasion in the distance. The warband had apparently consisted of more

than fifty satyrs, accompanied by fifteen harpies, on an attack of a small village of the Furbolgs. The Furbolgs lived there in harmony, and apparently had even had contact with another group of sentients who Harry had not yet seen examples of, giant bull-like creatures that reminded Harry of a Minotaur almost. The name of that species had eluded Harry, and indeed, Harry counted himself lucky to have gotten all he had.

Harry had also discovered that the group was on its way back after a successful raid. They were moving at a fast pace, so that the Kaldorei Sentinels, couldn't catch up to them, the scouts pressed out ahead of the rest by a bare hour. The group would then meet up at a village of some kind in the distance, where their prisoners would be sacrificed.

At the remembered feeling of the pleasure the harpy took from that though, as Harry's hand flashed up. A single spell cut the creature's head off its shoulders, and Harry turned his attention back to Quetzal, explaining what he had discovered.

Quetzal frowned, his tongue flicking in and out as he thought. "So what will you do? I say you, but I suppose I will be forced to come with you."

"Ambush this warband, free it's prisoner, and then, find this village, where they are using their prisoners in this ritual of theirs."

"Why?" Quetzal asked quizzically, and Harry was reminded for the first time in a while, that while Quetzal was a moral individual, his morality was that of a snake. Snakes were solitary hunters, they didn't have any kind of fellow feeling towards other sentients, they only had the morals of a predator: kill if attacked, kill to eat, never otherwise, work in harmony so there is enough for all. Certainly, a snake would not go sticking his snout into other predator's business either.

Harry shrugged. "Because I have a people saving thing, and because I don't like the idea of this 'corruption' spreading."

While Quetzal disdained the concept of a 'people saving thing', he understood that it was important for his friend, and also understood the idea of wanting to tamp down or otherwise slow this corruption, whatever it was, of the forest. "Very well, how are we going to go about it?"

"Ambush them," Harry said simply, while above them, rain began to fall. "We find them, scout them out, then get back ahead of this group, we prepare the ground, and we overwhelm them."

That, Quetzal could fully agree with. It was the kind of plan a serpent could follow.

Now completely covered in invisibility cloak and Quetzal's chameleon ability respectively, the two of them moved in the direction the satyrs had come from, looking for an any evidence of the way the forward scouts had come through the forest. They swiftly found it,

a series of footprints leading deeper into the forest well off the direction from which Harry and Quetzal had been coming.

It was evident as the two of them moved closer to their quarry, that the group they were going to be ambushing had forgone hiding in turn for need of speed. They could hear them coming well before seeing them through the dense tree cover. But eventually, Harry and Quetzal paused, with Harry making certain his Invisibility cloak covered both of them as he hunkered down, unseen by his quarry.

There were around thirty-seven of them, all told, showing that the war band might have succeeded, but they had taken severe losses. Twenty-seven satyrs and ten harpies providing overwatch, moving from one tree to another. Four of them were always in the air above the foliage, the others always closer to the ground, resting or hopping from one tree to another as they squawked in their language down to the satyrs. With his spell still activated Harry could tell they were taunting the landbound satyrs or telling them to hurry up in the most contemptuous tones.

The satyrs were armed with swords and spears along with shields. Simple weapons, primitive, but they certainly seemed effective, made out of iron or stone. Among the other satyrs though were eight who were marked out by the same purple and black flames around their hands as the previous spellcaster. As they ran through the rain the rain hissed and sizzled at it struck the fire, making Harry wonder why the heck they were still using the spell instead of waiting. Beyond that, the spellcasters were marked out by a sigil that looked like a bloodied handprint on their shoulders.

And among the satyrs were the prisoners. They were a mixed lot. There were seven Furbolgs, ranging from large to small. The small ones looked like bear cubs, except they were standing on their back feet half the time. Their parents looked like fully grown bears and were only vaguely cute until they opened their mouths, at which point they dispelled the cuteness entirely.

The others also resembled something that Harry had seen in the distance a few times before only Harry had thought it had been two different types of creature. They were four-legged people, with the lower body of does, and the upper body of what Harry had to assume were Kaldorei. They were extremely good-looking, and also extremely naked, with pert, swelling breasts that Harry could barely pull his eyes away from. They were currently wet from the rain, bedraggled and forlorn, with long hair plastered against their naked backs.

Their arms were tied behind their bodies, and someone had stuck something in their mouths, like a bridle on a horse, to keep them from speaking. The sight of that caused Harry's mind, which had suddenly devolved into a preteen turmoil at the look of boobies, back to normal, and he bared his teeth in a snarl.

He wasn't the only one snarling though. In among the other prisoners, was a tall Minotaur-like human creature. It was taller and stronger looking than any of the others even the two male Furbolgs, although not as wide in the shoulders. He was dressed like a Native American Harry had once seen in the book about a living toy: feathered headdress, leather jerkin and leggings, although his horns ruined the Minotaur impression, being more like those of a moose rather than a bull.

His hands too were bound, bound tightly against his chest in an 'X' form, and his fur was running with blood in different places showing where he had been hit hard by something. His head too looked like it had been burnt along one side and one eye was closed from blood seeping into it. Yet his teeth were still bared, showing a smile that was altogether frightening despite the fact that he had only the blunt teeth of an herbivore, and Harry decided that that guy at least would fight for his freedom once Harry got him loose. The others he wasn't so sure about. Even the two male Furbolgs seemed more beaten and biddable and the two four-legged ladies looked like they wanted to be anywhere but here, any fight in them long gone.

Retreating slightly from his vantage point, Harry looked at Quetzal. "How many do you count? Your eyesight's better in this rain than mine."

Quetzal snorted, its hiss a whisper on the wind. "Thirty-seven, eight of whom are magic users. I can see the glow of it around them." He paused, his reptilian countenance shifting into one of concern. "There are a lot of them Harry, are you sure..."

Harry shrugged. "I could take them in a straight fight," he announced without any false modesty. "What I couldn't do in a straight on clash is make certain all those prisoners stay alive, so we won't do that. Let's get ahead of them a bit and prepare an ambush. I think we passed through a likely spot."

Skirting around the group Harry and his serpentine companion got ahead of the group, Harry's spells once more causing Quetzal to fly behind Harry as he ran through the woods, his body lightened by a weightless spell.

Harry chose a point where there were two boulders set in the way of the warband. There was space between them, just wide enough for the satyrs and their prisoners to push through three at a time, but while it wasn't much, it was the best they were going to get, and Harry quickly began to place traps down there. A charm on the ground caused it to appear the same, but to have the properties of ice, a Dumbledore special Harry had learned.

Runic traps were set up there and elsewhere. They were simple, but profound, this kind of work being the only type of runes Harry had practiced before coming to this world. Madness, losing their eyesight, losing their sense of equilibrium, others that would knock out or hold the person who stepped on them. One shot runic arrays which would burn themselves out after a single use, these runes couldn't create direct damage spells, but what they could do would be more than enough to confuse and overwhelm the satyrs.

Beyond that, Harry summoned up several dozen cobras, telling them about what he was after. The snakes didn't seem to see the point of the battle at first. The satyrs were too big to eat. But Harry was a Speaker, and if a Speaker told them to fight, they certainly would, just like they would obey the orders of a dragon.

The news that this warband of satyrs had captured the women with the doe-like lower bodies, however, caused many of the snakes to blink in shock and become very angry, in their chilly reptilian way. "That is a travesty," hissed one of the large king cobras, the oldest if Harry was any judge of a snake's age, and he had begun to be one. "The Nymphs are the guardians of the forest, the trees and all animals that live within. We will help them."

Harry nodded thanks, internally reminding himself once more about the animals here are quite a bit more intelligent than the ones in on earth. *So those are nymphs, hmm? Interesting, they don't match what we would call nymphs back on Earth, but when in Rome and all that.*

Preparations done, Harry then set himself up on the top of one of the stones, pulling his invisibility cloak around him just as he had while scouting out the warband. Until he started casting spells, no one would know he was there, and even after so long as he didn't move violently they would see where the spells were coming from, but not Harry himself. Harry waited there, his traps set up, and watched as the reading party approached.

Being no fools, the satyrs slowed down upon seeing the large rocks, their column slowly piling up as the satyrs in the lead sniffed the air, looking around warily as the harpies all gathered in the trees above them. Harry, still using the Lingua Franca spell, heard two of them mutter about how their forward scouts should've been waiting here for them. "Kaldorei work in ambush," one of them growled angrily. "This is a perfect spot for them! Where are our scouts!?"

"We can't wait! Push on," Snarled another voice. The satyrs seemed to form words easily enough, but their throats or mouths seemed to lend themselves to growling and snarling.

The hiding wizard noted that both of the speakers were marked by the bloody handprint on their shoulder, marking them as magic-users, and Harry wondered if magic-users represented some kind of nobility among these creatures. Regardless, he picked them out, and the other six magic-users out of special targets, already preparing his first spell chain mentally. A spell chain, a series of spells tied one to another and then launched in a single flowing moment, was something he'd learned from Professor Flitwick before leaving Hogwarts for the last time.

Harry waited, and then, the first of the traps activated as the satyrs in the lead crossed between the two large stones. Several of them collapsed, frozen in place by immobilization rooms. Another started to scream, hacking around him with a massive stone blade. Two more lost their footing, dying to their crazy fellows. "Spread out! It's a trap!"

The person who shouted that died a second later, as Harry began his attack, shouting out in Parseltongue, his voice carrying through the rainfall and sounds of confusion thanks to a Sonorous spell. "Now."

Harry's summoned snakes attacked from every direction, coming up out of the forest's grass and among the roots to bite and poison the horned creatures. Satyrs fell to the snakes, and then Harry's first spell was flashed up towards the harpies above. At the moment, thanks to the snakes, they were the most dangerous group. This spellchain transfigured several hundred blades of grass into needles and then launched them upwards via a modified Leviosa spell, like wide-angle buckshot. The Harpies, who had barely begun to leap upwards from where they had perched, died to a bird.

With the aerial threat dealt with, Harry's eyes flicked down to the magic-users among the warband.

But the raiding party was so spread out that the group around the prisoners was still unengaged, not having fully entered the trap yet. Two of those satyrs turned and shouted, "Kill the prisoners! We can at least make certain they'll never return..."

He died to a Reducto and several more to the rest of Harry's current spell chain. But his fellows were already moving to do that very thing, causing Harry to shout out another set of spells as he raced forward from his hiding place, cursing as his movement caused the invisibility cloak to fall off his head and away from his hands. A Protego flashed between the satyrs and the prisoners, protecting two of the Furbolgs and one of the nymphs from their weapons.

As that spell faded and the satyrs turned to him, Harry lashed out with cutting spells, this time hit the ropes binding each of the prisoners, tearing them off. First was the large Minotaur, who roared, grabbing the sword from a satyr who had foolishly turned his back on the larger being. The blade bit deeply into his hand, but the Minotaur didn't seem to care, pulling that satyr close. A punch from the Minotaur laid out his opponent, possibly crushing his jaw, and a stomp ended his life as the Minotaur took the sword, looking like it was a dagger in his hand as he began to slice to every side.

Simultaneously, the nymphs showed that they were still had some fight in them as they kicked out, crushing a skull and breaking ribs, respectively. One of them was still cut badly in the side by one of the guards, but Harry's spells quickly freed the Furbolgs. The two males among them roared, grappling several of their guards. The two nymphs took the opportunity and sprinted off through the trees, having no interest whatsoever in fighting off their opponents.

The Minotaur took a slash to his chest, which sat him down hard. However, he still thrust forward with the sword he was holding at the enemy currently attacking him, causing the satyr to leap backward.

Then Harry was there, his cloak fully falling away from his body, revealing his short frame as he used a Reducto spell to blow apart one of the satyrs. This was followed without a second wasted as a bone exploding curse on another who had been about to hack down at one of the younger Furbolgs. When he died, that satyr took with him his two fellows as his entire body was turned into an explosion of blood and viscera, the bits moving so fast as to embed themselves in his fellows like shrapnel.

The Minotaur's eyes widened at that, wondering what this little creature was, to wield such powerful magics, and he watched as the creature freed the last of the Furbolgs and looked around wildly for any more enemies.

However, there were none. Quetzal and the other snakes had been very busy while Harry had moved to guard the prisoners. The snakes had poisoned every satyr they could, and Quetzal had personally sought out the magic-users among them. Harry had killed three in the attack he had launched after dealing with the harpies. Two more had been caught in the traps that Harry had put down, and the rest, who had spread out, had been caught by Harry's other runic traps. Quetzal had dealt with the one who had tried to retreat back into the rest of the warband as he tried to rally their fellows while he was trying to scorch the earth with his fire magic to deal with the snakes, his paralyzing bite holding him still for another bite to the throat.

Many of those snakes lay dead, but the others were already searching for chunks of the satyrs Harry had killed they could swallow, uncaring of their losses as only cold-blooded creatures could be. Quetzal moved through the grass as the furry folk gathered together, then began to race often away from the fighting, not even bothering to say thanks.

Harry sighed, calming down slightly, and smiling at the large creature, who had remained behind. "I'm hoping you can understand me, this is an all-purpose translation spell, and for anything more, I'll need to know the specifics of your language."

"I can understand you, young one," the Minotaur with the moose horns laughed, then winced and held his stomach. "Unfortunately, unless you can heal me, our ability to converse will not matter for very long. The blades of satyrs are often covered with fell things, not poison, but refuse and muck."

Harry instantly knelt down, using a series of healing spells to first make certain there was no sickness within the wound, cleaning it, and then he started to heal the wound slowly, using the same kind of spells Madame Pomphrey had used on him so often back in Hogwarts or the Aurors who had been trained as field medics. "Do you have any ribs broken?" Harry said, his hand hovering over the wound.

The Minotaur shook his head, sending water splashing everywhere, somewhat in awe of these spells this young creature had. The Minotaur could tell he was young by his build and the smoothness of his face, although admittedly, he was simply comparing his rescuer to a Kaldorei of the same gender. But the spells he was using were not nature-based, which was also making

him somewhat wary. His grandfather had told him about such things and how the Kaldorei had basically had to banish a large amount of their society for not being able to leave off using such around the same time his tribe had settled in their mountains.

Deciding his curiosity could wait no longer, he asked, "Might I ask, what are you?"

"I had the same question for you," Harry chuckled. "I am a traveler who has come from a distant land to this forest. Where I come from, we're called humans, and my name is Harry Potter. But I've never seen anyone like you before. Or those creatures that just ran off like their fur was on fire, although I know they are called Furbolgs."

"Ah, yes, but you will have to forgive the bear folk. Although, they are warriors are formidable if angered, they cannot sustain that anger for very long, especially after throwing off the effects of fear. They are peaceable creatures for the main, like my own folk. Fighting does not come easily to us."

"That makes your folk a good sight better than mine," Harry said dryly. "And yours?"

"Tauren," the Minotaur said, with a shrug. "My name is Tyre Fleetforest. I am a druid who was on my Rite of the Winds, an act of passage to be seen as a blooded warrior among my people. To do so, my people must leave our tribe's land. I had completed much of my quest when I decided to stop and speak with the local Druids of the bear folk. The raiding party hit the small village of Furbolgs two days ago in the middle of the night, capturing myself, that family you freed, and two visiting nymphs, whose call for aid the satyrs somehow silenced."

Tyre sighed, shaking his head. "The nymphs were... ill-used by the satyrs. As such, you will have to forgive them for their cowardice as well, I am afraid, despite their position as forest guardians."

Harry's teeth gritted at that. "There's no need for me to forgive them for that. I, I've seen what events like that can do to man and woman both." As Tyre's eyes widened and he reevaluated how old Harry Potter was, Harry pulled back from the man, smiling up at him. "How do you feel?"

"Tired, more tired than one of my race should ever feel. The satyrs were sapping my strength with some kind of fel-magic, and I cannot yet feel the forest around us, damn their blood-cursed existence! But I will be well enough to move on my own at least. Thank you for your help, Harry of the humans. A hand unasked for is always welcome. I am in your debt for this day's work." With that, Tyre held out his hand, and Harry found his own hand disappearing in the far larger hand of his new acquaintance.

"You have made an ally in this one," Quetzal hissed, moving over as he listened in. The Lingua Franca spell Harry had used worked on him as well, so he could hear the words spoken by others accurately enough, even if he couldn't speak it.

“Perhaps so, but he’s too tired and battered to help us with my next mission,” Harry answered back.

“You speak to snakes? That is an amazing gift!” Tyre exclaimed, staring between the rare Needlespine Shimmerback and this ‘human’, wondering what humans were. He had never seen a being quite like this young creature with his monstrous magical power.

“Kind of you to say so,” Harry chuckled wanly. “It’s got me into some trouble occasionally at home. Regardless, you’re not in my debt. I just did what anyone should have.”

“You did what few could have alone,” the Tauren rebuked mildly. “And if you will not take my debt, you will take my friendship.”

“That I’m always happy to accept,” Harry then cocked his head quizzically. “You say you’re a Druid? What does that mean exactly?” Harry had heard the term a few times in his old world, but druidism had gone out of style in the Wizarding World before World War 1.

Blinking, Tyre frowned. “In short, and far too short to be truly accurate, a druid is one who can call upon nature. Specifically, my people can call upon nature spirits and the ancestors who have become one with the Emerald Dream for aid. In this, I serve nature. Its power and majesty flow through me.” He then smiled. “If you wish to learn more, I will cheerfully tell you, but something of your stance and eyes tells me you wish to move on quickly, and I should head back to the Furbolg village to give them aid in recovering from the raid.”

Harry nodded, then glanced up at the sky, where the rain was slowly fading out. “I do need to be going. This warband apparently was but part of a much larger group. They mean to sacrifice several other prisoners they already have to do something with what they called the Taint and then flee the area. I want to catch them before they can do that or at worst, move on.”

The Tauren frowned thoughtfully, staring down at Harry. “I do not think I am well enough to join in such a fight,” he admitted, his voice an allow of guilt and self-recrimination, a tone Harry was all-too-familiar with, both from himself and from his friends. “Whatever the satyrs did to me have cut me off from the nature around us, and I am barely able to stand, let alone fight well enough to honor my clan. But if you face such numbers alone, would you even be able to...”

“I won’t know until I try,” Harry said, his face set. “You won’t know if something is impossible until you try it. And don’t feel bad about not being able to come with me. I’d wager you cost these satyrs as much as you could in lives and blood before they captured you.”

Tyre laughed quietly, once more reevaluating Harry’s apparent age upwards, as he reached into a pouch. Much of the few items he called his own had already been taken by the satyrs, despoiled or tossed aside. But within that pouch, there was a small stone on a string tied into place at the bottom. Tugging it free from its place in the pouch, Tyre held it forward.

It was a bright green stone, not a gem, just a green stone, with a series of etchings on it, including a mountain range done in a few simple lines. "Here," Tyre announced, holding it out to Harry. He looped it formally around Harry's palm, then around his wrist, before taking the stone and tucking it under the bindings on Harry's palm. There Tyre pressed his thumb against it, and Harry watched as the etchings there glowed slightly. "By the spirit of my clan-father Huln Highmountain, I call you friend Harry Potter. If you ever meet any of my people, show them this token, and they will know you as an ally."

Harry nodded. "I'll be sure to look them up. I'm always interested in learning new things. But for now, I will have to leave if I want to find that village and try to stop whatever they are doing. Farewell until then." He looked over at Quetzal, who moved to his waist, coiling around Harry's shoulders and stomach, laying his head on Harry's shoulder. He nodded once at Tyre, turned, and raced away, his body made lighter by a weightless spell allowing Harry greater speed.

Tyre Fleetforest watched him go, then turned, eager to return to the Furbolg tribe. Then, perhaps, he could reach out to the Emerald Dream and send a message to Lord Cenarius. Whatever the satyrs were doing, the Lord of the Forest needed to know if he didn't already. And about Harry Potter as well.

OOOOOOO

Cenarius scowled angrily as he stomped hard on a satyr, hands which had turned into massive wooden claws flashing in every direction, cutting down several more and blocking a fire spell from another one. *Fel-magic*, he thought to himself. *Will this world never be rid of it?*

The satyrs had ever been a curse, created magically by the Burning Legion's Titan ruler Sargeras in his first attempt to invade Azeroth from the bodies of Elves who followed their Queen into Sargeras' service. The first satyrs had been the followers of a Kaldorei lord, whose efforts on opening dark portal had not been fast enough for the Titan. Since then, they had propagated, breeding true with one another. Any captives they took, even nymphs and Keepers. And every satyr was bound to the Burning Legion's service.

*Or worse*, the demigod thought to himself grimly.

The War of the Satyrs had broken their power, shattered their numbers. Thanks to the Kaldorei, they would never again have the numbers necessary to truly challenge. But that was not to say that they could cause trouble, especially now, when something was stirring in the Emerald Dream, and the Druids and the Green Dragon Flight were stuck there, fighting the influence of the Old God, Yogg-Saron. It had been more than a thousand years since any of them had spoken in the real world. Cenarius himself came and went in the Emerald Dream, refusing to be bound to it, never forgetting the material world around him, the forest that was his true home.

Recently, however, Cenarius had begun to wonder if the satyrs had switched their allegiance. No longer were they just acting out wildly, trying to hurt the Kaldorei or anyone else, however they could. Nor were they trying to continually find a magical power source that could allow them to open a portal. Instead, many of the satyr bands his people had discovered were doing something else, something that was beginning to impact the Emerald Dream itself, where Yogg-Saron's Taint had already begun to spread, for all that Ysera, Malfurion and his druids could do.

Yogg-Saron was an Old God after all, and perhaps the most powerful that remained alive. His influence, his Taint, was powerful. And somehow, the satyrs were now spreading that influence into the physical realm.

Around him, a large band of Kaldorei Sentinels moved, racing along as fast as their feet could carry them, or their bonded animals. For the most part, these were wolves and elk along with a panther or two, with their leader, Arden Swornsong, perched on a jungle tiger. "Press on!" he shouted. "We need to press on. We must find out what these satyrs are doing and where."

OOOOOOO

Carrying Quetzal, Harry raced through the woods for several hours as night fell, covered by Harry's Mufilatio so the noise of their passage couldn't give them away. As they moved through the forest as quickly as possible, Harry and Quetzal quickly found signs of what Harry was coming to think of as magical corruption. It wasn't like anything Harry had seen in his previous life, a disease almost, a disease of the forest. Portions of the forest here and there, scattered at first, but then becoming more numerous as Harry raced through them, were marked by trees that simply looked unhealthy. Others had striations of black energy pulsing up their trunks from their roots. And here and there, he found bits of strange black stone.

"I've no idea what that substance is, but I don't like it," Harry said after only a brief glimpse of it.

As night fell, they paused to allow Harry to cast a spell that would allow him to see better in the dark. Meanwhile, Quetzal moved around a nearby tree where Harry could see the outline of a black stone, glistening almost like oil in the light of the moon and stars above.

His tongue flicking in and out, Quetzal was careful not to touch the stone or even the tree though, scowling as a snake would, his tail whipping this way in anger. "It smells of decay," he opined. "And it has not been here long. I would almost have thought that stone was perhaps placed here. It does not seem to thrust down into the ground as much as it should if the stone was natural."

As it was night, Harry carefully lit a small Lumos in his hand, then cast it, so the small light moved towards the tree, as Harry and Quetzal stayed away. Both of them stiffened, one in

narrow-eyed thought, the other in growing fury. The stone was not natural. Instead, it seemed to have grown out of a skull, pressed into the tree's roots.

"I think that is what they're going to sacrifice their prisoners for," Harry murmured, scowling. "Some means to spread that kind of corruption over a wider area, perhaps. I wanted to save them before, but no one would be simply corrupting a forest like this, not without a grander plan. At least, I hope not."

Quetzal scowled. Shaking his head from one side to the other on his sinuous body. "You are putting too much emphasis on forward planning. Remember what Tyre Fleetforest told us. There are not nearly enough satyrs remaining to make any long term plan like that work. Although, it is true that the master of the forest, Cenarius, should be aware of this. The fact he is not is...troubling."

"Maybe not so much. Tyre said he was cut off from the Nature Magic somehow. If they can do that over a wide area, perhaps this Cenarius fellow is unaware of what's going on. Regardless, we need to push on," Harry ordered.

Nodding, Quetzal wrapped himself around Harry once more, and the two of them got onto the floating surfboard. The two of them pushed forward, deeper into the area where they were growing bits of corruption scattered throughout the trees, now moving much more silently and slower now that the rain was falling. The rain would otherwise have messed with the cloak and Quetzal's camouflage skill. Despite that, Harry wished again that he knew how to craft a real flying broomstick.

*Dammit, I really, really wish I had been able to grab a broomstick or something! But Death was adamant that I couldn't leave that room or interact with anything beyond it.* Still, Harry figured, looking back on it, that Death had sort of been breaking the rules to let him bring anything along at all, so he couldn't get too angry at her about that. But none of the books he had with him had anything to do with broomsticks or how to make them.

Still, coupled with Harry's invisibility cloak, the flying board was enough to get them straight through a line of sentries as they neared the satyr village. These were harpies perched on their trees, occasionally calling to one another.

They soon pushed out of that area of forest and into a glade, which had been transformed into a clearing, where the fires of several torches and firepits nearly had Harry's blinding himself for a second, before he pulled back and away, blinking lights away from his eyes. Quetzal didn't have the same problem, his reptilian eyes acclimating quickly.

Several huts and what even Harry could recognize as crappy tents had been set up here and there, around a single house of more ancient and solid construction. Two of its sides were gone, for now, a roof of what might have once been a living tree was also gone, the branches shattered in some bygone era, replaced by a dirty black cloth.

It was very obviously a ruin made into a temporary base camp, built around a single giant tree, larger than most Harry had seen so far. It wasn't huge by this forest standards, but it's solitary majesty was still eye-catching. And so was the fact that several beings tied there.

Two were male equivalents of the nymphs, complete with green hair, long ears and light purple skin. They were both well-built and powerful, but currently slack-jawed, tied around the tree by ropes which secured them at waist and neck, their arms tied crossways to their chest, their legs hobbled and also tied in a position that had to be painful. Their eyes were closed, and their chests barely moved, and there were marks of wounds all over their bodies.

Beside them were two of the nymphs, and it was the sight of those that caught Harry's breath. Not the beauty of them, though with his young body, Harry knew the images of those bodies would probably be coming back at night along with that of the nymph he'd already seen today to make his dreams quite messy.

No, it was the fact that thanks to a nearby torch Harry could see that their skin had changed from what he suspected was a normal greenish tint to dark red. Their eyes were vacant, and they seemed to be occasionally convulsing as he looked at them. Purple and black swirls also appeared on their skin, and Harry watched them move like an invading army crossing the nymph's skin. *Whatever that is isn't good.*

Harry watched for a few moments, as one of the male nymphs seems to shudder, his eyes blinking rapidly, and the blackness receding. This did not go unnoticed by the satyrs, and one of them moved over, smirking as he cut his palm, clenching his hand over the creature's mouth, forcing him to drink the satyr's blood. *The blood itself must be tainted*, Harry thought, that was not good. *Flipping hell, what about the snakes I fed after the ambush!?* *Thank goodness Quetzal didn't eat any. Still, nothing I can do about it now.*

Shaking his head from that side note, Harry watched as the male nymph thrashed and bucked before falling still again. Blood, barely visible from where Harry was, began to drip down from the ropes tied around the man, and the black and purple swirls began to gain power once more on his skin.

Watching that, Harry's teeth ground, and he could hear Quetzal sitting angrily as he too watched the event. "What are we going to do?"

"Split up and scout around," Harry ordered, looking at his friend sternly. "Stay under camouflage and move slowly, right?"

Quetzal hissed in amusement. "This might be the first time that I have dealt with intelligent opponents, but it is not my first stalk, Harry."

Harry smiled wanly at that, and the two of them moved around the campsite, scouting it out. Together, they estimated there were at least four-hundred satyrs and nearly three-hundred harpies in the trees above. Most of them were not awake just yet, it being night now,

but there was a strong guard all around. They weren't organized, but they made up for that in numbers.

Both the Needlespine Shimmerback and Harry also found that there were numerous dead prisoners all around. Their bodies had been fused into the trees, their bodies having been turned into vessels of corruption which was thus conveyed into the trees.

Once they met up, Harry frowned, concentrating on a map of the campsite that he had created in his mind as they'd scouted around. There were no internal defensive areas, but the trees and the rocks scattered through it here and there made for natural barriers. Their numbers were also a severe issue, especially considering how many were still awake and moving around the prisoners. *Damn it, if I had my fully grown body back, I bet I could kill them all given time. But I'm going to have to be sneaky here and use prep work a lot more than I'm used to. Again. Still, getting the prisoners out is the tricky part.*

With a vague plan in mind, Harry looked down at his friend. "Let's move back a bit. I think I've got a plan, but it's going to be very dangerous. And I think I need to experiment for one part of it first."

Quetzal's eyes narrowed, and his tongue flicked out in annoyance, almost smacking Harry in the forehead. "If you think I'm going to be leaving you or anything of that nature, I require that you do not even voice that thought. Those are male and female nymphs there, creatures of the forest, and like that king cobra said in the last battle, few beasts of the forest would be unwilling to help them. And you are my friend Potter. Admittedly, I am a little new to this whole friend thing, snakes do not often form such, but I refuse to leave."

"Never even thought of it," Harry said with a drawl, oddly touched despite his stiff upper lip. Then he smirked. "You're going to be how I get those prisoners out after all."

The Needlespine Shimmerback blinked, once then rose to his full height, equal to Harry's own head. "Tell me more."

"Well, I'm wondering if I can make a portkey that can be activated by Parseltongue."

It turned out he could, the little garden snake he had summoned popping from small one side of a tree they'd hid behind to another nearby tree, and Harry smiled thinly as he once more enlarged his trunk and began to go through it, thinking things through. "The prisoners are the main thing. The rest, there. So here is what we are going to do. This will require runic arrays, misdirection, and subtlety. So it should be right up a snake's trail, shouldn't it?"

Both garden snake and Quetzal hissed in agreement, listening as Harry went on.

**OOOOOO**

Elsewhere in the forest, Cenarius rode through the forest, alongside his two sons, their most warlike keepers of the Groves. All of them had Kaldorei on their backs as more ran

through the forest on their tiger or panther mounts, fury in their hearts one at all. Behind them, the remnants of a Satyr village lay silent now, a field of thorns, wooden spikes, and torn earth. They had tracked a war band back to this base after it had attacked a small night elf hamlet. The war band leader had been a little too complacent, a little too confident a being able to run back to base before the Sentinels could find them, and Cenarius and his force had taken the entire village by surprise.

What was worse for Cenarius was what they found in the village. More than a dozen, it was hard to be sure given many of them had been in pieces, bodies of Keepers and nymphs both. The sight sickened him and worried Cenarius in turn, and his wrath had been terrible. None of the satyr's prisoners had been alive, and now, none of the satyrs or their harpy allies lived either.

Arden rode up next to him, pushing his mount hard. "A messenger owl just came in," the man began without preamble. "They found another band of satyrs, crushed them before they could hit another Kaldorei dwelling by the shore of the Wildbend River. Tracked them back to another group of hovels."

Cenarius grunted, his mind on their current objective. They were now racing through the woods to where two of his nymphs had told them of where they had been rescued from captivity, leaving behind their wounded and dead for now in their haste to move on. Neither had been his daughters, thankfully. Although, Cenarius had a brief moment of humor at the thought of anyone attempting to capture one of his direct descendants. They might not have his full might, but they certainly had more than enough to defend themselves. And Laura was quite a fiery combatant when need be.

The night elf took that grunt as an indication he should go on and did so. "They found the same evidence of corruption there we did back at that base."

At that, Cenarius winced. Somehow, he didn't know how the satyrs had discovered a means of corrupting both the forest. This same means seemed to hide the corruption from his nature-fueled gaze. *The Old One, it must be. We will need to strengthen the Sentinels and patrol every part of the forest, not just the area around my people's or the Kaldorei's settlements.*

"Beware, enemies above!" Shouted someone from the head of the column, everyone in the column reacted instantly, moving this way and that, practically disappearing into the surrounding forest. However, the harpies that came from above were numerous, and a hurled down spells, stones and spears at them.

The Kaldorei all carried bows on their backs alongside their normal double-bladed staffs. Dropping off of their mounts in many cases, they took to rapid firing into the air above them. Harpies started to die before they even reach the forest's foliage.

Then from every angle, more satyrs suddenly charged from preprepared ambush positions. But Cenarius roared and his two sons, Remulos, and Zaetar moved in his direction. The three of them created a wedge of muscle and steel-hard oak that crashed into the charging satyrs. At the same time, Cenarius' Nature Magic wove around them all, the trees coming alive, the very air becoming green and heavy with promise, imbuing power and strength in all of the defenders of nature, healing wounds, aiding speed and strength.

Several of the satyrs stumbled, one or two fell, and others simply halted in fear before Cenarius barreled into them, his hand, which had transfigured into a massive oaken ax, cutting him in two. Several of them attempted to use their fel-powers on him, only to find the trees above them reaching down, grabbing at them, pulling them away. Meanwhile, bolts of pure life energy appeared from Cenarius' hands. Timothy and Zaetar protected him as he dealt with the spell casters.

Elsewhere the Kaldorei shouted out their war cries as they clashed with their enemies, answered by growls and snarl and jeering taunts from satyrs. Together they created a clamor throughout the woods, aided by the bellows of Arden as he tried to create some order from this madness and the howls and snarls of their mounted animals.

As the fight continued, though, Cenarius wondered where this amount of enemies had come from. *Perhaps there could be some more villages around here? And this is some kind of reaction force?*

**OOOOOOO**

Having moved back to a small noll where he could hide and work on his various runic traps, Harry looked up as Quetzal hurried towards them. He had left the Needlespine Shimmerback and several other large snakes to watch the satyrs' camp.

"Something is going on," Quetzal hissed, ordered urgently before Harry could ask. "There's a lot of movement, and more of the satyrs and harpies are waking up."

Harry frowned, looking down at the work he'd been doing on summoning snakes and creating new wards stones. There were several dozen snakes all around him, but Harry had only created two runic traps and cursed the haste with which he had used so many of the ones he had already prepared in his ambush before. It had proved to be overkill, and he couldn't make up the difference now.

Harry moved to join Quetzal as they looked through the tree line towards the village, and Harry instantly saw what Quetzal had been talking about. A group of harpies had apparently just arrived from somewhere else and were in the middle of the shanty village shrieking their fool heads off. From here, Harry couldn't hear them, but it was evident that they were giving orders, or at least information that was pushing the people in the village to start moving quickly. A few of them were preparing packs. Others were grabbing up weapons.

“We’re out of time.” Harry looked over his shoulder, the snakes he had just summoned having moved after him, following the others he had already summoned. “Quetzal, you’ll lead the snakes in. Stay out of sight until I attack.”

“You are going to do something big and explosive, I take it?” The snake asked, using the word that Harry had previously introduced him to when describing some of his spells and their effect.

Harry nodded and then held up a finger. “And before you move, I’m going to light up the night. So be prepared to lose your night vision. That will be the signal for you to start moving.”

Many of the snakes hissed in amusement, while others grumbled at that. Pythons, boas and pit vipers could almost be said to smell the heat given off by others at night thanks to small cavities near their noses called pit organs. Their eyes had very little to do with how deadly they could be in the dark. For the others however, that was not the case.

Whereas the satyrs were about to become very uncomfortable. Harry had noticed their eyes seemed to be somewhat bent towards seeing in the dark.

Thanks to his invisibility cloak and spells, it took Harry about five minutes to move unseen around the village, directly opposite where Quetzal and the snakes were now poised, waiting for their orders. Once in position, he breathed in, gathering his magic as he prepared his spells, admitting to himself that this was going to be chancy work.

Before, Harry had used subtlety, small-scale spells, and preparation. Here, he had hoped to do the same, but while subtlety would still be there thanks to snakes, he hadn't had enough time to prepare. Now, Harry would have to rely on overwhelming force to pull the satyrs' attention to him and away from the prisoners.

Gesturing to either side, Harry concentrated, and a few scattered rocks slowly shifted shape into large lions, their shoulders equal to Harry's head height. *Thank you, Dumbledore, you piss of filth.* Behind them, several more lions appeared, conjured into existence by his power, while a boulder which Harry had previously hidden behind while scouting became a large rock golem.

He gestured them forward, whispering out orders as he pulled his invisibility cloak's hood over his face. “Attack the ones with furry legs and also the ones with wings for arms.”

As they burst out of the tree line towards the satyrs, Harry threw his hand up into the air, once more concentrating his magical power as he shouted out a simple spell, but when he was grossly overpowering right now. “LUMOS!”

In the air above the village of satyrs a new sun bloomed into being, changing the deep night into midday and causing many of the harpies and satyrs to howl in pain, such was the brightness of it.

Many of them fell to her knees, scrabbling at their faces and pulling his arm away from his eyes, Harry saw his transfigured troops crash into the outskirts of the shantytown. The satyrs had the numbers, but his creatures were made of stone, not flesh, and their swords and spears couldn't do much damage.

Their magics did, and there were at least twenty magic-users over there, most of them clumped together near the prisoners at first. They pushed out towards the attackers, forgetting the prisoners for a moment in shock at this strange attack and half-blinded by the artificial sun above them. The Harpies were immobilized for a moment, unable to see enough to take to the air.

On the other side of the camp, Quetzal hissed in humor, having hidden his eyes against his coils. Now he looked around at his fellow snakes. "Well, Harry did say he was going to light up the night."

The king cobra, despite also being blinded, hissed in amusement. "The Speaker spoke truly."

Then they were all moving in towards the camp. Most of the smaller serpents were moving in different directions to cause chaos, but Quetzal and the next two largest snakes moved as one, towards the prisoners, with all of them carrying a large stick. The stick was almost as long as Quetzal, and Harry had made it into a portkey during his preparation time. It was awkward as all get out to move with it like this, but with three of them holding it, Quetzal in the middle at two of the King cobras on either end, they could do so, even if Quetzal thought it rather humiliating. Still, the mission was more important than his hurt feelings, and the stick had to be this long so that all four of the prisoners would be touching it when Quetzal activated the magic within.

Elsewhere, the harpies now attempted to take to the air, a few of them actually charging into the sunlight, screeching in anger and annoyance, and doing nothing but further blinding themselves. Lumos was a magic ball, which had barely any physical component to it.

At this point, Harry also joined the fight, moving forward out of the woods, but still very well hidden under his invisibility cloak as he continued his magical attack. With one hand, Harry sent out cutting spells, killing several of the magic-users among the satyrs, then moving to another position as a few others had seemingly seen where his spells that come from, lighting up that area of the forest with their fireballs.

Ironically the first one came so fast that Harry might well have been hit if he was actually as tall as he had been in the past. At the same time, Harry concentrated on a new spell, a spell that created a kind of gas directly above his head, which he tossed upwards so that it would hover over the campsite.

It looked almost like a mustard kind of color but what it really was, was scattered sneezed powder and pepper spray in aerosol form. It was a very easy compound to make, and

Harry, who had come up with this spell on his own, could create it in near-endless amounts without really taxing his abilities.

As it spread the harpies moved through it and instantly they began to scratch, sneeze, and scream as it got into their eyes, causing their eyes to redden, blinking back tears. Many crashed into one another, others started to bite and try to scratch at themselves. Soon all of the harpies started to retreat, removing the aerial aspect from the fight.

However, in doing so Harry had stayed still too long, and the satyrs were no one's fools. One of them barked out orders, and the remaining magic-users left off, destroying the last of his conjured creatures to start firing spells into the woods around them. Each magic-using satyr took a special a single area of the forest under fire, hurling out their fireballs spell into it. Two such bracketed Harry now hurling him off his feet with a cry of pain.

Before he could pull his invisibility cloak up once more, the other magic-users had turned in his direction. A hasty Protego shot out from his hand, blocking their spells for a moment and allowing Harry to get his feet under him. But the satyrs had done too good a job at destroying his creatures, and now all of them were charging towards Harry unmolested by any save a single lion.

An overpowered bone exploding curse struck one of them, turning his body into a bomb that exploded instantly, showering his fellows with offal and bones that were moving as fast as shrapnel. This spell was followed by the rest of a spell chain, turning the ground slick, blinding, and then afflicting two of them with a short blast of Crucio.

One satyr leaped over this pile was struck by a Reducto spell, which tore his upper body into so many pieces. Then Harry was conjuring up hundreds of tiny needles, sending them forward as fast as bullets.

The magic-using satyrs quickly began to use their spells again to burn the needles from the air. The black and purple fires proved enough to either melt and thus change the needles' shape, or simply shift the direction they were flying, Harry wasn't certain.

Now several of the others satyrs got close enough to Harry to start attacking him, and Harry was forced to shrink his Protego spell and wrap it around himself like a half-shield, so that he could keep using his other hand, ducking underneath several blows, cursing his small body again, as his one hasty attempt to block a blow with his sword again failed miserably, as it had when the satyrs had first attacked him.

Harry quickly gave ground, retreating deeper into the woods, and once more used Transfiguration on a larger scale to create a lion before rounding a tree. At his shouted command the lion roared, crashing into several of the satyrs, biting and clawing.

With that break, Harry pulled his hood down, covering himself with his cloak and, dispelling his Protego, went on the attack began. He used the advantage of the tree cover to

pound several more satyrs before the magic-users behind them could start to bracket his position again. Two of them died trying, but there were still sixteen of them, nearly all of them having come out after Harry.

Back at the camp, only about ten of the satyrs had not rushed out into the trees. One of them was a magic-user, taller and stronger looking than the others. His entire upper body was also marked by multiple bloody handprints.

He looked towards the prisoners and snarled something to his fellows, which Quetzal, moving through the camp with his two fellows, couldn't understand. But they saw the impact of his words. Several of the satyrs moved to the prisoners, knives in their hands. It was evident that whatever the outcome of the battle, this village would be abandoned, and the prisoners would not be allowed to live. Quetzal wondered if that was a decision made out of cold calculation or simple hatred, wondering again why anyone would want to be warm-blooded if they had to deal with that kind of nonsense in their brains.

Regardless, the snakes, who had been moving slowly through the camp to not draw attention, had just run out of time. He removed his mouth from where he had been carrying the center of the portkey stick to hiss out, "Kill them."

The speed with which the satyrs reacted to Harry's attack meant that most of the snakes hadn't been able to move into position to attack them before the majority of the satyrs raced off into the woods after Harry. But now,, several hundred poisonous snakes moved in on the ones that had remained.

Simultaneously the commander twisted around, somehow having heard Quetzal hissing over the sound of combat in the nearby woods. He saw the snakes moving in the light of the illumination spell that Harry had created and barked out a command. Instantly nearly all of the satyrs turned, grabbing at spears and anything that could give them more reach. With these often makeshift weapons, they began to attack the snakes, hacking at the ground wherever they thought they saw a snake.

Several of the cobras died, but a few of them were able to close, biting at hand, leg, or in one case, coiling and launching himself upwards to bite at the thigh of a satyr. Yet the most damage was done by the enemy magic-user, who conjured up a blast of fire and flame and send it heaving towards where Quetzal had been hissing.

He ducked low, the blast missing him, but searing one of his fellow snakes to ash, along with the portkey-imbued stick. Now hissing even louder in fury, Quetzal knelt down on the ground, allowing his camouflage ability to activate, while his quills along his back stood up sharply.

He then moved forward, and, as the fireball hurler turned his attention away, got close and struck.

The satyr screamed, as the paralytic poison in Quetzal's bite went to work, collapsing to his knees and then his face, where a cobra struck, finishing the job and looking slightly smug for itself. That smugness disappeared as Quetzal's quills shot off from his back, hitting several of the nearby satyrs, paralyzing them in turn.

Thinking quickly, Quetzal looked around at the snakes, making his voice a suggestion instead of a command. After all, he didn't have Harry's ability to be obeyed by the lesser breeds, and one snake could only suggest a course of action to another, not command. "With us being unable to remove these four, I believe that the Speaker would want us to protect them."

As the cobras and other snakes moved into position, Quetzal stared out into the forest towards where the sounds of battle were still going on, then up into the air, his quick mind racing as he thought about the battle all around him. It all depended on whether or not the harpies had been run off for good. If they came back and the cloud of whatever it was, Harry had used the harpies, with their legs and their ability to drop things from the air, would overwhelm Quetzal and the snakes quickly.

For his part, Harry was being pressed hard. He had taken a few hard knocks by this point, unable to keep the satyrs from encircling him more than once and being no match for them in a physical contest. Harry had even taken a sword wound to his side, which bled quite a bit before Harry had been able to stop it with a suturing spell. "Another scar for the collection," he mused, ducking under a blow from one satyr and cutting him in half with a cutting spell, using another curse that he knew to take command of the creature's blood as it came apart, turning it into so many projectiles into his fellows behind him.

He then ducked around a tree as two blasts of fire crashed down right where he had been standing. Harry saw a group of satyrs charging towards him from behind to trees, seven of them, and cast a charm on the ground writing at their feet. All of them lost their footing, and Harry twisted around, heading towards one of the magic-users.

A Protego spell appeared all around him, protecting Harry from several more fireballs, as he hurled the sword of Gryffindor through the air towards another magic-user, using a Leviosa spell to control its flight to impact the spell user. The sword then twisted around, catching two more satyrs lightly. Allowing the poison to do with the work for him, Harry used an Accio spell to pull the sword back just in time as the Protego spell behind him disappeared, overwhelmed by the impact from several different fireballs.

Harry ducked into a hole, grabbing the sword of Gryffindor out of the air, and flinging himself around a tree again, before realizing suddenly that there was no eye on him just yet. With a quick wrench with one hand, Harry once more pulled his cloak over his face, and ducked down, the sword of Gryffindor up disappearing from his hands.

For a moment, the satyrs all moved around, shouting and yelling at one another, and Harry picked out the three that were yelling the most loudly, three more magic-users. Taking aim, Harry quickly conjured tiny needles again, flinging them out with deadly accuracy and precision. One of them went so fast, Harry having accidentally overpowered the spell, that when it hit, there was a booming noise, and the satyr's head disappeared into a fine mist, as the needle kept on going, through a tree and up into the stratosphere.

For a moment, the rest of the satyrs simply stared, then Harry began to attack them once more. A large lion appeared to either side of him, guarding him against the satyrs as they tried to close, and Harry lashed out at the last few magic-users he could see these not having been shouting orders moments ago.

Each of them fell, but then Harry was struck from behind. One of the harpies had been too high in the sky for the pepper spray attack to have caught her, and she now raked at Harry's back, savagely shouting, "You like playing with snakes, feel our poison!"

Harry grunted as he rolled away from the harpy, leaping to his feet, and then ducking around a savage spear thrust. He flashed a hand towards that satyr's face, exploding it and temporarily blinding the harpy for a second as she squawked, trying to reach the air, only to smack her head into a branch right above her.

Two more satyrs died, and then Harry was ducking around the same tree whose branch had just knocked the harpy to the ground. She looked up at him in shock, stammering, "H, how, how are you still moving?!" In her own tongue.

Harry smiled thinly and cut her in two with another spell. "Poison doesn't work on me."

Yet there were still more than one hundred satyrs trying to close with Harry, and for several moments, Harry was forced to duck, dodge, and try desperately to regain some distance, having learned his lesson by this point. *Bloody bugger this young body!*

More conjured animals appeared, and then, the snakes started to wind their way into the battle from behind. As the satyrs split their attention, Harry transfigured rock, changing it into yet another golem, and Harry quickly scaled its side, standing on its shoulder and lashing out down at the satyrs. "I'll call it Hagrid mark two!" He giggled, somewhat insanelly. There had been a lot of close calls when the satyrs started to circle him.

But now, from this safe vantage point, Harry quickly began to overwhelm them, lashing out with Sectumsempra, several Dark curses, and in particular his specialty of insanelly quick conjured or transfigured needles. Soon, Harry noticed that not a single satyr was trying to run. Blood-maddened or simply unable to think of doing so, Harry didn't know. But in the end, he had to kill each and every one of them where they stood.

With the golem still carrying him on his shoulder, Harry and the Golem, along with his summoned snakes, moved back into the village, where Harry found Quetzal and the rest of the snakes he had summoned and the former prisoners.

Leaping down from the golem, Harry moved to the foursome, raising the eye of one of the mail nymphs, as Quetzal explained what had happened. "I am sorry Harry, I had never thought that a satyr would have such good hearing."

Harry waved off the snake's apologies, shaking his head. "No plan survives contact with the enemy. That's why they're called the enemy. And this one was pretty rough anyway."

He knelt down in front of the prisoners, feeling their pulse, which was very strange. For a second, it felt as if they were running, then their pulse fell almost to nothing before pounding hard once more. They were also shivering and shaking where they were, their bodies trying to fight off this corruption and failing as Harry examined them. Every spell he tried, even a regurgitation spell, failed to do anything to help, although the spell was able to force them to throw up the blood and whatever else they had been eating. It was clear that the four creatures had been tainted somehow from whatever the satyrs had done to them.

He frowned, thinking deeply about how to help them while casting a worried glance up at the sky. His Lumos spell was still there, obviously, but it was starting to dim, and Harry could also see the cloud of pepper spray above him dissipating too. He was also feeling tired from the number of spells he'd had to use today, having overpowered his spells more than once. But these four looked to be in a very bad way, and Harry refused to leave them. Not if he could help them, and he didn't know if anyone else would be able to do anything against the Taint within them.

Sighing, Harry moved the four forest dwellers so that two of them were pressed against the backs of the other two forming a square, with Harry between them, as he thought about what to do. This was something he had never seen before, and the curse within them seemed to be mostly some kind of darkness based foulness. *So perhaps, perhaps a spell designed to dispel the darkest of creatures would work here.*

Looking over at Quetzal and the others, he ordered, "Scatter, and then you, Quetzal, keep an eye on that pepper cloud in the sky. If the harpies make a reappearance, I'll need to know, but I may be too deep into this spell to really do anything."

"And what exactly is this?" Quetzal asked warily.

"A take on what I did to our prisoner with a rather large addition," Harry said, before slowly moving his hand to touch down on the paired shoulders. His hand paused momentarily as Harry grit his teeth in determination, then leaned forward, touching the clammy, pulsing skin of the forest dwellers. Then he breathed out, a spell that he had long thought of as one of his favorites, for all that unhappy memories had slowly started to blot out his happy ones, coming into his mind. As the spell formed in his head and he began to summon up the memories

needed for it, Harry then began another spell, connecting the two together in a very small spellchain as he imagined the impact he wanted to achieve.

With his spells ready in his mind, Harry thrust both of them out, as he intoned, “Expecto Legellimens!”

The spell roared into each of their minds all at once, crashing into the corruption within, moving from their minds directly into their bodies. The corruption had not yet reached their souls, and now freed, those souls began to fight back as Harry's massively overpowered spells began to clean them of the Taint.

All four of the forest creatures gasped and shook as Harry's spells fought into them, forcing their way through their bodies to attack the Taint. This put a massive strain on their bodies, and for a time, Harry was afraid that his spells would kill the four of them instead of saving them. But slowly, the red tint to their skin disappeared, changing back into pink or green, while the black whorls retreated from their skins too. Harry kept the spell going, even as one of them slowly opened his eyes. He stared at Harry, seeing a young-seeming creature, the body of a Kaldorei but with nothing else screaming of the Kaldorei, and the eyes of emerald so bright that it reminded the Keeper of the leaves of a tree in summertime. Then, his eyes rolled back in his head, and he collapsed into unconsciousness.

After the man had collapsed, Harry began to really feel the exhaustion of the spells he had been casting. But he kept on, even as Quetzal hissed a warning. The rejuvenated cloud of pepper spray had begun to dissipate, and the Lumos spell was now almost gone, it's bright light being replaced by the softer silver light of the moon.

Harry ignored him, more power thrumming into the spell as he tried to save these four's lives.

**OOOOOOO**

Elsewhere, Cenarius lifted one hoof off of a dead satyr's crushed head, twisting his still-transformed arm around to batter aside another attack, before his eyes widened as something hit his senses. Someone had used arcane power nearby, within at most an hour's ride if he was any guess, and since this was his forest, Cenarius' guess would be quite accurate.

Scowling, Cenarius wondered for a moment, but then the feeling of the spell hit him. It was like a warm summer day, a happy memory, a feeling of light and goodness all at once. And he suddenly knew that whoever had cast that had good intentions.

He came back to the here and now as his son Zaetar bellowed out, “Father!”

Cenarius moved his head just in time to dodge a hurled spear, almost negligently pulling up a branch and hurling that back. By the time it hit the satyr, the tip had shifted into a spearpoint while Cenarius twisted around, kicking out hard, catching another satyr in the chest, hurling him up and into a tree where his body was basically broken in half.

The massive demigod twisted around again, moving away slightly from where he had previously been fighting, putting a tree between him and the next group of satyrs to charge his position. This allowed several of the Kaldorei who had finished dealing with the harpies to turn their arrows on this group.

Meanwhile, Cenarius stared out into the forest, his eyes closing slowly as he tried to figure out where that spell had been cast. With a start, he realized it was in the same direction that he thought might be the direction of another satyr campsite. Quickly Cenarius looked around at the others calling out, "Zaetar, Remulos! With me, I have a notion now as to where we will find our foe's remaining base. You are in command here, Arden," he said to the Kaldorei. "My sons and I will head out further and report back to you what we find."

The night elf commander nodded, not even trying to protest, and with that, Cenarius and his sons raced off, heading in the direction he had felt that pulse of power.

**OOOOOOO**

Harry was near to collapse five minutes after his spellwork began. Whatever corruption was in the forest beings, it was powerful, extremely powerful. It didn't have the same aura as a Dementor did, but simply getting rid of it was impossible. It wasn't like fighting a Dementor. Their aura of despair and darkness fought against the Patronus spell and could eventually overwhelm even the strongest. This thing, it was like trying to dispel sludge made of dark magic. It's very nature fought against the spell, rather than any conscious effort. Finally, though, Harry felt that the four prisoners were well enough to overcome whatever corruption still existed within on their own, and he pulled away.

A moment too late, alas. From above came the shrieking of harpies returning. "Kill the magic-user, killed the prisoners! Then we must fly sisters!" shouted one of them, her voice cutting through the noise of the others in a tone of command.

Harry had barely turned his head wearily upward before the harpies began to drop stones and spears down towards him. Others flew down, their talons outstretched as they clawed at the ground, killing snakes, their legs immune to the snakes' bites as another two went for Harry. Hagrid Mark 2 moved in front of Harry, taking those blows, but it was too slow to attack the harpies in turn, and the voice of command shouted another word. In response, the golem came apart under some kind of wind spell.

But Harry was too tired to fight them. He could maybe have fought them off, but once more, Harry couldn't protect the prisoners at the same time. Pulling his cloak around his body, he used a single transfiguration spell, transforming a nearby piece of wood into a flat skateboard sort of thing, as he flopped onto it, a Protego protecting him and the prisoners for just a moment. "Quetzal," he gasped, "get me out of here." It was time to retreat, and Harry knew it.

Having seen the other snakes dying all around them from the harpy's aerial assault, Quetzal obeyed instantly and grabbed up the end of the rope, his own body slowly shifting to match his surroundings as Harry hit the rope with a dissolution charm of its own. Then he was being pulled away, and Harry turned, creating a Protego spell over the prisoners. As blood began to stream down his nose, and his head began to throb, Harry thrust out all of his remaining magical power into that spell, creating a dome of powerful magical energy about a foot thick. But he powered through it, then cut off the spell, reached up, and wrapped his cloak around himself, so that he was invisible, as his snake companion continued to pull him along through the air on his disillusioned board. *Th, that will have to be enough. Hopefully, they'll be able to run fast enough to get away from those winged rats!*

Seeing the magic-user somehow disappear, the harpies began to throw down nets. But Quetzal skillfully moved through them, waited until a net was on the ground, then slithered over it, trusting in his own chameleon spell. No longer able to see the magic-user, the harpies slowly turned their attention on the Protego dome, thinking that the magic-user was within it along with their prisoners.

Stones, spells, spears, bulky cobs of wood, and eventually even harpies themselves dove down on it, while Quetzal led his friend away, only stopping as several large bodies moved through the woods nearby towards the screeching Harpies. "Well now," he hissed, his voice distorted. "It seems as if those prisoners will indeed be saved..."

**OOOOOOO**

Cenarius and his two sons roared out through the trees and into the clearing of the former Kaldorei village, bows in their hands as they shot up into the air at the harpies. All of their bows were massive, almost as long as a Kaldorei was tall, and fired not one arrow, but a bushel in a pattern that Harry would've called buckshot, clearing the air above them. It was a technique that Cenarius had developed after having first had to deal with being bombarded from the air by the filth.

And every time he did deal with the harpies, Cenarius had to weep a little inside at how far the followers of Aviana had fallen since the War of the Ancients. Their fall after Aviana's death had been slow, and harpies had never been the most pleasant of neighbors. Because of this, Cenarius and his allies had never realized that, with their patron demigod gone, that the Harpies too might succumb to the touch of the Old Ones. But they had, and now worked with those satyrs who too had turned aside from even the Burning Legion, eager to bring their fell deities back to the world of Azeroth.

Harpy carcasses fell to the ground or were simply being torn asunder by the number of arrows that struck them. And as his sons continued the attack, Cenarius turned his attention to the dome of Arcane magic over the four people within. None of them had conjured it into being, and as he watched, the energy of the spell began to flag under renewed assault by the harpies. With a grimace, Cenarius created an internal dome of dirt and tree roots to further

protect the prisoners. Then he turned his attention back on the harpies, swatting a spell out of the sky and tossing back another bolt of pure Nature Magic, crashing into the head of a magic-using harpy.

Several minutes later, the Harpies finally broke off, what few that survived shrieking insults even as they retreated in every direction. With that task done, Cenarius turned his attention back to the dome of dirt. A single moment of concentration dissipated it and Cenarius moved to hold his hands out to the four former prisoners within. "It is alright now, young ones."

Looking extremely shaky and weak, the two nymphs and two Keepers pushed forward shouting "Grandfather!" though this was an honorific. At present, Cenarius had no grandchildren, although his oldest son's mate was with child.

Gently, Cenarius went to his knees in front of them, helping the two nymphs onto their feet, while Zaetar and Remulos moved to help the Keepers. He scanned the sky, worried the harpies would return, but the fight against them had taken so long that a group of Kaldorei Sentinels had been able to catch up to them. They now poured out of the trees, waving their bows towards him. "Go on, Master Cenarius!" One of them said jubilantly, not even questioning the state of the camp, assuming it had been Cenarius and his sons who had done all the damage they were seeing. "We will hunt down the last of the harpies. You see to your folk."

Thanking them, Cenarius rose from where he had been crouching and turned slightly, looking around the battlefield. "Can any of you tell me what went on here?" he asked quietly.

One of the nymphs leaning into his side shook her head, murmuring, "We know not, master. The satyrs, they were poisoning us slowly, feeding us their blood!" She shivered, then, seemed to collect herself. "It was horrible. We could feel ourselves losing everything. But, then there was something else, a spell or some other thing that we were fed, maybe? It's all a blur. I remember throwing up for a time, and then... and then light."

One of the Keepers, the one Zaetar was helping along, declared, "I thought I saw something. I think I woke up for just a second before the harpies attacked. I saw a, a young... Kaldorei? No. I don't know. He had the same building as a night elf youth. But it didn't have ears, whatever it was. That's all I can say, master."

Cenarius looked around him thoughtfully, then gestured his sons to follow him as they moved around the village, surveying the battlefield and helping the Keeper along. All of them could see as well in the dark as in the day, and they could see the signs of battle, the bodies lying everywhere. Someone had fought hard here against a large number of satyrs, almost equal to that which had ambushed Cenarius in his folk. Maybe even larger than the village that they had sacked mere hours ago.

Remulos grunted, kneeling down and looking at a cut made on a tree root, then around him. "Magic," he said, shaking his head. "But not just the fel-magic of the satyrs. There was more done here."

"Yes, and until we know what, I think we need to keep our supposition on that to ourselves," Cenarius answered slowly. "I am loath to do it, but the Kaldorei are still extremely leery about arcane magic, and this all reeks of the arcane."

Remulos grunted again, shaking his head. "That disaster in Northrend the Shandarai caused undoubtedly has something to do with that, Father."

Cenarius winced, nodding his head at that. The disaster that occurred near to two-thousand years ago would not soon be forgotten, particularly that it had left little survivors of the small formerly-Kaldorei colony on Northrend when the Blue Flight had retaliated against them. The horribly changed Crystalsong Forest would see to that.

Blinking, Cenarius looked at something to one side. There, a large king rattlesnake had nestled itself in the tree's roots. Looking at it, Cenarius knelt down, gesturing the snake forward.

No animal or beast of the forest who had an uncorrupted heart could ignore Cenarius. The snake moved forward, bobbing his head to him as Cenarius spoke, his voice translated to that of the listening animal via a minor portion of his magic as a demigod. "And what did you see, my scaly friend?"

The snake seemed to think about it, then began to speak. "§We met a Speaker. One who could speak the sacred tongue of snakes. He said at one point in my hearing that he called himself a 'human'. It is a term I have never heard before, but he did not look like a Kaldorei. §"

"Describe him, please," Cenarius requested politely. "And have you got enough food from this battle?"

The snake shrugged his shoulders. "§Satyrs are too big to eat. But if you could carve off bits, perhaps I will tell you more. Perhaps. §"

"I think we can do better than that," Cenarius chuckled. A fully grown vole and two mice later, the snake sat in distended pleasure as it related what had occurred.

Cenarius questioned it a few times, as his sons made certain that the Kaldorei didn't come near. After he finished questioning the snake, Cenarius looked at his sons, gesturing the two nymphs over to them Remulos. "Go with the Kaldorei but speak not of this Speaker to them. See to our four fellows here and that they are safe and sound. I think that I will try to track this, Harry. We owe him a debt of gratitude, and frankly, my interest has been awoken something fierce."

His two sons both chuckled, nodded their heads, and moved off, although the younger Zaetar looked a little annoyed at how Remulos was always the stronger and more physically imposing, able to lead a nymph and Keeper along without any effort like Zaetar was forced to. *I may have to do something to curb Zaetar's feeling of being second best to his older brother. It could fester and drive a wedge between them.*

Setting his sons to one side of his mind, Cenarius began to move around the village once more, looking down at the ground for the signs of a large snake's passage. Even as he thrust out his mind into the surrounding trees, asking, in the language of trees, if they had sensed anything passing them.

**OOOOOOO**

After listening with some relief that his rescue attempt had been bailed out by the local good guys, Harry spent several days recovering from his magical exhaustion, All of the small spells he had done had slowly begun to take their toll. But alone, that wouldn't have been an issue, not enough to nearly put him on his rear for even a day, let alone four days of low magical usage. It had been the cleansing of the four prisoners which had truly drained Harry.

Looking back on it, Harry realized it was insane how horribly that had sapped him, almost like fighting taking over a Fiendfyre spell someone else had let loose in a well-populated area. That was something Harry had experience thanks to an American psychopath who had thought it a great idea to attack Harry at the Black Mansion in London by using the area effect spell. This had been worse.

During this time, Harry relied heavily on Quetzal, who rose to the challenge splendidly. The serpent had discovered a small, well, calling it a valley was a bit of a misnomer. An area between two hills it was a tiny dale so hidden that Harry could drop his cloak again. There was a tiny stream moving through it, not wide enough to have any fish of its own, but enough to provide water which, once cleaned of bacteria, was good enough for Harry to drink. Even if, at one point the next day, he'd basically had to roll himself over to it, being too tired to do anything else.

Weak as he was, Quetzal had to do the hunting, although Harry was more than willing to live off jerky. But Quetzal was not, and was often gone, coming back with a paralyzed boar occasionally or smaller animals, still too large for Quetzal to eat without Harry around to cut chunks off for him. While Quetzal's jaws were strong, they were not designed to be able to bite away pieces from a larger kill than he could swallow.

On the fourth day, Harry, nearly back to normal, or normal for his twelve going on thirteen body anyway, took to the air to make certain they weren't being followed by any surviving harpies. He nearly crash landed afterward, but was able to control the cob of tree that he levitated into the air long enough to make certain they weren't and to take a bird for the two of them to split.

Digesting his portion of the bird raw, Quetzal decided that it was nearly as good as boar.

On the other hand, Harry sautéed the bird in a bit of oil that he had conjured, the oil not having any nutrients in it but still tasting like oil, thus adding flavor to the chicken. To this, he added a bit of mushroom sautéed in their own juices, with a hint of rosemary. The serpent said he preferred it raw, but Harry detected a hint of obfuscation in his tone of voice. But before Harry could call him on it, Quetzal changes the subject, asking after Harry's health, then wondering, "What they should do now?"

"For now, I think we've earned ourselves some time thinking about simple things and not dealing with any deep, intense issues," Harry answered fervently. The last thing he wanted after more than a month of peace was to go back to a life of near-constant combat, no matter the cause he'd be fighting for. "I also think that I need to start getting better at runes, and we can't do that while traveling. So first, we need to find a more permanent area to stay. A closer source of food maybe? Another stream that has fish in it for me, and birds and other things for you. I also think, when we do settle down like that for a bit, I want to figure out more about this Nature Magic Fleetforest."

"You wish to become a Druid?" Quetzal hissed musingly. "The Kaldorei are said to be masters of that art, learned at the feet of Lord Cenarius himself."

Humming as he chewed on a bit of bird, Harry nodded at that, recalling that Quetzal thought it had been Cenarius who had arrived as Harry was being pulled away from the shambles of his rescue attempt. "Would the Kaldorei be willing to teach me, do you think?"

That Quetzal shrugged his shoulders. "I have not seen magic like yours before, although on reflection, perhaps it could be the kind of magic that the queen of the elves had long, long ago. All my sire said on that score was that the magic that was done near our home was different than the Nature Magic done today. That is all I can tell you."

Frowning, Harry wondered about that. "In that case, maybe before we meet with them, I should create some more portkeys, only a more permanent variety, and this time, work on runes too. It never hurts to have a quick escape after all." *And I should really have thought of that before attacking those satyrs in their place of power. Cock, is my being a young teen making me forget I, too, am mortal?*

Finding a proper campsite took them about a week of travel, but they had a good starting point thanks to the stream, and just followed it first downriver, which led them to a tiny pond. But getting closer to it, they saw that it was the home of a community of boars, and though Quetzal was more than willing to eat all of them, Harry didn't want to run them off their natural area. That just seemed a bit impolite.

In the other direction, they hit the jackpot, as if the forest was rewarding Harry for that forethought. The stream led into a river which had several deep points and a ford upstream. The stream continued on, leading up towards where Harry and Quetzal had seen a mountain

range begin when they had climbed a tree. And here, where the tiny stream met the larger river, was a large stone jutting out into the river in the center of a series of even larger trees overlooking the area.

All in all, it was a very nice little place. Harry and Quetzal both liked it, and as Quetzal moved off into the bushes to start hunting, Harry started to open his trunk once more as he thought about how to make this place more homey. Searching around, he found several pieces of wood, and carved them into various sizes, then used the spell he had previously used on a canoe to fuse them all together, putting them up as a kind of platform halfway up the largest tree, fusing it in turn to some of the larger boughs.

He then transfigured several other down tree branches into ropes, tying them together to make one thick hawser, which Harry could scale up and down with difficulty. He was rather philosophical on that, even as Quetzal, back from his survey of the area – he hadn't found anything and refused to admit that hunting had been the point of his trip - look at it askance. "It's just more upper body exercise."

Snorting, the snake wound itself around the tree, then upwards and upwards, climbing the tree as only a snake could, before it then wrapped itself around a tree branch near Harry's platform. "Once more, the superiority of the snake form is proven," he said, watching Harry, who was barely halfway up the rope, his arms straining.

Rolling his eyes, Harry continued to climb up, then laid flat out on the platform he created, gasping and wincing at the soreness in his arms. *Quidditch, great for the leg muscles and core, not so much for the upper body.* "Yep, adding more upper body exercises to my daily repertoire."

The two of them spent a few days making the area more comfortable to live in, and then, Harry got to work. He split his days in two, or rather three portions. The third portion was so small that it hardly merited being split off in his timetable. Harry would spend about twenty minutes after breakfast fishing and moving around in the forest, always going further away from where he had started to look for edible plants, berries, and spices. He found more than a few things that his 'edibility' spell told him was useful as an herb somehow, a lot of whom he hadn't ever seen. Another Australian spell, this didn't tell him how to use them, and trial and error turned every meal into a little adventure.

Both Harry and Quetzal were very careful not to trouble the other primary predators in the area. In this case, it was a pack of wolves who lived somewhere on the other side of the river. Apparently, word of Harry had gone around the wolf community, and they only growled at him if he came near. Otherwise, they kept their distance now, their noses telling them that Harry was bad news, but only if they started trouble.

After fishing, Harry would spend the morning going over runes, practicing them diligently. It was during this time that he had his first real breakthrough on runes: he created

an intent-based ward around the area. It was primarily made to keep away enemies, but it was a step towards Harry's coveted anti-animal array.

In the afternoon and into the evening Harry spent time meditating, trying to get in touch with nature. He had learned something during his time cleansing the nymph of their corruption, that the mental process of sending out an attack like Legilimency could serve in other ways other than attacking or seeing into the mind of a person. He could also use that same technique only softened in some way Harry couldn't quite put into words, to touch nature itself.

This was a process of extreme trial and error. But eventually, about three weeks after Harry and Quetzal had set up camp here, Harry was able to feel the pulse of life within the tree underneath him. He felt it, then shook his head as he came out of his meditation, shuddering a little at the sheer time and majesty the tree appeared to his magical senses even more than his physical. "That was intense."

For several days, Harry forewent his runic training, having had that breakthrough. He now was slowly able to send his mind into the forest around him and found a magical power there waiting for him, immense, inhuman, thundering with the life of the trees of the forest and everything within it. Harry could only maintain that connection for a few seconds before the sheer amount of power and the otherworldly nature of it caused him to fall back into his head, but each time he was determined to explore it more. If Harry could learn to harness that power somehow, it would be insane.

After the fifth day of solid experimentation, Harry created the condition with which his mind could reach out into the forest around them for a longer period. When he did, he could then not just see through the forest but allow some of the forest's energy to flow back into them, his own magical power flowing into the forest at the same time. It was a strange give-and-take relationship that Harry could barely feel, let alone understand, and he wondered what kind of magic the magic of the forest would lend itself to.

Still deep in his meditation, Harry became aware of something nibbling at his fingers and wearily opened his eyes to see a wolf cub there, nibbling at his fingers. At the same time, another one was pouncing on his twitching foot, gnawing at the heavy boot Harry had crafted for himself.

Nearby, on the outcropping of rock, another full-grown wolf lay, its eyes staring hard at Harry. Its body language conveyed wariness but no hostility.

*They passed my ward? I wonder wh... ah, is this perhaps a side-effect of my studies in the nature magic? Regardless, they don't seem to be treating me as an enemy so...*

Harry gently flicked the wolf cub that was nibbling his fingers on the nose, then as it growled at him, quickly moved his hand behind his head, ruffling its ears, causing it to pounce on his hand and playfight with him. Harry chuckled, reached into his nearby trunk, and slowly

pulled out some jerky, which he held down in front of the Wolf that had been nibbling on his fingers.

Quetzal found all of this rather amusing, although he felt he had to disprove Harry spending time with wolves rather than other snakes. Yet, like Harry himself, Quetzal started to realize that connecting with Nature Magic had already started to change Harry. He was tougher, stronger, he had more physical endurance than Harry had before, evinced by how quickly Harry could climb into and out of his treehouse, and the one time he tried to race after a wolf who had snatched a bit of his clothing off the wash where Harry had left it to dry naturally.

A week later, Harry felt he had reached an impasse. He couldn't figure out how to direct the Nature Magic. Harry could feel it entering his body, and he allowed it to do so now almost on a subconscious level. He didn't even have to really try hard to reach out to it. But every time he tried to project the Nature Magic out from his body, the Nature Magic refused his commands. Yet Quetzal insisted that Kaldorei could use it in other ways, ways beyond toughening their own bodies. How was the issue.

"Is it just, well, trying to control nature, having the trees move around you, maybe hiding among them? Or is there more than that," Harry mused, as he sat on the edge of his treehouse from Quetzal. The treehouse had grown slightly over the weeks. A few more flat areas had been created. One of them was directly over the river, allowing Harry to fish and not even have to leave the treehouse, which he had used few times when it rained heavily. Boar hides had been stretched here and there above them, creating a somewhat tent-like atmosphere, and Harry had even been able to create an actual tent, although it was still far too ramshackle for him to try to add spells to just yet. His hides, too, were not exactly up to the canvas cloth he could have gotten from his old world.

"Perhaps you have reached the edge of where your knowledge can take you," Quetzal opined. "No matter how good you are at your own magic, trying to simply figure another magical school out without any hints or anything else could be beyond you. Fleetforest didn't tell us anything more about druidic powers other than, that his had been cut off by the satyrs after all."

"Maybe," Harry sighed. "I'm going to think about it for a bit. Are you going to go out hunting? We're down to fish again." The only birds he had seen for a few days had been hawks and owls, and Harry flatly refused to attack either.

Quetzal nodded, and, after his friend had wound his way to the ground, Harry pulled off his shirt and, with a wry grin, took a running bound out into the river. After all, Harry's body was nearly thirteen again. And what was the point of being so young if you couldn't enjoy it?

There was a tremendous splash, and Harry whooped as he surfaced, doing the backstroke for a second as he looked up at the sky above. "While I can't say I like the speed

which I was hustled into this new life, I can't complain about the results," he murmured, grinning to himself, before turning his attention to the nearby yipping of wolf cubs.

**OOOOOOO**

Nearby, Cenarius watched as the young cursed vrykul made his way to the river's shoreline, a smile on his face as he hid in the forest like a single leaf among the trees, the forest itself helping hide his presence. It had taken a long time to find the Arcane user who had apparently ceased using large-scale Arcane magic after his one-man assault on the satyr campsite. Indeed, Cenarius had lost the youngster's trail entirely. His snake companion was even better than most of that breed at hiding himself away.

But eventually, the wolves and the trees of this area had carried word to him of their presence, and Cenarius had come here to observe. He watched for several days, learning the name of snake and cursed vrykul alike. Harry's ability to speak snake was amazing and seemed to be some kind of magic all its own, one which was certainly interesting, but not as interesting as Harry himself. Or the fact that before Cenarius arrived, Harry had started to teach himself the druidic magic. The forest animals now recognized Harry as one of their own, and Cenarius smiled as Harry rough-housed with a few wolf cubs, their parents watching on in amusement from nearby.

Even as he watched, Harry dove back into the water, coming up and used some kind of small Arcane magic spell, the likes of which was both prosaic and beyond anything that Cenarius had seen before, to grasp several fish out of the water. He tossed the majority to the wolves as he took two.

The wolves nudged the still flopping fish for a time before biting into them, as Harry set to work on cleaning the scales off, preparing the fish for cooking in a well-made firepit. Indeed, everything Cenarius saw was made reasonably well. There was no refuse, no harm being done to the trees or the forest in general beyond what was strictly necessary. Even the cursed vrykul's treehouse was decently made, doing no real harm to the tree, merging with the tree for the most part.

Indeed, by this point, Cenarius had a very good impression of Harry. Here was a young being with a good heart and an extremely agile brain to go with his strange Arcane powers. Yes, Cenarius decided it was time to reveal himself.

He stepped forward into the clearing around the treehouse, smiling down at Harry, who twisted around almost instantly as Cenarius crossed over the divide of his runes. The magic of them had been negated by Cenarius' own abilities with Nature Magic, and Cenarius wasn't a threat to Harry or didn't mean him harm, so several of the more complex wards did not activate.

He held up his hands to either side as Harry twisted around, smiling. "Greetings," he said, trusting in his demigod status to translate his words. "My name is Cenarius. Welcome to my forest."

Harry stared at the creature in front of him, in awe, not just because of how massive the creature was, but the amount of power radiating off him. It was like he was a moving talking generator of Nature Magic. And the fact that Cenarius had simply appeared out of the woods so easily, bypassing Harry's new defensive ward, was also somewhat worrisome. But the smile on the creature's face put Harry somewhat at ease, and he slowly lowered his hands, shaking his head slightly as he realized that the creature was somehow making himself understood despite the fact he wasn't speaking any language Harry knew. "Greetings, Great One. If you would mind, I have a spell that will allow me to hear you in your language. Indeed, if I keep using it, I will simply absorb the knowledge of your language over time."

The appellation came easily. Never had Harry felt the amount of power Cenarius contained before. It made Dumbledore or an angry Riddle showing off look like a toddler's temper tantrum. In the face of that, even with the surprise of his arrival, Harry was determined to play nice.

Cenarius nodded his head graciously, and Harry cast *Lingua Franca*, and then looked up at Cenarius for a moment before moving back to his tree. "I think we are in for a long conversation," he said over his shoulder, "And I am not going to hurt my neck talking to you."

Cenarius laughed at that, a booming laugh that carried through the woods and caused every creature that heard it to wag their tails or otherwise evince pleasure of their own.

Then he turned back to the young being in front of him, staring him in the eyes now as Harry sat on the edge of one of his platforms. This close, Cenarius realized with a start that perhaps Harry wasn't all that young. His body said one thing, but those eyes, the intelligence Harry Cenarius had seen before, coupled with the experience he could now see in those eyes, said something different. "...You have either had an extremely horrendous life," the demigod said slowly, "or you are older than you appear. Which is it, I wonder?"

"Both," Harry replied bluntly. "Where I came from, I went through a very odd rebirth on the point of my death at around thirty-two years of age and had a life spent mostly in combat in various ways before that."

"Interesting, rebirth? Not resurrected?"

"Resurrected would imply that I somehow continued from my age at that point. Rebirth is closer. I was returned to this point in my life when I was first... call it imbued with the power of a phoenix."

"A creature of rebirth and light," Cenarius nodded slowly in thought, his antlers gently scraping along the underside of a few branches above his head. "Yet you are not from around

here. Are you a planar traveler?" The question came out hesitantly, the demigod suddenly worried. After all, the Burning Legion had come from outside of this world. But Harry was certainly no demon, nor did he feel as if he would ever have truck with, there was note tainted Harry that Cenarius could discern, and he with his connection to Nature Magic, Cenarius certainly would have felt it.

"I am not," Harry decided it was best to play it straight with this being. For some reason, he knew that Cenarius would be able to tell if he lied. "I was... sent here, I suppose you could say. My life back home had become one I no longer wanted to live. I was willing to die when I had taken a spell that would eventually cause my heart to burst. But that was not to be. And after several months in this forest, you could certainly say that I have found a new lease on life."

Again, Cenarius raised his estimation of Harry's maturity and danger. Yes, he was in the body of a young teen, not even thirteen turns of the sun if his body grew at the same rate that a night elf did. But he spoke and acted like a seasoned warrior. After watching Harry at play, Cenarius had been somewhat in doubt that. "Who might I ask, sent you here?"

After a moment, Harry decided, *All in my lad, here's hoping he doesn't go spare. That would hurt on so many levels.* "A manifestation of Death. She spoke of Azeroth, it's future, and how Death had decided to step in, to stop people from misusing her power."

To Harry's relief, Cenarius simply nodded slowly. "I can sense some kind of Death Magic within your body, tied to your very being. I had wondered what it was, considering that Death magic should not exist within the body of a living being, even a Necromancer would only have the Death Magic in his aura rather than his physical body."

"You're not concerned about that? I want to be clear on this," Harry went on hesitantly.

Cenarius shook his head. "Death is but part of the process of life. To be scared of death is natural for those who are mortal, but death comes to us all, and it is not death itself that is to be feared but the manner of the passing from one life to the next."

Harry smiled at that, waving one arm around. "Well, for me, that was a bit more literal than for most, I think."

"Ah," Cenarius said with a booming laugh, "but that is because you have not yet finished your education in Nature Magic. There are many indeed who have passed from one plane to another."

"Are you offering to teach me?" asked Harry, looking at him closely.

"Perhaps I am," Cenarius answered with another booming laugh. "Perhaps. You do show proper deference and respect for nature and have already begun to attempt to learn it on your own. But tell me more about yourself, Harry. I wish to create a picture of your personality, to know how it grew."

Harry frowned, thinking, then shrugged. "I will tell you my story, if, in return, you can tell me yours," while Quetzal coiled up around the right tree limb, watching events through half-slitted eyes.

"Agreed!" Cenarius leaned forward eagerly, resting his elbows on another large branch as he peered at Harry. "The magic you do, we would call it Arcane Magic here, and yet, the spells you routinely use, some of the spells you might have used in combat, I have not seen the like. Tell me more of your world, and..." Cenarius reached out and laid a hand on Harry's shoulder, "Tell me why you had eventually decided to embrace the final journey. Even now, with the happiness and life of the forest rejuvenating you, I can still see some measure of grief inside you, of weariness and anger, and above all, loneliness."

What followed was five days of simply exchanging stories, tales, and adventures, with Cenarius telling Harry more about Azeroth's history, Kalimdor, and Cenarius' own place in it and how Kalimdor had been shattered in the War of the Ancients. In return, Harry told Cenarius about his life. He started from when he was simply Harry the freak, to Harry Potter the Boy-Who-Lived, then Harry Potter, The Man Who Conquered, international troubleshooter and dark wizard moving target number one. About how he had lost friends, how he had pushed them away to protect them, and how even his best friends had realized that, yes, being around Harry was too dangerous for those they cared for.

Eventually, their tales had been shared, and Cenarius had made his decision on Harry. Here was a young man whose own world had done him wrong. But the very anonymity, coupled with the savagery of life on Azeroth, would protect Harry from being so targeted. Moreover, here, he would find allies and friends, like Cenarius, who were more than able to look after themselves and were used to the amount of combat Harry had found himself facing.

And there was a power to Harry. Beyond his abilities and knowledge Harry had a strength and resilience that spoke of someone who would do great things. Indeed, Cenarius realized that he wanted to help Harry along the way. "Tell me, Harry, would you like to learn more about Nature Magic?"

With Cenarius in the lead, Harry traveled through the forest, carrying Quetzal. They were not moving towards Cenarius' home near Nordrassil, where he habitually stayed but to another one of his houses. Cenarius had several places where he tended to live for short amounts of time throughout the forest. They took their time doing it, still getting to know one another. They talked about the War of the Ancients, about what Cenarius called the Arcane, and ancient magics, and the two of them explored the differences between Harry's method of magic and the Arcane along with the history of the Kaldorei, in greater detail than he had covered back at Harry's little camp.

In this, the two of them gained one another's trust to a greater degree, and slowly, as the journey continued, friendship too. It wasn't quite a friendship of equals. Cenarius, after all, was not mortal in any way. He was a demigod and could, perhaps, live forever. Harry, for all his

ability to simply be rebirthed, still had the mindset of a mortal, and Cenarius could see his eyes cross every time Cenarius idly mentioned how long it had been since the War of the Ancients, let alone how long it had been since Cenarius himself had been formed from the mating of Elune and Marrone. Moreover, Cenarius was far more powerful, magically and physically, than Harry. And that wasn't something that would change as Harry's physical body grew.

But that was all right with Harry. Cenarius, Harry reflected more than once, was an impressive individual on many levels. He had more power both magically and physically, and perhaps even politically, although Harry wasn't certain on that score than anyone Harry had ever met. And yet, he was by his very nature down to earth. Cenarius called himself a caretaker, not Lord of the forest and only referred to his power as a demigod once as if being a demigod was merely a job. It did not define how Cenarius wanted other people to perceive him. In all, Harry was eager to learn from him and get to know the massive man further.

However, his introduction to Cenarius' family could perhaps have gone a little bit better, in Harry's opinion. Cenarius had been calling out occasionally, his voice booming, echoing through the trees as the trees themselves seemed to carry the noise along. He had told Harry that this was to inform his family that he was traveling to this particular dwelling and that, if they were in the area, to stop by. And the first of Cenarius' family that Harry met turned out to be his daughter.

The dwelling in question was a series of large trees intertwined to look like a single one, its boughs curving up and over a stream, while also creating a kind of covered dwelling. It wouldn't be very hospitable in wintertime, but during summer, it seemed a fantastic spot. And barreling out of the tree as if the tree had birthed her, came a being who almost looked like a one of the nymphs Harry had seen captured by the satyrs more than a month ago now.

However, unlike those two, she looked a little more wild. She stood taller, she had long, curving antlers coming up out of her hair, which was in turn more like leaves than actual hair. Her face and yellowish eyes was also full of spirit and joy, and she ran towards them as Harry and Cenarius started to come down into the valley where Cenarius' dwelling lay. "Father! Is this the little creature that saved Anthelia and Neerja!? He's so cute I just want to pick him up and hug him!"

Harry had barely a moment to blink before Quetzal swiftly launched himself from Harry's shoulders just as she barreled into Harry, picking him up and twirling Harry this way and that. "He really is like a tiny vrykul, but his color is far more tan! Ooh, do you think he'll eventually have skin like a tree? That would be amazing! But he's so small and kind of cute. Did he really do all that magic and save Anthelia and Neerja from the satyrs?"

Watching this, Cenarius boomed out laughter as his oldest daughter Lunara squeezed his new friend as if he was a toy. "Now now Lunara, remember, other species are sometimes very breakable. You can't just pick them up and shake them willy-nilly. But in answer to your

actual question, yes, this young man," he emphasized the words as if Harry was a night elf of similar age, "is the one who did all that amazing magic that saved six of our folk."

While a part of him was very happy to be where he was right now, specifically where his face was currently residing, Harry grimaced as he was tossed from side to side, then decided enough was enough. He sent a stinging hex into the side of the girl currently trying to use him as a plushy, who let go of him with an "Ow!" Before the woman could respond further, Harry followed it up with a tickling charm.

Cenarius looked on as his daughter let go of Harry and backed away, giggling and laughing and slapping her own sides shouting, "Ahaha how, ahaha did you, ahaha, what is this!?"

"Tickling charm," Harry gasped out, clutching his ribs and ignoring the part of him that had actually been quite happy to have his head pressed into the girl's chest. As he straightened up, he felt Cenarius' hand on his shoulder while looking at his daughter, taking in the view a little better than he had been able to when the girl had simply charged out of the surrounding forest and pick them up. She was about half the size of Cenarius, her lower body that of a large doe rather than a massive horse like Cenarius.

She had long green hair falling down the back of her human side to bounce and jitter along the top of her lower body. Her arms looked almost spindly, but Harry could well attest that they were a lot stronger than they looked, and she was almost naked. She had a covering of downy on her upper body, which kept her nipples from showing, but that didn't really leave much at all to the imagination and having felt of those mounds bouncing sway into his face and ago had been an experience. She wasn't all that stacked compared to some of the girls Harry had known but feeling her down-covered B-cup breasts rubbing into his face still made Harry blush hotly.

"Accursed hormones," he muttered, shaking his head, and Cenarius chuckled, squeezing his shoulder gently and moving Harry around his still giggling daughter. "Concentrate on the Nature Magic beneath your feet, Lunara. Pull it up into your body, and you will be able to dispel Harry's little charm."

"Hahaha, how am I supposed to, hehe, concentrate on that, hehe, when I'm laughing," Lunara shouted, as she fell to her side, kicked all four of her feet, and then tried to right herself only to fall back, still giggling.

Cenarius chuckled again, then patted Harry on the shoulder, looking down at him. "Would you mind?"

"Will she pick me up again?" Harry asked dryly, to a hissing noise of amusement from Quetzal, who Harry turned his glare on a moment later. "§Some help you were.§"

Quetzal hissed in amusement, unable to snort. “§The only way I could've stopped her was to try to bite her, which wouldn't go over well in any way, shape or form.§”

“Harry,” Cenarius asked again, still smirking.

Still blushing, Harry sighed, turned and canceled the charm on Lunara. She huffed and got to her feet, pouting at Harry. “You're not cute at all,” she muttered, shaking her head.

“Oh, and here I thought you looked like a girl who liked a good laugh,” Harry snarked.

Lunara huffed, then smiled, and leaned down, bussing her lips on Harry's cheek. “Thank you for helping Anthelia and Neerja! And Mulder, Tala, Katya and Noll.”

Harry nodded, trying to banish a blush from his face. *Stupid young body! Acting like a freaking hormonal virgin!*

Harry was not a virgin. He and Ginny had actually experimented well beyond what either of them was willing to admit to the girl's parents. And Harry and Hermione had a brief but passionate moment in Zürich Germany, right before news of an attack on her parents had reached them, and, coupled with wounds that Hermione had taken when a meeting with the New Wizard movement had turned into an ambush a few weeks after, had convinced them both that Harry was just too dangerous to be around.

That didn't matter at all, thanks to his now-young body. “Y, you're welcome, I suppose. But I don't see what the big deal is. Surely if any of you had been in a position to help them, you could have done the same.”

“Perhaps, perhaps not. Against that kind of numbers, only my oldest son and I would've been able to prevail as you did. Most particularly against the number of magic users, the satyrs of that village had been able to gather that you told me about while also protecting the prisoners.” Cenarius would have found it annoying but simple enough. Remulos would have found it difficult but doable.

Lunara blinked, becoming serious for a moment and as she asked, “How many?”

“Twenty satyrs were able to use magic in the village, along with five harpies,” Harry said briskly as if he was giving an after-action report. “The eight magic-using satyrs before that I dealt with pretty easily. I think I killed the leader of the warband with my first attack, and that threw all of the rest off. I had time to prepare, not like when I had to attack the village. That, that was a bloody mess.”

Cenarius held up his hand. “Do not walk us through the entire battle just yet, Harry,” he said calmly. “You should only need to do so once. Let us see if either of my sons will be joining us in the next few days. Until then, we can give you some more background about the satyrs and how that pestilential race came to be.”

Lunara shivered, stamping one of her front feet, then one of her back in anger and fear as she turned and led the way towards the house. She almost automatically reached down and placed a hand on Harry's shoulder, smiling down at him as she whispered out another 'thank you' before explaining about the Satyrs and what they had learned of how they were able to hide from Cenarius' Nature Sight.

While Cenarius and his children could feel the forest to an incredible degree, there was a limit to what they could concentrate on at any one time. They used the nymphs and Keepers as their eyes and ears throughout the forest to combat this. The satyrs had captured one such before she had been able to get the word out and then had used that one prisoner to reverse that flow of magic, blocking instead of allowing Cenarius and his family. Because of that, none of them had felt that anything was wrong in that area of the forest until the satyrs got too cocky. "We lost at least forty of our brethren, and we didn't even know it," Lunara finished.

"And unfortunately, it was not the only area they were doing that in. I have my suspicions about how they were able to construct such spells given the limited ability of satyr magic, but we will talk further about it." Cenarius added.

Harry frowned, scratching at his scar on his forehead until Lunara's hand touched his hand, batting it away as her finger traced the lightning bolt. "Did you get this during the fight?" she asked quizzically. "It feels as if it is a part of you, and yet was not at one point. And how are you speaking as if you're so old anyway? Your only what, the equivalent of thirteen in Kaldorei years? That's barely passed toddlerhood!"

Cenarius chuckled, and Harry looked up at him with a frown. "Let's just say that our new friend is a good deal older than he appears, and he is not a diseased vrykul. Look at him with your Nature Sight, daughter. What do you see?"

Lunara sighed in annoyance but stepped away to take in Harry's entire appearance for a moment, her breasts jiggling in such a way that Harry had to close his eyes and turn away. *Freaking young body!*

As he looked away, Lunara gasped, shaking her head. With her Nature Magic, she could discern things about Harry that Harry himself couldn't say. She could see the Death magic within him, the Life magic within him, signs of his being related to a bird somehow, and signs of a serpent within his body too. "Wow! So, how old are you really? And what are you really? You're definitely not a vrykul like the Kaldorei court used to keep as exotic attractions back in the bad old days."

"That's the second time you've mentioned that term. What are they? My people call ourselves humans. But I'll admit that I am not native to this world." He then quirked an eyebrow at the girl. "As to my age, I'm around thirty-two in my people's years. And humans would call that middle-aged. The only difference between magical and non-magical is that

magicals would live to around two-hundred and three-hundred years old, whereas non-magicals would barely live past the hundred most of the time."

"Your lifespans are that short?!" Lunara gasped, prancing backward in shock, shaking her head. "However do you get anything done?" She turned her attention suddenly to a nearby tree, patting it companionably, and chittering happily at a series of squirrels that had just reached down onto the branch above her.

Harry watched as her attention was completely deserted for a second, and then looked up at Cenarius. He was chuckling quietly to himself, then gesturing Harry on. "She'll be a bit," Cenarius said dryly. He then began to explain about the Vrykul, the former giants of Northrend, whose cursed members were born small and stunted like Harry seemed to be, and thus exiled from their Giant-sized people. There weren't many of the true vrykul remaining, and none on this continent as far as Cenarius knew, but there had been a time when diseased vrykul were captured by the Noble Kaldorei and used as pets or slaves.

When Cenarius was ensconced in his dwelling, Harry began to create a small platform for himself halfway up the interior's side. That way, he could continue to talk to Cenarius from equal height, something that he was very conscious of. *I like to think that I wouldn't be so conscious of it if I was my actual age, but maybe I would. Cenarius is just huge! And he gives off this aura of ancient wisdom that is just amazingly powerful.*

As Harry worked, Cenarius and Quetzal conversed, mostly about Harry's travels through the forest, a topic which they hadn't yet gotten to on their own travels to this house of Cenarius'. Soon though, Lunara came back, pouting at them a little, but settling down on the ground next to her father, watching Harry work in interest. "That is so weird," she said, at last, watching Harry use the joining spell to place the slats together and then merging them into the curve of the dwelling place.

"It's such a prosaic use of Arcane, and yet, you do it so easily and quickly. I can't remember ever seeing any of the Arcane addicted elves doing that kind of thing with their magic. It was always big stuff with them," Lunara exclaimed, childishly waving her arms around. Harry had the impression she greatly enjoyed acting like a child, but she could become serious at need.

"Cenarius said that the Arcane-using elves were somewhat addicted to it, correct?" Harry said with a shrug. "I'm not. Magic is a part of me, certainly, but it isn't something I have to give vent to or anything like that. And it comes from me, not from any external source."

"That's good to hear," Lunara said politely, looking over at her father, who nodded his head in agreement with Harry's comment. Whatever else, Cenarius had no concerns about Harry falling into the same magical addiction that had forced the Kaldorei to split into Kaldorei and High Elves two-thousand years prior.

Cenarius let Lunara drive the discussion until Harry's work was done, then, with Quetzal sunning himself outside, he shifted the discussion slightly to how Harry had started to learn Nature Magic. And at that point, Harry's education in Nature Magic began.

Over the next year, Harry stayed in that dwelling place with Cenarius, learning from him, or Lunara, who though flighty was actually quite a good teacher. She also mixed up a kind of herbal remedy imbued with Cenarius' magic and her own to feed to Quetzal when he showed signs of the taint from having bitten the satyrs, and helped to hunt down the snakes who had eaten chunks of the satyrs.

Biting was enough to carry the Taint, but Quetzal, as a inherently magical snake, was nearly immune to that small a contamination. He had felt sick a few weeks after the fact, hence the need for a herbal remedy, but nothing more. In contrast, the snakes had fallen completely to the Taint by the time Lunara hunted them down. they had mutated into horrible beasts, dangers to anything they came in contact with, but Lunara dealt with the still-animalistic reptiles easily enough.

During that time, Harry got to know Cenarius' sons as well, Zaetar and Remulos. All the demigod's daughters, who were collectively called dryads, seemed to get along with Harry quite well. Like Lunara, they all treated him somewhere between a toy and a child at first, then a toy and a playmate late. But his relationship with Cenarius' sons was more formal.

Zaetar and Harry didn't like each other almost from the start. Zaetar didn't like the fact that Harry wore the body of a vrykul, which Zaetar mistrusted for many reasons. He also resented Harry for taking up their father's time in training him in Nature Magic and disdained the fact that Harry would have such a short lifespan.

Harry had asked Cenarius to keep his rebirth and regeneration type of immortality to himself. It was both a massive strength but also a weakness, and frankly, Harry didn't think that even Cenarius' family would believe that such a thing existed until they saw his rebirth process for themselves.

For his part, Zaetar reminded Harry of the worst habits of Ron with a bit of Malfoy's arrogance tossed in. He was jealous, arrogant, somewhat narrow-minded. Yet for all that, his loyalty to his father was absolute, so Harry tried to get along with him, to a certain degree.

In contrast, Harry found Remulos quite stuffy, and Remulos found Harry almost annoying in how energetic and playful he was. Harry still wanted to really enjoy his youth in a way he hadn't before, despite resenting how being in such a body impacted his mind and abilities. Yet, Remulos came to enjoy Harry's conversations when he wasn't feeling childish. There were several long conversations about combat, warfare in general, and the difference between fighting in different environments compared to the forest, all of which both of them enjoyed. Remulos also thawed noticeably when Harry presented him with a worked runic necklace of protection from fire and illness for his firstborn, the Keeper Celebras, Cenarius' first

grandson. Harry's education in runes had come a long way since settling down at Cenarius' home.

From the start, Lunara was fascinated by Harry and spent much of her time over the next few months with him, helping her father to teach Harry Nature Magic, asking Harry about stories from his world, and eventually, when Harry figured out a way to use runes and charms to make them work, greatly enjoying the music from the CDs that Harry had brought along. Jazz quickly became her favorite and a kind of music that Harry had called classical as well, with its violin and heavy string instruments.

But after a few months, Lunara, being somewhat flaky by nature, began to drift away.

Months turned into a year, and Harry, with his spells hard at work to make this home as hospitable as possible in winter, continued to learn meditation and Nature Magic from Cenarius. But as Harry turned fifteen, his progress had slowed to a crawl.

His meditation had pretty much gone as well as could be expected. With Cenarius' advice, Harry had completely rebuilt his Occlumentic realm. The original had been a haphazard thing developed over the years to keep people from mentally raping his mind. Now Harry's mental plain had shifted from a simple representation of Hogwarts to an entirely new castle made of living wood, various types of stone and several interconnected walls of the same materials. The wood within his mental plane worked as a means for the Nature Magic to enter his mind and physical body but would keep out any conscious influence from the outside.

Harry could now reach out to the Nature Magic all around him with some ease. He couldn't quite do it while doing anything else yet, which was a problem, but he also still couldn't use the Nature Magic in any way beyond his own body. He had used the Nature Magic in his body to strengthen it, make it faster and stronger, and Harry estimated that after a year or so starting with Cenarius, his physical abilities were almost up to where he had been in his older, more mature body. And perhaps in some ways better, considering this body still had both eyes and feet.

He had even begun to use Nature Magic to bolster Quetzal, who was now a quite dangerous creature, having molted several times during their stay here and growing at an exponential rate. Now he was at least twice as long as Harry was tall, and his paralytic poison was now almost instantaneous in how quickly it acted regardless of the size of the person bitten. And he had begun to shoot his bristles further and harder, something Harry further enhanced with Nature Magic, making them like Harry's own needle spell.

But beyond that, Harry was not making any headway, and he was starting to get antsy. Not frustrated yet, but Harry was for all that had called himself a chimera, he was still human in many ways. Humans had limited attention spans, not like Lunara perhaps, but still pretty limited compared to the Kaldorei that Cenarius was used to training as he had done with Malfurion Stormrage.

Cenarius had been immensely pleased by how much progress Harry made, somewhat astonished by it, in point of fact, but he knew that Harry had to have a change of pace before they could continue their training. So when Harry came to him and confessed that he wanted to take a few months' breaks, it being summer again here in this area of the forest, Cenarius acquiesced before thinking deeply.

"I agree that you should take a break, young Harry. However, I would like you to take this final fought with you. You have come as far as you can with imbuing your body with Nature Magic as you have been doing. But I believe that there is more than you can accomplish there, and indeed more with Nature Magic if you were able to understand your own abilities."

"What do you mean, Shan'do?" Early on in their studies here at Cenarius' dwelling, Harry had learned that that was the Kaldorei term for teacher, like 'professor'. And given how much Harry was learning not just about Nature Magic, but about the history of this planet, animals, plants, and many other things, it made sense for Harry to call Cenarius that, above and beyond the respect and friendship Harry felt towards Cenarius.

"You have spoken often about how your body is not quite human, but you have not, to the best of my knowledge, meditated on that or trying to get in touch with your other halves. Your snake self," he said, tapping Harry on the arm where Harry had the scar from his brush with the basilisk, then gesturing to Quetzal, who was sunning himself nearby. "Your bird nature, the Phoenix you said." He gestured upwards, and Harry looked up, smiling faintly as Cenarius chuckled.

Above them, several dozen owls perched in various areas. Harry had slowly started to attract them as he pushed deeper into Nature Magic, going above and beyond the way that the animals like the wolves and others had reacted to him previously. The owls just seemed to adore him, along with eagles, falcons, and even hawks. Sparrows and smaller didn't seem to care one way or another for Harry, and he wondered why momentarily, as one of the few day dwelling owls above him blinked down at him, hooting faintly, before twisting around, watching Cenarius as well.

"You have not tried to use their powers. I think you need to. I think you need to accept that you are not just a human with an odd ability to ignore poisons and who heals slightly faster than normal. Your Phoenix side is not just based around the ability to let you resurrect yourselves from death, rebirthing after you die of old age. You have mentioned the ability that this Fawkes had: the ability to transport himself from one place to another via fire teleportation. You have mentioned the fact that he is a bird, yet you have not tried to fly."

"Humans who try to fly without magical assistance tend to crash, Shan'do," Harry quipped.

But he did look as if he was listening to Cenarius, who smiled faintly. "Beyond that, you have not tried to get in touch with your basilisk side either, beyond speaking Parseltongue,

which I understand was an ability of your human body, not something you received upon resurrecting in this new form. You need to accept those two sides of you, Harry before you can truly take your learning of Nature Magic beyond where you have already. If not, part of your body and spirit will continue to reject it, whatever you do.”

Harry nodded slowly, taking in the ancient demigod's words. “I will think about it master, I'm just uncertain how to do so, that's all.”

“In that, I cannot help you,” Cenarius chuckled. “You will have to figure it out on your own.”

Harry nodded again, and the conversation shifted to where Harry wanted to go. Over the past few months, Harry had created a map of the forest from what Cenarius and his family had told him about it, and Cenarius was interested to know where Harry wanted to go. Harry was firm about his opinion that he didn't want to yet interact with the Kaldorei. Cenarius had spoken many times about the conflict between the Kaldorei and their Arcane-using former nobility. He certainly didn't want to run into any without Cenarius around to prove Harry's intentions.

After a few moments spent staring at the magical map that Harry had constructed in the center of the dwelling of the forest with his help, Cenarius smiled faintly, tapping one aspect of it. “I do look forward to the day when you can create with these runes of yours in greater numbers. The warding and communication arrays that you have spoken of will be immensely helpful. But for now, I would suggest you move out into the mountains here first. Get out of the Emerald Dream for a time, it will give you better perspective on Nature Magic. For that, I suggest a trip to the Wintersong mountains. Beyond that, you mentioned at one point that you met Tyre Fleetforest? Perhaps a tryp to the Emerald Isles could be interesting for you. Although how you will get there is a different question.”

His finger slid through the mountains. “I will warn you, though, that, these mountains are are becoming infested with frost giants. They are practically mindless creatures, who revel in destruction, and are extremely territorial.”

Harry frowned at the map as well. “They don't follow your commands? Those mountains are within the forest, even if the Emerald Dream hasn't spread up into them.”

The fact that much of that forest covered a large portion of the continent whose outline Cenarius had barely spoken of was somewhat amazing to Harry. It was like staring at a map of perhaps Africa, or North America and Canada combined, with the entire territory covered with forest.

“They do not. The frost giants have just enough intelligence to not be considered animals, but not enough intelligence to actually converse with others beyond their own kind,” Cenarius scowled, shaking his head. “I do not even know how numerous they are in that range.

I just know that they are a threat to travelers moving between the Kaldorei settlements at the base of those mountains.”

Harry nodded. “My other idea was to head to the swamps to explore a bit. Maybe figure out why those turtle dragons reacted so badly when I tried to use Parseltongue. Still, the idea of these mountains and maybe meeting more Tauren eventually does sound interesting. I'm not certain I'll get that far, after all, I don't know anything about sailing, but we shall see. Thank you for your advice, master.”

“Think nothing of it,” Cenarius said, smiling benignly, while inside, he was chuckling a little. In point of fact, he had wanted Harry to start reaching out to the Kaldorei. But he understood Harry's reluctance to do so on many levels and agreed with some of his points. But Cenarius felt that if Harry could make the proper introduction to the leaders of the Kaldorei, then much of the trouble that Harry might well run into could be mitigated. And he knew that those mountains were one of Tracy's choices for her upcoming year of isolation and reflection.

OOOOOOO

The next day, Cenarius waved goodbye to Harry and quickly set off on his own short mission. But he did so in a way that only he and his family Cenarius could travel, instead of traveling at the slow pace that he and Harry had maintained when they had been traveling together. Using the Emerald Dream as a medium, Cenarius teleported from one area of the forest to another, his body reforming near Mount Hyjal mere moments after he had begun the journey out of dirt, grass and tree.

As always, when he approached it, Cenarius took a moment to stare at Nordrassil in some delight where it rose up from the top of the Mount. It was truly a magnificent edifice of Nature Magic and goddess-given splendor, a tree so big it could be a hill on its own, its branches rising to the sky. And everywhere around it could be seen the lights of the Kaldorei, as they moved about their doings under the light of Elune. The Kaldorei were almost entirely nocturnal, a sharp contrast to Harry, the demigod thought to himself with a chuckle as he walked up the thoroughfare that started at the lower edge of the Mount and moved upward.

The night elves had changed dramatically in the time since the War of the Ancients, and their architecture showed this. Gone were the walls, stone columns and domes of their ancient cities like fabled Suramar. In their place, there were wooden treehouses, open-topped temples composed of bare stone plinths and gardens, houses built into the ground of the Mount, and a series of walking paths among the trees.

Mount Hyjal was the only real city the Kaldorei had any longer. The majority of their population had spread out in towns and villages that blended with the nature around them. And at the city's center was the second Well of Eternity. Feeding Nordrassil with its waters, this lake had been blessed by Ysera, Alexstrasza, and Nozdromos, the Dragon Aspects of Nature, Life, and Time. Nearby this lake lay his destination.

As he walked, Cenarius was met with awe and delight by many of the Kaldorei, who bowed, clapping their hands in front of them as they offered reverence towards him, which made Cenarius somewhat uncomfortable. He had a strong relationship with the Sentinels, the Sisters of Elune, a few other more warlike or explorative groups, and the druids. But most of the druids were locked in the Emerald Dream, doing battle with the corruption within alongside the Green Dragon Flight under his stepmother, Ysera's, leadership.

That left a large majority of the Kaldorei population: the artists, scholars, farmers, merchants and so forth, who Cenarius did not interact with nearly as often. And they reacted to him more reverently and religiously than he would've preferred. Still, that was a small annoyance, as he moved through the Mount, heading upward.

Here, to one side of the Well of Eternity was the temple to Elune, Cenarius' birth-mother and goddess of the moon. She, too, had added her blessing in the creation of Nordrassil. And it was there where he found his target, for this walk, Tyrande Whisperwind. Despite all of the demands on her time as the leader of the Kaldorei, Tyrande maintained her quarters here at the temple to Elune, believing that her connection to Elune, and her position as High Priestess, was still the most important of her tasks.

"Others could take on the mantle of leadership. But my place has, and will always be, defined by my service to Elune and our people," Tyrande had said more than once.

It was a mark of humility that Cenarius quite approved of, and indeed, he quite approved of Tyrande in general. She was one he would call friend, and he was happy to see her smile at him as he entered the gardens of the temple. "Tyrande," he said, holding out his hands.

"Cenarius," she greeted him, doing the same, disdaining any other form of address. They clasped hands, one hand parallel over the other, as old friends would, and she smiled at him in delight. "Long has it been since you strode the streets of Mount Hyjal," she teased.

"Long as it been since I had reason to. And you well know that I prefer my own halls, my own trees and forest to even the civilization of the Kaldorei. Houses and temples have never been for me, to say nothing of roofs. You know about my opinion on those unnatural things."

"Yes, you have often mentioned your belief that being open to all the weather the world sends us is a means to build character," Tyrande chuckled, although even as she did, Tyrande looked at him shrewdly. "Yet I doubt doing so once more is why you are here. Nor are you here to report on further troubles. By all the reports I have gotten from the sentinels, the forest has been remarkably peaceful since the trouble last summer."

Cenarius nodded, murmuring about how his sons and daughters had become more vigilant since then.

“But you are not here to speak of that's time or these past few years. You are here to tell me something, aren't you?” Tyrande questioned shrewdly, narrowing her golden eyes as she looked up at the Demigod.

Cenarius chuckled. “Tyrande, your ability to read people is one of your greatest skills, I must say. But you speak more firmly than I would've expected. One could almost wonder if you had been warned of my news by a higher power...”

Tyrande smiled, picking up a small pebble from the path through the garden that they were following as they talked. She moved over to a nearby pond and then held the stone slightly before dropping it into the pond, watching the ripples begin. “Elune has indeed spoken to me. A fate changer has come, a stone in a pond. She will not speak to me of what futures were so dire as to demand one such. I felt as if we will have several thousand years of relative peace before the true test comes. But he is here now. And you know of him. Can you tell me about this fate changer?”

“I will not.” Cenarius shook his head. “I would prefer you to make your own judgment of his character, and I will not give you any more information than you apparently already have.”

Tyrande shrugged, and for a time, their conversation turned to the matter from last summer and how the two of them had attempted to make certain that such events would never happen again. More Sentinel outposts had been pushed away from Nordrassil, deeper and further into the forest and towards the edges than before. A permanent central presence had been placed in particular at the point where the satyr villages had sprung up previously, able to watch for any further incursions.

But unfortunately, there just wasn't enough Kaldorei to truly patrol the entire massive forest of Ashenvale. The Kaldorei were peaceful people, and only one in fifteen took up arms as Sentinels or otherwise, and it took decades to train a true fighter. Worse, only about a tenth of the total druids had not sunk themselves into the Emerald Dream, their bodies protected under Nighthaven. And those who had not were... fractious at the best of times. Tyrande was reluctant to trust them very far from her sight, given a few of their actions in the past three thousand years.

Eventually, that conversation wound down, and Cenarius broached the subject that he had been here to speak of in the first place. “Are you still intending to begin your sabbatical soon?”

Every four-hundred and twenty-two years, Tyrande would take a year off, starting from the summer, which had just begun once more. She would remove herself from the rest of her people and travel through the forest, speaking with Cenarius at times or his children. Indeed, once she and Lunara had traveled throughout the entire year from one side of Ashenvale to another.

But for the most part, Tyrande stayed apart during this time, simply taking in nature herself, communing with Elune away from the trappings of her office and temple. It was a time of renewal and rest for Tyrande that she desperately needed.

Tyrande was **not** a natural politician or strategist. She was an excellent advisor and did well on the tactical level, but leading her people on her own taxed her greatly. Yet even now, near to six thousand years after she had taken over the leadership of their people out of necessity, no one else commanded as much respect among the Kaldorei as Tyrande did.

"I would honestly rather not," Tyrande sighed, showing an amount of exhaustion and frustration she would never allow anyone but her closest friends to see. Several of the Cenarion Circle annoy me greatly, pushing for evermore independence for themselves, the Moon Glade and their folk who have not chosen to bind themselves to the Emerald Dream while others push for more control of the government. You would think they would have learned from the disaster with Vordrassil."

Cenarius winced at that reminder. In an effort to re-create Nordrassil, many of the druids had taken clippings of the great tree and planted them around the forest at different points several thousand years ago. They had wanted to set them up as essentially, anticorruption points, areas where the Kaldorei could spread out further and thus spread their influence through the forest better than the sentinels or their small scattered villages could provide.

Yet most of these had failed to grow beyond the normal size, and the one that had actually succeeded to grow beyond that size had been corrupted to the point where it had directly begun to impact the Emerald Dream thanks to the touch of Yogg-Saron. The conflicts there against the Old God had slowly begun to turn against the druids at that point until Tyrande, and a force led by her and Cenarius had cut Vordrassil down. Yet the damage was done, and the fight in the Emerald Dream was dire.

"That was a tragedy," Cenarius agreed. "Such a magnificent tree it had become and would have continued to grow if not for the Old God's influence. Still, you are taking your sabbatical?"

Tyrande raised an interrogative eyebrow but nodded slowly, "Yes. I was thinking of visiting someplace cold, I rather enjoy the sensation and have not felt it in decades. Or perhaps traveling to the Broken Isles to see the Highmountain clans and getting to know their new High Chief. I normally would send an ambassador to do so, but since this time the change of leadership coincides with my sabbatical it might be interesting."

"Indeed, I think that would be a grand idea," Cenarius agreed blandly. "I think you would greatly enjoy the journey. And perhaps what you might find there, or even on the way."

Tyrande cocked her head thoughtfully, staring up at the far larger Cenarius, then nodded slowly, a smile appearing on her face once more that seemed to banish the fears and

concerns of leadership from her face. "It seems as if Shan'do Cenarius has found another student, perhaps?"

Chuckling, Cenarius shook his head. "Perhaps."

"In that case, I must say that visiting the mountains sounds most agreeable," Tyrande murmured as they made their way back to the entrance to the temple.

**OOOOOOO**

Harry and Quetzal traveled up through the mountains, and SOON Quetzal found himself practically wiggling in delight at how well the journey was going for him. The snow was all around him, yet Quetzal, with a warming charm on his body that Harry renewed every few hours, couldn't care less about the weather. All the smells were crisp and clear during the winter in a way that Quetzal had never smelled before.

And, up here, there were goats. Quetzal had never tried goat, and the goats themselves were not wary enough of snakes to know they should avoid him. So he'd had several very easy meals, which of course, he had attempted to share with Harry.

Hopping on a rock to one side of the route that they were following through the mountains, Harry chuckled, shaking his head as he looks down at his friend. "If you keep eating like that, you're going to go into a food coma, you know."

"But they are so tasty!" Quetzal replied, hissing in amusement at his friend's words as he coiled himself upright so that they stood eye to eye. "You are just jealous that your taste buds do not allow you to take in the full flavors of raw meat."

Harry shook his head. He was not a fan of goats. Fish and chicken were much more in his liking, although he had slowly started to stop eating birds entirely in the past year, considering it somewhat wrong given his friendships with so many of the owls down near where he had been staying with Cenarius. "Seriously though, you've been slowing down over the past few hours. Do you want to rest?"

Quetzal sighed. "Resting would be good, but we should probably get to someplace a little more level than this at the moment."

Harry nodded, and they continued traveling up into the mountain. There was no trail or anything so nice. They were simply heading up the mountain as best they could, taking the paths of least resistance as they could. There often was none such, forcing Harry to use his magic to help them along. Although with his Nature Magic enhanced body, Harry found himself able to climb like a monkey now, scaling sheer cliff faces with some difficulty. Quetzal had no such ability and had to be helped along numerous times.

Eventually, they found a flat bit of ground around a single tree before the mountain again became extremely steep, although there was a bit of a dirt area they could have followed.

And normally, the two travelers would have done just that, pushing on into the night, not tired just yet thanks to their Nature Magic given endurance. And indeed, Cenarius had slowly started to tell them to do so in preparation for the time when Harry would interact with the Kaldorei, who were largely nocturnal.

However, this time they stopped, allowing Quetzal to finish digesting. Something that Harry twitted him on numerous times. But after Quetzal fell asleep, Harry spent most of the night awake, meditating on Nature Magic once more, thinking about what Cenarius had told him. It wasn't that easy.

*If my body is indeed a hybrid of Phoenix, basilisk and human, I haven't seen much sign of it. My reflexes were already crazy. My body wasn't any tougher until I started using Nature Magic. I'm no lighter, and I... hmm... maybe I should think about this like I was attempting to become an Animagus? Try to meditate on the images of my two sides?*

Harry had wanted to be an Animagus since he had first seen Minerva change from a cat back to a human. But doing so took a lot of time or a lot of potion-based preparation, and Harry was pants at potions. Worse yet, the books in his sitting room where he had died had not included the books on the subject he had gathered over the years.

As he pushed out his senses into the surrounding nature, Harry frowned, his senses ringing with a discordant note. It wasn't a foreign note, as Cenarius had told him the satyrs or other corrupted elements would appear to his Nature Magic senses. Rather, this was simply discordant, as if something in nature had clashed with something else in a very bloody manner.

He wondered what that was and then felt something on the edge of his senses: first panic, then a life snuffed out. He barely had even a time to get an idea of what kind of life been before it was gone. He frowned, and with a gesture, was holding the sword of Gryffindor in one hand as he continued to sit there beside his large serpentine companion. Then he conjured his cloak around himself, hiding his presence from anything that would harm him. This faint rustling caused Quetzal to rouse slightly, blinking one eye open to look at where Harry had previously been. "What is it?" He questioned the air.

Harry allowed the tip of his sword to appear for a second before tossing his cloak over it once more, staring around him. "I don't know. I sensed something at the edge of my range, a death of some kind.

Quetzal nodded slowly but did not rouse himself further. As Harry had teased him about, he was just too full to have much energy.

Luckily, the two of them were not bothered that night, nor the two days following. Yet at night, Harry felt violence once more occurring someplace nearby. Something was hunting something else and taking great delight in the killing. And after that second night, Harry got a better idea of the minds of the creatures involved. He could barely sense one of them, a mass of anger, fury, delight in the carnage, and animal-like cunning. The other was the mind of an

intelligent predator, but a predator who had suddenly found itself pray, panicking, fearful, yet snarling defiance as it tried to think its way out of whatever trap he had discovered himself in.

Why the phrase snarling occurred to Harry, he didn't know, but at that point, Harry made the decision that the two of them would start traveling at night through the mountainous forest, resting during the day. "Whoever is out there is active at night, and I think we need to figure out what's going on."

"It must be those snow giants that Cenarius mentioned, shouldn't it?" Quetzal asked with a serpentine shrug. "Wouldn't it be better to move during the day, watch for signs of their passage and then kill them there if need be?"

Shaking his head at his friend's coldly calculating yet rather bloodthirsty nature, Harry shook his head. "No, we don't know what they're hunting or why they're doing it. If they're hunting for food, then there's no issue. I don't think that's true, but I don't know it for a fact yet. And they haven't made any attacks on us."

That state of affairs did not last through their fifth night on the mountain.

Harry and Quetzal were moving through a small escarpment, a cut in the mountain's rock, which slowly wound its way upward. They were about halfway up its length when there was a bellow from above. Before Harry could even open his mouth to shout a warning, there appeared a giant above them.

It was massive, at least as tall as the giants at home, but wider in the waistline, potbellied and big-chested. It wore the same kind of neanderthal outfit and came with a giant club that looked like someone had trimmed a tree trunk. Its face was dominated by a beard that came down their chest, doing a somewhat better job of covering the giant's blue skin than their outfit. Its eyes were deep-set in its face and had an oddly small head to its size. That, and the blue skin, marked it out as an ice giant, not one of the Titan-kin who had seemingly birthed this planet's humans.

And as soon as the creature saw Harry and Quetzal, it started to toss boulders down towards them.

"so much for looking for the good in these creatures. And for not being paranoid enough. After this, we move forward cloaked, Quetzal," Harry announced almost lackadaisically, smashing them out of the way with a single wave of his hand and a spellchain of linked Reductos.

Not bothering to reply verbally, Quetzal slithered upwards faster than he had been moving before, it's fangs glistening even as his chameleon cloak slowly started to make him invisible. Seeing that, Harry kept the giants' attention on him, battering aside whole trees and large rocks, the giants tossed down towards him. And between defensive spellwork, Harry was able to cast the *Lingua Franca* spell once more on himself.

But this didn't help him understand what was being bellowed at him from the giants above him. The Giants were not in point of fact conversing. They were simply bellowing and hooting and hollering in bellicose laughter. It was evident to Harry that while possessing brains, they were not truly bright. They were human-shaped, but they certainly didn't have any kind of native intelligence beyond that of perhaps Neanderthals. And beyond that, they were consumed with hatred of Harry for some reason. The very sight of him seems to infuriate them.

*Then again, given what I've felt the past few nights from them, perhaps just the site of anything different causes that reaction.* Regardless, Harry continued to defend himself until Quetzal was up among the three Giants.

For his part, Quetzal maneuvered until he was behind the trio of fat humanoids, then aimed for their calves. His first bite proved that these creatures, for all they looked like they were made of flesh, also had some rock in their ancestry. His fangs barely penetrated and nearly got caught in his first victim, who bellowed, turning as Quetzal pulled away. But regardless of the denseness of their skin, Quetzal's poison worked through the giant's system quickly, paralyzing him. But the other two turned away from Harry to attack Quetzal.

This proved to be a mistake, as a series of Stupefy spells struck them from behind. They stumbled, showing that they also possessed some magical durability, but this let Quetzal both shoot off his quills into their faces and get in a second bite. A cutting spell sliced the last giant in two even as the paralytic in Quetzal's quills went to work on him, and the other froze in place, unable to move a muscle.

Harry moved up towards them, then attempted to ask them questions, trusting in the Lingua Franca to let them understand him. But once more, like with his harpy prisoner way back before he met Cenarius, Harry didn't get much out of this. And he was extremely leery of trying Legilimency on creatures like this. Eventually, as they started to show signs of powering through Quetzal's paralytic somehow, Harry decided to simply kill them. Neither of the two survivors had made any sign that they understood his questions at all. They just didn't have enough native intelligence, as Cenarius had said, to understand that attacking other creatures and bashing them over the head was not a good idea all the time.

Leaving the three corpses behind, Harry and Quetzal moved on, but now more warily. Even during the day, Harry covered himself with his invisibility cloak, and Quetzal moved with his chameleon cloak activated. Throughout the day, they traveled hired the mountain, with every puff from Harry's mouth producing smoke, making Harry cast a slight Disillusion spell on himself, which would keep anyone from noticing that.

In this manner, the two friends saw several other bands of the frost giants moving around. They definitely seem to be the dominant creature in these mountains and also seemed to just love chaos and violence. Most of the time, they were fighting one another. Other times, they spotted some small animal and rushed off after it, hooting and bashing their massive clubs

on the ground into rocks or trees indiscriminately. Yet Harry only rarely saw them actually eat the things they killed, and when they did, the frost giants ate their squashed prey raw.

Harry saw them do this to goats, squirrels, even at one time of flight of birds. The birds all got away. The rest didn't and disappeared down a frost giant's throat. Even squirrels couldn't always get away if the frost giants surrounded them and bashed everything within the circle.

But on the fifth day, Harry and Quetzal found themselves perched high up on the side of a stone rockface, watching as a large group of eighteen frost giants faced off against a pack of frostsabers, twenty strong. The frostsabers were arrayed at the outer edge of a tiny group of trees, within which Harry could see a large cave towards the back of the trees against the far wall of the tiny basin.

It looked as if this fight would be for all the marbles on the frostsabers' side. Two of them died even as Harry came upon the scene, and he scowled angrily. "Let's get in there."

Quetzal rolled his flat reptilian eyes but agreed, quickly moving to the side of Harry as Harry began to fire heavy attack spells downrange. Bombarda, Reducto, and Sectumsempra, along with a long-range fireball spell, followed by several more.

Once more, the frost giants seemed to have some magical resistance, and a few of his spells weren't quite strong enough to get through it, splashing over the frost giants in a kaleidoscope of colors. Others, though, removed heads, limbs, legs and turned the battle from what would have otherwise been a massacre into a real fight. Several of the frost giants turned, looking around in confusion as if they couldn't figure out where Harry's spell work was coming from, while others continued to rampage against the frostsabers.

With the frost giants unable to find him thanks to his cloak, Harry had time to realize that the frostsabers were not exactly pushovers either. They worked in packs of three, like wolves, two of them from the front, the other coming from behind to hamstring and Harry the legs of the Frost giants which had attacked their homes constantly moving, their hides blending into the snow on the ground.

There was a bellow from nearby, and from out of another ravine leading into this glen, came more frost giants. At first, they roared towards the fight going on the tops of trees, but then, one of them seemed a bit brighter than the others and turned towards Harry. It pointed his way with a massive club, ululating a warcry that the others took up as they charged toward where the spellfire was coming from.

Harry gestured to the ground around the bottom of his current perch, conjuring up a series of spells that made the ground as slick as ice. He then conjured up the same kind of mixed pepper spray and itching powder he had used as a fog against the harpies, pushing it down towards this new group of frost giants.

It caught all of them just as arrows began to fall from on high. Harry saw them coming and knew that they were not aimed at him, so he decided to ignore it, for now, hitting himself with another Lingua Franca sky like Harry had tried the first time he'd met the frost giants as he shouted out, "Help the frostsabers!"

Above, Tyrande Whisperwind paused. At first, she had feared that they would be able to close with the magic-user who was somehow hiding that even she couldn't sense him. But now, all of those Frost giants were falling over one another, unable to keep their feet, sneezing, scratching at their tests and legs, unable to simply charge forward. *He's right, whoever he is. The Frostsabers and that giant snake need help.*

Before the arrows had started to fall on the new group of giants, Quetzal had reached the frost giants near the group of trees and was biting every one of them he could, his quills flashing out. But the skin of the frost giants meant that even a glancing blow from his quills was enough to turn them aside, and forcing his teeth through their hides slowed his biting attack down. Still, every time one of the frost giants was paralyzed, the frostsabers took advantage, a series of growls and snarls somehow letting them coordinate their defense.

But one of the frost giants got lucky. His club's wild swing smacked Quetzal hard in the side, hurling the snake away to wrap around a tree, where he lay dazed. He had been able to paralyze four of the frost giants.

Harry was busy with the new group of Frost giants, keeping them occupied. This and his earlier assault meant there were still ten of the original group to battle the frostsabers, who had already lost several of their pack. Two more frostsabers went down before Tyrande was upon them.

She danced in among the Frost giants, shooting up at their faces for a few seconds, then dropping her bow, and pulling out her special double-bladed swords, lashing out like a dervish in the Kaldorei style of combat, all speed and cutting power. Her blades sliced through the frost giants' armored hide despite the flesh been almost stone-like substance. More of the frost giants fell to be torn his part by the vengeful frostsabers, but six more frostsabers fell before Harry could turn his attention back to the original battle.

At the range he was at at the moment, Harry realized that even with his Owl-sight spell, he couldn't pick out his enemies in the tumult. Both frost giants and frostsabers were blue and white, there was too much snow being tossed about, and they were all too close.

With a final glance back at the group of Frost giants Harry had already finished off, he raced in that direction, already conjuring up several dozen needles as the sword of Gryffindor appeared in his left hand.

For the first time since he had arrived here, the sword of Gryffindor failed to cut through something, bouncing off the first frost giant he struck with it. Yet simultaneously, a cutting spell tore another in half right before it could finish off the frostsaber.

On the other side of that frost giant, Tyrande gasped, twitching away from the welter of blood, wondering anew about this strange spell user. *That was a powerful spell, yet I sensed no buildup of the arcane.*

“Go for the injured ones, leave the two uninjured to me,” Harry shouted, and to her surprise, not only Tyrande but the frostsabers seemed to understand, breaking away from the two heretofore uninjured frost giants.

This allowed Harry to fire a Reducto at one. That one's head disappeared, and Tyrande charged forward, stabbing one sword into the last one's foot, then Somersaulting between his legs, before kicking off the ground hard, and jumping up words, landing on his back.

The frost giant squealed for just a second, looking down at its foot before Tyrande stabbed her second sword deep into the back of its neck. The blow severed its spine, and out the other side in a cascade of blood. Like an ancient tree slowly succumbing to age and wind, the frost giant collapsed slowly to the ground, and Tyrande leaped clear, landing nearby as the snow puffed out from where the frost giant landed.

For a moment, the battlefield was still, then the frostsabers started to snarl in victory, and Harry smiled wanly at them all before moving over to Quetzal, who slowly raised his head, staring hard at Harry as he approached. “§I am not pleased. My race is supposed to be ambush predators, not head-on attackers, Potter!§”

“§How was I supposed to know that a second group of frost giants was going to come up and force me to let you make your attack alone?§” Harry shot back incredulously.

To one side, several other frostsabers, all cubs, came running out of the cave that Harry had spotted behind the trees, staring at the carnage, then moving to find their parents. As the largest snow leopard there moved to thank the Kaldorei, Harry watched the others, saddened as he noticed that several of the cubs failed to find their parents.

Faced with the snarling growling frostsaber in front of her, Tyrande smiled and held out her hand, and the frostsaber sniffed it before moving underneath her hand, letting Tyrande scratch its ears. Like most creatures, frostsabers knew Kaldorei as creatures of the forest just as they were, creatures of goodness and those intelligent animals enough were able to understand and actually fight alongside them as had been the case today. “//I thank you for your aid tonight, Night Elf. My name is Alar-Kyree, and I am the king of my people. We have long been locked in conflict with the frost giants. They have been hunting my kind, and my clan might well be the last in these mountains.//”

“//You're welcome, and I truly hope that they are not the last. That would be a tragedy given how magnificent a creature you all are. And the fact that you are able to converse with me, rather than simply attacking me, means you're much more intelligent than the frost giants.//”

Hearing Harry reply in the Kaldorei's language to the growls and snarls of the frostsabers caused Tyrande to ask, "Are you using a spell perchance to understand these magnificent creatures? I understand that frostsabers are intelligent to understand my speech, but you just responded as if their growls were able to convey meaning beyond simple thanks to you."

"I can. If you allow me, I will use the spell on you as well," Harry answered, now turning to face the night elf directly. "A, Although I will warn you, I have been told that it is what you would all call an Arcane spell. It's not a powerful one, but I did want to warn you." Harry practically babbled, as his eyes widened, before he turned his eyes upwards slightly, staring at the Kaldorei woman's forehead. *Good God, what do they feed the women here, and why can't any of them wear an appropriate amount of clothing!?*

The woman across from Harry was tall. He estimated she would stand at least a foot taller than his adult body. She had light purple skin, which seemed to glow in the light of the moon above them, along with pale golden eyes, set in a somewhat severe, yet currently smiling countenance, along with two long ears, like Lunara's. Her hair was a deep

Her legs were long and lithe, sinewy with muscle and strength, shown off quite well by the fact that she was wearing a short metal skirt whose rigid edges barely fell to mid-thigh, along with long boots that came up to right below her knee, letting a majority of her thigh visible. Above that, the woman wore what Harry would like to a metal sports bra, protecting her chest, but little else, allowing Harry to see her flat, impressively muscled stomach, along with her thin waist, to go with slightly wider hips. Her breasts were around the same size as Lunara's, a firm B-cup maybe, but seemed even firmer, almost not moving much at all as she looked this way and that between Harry and the frostsabers.

"I will agree if you would allow me to see more of you," Tyrande asked tartly, her smile fading as she looked for the speaker's face, only able to see one hand such was the ability of whatever cloak he was wearing. "You and your snake companion are both nearly invisible to my eyes. A marvelous feat, I'll grant you, but not one to set me at ease."

Quetzal came out of his own camouflage to at once, nodding over to the Frostsabers as he tapped his jaw on the snow Frost giants meaningfully. Since they were not snakes, they couldn't understand his words, but his gesture made many shake their heads, and Quetzal hissed out a theatrical sigh. "§What is the point of killing something if you are not going to eat it! Are snakes truly the only intelligent individuals in this universe?§"

"In that area perhaps," Harry said dryly, before pulling off his invisibility cloak entirely, letting Tyrande see him as it disappeared into his skin. "Forgive me for not introducing myself. My companion is Quetzal, and I am Harry Potter. Recently of the dwelling of Shan'do Cenarius, although right now I think he set me up when he suggested I head to the mountains."

"Truly, I believe much the same Harry Potter. Cenarius hinted at the fact that I would be having an interesting meeting if I came up to these mountains, although he did not tell me

anything about you, wishing I would make my own determination about you.” As she spoke, Tyrande was studying Harry from head to toe. She had seen the shrunken titans before, back in the rain of Azshara, when several of the high elves had taken them as pets or simple objects of amusement.

But there was something in Harry's face that none of those pets had ever had: a self-awareness and intelligence to go with the magic he had previously shown. And while that magic had been indeed Arcane, he wasn't a Kaldorei, and he certainly hadn't used any spells big enough to attract... undue intention. Moreover, the spells he used seem to come from within himself, not powered by an external source of mana.

But in the same vein, Harry looked young, far too young to wield that kind of power. He was perhaps 14, perhaps as much a 16-year-old if his body grew as a Kaldorei's would, and she could tell by his bone structure that he had a good bit of growing to do yet. He looked somewhat handsome, even without ears, and in the light of the moon, those emerald eyes gleamed amazingly.

It was those very same eyes, and his former ruthlessness against the Frost giants, which made Tyrande wonder about the evidence of her eyes compared to how old Harry Potter really was. Looking at him with her senses as a priestess of the Moon Goddess, there was no doubt in Tyrande's mind that this was the stone in the pond that Elune had told her about. And as she thought that, and what it might mean for her people, a stream of moonlight broke through a cloud directly above Harry, the bathing both him, Tyrande, and the scene in moonlight, as if Elune was blessing this meeting, and what they had done.

Tyrande smiled at that and set aside her worries about this young being using Arcane power as he had. If the goddess was willing to look beyond that, then Tyrande would look beyond the prejudices of her own people and do the same. “That is much better, Harry Potter, thank you.” She would have said more, but one of the cubs had just pumped into her leg, and she knelt down, rubbing the little cub's ears. “Hello, little one. How do you do?”

This was followed by another, larger frostsaber moving to stand in front of her. It was the same one who had spoken to Harry before, and Tyrande noticed that it had faint marks around its head, which could almost look like a crown. The hub looked up at her, and she looked at it in, ruffling it's for as the older Frostsaber spoke, interrupting her and Harry. Luckily Harry had already hit Tyrande with his spell.

“//We thank you as well, Lady. We know that the Kaldorei are protectors of the forest, but this was not your fight. And yet, you helped to rescue my clan and me from certain death. You and the young magic-user. As such, we owe you a debt.//”

“No debt,” Harry said, shaking his head. “I would've done the same for anything being attacked by those frost giants. I've tried to communicate with them, and they're just smart enough to be deadly, not smart enough to make peace with.”

“Truly, Harry Potter speaks for me as well. I saw you are in trouble, and I decided to get involved,” Tyrande added, grateful that Harry had hit her with the Lingua Franca spell as the frostsaber started to speak.

“//And yet, my people elsewhere are still in danger. The frost giants breed like rats, and they have wiped out many other species in these mountains. You will not find bears, wolves, nor even the majestic Roc in these mountains any longer. The Rocs fled, the bears and wolves died. Only my own people have been able to fight back, and even then, that simply slowed our destruction.” The frostsaber scowled, showing more than a bit of fang, before going on with a sad note to his growl. “Therefore, we must ask for your aid further. But we would not do so without offering some manner of recompense.”

Tyrande didn't even look up at the king as he was speaking, staring down at the face of the young frostsaber, then very gently picking her up and rubbing her nose against the young female cub's nose, who purred happily.

At that sight, the king's tone changed to one of amusement. “//What we would offer is an alliance between our focus and the Kaldorei. We know that you Kaldorei ride lesser tigers and panthers into battle. We would offer ourselves as such mounds, with my young daughter, Shy-rotam, becoming yours.”

“//Yes!//” the little cub growled. “//You smell good, you have strength, I wish to be with you, to fight with you!//”

“I agree,” Tyrande answered instantly, before tapping the nose of the little frostsaber and smiling up at the king. “Although she is too short for me to use as a mount just yet. I will have to teach her her other ways to fight beside me.”

“//Good!//” the young Shy-rotam purred, nuzzling her head against Tyrande's face.

“I agree too,” Harry said, “and you don't have to offer an alliance with me or anything. I think helping you is why Cenarius sets me up here. Well that, and meeting this one,” he added, bowing grandly towards the Kaldorei woman. “Although I would like the name of my new companion before we get down to planning this expedition.”

She smiled back, nodding her head. “I apologize for my momentary lapse of manners Harry Potter, student of Shan'do Cenarius. My name is Tyrande Whisperwind, high priestess of the Elune, the moon goddess who shines above us even now. And I believe Harry Potter, that this is the beginning of a most interesting acquaintance.”

**End Chapter**

**Chapter 2: Friendships, Bloodletting, Travels, Travails**

Harry tried not to stare, he really did. But as the Frostsabers continued to explain how the Frostmaul giants had come to dominate the mountains of Winterspring, he just couldn't concentrate. To Harry, the tale was a simple equation: the Frostmaul giants were composed of frost and stone, and the Frostsabers were flesh and blood. As powerful and as strong as their jaws might be, and Harry could tell their physical abilities had been enhanced Azeroth's ambient magic just like their intelligence, he doubted that they would have it an easier time of biting the Frostmaul giants than Quetzal did. And Harry's serpentine friend had his paralysis venom to aid him, which allowed him to paralyze his prey even with shallow bites. The Frostsabers didn't even have that.

Worse, was Tyrande's presence. Harry had been around Lunara and other nymphs for several months before this, but that bit of exposure wasn't helping right now. Tyrande was drop dead gorgeous, her light purple skin almost luminescent in the moonlight, like a lavender flower made into skin. The silver strands in the deep blue of her hair grabbed his attention, almost lighting up the blue of her hair. Her eyes were like twin stars, and her body...

Quetzal's tail smacked into Harry the side, lightly for the massive snake. "§Stop staring. I know you mammals do things differently, but surely staring so much must be off-putting to two-legged women, especially since you look like you're going to start drooling at any moment.§"

Harry shook his head, then looked away, grateful that Tyrande at least hadn't seen to notice his moment of teenage stupidity. "§You're right my cold-blooded friend. Hormones, they are from the bloody devil, I tell you.§" he whispered. With that, Harry turned and pulling out his trunk, began to work on a series of wards to help defend the Frostsabers valley from their enemies.

In point of fact, Tyrande had noticed his looking, but since he had not, in point of fact, been drooling, or attempting to flirt with her, she wasn't going to mention it. Indeed for the most part he had kept his eyes on her face, only looking at her arms for some reason occasionally, never letting his eyes wander to more sexual areas. She was even amused by his comment, as she could remember when she was young thousands of years ago and had seen young Kaldorei acting much the same way throughout the millennia since. *Hormones are indeed of the bloody devil, whatever the devil might be.*

*And yet, for all his complaints about them, he is handling himself quite well.* Tyrande had been told all her life she was a rare beauty. Even though every Kaldorei knew she and Malfurion were an item, she still turned heads today, though honestly she didn't know why people made such a fuss. Harry had been practically polite with his staring, and his control was very good for a seeming-sixteen year old. *Although perhaps his people age physically or mentally faster than mine?* Harry certainly seemed older, looking out at the world through eyes which had seen far too much combat, the eyes Tyrande saw in other veterans of the War of the Ancients.

*Yet what beautiful eyes they are. Like emeralds, or like the greenest leaves on a summer day. Yet, I wonder what caused that strange lightning bolt scar on his forehead?*

Still, despite Harry not being a Kaldorei – or even a cursed Vrykul as Tyrande had first assumed - his use of Arcana concerned her, and the sheer number of spells that he used. *Although, I might be willing to overlook everything for free access to that's translation spell she mused with an internal chuckle. That would be a major help, for both herself, and my people in general.*

Tyrande internally shook her head. *Do not leap to conclusions. His Arcana seems different than my people's and regardless, I should judge him by his actions. And continue to listen to the Frostsaber's tales about the Frostmaul giants. Silly woman, information is power after all.* Eventually, the Frostsabers had finished telling her story, as well as what they knew about the movements of the Frostmaul giants, and Tyrande turned to look at Harry, wondering what he thought about it all.

When she voice this question, Harry shrugged. "I attempted the translation spell on them, the one I just used on you, Milady..."

"Tyrande, or Miss if you feel you must give me a title. Milady sounds too much like a noble title, and I am not here acting as leader of my people or as a priestess of Elune, which would be the only real title I would lay claim to," Tyrande interrupted. She was well aware that formality and decorum had a purpose, but in this time and place, she did not wish to deal with them. *I am on sabbatical, blast it.* "Further, if Cenarius planned this meeting, it would behoove us to get to know one another. Being overly formal would get in the way of that."

"I... alright Miss, but give me time please. I'm not used to being so informal so quickly, er, especially with women" Harry answered, somewhat embarrassed, although he had to smile in agreement at her words. "Anyway, I tried to talk the first group of Frostmaul giants Quetzal and I ran into. It didn't work. The translation spell hit them, but the Frostmaul giants don't seem to have enough native intelligence in order to really have anything like a language."

"That is interesting, and very strange. I have seen the Vrykul of Northrend and their diseased brethren, who I thought at first you might be. While they are immensely aggressive, they are not without their own type of intelligence and language. Worse, these Frostmaul giants seem more magical construct than living creature."

"Yep, literal ice and stone, there's scant little even of their remains to tell us they were truly alive in the first place," Harry agreed, then went on more hesitantly. "Erm, do you have a problem with taking the campaign to them, Miss? Only, if the Frostmaul giants are spreading as they seem through these mountains their numbers have to be pruned back, if not more. That could be a bloody business."

Tyrande sighed. "While I am wondering why you seem to be overusing the word 'bloody', I must admit I would normally disdain any such thoughts of making war upon an entire

race. And yet, I have never had any dealings with the Frostmaul giants for this. And what you are saying and from what the Frostsabers are saying, they are inimical to all other life. It... it is possible that they might be a creature of the Old Gods, which somehow survived the fall. That would make it my duty as a priestess of Elune to look into at the very least.”

Harry scowled at that, shaking his head and Tyrande smiled internally, having thought she would get that reaction to anyone who would call Cenarius Shan'do. “I've learned about the Old Gods from Cenarius. What he told me about them was not pleasant listening. Especially what he said about Andrassil, and how the druids were forced to cut the world tree down.”

“Aye, they were, and that is all that we Kaldorei can do with those Tainted by the Old Gods touch. There is no way to free someone of an Old One's influence once his hooks are in a being.” Tyrande then paused, frowning at Harry in unspoken question.

Seeing that, Harry chuckled, shaking his head. “No. If you want something attacked, stunned or an area awarded against threats, like I'm working on now,” he held up the stone tablet he was working on, showing the runic array he was working on. “I can do all that. But cleansing something...”

Frowning in thought, Harry looked down at his work and correcting a mark on the stone, adding a tiny line to a rune. “I did it off the cuff, once. But...” He looked up at Tyrande closely and asked, “I suppose you would have been told about a incidents with the satyrs? About...” he paused, then looked a little lost. “Heck, I don't even know how long ago it was. Spending time with Cenarius is strange in that way.”

Tyrande nodded. “Mortals can find it so, I've been told. Although I am surprised that your serpent friend wasn't able to keep track of things.”

Quetzal blinked at her, then shook his head slowly. “§What care snakes of the passing of days? We think in terms of seasons. In that term, it has been nearly five seasons since the Master of the Forest met Harry and I.§”

“Is a year a long time among your race?” Tyrande asked, thinking that Harry's face looked almost bemused and shocked in the moonlight. “But yes, in answer to your question, I did hear of satyr's preying on distant settlements. It was very worrisome at the time. As is the fact many seemed to have switched allegiances to the the Old Gods.”

“A year is a okay amount of time, not really long for my people,” Harry mused, smiling faintly as he considered he'd only been training for a year with Cenarius. *Makes me less annoyed at my lack of progress with Nature Magic at least.* “Anyway, during that incident, I attempted to free a few of the Cenarius' people who had been captured of the Taint that being forced to drink Satyr blood had given them. It wasn't easy. The taint within them almost fought back. I was able to eventually combine spells to clear the Taint from four of them.”

Tyrande's eyes widened at that, but Harry hastened on, while the Frostsabers all around them were all listening in some confusion, having no understanding of the terms the two were using. "But it put me on my rear, and if we assume that these Frostmaul giants were born with that kind of taint, it will be stronger. And their bodies are way larger than the nymphs and keepers I freed. I don't think I have the strength to do it. Not with my current bag of tricks."

At that, Tyrande nodded, thinking hard. She was pleased that Harry was willing to acknowledge the fact that he wasn't all-powerful, something few magic users in her life had been able to do. But, that just left them with violence as the only solution. When she said so, Harry nodded. Then Tyrande frowned. "Wait, what do you mean you combined your spells?"

"I basically had to use a spell that creates a... call it an aura of goodness I guess? Where I come from there were these creatures that fed off the souls of the individual. When they attacked, they brought with them an aura that suppressed any good and happy emotions. This spell creates those good emotions, uses those to power an attack spell of sorts. I coupled that with a spell that allowed me to invade minds..."

"What!!" Tyrande had previously been able to ignore the fact that Harry was a magic user thanks to his actions and his acquaintance with Cenarius. But the very idea of entering someone's mind? That was horrendous.

Harry took Tyrande's anger in stride just nodding his head. "I know, I don't like it either. But where I come from there are spells that allow one to invade another individual's minds. I sued it this time to send the aura of goodness from the other spell into the minds and then the bodies of the Tainted victims. It worked but was very hard." Harry looked at the Kaldorei high priestess then shrugged, and decided to get this over with, somewhat like pulling off a scab. "There is even a spell that will allow the user to completely crush the minds of the individual it uses it on. Only people with strong willpower can toss it off."

Tyrande stared at him, then breathed in, slowly controlling her initial rush of fear and disgust. "Very Well. I am grateful that you are being so upfront about these spells of yours. And yet, that does not make me feel any better about anyone having access to that kind of spell in the first place."

"For what it's worth, I agree, and I'm utterly pants at that spell. You have to have this desire, this need, to dominate other people, and I don't have that." Harry shrugged wanly. "I am in fact the exact opposite."

Tyrande cocked her head thinking about it, then said slowly, "You have a propensity to rebel."

"More to go my own way than actively rebel, but yes. I didn't grow up with it more's the pity, acting out more often would've made my life a lot easier, especially if I started to ask questions about what was going on around me, but I didn't. Yet now, I am very much antiauthoritarian in many ways."

Tyrande slowly nodded again, then her lips quirked slightly. "I would wager, that being around Cenarius has been a trial then."

"Not really. He isn't all that authoritative." Harry looked at Tyrande anxiously, understanding that had been a trap to see if he did indeed know Cenarius. "I know Kaldorei have problems with Arcane users, and I can tell my earlier words are still bothering you. Er..."

Shaking her head slowly, Tyrande raised a hand, stopping Harry from speaking. "I can tell that you have met Cenarius, both from your reply to that trap and more. I can tell further that you feel remorse even for the existence of those spells. Simply swear to me that you will not use them on me or my people, and I will be happy."

"What do you want me to swear by?" Harry asked warily. He'd never liked magical oaths, understanding just how badly they could be abused, but Harry reminded himself that Tyrande wasn't just a random Kaldorei Warriress, she was the highest religious and social figure of the Kaldorei race. Getting her on his side was an extremely important thing.

"Swear by Elune," Tyrande answered promptly. "Swear you are no threat to me and my people. That will be enough. And in time, I will even be able to use that to aid in introducing you to other Kaldorei, if you wish."

Blinking, Harry looked from the priestess up to the moon above them, and then smirked shaking his head wryly. "Heh. I suppose that is appropriate." With that he held his hand to his heart, and, looking earnestly at Tyrande, intoned, "I, Harry Potter, do swear on the light of the moon and the Goddess Elune, that I am not a threat to you and your people through my own actions or magic."

Tyrande looked at Harry as he spoke, and her eyes saw the glow of truth around him. Whatever else occurred, Harry was no danger to the Kaldorei. At least through his own actions. Danger might come to her people because of Harry's existence, but not directly from him. "Elune has heard your words Harry Potter, and declared them truth."

"Well, that's good to know," Harry said, frowning as he hadn't felt anything there. Still, Tyrande seemed much happier than she had been a moment ago, so Harry wouldn't question it. "So what do we do now?"

"While I do have more questions about you, and your past, I do think we should begin to move." Tyrande leaned her head back, closing her luminescent eyes for a moment as if the rays of the moon were coming from the sun, and she was enjoying their worth. Regardless, she looked up at the sky, which was beginning to lighten and frowned. "I would prefer that we moved at night, is that a problem?"

Harry shook his head. "I have spells that will allow me to see in the dark as well as I can during the day, and my friend is, as you noticed, a serpent."

Chuckling dutifully at the small joke Tyrande got to her feet, saying farewell to Shy-rotam and the other Frostsabers. Although the cub and she had bonded, Tyrande would not bring her along on this mission. It was simply too dangerous, and she would not have the time to look out for her either.

The cub mewled at that, wrestling with Tyrande's foot in an effort to stop her from leaving, but eventually, the tiny cub's father came over and picked her up by the scruff of the neck, carrying her away. "//Your time to hunt will come daughter. But no hunter can find the trails of his or her prey with a young one bounding around their feet.//"

//Mrmrmm....// The cub made a noise that was like a verbal pout and snarl combined and Tyrande spent another moment to rub her head before taking her leave.

"So where are we going?" Harry asked. As Tyrande had been 'fighting' with Shy-rotam, he had finished his makeshift ward-stone and had placed the rune stone down in front of the cave. Like the ones Harry had used to defend his tree house before learning Nature Magic, it would keep the cave from being found by anyone who wished harm upon the Frostsabers within.

"We will need to see what tracks these creatures left, then track them to their nearest lair. From there, we can decide whether or not there are indeed enough of them in these mountains to warrant the kind of campaign that our Frostsaber friends seem to indicate is necessary. As much as they do not want to admit it, there could be far fewer Frostmaul giants out there, given how impotent against them the Frostsabers are," Tyrande replied.

Harry blinked at her, then pulled out a stick from the ground, set it lengthwise on his palm, and said, "Points me nearest Frostmaul giants."

"That cannot possibly work, Harry," Tyrande chuckled. "You are making a joke..."

She paused as the spinning stick stopped spinning and pointed in a direction that was through the side of a portion of the tiny valley and up a ways. "They're that way." Harry smirked at her. "Will that be all, Miss?" He asked, as if he was a merchant trying to sell her something. "A warming cloak perhaps, you look a little chilly."

"Actually, I'm quite fine," Tyrande retorted. "My people tend not to notice the weather as much as yours," she taunted back, beginning to understand why Cenarius had enjoyed being around the young human. He was like a flower almost, so vibrant and bursting with energy. Quite unlike her own people, who tended to be more stolid like the great trees they so revered.

"That spell isn't all-powerful" Harry added, ignoring her jibe. "Initially it was just supposed to point north, acting like a compass. Now, while it's good for finding specific people, it will be messed up by any active magic in the area. It also wouldn't point you toward, say a good meal, as that's too existential, although you can use it to find fresh water. Nor can you use

it to find the nearest threat. That's not specific enough, nor is the idea of a 'safe place' or something because it can't tell what danger you want to be safe from."

"Could you teach me how to ward myself against it? If you can use it, that means an Arcana user might be able to use it, correct?"

Harry frowned, looking over as Quetzal joined them, slithering out of the trees to look down at the pointing stick in Harry's hand. "I don't know enough about Arcana magic to say but I know Cenarius was able to use nature magic to hide from it. I tried to use it to find him and once to try to find Lunara. All it did was point to the nearest darn tree."

At the look of annoyance on his face, Tyrande snorted. "And let me guess, Lunara was hiding from you for some reason? Something related to her rather... robust sense of humor. I can well remember the tricks she would play on Malfurion when he was studying under Cenarius. He still is not a fan of the color bright orange or seeing bows in a person's hair."

"Heh, yep, although I avoided the bow in the hair thing. Thank you I'm going to have nightmares about that now," Harry replied dryly.

Tyrande chuckled again at that before sighing, becoming somewhat more somber. "I must admit, Harry Potter, your attitude and oath is putting me at ease. Yet the very magic that allows us to speak and how much magic you used in battle continues to bother the part of me that went through the war against the Burning Legion and Azshara and then had to deal with the remaining Arcana users who refused to give up their power despite the dangers."

Harry nodded thoughtfully, remembering what he had been told of the disaster on Northrend and before that the banishment of the Highborne. "I understand, and that is part of why I was so willing to give you the oath I did. Beyond that, all I ask is that you judge me by my words and actions, not by my magic."

"That is what I am trying to do. Alas, even I am not entirely free of prejudices as I would like to think. Still, I will do my best Harry Potter, I can promise you that."

The friendly smile she bestowed on him made Harry grin back, although thankfully by this point Harry had gotten his hormones under control, so it didn't cause him to break out in a blush. He then looked down to the stick in his hand then the direction it was pointing. "In that case, I think we should be off."

The stick pointed to one side of the entrance to this hitting little area of trees, but Harry figured that the Frostmaul giants certainly wouldn't be able to get around as easily as he and Quetzal, or even Tyrande could. So there had to be some kind of path leading to wherever the nearest Frostmaul giants were, which he assumed as Tyrande had, would lead to a village or central town of some kind.

At first, Harry rode alone on Quetzal's back, while Tyrande marsh along beside them, keeping up with the fast-moving snake's speed well enough. "How is it that a snake is so active during winter?"

"§A heating spell,§" Quetzal replied. "§Perhaps the greatest magical creation known to humanity.§"

"Humanity? Is that what you're species calls itself?"

Harry nodded, then looked over at her. "You know, if we're going to play 20 questions, perhaps it would be easier you rode as well?"

"What is 20 questions?"

Harry chuckled, and told her about the game, and after a few more moments, Tyrande agreed that it probably would be easier if she joined Harry on Quetzal's back. "Can he really carry us both so easily?"

"We'll have to get off Quetzal when we come to cliff, but other than that, he should be able to handle our weight with ease."

As Tyrande climbed aboard Quetzal, Harry glanced up at the one moon visible at the moment. It was a crescent shape at the moment, larger and closer than the moon back on Earth, and far whiter too. *No wonder it is called the White Lady. Although I still think Blue Child is far too silly sounding for the name of a moon.* "I've been told of Elune, Cenarius' mother, but seeing her like this, without clouds or trees to get in the way, makes you really think that there could be truly something godly about it. Mystical anyway."

Tyrande followed Harry's eyes, then smiled faintly. "Would you like to know about the faith of the Elune?"

Harry nodded slowly. "Yes, I think I would. I've heard about her as an individual, but you are the first actual worshiper of the Elune I have met."

"Very well, I will explain." Tyrande's lips quirked. "But this will count as your first question to me. Is that acceptable?"

Harry laughed and nodded, and Tyrande began to explain about Elune, the worship of her, and why she was the patron goddess of the night elves. Indeed, nights like this, when half of the moon was unseen, and the other half starkly luminescent, were seen as the most spiritual nights by her people. Harry asked a few questions of his own during this explanation, and always worded them as a statement rather than a question.

When she finished, Harry leaned back against Quetzal's head, which he had been using as a backrest as the snake moved along, its head and upper body held off the ground. "That was interesting, thank you."

“I suppose it is only fair to ask you in turn about your religion? Who do you pray to?”

Harry barked a laugh. “I don’t pray to anyone, Miss. I was an orphan, sort of, long story. But my relatives thought of themselves as following the predominant religion from where I came from, but they certainly didn’t practice what they pretended to believe in. My own people, Arcana users like myself, believe in a kind of ancestor worship coupled with hero worship. I never really espoused that belief either.”

“But from what you’re saying, the belief in Elune is, while in some ways more formal is also much more personal. But perhaps that’s not quite the right word. There is a more direct connection between your goddess and you, and your people then there has ever been in my world. A lot of people believe in God without any evidence, whereas you know your God exists.” Harry then smiled. “And now for my question...”

“§I think it is time to put questions to one side and prepare yourselves,§” Quetzal said, frowning and hissing the words out in amusement. He pointed forward. “§I just saw something large moving out there somewhere. Just on the edge of my heat vision.§” Despite seemingly being made of stone and frost, there was something within the Frostmaul giants that created enough heat for Quetzal to sense in the dark.

Harry nodded, and gestured with his hand, about to touch Tyrande to use a spell to hide her. Then he paused, looking at her for permission. “Er... I am going to cast a spell on you. It will hide you by basically covering you with a chameleon covering. Don’t be alarmed, and don’t move too fast, or else the spell will begin to fail.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Tyrande nodded. “This should be interesting. Let us see.”

With that Harry touched Tyrande briefly on the forehead, and Tyrande shivered as if she had been splashed with cold water. Looking down at herself, Tyrande watched the spell as it began to cover her body. Then afterwards she could see her body again, but now it seemed as if it was covered by some kind of film, which apparently would hide her from sight. In contrast, Harry’s face was still visible to her, but the rest of his body was simply not there. It was almost eerie, to be frank. Then his face was covered with the same kind of spell that he had just used on Tyrande, but she could still see his features through it. “That is terrifying,” she admitted.

“It’s part of my preferred method of combat,” Harry answered, shrugging his shoulders, though Tyrande could not make that out thanks to his invisibility cloak. “I prefer to at least start any fight I can from ambush. Makes it all easier. I had enough of standing up and facing my opponents in open combat when I was younger.”

Tyrande nodded, as that made sense to her. While a human might have sneered at the idea of ambushes as dishonorable Harry was pleased to see that she didn’t have that response. Perhaps as a Kaldorei that simply makes sense.

The two of them moved forwards around the bend in the path finding the way in front of them suddenly slopping upwards and around several more bends in the bare stone of the mountain. With Quetzal following they spread out, putting some distance between them on the path, which had widened the moment they came around the bend and beginning to head upwards. About five minutes after Harry had used magic to hide them, they spotted what Quetzal had seen. The path turned there once more to reveal several large stairs seemingly hacked out of the mountain leading up to an open area. Several Frostmaul giants there moving around, their movements just barely visible from the path below.

Luckily, the Frostmaul giants didn't seem to be on watch or anything, just milling about in the massive area, which Harry felt was about the size of a Quidditch field. Along the interior wall of the area was a series of large caverns which looked as if they had been carved out of the stone by equally large, very strong hands.

Harry estimated there were nine Frostmaul giants standing around the openings to the caverns, shouting and growling at one another. It was hard to make them out given how they all looked generally alike, and were somewhat bunched up. But they didn't seem to be doing anything that Harry could see. They were just standing around. *Almost like the worst guards you could ever imagine*, he thought, then whispered out his assessment. "There could be something important in those caves, something that can tell us more about these creatures."

Tyrande nodded agreement, frowning slightly. "How good is your camouflage spell?"

"Invisibility, please," Harry replied, affecting an annoyed air for a moment, before sending her a smirk, causing Tyrande to wrinkle her brow at him.

*Are all humans so... facially emotive? Among the Kaldorei, showing emotions like that, especially shifting from serious to teasing and such, would have been shown in their tone of voice and their ears, rather than in their face. It's fascinating, but his emotions shift so quickly that it is somewhat off-putting. In an amusing way to be sure, but one I doubt many of my people would be able to get used to quickly.* With Kaldorei, especially with combat so possible, any emotions would have been pushed down or disregarded beyond the desire for battle.

"At least in my case," Harry went on, unaware of Tyrande's rambling thoughts. "The one I used on you is a Disillusion spell, it makes is an illusion of what you are standing in front of and can be negated if you move too quickly or pass over loose stones. My cloak hides me from anyone attempting to find me in order to do me harm, and I can cover our tracks in the snow with another spell. Why?"

"Would it not be better to know what we are facing entirely, rather than just assume the nine guards are the majority?" Tyrande replied dryly.

She seemed to have a sort of dry sarcastic wit, Harry reflected. Not that he minded. He did think that Quetzal did sarcasm better though and said so.

“Ouch,” Tyrande muttered, then she chuckled. “Nonetheless, my point remains. We need to know what we are facing, how should we go about it?”

“Well I think I’ll just sneak past them then,” Harry shrugged, the movement once more unseen. “You two wait here, and I will report on what I find.”

“I don’t like the idea of you going in there alone,” Tyrande began, but then sighed. “However, if you think that my own invisibility won’t stand up to moving through them, then I suppose we are left without a choice.”

She moved herself over slowly backwards, then with a rope and grapnel from her pouch, she moved herself slowly up a nearby promontory. There, she noticed that climbing had seemingly been too much for Harry’s spell. *Still, I might not be a Sentinel, but that doesn’t mean I cannot move unseen without magical aid.*

Knowing that fast movement drew the eye, Tyrande slowly pulled off of her bow and quiver, setting the quiver down in front of her. Still moving slowly, she placed one arrow on her bow, pulling it back to her ear, where Tyrande held it motionless. *I am rather grateful that I have kept up my training these past thousand years, or else I would be quite sore right now,* Tyrande thought ruefully.

Having left the others behind, Harry had moved forward as quickly as he could, trusting to his cloak and the spell hiding his footprints. Slinking in between the Giants was hard given their size and how they were constantly moving, stamping around and roaring at one another. At one point he had even had to duck and roll straight between two gesticulating giants, entering the first of the caves.

It was a very short trip. In fact, the cave only went about perhaps a dozen paces before enlarging into what looked like a cavern, which connected to the other two entrances. Harry had thought that perhaps this would be a kind of home for the Giants, and it did look sort of like that, except for one thing. Or several things really, Harry reflected as he looked around.

One, beyond a single ditch and a series of beds, there was nothing homely about this area. No paintings on the wall, no interesting designs even. Nothing to show that the Frostmaul giants had anything like an artistic bone in their bodies. Nothing like the pictures he had seen in history books about Neanderthals or Cro-Magnons. Indeed, there wasn’t even any kind of firepit, although there were several animal corpses laid out in a heap in the middle of the area.

Nor were there any children or women around. *Unless their males and females look exactly alike? A gender neutral race?* Harry thought, before shrugging. Beyond that, there were another twelve giants inside, Most of them sleeping on massive slabs carved out from the side of the huge area, with one of them tossing fitfully from side to side.

The exception to this was the largest of the Frostmaul giants in the cave and this Frostmaul giant lay next of the pile of animal corpses in the center of the cave. He, it, Harry

wasn't certain, was, at least half again the weight of the others. All of that weight was in his shoulders and stomach, rather than in height, and for just a moment, Harry wondered if perhaps that meant he – the giant still had a beard - was a female. *Weren't dwarves supposed to be the ones whose females had beards?*

A loud crack resounded then, and Harry nearly tripped, staring at the overweight giant in shock. As Harry watched, the Frostmaul giant split. It was that simple. One moment, it was a single large giant with a massive potbelly and huge shoulders, and the next moment, it was two giants, each only slightly shorter than normal.

They growled and roared at one another, then began to fight as they rolled to their feet. This went on for a few moments, but eventually, the fight subsided as the other Frostmaul giants, woken up by this activity, roared in amusement at them. The two now shorter giants growled back, before grabbing at some of the stone below them and chomping it into bits, then they made a meal out of some animal that must've had the misfortune of running into their fellows. Stone and meat went down together, without even a fire to warm the meet up, let alone actually cook it.

*All right, that wasn't what I expected but...* Harry's thoughts paused suddenly, his eyes arrested. At the foot of one of the two Frostmaul giants who had been created via division from the first, there was a small luminous black kind of stone, almost hidden under the carcasses of the various dead animals. *That looks almost like the kind of corrupted stone that I saw before with the satyrs. Looks like Tyrande was right. But I don't know if I would call them corrupted by the stone. More created by the Taint itself.*

Regardless, Harry had enough information. There were now fourteen more Frostmaul giants inside the caves, coupled with the nine outside. *And if that black stone is part of how these Frostmaul giants are created, then perhaps destroying this place will halt their creation.*

With that in mind, Harry returned to Tyrande, noting her and Quetzal's new position, although with difficulty. *Good grief, I don't think Kaldorei need my help to be invisible,* Harry thought ruefully, only able to make out her figure with difficulty and only because it was now approaching dawn, providing him with more light to see than even his night vision spell.

In contrast to the poised, ready Kaldorei, Quetzal seemed relaxed. He leaned his head against the rock right beside her. Moving in that direction was tough, but soon, Harry was perched beside Tyrande, scratching his friend's head behind the eyes, which the snake seemed to like.

"And what have you discovered?" she asked in a whisper, looking up at him.

Harry explained what he had seen, and Tyrande scowled angrily. "I see. This stone you have described is very disturbing. Especially if it is somehow involved in the creation of the Frostmaul giants, surely another sign of the Old God imprisoned below. Regardless, it is time to stop investigating, and start attacking."

This group of Frostmaul giants were not only examples of the breed, but the closest to where the Frostsabers had been. She looked up at the sky, frowning slightly as she saw the sun rising over the horizon. "I could've wished we could have attacked during the night. I can more easily call upon the power of Elune when the moon is out. Yet I will have enough tricks under my sleeve regardless."

Harry shrugged, noting that Tyrande was practically vibrating in place with the eagerness to be about it. "We could wait, but I really don't see a point to it."

"With your abilities added to my own, nor do I. How are we going to go about this however?"

Harry shrugged. "Prepare an ambush, wipe them out. Pretty simple frankly. Although I wish we could use the tactic of just bringing that cave down on top of them. But the way they were eating stone as well as meat, I'd wager they could probably just chew their way out."

"Truly, it would be like trying trying to trap the mouse in a cake," Tyrande murmured another faint smile on her face. "Yet how then are we going to trap them?"

A few moments of discussion later and Tyrande was waiting once more as Harry moved around the area, dropping several runes he had created behind.

Most of the runes he knew wouldn't really work on the Frostmaul giants, because they were, well, made of frost and stone, but entrapping or paralyzing runes would probably work just as well as they would on anyone else. For himself, fire had worked on them if the heat was hot enough, and Reducto spells as well. Harry put the runes around the edge of the open ground in front of the cavern and then some more in front of where Tyrande was situated before moving back to the base of the stone steps.

With the trap actually created, he now baited it.

Using a conjuration spell, he created several hundred giant rabbits, each the size of a normal Frostsaber. He did so right in the center of the Frostmaul giant giants who were outside the cave.

They took one look at them, then as a single creature bellowed, raising their massive clubs and bringing them down as they roared in delight. Instantly the Frostmaul giants inside began to boil out, several to a tunnel, showing why they had three entrances instead of one. They all began to attack the bunnies, roaring in rage and delight mixed.

Instantly Tyrande began her attack, thinking, *I do hope that Harry's conjuration spell isn't pulling those poor creatures from somewhere else. Such a waste of animal life would be rather sad.* Her arrows, blessed by Elune to penetrate anything they hit, took a giant in the eye. The giant stumbled, then collapsed, but this wasn't noticed by his companions, so delighted were they with the carnage they were causing. She was able to get off five more shots, downing

two more giants and wounding another, although even blessed, her arrows were having difficulty penetrating the Frostmaul giant's skin.

But by that point, the Frostmaul giants had noticed the dead comrades in their midst and turned, roaring in rage and fury as they charged toward where Tyrande was on her perch. The giants tried to climb up the edge of the rocky promontory, only to run into the wards Harry had set up. The first few giants froze, their hands tearing into the stone even as they ran into the paralysis wards. Two more giants climbed over their frozen fellows. But Quetzal smacked them off, the giants being forced to use their hands and feet to climb up the mountain face meant that they couldn't protect themselves from the snake's tail.

As the giants began to turn their attention to Tyrande, Harry attacked from behind. "Reducto," He murmured, the cutting spell, which he was now overpowering thanks to having run into the magical resistance of the Frostmaul giants before, lashed out into the mass of the Frostmaul giants. His spell cut into several giants, maiming several but killing none. His next Reducto though downed almost as many as the first had injured permanently. At that point the giants seemed torn, debating on which enemy to attack, but since Harry was still under his Invisibility cloak, the spells seemed to come from nowhere, despite the fact he was standing out in the open.

"Bombarda!" Harry went on, sending explosive spells into the mass of giants, while Tyrande kept up her attack at range.

Soon the last of the giants was down, and Harry, still invisible moved forward, making certain all of the Frostmaul giants were dead. Tyrande scaled down from her former position, with Quetzal moving after her. "Well, that was relatively easy," Harry quipped.

"These creatures aren't intelligent enough to require any grand battle plan, and they seem extremely susceptible to simple ruses and confusion. I have to wonder if they would even have noticed my depredations if they could have continued slaying your conjured creatures. By the way, those beasts are not taken from somewhere else, are they?" She actually glared at Harry as she said that.

"Heh, didn't think of you as someone who would like bunnies, I thought you were a cat woman," Harry teased, but when Tyrande's ears flicked down and her eyes narrowed he went on hurriedly. "Er, no. That would be a summoning spell that would bring a living animal to me. A summoning spell has to be specific, and I honestly only know how to summon snakes and mice."

At that, Tyrande's look became somewhat more wary than angry. "Why mice?"

"Something to feed the snakes for their help of course," Harry replied, as if it was the most logical thing in the world. "You can't eat conjured food, you know."

Tyrande kept glaring for a moment then laughed, shaking her head, her ears standing upright once more. "Truly, you are a droll fellow, Harry Potter. You remind me very much of a young Malfurion, before he found his calling or I mine. I have always felt a decent sense of humor is necessary in this life." Her eyes narrowed then. "I just hope that your sense of humor does not include practical jokes. Or those mice. If it does I will stick my double-bladed swords into places you will not like, am I clear?"

Chuckling Harry held up his hand, glad that the woman was willing to joke with him, despite the wariness he could still see in her eyes when he used magic. *Yet it's my magic that makes her uneasy, not the fact I'm a different race. Well, my magic and the fact we don't actually know one another very well,* Harry thought ruefully. *Still she seems open to being friends at least. Although, dropping her boyfriend's name... was I accidentally looking where I shouldn't again? Something to be aware of.* "Duly noted, Miss."

Tyrande then turned her head towards the caverns. "But now, show me this black stone."

Grimacing, Harry nodded, and after asking Quetzal to stay outside on guard he turned to lead the way towards the nearest cavern entrance. The snake grumbled a bit, "Oh yes, now that the transportation and fighting is done, why don't we just leave the snake out in the cold. Nevermind that it's utterly unusual for a snake to be around in wintertime, let alone out and about all this snow. Oh woe is me..."

Turning, Harry cast a warming charm on the snake again, and heard his hissing turn into one of pleasure. "Better?"

"§Oh yes, that's the stuffs,§" the snake murmured, for all the world like a druggie that had just gotten a hit.

Harry frowned a little at that, whispering to Tyrande, "Is it possible for a snake to get addicted to feeling like he's in the sun all the time?"

While Quetzal hissed out, "§And what's wrong with that!?!§" Tyrande shrugged although she was smiling at the interaction, and the fact that she could still understand the snake.

*Oh yes, just his ability to translate things is going to turn out to be a major boon for my people, if I can get them to accept him.* "I do not know, though I confess to not having much to do with snakes or any kind of reptiles over my lifetime. I have always, as you put it, been a cat person, although it has been nearly 1000 years since I last bonded with a single animal. My duties as high priestess have allowed me much time for such things."

"I've heard about the Sentinels and their bonded animals. How does that work actually?"

That talk took them to the entrance to the cavern, as Tyrande explained the process through which a Sentinel. With the use of water from the cup of Elune could come to almost share the thoughts of her chosen animal. The two would then act as one, with the Sentinel able to direct and ride the animal in question, who would also be able to convey his or her own thoughts to the Sentinel. "But only in emotions and images, not words like your translation spell allowed with the Frostsabers. It will be fascinating to discover if other mounts have the ability to communicate so well," she enthused.

"They should, given the intelligence of the Frostsabers. But I understand most of them are cats too, and as I've always thought of myself as more of a dog person. So will it be hate on sight if I ever meet one of your Sentinels?" Harry teased, although there was some seriousness below that. Harry was indeed worried he would be either attacked on sight as a stranger or as an Arcana user by other Kaldorei.

"You will not be attacked out of the blue, never fear. The Nature Magic I sense about you would preclude that. And once the two of us get to know one another, I will further vouch for you to my people," Tyrande soothed, somewhat amused by his joke about being a dog person. She couldn't see it, honestly.

Yet as they entered the cavern proper, Tyrande's attitude turned serious. She frowned, looking around, and shaking her head, holding up a hand to stop Harry's current joke. "I feel a subtle, almost cloying sense of decay perhaps, in the air. It is hard to put into words."

Harry just nodded. Although he didn't feel it as Tyrande did, he too knew the black stone was unnatural.

Moving forward, Harry banished the remains of the animals the Frostmaul giants had been eating, showing her the stone underneath. With the carcasses out of the way the black stone was larger than he had expected, almost bulging out from the ground of the cavern in a low dome-like shape about the same size as his outstretched arm, although shaped more like a long ovoid. And as Harry looked at it, within its depths Harry could see a faint throbbing almost, like a pulse from the stone itself. "Is it... alive?"

"No," Tyrande said coldly, her lips peeled back slightly in a small scowl. "Although that does not mean that it is any less foul!" She moved around it for a time, frowning, then looking over at Harry. "I do not suppose that you could create something for me to write with, some kind of parchment and ink?"

"I have parchment in my trunk, and a pen too," Harry replied, tapping the small square box hanging from his neck.

A second later, she watched as he once more enlarged the trunk, rifling around inside it. Tyrande had seen this before when Harry had prepared to make the 'runic arrays' that he had put down to help guard the Frostsabers' cave, but she hadn't watched closely, having been

busy playing with Shy-rotam. Now once more Harry's magic interested her. It is so much more utilitarian than most any magic I have seen before. Fascinating.

Tyrande's fascination increased alongside her confusion when Harry handed over a pen, Tyrande looked at it in confusion, then at Harry's gesture pushed down at the top, and watched as a bit came out of the bottom. She looked at it in wonder, turning it this way and that, seeing the liquid move ever so slightly inside. "Amazing! And what is this material?"

"Plastic, but don't ask me how it's made, I don't think I could explain, since I don't know myself." When Tyrande looked at Harry in confusion, he shrugged. "Could you explain everything to me about how to make boots or jewelry?"

"Beyond making it shiny, and making them fit the person, no," Tyrande conceded before sighing take his paper that Harry had handed her and drawing a description of the rock along with her own impressions of it.

"What are you doing?"

"Just because I am on sabbatical does not mean that my duty to my people stops entirely. I must send a message to the Council to make certain that they are on the lookout for stones like this. Especially if there is any connection between it and the satyrs and their own activities. But do not worry, I will not say anything about you or your abilities."

While wondering how she was going to send the message, Harry just nodded, staring at the stone himself in thought. "... I'm going to try something. It might not work, but it shouldn't hurt."

Tyrande looked up from her note-writing in confusion but watched as Harry held out his hand. Using the memories of his happy time in the forest, with Cenarius, Quetzal and Lunara, Harry whispered out the words for his spell. "Expecto Patronum."

From his outstretched blasted out a giant, silvery phoenix causing Harry to start surprise. This was the first time he'd used the Patronus spell unmodified since his rebirth, and a part of him realized he shouldn't have been surprised it had changed forms, but he had been. And besides being a different form, this new shape seemed both somehow more Harry's in some fashion. His father's Animagus form had seemed a connection to his past family, which he had longed for when he first learned the spell. The phoenix though, that connected to his life now.

Harry could also tell the Patronus was more powerful. The feeling of goodness, of fierce protectiveness and joy blasted out from the magical construct, filling the cave to a degree Harry had never felt before.

Tyrande gasped in delight, staring at the thing. It is as if Elune's light was given form, Although that wasn't the case. As inviting and protective as Elune was, never had calling upon her power brought along this feeling of such joy. Goodness, yes, but not joy and happiness in that act alone.

The Patronus flew twice around the cavern, then to Harry's surprise, ignored him to alight down next to Tyrande staring at her in curiosity. *Huh, it's rather more curious and alive acting than most Patronus I've seen. Is it because of Azeroth's ambient magic?*

Tentatively, Tyrande reached out a hand, and began to stroke its plumage, astonished to almost feel the sensation of real feathers under her fingers. "This is amazing! What kind of spell is this, Harry Potter?"

"Do you remember me saying that I had a spell which could scare off those soul eaters back in... where I had lived previously? This is it," Harry gestured, and ordered the Patronus to attack the black rock. "Now, if I had ordered my Patronus to attack a Dementor, the Dementor would have been destroyed, let's see what happens hear."

Unfortunately, as the Phoenix turned in the direction of the stone, it already began to lose its corporeal form. Harry grimaced, and reached out a hand, closing his eyes and concentrating, pushing more of his magic into the spell, further empowering it. With that, the creature of light flashed towards the stone, landing on top of it.

But a bare instant later it was almost instantly dispelled in a pop of air and blazing light, so loud it hurt Tyrande's ears.

Harry gasped as the blowback from having his spell broken like that hit him, along with the normal tiredness from holding such a power-intensive spell. He stumbled, but Tyrande caught his arm, glaring at the stone. She could see gouges that had been almost burned out of the stone by the phoenix's talons. These gouges were currently glowing almost with black energy, like bleeding wounds. *Or was the stone at one point a liquid? Is it more like ice instead of stone, or is it somehow volcanic in nature?*

Whatever the case, and she made a point to remember to put that concept down, Harry's attempt to destroy it had not worked.

As she helped the young human over to the cavern entrance and leaned him against the wall there, Tyrande mused aloud, "But I think you are on the right track, a **cleansing** is what is needed here, not an attempt to destroy it. Destroying it, unless we could do away with it entirely, would simply leave it in smaller bits, its nature would not change.

Tyrande cocked her head staring at the stone and frowning in thought, one finger going up to an ear and gently moving along the underside of it in what Harry recognized as a thinking

gesture. "Silver," she said aloud, "silver and Elune's blessing. Do you think you could conjure true silver into being?"

Harry nodded. "I can transfigure something into silver or conjure it, but it won't last very long. Hard metals, especially rare ones, like that are tougher than say changing one stone to another or chancing something into iron or steel. I'm not certain that conjured silver will do for what you want."

"At the moment, I'm not even certain that what I want will work," Tyrande admitted. "However, looking at that stone, I am more positive than ever that it is a foul, unnatural thing, and should be destroyed." She looked back towards the entrance to the cavern, then back to the stone "I only hope that there are not too many similar sites."

"In relation to the size of these mountain ranges, there probably won't be, but even one is bad," Harry agreed. He stood up, pushing away from the wall of the cavern, then looking at Tyrande. "I think I might be able to destroy that stone through continued use of the Patronus charm, but I don't know, and even if it worked, it might put me on my rear for several days. If I could figure out a way to use Nature Magic to power the darn spell maybe it would be better," he grumbled, smacking his hand against the side of the stone. "But I don't know how."

"After less than a year with Cenarius even being able to feel Nature Magic is amazing, Harry. Do not denigrate your achievements. Malfurion took nearly a century before he could do the same to any extent," Tyrande soothed, a faint smile on her face as she remember that time, when she, Illidan, and Malfurion were young. *Things were much simpler then, before they began to fight for my hand, before I found my calling as a priestess, and before Azshara's fall from grace.*

With a shake of her head, Tyrande turned her attention to more practical matters. "First, I think that we need to open this cavern. Do you think you could carve out a large enough hole in the ceiling? Without bringing the whole thing down," she added hastily. "That would rather defeat the purpose."

Harry frowned staring up at the ceiling. "Maybe a slow melting spell, or a drilling spell of some kind? The whole not wanting to bring the whole cavern down does limit my choices. But yes I can do that, I think. Just will take a bit of research and trial and error."

"What can I do to help?" Tyrande asked earnestly.

Harry's stomach grumbled, and he shrugged. "Prepare a campfire and some food?"

"I had forgotten for a time how young you are," Tyrande laughed, shaking her head. "The young are always hungry, I suppose, regardless of race."

Harry rolled his eyes but didn't reply. It was true, after all. His body was young and the whole idea about teenagers being walking stomachs had some firm basis in fact.

By the time Harry had figured out what kind of spell he wanted to use and had begun the work on creating a tunnel up through the ceiling of the cavern to let in daylight, Tyrande had returned, and had begun to cook over the fire. She had found some fresh herbs somehow, and had trapped a hare, which was cooking over the fire as Harry came out of the cavern. But that wasn't as surprising as the fact that a giant owl almost as large as Harry was sitting on a rocky perch nearby, as Tyrande put the finishing touches on a message, and tied it to his foot.

The giant bird turned staring at Harry, fluffing up its wings, and looking at him as Harry slumped down next to the fire. "All done. Controlling that spell was a little more difficult than I had thought though." Harry had decided to use the Gouging Spell, which he had initially learned in Herbology of all things, . But continually using it through the bedrock of the mountain had been tiring. "But where did the bird come from?"

"I called for him," Tyrande said simply, watching as the bird continued to stare at Harry, then made a happy sounding hoot, as Harry moved over and began to stroke its plumage. A bird like this would normally not even be pleased to be in the presence of most Kaldorei, let alone a human, a being from someplace beyond the forest. But the touch of Nature Magic within Harry was such that enjoyed his presence. "It will take my message back to the council."

"And will they then send help up here?" Harry asked, suddenly wary. He knew that the majority of Kaldorei would not be nearly as accepting of him and his magic as Tyrande was, regardless of his connection to Cenarius. He might get a pass from the druids who looked to Cenarius as their ultimate teacher, but not from the rest of their society.

"No. That would be pointless and would interrupt my time away from my guardians and fellow leaders, which I am not willing to do. I merely told them to be on the lookout for more black stone is all." Tyrande looked at Harry, understanding his worry, but not addressing it. It was true after all, her people would not be happy to see someone using Arcana-type magic as openly as Harry did. And few among them would understand that it came from an entirely different type of school than that which had been previously used by the Highborne.

Instead Tyrande deliberately changed the subject, asking "Are you strong enough to start to try conjuring silver?"

Harry thought about it, then asked, "Why silver? Where I come from it has a certain defensive property against one or two types of so-called dark creatures, but..."

"Here it is the metal most easily blessed by Elune. Once that is accomplished, the silver has some holy properties. With that directly touching the black stone, and with the moon above, I believe that I can call upon Elune to erase the taint of that stone."

Harry's eyes widened at that, and he suddenly nodded, looking eager. This would be an entirely different kind of magic, one that he had never seen before, not even from Cenarius and his family. Though they revered Elune, none of them called upon her for their power. "I'll start experimenting. I don't know which method of transmutation will work best, but I can find out," he said earnestly. "But that means that we will have to stay here until nightfall, right?"

Tyrande nodded, and sniffing the air, moved over to the fire, removing the skinned hare from its bed of fresh herbs. "This is ready". The two of them ate in silence, both of them lost in their own thoughts, but strangely it wasn't an uncomfortable silence for either of them.

After having a piece of the hare, the owl took off, winging through the air with a long hoot trailing behind it. Quetzal, after demanding another heating spell from Harry, curled up around him, warming Harry in turn, as he began to take several flat stones out of his trunk along with an etching kit, working on a series of protective wards to put up during the night. Then Harry began to experiment, conjuring into being a small silver pin, and then transfiguring a piece of stone from nearby of similar size.

It turned out that transfigured silver lasted longer, although both lasted far longer than Harry had expected. In his old world, transfiguring anything to silver or metal never lasted very long. And conjuration lasted for even less time. That was alchemy territory. But here, the rules seemed a bit more elastic. The transfigured item lasted for about three hours.

By the time Tyrande came back from hunting once more he had repeated the experiment and had just created a large silver ingot around the side of his forearm as she appeared, racing up the steps like the wind. The Kaldorei woman carried two birds, which made Harry wince. He had stopped eating birds during his time with Cenarius, and even now he decided that he would rather go hungry instead.

For the rest of the day, as Harry worked on his ward stones, Tyrande watched the silver, occasionally reaching out to touch it, closing her eyes and trying to commune with Elune. During the day that was much tougher than at night, but she still got the impression that Elune approved, and that what Tyrande wanted was indeed possible with transfigured silver.

When the moon rose once more that night Tyrande smiled up at it, her hands outstretched to either side of her as she began once again to commune with her goddess as she murmured the words to a prayer. The connection now came quickly and Tyrande's smile widened slightly before she concentrated on her task.

In front of her, the latest bit of conjured silver lay, the same size as his third experiment, conjured out of the same lump of stone and from nearby Harry watched intently. He could almost feel some kind of power, a new kind of magical energy moving within Tyrande. For a moment it was almost like he was sensing Nature Magic again for the first time, but on an entirely different frequency perhaps. It was very interesting, but that faint sense was all he could feel from it.

Tyrande touched the silver. For several moments, Harry and Quetzal both watched, as she simply held the silver in her hands in order to catch the light of the moon above. Then the ingot began to glow with its own internal light for a second, gleaming like a shard of the moon had come down and taken solid form in between Tyrande's hands. She stood up, nodded to Harry, and said simply, "Come, it is time to deal with this aberration to the natural order of the world."

Harry nodded wordlessly, deciding that speaking further would somehow break the mystical moment that had come upon them at the moment. *Is this what muggles think when they see magic, that they are seeing something unfathomable?*

The two of them moved into the cavern, where Tyrande set the silver down, and asked Harry if he could magic it up onto the black stone. She did so through gestures, as if Tyrande too felt that speaking at the moment would somehow ruin the mystical energies around them. Nodding, Harry gestured with his fingers, casting a Leviosa spell on the silver, and then gesturing it forward, until it clinked gently down on top of the black stone.

Above, the silver light of the moon shone through the hole that Harry had created, bathing both the cavern and the silver in its light. Once more, the silver, which had dimmed during the brief walk through the short tunnel, seemed to glow, and Tyrande stepped forward, her hands outstretched in prayer, her eyes closed at the moment as she mouthed the words of a prayer again, asking the goddess for aid in cleansing this place.

The beam of moonlight from above seems to grow brighter, and Tyrande and the ingot of silver both shimmered in reflected glory, while the black stone underneath began to smoke and sizzle, foul smoke erupting from where it touched the silver.

The gleaming from the silver quickly became so bright that Harry had to close his eyes, and he could still see through his eyelids that the glow was getting brighter and brighter that seem ethereal glow, coming from the silver itself. Behind him, Quetzal, who had followed them in, ducking his head and closing his eyes tightly, twisting around and exiting the cave quickly. "§I don't think you need to be here for this,§" the snake hissed. "§And something tells me that something is about to go boom.§"

Harry's instincts were also telling him the same thing, but instead of running, he moved towards Tyrande, arriving just as the reflected light within her went out. She stumbled back but Harry grabbed her arm, and asked lightly, "So, is this when we run?"

Wordlessly, Tyrande nodded her head, too tired to speak, and Harry propelled her towards the nearest entrance to the cavern. The two of them had barely gotten outside when there was a tremendous crackling 'boom' behind them, and a rumble of displaced stone.

As he turned around at the entrance Harry saw that the cavern hadn't been destroyed, but the black stone certainly had been. Thanks to the light of the moon above he could stare

straight into cavern now and could see that the black stone was completely gone. In its place was a kind of splash of silver and black marks spread out across the stone of the cavern.

Beside him, Tyrande straightened up, also turning to stare, her breath coming in gasps. "Ask, and Elune provides." That was as far as Tyrande got before she collapsed, the spellwork having utterly drained her.

And why wouldn't it? Communing with her goddess, she had been informed that she was correct, the black stone was from the Old God Yogg-Saron. It was in fact the foul being's own blood, the blood seeped into the stone of his prison and then eventually forming in tiny veins through the stone up to the surface. The prison was still strong, the creature could not break free, but as Tyrande had told Harry, it could certainly still influence events.

Luckily, once destroyed, the stone would not be able to reform for a long while even as the Kaldorei thought of such things. It took thousands of years for even a tiny droplet of his black ichor to reach the surface, and far longer for it to build up to the point of being able to create such abominations as the Frostmaul giants. These droplets of black stone had been here since before the Sundering.

Not that this particularly mattered at the moment, as Tyrande collapsed into unconsciousness, stumbling to the side and down to the ground like a marionette with her strings cut.

Harry caught her, but in so doing, he had forgotten one important factor. Tyrande was quite a bit taller than his currently teenage body. Catching her like this, his arms around her waist, had pressed the Tyrande's chest directly into Harry's face, filling his nose with her smell, a kind of lavender and flowery scent of some kind, which, coupled with the feel of her soft skin against his face was enough to cause a bright blush to cross his features.

Nearby, Quetzal hissed in amusement. "§I thought that touching a mammal in the mammary glands was supposed to be some kind of sexual thing. Is that not the case, Harry? Not that I can see the appeal myself.§"

Turning his head very slightly, which caused Tyrande's breasts to bounce lightly against his head, Harry glared as well as he could through his current blush at his reptilian companion. "We will never speak of this ever, am I Understood? Not even Tyrande will know of this moment. Or do you want to taste the scent of skunk whenever you eat **anything** for the rest of your natural life?"

"§I'll be good,§" Quetzal replied hastily, although he was still hissing to himself in amusement, his tongue flicking in and out. He was greatly amused by his friend's embarrassment right now.

With Quetzal carrying Tyrande, the two of them cleaned up their campsite, moving it back down the trail a bit. Harry had a thought of retreating entirely to where they had met the Frostsabers but decided that might take them in the wrong direction from the next target, and so made camp a little ways down from where the steps had begun. This also served as a more defensible position, just in case the other Frostmaul giants became aware of the destruction of their fellows somehow. After what he had just seen, Harry was not going to assume that anything was impossible.

They stayed there for two days, with Quetzal and Harry doing some hunting, and between them they sacred a giant bear out of hibernation. It had seemingly been able to avoid the Frostmaul giants somehow but in attacking Quetzal showed that had been luck rather than basic intelligence or instincts.

On the second night of their stay at the steps, Tyrande revived as the moon once more rose into the sky. The first words out of her mouth were, "Did it work?"

Laughing, Harry said that it had, and told her about what he had discovered when he reentered the cavern.

"Good," Tyrande said with a sigh, then, she blushed very lightly, her lavender skin noticeably darkening around her face, as her stomach roared in hunger. "I don't suppose we have some food?"

"Would bear stew do?"

Evidently it did, because in the next few moments, Tyrande had three helpings of it. After her hunger had been sated, Tyrande said thoughtfully, "That is what we will have to with all such places I'm afraid. While I was communing with Elune, she gave me some information about that black stone, which she called saronite." With that, she relayed what her goddess had told her of the blood of Yogg-Saron.

Harry frowned, wondering if there was a way to stop the saronite from rising to the surface like that. *But if it just pools underneath, would it then start corrupting the land and the mountains? I just don't know enough about how that would go frankly. Nor Harry thought ruefully do I have any idea of how to stop it from happening in the first place.* Instead of giving voice to those thoughts, he asked, "And will it put you out next time like it did here?"

"Perhaps. Being the conduit for my goddess's power is draining normally. Being the conduit as she does battle with the blood of an Old God, a creation of pure corruption? That was worse." Tyrande shrugged. "Still, it must be done to do away with the Frostmaul giants at the very least. I can only hope that such patches of foulness have not begun to appear in the forest."

"Then I suppose that we should get going," Harry said, standing up and moving around the camp cleaning up, knowing Tyrande preferred to travel at night. "That is unless you want to rest some more."

Tyrande shook her head, then with a smile gestured to Quetzal, who had been watching their discussion from nearby. "I can rest as we go."

"§Oh yes, that's me, just the beast of burden to you two legs,§" Quetzal muttered, but he was too full of bear meat to put the proper amount of sarcasm into his voice.

With a plan in place, and a chosen method of attack, the various battles against the Frostmaul giants became rather straightforward. Find them, place Tyrande nearby, defend Tyrande with wards, conjure bunnies, attack from behind. Rinse, repeat. Fighting truly stupid enemies was a treasure that neither Tyrande nor Harry had much experience with, but they were greatly enjoying it now. Although of course, as Harry had been concerned about, dealing with the saronite still took time.

Nor did that time decrease as Tyrande continued to act as a conduit for Elune's power. Every cleansing would see her unconscious for at least two days, and sometimes as many as four days, reviving as the moon came up.

Time passed quickly as the trio traversed the mountains. Even with Quetzal and Harry's spellwork, it was often slow going, and as they moved through the mountains, finding food also became somewhat troublesome, taking time out from their travelling.

And then there was the weather to deal with, which was often very nasty. Even Kaldorei and Harry with his magic spells could not see well in a blizzard.

But despite that, the ease of the actual battles allowed them to concentrate more on getting to know one another. Although they did abandon the twenty questions format. Looking back on it later, Harry felt that there were a few moments that meant the most to him, and though he didn't know it, Tyrande too, as they moved from acquaintances to traveling companions and fellow warriors, to actual friends.

The first occurred five weeks and three similar ambushes later. It began with Harry and Quetzal trading barbs and gibes. Quetzal had just insulted Harry's physical youth and had hinted at the moment with Tyrande after that first ambush, and Harry had quickly silenced the snake. This infuriated Quetzal, and he quickly shimmied, tossing Harry off his body and Tyrande too. Tyrande was able to use her Kaldorei reflexes to grab at a passing tree, which had grown out of a small crack in the mountain. Harry however was smacked into the snow, where Quetzal's tail thwacked him down deeper into it before lifting away.

Gasping, Harry pushed himself with difficulty out of the snow, the snow having been the kind of white puffy snow that had barely anything to push out of. He glared angrily at his

companion, while Tyrande pulled herself up and onto it as she watched proceedings. "What did you do that for!?"

Quetzal glared at him, flipping his tongue towards his mouth, and opening his maw wide, obviously angrily, although the sound was still silenced.

Grumbling, Harry canceled the silence spell on his companion, but then used a modified Accio spell, like the one he had used to grab multiple fish, to grab up a giant amount of snow, packing it into a large snowball and then tossing it at the snack. "I think you need to cool off!"

"§You warm-blooded bastard! This means war!§" Quetzal gasped as the large snow smashed into his face. He then retaliated, using his tail to smash some snow back towards Harry like a wave.

As Tyrande watched, shaking her head in amusement, the two of them began a snow fight. "Given your age, I suppose I should not be surprised that you have moments of childishness like this," she said aloud, only to squawk as a snowball hit her, levitated up from behind and flung with unerring accuracy into the side of Tyrande's face.

She glared down at Harry, who grinned up at her. "After the life I've led, I think I deserve to have some moments of childishness," he quipped.

Tyrande's eye narrowed. "I know you are older than you looked. But by how much?"

Harry shrugged, not answering but Tyrande sensed a moment of seriousness. Yet after a few moments, she shook her head. Then she reached over to a crook in the tree which had accumulated some snow of its own and began to create her own snowball. "And this is supposed to be my sabbatical after all. Acting like a child for an hour should be alright."

With that, she flung the snowball down with unerring accuracy right into Harry's face. Harry would tell her what he wanted when he was ready. Until then, Tyrande would not pry. Harry recognized this, and even as he fell backward sent her a wider smile than normal.

The two of them also had several discussions about past battles now that Harry being much older than he looked was out in the open, if not the method behind his rebirth. And both of them discovered that they had similar codes in a way, a mixture of honor, pragmatism and kindness. Harry in turn learned about the histories of her people from Tyrande's view, the view of a person who had been involved with many of the greatest, most momentous moments in that history.

One evening, they had fallen back to the copse of trees where they had first met the Frostsabers. There they found that several other smaller families of Frostsabers had joined the king and queen's clan there. The king had sent out lone hunters in search of their fellows, and

as Harry and Tyrande had begun to prune back the numbers of Frostmaul giants, this task had begun to bear fruit.

Tyrande spent much of the night playing around with Shy-rotam, which Harry had thought ridiculously cute, seeing the last bits of her decorum and self-control disappearing. But he wouldn't say it aloud. After all, she had joined his moment of childishness. So instead he played around with a few of the other cubs, while Quetzal watched in somnolent torpor, having eaten the better part of another bear who had decided it didn't like the giant snake coming into its lair.

Shy-rotam had grown quite a bit in the months since they had been here, and Tyrande had quite a lot of fun roughhousing with the little Frostsaber, enhancing their connection further. Now, with Shy-rotam curled up on her legs, Tyrande sat down with Harry for a meal he had cooked at the fire. Eventually as the day wore on, she opened up about her involvement with the overthrowing of Queen Azshara. That movement, and the reason behind it, was the moment that had truly shaped Kaldorei history. And yet, though it was almost six thousand years in the past, it remained prominent in her thoughts.

"It was necessary, but I never wanted to be our leader. But when Prince Farondis died, someone had to take command of the rebellion. And that was Malfurion and I. Now Malfurion is involved in the battle in the Emerald Dream, keeping Yogg-Saron's darkness at bay there, while I lead our people. Now I cannot turn away from it. Especially now perhaps, when in this time of peace, factions and divisions are arising within my people. That cannot be allowed to go so far as to damage our unity."

"Then I suppose we have something in common, although you couldn't pay me to become a leader," Harry said with a chuckle, that was almost but not quite bitter. Tyrande looked at him in question, and he shrugged his shoulders. "Neither of us have it within us to turn away when we see something that needs doing, particularly when it comes to defending other people."

Tyrande smiled at that, and then allowed her expression to turn sardonic as she once more showed her own sense of humor by looking around them then back to Harry. "You don't say..."

Another moment on Tyrande's side came several months after that discussion. They had decided to push on during the day due to a heavy snowstorm having fallen the past few nights, slowing their progress significantly.

In the light of day, Tyrande looked at Harry thoughtfully, causing him to ask her what was wrong. "I don't have something on my face, do I?"

"In a way you do. Hairs," she supplied with a chuckle. "You seem to be growing a beard. And at such a young age for your people too. At least what I assume is a young age, perhaps your people mature faster than mine in that manner as well as in others."

"Sixteen going on seventeen? That's pretty young for us yes," Harry answered dryly. "Not that that ever... well never mind." Harry raised a hand, and touched his face, feeling the hairs there. "That's interesting, I don't remember growing hair like this was when I was this age before. Still, I don't think it is all that unusual."

While he hadn't shared the full details about his new lease on life, Tyrande understood that this was indeed a second life for Harry in some fashion, though she didn't know how it had come about. That was somewhat worrisome, but again, Harry's general attitude, and the fact that he was a student of Cenarius kept it from bothering Tyrande too much.

"Truly? Growing a beard so young was not unusual among your people?"

"I wouldn't call it a beard," Harry chuckled, "more peach fuzz than anything else."

"And yet, even that is more than most of the men of my race would be able to do at anything less than two hundred years old. Indeed even afterwards our males take decades to grow much of anything. I know many a Kaldorei youth who would love to be able to grow a beard so quickly. My mate Malfurion, spent more than a two decades growing his beard."

Harry shook his head with a laugh. "That speaks of far more dedication to a beard than I could ever have, in fact, I'm thinking about shaving this bit off."

That caused Tyrande to blink in surprise. "Everything? Why ever would you do so?"

"Because it itches something fierce," Harry said with a laugh, causing Tyrande to laugh aloud as well, shaking her head with a chuckle at her friend's words, then pausing suddenly as she realized that she had thought of Harry as a friend despite the fact that the two of them had not even spent a year getting to know one another yet. *And yet, perhaps it is not so unusual as it might seem at first.* She thought, allowing her smile to widened, at which Harry's did the same.

There were lots of little moments like that. When he created the bath for them, two separate ones, separated by the vast bulk of Quetzal, who reveled in the heat coming off of the bath. Harry didn't peek, despite the frank appreciation Tyrande could see in his eyes occasionally when he looked at her. Indeed, beyond looking at her as if she was a woman, which few of her own people would allow themselves to do, Harry was always the perfect gentlemen, despite the teasing she inflicted on him occasionally for his physical age.

Another moment was when Tyrande told Harry more about her lover, and when Harry in turn told Tyrande about his past associations. Ginny and the two of them breaking up in

order to defend Ginny's family. Hermione, and how he had refused to become involved with her for fear of what might have happened. Tyrande had completely understood that decision and talked about how she and Malfurion had been leery of becoming involved for fear of one or the other being seen as a target for their enemies.

"We did get together, but by that point neither of us had any family left to threaten, save Illidan, and he was far more dangerous in a fight than either of us. I completely understand why you and Hermione made that decision. In a perfect world I have no doubt you and she would be happy together, friends make for the best lovers. But this is not a perfect world, Harry Potter, no matter where you came from that truth is eternal. And you are the type to run to the sounds of battle. Anyone with you must be willing and able to do the same."

"I understand that. But understanding doesn't make it any easier to live with though," Harry retorted somewhat tartly.

"No, nor should it. Life is often bittersweet filled with what ifs and supposes. The trick is to not get tied down by them," Tyrande answered serenely.

The campaign into the mountains lasted nearly eight months and perhaps the most important discussion in terms of Harry's growth going into the future occurred as the campaign began to wind down, the trips between ambushes becoming longer and longer. The Point Me spell was simply that useful, but the weather was against them more often than not, and at times they did have to find ways around certain obstacles. Yet the Frostmaul giants themselves were no real threat to either of them.

They checked back in with the Frostsabers every month, finding more and more Frostsabers congregating in that secret Dell every time. By the time the campaign started to wind down, bands of Frostsabers had been sent down into the hills for food for the growing clan. Normally lone hunters, many had begun to learn to band together as wolves did.

That night, after again playing with Shy-rotam, who now was big enough that Tyrande felt that she would be taking Shy-rotam with her when she left the mountains, Harry explained about what he had been studying with Cenarius, and the problems he was running into with learning Nature Magic. "I don't know why, but I've run into some kind of bottleneck. Cenarius said it is probably because of my Chimera status, and my not understanding my own nature."

Harry shook his head, remembering the last conversation he had with his Shan'do. "He said to get in touch with my various sides, but I don't even know where to begin with the Basilisk. I've tried to meditate on it, thinking it might be like Quetzal, but it hasn't worked. I mean let's face it, the only basilisk I ever met was the one that injected me with its venom to the point that I needed Phoenix tears to stay alive."

"§One snake is most decidedly like another, as I've told you before,§" Quetzal retorted, the words 'idiot' left unsaid but certainly hinted at.

“Oy, I know that idiot, I just through that observing you or a cobra would give me an idea of what the basilisk side of me is like. But then again, even my attempts to get in touch with my phoenix side hasn’t worked. No matter how hard I try to meditate while remembering Fawkes or anything I think is connected to a phoenix hasn’t worked.”

By this point, Harry had shared his status with Tyrande, although he was still silent on where he had come from. Still, Tyrande had gotten enough hints at this point to believe that Harry was a planeswalker, coming from some other world to this one. That should have made Tyrande even more concerned about him, and why he was here. But every time she communed with Elune during the past few months to ask for aid in destroying the saronite deposits, Elune had been very firm. Harry was not here to cause problems, although problems might come from his being here. Rather, Harry was here as an ally, and eventually, perhaps as important an ally as the green or red dragon flight.

Although she was still somewhat bemused by the idea of phoenix tears. An animal’s tears having such amazing healing properties? That was very strange. Basilisk venom at least she could understand, generally speaking. But the two of them combining to change Harry on such a fundamental level? Now as the two friends continued to bicker, Tyrande leaned back, her cub curled up next to them, stroking the young female feline’s head as she thought about Harry’s issues, when an idea came to her.

Gently coughing she drew her friend’s attention and began. “I think part of the problem with your interacting with Nature Magic comes from the fact that you are trying to learn like a Kaldorei. Meditate about connecting to nature, reaching out to the Emerald Dream as a whole before, eventually, deciding on which animal or animals to begin to emulate. Perhaps that is not the way forward for you. Perhaps, you need a new medium. One that will allow you in turn to understand the animals within.”

Then Tyrande laughed. “And of course, you don't have twenty to thirty years to spend in meditation before discovering your own connection to nature.”

“No I don't,” Harry chuckled as well. “I mean I probably could use that time, but I don't know if I would be able to stay on task for that long. But what do you suggest?”

“There are other ways to commune with nature. Through the use of totems, sacred beasts and shamanism rather than directly as Cenarius would teach you.” She coughed delicately, looking away. “Further, while Kaldorei are able to achieve certain mental states through dedication and fasting, you might not be able to do the same without... medicinal aid.”

Harry blinked, then nodded slowly, the movement speeding up as the idea took hold. “Like the Tauren? I ran into one of them during that whole satyr business. But he was so badly drained and weakened by whatever they had done to him that I sent him back to the Furbolg village where he had been staying.” Then his lips quirked. “And ‘medicinal aid’? Do explain that one Tyrande.”

"I understand that the Tauren, who really are the only race my people have had peaceful contact with, ingest certain herbs and herb smoke to aid them in achieving higher mental states as they commune with their totems, at least for the first few times." As Harry looked at her in amusement, Tyrande hastened on. "Most of the Tauren might have left Ashenvale for the south but others moved to the Broken Isles, and it is those who my people still have relations with. They are called the Highmountain Tribe, and their mountain bears the same name."

"That name, I recognize that from Cenarius' history lessons. That's the name of the Tauren leader who brought their tribes together to join with yours during the War of the Ancients, correct? Huln Highmountain."

"Yes. They have long been allies of my people, although distant ones. While the other Tauren tribes left our forests long ago and cut off contact, the Highmountain clan has never done so, and our warriors often journey to one another's lands. I think if you merge their teachings about sacred beasts with the meditation that Cenarius has been teaching you and your own people's mental disciplines, this Occlumency and mental realm business, it could work to get you in touch with your animal sides."

With a laugh, Harry got to his feet. "In that case, let's finish this campaign and then you can introduce me to the Tauren. After all, we are coming up on the end of your year-long sabbatical, aren't we?"

Tyrande actually winced at the reminder but nodded reluctantly. She was somewhat dreading going back to work, although not as high priestess. That, she would never regret in any way. But the mantle of leadership was still not one settled comfortably on her shoulders. "We might run out of time before we can leave for the Broken Isles, but if so, I will write you a letter of introduction to them." *Or perhaps make it a formal diplomatic mission. That seems like a better idea, frankly.*

Moreover, Tyrande knew that she would have to tell her fellow leaders about Harry, and she was not looking forward to it. The fear and loathing of the Arcana ran deep in her people. *Still, I will make them understand. Whatever else he might be, wherever he truly comes from, Harry is not evil, and I think he could be a very strong ally for our people.*

A month and a half later, most of which had been spent traveling to and from through the mountains, Harry's Point Me spell no longer found any Frostmaul giants. When he tried to use it to instead discover the black rock, no matter how he visualized the black rock in his mind when he cast the spell, it didn't work. It would simply point to the nearest stone that was colored black. So while the issue with the saronite might come back, there were no more Frostmaul giants living within these mountains.

With that, Tyrande, after one last visit to the Frostsabers where Shy-Rotam joined them. With the Frostsaber, now more than cub but nowhere near fully grown, gamboling alongside

them, Tyrande led them down into Ashenvale and then to the east to the edge of the forest and the continent of Kalimdor.

### **Death's Avenger: Chapter 2 Episode 2**

It took them about half a day of travel, but both Harry and Tyrande enjoyed once more being among the forest rather than above in the rocky, barren mountains of Wintersong. It was a completely new environment for Shy-Rotam, and the moment they got down into the tree line, the young frostsaber became almost entirely uncontrollable, moving around and sniffing at this and that, her whiskers twitching in delight.

“Ooh, what is that weird creature? What’s this tree called, ooh this flower smells nice, aAGGH, but this smells disgusting!” Shy-Rotam continued to growl out a non-stop stream of words flowing from her mouth as she raced from one thing to another through the shadows of the forest, delighting in every sense and scent.

Watching this, Tyrande was amused, waiting for her young bonded to come back to herself. “Do not go too far, Shy-Rotam,” she cautioned. “For all your ferocity, you are still a very young frostsaber, and you do not know what kind of threats there are in the forest.”

Watching this, Harry also had an amused look on his face as they continued down through the hills deeper into the shadowed forest below. Quetzal, on the other hand, did not look amused. Instead, the Needlespine Shimmerback looked affronted by it all. “You would never see a young snake acting in such a manner. Why cannot the youths of other races be as sedate and calm as we are?”

“Because young snakes, while interesting, are nowhere near as cute?” Tyrande asked, her eyes twinkling even more than their normal white light would allow for as she turned her gaze to the large snake.

Quetzal hissed out a harsh laugh, his tongue flicking out before he flicked it back into his mouth. “What is cute? Can you eat it, or is it some kind of combat ability? Can it make you better at hunting or hiding? If not, it is foolish to care overmuch about it.”

“Ah, but you are thinking too linearly, my fine scaled companion. Cute is important. In an animal, it can help protect one from being hunted by sentient creatures such as my race or the Kaldorei. In a sentient person, it can help in the early stages of the mating ritual.” Harry replied dryly, shaking his head in amusement again. He knew that part of Quetzal’s current annoyance was real, but a majority of it was because the snake enjoyed acting like snakes and other cold-blooded types were superior whenever he got the chance.

In response, Tyrande burst out into peals of laughter, shaking her head, throwing her hair in every direction, while Quetzal simply rolled his eyes. the sight was striking, the sapphire blue of her hair a backdrop to strands of silver that glowed with reflected moonlight, causing Harry to gulp a bit and look away.

Just then, as Quetzal turned his head to address Tyrande, Shy-Rotam pounced on his tail. The aggrieved snake hissed, twisting around his body and bearing its fangs at the frostsaber, but Shy-Rotam was fearless, hopping off of the snake's tail and smirking up at him in a particularly catlike manner. "Sorry, I thought it was a root..." she yowled in amusement.

"You did no such thing, you little..."

"Now, now," Tyrande said, getting between them. "Shy-Rotam, you know not to pounce on allies like that. Unless you're play fighting, and they know to expect it. And Quetzal, you should remember that for all my new familiar is young, she understands you just as well as we understand her thanks to Harry's translation spells and does not know if you are joking or not."

The two animals looked at one another, and Quetzal decided to be magnanimous about this. *I am the older, larger and far more powerful predator here, after all. No need to get my spines up at the foolish gamboling of a curious youngling.* "You are correct. I should learn more control of my tongue when dealing with the young of other races."

"And I'm sorry I pounced on your tail," Shy-Rotam answered quickly, then seemed to think about it. "Next time, I'll warn you I'm going to try first." With that, she was off again, sniffing the wind.

Tyrande laughed as Quetzal looked a little aggrieved before his serpentine features morphed into a lazy smirk. "Well, at least you will never need to question her spirit."

"Yep. And next time Quetzal, just flick Shy-Rotam off. She will get the hint that pouncing on you is not a good idea when she is sent flying. Just make sure to avoid the trees."

"That's a great idea, Quetzal said enthusiastically and very mockingly, as he looked around them at all of the trees that blocked their lines of sight in every direction. "How exactly would I avoid the trees again?"

Tyrande laughed, and Harry followed in turn before sobering a little as he heard a rustle in the bushes nearby and Shy-Rotam leaped out towards him, pouncing with a, "I'm going to get you!" coming from her mouth in the form of a rather cute roar.

The frostsaber, now being almost as large as Harry was tall, easily smacked Harry off his feet, landing on top of him with a woof of displaced air. Chuckling even as his ribs protested the treatment, Harry reached up and began to stroke her fur in just the right manner to cause the large frostsaber to purr. "And have you gotten it out of your system yet?"

Shy-Rotam nodded and moved over to Tyrande, rumbling happily as she leaned against her side. "When will we learn to hunt together? I have gone on some small hunts with my clan, but the scents here! There are bigger prey here and many different ones too!"

"We will spend a portion of every day on the hunt, yes," Tyrande answered, smiling and rubbing Shy-Rotam's fur as Harry had a moment ago, looking at Shy-Rotam's large paws,

estimating when Shy-Rotam would be large enough for Tyrande to ride. Another six months, perhaps. *Until then, teaching her how to move silently in the forest will only be a matter of awakening her instincts and putting them into action.*

Harry looked at Tyrande as Quetzal raised his head upward into the foliage of the nearby trees. Scaring several of the little strange monkey squirrel things that Harry had met upon his original arrival in Azeroth, a hiss of purely reptilian amusement accompanying the move. From his back, several needles shot up into the foliage, and one unlucky creature was struck twice, becoming paralyzed as the others scattered in fear at the giant serpent that had suddenly appeared among them.

Since it was too small to bother sharing, Quetzal didn't let the creature drop out of the tree. Instead, gobbling it up in a single bite. However, the giant snake knew he would need to eat eight or nine of them to be full. But one was enough to sate him for a day or so. "I vote for hunting in the morning," Quetzal announced as he joined the conversation, the prey so small it didn't even make a lump in the giant needlespine shimmerback's body. "Boars are always more active in the morning, are too stupid to know when they shouldn't attack someone, and they make excellent eating."

"Knowing boars as well as we got to over the time we were in the forest, I have no doubt that we will be hunting them first," Harry replied dryly, patting his snake companion on his massive side. "For now, though, um, where exactly are we going? These are your forests, and beyond knowing one direction from the other, I have no idea where we're going."

Tyrande laughed again, this time much more quietly than before. After a single glance around, she pointed in a direction out through the forest. "That way. We came down out of the Winterspring mountains at the far eastern edge of the range. So we will want to continue heading straight east for a time towards the coast and the port of Danavia. From there we will take to the Frozen Sea, in order to get to the Broken Isles."

As she led them off, Tyrande's mind wandered for a moment, trusting in her companions to warn her of any danger and honestly not expecting any. Instead, the high priestess of Elune was wondering about Harry, her new friend, and what was to come when he began to interact with her people. *Unfortunately, Danavia's Sentinel commander is one of the most outspoken against the arcane. Harry's introduction to the rest of my society might not be the smoothest. On the other hand, if he can win Nightshade over, he will probably win over most of my officers and people. And if not, meeting her will certainly prepare Harry for the worst.*

Almost as if he was reading her mind, Harry asked, "By the way, are you still concerned about how your people will react to me?"

"So long as they are willing to look past their prejudices, I believe that any of my people who get to know you will realize that you have nothing in common with the former Highborn

Arcanists that we were forced to banish, and certainly nothing to do with the royal court or our enemies. It is getting to that point that might cause issues,” Tyrande answered. “Still, I believe that you have a good chance of winning some acceptance if we can continue to introduce you to smaller groups of my people at a time.”

She shook her head. “And not, for example, the higher-ups of my government or the reactionary elements among the populace. But despite Sentinel Commander Nightshade, Danavia is one of my people’s more open-minded towns. I doubt you will face many issues beyond some staring and perhaps some wariness among the normal populace.”

“I would be willing to use my Invisibility Cloak to simply bypass the town,” Harry offered with a shrug of his shoulders. “That way, you can have a few days to spread tales about me, and then they’ll meet me afterward.”

“No Harry,” Tyrande answered swiftly, shaking her head once from side to side. “Your presence would come out eventually, and any attempt to hide you would make your eventual revelation seem all the worse. Besides, for all that my people are adept at hiding and misdirection in battle, we prefer to not use such guile amongst ourselves. No, it is best to get your introduction to people over with quickly. All I would ask is that you refrain from insulting anyone who insults you and keep your spellwork to both the minimum and nonlethal in nature.”

Harry frowned, thinking on that point. “I don’t like putting those kinds of restrictions on myself, although I’m not really a taunting sort of person, so you needn’t worry on that score. But as for keeping my spells nonlethal, I’m not certain I can promise to do so if someone, or several people, are attacking me with their lethal intent. I can only promise to try.”

“That is all I can ask,” Tyrande smiled, and the two of them fell into a companionable silence once more, watching as Shy-Rotam bound ahead of them, sniffing at something on the ground, then back to them before pausing in front of a new creature she had never seen before. This was a small, bright red and orange frog, about the same size as Shy-Rotam’s paw, its colors making it stand out even more at night. “Ooo, what is that?”

Quetzal looked over at the frog, then, showing his earlier annoyance with her was partly an act, decided to not allow the young cub to do something she would regret later. “That is a poisonous frog. Do not try to eat it. It will make you most egregiously sick if you are lucky.”

Shy-Rotam frowned, staring down at the little frog. “But it’s so colorful, and it’s not running away. It should know where it stands on the food chain.”

“It does,” Quetzal answered dryly, shaking his head from side to side, staring down at the little frog himself. “It stands precisely on the **side** of the food chain because no one in their right mind on said chain would eat it. But if you want to spend several days regurgitating everything you have eaten in the past few weeks, and perhaps with a fever and a nasty shakes to go with it, go right ahead.”

At that, Shy-Rotam backed away, then twisted around abruptly pounced. The frog hopped away quickly, bounding off into the forest, and Shy-Rotam frowned, staring after it. But she didn't go after it, having taken Quetzal's words to heart, merely wanting to impress upon the creature that it still lived due to her largess.

"Let that be a lesson, young Shy-Rotam. Just because something is nice and bright and interesting looking does not mean it is actually palatable," Harry interjected loftily.

"Such wisdom from one so learned in leaping before he looks should be listened to most strenuously. After all, learning from the mistakes of others is the true path to wisdom," Tyrande teased Harry.

"Ha, ha...it's so funny because it's sooo true..." Harry said dejectedly, then his eyes narrowed, and he looked up at the taller Kaldorei woman. "Although I wager you have some stories of your own to share."

"Heh, indeed I do. A tale for a tale then?" She asked in some amusement, thinking about another angle to get her people used to Harry as she mentioned their normal method of sharing bits of their past. *I might want to find a young elf for him.. I think that he has quite a bit to offer the right lady, so long as she is very understanding. Although I'll have to get my people used to him and his very existence before playing matchmaker. And find out why he always looks like he is having trouble deciding whether to grimace or snort in laughter whenever we skirted around the topic of our race's different lifespans... There's something going on there, but I won't pry. Yet.*

The two of them continue to banter back and forth in low voices, continuing to exchange tales as they moved through the forest. Quetzal moved along sedately beside them while Shy-Rotam continually bounding ahead or around them, interested in everything.

But as night gave way to dawn, Harry and Quetzal's prediction proved accurate. As they moved on, a boar did indeed come out of the bushes. The moment its beady eyes locked on them, the boar charged towards them with a bellowing warcry. Boars were simply too stupid and far, far too aggressive to be really influenced by Harry's limited Nature Magic. Indeed, Tyrande knew that even her own race, as part of this forest as any animal could be, often had trouble with them, along with the occasionally idiotic younger predators, although not nearly as often.

Harry flung up a shield, and the animal bounced off it, causing him to stumble to one side, shaking his head, and then pawed the ground, racing forward again.

"Shy-Rotam, attack from behind. Try to leap on its back and go for the area at the back of the neck. There you will find its spine," Tyrande instructed like she was sitting in a training ground and giving out orders to a young group of would-be Sentinels.

“Oh, of course, don’t mind the one who’s actually keeping the beast at bay,” Harry muttered, causing Tyrande to send him a small smile at his sarcastic humor.

Shy-Rotam had frozen at first at the sight of the strange animal. But now the tiger shook herself and instantly started to go around the animal, as it charged Harry again, only to bounce off another shield. Boars were single-minded like that.

Quetzal had also moved forward, and now he glared down at the boar. Unlike many of his reptilian kin, the snake didn’t have a paralyzing or hypnotizing gaze. But the sight of such a massive snake rearing up in front of it was enough to give the boar some pause. It backed away for a second, and Shy-Rotam struck from behind, leaping on top of the other creature.

To Shy-Rotam’s astonishment, her weight didn’t make the large boar fall to its knees. It stumbled but did not collapse, and then the boar was trying to buck her off, its large, pointed tusks rearing back towards her.

But Shy-Rotam was having none of it. Her instincts had now fully come to the fore, and she ducked her head low, her claws digging in deep to keep her on top of the boar. Then her mouth flashed down, fangs gaping. Biting through the bristles wasn’t fun, and one of them got up Shy-Rotam’s nose. But she was still able to find the muscle and bone of the spine and bite down hard.

Pound for pound, a frostsaber’s bite was even more powerful than the bite of a snake like Quetzal. It severed the boar’s spinal column, and the boar collapsed, paralyzed. Then Shy-Rotam tore off a chunk of its back, gulping. “Hmmm, it is tasty!”

Harry moved forward, and between him and Tyrande, they skinned off enough of the animal’s hide, setting aside enough of the meat for the two of them. Then Tyrande cut off a haunch for Shy-Rotam, leaving the rest of the beast to Quetzal.

“Why does he get the larger portion?” Shy-Rotam asked quizzically. Just quizzically, though. She wasn’t annoyed, which surprised Harry. But Shy-Rotam had hunted with her clan several times and trusted Harry and Tyrande to not hand over what Shy-Rotam deemed her kill without reason.

“I require one large meal a week, young one. You will never eat as much in a single sitting as I will, but will have to eat more often,” Quetzal answered politely.

Nodding at that, Shy-Rotam dug into her portion with gusto and, to Tyrande’s amusement, with none of the care that most of the tiger familiars she knew of showed. *Hopefully, that too will change in time.*

Taking it as a given that they would rest now since the two animals were eating, Harry and Tyrande decided to set up camp. While not naturally nocturnal as the Kaldorei were, Harry had gotten used to it after the months of traveling with his companion. He’d even created a sleep mask for himself to block out the light.

As Harry went about setting up the tent, Tyrande scouted around, making certain that the boar, a male, had been alone. It was, and she returned reporting on this as Harry turned his attention from the now finished tent, such as it was, to the runes that he would put out to defend their camp.

Tyrande sat across from him as she began to put together a small fire so they could cook their meat, smiling faintly as a bird moved down through the foliage to land on Harry's shoulder. *I do not think it will take long for Harry to get in touch with his Phoenix side with the help of the Tauren. His snake side? For all his friendship with Quetzal and his combat style, I think that will take a bit longer.*

Shaking her head at that, Tyrande held out a small portion of the meat to the bird while watching Harry work. Harry had been teaching her about runes for a few weeks now, but Tyrande was nowhere near the point where she would be able to create anything herself, although it was astonishing to think that she might eventually be able to do so.

Not, mind you, that her people were without knowledge of runes. Runes had been a primary pillar of the Arcane arts used in times gone by by the Kaldorei before the Sundering, when Tyrande and Malfurion had led their people to turn their backs on the Arcane and the addiction it built up within those who used it. Even today, runes were used in certain places: the temple of Elune, the Well of Eternity, and other places of great importance. Places which were able to create their own magic to power the runes in question.

But what they could do with those runes was so... well, limited in comparison to what Harry's runic arrays could do. They couldn't do as many impressive things with their runes as the Highborn had been able to do with their magic. The runes also had no **direct** combat applications, like so much arcane magic was devoted to.

And yet, Harry's runic arrays could do so many more things. From something so prosaic as a runic array to keep bugs away from them, up to the defensive arrays that Harry was making now. Easy, simple to create once you knew the secret of the runes, and easy to take down once you were done. Not the work of dozens of people to create a single rune which would last until someone destroyed it.

To say nothing of the space expansion charms on Harry's tiny trunk, which she could see on its necklace around his neck. That kind of magic was almost unknown entirely to her. The closest she could think of was the blessing of Elune that created the partner-totems of the Sentinels.

The journey continued for a few weeks, their travels slowed by the need for Shy-Rotam to hunt daily and for Tyrande and to train with her. These were two different things, and the second was not aided by the frostsaber's natural instincts. Knowing how to follow orders and fight with someone whose body was not like your own was very different from what the young 'frostsaber was used to. Tyrande also taught her how to attack humanoid opponents, with

Harry joining in to help Shy-Rotam build up her combat sense: the ability to keep track of multiple enemies around you.

But beyond the odd boar and, at one point, meeting a bear, the trip was mostly uneventful. The bear in question was a massive matriarch leading a pair of cubs. But thanks to Harry's Nature Magic, it didn't automatically attack them, although Shy-Rotam seemed to think that picking a fight with her might've been a good idea before Tyrande calmed her down a bit.

Eventually, they began to see signs of the Kaldorei. They were small flashing lights in the trees, tiny crystals set here and there reflecting the light of the moon above. These were a visible sign of their devotion to Elune, small markers that denoted the edge of territory within the forest that the Kaldorei would truly call their own.

Tyrande began to point other markers out, and then made Harry come over to what looked to Harry like a small piece of art on a stone slab that had been set up in between a few tree bows, but which in reality was a sign, telling them how much further it was to the port, as well as where to find the nearest Sentinels. While Harry's translation spell allowed him to understand spoken Kaldorei, he could not read their languages, which came in two forms: one, a formal writing style that they used for everything important, and second, a more cuneiform-like style that was used when it was thought to be necessary to convey emotions or when describing something physical in nature.

A few moments later, a silver disk about as tall as Shy-Rotam was at the withers came up, caught his eye, and Harry asked what it was, being told it was a 'passing marker'. "Passing markers are placed on a tree nearby where someone has passed on, or more often, are made to mark something momentous in the lives of those who live there or nearby. This one," Tyrande leaned forward, pointing out a set of marks on top of the large, silver disk, then to the picture in the center. "This marks the passing of a group of Sentinels who were born in the nearby town during the war of the Satyrs. At the time, we had the habit of keeping units raised in communities like that serving together. It was not a wise policy, one I still sometimes feel guilty over."

"Erk," Harry grunted, shaking his head and patting her shoulder. "I can understand that. My own nation did something similar at one point, Pals Battalions they were called. Although I doubt that your losses were ever like what we faced in World War 1."

"The way you just drop the idea of a war large enough to be called a 'world war' in there would frighten me if I had not seen the horrors of the Demons in the War of the Ancients," Tyrande drawled, but the smile on her face, which had been bittersweet, was now somewhat wry. "Nor do I understand the word 'pals', although I can understand the gist of it. But while at times we Kaldorei grieve those who have passed before their time, we also celebrate the lives of those who have passed on in honor, hence this marker. It is not to simply grieve, but to acknowledge and honor the passing of the Sentinels in question."

“So these smaller pictures, they detail some moment from the lives of the Sentinels in question?” Harry asked, pointing at the image of a small tiger image that looked to be sitting on the back of another figure.

“Indeed, little jokes like that, in-jokes I suppose you could say, are common in Elistran.” Elistran was the name of the informal artistic writing style. “I’m afraid I could only guess about the nature of most of these images.” She turned away from Harry to gaze up at a nearby tree. “Perhaps one of the locals could tell us more, hmm?”

At this, two more Kaldorei dropped down from the tree she was gazing at. They were both men, and something about their unsure or awed body language told Harry they were young, or at least inexperienced, which he knew wasn’t the same thing. They wore what looked like a uniform, a black and green leather jerkin and leggings, with a breastplate that somehow seemed to have the same colors on it, letting the two merge into the darkness of the forest. They were both armed with bows and the same kind of double-bladed swords that Tyrande used, although they were not nearly as large as the high priestess’s.

For her part, Tyrande was both surprised, and somewhat thankful, to see two males in Sentinel colors. That was a rarity in this day and age. All too often, those men and women who wished to serve the Kaldorei nation as a whole instead of following a civilian profession felt that Sentinels service was for women only, and that men had to become druids. There was no reason for this, really. Yes, Elune preferred priestesses, but the Sentinels were not fulltime priestesses in her worship. Women could, in contrast use Nature Magic just as well as men could. But the Kaldorei society had somehow shifted to make it almost unheard of for men and women to join the other’s so-called ‘specialties’. Tyrande had spoken out against such thoughts, but for once, her words had not made headway against this strange societal drift.

The two newcomers had hidden so well that Harry, Shy-Rotam and even Quetzal were taken by complete surprise. Tyrande had become aware of the two Sentinels the moment they were within hearing range but had not said anything, wanting to see how Harry would react, and, moreover, wanting to speak to Harry in such a way as to make certain her own opinion of him was obvious to the two silent watchers.

Thankfully, as she had hoped, Harry simply turned in their direction but made no aggressive move. He didn’t even curse. Instead, Harry simply nodded in the newcomer’s direction. “That was very well done. Quetzal, how come you didn’t smell them? I thought you snakes took pride in your ability to smell things.”

“They smell of trees and forest. They have no scent of their own underneath to detect. Odd,” Quetzal shook his head from side to side, his needles slowly lowering from the aggressive stance they had been before.

Shy-Rotam yowled, “I didn’t smell them at all! I still have a lot of learning to do, I suppose.”

“The fact that you acknowledge that you have shortcomings is half the battle, my dear,” Tyrande said, patting the young tiger on the head.

The Sentinels had been about to greet Tyrande, but this, hearing both animals respond to their companions as if they were able to hold real discourse, threw the two Male Kaldorei off entirely. They looked between Harry the snake and Tyrande, then one of them seemed to gather himself as he began to speak. “H, High-priestess Whisperwind! It is a delight to be in your presence,” said one of them, bowing profusely to her, obviously continuing a prepared greeting.

“None of that,” Tyrande scowled, shaking her head as she let out a faint chuckle more rueful than merry. “After all, I am still on my sabbatical.” *And I would rather not have to deal with more of that formal fluff than I have to.*

The Sentinels all looked at one another, shrugging their shoulders. “As you wish, Mistress Whisperwind.”

“I suppose that’s going to be the best I can get,” Tyrande murmured, now keeping down a put-upon sigh, needing to put a surprising amount of effort into it. *Hero worship. Honestly, do I seem so aloof as all that to our younger generations?*

“And um, what, er, that is, who is this?” One of the Sentinels asked, pointing at Harry.

The other one was not nearly as polite. “Did you capture it? Is it some kind of pet that you have taught our language?”

“Oh, you are just making a lot of points right now with me,” Harry murmured, his eyes narrowing. “Pet, really?”

“That is how small Vrykul were kept at the height of Queen Azshara’s power,” Tyrande reminded him. They had talked about that before, soon after they had first met.

“How long did it take you to teach it to speak so well? My father always told me small Vrykul were almost as stupid as squirrel-monkeys,” the same young male said while his fellow shook his head at his bluntness, the movement showing a certain habitual note to it.

“It is a ‘he’, thank you, and would rather not be spoken to in such a manner. I am a human, and as sentient as any of you,” Harry said, although he was smiling as he did. “If you all continue to assume that I am a beast of some kind, perhaps spending some time as beasts yourselves would be appropriate?”

Rolling her eyes, Tyrande put a hand onto Harry’s shoulder, reproving him very gently. He was in the right here, after all. “Forgive this young man for his ignorance. After all, they have yet to spend any time in your presence. Nor do either of these Sentinels have the ability to feel the nature Magic within you.” She then turned back to the two local Sentinels. “This is Harry Potter. He is an ally and friend of mine, who has also been a student of Cenarius.”

Nodding, Harry bowed from the waist. "I have that honor, although my training is not complete just yet. If you're worried about any threat from either of us, the only threat that Quetzal poses is to the local boar population."

"Er, there were reports of seeing the marks of a large snake, and we were indeed concerned that it might attack some of our farmers. But if er, if Quetzal is smart enough to um, to speak, then I suppose we can assume he is trained well enough to..."

"There's that word again," Quetzal grumbled, leaning down and forward to stare into the Kaldorei's eyes. "I am not trained. I am intelligent and sentient and I make my own decisions. As Harry said, do not speak of me as if I am an unthinking animal."

"Or me!" Shy-Rotam growled. "I'm young, but I can understand you too."

"Th, That isn't so unusual young tigress, erm, it, it is our understanding of your kind that that is unusual," the Sentinel who had yet to be infected by his friend's foot-in-mouth disease answered. He fingered a small stone statue that was hanging from his belt for some reason. "How has such a miracle come about?"

"You have Harry to thank for that. He can use magic to perform many miracles. One of which is a translation spell. So long as the individual has enough basic intelligence to have an actual language, it will allow others to understand the target's speech. In this case, Harry has used the spell on Shy-Rotam and Quetzal." She felt adding that Harry could already communicate with Quetzal was a needless complication.

Eyes widening, the two Sentinels stared while Tyrande sighed internally. She had left out where Harry got his magical power and hoped to push back any issue on that score. It seemed to work, but it didn't make her feel any better, fooling such young examples of her race. *Why they cannot be more than four hundred years old.* That was barely past the teenage years for a Kaldorei. They were not only essentially immortal, but their race also matured very slowly.

However, her little lie worked. Instead of becoming defensive or hateful at the idea of someone using Arcane magic, the two took it as a given that Harry was a druid and that being of a different race, he would have access to different abilities. "Erm, could, could you perhaps your translation spell on our own familiars?" When Harry nodded, the more polite young man touched the small stone statue at his side. He pulled it off his belt and tossed it to one side.

As Harry watched in slack-jawed shock, the tiny statue started to blaze with golden and green light then shifted, shivering almost like water before it transformed into a fully grown panther in midair, which landed on the ground on soft paws. It immediately moved over to its rider, staring between Harry, Quetzal and Shy-Rotam, apparently, judging by its fanged scowl and the way it growled, only approving of the young tigress.

As his partner started to sooth the panther, Harry shook his head, leaning toward Tyrande. "You've been holding out on me. I thought your people didn't know about transformation-type magic."

"That is not an Arcane transformation. It is a blessing of Elune to our Sentinels, so that they are never forced to leave their bound partners behind." Tyrande then smirked. "And yes, I never told you about it, as I wanted to see your face when you saw the blessing in action."

"Heh, alright, I'll give you that, but if you think you're going to get away with just calling it a blessing of Elune, you had better think again," Harry mock grumbled. Then, when the panther's partner indicated they were ready, Harry pointed his finger at the panther. There was a light purple flash of some kind of magic, and then, Harry said, "Sorry if that startled you, your friend here just requested I use a spell on you."

The panther growled out, "And why did my bonded request this? Speak quickly, else..." The panther paused, staring in shock as his companion, who had gasped and moved forward, his eyes widening. "H, how, am I speaking like a Kaldor?"

"You are indeed," Tyrande intoned, smiling slightly.

Shakily the rude one also asked to speak to his own companion, and after ribbing him gently for a moment, Harry agreed. Soon, a tiger too stood there, blinking in shock as his bonded scratched at his neck, the tiger actually giving verbal directions now on where to do so.

Leaning in, Tyrande whispered into Harry's ear with a faint smile. "You see, Harry, that spell will get any Sentinel on your side."

Chuckling wryly, Harry looked at her sideways as if asking, 'are you sure about that' and then waved away the fulsome thanks of the Sentinels.

But when they sobered, Harry's opinion seemed to be shared by the two Sentinels. "Well, if you are being accompanied by Mistress Tyrande, that is enough to mark you as a friend, above and beyond this spell, which would make you as welcome as the mightiest of our own druids. Although... I doubt that Commander Nightshade will approve. She won't like the idea of a, a human going around in our territory, regardless of who vouches for you, since you are not Kaldorei.

Tyrande sighed loudly, not even bothering to hide it from the two young men. "Alas, that is all too believable considering what I know of Nightshade. Still, let us continue on. At least with you two escorting him, we will not have issues traveling through Danaveia. Still, it is best to get Nightshade's reaction over with quickly, before sunup." *This isn't even considering that Nightshade will detect that Harry is using something beyond Nature Magic. Translation spell or no that is bound to make this more annoying.*

Entering the town was a startling surprise to Harry. It was a very subtle change from the forest around them. The trees were larger, and broader but with fewer small branches on the

bottom several yards. At first, Harry thought that they were simply a new type of tree but noticed a uniformity that was impossible to find in nature. Then he started to see dwellings in the trees. They were not made of planks and such, rather the trees themselves had been molded into dwellings. Those dwellings were all interlinked as well by carefully designed walkways.

Meanwhile, on the ground, other houses, slightly more normal-looking, also began to be seen, with Kaldorei moving in and around them. The first few were Sentinels, these fellows wearing more complete armor than the two Sentinels escorting the group. Then more Kaldorei appeared, all of them seeming to be dressed in normal-seeming clothing rather than armor. The clothing was made of cloth, leather and something that looked like silk. No jeans were in sight, Harry thought with some amusement.

And as they moved out from around one particularly large tree, he found himself staring at what looked like a bazaar of some kind, spread out in among the trees, with several hundred Kaldorei. The sight of that many people froze Harry for a moment, not having been around so many recently, but then he shook himself before following Tyrande.

But what really surprised Harry was the various shades of skin, their eyes and the hairstyles. Lunara and the other nymphs that Harry had met all had the same wild, seemingly uncared for hair. But The Kaldorei, all of whom seemed to favor long hair man or boy, had dozens of different hairstyles, some of them very strange. The sight of one man who had his hair done up in several large spikes pulled out and formed into spikes directly over his ear, and a woman with a mohawk stuck with Harry. As did the skin colors. While Tyrande had violet skin, that was not the normal color for her people, who seemed to favor a darker, almost purple color or an even lighter violet color.

As soon as the people in the town spotted her, it was obvious that many of them recognized Tyrande, but thankfully, most of the Kaldorei didn't seem to have the same need to get near and touch their idols as humans did. Instead, as one, every Kaldorei there bowed deeply, murmuring, "High Priestess Whisperwind," as they did so.

Only a few came forward, kneeling for a moment on the grass and dirt beneath as they crossed arms over their chests. The move reminded Harry of a movie about ancient Egypt he'd seen once. "High Priestess Whisperwind, may Elune bless you!" Others, as they got over their surprise, shouted out to Tyrande to come and try their wares, or their food or whatever.

Harry moved to stand beside his friend, whispering, "Is it always like this? If so, I can see why you want to take a sabbatical. Heck, I think you deserve a medal for only taking one sabbatical every three hundred years. I'd take one every other year. And yes, the sabbatical would still be a year long."

She smiled wanly, then shook her head. "It's not this bad near the main temple in Nordrassil, with other priestesses of Elune, or the upper echelons of government for... various

reasons. But I don't think I've actually ever visited this town before except once when it was being built. And too many people still view the leadership of myself and Malfurion as the real reason we were able to win the War of the Ancients."

As Harry shook his head, he became aware that a lot of the small crowd, if it could be called that. The Kaldorei seemed to not believe in getting as close to one another as humans would, were now staring at him. It reminded him of being back in Hogwarts that first few days of his life in the Wizarding World: being stared at like an exhibition in a zoo. *Oh, hell no. Once was enough, thank you very much. Ugh, please don't let the Tauren react like this. I would not be pleased to be the, the constant outsider, the constant source of interest.*

"What is the High Priestess Whisperwind doing with a tiny Vrykul?" One voice said, loud enough to be heard through the susurrations of the rest of the Kaldorei.

"At least he isn't dressed like a barbarian. Although those clothes do look strange. Very unusual." Another voice, louder this time.

"I am not a tiny Vrykul," Harry shouted, winking at the one who had spoken, causing her to blush and stammer, looking away, not having realized he would overhear her. "I even believe myself quite civilized, thank you."

That won him some chuckles, and much of the crowd of Kaldorei's around them started to back away, still bowing their heads towards Tyrande but no longer bothering Harry so much with their strange gazes. A few were still looking at him, but their eyes were narrowed, their gaze wary rather than confused or curious about this new curio of this new attraction. Many of them had scars and looked older than the others in the crowd.

As they moved through the crowd, stone and metal began to appear among the building material on display. Or rather, silver, not steel. And it wasn't used as building material, only as display markers here and there, a small but intricate etching and a few disks which were obviously set up in the trees above to reflect the light of the moon down into the town. Stone, though, was used as a building material. Several houses were made out of it amongst the trees, a few houses showing stone and wood merged together.

Soon they started to see a large octagonal palisade ahead of them, and they also started to see real roads. These were not paved as they would've been in a human town. Rather, they were made of hard-packed earth, the roads creating a circle around the keep, with branches leading off in various directions.

The palisade itself was made of stone pillars and trees planted between the stone, and these were not average trees. They were thicker than even the majority of the other trees in the town. They also grew upwards taller than the rest to grow together in an intricate network that seemed to absorb the stone pillars.

Harry thought it was a fallback point for the townsfolk in times of trouble and nodded approvingly.

Right up until he passed through the gate and found himself in the training ground inside. Then Harry found himself facing several dozen drawn bows in the hands of fourteen Sentinels like the two who had escorted them her, along with ten Sentinels all fully armed and armored in scale mail, their twin blades at the ready as they sat on their bonded animals.

The Sentinel in the center was riding a massive tiger, his orange coloration dimming with the gray of age. She was taller, broader in the shoulder than any of the others, her armor full-plate rather than the others' scale mail. In her hands was a massive spear, reminding Harry of Cenarius, except this one was tipped with metal instead of oak from tip to butt. "Move away from the High Priestess, Arcanist!"

Staring at the half-circle of battle-ready Sentinels, Tyrande felt the beginnings of a headache coming on. Commander Nightshade, this is Harry Potter. He is not a small Vrykul. His people call themselves humans. He has been my companion for several moons now."

"High Priestess Whisperwind, far be it from me to question you, but you cannot bring this Arcane user into my town and assume I will just stand by and allow it!" The lead Sentinel exclaimed, a scowl visible under her helmet. "I can smell the Arcane on him! Who is to know if he used his magic on you somehow?"

"Beyond my word and the fact I have my goddess's blessing? Or the word of Cenarius?" Tyrande replied.

"Again, High Priestess, he might have ensorcelled you to say that. I cannot take the chance of this, this strange creature and the power I can see within him," Nightshade replied firmly. "Leothi, Cainor, bind his hands and muffle him."

As the two Sentinels paused for a second before reluctantly moving forward, Beside Tyrande, she felt Shy-Rotam shift uneasily. Yet her eyes were locked with that of the chief tiger, staring back at that experienced firm glare, not doing anything but not showing any deference either. She was the daughter of the king and queen of frostsabers, and as learned and powerful as this Hunter was, she would not be intimidated.

For her part, Tyrande too hesitated. She could order the commander to leave off, of course. But technically, she was still on sabbatical, and she had used being on sabbatical before to get out of making any kind of command decision, even in combat situations a time or two. It would be hypocritical of her to turn around and use her authority now. *I just hope that Harry remembered what I said about keeping things nonlethal*, she reflected, shaking her head once and stepping to the side and away, very visibly wiping her hands of whatever was about to happen. "On your head be it then Nightshade."

When the two Sentinels with them attempted to put their handcuffs on him, Quetzal appeared, phasing out from behind his chameleon cloak and hissing. "I think not!"

While Leothi and Cainor both backed away, staring in shock and wondering how they had missed that Quetzal had turned invisible as they moved through the town, the other Sentinels didn't hesitate. Bows twanged, all of the archers having instantly turned their attention on him, and the other Sentinels charged forward on top of their companions.

For all their martial prowess, Harry was ready. He flicked his hands, and a gush of wind caught up the arrows as well as the two nearest Sentinels, hurling them away. Then he was pointing his hands forward. Before the Sentinels could cover more than a single bound toward him, a wide burst of magic splashed out and away from Harry. "Immobulus."

An instant later, all of the Kaldorei found themselves immobilized. Even the leader who had leaped forward without even as long as a millisecond delay after the snake appearing was caught, her mount rearing to leap forward. "Now, if I was an enemy, I could finish you all right now." He let that sink in, moving forward and even tapped the end of Nightshade's spear, waiting until he saw the light of fear overriding the concern.

"Instead..." Harry winked, then thrust out his hands once more.

An instant later, all of the trapped Sentinels, man and woman, began to laugh, hit by the Tickling Charm. Even the commander, who seemed like the sort to never have laughed in her entire life, couldn't stop herself from chuckling, although she tried and failed to clench her jaw around it, thanks to the spell holding her still.

After a few seconds, Harry released them from the second spell but not the first one as he turned to Tyrande, a roguish smirk on his face and a twinkle in his eyes. "I find that laughter is the best medicine, don't you?"

Turning in place, Harry looked around at the Sentinels as they slowly began to recover. "Now, I hope I have proven that were I an actual threat, you would not be able to do much at the moment. So let us move on to the other issue you have with me, my use of magic. Am I what you call an Arcanist? Honestly, I do not believe so. Judging by what Tyrande has told me, all Arcanists among your race start off weak on their own and have to find an external source of power for most of their magic. Further, connecting to such a source of magic appears to act almost like a drug, and can change your people on a physical level. Am I wrong?"

Nightshade scowled, and Harry released her head from the spell, moving to look her in the face while trying not to listen to the growls and snarls of the tiger under her. Despite not having used a translation spell on him, the tone of those growls didn't leave Harry in any doubt as to their meaning. "Well?"

"Yes!" Nightshade growled out. "Magic is a drug. Once you have found a source of power enough to give you Arcane users the power you all seek, you are compelled to drink

from it again and again. Only Nature Magic is pure! You and your foul magics are dangerous to anyone...”

“In that case, there’s no problem,” Harry interjected, looking around at the others. “My magical power comes from inside me, an internal source rather than external. Nor am I addicted to magic itself. I’ll admit I use it a lot, but it’s just a tool to me.

As to my being dangerous, certainly. So is every single one of you with your great big bows and your great big arrows, and your oh-so sharp and intimidating swords.” Harry snorted, releasing some of the Sentinels who were using bows. They all looked at one another, then at Harry, but made no move to attack again, knowing intellectually that they didn’t really constitute a threat to this strange ‘hooman’.

“But that doesn’t mean I’m going to be dangerous to anyone under your command or your protection. Tyrande and I are friends, and I am willing to do my part to make certain that that friendship extends to her people as a whole,” With that, Harry released the remaining Sentinels.

The felines all stumbled, but the commander’s companion turned that stumble into a twist, then launched towards Harry, Nightshade’s tri-sided moonblade flashing towards his new position. The other mounted Sentinels also made to follow suit, but an Immobilus spell caught the pair once more, catching the tiger with one paw on the ground, and a look around at the others stopped the rest of the Sentinels in their tracks.

“But you are not making it easy,” Harry muttered, hitting her with a cheering charm this time. “Now come on,” he snorted, holding the spell on the woman. “Give me a smile.”

She scowled, despite the nature of the cheering charm, her face promising further violence. But Tyrande shook her head, and at her gesture, both Shy-Rotam and Quetzal moved between them. Shy-Rotam, with all the courage of youth, moved over and batted at Nightshade’s leg where it was around the tiger. “You are a very silly Kaldorei. Even a youngling like me can tell when I am overmatched. **And** when I am in the wrong.”

“If you wish to continue this battle,” Quetzal hissed, rearing up to his full height, which was now pushing two stories and more, to stare down at them. “You will be forced to deal with me as well. And my ability to paralyze involves biting. Not nearly as nice as my friend’s spell.”

Tyrande waited for the knowledge that both animals had seemingly spoken in Kaldor to sink in and the whispered shock to go around the group then spoke up. “As I was saying. Cenarius came to see me in the capital at one point and convinced me to take my sabbatical up in the Winterspring mountains. There, I met Harry Potter, and together we campaigned through the mountains against local monsters called Frostmaul giants. They were a formidable enemy who had wiped out most other life in the area, and had almost wiped out my new bonded’s clan, the frostsabers. Harry is indeed able to use magic, but his spells are vastly different from

what the Highborn performed, and his heart and moral fiber are both of high quality regardless of him not being Kaldorei.”

She paused, then moving around the group, then back to lock gazes with Nightshade. “And both Elune and Cenarius vouch for him. As High Priestess, I vow this to be the case. There is nothing more that needs to be said.”

At her look, Harry released Nightshade from the two spells on her. Now released, she scowled, but, as her tiger settled back onto its haunches, glaring down at Shy-Rotam with affronted dignity, Nightshade hopped down. She glared at Harry, and Harry gazed back before Nightshade, now realizing what had already occurred to her followers, turned to Tyrande. “You vouch for this creature?” she ground out.

“I just finished saying so, Commander Nightshade,” Tyrande answered, although her eyes flashed in annoyance. *And you will be Group Leader Nightshade the instant I come back to work. That will be the first bit of paperwork I see to, I swear.* And yet, Nightshade didn’t seem to notice, simply staring between Tyrande and Harry, before throwing her hands up. “Very well, but if you do vouch for him, it will be on your head if this creature goes insane from the use of Arcane power. I want him kept far away from me. And I will demand that two of my Sentinels are assigned to you as long as you all are within my purview.”

She looked around at her command and chose out the youngest pair of night elves there, two young women even younger than the two men who had escorted them to the garrison. “Berena, Sylina, you two watch him. He is not to do anything magical during his time in this town without permission. If he becomes a threat, I expect you to do your duty.”

The two young Sentinels exchanged glances as if asking one another ‘how!?’ which Harry could sympathize with even as he took in their appearance, trying hard not to just nod in hormonal approval. Both appeared young, obviously, and dressed in brigandine armor with leather skirts down to their knees, long daggers at their sides and bows on their backs. There, their similarities faded.

One had a somewhat coltish appearance to her, nervously moving from one foot to another, with a small, barely perceptible bust, thin legs, and a somewhat thin face and thinner ears than Tyrande or most of the other Kaldorei Harry had seen so far, although she had the same gorgeous violet skin Tyrande did. Her hair was white and done up in long braids, with tiny stones braided into them. Harry couldn’t determine the color of her eyes in the moonlight, but she at least was smiling, if hesitantly.

While her companion’s face was just as youthful, she had much more mature body. Indeed, the second young Sentinel assigned to ‘guard’ Harry had the largest chest Harry could see among the bow-wielding Sentinels. Her skin was a dark, almost black purple color rather than violet. Her hair was done in two long ponytails falling down to either side of her chest and

was a pale green. She, too, was smiling, a bit wider than her companion as she looked at Quetzal and Shy-Rotam.

“Now, if you’ll excuse me, I have work to do.” With that, Nightshade turned away, moving to the small barracks nearby, her tiger following her with a final snort towards Shy-Rotam.

Harry winked at them, and Tyrande moved over to them, nodding politely to the youngsters. “Don’t worry, he doesn’t bite.”

“That’s my job,” Quetzal hissed cheerfully. “What fools these warmbloods be, to take counsel of their fears so much so that they make fools of themselves in front of their betters.”

Ignoring the sarcastic snake, Tyrande looked over at Harry. “You looked interested in some of the wares in the marketplace, or am I wrong?” When Harry nodded firmly, she smiled and gestured to their new companions. “These two can take you back there to start shopping while I procure us a ship.” She looked over at the two young girls. “If Harry finds anything, tell the seller that the temple will reimburse them if they refuse to take his payment.”

Harry nodded, bowing grandly to the two. “Lead the way, Berena, Sylina. Although before you do, which is which?”

“I’m Sylina Sungaze. She’s Berena Snowglare,” the woman with the large bust smiled good-naturedly at Harry. “Are you really able to allow us to communicate directly with our companions as you did just now with the snake and young frostsaber?”

“Help me find the goods I want, and I’ll perform the spell on your bonded too,” Harry answered, nodding his head, while Quetzal, much to his surprise, moved over to follow Tyrande. *Then again, I suppose we might get a little too crowded without Tyrande around in the marketplace, and I know he wouldn’t like that.*

Smiling happily at the idea of being able to talk to her leopard, and completely, one could almost say willfully, ignoring the fact Harry would have to cast a spell to allow it, Sylina asked, “so, what are we shopping for exactly?”

“Clothing,” Harry announced firmly, amused by their reactions, and grateful to see that Tyrande wasn’t alone in being accepting of him and his magic. “Clothing and a tent. I’ll cheerfully pay for the best tents money can buy. I do have gold coins to use, even if they won’t be in your currency. As well as a sleeping bag.”

“Sleeping bag? You mean a bedroll?”

Harry sighed. “I suppose a bedroll will do for now. But clothing is more important, and a tent. And underwear,” he added. “I need some new underwear.”

Both of the young women giggled nervously at that, looking away from Harry before Berena waved him to follow them out of the bastion, while Tyrande whispered something in Sylina's ears as she passed. The portcullis opened for them with what Harry could only discern as mechanical reluctance to let Harry escape from the fortress's environs. Outside, Berena retraced their steps on a bit of an angle, following one of the main roads rather than, as Harry and Tyrande had, coming in from the side.

It turned out that the marketplace the foursome and their guides had passed through initially was only a part of the total marketplace. Indeed, Harry estimated that the town was far more sprawling than he had even thought at the time. *Far fewer people per acre than humans for certain, and way more spread out. Plus, no outer defenses. Still, with their Sentinels' skill, I suppose they don't have to worry so much on that score.*

As soon as Harry stepped outside and into the marketplace again, he found that many of the night elves were staring at him in suspicion once more. But not nearly as many as he had feared. Harry knew that part of that was because he had arrived with Tyrande and because he had yet to use his magic in front of the masses, so to speak, but even so, it was nice to see that at least a few of the people who had been staring at him for being a different species had stopped. And as he neared them, they began to cry out their wares to him just as much as the other passerby.

"Can I ask why you need clothing?" Sylina said, looking down at his pants. "If you think you'll find anything like you are wearing, I believe you should reconsider. The shirt seems to be made of wool, perhaps? We could do something like that or better, but the pants? Just by looking at them, I admit that I have no idea what kind of material they are made of, although they certainly look to be a very hard hearing substance."

Harry glanced down at his jeans before shuddering very slightly. "Leggings will do for me. I'd just like them to be tough, that's all." He smirked then, sending a sly glance at his two companions. "And while hard-wearing, these jeans are my only pair, and I think at this point, if I took them off they would be able to stand up on their own."

Both young women blanched at that, and he chuckled but made no move to share the real reason just yet. Because the real reason was that most of his clothing these days had been transfigured from something else, transfigurations lasting much longer than conjurations. He'd gone through most of the clothing he'd been able to pack when he was with Cenarius. The nymphs and Lunara liked to play rough, and Harry had found out that there was a limit to how many times you could use a repair spell on items of clothing before they started to fall apart.

This was exacerbated by the fact that Harry had not been able to pack as much clothing at all, especially in the realm of underwear, and again, cleaning charms only worked for so long. So, Harry had taken to transfiguring some underwear for himself in the last few weeks learning

from Cenarius. But over the months that he had been traveling with Tyrande through the mountains, it had started to bother him.

Harry found himself feeling itchy in various places, scratching at his side or thighs or other places. He didn't know if it was all in his mind or a real sensation, the transformation slowly fading. Regardless, Harry could no longer get over the fact that he was wearing underwear and shirts made from leaves or other materials.

With Berena in the lead, the group moved through the town, still gaining a few looks, but nowhere near as much as Harry had feared. Soon they came to a boutique, which apparently was one of the few indoor stores. Over its doorway, a series of pictures told everyone who passed by that it was 'the Golden Weave', which Sylina read aloud for Harry before questioning, "You can understand our verbal language but not written?"

"At this point, I don't need a translation spell to understand your language," Harry chuckled. "I haven't used a spell on myself since I was training with Shan'do Cenarius. But he didn't actually have any examples of your written languages to help me learn with."

Berena laughed. "True, our Druids aren't exactly the best when it comes to writing things down."

"Comes from those bear claws they like to transform their hands into. That and the beards, they interfere with the male mind," Sylina opined, nudging her friend in the side.

Harry smiled at their interaction as he opened the door, bowing them inside. He had become used to Tyrande and her more mature, low-key sense of humor and controlled body language. These two were far less self-possessed than Tyrande and far more emotive. *I know they are older than the modern age in my own world, but I still get the impression that they are about as old as Fleur or Bill at most.*

Inside they found the first overweight Kaldorei that Harry had seen so far. She was a short, plump woman, who reminded Harry of Madame Malkin as she bustled forward, smiling, before freezing at the sight of Harry. Her welcoming smile seemed to fade very slightly, but she nodded at him all the same. "And who, or what is this?"

"My name is Harry Potter, ma'am," Harry said, deciding to put his best foot forward. "I recently arrived and decided that I needed more clothing than I already possess."

The older woman looked at him thoughtfully with her head cocked to one side for a moment, then shrugged. "Well, you can speak like an intelligent being anyway. So long as you can pay, I am willing to see if I can find anything to suit your needs."

Harry nodded and reached for the pouch at his side, which he had earlier taken out of his luggage. Pulling out one of the gold coins within, he held it up to the woman. She took it,

staring at the faces on it for a second, frowning, then moved over to her desk, where she pulled out a set of scales, which was dusty from disuse. She set the gold disc down, then took out a series of other coins in local currency, setting them down one after another as she watched the scales.

As each one landed, her frown slowly disappeared and eventually turned upside down. "That will do nicely. I will give you two gold and a silver for every one of your gold coins."

Harry nodded, making no comment on the fact that she had actually stacked four silver coins onto the other side of the weight along with the two gold. After all, he had more than enough gold to go around. *And I would be willing to pay any price to get some new underwear that doesn't make my mind think of leaves!*

With that, the woman bustled off, calling over her shoulder, "What exactly are you looking for? And might I examine your leggings at the same time you're trying some on? That material looks fascinating."

"You can indeed, Madame. I'm sorry that I can't tell you how it's made. I was a soldier where I came from, not a clothier," Harry answered as he followed.

Beside him, Sylina was already moving over to one side, frowning in thought as she remembered what Tyrande had whispered in her ear as they left. *Dark brown and maroon, is it?* She held up shirts of those colors, looking between Harry and the shirts thoughtfully, and then nodded. Tyrande was right, she decided, as should be expected of the high priestess. With that, she pushed the shirts into Harry's hands. "Try these on."

Harry looked at them, shrugged, nodded, and moved over to a changing booth set along one of the store's walls. Despite the material that it was made of, the store looked much like Madam Malkin's dress store back in his old world. Although Harry was amused to note, it had a lot more clothing in stock and far more styles available, if not types of material.

Unfortunately, denim flummoxed the store owner. She thought at first it might have come from an animal and was simply a type of leather, but it didn't appear as if it was. The zipper, though, was fascinating. She made a note of it, wondering if she could find a metalworker that could do that kind of fine work.

With Sylina's enthusiastic help, Harry eventually bought ten sets of leggings, all of them the more expensive kind, which had pockets included along with small built-up pads on the thighs and knees. Beyond that, he purchased four belts, twelve shirts, and several leather jerkins, both long-sleeved and not, to go over the shirts.

Leaving behind a very happy shopkeeper, Harry wondered about armor and decided to ask his two local guides about that. "By the way, is there an armorer here?"

"There is, but the Firetongue family aren't the best smiths, whatever they might tell you," Berena answered instead of the more voluble Sylina. "All of the armor the Sentinels here use are actually made in Darnassus . If you want good armor you have to go there, and you would probably be unable to wear any of the armor we have on hand."

Berena glanced at their odd charge, shaking her head, setting a few of the stone beads in her hair to gently clack against one another. Harry was not as tall as a Kaldorei who had yet to gain their full maturity. At the same time, he was broader in the shoulders as well as in the waist, something his new shirt showed off rather well. His legs were also a little shorter. So anything made for a man of similar age would have to be fitted to him, a harder process for armor than for clothing.

She idly wondered how old Harry was for his own race and decided that he was probably quite young. Perhaps the age where a Kaldorei would be thinking of his future profession, but no older. *Although he is certainly much more...not certain what word to use, mature doesn't quite cover it. Self-assured is closer. Self-assured and not as shallow as such a young person would normally be.*

Shrugging his head at that, Harry looked around, asking allowed, "So, where do we go for tents?"

Unfortunately, Harry discovered that not all shopkeepers were created equal. The tent seller's stall was outside its wares on display to one side. Each tent was small, well made and colored to blend into the environment.

All that was good. But the moment the possibly married couple manning the stall saw Harry moving towards them, they scowled. And when he and his companions got there, the man addressed his harsh question to Harry's two minders. "Where is this one's a leash? You do yourselves a disservice to assume that you can control it as well as High Priestess Whisperwind could without physical reinforcement."

Harry quickly turned to his minders as well, asking, "So, is this the only place we can get a tent? Obviously, they don't want the business."

Berena winced. "Unfortunately, they are the only pair who sell tents and other such equipment in town. We're not a major source of cloth, alas."

"And before you ask, we Sentinels don't use tents. We simply have bedrolls and make ourselves comfortable up in the trees," Sylina added, glaring at the two stall owners. "This is Harry Potter. He is not a small Vrykul, and he is actually quite intelligent. High Priestess Whisperwind has vouched for him, and according to her, so has Lord Cenarius."

"He's also willing to pay in gold," Sylina added tartly. "Which I assume would be more important to you two."

"Mind how you speak to your elders," the woman of the pair barked back, scowling at the two young Sentinels. Then she looked at Harry and said sharply, "If you wish to buy a tent, it will cost you 10 gold coins."

Harry didn't need to hear the sharp intake of breath from his two companions to know that that was far more than he should be paying, and he smiled thinly, biting back any desire to taunt or otherwise tease these two, shaking his head slightly. *Tyrande probably wouldn't like it if I used my magic to make these two miserable.* "And it's obvious that they do not want the business," he repeated, shaking his head. "Let's just move on."

With a final scowl sent to the two shopkeepers, Sylina and Berena led the way through the bazaar.

How long Harry spent immersed in the bazaar after that, he didn't know. But it was certainly enough to take away the taste of those two from his mouth, quite literally, because he spent most of that time sampling this or that type of food or spice, delighting in some and buying quite a lot of the spices in small bags, adding them to a series of packages that he was carrying.

As he did, he and his two companions got to know one another, and Harry learned that Sylina had been posted out here from a small community on Nordrassil just outside of Darnassus, having been raised there most of her life. On the other hand, Berena was a local girl, well known by the stall owners, and something of a voracious eater. She matched Harry plate for plate as they moved through the stalls and helped to direct him to a few of her particular favorites.

One of which, the braised fish skewers, Harry loved. Each chunk of fish stuck on the skewer between each of them was coated with subtly different spices, and he spent several moments almost begging for the recipe to the laughing delight of the man who ran the stall and a smirk from Berena. He even took several away from the stall to share with Tyrande and their two animal companions later on.

Harry did note that there was a distinct lack of dessert-type food on display. He wondered if that was because of the time of night it was – pushing dawn by this point and thus when most of the Kaldorei would be turning in - or if it was a societal thing. *Or maybe this market just doesn't have any? If they did, I'm certain Berena would already know of it,* he thought in amusement, watching Berena gobble up a second fish skewer. *I take it back. I now think she a bit younger than me,*

At the moment, Harry was pushing seventeen years of age (again). Berena, when she ate at least, reminded him of Luna, a year younger than him but somehow even younger-seeming thanks to her innocence.

Eventually, however, one of the other Sentinels from the bastion came looking for them. He was an older man who had the most magnificent sideburns Harry had yet to see, a thin, severe face and scale mail armor, unlike Harry's two companions. He took a moment to glare down at Harry for a second, who he topped by at least two feet, before shaking his head and very frostily, if politely saying, "Harry Potter, High Priestess Whisperwind has secured a ship to take the two of you to the Broken Isles. She is waiting for you down on the docks."

He then looked at Harry's two companions. "Commander Nightshade has also decided that the two of you will continue to travel with them for a time, along with a full unit of Sentinels. Broken Isles being what it is, High Priestess Whisperwind will need protection."

Harry's eyebrows rose at that, and he shook his head slightly, looking between his two companions and the man who had just given them the message. "I don't suppose Nightshade talked to Tyrande about that point, did she? That's rather like assigning a team of house cats to guard a full-grown tigress."

"I'd resent the implication if I didn't agree with you," Sylina giggled under her breath, shaking her head.

But she wasn't exactly unhappy about the assignment. Like the rest of the Sentinels, she had been appalled at the idea of an arcane user like Harry being within their territory. But her disgust faded greatly when High Priestess Whisperwind had vouched for him. Then talking to Harry and using him as a dress-up model in the clothing store and even later as they moved through the marketplace had been fun. He was so full of curiosity, and there was something welcoming and warm about him, added to a wry, teasing sense of humor that was unlike most she had seen before. All too many males of all stripes took themselves too seriously, in her opinion.

Berena had her mind on something else entirely, though. She poked Harry in the shoulder with the end of her skewer, and when he looked at her, intoned firmly, "The translation spell for our companions, please."

Laughing, Harry agreed, and the two took out their totems, Harry watching avidly at the flash of what Tyrande had called a blessing of Elune. Soon enough two panthers stood there, blinking in some confusion as they heard one another speaking Kaldor. A moment later, both were talking excitedly with their partners, thanking Harry profusely for the opportunity, while the Sentinel officer looked somewhat dyspeptic, but said nothing.

Harry supposed he had been talked to by Tyrande, before coming to find him. Or perhaps the man was fighting the desire to ask for access to the same spell, his hatred of the Arcane warring with his wish to speak naturally to his partner.

All too soon for the Sentinels they were at the docks, and once more, the construction of the docks and the surrounding wharfs reminded Harry that the Kaldorei were not human, for

all that they seemed to have many of the same types of people among their number. To one side of the large dirt road leading down from the forest to the hills around the docks, Harry could see a single large wooden door cut into the raised side of a hill, which probably was a single large warehouse. There were no other buildings around them, save for small, stonelike structures Harry could tell had some military purpose.

Below that, though, the docks themselves were amazing to look at. Fossilized wood was pored with stone, the stone twisting around the wood like twin vines, reaching out from the shore into the water of the tiny inlet. At the far end of the centermost, largest wharf, Harry could see a giant tree growing, so big it made the trees in Danaviea look small in comparison. Several large green and silver lights could be seen within its massive boughs, winking in the waning light of dawn. *A kind of watchtower, maybe? Or rather a light tower.*

Harry also noticed something else. While it looked as if each of the wharves could handle six or seven ships large at a time, there were only two ships in port at the moment, with several other, smaller boats scattered around. *A naval power this place is not.*

The ship that Tyrande had found for them was also interesting, and although Harry had no idea whatsoever about ships, he could tell that this one was built for speed. While there were a series of catapults along the vessel's sides, the ship's seemed thin and low in the water. It almost gave the impression of being some kind of bird of prey.

Tyrande awaited them along with Quetzal and Shy-Rotam by the plank leading up on the ship along with another Kaldorei. Harry estimated that this one, a man, was perhaps as old as Nightshade or Tyrande. He stood there confident and poised, his face blank, as one finger strokes the bottom of a long, pointed goatee, his eyes deep-set in his head.

His skin, too, was weathered in a way that Harry had yet to see in any of the other Kaldorei, although looking around, he saw that a few of the other Kaldorei working on the boats in the port seemed to have the same weathered appearance. *I suppose that's because they spend their life at sea?* He had read a few fantasy novels that seemed to indicate that, and the term weather-beaten came to mind.

For her part, Tyrande smiled as she took in Harry's new appearance. He looked almost like a Kaldorei now. If you could ignore his facial features. *Those emerald eyes are indeed unusual, and those small ears of his. Still, I was right. The dark maroon color of his shirt definitely works very well for Harry. It would be rather silly to wear such a thing in the forest, but it still looks good.*

"I see that you were able to procure clothing at least. You look much nicer than you did in the mountains," Tyrande teased, causing Harry to snort. Then she went on, introducing the man next to her. "Harry, this is Captain Sunstide. He's graciously agreed to provide us with passage to the Broken Isles."

A vague uptick from one eyebrow seemed to indicate that the man didn't think of this trip as something he could've avoided, but he nodded politely enough to Harry and gestured him toward the ship. "If you would all board, we will be on our way. The tide comes with the dawn."

Harry nodded and mentally put that alongside the whole weather-beaten thing as a reason why the captain's skin looked a little tanned and ruddy in comparison to all the other Kaldorei Harry had so far met. Evidentially the ship was prepared to sail during the day rather than at night.

"Have you been told about our new companions?" Harry questioned, gesturing to Berena and Sylina and then to the other four Sentinels standing nearby, watching as the two young Sentinel's companions returned to totem form.

"I have," Tyrande shook her head, and if it were anyone else, Harry suspected that Tyrande would be grumbling right now. "Nightshade decided to foist them on me despite the fact I have no need of guards, and you have no need of a minder. Still, that is within her powers." *Though not for much longer if I have anything to say about it.*

The man who had come looking for Harry and his two companions seemed about to frown, but the look in Tyrande's eyes said that sabbatical or no, there was a limit to how far she would bend. His mouth clamped shut at that, and he bowed stiffly, sent one last glare Harry's way, and turned to join his companions.

Rolling her eyes, Tyrande placed a hand on Shy-Rotam's head, pushing her very lightly towards the plank. "Come, as the captain said, we should be off."

With Tyrande in the lead, they all boarded the ship, Harry thanking the captain politely as he did so, getting another incremental shift of an eyebrow.

However, Harry's goodwill towards the captain for letting them use his ship faded quickly. Because the moment they got out onto the ocean, the motion of the ship began to get to him. By the time the sun was in the sky, Harry's torso was over the gunwales, heaving all of the food he had recently eaten down into the ocean. Worse to his mind, while the ship's crew was small, much smaller than Harry had expected, not one of them looked anything more than amused and dismissive of Harry's troubles.

Tyrande was somewhat more helpful, patting his back occasionally. "I remember my first voyage at sea. It was most unpleasant for me at the time as well. But you will get over quickly enough. Quetzal, on the other hand..."

Nearby, Quetzal was curled up around himself, his head too stuck out over the gunwales, his eyes closed as he tried to fight through his nausea. Snakes did not have a regurgitation reflex, but his stomach certainly did not agree with this voyage. Shy-Rotam, too,

was a little annoyed, but that was more because she simply couldn't seem to get her feet under her against the ship's movement.

"I, I'll have to take your word for it, then. Although kn, knowing you went through the same experience is oddly th, therapeutic too. Kind of a 'y, you too are mortal' thing, even if, b, by definition, you aren't," Harry tried to quip before leaning back over the side of the ship and continuing to feed the fishes.

Tyrande laughed aloud, shaking her head in amusement, even as she winced slightly at the sunlight beating down on her. *It has been far too long since I traveled night and day if simply having the sunlight in my eyes bothers me.* "Ahh, Harry, if I ever became as arrogant in my position as Azshara, you would do a magnificent job of making me humble once more."

"H, h, I, can really feel the concern, Tyrande," Harry gasped out between dry heaves.

True to Tyrande's words, Harry quickly got over his seasickness. In contrast, the voyage only grew worse for Shy-Rotam the instant she was able to move around and looked over the side into the green-blue water. An instant later, she backed away rapidly and refused to move away from the ship's mainmast afterward.

"There's no bottom! How can there be no bottom to water?!" The young tigress moaned, refusing to even look at the horizon. Quetzal also seemed a little unnerved by the ocean, moving away from it quickly and wrapping himself around the mainmast. And none of the Sentinels even attempted to bring out their companions from their totems.

However, Harry didn't really have much time to spare for the two animals' care beyond making certain they were being fed. A few hours after Harry's stomach had subsided, Tyrande came up to him, a wooden sword in either hand. One was the match for her own normal double-bladed swords, while the other matched the proportions of Harry's sword of Gryffindor. This she tossed down in front of Harry. "Now that your stomach is settled, I think we should resume your education in the blade."

Harry stared at the wooden sword in some distaste but nodded, picking it up as he got to his feet, moving into a series of stretches as Tyrande watched, smiling faintly.

This was something they had taken up in their months traveling together, but now Tyrande wanted to start pushing their training harder. By the time they reached the high mountain clan, Tyrande knew that she would probably have to turn around almost immediately, leaving Harry to his own devices. And while Harry's magic made him incredibly formidable, he still wasn't nearly as good in a hand to hand fight as Tyrande wanted her newest friend to be. Even though her triple-bladed moonglaive was only superficially like Harry's longsword, she could still help him.

Then Harry turned to her, his sword raised. "What are you going to teach me today?"

"I think we're going to spar for today and then move on to a few forms when the sun goes down." With that, Tyrande brought her own sword up to a guard position, then without any warning or tell that Harry could detect, the high priestess of Elune launched into an attack. First came a quick thrust to Harry's chest, followed by a slash towards his leg, then another up towards his face.

To one side, Berena and Sylina watched as Harry danced back and forth with Tyrande, with Tyrande setting the tone from the get-go. Soon they were joined by the other Sentinels, watching Tyrande avidly. She was known as one of the best combatants the Kaldorei could boast, and it was obvious to all that watched, that she had not lost a step. "Good grief, I knew the stories about Lady Whisperwind, but this is something else," Sylina murmured, gaining rumbles of agreement from the others.

Although, Berena noted that Harry was doing somewhat well too. He wasn't in danger of winning, but he was still moving extremely quickly, and she couldn't detect any issue with his footwork, which was the core of good swordsmanship. Footwork was indeed what Harry and Tyrande had spent most of their time working on in the mountains.

Beyond that, Harry was very aware that he had something like preternatural reflexes compared to most humans he had met. Very, **very** rarely had Harry met someone whose speed and hand-eye coordination could match his own. It was what had made him a star Seeker during his time at Hogwarts.

But Tyrande's experience and speed were a combination that he could not hope to match, which she showed in the next hour. Tyrande seemed to know his movements before he even began them and was not only stronger but faster as well. Harry consoled himself by thinking that it was simply experience rather than natural talent, but the attempted salve to his ego didn't help much. She pinned him against the mast, tripped him up, then quickly disarmed him, going so far as to grab his sword out of the air, shaking her head. "Your left foot was too far off-center that time. Try again."

At that point, Harry was given a reprieve by Berena. She came forward asking, "Mistress Whisperwind, could we spar as well? Only, it isn't often that we have the chance to learn from someone with the amount of experience and training that you have."

Shaking his head, Harry kept quiet, knowing that line would not have been taken well by any human woman. But Tyrande simply smiled politely and gestured Berena to stand across from her. "Come, let us begin. And Sylina if you could spar with Harry? I would rather like to get him used to training against other people, not just myself."

However, something unusual happened that night, after Harry had finished training for the day. He was performing some final stretches, watching as some food was brought out for the crew, when Sylina came up to him. "So, we've seen you use a stasis spell, that tickle charm which is just wrong by the way, please don't ever use it on us again, and the translation spell.

But Lady Whisperwind says you could use other spells too. Are there any safe enough for you to show us?"

"What else would you like to see?" Harry replied, somewhat confused. "And I thought all Kaldorei wouldn't want to have much to do with magic like mine, which isn't Nature-based."

"We wouldn't, normally, but High Priestess Whisperwind vouches for you," Sylina answered. Then she smirked, her ears twitching. "And besides, I figure if you do anything bad out here, you'll have to swim back to shore."

"And neither of us thoughts to bring books or anything else along to keep us busy," Berena added somewhat more truthfully. "That, and you represent something new, which is always interesting."

Harry glanced over their shoulders at the rest of the Sentinels, who were looking over at them in disapproval. "Your fellows don't seem to agree."

The two young women both shrugged her shoulders in unison, something the two of them seemed to do occasionally without even thinking about it. "They'll get over it, eventually. For my part, I think that you're no threat to us and certainly aren't allied with the demons. You don't seem the type," Sylina said, speaking for them both.

Harry nodded slowly, then smiled, gesturing the two of them to sit down beside him against the ship's guard rail. "So, what would you like to see?" *And I'll note they aren't mentioning my runes, so I will keep those to myself. I already have one student in them, and that's enough, thanks.*

"You mentioned conjuring. What's that?" Berena asked instantly.

Despite still being on display after a fashion, Harry found that he didn't mind it so much. He tried to convince himself that it had nothing to do with the fact that the two people most interested in his magic were both young and extremely good-looking Kaldorei. They were the very definition of exotic in his eyes. But he only succeeded in doing so to a slight degree.

However, what he did do was demand that Tyrande explain the whole totem-to-living-animal thing the Sentinels seemed to have access to. He didn't come right out and say that it was something he would dearly like to do with Quetzal. After all, what the snake might say about that was probably not printable. But his interest was quite plain that first day out of port.

Alas, it turned out it really was a blessing given by Elune. "When one becomes a Sentinel, one bathes his or her hands in the fountain called Elune's Handmaiden in the main temple In Darnassus. When Elune recognizes the new Sentinel's fidelity to her service and the defense of the Kaldorei people, a vial of water that shines with Elune's light appears in their hands. This vial is then fed to the animal companion they wish to bond with. The bond allows

them to be shrunk down into a totem-form at need, and bonds the two together on a mental level.”

Harry asked a lot of questions about the whole ritual, but in the end, knew realized wasn't something he would be able to figure out how to do with his own magic. There were just too many different enchantments going on in the ritual Tyrande described, even if Harry could probably supply the necessary power.

After that first night, sparring, training and then showing off his magic became Harry's routine aboard the ship, causing the time to fly by. As the trip continued, Harry got to practice with the other Sentinels while on the ship. He found that he was overmatched by them as well, something too many of them were visibly happy about for his presence of mind. Once more, the Kaldorei proved to be superior in speed, reaction time, although none of them dominated Harry as much as Tyrande.

Sparring with the Sentinels turned out to be more worthwhile for Harry because of that. After all, losing against someone you could at least track was worth more than a one-sided slaughter. In turn, that was eclipsed by the work stance and cuts that Tyrande helped him with.

Despite sparring with him, most of the Sentinels assigned to protect Tyrande's dignity, or whatever Nightshade had thought was needed, did not warm up to Harry. Only Berena and Sylina did not treat Harry like he was a danger to Tyrande. So, despite the training and his acquaintance with Berena and Sylina turning into something approaching friendship, Harry was very happy to hear the shout of “Land ho!” from the lookout after about three weeks on the ship.

The island soon came into view from the deck, and Harry stared at it in awe.

It was huge. Harry had nothing to compare it to, but it certainly looked that way to him, anyway. It was also mountainous, a series of mountains rising higher than Harry could see. The island was also green, but not the green of the forest. This was a brighter, almost astonishing green, from one end of the island to another.

And as they came closer, Harry could see massive bits of rock sticking out of the ocean to either side, causing the ship to slow down and start to avoid its surroundings as they continued on their way. A bit after that, they started to see the port they were aiming for on the island. Although, calling it a port was extremely misleading.

Looking around as the ship entered the harbor, Harry could tell that this area had many natural features that anyone looking for a port in a hostile land could want. The area around the port was small, with hills surrounding it, the kind you could easily put, say guard posts on or something similar, and the water was supposed to be deep once you got past a certain set of four rocks sticking out of the water. However, instead of a large port like Danaviea, what awaited them was a small fishing village with a single wharf.

*Which, admittedly, is pretty darn amazing looking.* Harry thought, looking at it. It was made entirely of stone, unlike most of the things he had seen the night elves do so far and jutted far enough out into the water to service three or four ships the size of theirs, per side. It looked almost like concrete, but Harry realized it was made of marble, or a similar material, when he stepped from the ship. Here and there along its surface just below the water, there were glowing green lights.

Harry, for the first time in a long while, had the opportunity to use the word dichotomy in a sentence as he said, "That is the most interesting dichotomy I've ever seen: that wharf, and that village."

The village was extremely primitive, far more primitive than the town they had come from. Indeed, it looked more primitive than anything he'd seen in this world so far. Wooden huts jutted out here and there near the waterline, along with several actual treehouses beyond, with a few of the loghouses.

"Indeed. This place was once slated to become an outpost of the Kaldorei Empire under the queen. One of her courtiers created that wharf in preparation for that expansion, but the town itself was never built, and the project was abandoned during the War of the Ancients. The Kaldorei here wished to retreat entirely from our society, even after we had already exiled the Arcane among us. Many of them came to live here, forming their own small community, where they commune with nature in a more primitive fashion than the rest of my people," Tyrande answered from where she was standing beside him.

From her tone, Harry understood there was a story there. But evidently, it wasn't a bad one considering the moment they saw Tyrande striding into the town from the wharf, all of the elves there bowed, young and old. One of the youngsters, a young boy who seemed the youngest in sight, raced forward, holding up a crown of purple flowers to Tyrande.

Tyrande knelt in front of him, her movements carrying an air of formality even as she smiled at the youngster as he put the crown around Tyrande's head and said something too low for Harry to hear. As she stood up, her eyes flicked over to Harry and Quetzal, promising pain if either of them said anything.

But Harry was far too bright to go there. Instead, he was wondering why, of all the Kaldorei he had seen so far, that only here did he see old people. Several oldsters, in fact, men with long wispy white beards and women who looked like the Kaldorei equivalent of old biddies. Still, he didn't question it right now. Instead, he gestured Shy-Rotam and Quetzal forward, only to pause himself as Tyrande gestured them to wait. She then exchanged a few greetings with one of the greybeards for a few minutes.

Finishing greeting with the locals, Tyrande turned to smile over at the leader of the Sentinels who had accompanied them on the ship. "And with that, group leader, your duty has been fulfilled. Thank you and give my regards to Nightshade when you return."

"My lady, my orders are to guard you until you are back from Danaveia," the Sentinel with the magnificent sideburns said, looking a little uncomfortable.

"But the Broken Isles is out of nightshade's command, and as such, I am overruling her." Tyrande answered, her tone almost sweet but her expression stern. "I have no need of minders, and if over the past three weeks Harry has not shown himself to be no threat to me, then I rather doubt that anything will for now. Furthermore, the Highmountain clan might react negatively if I bring an entire group of Sentinels with me unannounced."

The group leader began to puff himself up as if he would argue, but Harry's next words cut through his pomposity with ease. "Of course, there is a way that they could prove that taking them along might be a good idea. They could face us in a mock battle. There's enough room on the docks here for it. If they could take on you and me, Tyrande, along with Shy-Rotam and Quetzal, then perhaps bringing them along might be worth it."

"I quite agree," Tyrande laughed, looking back at the guard commander, her head cocked to one side, her ears twitching in amusement even as she gazed at the man. "What say you, group leader Ashleaf?"

The man, whose name Harry hadn't heard before this somehow, looked pained, then shook his head. "No High Priestess Whisperwind, I am not so foolish as to try my luck in that kind of battle with you. I will not return, but I will await your return here. Is that sufficient?"

Tyrande nodded firmly and looked over at Harry. "Unless you need anything, I suggest we start moving now. I would like to be in the jungle before nightfall comes. That will allow us to get used to the forest's nighttime noises before we continue traveling tomorrow night." Being out in the day like this was not comfortable for Tyrande, although she still didn't know how much was because of her connection to Elune and how much the habit of several thousand years.

Harry nodded and turned to Berena and Sylina. "Well, you two, this is where we part ways. I doubt I'll be coming back this way with Tyrande, come what may."

"If you come through the port again, look us up," Sylina replied, shaking Harry's hand firmly. "It's been fun. And I cannot thank you enough for the translation spell on our companions."

"Agreed," Berena too took Harry's forearm in a warrior's clasp. "And your magic is still fascinating to me."

"Now I know you only like me for my magic," Harry replied poutingly, causing the two girls to laugh.

He released Berena's hand, then, without another word, moved over to follow Tyrande and Shy-Rotam out and away from the port towards the jungle beyond, with Quetzal following along. And as he stared ahead at the jungle and the mountain rising in the distance, he smiled. *Time for a new adventure*, he thought, his pulse quickening as he wondered what lay beyond those close-packed trees.

"Heh," Harry mumbled more than an hour later as he pushed through a low-hanging bit of foliage, holding the branch for Shy-rotam behind him. Tyrande, of course was ahead of him. She moved with a sort of stuttering gait, halting for a moment of observation and then moving quickly from one position to another. As she seemed to grow used to the jungle around them, her movements became surer, faster. *Like she's learning what she can and shouldn't filter out, what is dangerous and not. Puts her way above me in this kind of place.* Harry had only rarely operated in a jungle, and those moments were very much smash and flash rather than simply moving through.

"What 'heh', that sound means you saw something funny right? What's funny?" Shy-rotam questioned.

"Oh, it just occurred to me. I mean, we really are an odd bunch aren't we?" Harry waited for the frostsaber to cock her head to one side and make an agreeing sort of rumble before going on. "I mean, if you list us off, a tiger, a Kaldorei, a human, and a snake it sounds like the start of a joke. Preferably one told while drinking."

As Shy-rotam looked quizzical once more, and Quetzal thoughtful, Tyrande's chuckle reached him, and she turned enough for Harry to see her ears twitching up and down in a gesture of good humor. "Indeed. We made quite the impression on my people back there. I wonder, now that I am not around, how they are going to speak about you and Quetzal."

"Bah, they would probably be too busy mentioning my magnificence to..." Shy-rotam paused in her speech, leaning down and sniffing at a vine hanging from a tree. Then she yelped and leaped away as what she had been sitting at moved, a large serpentine head appeared, shifting down from above them to stare speculatively at Shy-rotam then around at the others. "This is not what I expected, when I felt something sitting on my tail," the snake hissed calmly.

"No doubt," Harry replied politely, although he was inwardly amused. *Looks as if my Nature Magic is still having an effect. I rather think he'd be attacking Shy-Rotam right now if not for that. and maybe recognizing Tyrande as a Kaldorei. I'm still uncertain on where the Kaldorei's ability to blend into nature finishes and Nature Magic begins.*

The snake's eyes widened and nodded to him. "A speaker, I've never heard the like. Fascinating." Yet despite the interest plain in his tone, the snake slowly retreated back up into the tree line, leaving the others there.

“First rule of this jungle I think,” Harry snorted, patting Shy-rotam on the head as she moved over to Tyrande. “Just because something is hanging from a tree, does not mean it is an actual vine.”

Quetzal on the other hand stared at where the other snake had disappeared. “That was rather rude.” With that he raised his head up into the foliage, and began to hiss at the other snake, his voice obscured by the foliage as Harry followed Sandra and Tyrande.

Despite Shy-Rotam’s inquisitiveness, the unusual quartet made good time. Unlike the boars back in Ashenvale, most of the predators in this jungle seemed to at least recognize Quetzal as a larger alpha predator. Only a few panthers and one tiger attempted to bother them, and Shy-rotam got some good wrestling practice in with the tiger before Harry ran it off. The panthers were simply good eating.

Tyrande however, warned Harry that his anti-bug charms and wards were the real reason this was so easy. “In this jungle especially, mosquitos and other bugs can be just as deadly as the predators. For which I thank you very much, Harry.”

“Find us something beyond panther to eat, and we’ll call it even,” Harry answered with a laugh. Tyrande however took it seriously and later that night, was able to come up with a few fish from a river they had to cross.

Soon after, hills bled into mountains, as the jungle around them grew denser, not thinner. There seemed to be a belt that extended almost entirely around the mountain consisting of extremely dense foliage, fed by several small rivers, each of them winding down from the mountains. Those rivers were spread out enough that the area didn’t become a swamp, but the density of the jungle definitely increased with the access to water. This forced the group to go around a few areas where trees were just growing too tightly together, or up and through the foliage above.

Other times, Harry just had to stop and take in the view. Tyrande noticed that he seemed fascinated by waterfalls. Once as she was fishing Harry just stood watching the waterfall for an hour with a smile on his face. For her part, Tyrande would admit to some delight at the sight of the mountain rising above them.

Of course, as they slowed, they were also attacked more often. The largest such attack was from giant bugs that looked almost like rhinoceros beetles. They were too large for the anti-bug charm to keep away, and they came out from all around them as the group made their way through a band of dense foliage made of trees that almost looked like Baobab trees crossed with oak.

Caught off guard, Tyrande decided she couldn’t get enough space to use her bow, and instead stayed where she was her lips thinning in revulsion. “Harry, if you could...”

Harry was already falling back, casting a series of spells on the ground, turning the ground into a series of spikes. Then he conjured lances of fire and sent them lashing out against each of the giant beetles that got passed Tyrande. Not that there were many of those. Tyrande was a whirlwind, a metal-tipped dervish, her double-bladed moonblade going in every direction, slicing and dicing the beetles coming toward her. Every so often she would also lash out with a kick. Once, she struck one of them in the face so hard that its horn shattered, and it flew backwards.

Quetzal was there a second later hissing and chomping down on the beetles one after another, his bulk creating a wall to one side of Tyrande. The next second a glue-creating spell flashed out from Harry, blocking some of the beetles from getting out of their holes. With that done, the battle wound down almost at once, with Tyrande slicing the last few beetles who could get out of their nest.

“Well, that was odd,” Harry muttered, while Quetzal and Shy-rotam both tried to eat a beetle, only to stop and share a look of pure animal disgust. “Why did they attack us when the other predators didn’t? Heck, not even the boars we’ve seen signs of haven’t and I would have assumed they were the stupidest bunch around.”

“Because these are rhinoceros ants. They are like ants in that the hive matters, not the individual, despite the fact they share some physical traits to beetles of various types all mixed together.” Tyrande shook her head, remembering some tales mariners and others who had been to Northrend. A few had mentioned that they had run into bugs of similar size. and while there was a place for all creatures in nature, Tyrande had to admit that bugs beyond a certain size gave her the chills. “Can we move on? Swiftly, if you please.”

Harry looked at her and saw Tyrande’s hands on her weapon gripping so tightly her knuckles had whitened, and her ears were almost flat against her skull. “Huh, um, of course. You heard the lady, Quetzal, let us get moving.”

Both animals were more than willing to do so, and Tyrande led them off at a fair clip.

The next incident that interrupted their travel wasn’t dangerous, instead it was hilarious for Tyrande and the two animals. They had broken off early that night, as they seemed to be coming out of the thick band of jungle, and Tyrande had to find some signs of the trail which would take them up into the Highmountain range to the Highmountain Tauren clans. Harry, who much preferred to sleep at night despite months travelling with Kaldorei, had decided to take a nap. Quetzal had curled up nearby, while Shy-rotam had, obviously, gone with Tyrande.

When the two of them came back, Tyrande paused, staring, holding Shy-rotam back from charging forward as she bit her lip to keep from laughing. “Harry, you seem to have had some nighttime visitors.”

Both Harry and Quetzal woke up at that but hearing no warning or concern in the woman’s voice, neither moved quickly. Instead, Harry simply opened his eyes and found himself

staring at a large owl, who had perched directly in front of him. It turned its head in a full circle, hooting at him, then leaning forward to headbutt Harry gently, before flapping its large wings and powering up into the nighttime sky.

If it had only been the one owl, it might have been poignant or perhaps just funny, but it wasn't. Several other raptors had landed down and around Harry. One large falcon, another bird that looked like a small Roc rather than anything Harry had seen before, and several different types of owls looked up at Harry as he began to stir. Then one after another, they all took to the air. Some circled him once, while the others nipped at fingers or hair before winging their way off.

"Well that was quite interesting. I think you have solid foundation in Nature Magic already from that little display," Tyrande mused, releasing a small giggle as she did.

"Or birds just love me," Harry retorted, rolling his eyes a second later at the unintentional double entendre. *Not that anyone else would understand it.*

"Hehe, come," Tyrande chuckled, gesturing Harry to his feet. "I would like us to put a few more miles between us and the edge of the jungle before bedding down for the morning."

"Why, are you afraid of more giant bugs coming after us?" Snorting, Harry got to his feet only for Tyrande to glare him into silence, annoyed that Harry had noticed her aversion.

Early the next night, they began to see snow on the mountain above them. The mountains here were not quite as rocky as the mountains of Wintersong, and they had quite a bit of trees and other growth. But this was now starting to be obscured by snow on the ground, and their breath came out now in puffs of air.

The night after they first spotted snow on the ground the travelers stopped early enough for Harry to throw up a full defensive array around them, while Tyrande set up their tents. Even after days in the jungle Harry still wasn't certain he liked the tent he had, he wanted to really do something especially special with the tent, but the small one man tents of the Kaldorei just didn't cut it for him. It was all right for now, and he was going to use it to experiment, but he surely wasn't going to use it as a final product. "So, who is going to cook tonight?"

"Hehe, as if you've cooked for us even once when you didn't have to," Harry teased. Tyrande was actually a good campout type cook, but it was also fact that she had rarely had to make a meal for herself in several thousand years. She was somewhat out of practice, and with Harry's skill in that area, Tyrande had yet to rediscover the skill.

Tyrande nodded with no sense of shame or apology visible. "True. I'll make us a fire pit then."

"Thank you. As for the meal, I think I'll just make us sandwiches. The bread we brought with us from the settlement won't last much longer the way we are going through it. That and a

thick stew from the last of the panther meat.” With that, Harry started to pull out his supplies, while Tyrande sat next to him, the work around the camp done and began to chop up ingredients for him in companionable silence.

That silence continued for a time, then Harry chuckled, looking at Tyrande as she concentrated on making sure each of the chunks of meat for the stew were precisely equal. His chuckle however, caused her ears to cock towards him as she asked, “What are you chuckling at now?”

“Oh, just thinking about how the other Kaldorei would react to this scene. Tyrande Whisperwind, the high priestess of Elune, the millennias-old, respected leader of the Kaldorei, hero of the War of the Ancients, and the War of the Satyrs. Here she is, my sous chef. How many of them would die of apoplexy I wonder?”

Divining the meaning of ‘sous’ from her current task and the sentence as being that of assistant, Tyrande rolled her eyes. “It is my connection to Elune, and my training under Cenarius, that makes me as good as I am in matters of war and statecraft. Anyone else could have done the same thing if they had that connection and knowledge.”

“I doubt it,” Harry said seriously, and Tyrande looked up at him, her eyes narrowing slightly as her ears flicked in confusion. “While I understand where you’re coming from and even agree that setting you on a pedestal for your abilities is wrong but your decisions and your choices are important and worth respect. Not everyone could have chosen to throw in their lot with Stormrage and his brother. Not everyone could have decided to keep on leading your people alone when he retreated into the Emerald Dream.”

“It was not a retreat, Lady Ysera needed his aid. He and the other Druids serve a purpose there, holding back the corruption of the Old Gods in that realm,” Tyrande protested, shaking her head. “You should know that given your own training under Shan’do Cenarius.”

“I understand that, but he still left you with all aspects of leadership afterwards.”

“...That I cannot argue,” Tyrande admitted ruefully. Nor would she have. Tyrande had never, in several thousand years as leader of her people, seen it as aught but a burden. She would have been much happier leading just the church of Elune, if that.

“Exactly. So taking up that mantle is something that is worthy of praise, even if you deny it.”

“Enough about me,” Tyrande said, motioning to her work. “I am done here, and I think you are done with the stew correct? So let it simmer and show me more about your runes and wards.”

Harry nodded affably, and the two of them spent some time on that before the stew was ready. After dinner, Tyrande once more took up the task of teaching Harry proper

swordsmanship, as much as she could given the difference in Harry's weapon and the double-bladed Moonglaive, exchanging japes and mild taunts as they did.

A day later, snow was now the predominant feature as they made their way up the mountain. The going was slow, as the trail wasn't obvious, and Tyrande had to backtrack several times to find the trail, looking for small stone beads left embedded in the rock or bits of leather and bronze torques which the Tauren used to denote the trail.

As night fell, they continued on, but Tyrande was now moving far slower, looking around them and frowning thoughtfully, something niggling at her senses. Watching her from behind, Harry smirked. "You haven't lost the trail again, have you?"

"I don't believe so but I... AMBUGGH!!!" A large stone spear slammed into her side, hurling Tyrande backwards, losing her weapon in the process. It wasn't able to break through her armor, but it still hurt like blazes, and her gasping shout of ambush became a high-pitched howl of pain.

From all around the quartet all enemies popping out all around them as if some wizard had transfigured the landscape around them. The only warning had been when one of them had shifted his arm into a throwing position, the slight movement having caught Tyrande's eyes.

The attackers were about as tall as Harry, but thick of body, their skin a mix of gray, black and white, wearing long loincloths and heavy but not very well made armor that only covered their stomachs. Their legs were short and stumpy, and their arms were both longer and much more powerfully built than either human or Kaldorei, with spikes of bone or something similar sticking out on their arms and from the back of the head and shoulders. The head was hunched forward from the shoulders, with long ears, and a jaw that jutted forward, with long fangs sticking up from the lower jaw.

For weapons, many had large spears, like the one that had caught Tyrande. At their side, they wore large, stone clubs, marked with large metal spikes sticking out of the sides as a secondary weapon. They had no bows, swords or anything else.

Harry was completely blindsided by the attack and nearly took an axe to the face, which cut across his head, and nearly dumped him to the ground, blood in his eyes and pain wracking his head. A hasty Incendio lit up his attacker like a torch, and Harry used the now screaming and writhing monster as a shield to back away, cursing angrily as he wiped at the blood on his face.

Blood in your eyes was a surefire way to get killed in a fight. This was one of the oldest rules of combat regardless of weapon type or age, and as more blood fell into his eyes, Harry hastily applied a Episkey spell to his face, healing the wound as The wound taken care of, Harry wiped the remaining blood from his face, looking around hastily.

Nearby, Shy-rotam was busy tearing one of the creatures into shreds with some difficulty. The creature's protrusions seemed to be almost rocklike and the creature used them very well. This attacker was also fighting back with claw and fang.

On the other hand, Quetzal was making hash of most of the attackers, smashing into and through the center of the ambush area, thrashing his bulk from side to side. His much greater size allowed him to bite through one of the creatures and crush several more, although their clubs seemed to be doing a bit of damage even as he crushed them under his bulk.

Tyrande, had leapt upwards, and managed to use a minor blessing on her weapon to pull it into her hand, before landing in among the spear-throwers, laying about her with the moonglaive again. There were over fifteen of the spear throwers who had come out from their hiding position and yet, they were far too slow to catch Tyrande, who was able to slip this way and that around them. In contrast, her precise strikes hit ears, eyes, throat and joints. The ears especially were a weak point. Not only was it exceedingly painful to have an ear sliced off, stabbing through them into the Dogbars' heads proved that their skulls were a bit weaker there. The attackers were slowly being sliced apart, though they weren't going down quickly.

Yet watching that, Harry felt that Tyrande would probably win that small portion of the battlefield. But that was as far as Harry could see before three of the attackers were on him again, having moved around their burning companion. One of his eyes was still caked with dried blood, but Harry had his sword in one hand, and a cutting spell from his off-hand, slicing all three into ribbons. *No natural magical resistance, that's good to know.*

With that done, Harry wiped his remaining eye free, then turned to the others close by, overpowering his spells somewhat, but Harry felt he could be forgiven. It'd been a very long time since he'd been ambushed like that, and he cursed himself for not having realized what Tyrande's caution could mean. *Just because were supposed to be heading up into Tauren territory doesn't mean there aren't any other intelligent enemies around. You got too used to fighting stupid opponents Harry,* he remonstrated with himself.

The same thoughts were going through Tyrande's head as she cut down the last of the attackers, recognizing them as Drogbar. Native to the Broken Isle, they were known to be harshly territorial, but also intelligent, and the last time Tyrande had seen, a report on them had indicated they had maintained a peace with the Tauren who were their only real neighbors.

As the last of the attackers fell to a spell from Harry, he moved over to Tyrande, already casting a healing spell for bruises on her before doing the same to Shy-Rotam, who had taken a hit to the side and was limping. "So, any idea what this was about? And how the hell did they..."

Quetzal however was already moving, heading to where one of the attackers had appeared from. A quick flick of his head toppled over what had looked like a rock but instead was a foxhole, covered by a stone made of wood and lattice. "That's honestly impressive. So they weren't waiting here for us specifically though, this kind of thing would take time," the

snake observed, once more reminding Tyrande that, despite his lack of proper morals and his somewhat one-track mind occasionally, the snake had a very good mind.

Now healed, the others moved around, kicking off other places. This revealed more foxholes, and two tunnels leading into the mountain. "What the heck are these creatures?"

"Drogbars. They are an intelligent subterranean species native to the Broken Isles. They're not usually all that violent. Territorial yes, if we were near one of the main entrance ways to their territory, I could see them becoming very aggressive, but laying anlike this outside their tunnels, that I cannot see," Tyrande mused. "And when I last sent an ambassador to Highmountain, his report stated that the Tauren were allied to Drogbars, or at least neutral."

"Unless something is changed in the last... well how long ago was it since you saw that report?" Harry questioned, only half-jokingly. With how long the Kaldorei lived it wouldn't surprise him if they didn't understand how quickly such things could change for other races. "I thought you said that you send off an ambassador every time a new High Chief is chosen."

"I do, but that is a rote response. Relations between us Kaldorei and the Highmountain tribes have been extremely cordial since the War of the Ancients. But the Tauren have always had those among them who are eager to wander, eager to explore. Indeed, they enshrine that concept in their Trials of Adulthood. In contrast, my own people have always concentrated inward. Rare is the Kaldorei who ventures out beyond our settlements in Ashenvale, and fewer still who leave our woods. So we have been cordial but distant with the Highmountain clans."

"Uhuh," Harry drawled. "And again, how long ago did you send your ambassador here?"

"Why it hasn't even been a century, no more than eighty years or so. Surely... oh dear," Tyrande fell silent pensively admitting that Harry had a point. "It is always hard to remember that other races tend to change more quickly than my own."

"So either something has changed, which given my luck is probably what has happened, or this group just didn't like how we looked," Harry quipped, groaning a little inside. A tribe or race suddenly attacking strangers on sight where before they had been somewhat peaceable? *That spells trouble, and where there is trouble, usually I'm forced to wade into it.*

Tyrande snorted a little, sending him a brief wink. "Well, let us hope that it isn't your normal what did you call it, Potter luck?" Then, when Harry just groaned even more theatrically, she let loose a laugh. "Then yes, let us hope that is not your normal Potter luck. Or if it is, it is a problem that we can solve relatively quickly."

"Well, setting aside my ability to attract magic like the shore attracts the tide, let's move on. I think putting some distance between us and this battlefield might be a good idea."

"I agree with that idea, although would either of you object to me gorging myself on all of these Drogbar? They are completely unknown to me, and I am wondering if they are tasty," Quetzal asked, with Shy-rotam also looking interested, going over to one of the courses and sniffing at it delicately. However, the looks both animals got from the two-legged members of their party had them backing off, although Quetzal made snide remarks about, "I still do not understand why you are so against such things. If you kill something, you should be allowed to eat it."

The group of four, despite the protests from the giant snake, traveled for several miles after that point, calling a halt at around daybreak. Tyrande and Harry conferred at that point, and Harry agreed that they would start traveling again after only a short rest. Harry took the time to make a meal for the four of them, raw boar steaks for Shy-rotam and Quetzal, and a fillet of a fish that looked like tilapia, which Tyrande had caught the last time Harry was busy being entranced by a waterfall. After that, Harry put down wards and they all settled down for the morning.

When they woke up, Harry moved around, picking up the ward stones he had set out last night. As he did, Harry looked over his shoulder at Tyrande, who had slept in an upright position against a snow-laden tree instead of using her tent the day before. "So, do we assume that we're going to run into more of these Drogbar?"

"Almost certainly," Tyrande replied with a sigh. "Their territory is just below that of the Highmountain tribes, which means we'll be travelling through it for several days as we go higher up the mountain."

"In that case, I think from now on that we should all travel under some invisibility charms. I don't like being ambushed," he finished, with a tone of massive understatement that caused Tyrande to nod firmly in agreement.

With all four travelers under Invisibility spells or in Harry's case, his cloak, and Tyrande still acting as a scout, they found two similar ambushes, killing all involved. The fourth incident however was very different. The odd quartet had paused once more to let the two animals go off to hunt, which was much easier when they were invisible, something Shy-rotam had to be reminded several times was not permanent.

But instead of coming back looking like an overstuffed cushion several hours later, Quetzal came back within an hour, his voice mild but his words carrying a certain amount of import. "I haven't found any animal tracks yet, but I did run into something that might interest the two of you. I found what looked like a Tauren fighting off a war band of Drogbar."

Frowning faintly, Tyrande raised a special whistle to her lips. Moments later, Shy-rotam came up the mountainside towards them, bounding from boulder to boulder, her Invisibility in abeyance and blood on her jaws, a clear sign she'd had better luck than Quetzal. "show us where," she ordered.

Quetzal instantly turned and led them off, with Harry and the behind him, frowning as he created a spell chain in his mind.

The Tauren being attacked was a younger example of the species than the one Harry had met before. He lacked a beard, was thinner in the shoulders and shorter, but his horns were just as long, and he was fighting back hard. He had put himself in the space between a boulder and the mountainside, to protect his sides and back. This had allowed him to kill at least four of his attackers, and wound two more with his large axe.

However the band of seven Drogbar had grown in the time that it took Quetzal to get back to the others. There were now at least twenty of them, milling all around the field, waiting for their change to attack the Tauren. But only two, if they were very friendly, could attack him at a time. But just clanging at the battlefield, Harry knew that wouldn't last as several Drogbar were making their way up the hill around the stones defending the Tauren in order to attack from above.

Tyrande was about to race in, but Harry, gripped her arm. "Wait, look..." To one side of the ongoing battle was an open tunnel leading into the mountain, the same kind they had seen before. Here however the entrance was open, and as they watched, several more Drogbar came out. "Let me get into position to cast a spell into the tunnel to stop any reinforcements. Then we can attack from several directions at once."

With his own camouflage skills and Harry's spells, Quetzal moved into position directly above the ongoing battle. Meanwhile, Tyrande had laid out her arrows and crouched on a boulder well back of the battlefield, with Shy-rotam nearby, her tail flicking from one side to another eagerly as she waited for the battle to begin.

Soon Harry was in position and began to wave his hand through the air, moving it in the motion needed for the spell he was about to use, which wasn't a normal part of his repertoire. *Still, it works very well in enclosed spaces so...* "Niraasha ka dhuaan (Smoke of Despair)!" He shouted flicking his fingers forward into the tunnel.

From his hand erupted a gray, green cloud of smoke that quickly filled the tunnel, spreading down its length and into the faces of a half dozen Drogbar within. More shouted in the distance, but by that point the six initial victims were already on the ground twitching. The smoke acted both as a paralyzer and a poison for those who inhaled it. The spell, which Harry had learned from Padma Patil oddly enough, was one of the nastiest non-curses Harry had ever learned. The person would be first paralyzed, unable to flee the area as the poison, which was slower acting, went to work.

Even as Harry flung the camouflage entrance down over the tunnel, the Drogbar responded intelligently to this new attack. Five of them kept attacking the Tauren, while the rest turned, splitting into teams. Some of them charged forward, others stood where they were, spears cocked back to hurl forward.

The first two spears hurled crashed into a hasty Protego, before Harry went on the attack, transfiguring two lions to help him. Then Tyrande's arrows were flying, slamming into eyes, through ears, and open mouths among the spear throwers.

Again, the Drogbar didn't panic. Two of them bellowed commands, one of them dying to a bowel exploding curse a moment later, and the group moving to attack Harry turned around, charging towards Tyrande's position. The second leader died in turn from one of Tyrande's arrows. Both of them understood the same rule of war: when in battle kill the leaders first.

Drogbar charging toward Tyrande were met by Shy-rotam, while Quetzal charged down the slope above the Tauren's position. He battered several of the ones pinning the Tauren in place. He laughed, bellowing, "Hah, when I asked the ancient Spirits for aid, I didn't think it would come so quickly!"

Harry took a moment to quip "Ask and you shall receive," before launching a few more spells.

Without magic of their own, and caught between Harry and his companions, the Drogbar had no chance, and the battle was over quickly. None of them survived, the last of them collapsing from an axe strike from the Tauren, who stood up, bowing from the waist towards Tyrande as she moved forward, patting an exultant Shy-rotam on the head. "I thank you for your aid friends! These Drogbar would have overcome me soon. I am supposed to be on my Test of the spirit."

The young Tauren smiled then, and Harry decided that he would like this fellow. "As it is, I seem to have rather accidently doubled down on my Test of Courage. Might I ask who was doing the magic, and where this giant snake comes from? I've never seen the like of you before," he added, addressing Quetzal. "Oh, and I am Pahr Fangstone, of the Highmountain tribe."

"Yes, I am rather magnificent," the snake answered, hissing in amusement. "Although I would dare say you have not met a Needlespine Shimmerback before."

The Tauren started but then seemed to take the snake speaking in stride. "All that and you are humble too."

"Can you tell us why they were attacking you? Indeed, why have Drogbar begun attacking like this at all?" Tyrande asked.

"Unfortunately, I have no idea on that score. I know that we have had troubles in Highmountain with them, but the fact they are attacking those entering their territory so far below our lands is news. Then again... none of those who have left Highmountain from my tribe have returned as of late, but those who return from their Trials do so at such sporadic rates normally that I don't think anyone has noticed."

As Pahr thought, he scowled. That should have been an odd expression on his somewhat bovine features. Yet like Kaldorei and humans and not like cows, the face of a Tauren had evolved as a means of communication, allowing for the same breath of expression as a human's. "If not for that fact I would have to wait another five years before retaking my Trials I would return now and warn the clans."

"There's no room in your... code of conduct I suppose. Sorry I am not certain of the right term to use, for an emergency like this?" Tyrande questioned.

"Unfortunately not. I must complete all the remaining Trials before I return, or else I will not be declared an adult. That would be a... problem," Pahr replied, looking away.

Tyrande was about to press for more, but Harry spoke up then, a wry expression on his face. "It's for a girl, right?" The young Tauren twitched, but that was enough of an answer, and Harry laughed. "And let me guess, she's got other suitors, some of whom have already finished their trials?"

"Yes, crush it, there are. And since she is from another clan in the first place, I have enough trouble without putting off my Trials further." Pahr spat out quickly, then seemed to gather his self-control a bit. "But who do I have the honor of addressing?"

"I'm Harry, and this is Tyrande," Harry answered, watching as his companion's name went over the youngster's head, much to his amusement and her quiet delight. "We were travelling up to Highmountain ourselves and are willing to warn them about how widespread the issue with the Drogbar is. But can you tell us more about the way up the mountain?"

Pahr nodded and while Harry healed his bruises and cuts spent a good forty minutes describing portions of the route to them while Quetzal went off to hunt once more and Harry used magic to bury the bodies of the dead. Enemies though they might be, he didn't want to leave their corpses out like this. Besides, they smelled.

Soon though, Pahr was on his way once more, waving farewell as he moved down the mountain, armed with the knowledge of where Harry and the others had run into the previous ambushes. Tyrande and Harry watched the young Tauren go, and then Tyrande let loose a laugh that was almost a giggle. "I see that young men are the same regardless of race. They will go to the ends of the earth to impress a girl."

"Heh, ah, yeah. That's probably a universal rule. Still, I hope he succeeds. I think I rather like that youngster," Harry answered, causing Tyrande to laugh even louder.

They traveled for another day and a half in this manner, half during the day, half during the night. The going was very difficult in parts as the granite bones of the mountain started to become more prevalent, and twice the four of them had to scale up large stone rungs carved out of rocks. Here Harry would have to levitate the animals or indeed all four of them up to

make progress. Nevertheless, it was a sign that someone used this path if only occasionally these days.

At one such point, Tyrande paused, then moved her foot to the side, crouching down quickly and lifting out of the patchy grass at her feet a small item. It looked like a large bracelet or a thigh strap of some kind. She held it out to Harry, who saw the middle of it was marked by a tiny copper medallion, where four lines marked out the image of a mountain. "I believe that these are markers indicating that we come in peace to the Highmountain tribes which Pahr told us about."

"Should I try a copying spell on that, or would that be a social faux pas?"

"A what? What language did you just use?" Tyrande questioned, laughing as the odd word rolled off Harry's mouth. Harry had been speaking Kaldor for weeks now, but just then, Harry had reverted to some other language, although Tyrande didn't think it was the language Harry called English.

"Sorry. The English language occasionally picked up other words from other different languages and incorporated them into itself, and I sometimes forget I'm no longer speaking English. That means a social mistake or misstep, one that is embarrassing but not dangerous, at least usually," Harry explained.

That caused Tyrande to nod, and understanding his question now, shrugged her shoulders in one of those minute gestures that her people used. "I believe that having one of these with our party will be enough, so there is no need to copy it."

Harry held out a hand, and Tyrande handed torn strap of leather to him. Harry took it and after a moment tied it to Tyrande's upper arm, trying to ignore the fact that, like the Kaldorei he had come into physical contact with on the boat during sparring exercises, Tyrande's skin was inhumanly smooth, almost feeling like silk to the touch. "As the only one of us who is a recognized authority, I figure you should be the one to have this."

Tyrande shrugged and gestured. "In that case, let's keep going. We still have several hours under Elune's gaze."

Harry chuckled and then used the Leviosa spell to carry all four of them upwards once more. As she rose a few feet off the ground, joining Harry at his head height, Tyrande shook her head. "I still believe this is cheating. The Tauren rites of passage are supposed to be difficult. You shouldn't simply wave your hand and abrogate an arduous climb like this," she teased.

"Yeah, it's good neither of us are Tauren and need to pass those rites of passage to be considered an adult, isn't it?" Harry retorted.

Tyrande laughed, and the foursome continued to float up through the air. A second later, however, she had a brief second to thank Harry for using his magic on them as the group in the air came up to the end of the stone ladder, only to find themselves staring at a group of the same Drogbar who had attacked them before.

All of them had been prepared to attack the group as they made their way up the ladder but quickly changed targets, hurling their spears before the four in the air could try to dodge.

One spear struck Quetzal in the side, bouncing off his scales. The other struck Harry in the center of his chest, but Harry was still wearing the reinforced armor that he had been given by Tyrande, and although the blow bruised something fierce, it didn't penetrate. Tyrande, in turn, used her double-bladed staff to smash several spears out of the air as they came towards her and Shy-rotam, although one got through leaving a cut across her inner thigh.

At that point, the advantage switched to Harry and his companions. A Reducto spell sent at their feet caused the attackers to fly in every direction, and then Quetzal and Harry were down on the ground, with Tyrande and Shy-rotam landing nearby. Tyrande stumbled, her leg bleeding profusely, but still cut down one of Drogbar near her while Quetzal and Shy-rotam ran roughshod over the rest.

The battle ended soon after. Drogbar here didn't have the same numbers as the groups that had attacked Harry and Tyrande before, and the battlefield was certainly another compounding factor since it was all too easy to fall off the edge of the cliff, the trail here being narrow and moving along the side of a sheer cliff face rather than deeper into the mountain.

Standing over the body of the one Drogbar she had slain, Tyrande shook her head with an annoyed expression on her face as Harry knelt to one side, using the Episkey charm to heal her wound. While Harry was all business, the sight of the blood worried him enough to ignore the somewhat racy nature of where the wound was, Tyrande tried to ignore the feeling of Harry's finger on the inside of her thigh. *My word if this minor, innocent touch is having such an affect from someone giving me medical attention, it is a sign. I really should find Malfurion the next time I enter the Emerald Dream.*

"Yes, Harry, I do believe there is definitely something up with these Drogbar. You could have argued that we had made camp literally on top of one of their caves before the first attack. Here? This was a deliberate ambush set to keep any returning Tauren from being able to rejoin their tribe. Why? It isn't as if the Tauren would even carry anything Drogbar find valuable. And I refuse to believe that Drogbar are attacking solely for the delight of killing."

"Cutting the mountain off from the outside world, maybe? It's about the only reason I can think of. Although considering how tenuous the connection between the Kaldorei and the Tauren are already, I can't see a point to it," Harry confessed.

"But again, why? To take over the Highmountain territory for themselves?" Tyrande did not like it when beings acted against their nature, which felt like that to her. "What would they do with all that extra space? It isn't as if they even enjoy living on the surface rather than in caves. Nor do they have any need for the forest or farmland."

Harry shrugged as he stood up, advising, "Ignore it for now. We'll eventually find out one way or the other. Your wound's healed now. It will still sting for a while but shouldn't even leave a scar."

Her lips quirked into a worried frown at that, but Tyrande still nodded agreement, and the four of them began with their way. Soon, the path leading higher into the mountains narrowed so much that Harry had to shrink Quetzal down to just above shoulder height on Tyrande. Otherwise, Harry would've been forced to levitate him above the path for a time, which would've been humiliating for the large snake.

The air began to get cold that night, and Quetzal was once more extremely thankful for Harry's warming charms, swearing undying devotion and affection for his friend. "Just keep the warming charms coming!"

"I feel as if I have more to offer than just warming charms," Harry quipped.

Quetzal retorted, "Perhaps, but they are your most important feature."

However, after several hours more of upward movement marked by numerous stone ladders, the trail started to level out. Then it weirdly began to go down slightly. Then, even more shockingly, the area around them began to grow green again, despite how high up in the mountains they were.

It wasn't the green of the jungle or Ashenvale. Rather, it was the green of a northern woodland, much more like the Forbidden Forest or others Harry was used to in Britain or even further north. Regardless it was noticeably warmer than it had been. Not to the point of the jungle at the mountain base, but certainly far more than in the Wintersong mountain range where Tyrande and Harry had met.

At first, Harry didn't realize how this was happening or why. But soon, both he and Tyrande saw the reason as they continued down into what Harry could now see was a huge hidden valley that seemed to extend well out of sight in every direction. "Smoke?" Tyrande observed thoughtfully, "No, that is steam. My ambassador mentioned once that they had hot springs up here. I did not realize the full implications of that."

Harry nodded too, and the two of them led their animal companions toward the steam, finding that it was coming out of a crack in the mountainside. The steam filled the area around it with heat, reminding Harry of a science program he had seen once as a young boy in class about underwater volcanoes and air vents. Here the area around the air vent wasn't as hot as in

that example, but the cumulative effect of this air vent and others in the area meant that it was a good deal greener here in this area than anywhere else in the mountain.

In turn, this allowed for a real forest to grow up here, although the soil still wasn't nearly good enough for regular farming or anything like that. Not that Harry had gotten the impression the Tauren went into farming any more than the Kaldorei did.

The forest around them continued to change, spreading out as the mountain continued to slope downward. The going was now far easier than anywhere in the quartet's trek since the first ambush. And then as they were about to reach the floor of the valley, Tyrande saw a totem ahead of them on the slope.

Coming closer, Harry paused, staring at it while Tyrande also examined the totem in interest.

It looked like four large tree trunks had been cut down and then twined together somehow, left here so long that the oak had solidified into something that looked more like stone. Into the sides of these logs were carved several ancient Tauren faces, each of them so detailed that it was obvious that they were all individual people. Between these faces were animal figures. The image of an owl with its wings spread out grabbed Harry's attention the most.

While Harry had thought he would see something like this, having already likened what he had seen of the Tauren to Native Americans he'd read about in books as a child, the colors of the totem were well outside of his expectation. The faces were marked to almost look alive, whereas others were more of an image of what people thought the animal was like, rather than the reality. Many animals were colored true to life, and the bird at the top of one of the logs almost looked like it could just flap its wings and fly away. The others, the figures of the spirits of animals, were of a very different nature. They were more multicolored than would be found in nature. Their eyes were also normally larger and emphasized, which Harry pointed out.

Tyrande laughed quietly, moving up beside him, and when he turned to her, she reached forward, gently placing a finger underneath one of his eyes. "Surely Harry, your people have the same expression that my own and the Tauren do? The eyes are windows to the soul."

"We do, although I will admit that our artists rarely show that veneration to this extent," Harry agreed, and Tyrande pulled her finger away, shaking her head. It was evident that Harry had not heard some of the discussions about him the other Kaldorei, particularly the younger set, had when they were aboard the ship. Many of the young women had been quite taken by Harry's emerald eyes. And she had to agree with them to a certain extent. They did look indeed like the Emerald Dream given form.

Tyrande stepped back, gesturing to the four twined logs. "These, I believe, are supposed to represent the four tribes that make up the Highmountain nation. On this log, we have the

Rivermane tribe, those blue lines creating a wave-like motion paired with a blue dot under the wave. Their tribe made a name for themselves in the War of the Ancients by being very good marsh fighters and also helped to supply food to their own people and mine."

"Oh, so those designs between the various carvings have meaning too? I would have missed that," Harry confessed.

"Understandable, as I would have not known about them either if my ambassador had not included paintings of the various tribal markings in his report. Although I would guess that natives could tell us more." With that, Tyrande turned and looked out and further down the slope. "Is that not the case, good hunter?"

"I am not a hunter, Miss, but a watcher," a respectful voice came back, and from behind a final patch of snow built up around a tree, which Harry realized must have been fake, a male Tauren appeared, moving up the slope towards them. On his back, he had a large bow, paired with an equally large quiver full of arrows that were probably about as long as Harry's legs. At his side, he wore a small horn made of bone and a large dagger, which would've done for Harry as a short sword.

The Tauren himself was clad much like the other Tauren Harry had seen, leather wrappings around his thighs, paired with a wide belt and loincloth that covered everything the Tauren wanted to keep private. His shoulders had guards on them that spread down to cover his pectorals but left his stomach bare. Most of his clothing was simple brown and black, but there was a painted mark on either shoulder. On one shoulder was a mark that Harry realized matched one of the tribal markings on the totem, while the other held a large eye.

When the Tauren came close, he held out his hand and formally shook both Tyrande's and Harry's in turn. "Hail travelers and well met. I am Jorl Iceflow. I hail from the Skyhorn tribe, whose turn it is to watch the path leading down the mountain."

"And you do this alone?" Harry asked, glancing over his shoulder into the opening at the top of the hill they had been descending into the dale. "Or are we just so blind that we didn't see anyone else?"

"Forget being blind. Shy-rotam and I would have smelled them," Quetzal said, rearing up next to Harry, from where he had been examining some of the faces closest to the ground. One of them looked distinctly snake-like, but not quite, which had thrown him.

"Hah! your noses haven't been worth much yet, have they?" Harry questioned archly.

Shy-rotam scuffed the ground in front of her while Quetzal shot back instantly. "Dogbar smell of the earth and stone, they barely smell alive when we're fighting them, let alone when they are hidden. Besides, who was it who spotted the two ambushes we attacked in turn?"

Jorl blinked in surprise, staring at the talking snake, then over to Tyrande. "Is this some new nature magic of your people? The ability to talk directly to animals?"

"No, that ability belongs to Harry here. And the animals must be intelligent enough to converse in the first place," Tyrande replied.

"Truly? Fascinating." Jorl looked thoughtfully at Harry, then over to Tyrande. "As for my being alone, I am. I am a watcher of the path, not a guard. After all, you have all made the trek up here. How likely is it a war band of any size, let alone any other kind of danger, could make it up to us from that path?"

"You have a point," Harry mused. "Still, I would have thought the only entrance to your valley would have some kind of guard on it."

"It isn't the only entrance. It is simply the only entrance that leads directly down the mountain. And there has been talk, you are correct, about placing guards here. But it was felt that the war bands should instead guard the entrance to Droghbar caves that come out in our territory."

"Yes, we were attacked twice by Droghbar on the way here. Might I ask if you know why they have become so warlike? Protecting their caves and their dwellings, I can understand. They have always been territorial to that extent, a but to attack those of us on the surface, surely that is not usual," Tyrande questioned closely.

Jorl nodded, although he looked a little worried himself. "I do not know what is causing it, and if the high chief and the other leaders do, I certainly haven't heard about it. But can I assume, my lady, that you are here as ambassador from the Kaldorei to the new high chief?"

"Something of the sort," Tyrande answered with a small smile while Harry chuckled and gestured toward him. "I am also here escorting this one to your people in the hopes that you can help him better understand his own nature so he can use Nature Magic more effectively."

The Tauren chuckled, waving one hand in the air back and forth. "For that, you will have to speak to the shamans. I am a mere hunter. I leave the greater mysteries like that to those with wiser heads."

Tyrande nodded that, having expected that kind of an answer. She was also pleased to note that Jorl was not reacting negatively to Harry in any way, even though he very obviously was not a night elf or any other race the Tauren might have interacted with. "We would like some directions to the high chieftain's village, but first, tell me what you can of this totem and your various tribes, please."

"Gladly," Jorl said with a smile. "These four logs were originally from the four corners of our valley. Each, as you suppose, was carved by a different tribe. The faces you see there are

famous leaders or warriors from each different tribe. The faces on these, in particular, are ones that every other tribe acknowledges are important rather than solely important to the tribe in question. This is a totem of unity to show that the lands of Highmountain belong to all four tribes equally. Like you, miss..." He trailed off, indicating that the Kaldorei woman had not introduced herself.

Sighing and realizing her little bit of fun was over, Tyrande introduced herself, seeing the warrior's eyes widen as he bowed respectfully towards her. "Please don't do that. There is a reason why I didn't introduce myself first, after all. I am on my sabbatical, and I would rather not deal with such things."

"I... Yes, my lady." The Tauren stammered, suddenly sounding a good deal younger than he had previously. But he continued on, gamely pointing to the tribe of his own people. "The Skyhorn tribe is denoted there, the totem topped by an eagle carving. Our markings are thus, green and white lines in the shape of two curved-back wings, with a square denoting that the heart of our people is in the sky."

Harry smiled faintly, hearing the pride in his people in Jorl's voice. "As someone who considers himself quite close to birds, predatory ones anyway, can I take it that you all have a connection to birds as well?"

"Yes. My tribe has bonded with families of giant eagles, who can carry us where we wish to go. We have become the scouts of Highmountain, ranging far and wide through the peaks of our mountain home," Jorl answered. "I'm afraid that we are not as welcoming of sharing our secrets as some of the other tribes are, however."

That caused Harry to nod, understanding his point. "And Rivermane? The tribe that Tyrande already mentioned?"

"They are actually the most welcoming of strangers and outsiders. Indeed, if not for the trouble with Drogbar, you would probably have met several of them in your outpost. They are our diplomats, our fishermen, and some even farm the land."

Harry's eyes widened, and he glanced around, then looked back at the Tauren, raising an eyebrow in a show of extreme shock to get that across to the Tauren, who no doubt didn't know human body language all that well. *Considering I'm the only human around at the moment.* "Truly, up here?"

Jorl laughed, nodding his head. "I see you understand something of the soil then. Yes, it is extremely difficult to work and somewhat thankless. I know that young fools from my own tribe and Bloodtotem tend to make fun of the Rivermane plan. But those of us with more sense remember that, as Lady Tyrande said, the Rivermane clan won their name in battle against the demons, and indeed in several cases did far better than the other clans. That they do not take

pride in martial prowess is no reason to forget that they too are Tauren and can fight just as well as the rest of us."

"And the Bloodtotem clan?"

"The Bloodtotem tribe is the tribe that is most used to the idea of the warrior path. They are warriors, explorers, and hunters. It is a very rare Bloodtotem tribesman who would bother with agriculture or tending domesticated animals when they could hunt for their meal. They hold some pride in the fact that the first leader of the Highmountain clans came from the Bloodtotem tribe." Unlike when he spoke of his own tribe or the Rivermane tribe, when Jorl spoke of the Bloodtotem, his tone was wary, annoyed. It was clear that there were some tensions between the tribes here.

*I suppose people are the same everywhere. We always latch onto differences rather than what could unite us, Harry thought.*

Tyrande cocked her head thoughtfully to one side. "The first leader of the Highmountain tribes was Huhn Highmountain, Huhn of the Eagle Spear. I met him personally, and I would say that we were friends during the war of the ancients. For someone so serious and warlike at times, he was a gentle soul who liked to play with the children when he could. Whenever he could, Huhn could be found doing one of two things. One was being among the children, carving little toys for them or playing games to keep their spirits up when they were transported from one place of safety to another. The second would be hunting, but not to eat or kill, instead simply to test himself. He often said that the kill was nothing, it was the skill to get close enough to make the kill that was important."

Tyrande shook her head, coming back to the present with a small shake of her head. "So why do you speak as if he was from the Bloodtotem tribe?"

Jorl was stunned, staring at her for a moment, before remembering that this was indeed Tyrande Whisperwind, one of the two leaders of the Kaldorei during the war of the ancients. "I, I did not know that. But the war of the ancients is not the first time the four tribes had been brought together under one leader. The first to do so was a Bloodtotem chieftain, as were several of his successors. Indeed, it was Huhn who broke the power of the Bloodtotem tribe. Since then, the leadership of the tribes have rotated, but the Bloodtotem tribe have never really reconciled to that fact, despite the thousands of years which separate us from that ancient past."

"Ancient past, yes, I suppose it is for most," Tyrande said with a sigh, shaking her head. She touched a small scar on her side, remembering a specific battle, where she had led a force of Kaldorei alongside Huhn and combined tribes of Tauren. "Although for me, it is not so ancient. Some things cannot be forgotten."

For a moment, the group fell silent, staring at Tyrande as she was lost in memory once more. But then, Shy-rotam butted her head against Tyrande's shoulder, nearly causing the night elf to lose her footing, so out of it was she. "Enough of that. The past is the past and should stay there. Instead, we should concentrate on the now."

"Such wisdom from one so young," Tyrande teased, running her hand through the frostsaber's pelt.

Harry nodded wordless agreement with the tiger. *After all, if I only dwelt on the past, I'd become a broody and angsty soul very quickly. And who would want that?* "Is there actual physical conflict between the tribes?" He asked, trying to bring the conversation back to the here and now.

"No, if by that you mean open warfare or anything similar. Occasionally, there is a meeting of champions, wrestling matches, contests of strength and knowledge. That is how we settle disputes when the word of the high chieftain is not enough. I will not deny that the Bloodtotem tribe demands more such contests than any other, but they, like all of us, revere the memory of Huln despite his having broken their position of greater authority over the other tribes."

"And all of that means that the last mark here, the one that looks like a simple mountain but is surrounded by triangles made of the colors of the other tribes, is the Highmountain clan?" Harry found it fascinating that this tribe had actually worked the idea of unifying the various tribes into one into their personal symbol. That either spoke to the purpose of the tribe as they saw it or hubris. Harry wasn't certain which.

"Indeed." Whereas before when Jorl spoke about the Bloodtotem's, Jorl's tone had indicated wariness, when he spoke of the Highmountain tribe, it was tinged with simple respect, similar to the tone Jorl had used when he spoke of the Rivermane tribe only perhaps a little more? Harry wasn't certain. "Whereas once the Highmountain tribe was simply one of four, they changed their name and became the dominant tribe under Huln's command and for some time after his death, and then created the system with which the high chieftain is chosen from among the tribes peacefully, even though this decreased their own power."

Tyrande nodded, having heard of this before, but still showing quite a bit of appreciation for the idea. The idea that unity mattered far more than the power of a person was something she readily understood. Harry too understood it and wished that wizards could have shown such wisdom more often.

"Since then, we have had several thousand years of peace and prosperity, and the Highmountain tribe seeks to serve the interests of all Tauren upon the mountain, not just themselves. A sign of this is that anyone from the other three tribes can join them if they wish, or leave if they wish, whereas the other tribes are still tribes in truth, with family ties of blood connecting everyone together."

Quetzal made a grumbling noise as he shifted away from the discussion. "I hunger," he said simply. "If you two legs are going to continue to talk about histories and societies and such useless things, I am going to see to something far more important: filling my belly."

Harry chuckled at that and then gestured Jorl to sit. "If your duty will allow you to, would you mind answering some of our questions? We would like to know where to go from here, as I don't think Tyrande has an idea on that score past getting us up to this valley in the first place."

Tyrande indicated that was the case, opining that, "While I was told that the new chieftain would be chosen shortly, I wasn't told which tribe he would represent. I understand that the chieftain's seat of power changes with the chieftain."

"That was true in ages past. But it was decided that that was not the way forward. Each tribe has its own separate territory, but beyond that, the four tribes hold a single town equally. There has been some talk of transitioning that to a formal city, as, despite my earlier words about the Bloodtotem and my own tribe being insular, we do still interact with one another. Such things are easier to do in a centralized area. But that hasn't occurred yet," Jorl corrected.

From there, the three of them talked about the various tribes, where they could be found in the Highmountain territory, and some aspects of each of their history. Here Tyrande joined in, mentioning this or that warrior she had known during the war of the ancients, although she had never as close to any as she had been to Huln as a fellow leader. Even so, she didn't talk much about the war itself, instead speaking about the quiet times between the battles, the moments of momentary peace they had between the various campaigns.

Jorl lapped that up, and it was clear that he was looking forward to passing on these tales to others, which, Harry reflected, was probably part of why Tyrande was doing it. Still, Jorl gave them enough directions to make their way to the combined Tauren town, which was, according to Jorl, in the direct center of the valley. He also gave them an idea of the dimensions of this valley, which was, to put it bluntly, huge. The valley continued out of sight around several different peaks that Harry had thought originally marked the end of the valley. It would take a party traveling nonstop from the home of the Skyhorn clan more than a week to get to where the Rivermane clan had their home on the opposite side of the valley.

Harry mostly listened and asked but eventually, when it became lunchtime, and the talks had not finished, made all three of them a meal. Jorl had never had some of the spices that Harry had picked up among the Kaldorei and declared Harry, "one of the best cooks whose table I have had the honor to sit at."

They spent much of the day with Jorl and then set out as evening began, leaving him to his lonely duty, although having supplied him with at least one more meal's worth of food from Harry. Quetzal, who had returned at some point, looking sated and somewhat annoyed, to move on, stating that, "We should be on our guard when we hit the forests. I ran into

particularly large versions of those snow leopards we saw earlier. One of them had the temerity to attack me."

"Which just means you ate well," Harry drawled, shaking his head. "Still, if you think we need to be on guard, we'll do so."

"And I would rather like to return to my real size Harry," Quetzal shot back repressively. "I made several mistakes in that fight, including forgetting for a moment that you had shrunk me before the battle began and that it nearly cost me."

Harry apologized for that, and when they hit the edge of the forest that seemed to dominate this portion of the valley floor, Harry canceled the shrinking spell he'd used on Quetzal earlier that day. It had simply been easier for Quetzal to get along when he wasn't the size of a train car.

Continuing their series of traveling during the day for some time and then during the night the second half, the group made good time, despite Tyrande now stopping more often to educate Shy-rotam on moving with Tyrande on her back. Now that the tiger was almost fully grown, it was time to train her as a war mount rather than simply a hunter.

But as they moved through the wilderness, they came upon signs of battle. A few sites were small, skirmishes if that, but at one point they found signs of a much larger battle, with several dozen funeral mounds dotting the area.

One night as they traveled, the quartet started to notice that many of the trees around them had been decorated. However, unlike the Kaldorei' decorations, there was little subtlety about the Tauren items in the forest. Most of them were very brightly colored, or small copper and bronze plates which shone in the light of the moon above, standing out starkly against the forest in a way that most of the Kaldorei similar items would not have.

As they continued on there was the sound of a horn from one side of the direction they had been traveling. A second later, there was a sound of many feet, and out of the forest around them came a band of eight Tauren, all of them armed with axes or large, heavy spears. Built to fit the size of their users those axes looked massive, as did the spears, and all of the Tauren looked ready to fight for a moment, charging towards Quetzal, before halting as they saw Harry and Tyrande moving along peaceably with the giant snake. For a moment, they skidded to a halt, and then one of them, the oldest of the group, stepped forward, planting his spear in the ground. "Hold strangers. You, bring a beast of such danger into our lands?"

"Actually," said one of the other Tauren, frowning as he stared at the snake. "How did a snake of that size climb to our lands? It should not have gotten through the middle layer. And there is no chance of such a beast having grown to that size without our knowledge in our valley."

"I'm afraid that is because of me," Harry answered. "My name is Harry Potter."

"Tyrande stepped forward, making certain that the band of Tauren saw the armlet on her shoulder as well as could make out her features in the light of the moon above. "And I am Tyrande, of the Kaldorei." She said nothing more, no title, no last name. Like with Jorl, there was no need.

As one, the Tauren looked at her in surprise and awe, and many of them lifted their weapons in salute. "Lady Tyrande, you are known to us, of course, although none of us expected or were informed that you would be traveling our lands!" The spokesman said. He looked over at Harry quizzically, cocking his head to one side. "And do you vouch for this magic-user? And his monstrous companion?"

"His monstrous companion' has a name, and can speak for himself, thank you," Quetzal grumbled, rearing up to stare down at the Tauren.

"It speaks the common tongue?" One of the Tauren exclaimed, staring up at the still shrunken snake. "How?"

Tyrande smiled. "That is part of Harry's magic. My own companion can speak as well."

Shy-rotam came out of Tyrande's shadow, padding forward, looking at the Tauren with as little fear as Quetzal had. "They are quite large, are they not? Those horns on top of their head look dangerous, and yet I rather like the look of their eyes for some reason."

"On behalf of my people, I thank you for the compliment, young tiger. Your kind, or at least a variant of your kind for we have never seen one with fur so white, are known to us. But, unfortunately, your kind, giant snake, is not."

Quetzal hissed in amusement as he replied. "I am a Needlespine Shimmerback. My species only live around large concentrations of magic. I do not believe there is any such within your domain."

"There are places on the island which are like that, although you are correct, there is no such within Highmountain." The Tauren who was speaking seemed to compose himself, at last, shaking his head. "I have been remiss in my manners. My name is Tarl Axehand. And I welcome you strangers and allies to our lands. Please, come with me. I will take you to our High Chief."

He led the way through the forest to the outer area of a village. It didn't have an outer wall, although it did have a series of ditches here and there and several well-built lookouts, towers made of stone and rock. One of those was currently unmanned, and Harry supposed that was where Quetzal had been spotted from.

Behind that spaced-out defense was a large town, but instead of houses, the Tauren lived in large tents, circular or octagonal in shape. These were large structures, some of them two stories tall, although much of the size was simply because of how spread out they were rather than how tall.

While the Tauren of the town might have been warned about their approach, Quetzal still garnered quite a few stares as they reached the outer edge of the town, and then still more as it followed Harry and Tyrande in with the tiger moving along beside him, looking around and interest. Harry, too was looking around in interest, although a time or two he had to shake his head and move on quickly.

The reason for these momentary stutters in his self-control was simple: the Native American-like feel of the Tauren continued here, including their clothing, and of course, among the townsfolk were a good deal of women of all ages and sizes.

The Tauren were not human, and for that Harry was very thankful, because much of what they wore showed the Tauren's, ahem, proportions quite well. Their legs were covered with light fur and not shaped well, or else the type of clothing the Tauren wore would be highly inappropriate in public. Moreover, their upper body was, even among the women, heavily muscled, with breasts smaller than would have been normal on a human woman of their size. Madame Maxine came strongly to mind as that realization came to Harry.

There were a few exceptions though, that grabbed Harry's attention despite the non-human nature of the Tauren. First, were a few of the middle-aged women who had babies. Evidently nursing Tauren grew several sizes, but the Tauren didn't think about changing the style of clothing they wore, and Harry had to bite his cheek to look away.

Furthermore, Harry felt the fur was not exactly a turnoff either. Outside of their hair and on some of the older Tauren's arms and legs, their fur seemed to be of the short variety rather than long. And there were several younger girls who grabbed Harry's attention for a few moments.

One had long black hair tied into ribbons falling down her chest, each ribbon denoted by a different kind of colored feather and ribbon. She stood in a leather skirt, well-made and durable, that came down to her knees, leaving her lower legs bare. She was laughing at something someone else had said, the sound and how expressive her face was drawing Harry's eye.

Another was a russet-haired woman a little bit younger than the blonde, if her less spectacular build was any measure. She was a bit shorter, but seemed full of energy, bouncing in place which did fascinating things to her anatomy despite it not quite measuring up to what a human of similar size would have. She had an anklet of some kind, which gleamed with the color of some kind of metal. In the moonlight it was impossible to tell if it was steel iron or

silver, and the gleam of it was matched by a necklace around her neck that rested between her bountiful breasts.

In both cases it was the way they moved and laughed and sounded so alive and human that attracted his attention, just like among the Young Kaldorei. Indeed, watching them Harry had a moment to regret the fact that Berena and Sylina had not come with them. "Who would have thought I'd be missing those two so quickly, and after so short an acquaintance?" he murmured.

Beside him, Tyrande smiled faintly, while inwardly laughing at that. "Hmm, I will be sure to tell them about that. Indeed, I could probably come up with an excuse to send the two of them here to join you among the Tauren. Would you like that?"

"That would be a gross abuse of your power and our friendship Tyrande. So while yes, I would like that, I don't think I can ask for it," Harry answered dryly, rolling his eyes.

"Bah, I wager I would just have to tell them you missed them, especially after so short an acquaintance, and Sylina at least would come running," Tyrande laughed quietly once more.

"I might be a teenager right now, but while that is still having an impact, hormones are the devil I swear, I am not that far round the twist. So thank you for the offer, but I repeat, no," Harry repeated, although Tyrande could detect a certain wistfulness in his voice, and he seemed to be looking between one of the Tauren and nowhere.

Almost as if, Tyrande reflected, he was imagining one of the two younger Kaldorei in the traditional Tauren clothing. That thought caused her to want to tease him some more. "Indeed. Thankfully, my own teenage years are so far in the distant past, that I cannot remember how much of a fool I made of myself. Although I know I did, if only in terms of writing incredibly bad poetry and pining away from afar rather than simply staring at nothing and having to cross my legs to hide the proof of my thoughts."

As she had expected, Harry's eyes widened, although he had not in fact been thinking about the younger twosome at that moment. No, his thoughts had been about someone else entirely. Regardless, his hands moved to re-arrange the front of his pants subtly before pausing as he realized there was no need. He looked at her and shook his head at Tyrande's twinkling eyes. "Okay, that was a good one," he allowed. "And I can't deny that Berena and Sylina were attractive. But they are Kaldorei, and I'm not. So any thoughts I might have of... companionship... in the future are useless."

"Don't set that thought in stone Harry," Tyrande murmured. *I rather think that any Kaldorei who could get past his odd appearance would be very happy with Harry. But that is for the future,* she thought, before she turned her attention back to the Tauren around them, a few of whom were looking at them speculatively having overheard their discussion.

What they made of it, Tyrande didn't know as they reached the entrance to the large red tent she had seen moments ago and a Tauren of impressive build came out. He wasn't the oldest Tauren in sight, but his shoulders and chest were among the broadest, and the beads and feathers in his beard and hair were more elaborate than anyone else in sight.

The man moved forward, then bowed deeply from the waist. "I am Lars Proudtree of the Rivermane, High Chief of Highmountain. Lady Tyrande, having you here both as representative of your people and as a veteran of the War of the Ancients is both an honor and a surprise. I did not anticipate you personally coming to greet me upon my ascension to the High chieftain's hut."

"True, normally I would not be able to get away from my own duties as a leader. But this time, your becoming high chief coincided with my own sabbatical from my duties as leader of my people," Tyrande replied, then decided to make a joke about it. "Perhaps you have heard of that before? Every four-hundred and twenty-two years, I take a year off to commune with nature and get away from my duties for a time."

The Tauren chuckled, a deep subterranean noise from his cavernous chest. "Only Kaldorei can speak so casually about the passage of time. Still, please introduce your companions to me. I also understand that your two animal companions can speak for themselves? That is an intriguing ability. Yet one which, I believe, comes from your companion, not you, Lady Whisperwind."

Harry nodded, and at Tyrande's gesture, he stepped forward, introducing himself as well as Quetzal. When he finished, Tyrande introduced her own companion, scratching Shy-rotam behind the ears.

"We have records of Shimmerback snakes from our wandering brethren, although rarely do they live to be as large as this one on the Broken Isle," the chieftain murmured, then bowed politely to the snake. "You're welcome in our lands, so long as you do not feed upon our people or our livestock without our leave."

"I ate a particularly foolish leopard a few days ago, so you need not fear on that score. I might take some unwary birds on the wing or a squirrel, but I will not need a main meal for a few more days," Quetzal responded regally.

"Please, come inside, let us talk."

The interior of the tent soon became packed, as more Tauren entered behind them, interested to hear the story of how lady Tyrande, who was a legend among their people almost as much as she was among the Kaldorei, had come to be here, and with such odd companions. Between them, Harry and Tyrande explained his past as much as Harry wished to and his training with Cenarius before their meeting in the mountains against the Frostmaul Giants.

"And so you come to us to learn our ways, to get in touch with your mixed natures," one of the Tauren mused, scratching at his beard thoughtfully. He was one of the oldest Tauren there, his hair was mostly white, with only streaks of its original brown here and there, although his fur seemed to have retained its color. He had almost as many beads and feathers in his beard as the king, and his horns were huge, even in comparison to the other men around them. All of whom, Harry was interested to note, had the same type of horns: that of moose rather than bulls or anything else.

"So long as you are willing to put in the time Harry Potter, I believe that yes, you can learn from us about our shaman ways. But do not expect that we will allow you to learn such for free. Every adult must be able to contribute to the clan. And judging by the tales of your combat prowess, you are an adult, despite your apparently youthful appearance that puts me in mind of our own young."

It was with a start that Harry realized at that point that none of the Tauren had called him out on his being human, or as the Kaldorei had put it, a cursed Vrykul. Instead, they had simply seen him as a stranger, not as a strange, possibly dangerous freak. That was humbling, as not even Cenarius' family had welcomed him without any preconceived notions.

Setting that observation aside, Harry nodded. "Whether you would prefer magic or sweat and the effort of the mind and body, I can cheerfully pay my own way."

"Nor should you expect it to be quick. We do not know how long you expect to live, but it takes decades for a shaman to truly be able to converse with the spirits, both within and without," the same elderly Tauren warned.

"I've never been afraid of hard work, although occasionally I have not volunteered for it," Harry joked, causing laughter to reverberate through the crowd of listeners, which had grown in the telling. Indeed, someone had moved segments of the chieftain's tent, rolling them up to the central support in the center of the hut so that more of his people could listen in.

"As grateful as I am that you are willing to help Harry with his dichotomous issue, I have to inform you that our trek here was more dangerous than we had anticipated. Animal, monster, the terrain and the weather, all of these I had anticipated. But these attacks by the Drogbar are beyond my understanding. I had thought that at least the very least in your father's time the Drogbar and you were leaving one another alone. Yet they clearly attacked us while we were on the trail leading up to Highmountain, along with a Tauren we met who was on his Trials. And yesterday, we saw signs of more combat."

"That is our problem to deal with, lady Tyrande," Lars answered repressively.

He was new to his position, Tyrande knew, and she understood he probably would not be willing to take help from outsiders for fear of looking weak. From what she had heard since arriving here, the Bloodtotem tribe would certainly not be happy about it. But that didn't mean

that help wasn't warranted, and looking around, Tyrande saw that several of his advisors were looking at her and Harry speculatively.

"But what is actually going on?" Harry asked bluntly. "What has started this conflict?"

For a moment, Lars was silent, then at the nudge of a woman who looked to be the same age, he started, then finally replied. "We do not know. It's been going on for a few years now, but we have no idea what sparked it. Suddenly, Drogbar were simply not interested in talking or keeping to their own territories as we were. They have begun sending war bands away from their caves, attacking travelers to and from our settlements. We have lost people, although not many as of yet. Still, the most recent attack was an assault on our goatherd, and it was more effective too, slaughtering many of the Highmountain tribe's reserves."

"And when the Highmountain clan sent out a party to hunt Drogbar warband down, we lost several people," said another Tauren. This one was another middle-aged man, although Harry guessed his warrior days were behind him given the leg he was missing from the thigh down.

"Could it be the Taint?" Harry guessed, looking over at Tyrande.

She frowned, then slowly shook her head. "I do not believe that the one buried beneath could influence events on the island. That would seem beyond his reach. Further, it is too simply too easy to point and shout 'Taint!' in such circumstances, something few can afford lest it breed reactionism. No, this is something else."

She stared up at the top of the tent, where beyond, she could feel Elune in the nighttime sky high above. Harry also did the same, smiling faintly as he stared at the stars. Harry had come to appreciate nights here far better than he ever had back in Astrology class, and the stories Tyrande had told him about Elune and Cenarius and the other spirits made it even better.

Finally, Tyrande turned her attention back to the chieftain, smiling somewhat lopsidedly. "Would you like help looking into this issue? From both myself and my companions? I think this might be more important than simply a land dispute or there being too many Drogbar for them to feed themselves. And, perhaps, if I show that you Tauren have allies, that alone will be enough."

Harry frowned at being volunteered, but after a second, he shrugged his shoulders. If he stayed here for any length of time, Harry would probably get involved in whatever this was anyway. *Best to bring it to the surface now and get it over with. Especially with Tyrande here to help.* While he had seen one Tauren warrior in action before, he had spent months fighting alongside Tyrande and knew exactly how deadly she was.

The High Chief frowned, but as other Tauren around him talked at him, Lars looked up towards the moon himself before looking back at them. "I believe that my people would value your aid in this. What do you propose?"

"Drogbar are still quite hierarchal correct? So they have a chieftain or a king?" Tyrande questioned. "Who perforce must be the cause of all of this trouble in some fashion?"

When Lars nodded, Tyrande turned to Harry. "Do you think we could sneak up on them?"

Harry smiled, stood up, and pulled out his invisibility cloak, throwing it on himself. Everyone there saw him do it, and then, no one could see Harry at all. Shouts of shock reverberated, and then Harry was back, pulling off his cloak, setting it to one side in plain sight, before looking over at Tyrande, who obligingly also stood up.

A second later, she was invisible in turn. When Harry canceled the spell, she had moved entirely around the central fire pit despite many of the Tauren up and looking around for her. Some even flailed with their hands in the air in front of them, only to find Tyrande sitting among several young women and men.

"I think that infiltration can indeed be our course forward," Harry said dryly. "Either for violence or discussion. That I will leave up to you."

Lars smiled, stood up, and reached across the fire pit to shake Harry's hand, although the human had to lean forward over the currently unused fire pit a ways to do so. "Let me tell you what we can of Drogbar and their territory, and then let us put together a real plan of action. If we can get to the King without having to fight through his domain, perhaps we can get some answers without fighting a war."

**OOOOOO**

The next day, Harry and Tyrande joined a select group from the High Chief's war band. They would be heading to one of the tunnels the Drogbar had used at the beginning of the current trouble set between the Blood Totem and Highmountain tribes. It hadn't been used since the initial push

At first, Lars wanted to take his entire band, but Harry counseled against it. "The more people I have to hide under my spells, the less effective they're going to be. For one thing, the more people I hide at one time, the more it takes out of me. For another, the more movement, the more quickly a spell breaks."

With Tyrande volunteering, the two of them showed what he meant by this. Walking, Tyrande could make her way entirely through the town without being seen or breaking the

Disillusion charm placed on her. But when she started to run, the spell faded out in a few dozen steps.

“Hmm, it’s actually good to see that your magic has limits. Unlimited power is something anyone sane should be happy about seeing in the hands of anyone, even themselves. Besides High Chief, you know that we’ll have issues anyway invading the Drogbar caves,” opined one of the older warriors there, reflexively tapping the top of his moose-like horns reflectively. “I doubt any spell will cover the sound of horns scrapping on rock overlong.”

The other experienced warriors around them all grunted agreement, with a few of them even breaking out into chuckles. Tyrande and Harry looked at them in confusion, and Lars smiled, tapping his chest where Harry’s head was and then where Tyrande’s head was. “Let’s just say that moving around underground is somewhat troublesome for beings of our size.”

“I could shrink you,” Harry suggested, his lips twitching. “I’ve done the same thing to Quetzal here a few times.”

“I wouldn’t recommend it,” Quetzal grumbled. “It wasn’t pleasant to relearn how to fight as a much younger version of myself.”

“I don’t know. Being small sounds like a fun adventure,” Shy-rotam announced from where Tyrande was currently rubbing her belly, the tiger’s voice interspersed with loud rumbling purrs. “It’d be interesting to fight one of those brave striped creatures on an even footing, or maybe even hunt a squirrel on its level.”

All the Tauren there shivered, shaking their heads in unison, sending bangles and beads to clapping so loud it created a cacophony of sounds. “No, thank you, Harry,” Lars said very firmly.

With Harry’s point made, Lars cut down the size of his war band to be himself, three warriors, and a shaman. The choosing was fierce, but eventually, they were ready to go, and Lars led the way out of town, with his band of four Tauren fanning out around their new allies.

The Tauren headed slightly eastward from the direction that Harry and Tyrande had entered the town from. The forest around them became larger and deeper as they went. It was surprising to Harry that all of this was on top of a large mountain, but twice during their journey, Harry saw other steam vents explaining away how it was possible to have this abundant foliage and life. *Although how the heck some of the animals I’ve seen got up here is a different story. I don’t see squirrels being able to get up that mountain, let alone tigers. Then again, maybe in the distant past, there was an easier way up here?*

After pausing for a light midday meal, the group carried on, but before long, they halted at a shout coming from one side of the route they were following. “There you are, oh High Chief! I understand that we are finally going to do something about the Drogbar problem?”

From out of the woods on all sides came a large band of Tauren, twenty strong or more. All of them were dressed in red and brown colors and showed the sigil of the Blood Totem tribe on their shoulders. Unlike the mix of spears and bows that the Rivermane tribe favored, these Tauren wielded large double-headed axes or warhammers to a man. A few favored multiple smaller axes, evidently for both throwing and dual wielding. All in all, they seemed a much more warlike group than the Rivermane tribe, which fit with what Harry and his companions knew about the tribe in question.

What was even more evident was the scowl on their faces and the glares that they sent in Quetzal's direction. "And why are you traveling with such a beast as that? Has a shaman bound with it, is it an ancestor spirit of some kind given life once more?"

"Hello to you too, Tarn Fangsnapper," Lars answered mildly. He showed no concern or even apprehension as he stepped forward towards the Tauren who had spoken.

While Quetzal and Shy-rotam both narrowed their eyes at the so-named Tauren, Harry and Tyrande also studied him carefully. He was the largest Tauren they had yet seen, with much broader shoulders than the High Chief. In one hand, he held a large axe that looked so large it could probably kill someone Harry's size just by the weight of it alone. Scars were evident scattered across his body, the most startling being one across the face that looked as if it had opened nearly claimed his eye in some bygone battle, missing by a hairsbreadth and traveling along with his nose and then around the other end. It gave the Tauren a perpetually aggressive, snarling sort of appearance.

Lars exchanged a forearm clasp with the larger Tauren without any sign of fear or concern, even his tone continuing to reflect that. "As for the snake, his name's Quetzal. He came with his two companions, who have offered to aid us in this current crisis. Indeed, their aid is the basis of my current plan for dealing with the Drogbar at all."

"Companions?" Tarn's face had mellowed considerably as Lars stood in front of him as if accepting the fact that the High Chief wasn't intimidated and approving of it. But now, as he looked past Lars and spotted Tyrande and Harry, his scowl came back with a vengeance, and he broke off their handclasp to thrust a finger over Lars' shoulder to point at the two of them angrily. "What are outsiders doing here!?"

"Tarn, be known to Tyrande Whisperwind," Lars announced, not even needing to mention her title or anything else. Tyrande's name was enough. "With her is Harry Potter, a human."

At the name Whisperwind, Tarn's face seemed to fight itself between his automatic distrust of other races and respect for a warrior of her capabilities. "...I suppose if Tyrande's combat prowess hasn't been exaggerated over the centuries, that her presence in the warband is acceptable enough, although I still think that this problem is something we should be able to

handle on our own! And as for her companion, what is a human?" Tarn barked a laugh. "And how could he be any help? He looks as if I could break him into by patting him on the back."

"You would find that a bit more difficult than you might think," Harry interjected before Lars could answer or Tyrande could try to calm the waters. "Especially considering I'd have to let you touch me, let alone hurt me."

Tarn stomped over, Lars allowing the other Tauren to pass them without comment, watching from the sidelines now as Tarn loomed over Harry. "And you think you could stop me, little creature? You barely come up to my chest, and your thighs barely look larger than my daughter's forearms! Are all your people so feeble?"

"We might be weaker physically than you Tauren, but I think we make up for it in speed. The council is still out on whether or not we have equal amounts of brain. Before this, I would've said so, but your example is making me question that assumption," Harry drawled, trying to give his words the same twist Snape always did when he insulted Harry or the other Gryffindors.

Tyrande stepped forward, but Lars stopped her with a gentle shake of his head, gesturing to Quetzal to stay out of the confrontation as well. Having another outsider step in would only exacerbate issues. Understanding what Lars meant without needing to be told, Tyrande sighed, then held up her hands and moved back a pace, pushing Shy-rotam behind her, very visibly removing the two of them from the current confrontation. Whatever happened, she was not involved.

"You dare insult me!" Tarn bellowed, raising his battleaxe.

Whether or not he actually would have attacked Harry was a question since none of his fellows seemed at all concerned, nor did Lars and his own people. But Harry wasn't about to let Tarn even swing his axe. He waved a hand, magic flashing out.

To one side, Tyrande saw the magic hit the Blood Totem chieftain's weapon and had to roll her eyes, her ears flicking down then back up in a sign of resigned amusement.

"Among my people, giving someone a bouquet of flowers is part of the courting ritual. But I got to tell you, Tarn, you're not my type."

Tarn frowned, feeling his weapon suddenly weigh far less than it should. Turning, he looked up at his battleaxe, only to find that it had been transfigured into a bouquet of paper flowers held together by a thin wooden vase, the only thing about the original weapon that hadn't changed. "What, how!?" His eyes turned red as he turned back to Harry, raising his free fist as he put two and two together. "How dare you use magic on me!"

The rest of his war band also growled, hefting their weapons and moving forward. In actuality, the Tauren didn't have much problem with magic because none alive could remember the Kaldorei who had fought for the Demons in the War of the Ancients. Most of the

magic they knew of was the Nature and Element Magic their shamans could call upon. While they hadn't seen anyone using magic to change one thing into another before, it normally would simply be interesting to them. But using magic on someone else outside of a life or death situation was incredibly rude. Indeed, it was seen as grounds for a duel, especially if used on a chieftain without his approval.

But Quetzal moved out of the pack of Rivermane Tauren, who also hefted their weapons. The snake reared up, staring down at them, his tongue flicking out as the spines on his back stood straight in preparation for launching. "I think you should reconsider that decision," the giant snake hissed while Shy-rotam also bounded forward, crouching down in preparation of leaping.

Since Harry had once again renewed the translation spell on both animals earlier that morning, all of the Tauren around him understood the Needlespine Shimmerback's words even if they didn't speak the common Kaldorei tongue, and the Blood Totem clan members all paused, shaken out of their anger at Harry's use of magic on their Chieftain by the revelation that the animal could speak intelligently. Shamans could speak with some animals and even understand their speech but allowing others to do so was beyond them. And most animals, bar the giant Eagles that the Skyhorn clan bonded with certainly didn't sound as intelligent as the giant snake.

Harry dodged the blow from Tarn easily, then leaped over a kick, rolling along on the ground for a moment. Tarn's speed had surprised him from someone so big, but now he twisted around, his fingers flashing out towards the large Tauren. Instantly the man doubled over in laughter, holding his stomach as he began to bellow and dancing in place as he was being tickled. "Haha, What, hahaha how, hehe, these spells, I, hahaha, I have never heard of the like!"

"Let's just say that I don't come from around here. Now, are we doing posturing, or should I start using lethal spells?"

Tarn looked around, trying to concentrate through his current peroxisomes of laughter, but couldn't find the creature he had challenged. "Where, haha, where are you!?"

"Why would I tell you that? You just tried to attack me, remember?" Harry's voice came out of nowhere. The wizard had taken the opportunity to pull his invisibility cloak around him.

"Ha, haha, have you no honor! Stand and, haha, fight like a..."

"I'm not a Tauren. Why would I fight like one?" Harry's questioned, his tone mildly incredulous.

Tarn surprised him a second later as he threw the bouquet of paper flowers in that direction. But Harry had used another spell to send his voice to a location two yards to his side, so the flowers didn't hit him and thus give his position away.

"I think that's enough, Harry. Cancel the spell on Tarn. Although, you might want to stay hidden for a bit." Lars finally spoke up, a little too late, and Tyrande's opinion. But he knew his people best, and she subtly pushed her moon glaive back into its holster on her back.

With an unseen shrug, Harry did so, noting absently that both animals were already looking in his direction. *Right, scent. I need to ask whether or not the Drogbar have a heightened sense of smell before we get there.*

As Tarn recovered, Lars helped the larger Tauren to his feet. "I let that go longer than I normally would allow someone to challenge someone given rights, Tarn Fangsnapper, because I wanted you to see what Harry brings to the fire pit."

Tarn grunted but heard the word of warning in Lars's tone and crossed his arms over his chest, bowing from the waist very slightly towards the High Chief. "Your pardon, High Chief, I didn't realize that you gave these outsiders guest rights. I don't agree that they should be part of solving this issue with the Drogbar. It makes us seem weak. But I'll at least listen to your reasoning."

"We don't want a war. A war between the Drogbar and us would be inconclusive at best. We could invade portions of their tunnels, but we could never conquer them. But we both know that trying to solve this diplomatically has failed. So that leaves subterfuge. Harry, as you just saw, brings quite a lot of skills that will help us in such a mission," Lars explained, moving over to pick up the bouquet of flowers.

With a true wizard's sense of timing, Harry hit the flowers with a Finite Incantatum, reverting them back to their original form. Lars nearly lost his grip on the weapon but didn't, and then held it out shaft-first towards Tarn. "Do you think you will need another example, or can we move on?"

Taking his battleaxe back, Tarn looked at it suspiciously, hefting it this way and that and then moving over to a nearby downed tree limb, hacking through it with a single blow. He then inspected the edge of his weapon, nodding in approval. "Just as sharp as it was before it became flowers. I will not forget that affront, but this Harry Potter has proven that he will be useful High Chief."

"That's good to hear," Harry said mildly, coming out from behind his cloak next to Tyrande, who, much to his annoyance, didn't flinch. Instead, she simply cocked an ear in his direction, not turning away from where she was still watching the two Tauren leaders, her body language suggesting that she was amused by his antics but not surprised.

Tarn sent him a glare but turned back to Lars as he explained the plan. After a moment, Tarn nodded firm agreement. "I still don't like relying on an outsider, but his spells should allow us to infiltrate the Drogbar caves. Cutting the head of the beast off rather than becoming deadlocked in a war that would not go anywhere sounds like a good idea to me."

Although the words didn't sound all that approving, he did clap Lars on the shoulder, an admission that he had been in the wrong. That act made Harry think slightly better of the bellicose Blood Totem chieftain, but he doubted the two of them would ever get along.

In contrast, when the next group joined them around evening, they were led by someone Harry already knew and was happy to see.

"Well now, when I was told a giant snake was traveling with the High Chieftain and the Blood Totem war tribe, I didn't quite make the connection. After all, the last time I saw you and your companion Harry Potter, he was not nearly that large. But it is good to meet you once more." Tyre Fleetforest smiled at Harry as he clasped forearms with the human. "It's even better to see that you are alive at all, considering the last time I saw you, you were heading off to attack a force of satyrs."

The other members of the Highmountain war tribe with Tyre all smiled in welcome as well. It was clear that he had told them how Harry had helped free Tyre from the satyrs several years ago.

"I didn't know you were a chieftain when we met, Tyre," Harry answered, cocking his head to one side.

"I wasn't at the time, but my tribe elected me to the position after our old chief died soon after my return," Tyre answered, shaking his head with a sigh.

"What is this?" Tarn asked, looking between Tyre and Harry. "You have fought satyrs as well, human?"

"Yes," Harry said with a shrug. "I met Tyre when I rescued him and a group of Furbolgs from a warband of satyrs which had attacked the village he was staying in. Together we wiped out the warband and freed the other captives."

Tyre barked a laugh. "Ha! Harry is too modest. He did most of the work at the time, as I was poisoned by some fell satyr concoction that stopped me from using my shaman powers."

"If you had told me of your past accomplishments, I might not have challenged you," Tarn grumbled, still smarting from his humiliation earlier that day. Left unsaid was that he probably would still have challenged Harry, such was the antipathy the Blood Totem tribe had for outsiders.

Harry seems to sense that and replied mildly, "I'm not one to toot my own horn like that."

"What does tooting a horn have to do with anything?" Lars asked quizzically, while the others all around Harry also looked confused save for Tyrande, who chuckled quietly at the use of what she knew was another colloquialism.

Harry slapped a palm to his forehead. "Nevermind. It's just a saying among my people for bragging about one's own accomplishments. I just have never seen the point to it." *Except when I want to intimidate someone*, He amended mentally. *And even then, just my name and lightning bolt scar were normally enough.*

"That too does you credit in my eyes," Lars responded, with Tyre nodding in agreement while Tarn still looked annoyed with Harry. Indeed, he looked annoyed at Harry and Tyrande, but such was Tyrande's position and reputation that he couldn't quite challenge her being there. The two animals barely registered in his mind. "Tales around the campfire are fun and can help to educate the young but bragging about your own accomplishments is foolish."

"Well said," Tyrande murmured, and she and Harry exchanged a glance, the human bowing his head toward her in response. After all, Tyrande's experiences made Harry's pale in comparison.

Lars explained the plan to Tyre, who nodded instant agreement. Anything that kept the bloodshed to a minimum was good in his eyes, just like it was to Lars and Tarn, despite the latter's belligerence. "Besides, the Drogbar are monolithic and culture. Their King has far more power over their society and people than any Chieftain of the Tauren has ever had, Even Huhn himself. Indeed, in a way, the Drogbar are almost animalistic like that: the alpha male being the king and controlling everything his pack does."

The other two Tauren leaders frowned at that, as did Tyrande. "It is that pronounced? I didn't realize it was that bad."

"It is simply their way. The Drogbar are simple folk, very set in their ways. They do not grow as we do, learn or expand as we do. Do not attempt to try to place our values and beliefs on them," Tyre warned.

"Bah, who cares about that? All I'm hearing is that the High Chief's plan to kill the Drogbar King will work even better than he expected. That is all I need to know." Tarn grunted.

Lars was about to remonstrate with him that violence was only going to be the last recourse, that they were going to sneak in and try to talk to the King first face-to-face, but he decided against it. *Tarn is in a bad enough mood as it is. Better to spring that on him when it becomes time, I think.*

After a few moments, Lars had picked out a group that would go with them. He only chose three others, but besides Tyre himself, two of his fellows were also shamans, giving them a total of four. That seemed to assuage even Tarn, who had offered ten of his own warriors to the effort, only to have them be pared down to an equal number to the Rivermane tribe without a single Shaman among them.

This gave the war band fourteen warriors, including the three Chieftains and four shamans. Harry, Tyrande, and the two animals added four more. This was still a bit larger than

Harry thought was a good idea, but he didn't object, knowing the three clans wanted to be represented equally. Indeed, it was only the fact that the Skyhorn tribe was on the opposite side of the valley from the tunnel Lars had decided was their best bet that there weren't still more of the Tauren.

They stayed with the rest of the Highmountain warband that night, setting out early the next day, traveling at what would have been a breakneck pace for a human force, pushing Harry and Quetzal hard. Yet, it seemed the normal speed for the Tauren, who raced along on their hooves as fast as reindeer or moose could move.

Soon, they started to see signs of conflict in the trees and on the ground around them and signs of significant animal movement in the area. When Harry questioned this, one of the shamans running next to them responded. They'd been having a somewhat disjointed conversation about Harry's reasons for being there and the Nature Magic that the Shaman could sense in him, as well as if Harry had a source for his own magic power. Which he technically did, but not in the way the Tauren was concerned about, allaying their fears as he had done when he and Tyrande had first reached the High Chieftain's town.

"This area was home to several herds of reindeer. They were not exactly domesticated, but members of the Rivermane tribe routinely came by to harvest their fur and cull the herds. The Drogbar would come either to take a few of them, meat is not easy to come by in their caves, or trade with the Rivermane tribe. But when these hostilities began, the herds in this area were among the first casualties, with a few survivors fleeing."

"The same can be said for other beasts within striking range of one of the Drogbar's tunnels," another shaman interjected. "Meat is a staple of their diet, but they simply started to kill for the pleasure of it. I know that several other herds of animals and even some predators have been killed by the Drogbar since this began. They don't just raid farms or settlements."

Harry frowned at that, seeing a connection to how the Frost Maul Giants had acted, which was made worse when one of the other warriors muttered, "that's as maybe, but I know that they also take a lot of their kills away. I didn't think the Drogbar population was that large. What are they doing with all the meat they take away? They surely can't preserve it for overlong, can they?"

"Perhaps. The Drogbar could transport ice relatively easily into their caves, after all," the first Shaman spoke again.

Harry listened attentively and yet found himself glancing at one of the other shamans, one of the ones who hadn't spoken yet. On the surface, there was quite a bit about him to grab Harry's attention.

He was one of the few Tauren that didn't come in shades of brown and red that Harry had seen. Instead, his hide was a darker color, almost a black hue, while his hair was pure black. His horns two were large and worthy of consideration, being almost as large as those on the

Chieftain or some of the oldest members of their war party. Yet, the Shaman in question didn't look all that old to Harry's eyes.

Yet, that was simply physical. For some reason, Harry felt as if there was something... Off about the Shaman. Different. It was as if his Nature Magic was telling him that something here was not what it seemed. This was exacerbated by the fact the Shaman in question was trying to keep at least three of his fellows between himself and Harry at all times and seemed to flinch whenever he felt Harry's gaze on him. It was quite odd.

Still, Harry decided not to inquire further. Instead, he questioned the others about fighting the Drogbar and why Lars said they might have trouble fighting in the tunnels anyway. Many of the Tauren chuckled, a sound mixing amusement with grimness in equal measure.

Surprisingly, it was one of the warriors from the Blood Totem tribe who answered him. His tone was gruff, and he didn't look very approving as he looked at Harry and over at Tyrande, yet he still answered. "The Drogbar, as you have seen, are shorter than my people. Whenever we have gone to them on diplomatic missions before, we have come upon areas that take advantage of that. The tunnels narrow so much that even Drogbar have trouble getting past while the roof comes down to just above their head height. It makes us almost impossible for us to fight our way into the tunnels beyond a certain point."

"Then why did Lars not agree to my idea about shrinking you all?" Harry asked disingenuously, wanting to both understand why and needle the Blood Totem tribe further. Their isolationist views reminded him a little too much of the prevailing thoughts of the Wizarding World, although he had thankfully not heard anything about their thinking that they were superior or wanted to wipe out other Tauren for having impure blood.

All of the Tauren within hearing range stared at him in horror, even the one that Harry had been surreptitiously gazing at before overcoming his aversion to Harry to stare at him in shock. "That would be horrifying! Having magic used on us in such a way by someone outside our own clans would be an indignity no warrior would allow. It was somewhat allowable during your battle with Tarn, but trust an unknown magic-user of another race to perform such on us? That would not be something any of us would endure save perhaps in the heat of battle," the Blood totem warrior said, his voice conveying his shock at the very idea.

Tyre was a bit more honest, chuckling dryly. "There's more than simple distrust of your magic working here, Harry. Height is **important** among Tauren. Our height is a sign of our status to our fellows. It is a social convention, much like our horns, and the marks we bare to show we have passed the Rites of the Earthmother and continue to do so to prove our status."

"More importantly, much of our combat style relies on us having a greater reach and size than our opponents. If we went into a combat situation so shrunk, it might leave us open to being overwhelmed in a way we would not normally be," another warrior added, looking around at his fellows, wincing. "But it might be a good idea to get through the chokepoints."

There was a rumble of reluctant agreement at that, although most of them still looked very wary at the idea, and the conversation turned to other matters. Specifically, Harry was surprised to learn that the Drogbar also had some magic of their own. They had an extreme affinity with stone and earth magic and could take power from the earth and stone much like the Kaldorei druids and Tauren shaman could from nature, if in a very different manner from either of those equally disparate groups.

“They do not seem to innovate, and from what I understand, Drogbar shaman won’t have as vast a repertoire of different spells as you do, Harry. But what spells they do have are powerful and will be more dangerous underground,” Tyre said.

“Stone spikes, bringing the roof down, creating chasms on the floor, creating a Golem, maybe?” Harry asked, counting spells off in his finger.

“All but that last one I have heard of. But what is a Golem?” Lars asked from where he was leading the group forward.

“A stone monster that I can create and command during the battle. It could be a force multiplier if we need it.”

“Wait, you mean you can summon an Earth Elemental?” one of the Highmountain Shamans asked in interest. “That’s fascinating. How intelligent are the elementals you summon? I can summon a small one, but the stone around here is so saturated with magic it would stay around forever if I but allowed it. ”

“Er, not intelligent at all. My golems are just dumb rock given form and commanded by me. What is an Earth Elemental? You make it sound as if it is something alive.”

As one, the shamans all turned to the oldest member of their brotherhood there, a Riverman tribesman who had come with Lars. He smiled and stepped over to Harry, running beside him. “I think, Harry, we need to talk a bit more about this. You see, when we speak about Elementals, we speak of actual element-based spirits. Elementals live on different planes of existence, and...”

The following conversation was utterly fascinating, and the Shaman was somewhat thankful to realize that Harry’s golems were not, in fact, elemental spirits, while also being pleased to discover Harry was a good listener. As the conversation shifted to the Elemental Spirits themselves, Tyrande began to add her own knowledge of the Elemental plains. She knew in particular about their Lords, having learned of them from Alexstrasza herself in ancient times, and knowing that they had served, some willingly, some not, the Old Gods. She hadn’t seen Harry use his golem spell before and asked him why at one point.

“Eh, it’s not something I do normally, as back home, large-scale constructs like that were often more trouble than they were worth. My enemies would either destroy them easily, or

their creation would give my presence away,” Harry admitted, somewhat dumbing down the reasoning behind his decision to not use golems often.

The fact was, golems were destructive but easy to destroy in turn by most spells, although they had their uses when fighting in an area that you didn’t mind laying waste to. And to be blunt about it, Harry hadn’t really experimented with them all that often before coming to this world. Despite that and his bemusement on there being actual elemental spirits, Harry was certain now that attaining a new outlook on his chimeric body wasn’t the only thing he would be learning from the Tauren.

At around midafternoon, the warband’s scouts crested a rise and found themselves looking down into a small dell in the valley floor, where an entrance to a cave could be seen among sparse trees. Soon Harry and the other leaders were all hiding, laid out among a few bushes as they stared down into the dell.

Lars scowled, shaking his head very slightly so his horns didn’t rustle the surrounding foliage too much. “That is the Drogbar tunnel that I was leading us towards. It was one of the first they used to attack from, but they haven’t done so since. I’d hoped it would be abandoned, but...”

The reason for their caution was a force of four Drogbar moving around a small fireplace right in front of the cave. Given how the Drogbar had been able to ambush him and Tyrande on their way up the mountain, Harry knew that meant there were probably at least two, maybe three times that number hidden nearby.

“Spread out. We’ll attack the Drogbar from every direction,” Tarn growled out, taking command from Lars, who looked at him sharply. That was a challenge to his leadership that he could not allow, and he hissed out a negative, glaring at the Blood Totem Chieftain.

After a moment, the other Tauren backed down but gestured down into the dell, his tone dripping sarcasm. “How then would you attack, High Chief?”

“I don’t think we should attack at all.” Tyrande spoke up. Everyone turned to her in some confusion, and she looked over at Harry. “Do you think you could create a sleep spell that would take out those guards?”

Harry frowned speculatively. “I could, and I could even get close to cast it without them noticing. But I don’t think I could find all of the Drogbar in hiding. I have a spell that could reveal them if they were members of my race, but the Human Revealing spell doesn’t work on other intelligent races. And unfortunately, it would only take one of them to sound the alarm, and then we would be fighting our way through the tunnels, which is not what we want to do,” he ended, deliberately looking over to Tarn, who huffed angrily. “I could maybe make an illusion and lead them off after something they want to chase...”

"I suggest we do something different," Quetzal said, smirking slightly from where he had slithered up unheard behind them, watching the Tauren twitch. Harry had shrunk him to half his normal size an hour ago when the Tauren told Harry they were getting close to their target. "You all are overthinking this."

"Alright, Scaly, what's your plan?" Harry asked.

"If we cannot get past them, and if you cannot put them all to sleep, then we must scare them away. Scare the Drogbar back into their tunnels and then follow after. And I am quite frightening, you know. Since none who have seen me have survived to speak about my connection to the pink-skinned one, they will think I am just a dangerous beast who has moved into the area."

"That could work," Harry agreed with a nod while the Tauren all frowned a bit but said nothing. "Which direction should we scare them towards?"

Lars pointed to the north of where the sides of the dell were least steep. "If you attack from behind where the cave is, you can scare them away from it down that direction. We'll set up an ambush there and wipe them out. We don't want any of their war band to just start wandering around behind us, after all."

Tyrande wasn't so certain about that, but again, this wasn't her land, and she was more than willing to let Lars take the lead on this. He and Tarn conferred for a few moments while Tyre led the other shamans out and around, followed quickly by the others, who gave Harry an approving glance, before following after their leaders, leaving Harry and Quetzal where they were.

"So, how big do you want to be, and do you want to rely just on your own chameleon scales, or what?"

"Since I am rather insulted already that the Tauren believe I will leave any of these creatures alive to flee, simply return me to my present size, and then hit me with one of your spells to help get me close. After that, I will do the rest," Quetzal declared proudly.

Harry did so, and Quetzal moved to attack the Drogbar. Once in position, he covered the distance as fast as the Disillusion spell on him would allow his own chameleon scales not as much help on the move.

The first the Drogbar knew of their peril was when Quetzal reared up, covering the last few feet between him and the first Drogbar within seconds. A quick bite had one of the creatures flailing in his mouth, where he was quickly swallowed. Then Quetzal was rearing up, hissing as he stared down at the other Drogbar, his long tongue flickering out.

The three surviving Drogbar visible outside the cave screamed in fright. Two Drogbar rushed inside, the other one turning away after hurling his spear up at Quetzal.

The spear did nothing to Quetzal's thick hide, and that Drogbar died, Quetzal's teeth sinking into its back like twin swords, picking him up and shaking him from side to side, to release him from the fangs, the paralytic in Quetzal's bite overkill to the size of his fangs. At the same time, several dozen Drogbar appeared from out of hiding places all around the cave, proving Harry right in his supposition they would be there, although this time they hadn't just used fake rocks. Instead, the Drogbar had created little foxholes for themselves with bushes pulled over the top, hiding in them like only the best human snipers would've been able to do.

The Drogbar hurled Spears up towards Quetzal, but then one of them knelt to touch the ground with both hands. Harry watched in interest from his hiding place as spikes began to appear along the ground heading towards Quetzal. But Quetzal simply smashed them aside, coiling for a moment, then springing forward, his whole body extended towards the Shaman.

The Shaman was a little too quick for Quetzal to snack on but was still headbutted backward, rolling like a spiky ball around along the ground.

This left the other Drogbar to grab up spare spears and clubs. With these, the Drogbar began to strike at Quetzal from several sides, but he just thrashed, tossing them this way and that, crushing one underneath his coils and then eating a second. Watching this, Harry was amused in a somewhat morbid way. *I wonder how much Quetzal's volunteering to do something for once had to do with his desire to try what Drogbar tasted like.*

If that was so, and Quetzal would never admit it, he was now regretting his decision. *Ugh, they taste okay, but those spikes are annoying my stomach something fierce.*

Regardless of Quetzal's stomach problems, it only took a few strikes each for the Drogbar to realize that they couldn't really harm Quetzal. As that realization went through them, the Drogbar began to flee one by one. Unfortunately, they fled in every direction while the Shaman attempted to cast another spell towards Quetzal.

Busy smashing a Drogbar with his tail Quetzal was hit by the Shaman's spell this time and hissed in fury as a stone spike took them in the center of his body mass, hurling him backward and to the side. Yet the spikes couldn't penetrate his scales, and he twisted around and hissed balefully at the Shaman before slithering forward once more.

Harry killed two of the Drogbar as they came racing up the slight incline of the dale. Waiting until they were out of sight from further below in the dell, Harry hit each with a cutting spell to the neck. They fell, but looking around from under his cloak, Harry hoped that the Tauren were in a position to do the same.

Several more Drogbar came out of the tunnel behind where Quetzal was chasing after the Shaman. But they took one look at the giant snake, then shook their heads and fled, heading back inside the cave as fast as their legs could carry them.

*Now that could be good or bad*, Harry thought, before racing down as quickly as he could towards the cave.

A few hundred yards into the tunnel, Harry caught up with the Drogbar as they retreated deeper. They met up with a few others, bringing their total numbers to almost the same as the group Quetzal had dealt with. This made Harry wonder if maybe their timing had just been super bad and this group was coming out to relieve their fellows.

*Or does every tunnel have a reserve force like this?* Harry wondered, remembering the ambush they had sprung on the Drogbar attacking young Pahr Fangstone.

Regardless, none of the Drogbar looked to have any interest in rushing outside to fight Quetzal. In Harry's opinion, this was uncommonly wise of them, and he followed on their heels as they retreated further into the tunnel.

The larger meeting area quickly gave way to a smaller tunnel, which choked off to the point where the Drogbar could only go in single file. The top of the tunnel almost scrapped their heads. *No wonder the Tauren had trouble fighting down here.* A Tauren would be forced to go on hands and knees, which would leave them horribly open to attack.

Harry had no such trouble walking behind the Drogbar as they entered. They continued on while the tunnel began to descend slightly. In this manner, they passed two more chokepoints before they reached a bend in the tunnel, at the end of which the tunnel connected to two others. There Harry paused, watching the direction they went, before deciding that the Drogbar didn't see Quetzal as a danger to their tunnels and seemed content to let him take control of the area around the entrance. *So that way will be the way to their main area.*

With that, he turned away, heading back outside, looking angrily at Quetzal and volubly denouncing Harry as a coward. "He fled! He ran away rather than take part in our foray into the tunnels. Are you certain that this one hadn't done all of his fighting for him, Tyre?" Tarn growled, pointing to Quetzal.

Pulling off his invisibility cloak, Harry called out, "Does that mean you wouldn't like to know what's exactly waiting for you in that tunnel? I could leave it as a surprise."

All of them turned to look at him, and he smiled. "I thought turning you lot invisible was the point of my being here. Is it any surprise that I would use that ability to scout ahead?"

"The Tauren are just bothered by the fact that Quetzal did his own thing and didn't let much fighting left for them, Harry," Tyrande replied, smiling faintly. "For my part, I thank you for scouting ahead of us. Did you run into any trouble?"

"There are a few chokepoints, but the Drogbar had a reaction force inside the tunnel. Heh, they took one look at Quetzal and decided to call it a day, so the tunnel is actually unguarded thanks to my friend."

“Just as I planned,” Quetzal hissed. “My appearance terrorized them into fleeing, which allows us a much easier way forward.”

“True, but you and the Tauren will all need to be shrunk, quite a bit in your case,” Harry warned. “You were right about those chokepoints.”

Tarn grumbled, but the other Tauren all looked pleased enough with Harry’s forward-thinking, although apprehensive about the magic he would have to use on them. A moment later, the shamans began to cast spells to mask everyone’s scents, making them smell like dirt and stone instead of living creatures, a useful spell to have among a race that preferred to hunt for most of their food. Another set of spells meant that anyone who heard anything of their passage would just hear natural noises, an equally nifty little spell Harry was eager to see if he could learn.

Harry went to work when they were done, casting spells on them all as they held hands. That necessity left all of the Tauren looked a little bemused by. But when Harry explained why, they all understood.

The last thing to be done was Harry shrinking Quetzal down to a manageable size within the tunnels. Then they were entering the tunnel, with Harry and Tyrande in the lead. That caused even further grumbling, but that grumbling subsided instantly as they reached the first chokepoint. Many of the Blood Totem tribesmen looked a little uneasy, muttering about whether or not that size continued on. Luckily for them, it didn’t, and Harry canceled the shrinking spells once they reached the intersection.

Behind them, they left two of the shamans by the doorway. Three of the other warriors waited with them to guard the tunnel keeping an eye on either direction of the intersection. This way, the way out would be kept clear if the infiltration team had to retreat abruptly. Which they probably would, unless Lars’ hope of talking the Drogbar King down worked.

Following the same direction that Harry had seen the Drogbar go, the party traveled in silence for some time. The tunnel didn’t break off again, instead heading further down in intervals, passing through what was obviously small natural caves that had been connected by the Drogbar in some long-ago time. Some of these caves were being used by other drogbar, causing the party to slow as they passed through mushroom and fungi farms, the mushrooms as tall as Tyrande.

These small caves did not prepare Harry for the sight that greeted them when they reached their actual destination. Harry had built up the idea that the Drogbar lived in small caves, like the ones that had been passing through, not really doing much to change them up, almost living like animals more than thinking beings.

But this, what had to be the central town, or perhaps even city, disabused him of that notion. The cavern was large, the equivalent of several football stadiums in size. Along the edge of it were several series of interconnected houses built out of the side of the cave, moving

up and down the walls in intervals, connected by walkways and stairs. In the center, further houses dotted the area larger and seemingly more prominent, perhaps for public venues or artisans, Harry wasn't certain.

Several hundred, or perhaps more than a few thousand, Drogbar moved around the cavern. With them were tiny creatures of various shapes and sizes which Tyre whispered were examples of Earth Elementals. Some of them were obviously work beasts: a few of them were working what looked like a water wheel pulling up water from some source beneath the cavern. Others pulled carts. But many were anything but, simply following around their masters, many of whom were young-looking Drogbar, as if they were pets.

But what most fascinated Harry was that above them, the stalactites of the cavern had been worked to a mirror shine, and lamps had been hung in a long spidery network of golden chains. In each lamp was set a massive candle, Harry couldn't estimate their size, but he felt they would be at least as large as his leg, maybe even more.

This created an atmosphere below that was, while dimmer than daylight would be, actually quite nice. It reminded Harry of being in the Great Hall in Hogwarts when the lights were turned low for dinner.

But the most impressive structure in the large cavern was certainly the one set at one end of the cavern's ovoid-shaped interior. For there, what had to be the equivalent of an underground castle rose. Built into the cavern wall like the majority of the Drogbar dwellings, it also came forward in the form of a series of staircases designed for Drogbar legs, shorter and longer than that of a human or night elves would prefer. To either side of the staircases were a series of statues of ancient Drogbar, although Harry had difficulty picking out differences between them save for the crowns they all wore. The castle's front was made into a series of frescoes surrounding a few holes in the stone, signifying windows looking out over the city.

"I'm going to go out on a limb and say that is our target?" Harry quipped in a low tone, causing Tyrande nearby to shake her head and poked him hard in the shoulder, indicating that perhaps he should be quiet.

Without any words being exchanged, the band of Tauren warriors began to break up into groups of three. There were just too many Drogbar moving around the city for them to get through to the castle without bumping into if the Tauren tried to get across in one group. They each moved across the cavern one group at a time, taking a different route each time.

Everyone had a few close calls thanks to how many Drogbar were around the cavern, with one of the Highmountain clan members having the worst experience as he was nearly hit by a cart backing out of one of the buildings in the center of the cavern. Luckily, Harry was nearby and renewed the Disillusion charm on him a second after it went out due to his fast movement.

Yet eventually, they were all together once more in front of the castle, with Tarn and the other Blood Totem warriors looking exasperated at the experience. Sneaking around like this was not for them. Luckily, it seemed as if the castle wasn't expecting visitors, and this area of the cavern was much quieter due to that.

After they had all taken a few seconds to recover, Lars led the way inside, trusting to Harry's spell work. Harry turned back to glance at Quetzal. "Stay here, my friend, and guard our back."

Grumbling, Quetzal agreed, moving into the shadow of one of the statues. There he lay, his chameleon scales letting him blend into the background even without Harry's spells so long as he didn't move.

Inside, the castle wasn't quite as impressive as the exterior. The stairwell abutted into a hallway that went on deeper into the solid rock of the mountain, but the rest of the castle wasn't as large as you would have thought from the front. There were only three rooms to a side and one stairwell leading up to more above them before the hallway ended at the open doors leading into the throne room.

That throne room was smaller than the main hallway in Hogwarts, which was the only castle Harry had to compare this to. And beyond a few columns set against the two walls to either side, there also didn't seem to be much in the way of decoration. Except, that is, a long carpet set into the center of the room, his colors red, gold and bronze, and what looked like metal sconces holding more giant candles, although these were free-standing, not inside crystal.

Oh, and there was also a throne at the far end, on a dais. The throne was made of wood for some reason instead of stone, but even from the doorway into the hall, Harry could see it wasn't exactly a master-crafted item.

On top of that throne sat a Drogbar. He was a little taller, a little broader in the shoulders, but his colors were much more striking. Instead of the normal gray tone to his skin, his skin looked a little black in places, like freckles on a Drogbar and his spikes were entirely black. A large club made of a single piece of stone rested to one side with bits carved out at the top to create spikes. On one wrist, the Drogbar king wore a few bracelets, and his armor covered his potbelly stomach and chest, unlike most of the armor Harry had seen previously on Drogbar, which only protected their stomach. And unlike those Drogbar, the spikes of stone-like protrusions that came out of his arms, back and legs were also tipped with some kind of dark metal.

Now they were here, Harry moved to one side of the door, intending not to participate in the discussions, making certain his hood was up. If it came to trouble, he wanted to be

invisible. Any hope of this being a peaceful meeting (if such a thing were possible, frankly, Harry was on Tarn's side on that score) would be left to Tyrande and Lars.

But as Tyrande and Lars stepped forward to make the trek down the carpet, things began to go wrong.

"And who is this, who has wandered into my halls covered with magic? Magic to obscure the minds of simple creatures like these Drogbar. Has someone discovered me? They must have! But I, in turn, have discovered you." An instant later, a blast of magic, raw power like Harry had not seen yet in this world, flew out, acting like a Finite Incantatum spell on the Disillusion charm Harry had cast on the Tauren and Tyrande.

Harry himself had been using his invisibility cloak and remained unseen for a moment. But he, like the others, was blasted off of his feet by the same roll of magic.

Tyrande rolled the attack, flipping in midair, her feet smacking into the wall by the door, pushing herself off and into a forward roll. The Tauren, like Harry, couldn't do the same and slammed back into the walls or down the hall where they now struggled to rise, grabbing at weapons.

Those in the hallway pushed themselves to their feet, as outside, the few Drogbar guards they had passed to enter the palace now became aware of them. As the Tauren pushed to their feet, the Drogbar charged down the hall, wielding their clubs hurling themselves forward. But unlike in the outer tunnels of the Drogbar nation, these tunnels were wide enough for two Tauren to stand shoulder to shoulder, and pair of blood totem warriors who had been flung out into the hallway did so now, blocking the six Drogbar moving towards them.

They were helped in this action by Quetzal. Roused by the shouts and the sight of the Drogbar racing into the castle, he reared up from his hiding place and attacked the guards from behind, halting half of them before they could even engage the Tauren.

Behind them, one of the archers from the Rivermane clan also pulled his weapon taut, the bow having miraculously survived his tumble. Now he shot into the charging Drogbar, downing one with a shoulder wound and another with an arrow to the neck.

Behind those three warriors, their fellows slowly pushed themselves upright as the Drogbar who had risen from the throne looked directly at Tyrande and smiled. "Now, this is a prize! Whisperwind, the hated leader of the night elves, not as hated by my Lord as the Stormrage but still a prize. Not as great an affront, as great a trophy as the one I am here to seek, but still great!"

"What are you talking about?" Tyrande asked, her moon glaive in her hand, as she crouched down low, grimacing internally. *And why do I think this is no normal Drogbar king?*

The King's eyes glowed, and then he looked over at Lars, his eyes widening in recognition. "And you have even brought me hostages!" Not just the High Chief, but two who

wear the marks of clan chieftains! Magnificent. I will have the one I am here for, and you! With both, I will be raised greatly in my Lord Deathwing's eyes when he awakes, greater even than Nefarian and Onyxia!"

At the name Deathwing, Tyrande's blood ran cold, and she remembered with a certain amount of horror that the Drogbar had served Deathwing thousands upon thousands of years ago when he was the Aspect of Earth. And then again, only unwillingly, when he had become Deathwing, betraying all of the other aspects as he unwittingly came under the influence of the Old Gods, becoming a self-styled Aspect of Death instead.

*But this is not Deathwing, praise the goddess!* With that thought, Tyrande barred her teeth, her moon glaive flickering around her from one hand to another as she glared at the transformed Black Flight member in front of her, unwilling to try and gain distance to use her bow in so small an area. "You will find, dragon, that my head is not so easy to take!"

At the word dragon, the stasis that seemed to have fallen over the Tauren at the creature's words broke, and they scattered all around the hall readying themselves to charge in. But the creature on the dais ignored them, laughing even as he batted aside a spell coming at him out of nowhere. "Bah, a magic-user hahaha, that will at least make this amusing. My name is Badrinath, remember it, Tyrande! It is the name of your killer. It is the name of the black dragon who will hail the return of our Lord with your carcass!"

With that, another blast of magic rose to engulf several more spells Harry had sent the creature's way, but this time Harry had enough warning to create a Protego in front of him and the nearest Tauren, protecting them. Then the creature began to change shape, growing, his stone-like skin changing into scales as he fell to all fours, the metal tips on the ends of his rocklike protrusion expanding before being shoot off with the tips of the spikes with a clang. One of them hit a Tauren, a warrior from the Highmountain tribe, right in the head.

He was flung backward, knocked unconscious by the impact. But with the speed imparted on those little bits of iron, Harry wondered if he was even alive. An impact like that would have probably killed any human or Kaldorei.

Thankfully he was the only casualty while the transformation continued, the raw magic coming off the creature having smashed them against the walls bar those protected by Harry's spell. The two warriors thus protected charged forwards, with Tyre claspng his hands once and then thrusting a palm forward, sending a spell that looked almost like a Patronus, but far more diffuse, in the form of a group of wolves.

Taking his cue from the Tauren, Harry sent another cutting spell at the still-growing dragon. But neither of their attacks did anything against the black dragon's scales, and it hissed in amusement, looking around it, as the change completed, and the dragon's bulk began to press them all backward.

“Hmmm, speaking of which, I thought that you night elves did away with your arcane fellows?” The dragon mused, his calm, almost lazy tone angering Harry, who launched a bowel exploding curse at the dragon, watching in dismay as it faded away the instant it hit the dragon. “Well, no matter, you are no match for my might!”

“Out!” Tyrande shouted. “We need room to maneuver, and if we stay in here, he’ll just crush us with his bulk!”

The two blood totem warriors who had been guarding the hallway leading into the King’s throne room now led the way with their Rivermane companion directly behind them. The group barely had time to get down the steps, pushing the group of guards ahead of them with the weight of their bodies when the black dragon burst out of the stone behind them. The monstrous beast treated the thick rock of the King’s castle as naught but wood and not particularly strong wood at that.

With his forearms and upper body free, he now stood on all fours amid the rubble of the castle, slowly pulling himself out from the remnants, his tail swishing from side to side as it cleared. Badrinath kept his wings furled close to his body. The cavern was huge, but so was the dragon, and there wasn’t quite enough room for him to fly.

The dragon reared his head up, staring past the invading force to the Drogbar all around them, before shrugging his shoulders. “Serve one way, or serve another, little creatures. That will be your choice once I have dealt with these interlopers.”

At that, guided by old instincts and fears, many of the Drogbar fled, their screams filling the cavern with a cacophony that served as a harsh parody of the bustle before. In the ancient past, the Drogbar had served the Earth Aspect joyfully, but since his descent into Taint-fueled madness, Deathwing had become a figure of horror to them more than any other race. Hundreds died as they were crushed by their fellows in their haste to escape the dragon who had suddenly appeared in their midst.

But a few dozen stalwart souls did not flee. Instead, they hid, waiting for their fellows to pass or, if they were in apposition to, they charged towards where the former castle had stood. Some of those moved to attack the Tauren, causing Tarn to bellow a command to the nearest four Tauren, regardless of clan. They obeyed, forming a line behind their fellows to block the Drogbar set on attacking them.

More Drogbar, however, growled in anger and perhaps some chagrin, considering how Badrinath’s words left no room to doubt what had happened. Already having grabbed up any weapon to hand, mostly mining tools or farming tools, they now charged forward, shouting out, “Never again! Never again!”

At the same time, a few smarter Drogbar shouted commands to the Earth Elementals around the cavern. Harry couldn’t hear what those commands were, but the effect was

obvious. The largest Earth Elementals started moving towards the dragon, while others shifted, growing into thick walls scattered around the cavern, providing cover.

The Drogbar who had moved to attack the Tauren found themselves boxed in by a few of these shifted elementals. And then, two times their number fell on the dragon-followers, bellowing insults and fury. It took only a few seconds to cut them down, and the four Tauren who had been waiting for the turncoat Drogbar now charged with those wishing to be free, joining the assault on the dragon, which had halted it in place for the moment.

Seeing that, Lars and Tyrande both smiled, realizing instantly that it was the black dragon that had been behind the Drogbar's recent attempts at expanding into the Highmountain territory. That meant that, if they survived this, peace might well be possible between the Drogbar and Tauren.

Harry disdained such long-term thinking. As Quetzal, who had been forced to retreat along with the others from the castle, slithered forward, a thoughtful expression on his reptilian face, Harry also moved to one side of the black dragon away from the others. As always in a fight, his thoughts were analytical, almost cold now. *I wonder what kind of spells will work on that hide?*

The answer seemed to be 'not many', although it wasn't the dragon's hide that was the main issue, something that became apparent after a few spells into Harry's assault. Sectumsempra struck Badrinath on the ridges above his eyes, startling Badrinath, and suddenly, a sibilant hiss and an aura of some kind, hazy almost like thin black smoke appeared around him, blocking the next four spells from Harry as Harry teleported around the area.

Then Badrinath began to attack, smashing two Drogbar into paste with one clawed paw, his tail shattering a dozen Elementals who died to defend still more Drogbar, ducking away from the strike. A piercing spell struck that elbow but was slowed dramatically by the aura before hitting the limb. Although it did cause Badrinath to growl, turning towards where Harry had previously been, growling angrily. "I will find you, Arcanist! You will learn that no magic is strong enough to harm one of my flight!"

By that point, Lars, Tyre, and Tyrande had all closed and were attacking Badrinath with their weapons, the black-smoke-like aura doing nothing to stop purely physical attacks. The weapons of the two Tauren still bounced off, doing no harm beyond perhaps annoying Badrinath. But Tyrande's moon glaive sliced a slight furrow across a few of the scales, not penetrating but showing that perhaps it could.

But when Tyre tried to use a strangely colored lightning spell, this too failed to do more than anger the black dragon as it hit Badrinath's aura. *So it's an anti-magic defense, then? Crap.*

As Harry tried another series of spells aimed at a specific area to see if he could overcome Badrinath's aura, Tyrande leaped up and over the strike from his other front leg, then

flung her hand out, hurling what looked like dust up into the dragon's face. Whatever it was caused Badrinath to rear his head back and scream angrily, "I will feast on your guts slowly for that, Kaldorei bitch!"

And then, Badrinath breathed out fire. Yet this flame was nothing like anything that could occur naturally in nature. Instead, it reminded Harry of Fiendfyre, save the near sentience of that fell spell. It was as black as it was red and so hot the overall temperature in the cavern rose dramatically.

Harry was well away from the attack, which flashed down towards where Tyrande had recently been standing. She dodged under the tongue of flame and to one side, grimacing at the heat but otherwise unharmed. But the fire kept on going, so hot that when it hit, it melted the very stone into magma for a few moments as Badrinath angled the attack up and away. This caught two of the Tauren warriors, another group of Drogbar, and then hit a house set into the side of the cavern, melting its façade into a pile of molten magma.

"Okay, so fire spells probably aren't the way to go," Harry whispered to himself, remaining hidden for now as he launched another spell towards the creature. "But that does give me a clue."

Shifting tactics for a moment, Harry hit Lars and Tarn with Engorgio charms to start. Both of them had been hiding behind one of the Earth Elementals turned walls. Now they exchanged a grin as they saw one another growing by at least half again the size they had been. "Now that's more like it! Someone hit us with a Bloodlust spell!" Lars bellowed over the tumult of the battle, no easy feat.

Still, one of the Drogbar Shaman heard him. A second later, both Tauren and several nearby Drogbar glowed red. The red then faded into their skin, becoming a tint instead of a glow around them.

Their normal semi-animosity gone, Lars and Tarn charged out of their hiding places, weapons raised. "For Our Ancestors!"

To take some of the pressure off them, Harry then gestured to the other side of the dragon, directly behind Tyrande. The rubble and bits of a house that had been there previously shifted and grew into a large, if somewhat simply, constructed golem. "Attack the dragon!" Harry ordered, before Apparating away as the dragon sent a tongue of flame toward where he had just been standing, grateful that the sound of the battle covered the implosion of air this spell created.

The dragon took several blows from the two Tauren and a few of the Bloodlust infused Drogbar. But even with their size enlarged and the Shaman spell heightening their strength further, they weren't strong enough to do much more than push the dragon around. Getting through his scales to really do damage was beyond them, although it was clear by his bellow that those blows hurt Badrinath regardless.

Meanwhile, having pulled back from the front line, Tyre started to use his magic to defend Lars and several warriors as they attacked, working alongside the Drogbar. But even so, the Tauren, Drogbar and few remaining Elementals were almost a sideshow. Tyrande was the dragon's main target, and she danced around it, dodging every flail of its claws, every strike from its tale.

{play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVE9FAf-y9Q>}

Watching her move, it was almost like Tyrande was dancing. Every strike, every flail from the dragon was dodged by the nearest inches as Harry's spells zipped in, trying to penetrate the dragon's aura or aiming at his mouth or eyes. She leaped up over one strike only to somehow dodge a second in midair, then disappeared, holding onto the dragon claw with one hand to avoid a blast of fire. A strike against the dragon's scales caused a flash of sparks, then Tyrande was dodging a tail strike before leaping up onto the tail and then off as the dragon lashed out at her with his forepaws.

If it wasn't for the deadliness of the battle, it would have been amazing. And also the fact that the tail strike destroyed his golem and crushed two Drogbar to a pulp. The golem's blows hadn't even registered as much as the attacks of the Tauren. *And is it my imagination, or did the golem's hands start to fall apart before hitting the dragon's actual scales? Damn.*

A final spell from Harry picked up the rubble of the golem, reforming it into a ball, then hurled it at the dragon's head. Right before it impacted, Harry hit it with a Reducto, creating a wall of moving shrapnel.

The dragon's scales ignored the assault, but it did flinch away from it slightly. The dragon's scales and magical aura were proving a powerful defense. Yet that was fine. Harry had other tricks.

"In that case, it's time to put my third rule of warfare to work. First, blind the fucker," Harry roared before Apparating to one side and behind the dragon's right flank.

At those words, Quetzal, who had just gotten into position to attack the dragon from behind, closed his eyes automatically. He had moved slowly to allow his chameleon scales work, hiding him from the dragon's sights. But Harry, his stomach now queasy from the continued Apparitions, took the time to shout, "Shut your eyes!" before casting his next spell. **"LUMOS Maxima!"**

The spell created a Lumos right in front of the dragon's eyes that was so bright it was almost like the sun had suddenly appeared in the middle of the cavern. It was the same spell Harry had used against the harpies and satyrs years ago, and like them, the Tauren and Drogbar were all blinded, stumbling back.

Tyrande had followed Harry's orders quickly enough to avoid it and now raced forward, hopping on the dragon's forearm then back even as the dragon thrashed. The few remaining

Elementals were not affected at all, and their attacks, centered on the dragon's tail, actually did some damage, denting scales or knocking a few loose.

Neither attack was noticed at present as the dragon had other things to worry about.

The light as bright as the sun appearing right in front of his eyes, Badrinath screamed, his voice going from a basso rumble of delight and evil merriment at what he was doing to the puny creatures attempting to fight him to one of agony in an instant. He thrashed away from the light, twisting so that his head was under one wing, even as Quetzal entered the fighting by biting into his other one.

The snake's venom didn't seem to do anything against the dragon's physiology, yet his fangs did tear nice big holes through the dragon's wings, and Harry paused in his next spell to hit the snake with an Engorgio charm of his own to make those wounds even worse. Thanks to his already large size, this meant the snake was almost as large lengthwise as the dragon, although the dragon had Quetzal beat in girth, and the dragon's overall weight was probably still more than three times the snake's own.

Better than crippling the dragon's ability to fly, Quetzal's assault protected a few of the Tauren, forcing the dragon to twitch away from that assault instead of crushing them under his weight. His front paws kept scrambling at his face, trying ineffectually to cover his eyes while his back legs came up, kicking out spasmodically.

Unfortunately, many of the Drogbar were too slow to back away and were slain in the dragon's pain-wracked spasms, and Quetzal was hurled aside, hissing in pain as gashes appeared on his flanks. The snake hastily retreated, firing off his spines into the dragon's side and neck, doing nothing against the dragon's scales, something Quetzal noted even as his chameleon scales let him fade into the background.

Still able to see, Tyrande on his back leaped clear as the dragon roared, now thrashing even more violently, his wings opening despite the agony. But his thrashing still protected the dragon from her strikes going wild or skittering along his scales instead of penetrating. The dragon's scales were now marked with numerous slash marks and gashes, while blood was starting to seep out from between a few of them where the Tauren or Elementals had landed blows.

Suddenly Harry oofed in pain, his breath leaving him in a gasp as the tip of Badrinath's tail caught him in the side, a rib or two breaking under the impact. He had been concentrating so much on the dragon's main body that he hadn't seen the tail spasming out towards him at the same time, twitching away from the Elementals attacks.

Despite being only the tip, the impact still lifted Harry off his feet, hurling backward to crash into the cavern's wall, although Harry was able to use a cushioning charm to soften the impact.

Leaning against the now-soft cavern's wall, Harry touched his side with his other hand, casting a quick bone-mending charm. This spell wouldn't repair the bone perfectly unless accompanied by a diagnosis spell, but it would keep the user up and moving.

Dropping to the ground once more, Tyrande dodged through the thrashing dragon's paws, her moon glaive stabbing here and there with better penetration this time. When Badrinath responded to these attacks by flinching away, she darted under his forearm, stabbing with all her might at his side where the smaller, somewhat softer-looking scales covering his stomach began.

But Badrinath suddenly superimposed his back leg between itself. Tyrande's blade stabbed deep into his arm, penetrating several scales to the flesh beneath. This enraged Badrinath further, and Harry saw his back leg kick at Tyrande like a dog with a football. But Tyrande leaped up and over the attack, although she was forced to leave her moon glaive stuck in the creature.

*I am rather glad I convinced Shy-rotam to stay behind. This fight is not one that she is prepared for.* With her moon glaive gone, Tyrande rolled and rolled again before getting to her feet and racing away from the dragon, pulling her bow from her back and an arrow from her quiver. A few of them had been smashed when she had been tossed off Badrinath a moment before, but most remained intact, and Tyrande put one of them to her string, turning, aiming it towards the dragon.

"Elune's light might not find me here, dragon, but her strength is always with me. Piercing Arrow!" Tyrande shouted, calling upon a specific power that Elune had blessed her with. A second later, she felt the rush of her connection with Elune filling her for a moment, passing through her body and into her hands, then into the arrow. Diffuse as it was thanks to the many thousands of tons of rock between her and the sky, that connection was still strong, and her spell lashed out, crashing into the dragon's upper arm and pectoral with all the power of a trebuchet.

The dragon, whose eyes had begun to clear, was hurled off his feet again onto his side. But despite that, Badrinath's anti-magic aura had stopped the majority of the attack's power, and now his sight had adjusted to the day-brightness. "You will pay for that. You and your bitch goddess will..."

"Die, dragon!" the still-enlarged Tarn roared, charging forward once more.

At the same time, Tyre had been given enough time to call on some of his own Shaman spells. Now he slammed his hand to the ground and beside him, a large mound of Earth shifted upwards, forming into a somewhat scary, heavily modified Tauren face. "Earthmother, fill my allies with your power!"

All around the dragon, the surviving Drogbar and Tauren, and the still hidden Harry and Tyrande glowed with a light brown color as the Shaman's spell impacted them. This was

followed by another spell from a nearby Drogbar Shaman. A second totem appeared in front of the Shaman, and the warriors around them were covered by another grey aura.

The dragon bellowed in real pain now even though the axe still couldn't penetrate his scales, the flesh underneath was going to feel it, and blood spurted out from between his scales. Yet without a weapon that could break Badrinath's those scales, they weren't doing enough damage, and as he too charged forward once more, Lars knew it.

Yet only one weapon existed on Highmountain that could really harm a fully mature dragon, one with full access to their Aspect and the intelligence to use magic: the Hammer of Khaz'goroth, an ancient weapon, older than the Tauren race, older by far than even the War of the Ancients, where it found its way into the hands of Huln Highmountain during the last days of that conflict. It had been used in ages past to help drive out Deathwing himself and would undoubtedly have been up to slaying this far weaker member of the Black Flight.

But Lars hadn't brought it along, thinking that would be immense overkill against simple Drogbar, and dangerous besides to risk on such a mission. Lars had also been worried that the weapon would overawe the Drogbar if they could actually converse with their King. Now he was castigating himself severely for that, even as he charged forward only to suddenly changed direction. Instead of attacking the dragon's neck, he body-checked Tarn out of the way of a backhand from the dragon that would have splattered the Blood Totem High chieftain.

Despite the Stoneskin Totem of the Drogbar, both Tauren were sent flying, bones broken and out of the fight but still in one piece, generally speaking. The same could not be said for their followers. Two more of the Highmountain tribe who Harry hadn't enlarged was struck by another claw strike. The claws caught them as they tried to charge forward, and while the spell the drogbar Shaman had cast kept them largely in one piece, the strike still snapped necks and horns alike, hurling them aside as their chieftains had been.

At the same time, a tongue of flame flashed out towards Tyre. A hasty spell shifted his own enhancement spell to that of an added layer of Stoneskin, causing him to have some immunity to the fire, while the Earth Elemental in the wall hiding him from the dragon pulled up further stones between Tyre and the incoming fire. The reinforced wall melted, the elemental within letting out a low, pain-filled groan as its essence gave way, the sound unheard by all save Tyre, then the much-reduced fire washed over the Highmountain chieftain in turn. Even with the fire being weakened and the double layer of Stoneskin, the pain was indescribable, and Tyre screamed in agony, the torture causing him to collapse.

Thankfully for Tyre, Harry now attacked once more, his back healed now, and a series of flechettes slammed into Badrinath's head all around his eyes and snout, causing the dragon to bellow in pain though once more none penetrated. Badrinath even used having his head turned away from the attack to launch another burst of fire at the Drogbar Shaman, who fared just as poorly as Tyre.

“Don’t let up!” Harry shouted before Apparating away. A second later, Harry collapsed forward, his stomach now in open rebellion so much that he had to fight back the urge to throw up as he appeared once more elsewhere in the cavern.

Apparating was easily the second-best method of magical travel Harry had ever run into and the easiest to use in combat. But it had hard limitations, above and beyond the need to have a proper mental map of the area you would Apparate into. The human body wasn’t meant to simply jump from one place to another without crossing the intervening space in the first place. Hermione had tried to explain it once to Harry using Muggle science and something she called ‘spatial jump theory’, a term she had come up with, but what it amounted to was that a person’s internal bits could only take so much sudden shifts in space.

Despite his stomach’s revolt, Harry clapped his hands together, then thrust them forward. From the ground all around Badrinath, the stone in a large radius began to shift and move, becoming almost like water, rising up to grab and drown the dragon. “Lapis Palus!” he whispered.

This was a modified spell Harry had developed with the help of Dumbledore’s ghost. A master in transfiguration, the ghost had taught him this spell, Stone Swamp. Harry rarely used it because he couldn’t do so nonverbally, the spell taking too much concentration and power, depending on the size of the swamp you wanted to create.

With a squawk of fury and a burst of fire up into the ceiling, Badrinath’s rear quarters disappeared into the stone swamp, destroying the amazing lighting that Harry had admired earlier. But the dragon’s foreclaws dug into the stone, pulling his bulk out of the water stone. But Harry kept his magic flowing into the spell, and the liquid nature of the stone made Badrinath’s attacks simply pass through it, rather than actually getting him out of the morass that was trying to reach up and pull him down into its depths.

While internally rolling her eyes at Harry’s unneeded ‘advice’, Tyrande sent another Piercing Arrow spell rocketing towards the dragon. Her attack blasted through the dragon’s uninjured wing, which was not as tough as the rest of him, causing Badrinath to below in pain and anger as the blow shattered some of the delicate bones there. Even if the dragon won the fight, he would need to spend months healing before flying.

Seeing Badrinath slowly starting to pull himself out of the water stone, Harry began his next spell while at the same time, Quetzal once more attacked. Having moved right underneath the dragon, the Needlespine Shimmerback fired his quills up into the dragon’s face as Badrinath attempted to shoot another fireball towards Tyrande. The dragon recoiled, although none of the spines could penetrate even the dragon’s snout and eyes.

With the dragon’s neck exposed, the large snake attempted to sink his fangs into the dragon’s neck but found his fangs couldn’t penetrate. Instead, his bite pinched the dragon’s

neck a bit, his fangs dragging downward, causing another deep furrow in the scales to join the multitude of other such. *Oh dear, I think I have miscalculated thisSSS!!!*

Quetzal's thoughts disappeared in agony as Badrinath's claws came up from where he had been clinging to the rock to tear at the snake. And unlike Badrinath's scales in relation to the snake's bite, Quetzal's scales were no defense against the dragon's assault. Blood spurted, and it was only a hasty spell from Harry that saved Quetzal from having his head bitten off. The piercing spell struck, impacting Badrinath's snout with enough force to cause the dragon to reel backward in pain, more of his body disappearing into the swamp of stone. This was accompanied by several Drogbar, added by another Shaman spell, trying to attack from the dragon's other side and another Piercing Arrow from Tyrande nearly taking the dragon in one of his eyes.

Bleeding badly from a series of gashes that would have killed any lesser creature, Quetzal tried to slither away. He might not have made it if not for Harry Apparating to his side, his hand flashing out to touch his friend's side. A second later, both of them were well away from Badrinath, groaning in pain as their stomachs rebelled against the side-along Apparition. "Okay," Harry gagged, "Not doing that again."

"You do, and I'll eat you," Quetzal groaned. "I'm a snake, we aren't supposed to get stomach aches, but this is the second time I have had such since we started our association, Harry!"

"Oh shut up, you have it easy right now, believe me," Harry grumbled before leaving his friend there, trying to rush to the side of the dragon only to have to shamle along thanks to his stomach. But thanks to Tyrande, the dragon was kept busy until he was in position, and, with the dragon now trying to both claw his way out of the swamp once more and fight her off, Harry launched his next spellchain, attacking Badrinath indirectly once more.

First, a modified Bubblehead Charm encased Badrinath's head and a good portion of his neck out to several feet in every direction. Then on the heels of that one, the next spell filled the globe with tiny particles, particles of flour, a bit of gas and gunpowder all mixed together. Each of them conjured into being by a separate spell, hence the time Harry had taken to set up this assault, and at the outer edge of the bubble, outside the radius of Badrinath's anti-magic aura. And because the spells conjuring these items into being were outside the aura covering the dragon, the field couldn't affect them. The magic in the particles was gone by the time they wafted into that aura.

Not knowing what odd smells were assaulting his battered nose, Badrinath decided to break the globe of magic around his head as he would overcome any problem he faced: by fire.

Yet the instant he opened his mouth and a flame appeared within, the fuel-air explosion Harry had prepared went off, the equivalent of several hundred pounds of TNT condensed into the area as large as a tall man. The dragon screamed now in real pain, his nose basically

destroyed, many of his teeth gone, and one of his eyes had simply burst due to overpressure in its socket while several scales had been blasted off or simply shattered.

Despite his agony, the dragon's mind was still working. The anti-magic aura seemed to lose some power as Harry watched, the dragon using his magic to cast a second spell. That spell flashed throughout the dragon's body from his head down, covering ruined flesh and ruined scales with a spell that looked like the Stoneskin the Drogbar Shamans had used previously. A glow engulfed Badrinath's mouth in the next second, some kind of healing spell, perhaps the equivalent of Harry's Episkey, healing the area around and within the mouth.

Of course, the remaining Drogbar and Tyrande were not idle during this, pressing the attack hard. The dragon stumbled back, yet even as more of his body disappeared into the stone swamp, Badrinath twisted, his one remaining eye staring right at Harry. Seeing that bloodshot gaze latching onto him. Harry realized with a start that in his hasty side-along Apparition with Quetzal, his hood had fallen off his face.

With his stomach still roiling so much Harry knew he'd splinch if he tried to Apparate away, Harry hastily concentrated, casting a spell chain he had practiced dozens of times when fighting flame-happy wizards. First, he transfigured a stone wall up from the ground in front of him and then backed it up with a Protego and a Flame Freeze charm cast on the wall. Although not the most powerful shield he could create, Harry had to hope that it would be enough as in the next second, flame roared towards him.

Harry's hope was in vain as his defenses started to fall after a few seconds. Desperately Harry dodged out of the way as the fire finished turning his defensive wall to magma, but then the dragon did one simple thing almost no wizard had ever been able to given the nature of even the strongest fire spells. Badrinath turned his head, following Harry's desperate dodge.

The dragon's fiery breath rolled over Harry, wider and taller than he was, burning Harry to a crisp so fast he didn't even have time to feel pain. Yet as he died, the Phoenix flames of rebirth activated, bringing him back to life as his twelve-year-old self once more. The next instant, his heavily warded and rune-protected expanded trunk seared a brand into his chest and neck, so hot was it despite the number of protections on it.

That was honestly scary since some of the runic arrays on the trunk, a Black Family item, had been reputed to be able to stand up to Fiendfyre, a spell the Blacks had created near the creation of Magical Britain. According to Sirius, he had seen his father cast that spell on the trunk in question to show the greatness of their family, and afterward, Sirius had been forced to touch the trunk, only to find it was cool to the touch. The dragon's black and red fire had proved far, far worse and gave Harry a greater appreciation for the Shaman's defensive spells.

Yet that thought couldn't stay in Harry's head, indignation at his body's current circumstances driving it out. *Fuck! Not again. I hate being so freaking young. I need to figure out a way to control that!* Growling, Harry crouched down, making his way through the smoke

as he ton all fours as he tore the sizzling hot expanded trunk from where it hung on his chest, ignoring the sizzling pain from his hand, another brand-like scar appearing there.

Tyrande stared aghast at where Harry had once been as the flame attack from Badrinath died off, and he pushed itself further out of the water stone that Harry had created. “Hahaha! With your Arcanist companion dead, none of you will be able to kill me! And down here, there is nowhere you can run. You will all die by my flame, no I will kill you slowly! I...”

The next second, Harry stepped out of the smoke, the invisibility cloak flying behind him, barely tied around his naked body at the moment. Connected to his new life as a chimera at Lady Death’s instigation, it could not be permanently destroyed or taken from him, not even with dragon fire. Or at least not Badrinath’s.

A stone spike appeared, transmuting into a kind of metal that shone in the light. Harry had conjured it into being as he was hidden by the smoke. Now he hurled the transfigured steel spike forward, and Badrinath screamed in agony as it crashed into his side and back leg right above where that leg had finally clawed its way out of the stone swamp. Scales exploded away from the impact, and blood spurted the leg going dead instantly, causing Badrinath to stumble back into the morass of the water-like stone floor of the cavern behind him.

Seeing that, Harry shouted out to Tyrande. “Catch!” and tossed the sword of Gryffindor towards the area between her and the dragon, where it impacted point first, sticking upright in the stone of the cavern.

Out of arrows and with many questions now swirling in her head, Tyrande raced forward, grabbing up the sword of Gryffindor. As Harry had hoped but hadn’t known until she did it, Tyrande was able to pick up the enchanted blade.

That wasn’t because of anything silly about the sword only being wielded only by a true Gryffindor or anything like that. No, it was due to a series of spells Harry had put on the blade himself after some asshole goblins had attempted to lawyer it away from him. Now only Harry or someone who trusted Harry implicitly and vice-versa could even touch that sword without Harry’s say.

Not that any of that mattered now as Tyrande charged forward, holding the sword expertly despite it being so different from her own moon glaive. Meanwhile, Harry gestured with both hands once more, taking control of the swamp-stone with a spell that allowed its user to control water, which, magically speaking, the swamp-stone currently was. Arms grew out of the water-like stone, one grabbing at the dragon’s back of the neck and twisting, pulling it back as it thrashed. The other hand grabbed the dragon around the neck.

While the dragon’s anti-magic aura started to disintegrate the water as the water touched it, that didn’t stop the attack quickly enough to protect Badrinath fully. And the next second, Harry canceled the original Stone Swamp spell. Instantly the stone began to revert to

its former nature, acting like quick-dry cement and encasing the dragon from just behind his forearms and down.

A magical blast from Badrinath blasted the water-stone all around him, shattering the arms trying to drag the dragon back and allowing Badrinath enough space to try and pull himself slightly out of the now solid stone. But by then, Tyrande was by the dragon's side. Racing up the back of his neck, she made her way towards his head, where few of the scales had been blasted off by Harry's earlier magic and had not yet been healed.

"For Elune and Azeroth!" Tyrande shouted. Invoking the name of her goddess, Tyrande's glowed like a star for a second as she finally reached the dragon's head. There, the sword of Gryffindor stabbed into the dragon's face, directly behind his cheek, and then Tyrande leaped clear as Badrinath tried to claw at her once more, his flames trying to track her.

A second later, She found herself yanked several dozen yards away, flying swiftly towards Harry even he ran away from the dragon. "Harry?" she asked, landing beside him, landing and running next to him.

"Just wait for it," Harry said grimly as they reached one of the last wall-elementals hiding there for a moment as he turned to look back at the black dragon. "I have told you a time or two that my blade is covered with poison."

"Surely you don't think it's going to work on a dragon of this one's power and size!" Tyrande shouted incredulously. "All dragons are sustained as much by magic as by their life force. The magic will counter the poison."

In far more pain than he had been ever since he had been whelped, Badrinath attempted to pull his ruined body up and out of the solid stone, sending tongues of flame out in several directions, driving back the few remaining Drogbar. Yet despite his wounds, when Badrinath spoke, it was clear he felt he still had the upper hand. "Hahaha! I do not know how he survived my fire, but even your Arcanist knows you have lost. None of you can stand against me, none of you can stand, can stand... against... A black dragon, what, what is..."

Badrinath slumped, his useless wings flapping to its side, his jaw no longer responding, his legs and spine no longer working as they should. But the black dragon was still alive, astonishing Harry. He watched as Badrinath continued to try and pull himself out of the stone despite more than half his body not responding. Yet, even so, Badrinath was still alive and was now stretching his claws out towards where Lars and Tarn lay, unconscious from their earlier wounds.

Instantly changing tactics, Harry sent out a Bombarda spell towards the dragon's head, where he had lost a lot of his scales thanks to Harry's earlier spell work. When the spell struck, followed by a Sectumsempra, the dragon's remaining eye burst in his head as more teeth shattered, gore exploding out of his mouth even as it raised a feeble forearm to protect his head.

Tyrande raced forward, holding out one hand towards the dragon's side, where she could just make out her moon glaive sticking out of one of the dragon's forearms. "Come!"

The intent-based enchantment on Tyrande's moon glaive had the weapon pulling out of the dragon and into her hands as she quickly twisted to the other direction as Badrinath turned towards where she had spoken. Another tongue of flame lashed out, but Badrinath was definitely moving slower, and she was able to get right up underneath his head. "I'm down here, dragon!"

Badrinath reared, then forgetting the horrid wounds his head had taken, dove down, intent on biting Tyrande in half. But Tyrande rolled clear, then kicked up off the ground and stabbed her moon glaive into the dragon's forehead. With no scales to get in the way, she only had to contend with bone and flesh, and neither was enough to stop a moon glaive dedicated to Elune. The blade of her weapon bit into Badrinath's head and then into his brain, killing the black dragon instantly.

Instantly the dragon's neck went limp, and Tyrande leaped clear, rolling a bit as she landed. She crouched there, staring at the black dragon as it lay twitching on the ground, waiting as the dragon finally stopped moving. When it did, she moved forward and pulled her glaive out of the wound in the dragon's forehead, releasing a river of blood and brain matter which slowly seeped out and down the corpse's head.

Turning away, Tyrande walked over toward where Harry had moved over to where Quetzal lay. The snake had long since fallen unconscious from blood loss, more wounded than Harry had thought when he left his companion's side. The wizard now hastily went to work, aided by the arrival of the Tauren Shaman and a few Drogbar Shaman who had survived the fight.

Having been so far away from the main cavern the Tauren they had left to guard their exit hadn't even known anything was happening until the fleeing Drogbar had reached them. Then they'd been trying to push against the crowd for a while. Now, several Healing Rain spells went off in the air of the cavern, spreading tiny drops of healing magic on everything they touched, Tauren and Drogbar alike. Then Tauren were racing towards their comrades, hoping to help them.

The sole exception was the oddly black-furred Shaman, who remained at the entrance, staring at the dead black dragon for a moment before moving forward, heading for Tyre Fleetfoot. He waved off another Shaman who turned aside and moved towards Tyrande, Harry, and Quetzal.

Many questions were going on in her mind. She had known Harry was strong but strong enough to help her slay a black dragon? *No, say it true, Tyrande. Without him here, you might well have died. If that is, you could have gotten here in the first place without fighting through the Drogbar.*

With that self-deprecating thought, she reached Harry and laid a hand gently on his shoulder as he knelt beside his animal companion. "How is he?"

"He needs a lot more blood than my Blood Replenishing spell can create in one casting," Harry answered, repeating the same gestures and whispered spell. "Beyond that, he'll live. Although I doubt he'll ever be able to move quite as well ever again. I'm not good enough with healing spells to heal him without leaving a lot of scar tissue."

"Nonetheless, that was very brave of him. If he hadn't wrecked Badrinath's wing, he might have been able to fly even in here. And his second attack should have blinded the dragon if he didn't have the iron eye trait," Tyrande answered, mentioning a trait black dragons could often grow after they reached maturity: a thin film of crystal over their eyes that could protect them from harm. *Most harm, anyway*, She thought ruefully, remembering the spells Harry had used to turn that strength into a weakness earlier.

"He still should have stayed outside with Shy-rotam. But I thought he could help us in here if it came to a fight. I never expected that," he growled, jutting his head out towards the dragon.

"I don't think any of us expected to run into a black dragon. And if one of us did, I would be having stern words with them later for not sharing their concerns," Tyrande said with a little laugh, pulling a similarly dry-sounding chuckle from Harry.

Neither noticed the black-furred Tauren flinch nor the guilty look on his face as he knelt beside his chief. Instead, Harry made way for one of the other Highmountain Shamans, who began to run gently glowing hands over Quetzal's side. "What do you think, Shaman?"

"My name is Fen Croweyes, Harry, and yes, I believe that he will live, as you said a moment ago. I can even heal his body up to full mobility, although he will bear the scars of this days' battle for many moltings." The aged Tauren spoke, shaking his head. "As will many others, both physical and mental."

"In that case, I will leave my friend in your care, Shaman Croweyes." With that, Harry turned back to Tyrande. "Come on, let's check on the others. And then I think I am done with this underground nonsense."

While Tyrande fervently agreed with that statement, it wasn't that simple. Having returned to their cavern, the Drogbar were incredibly sorrowful for their part in the conflict between them and the Tauren, not having had any idea that their King had been a black dragon before this. "He seemed to change decades ago when Grillkul went out on an expedition to the foot of the mountains to retrieve some herbs for his mother, but he was the prince, so no one commented on it. And until he led us into the conflict with the Tauren, he had been leading us quite well."

“It is evident that Badrinath long planned this operation, so no fault lies in you and your people. The black dragons would know how to act to emulate a Drogbar if anyone would,” Tyrande soothed, shaking her head at the speaker, one of the oldest surviving Drogbar.

Many of them had died in the stampede to flee the cavern. Yet others, nearly three dozen, had died fighting the dragon, which had won them quite a bit of respect from the surviving Tauren.

And the Drogbar had not died alone. Indeed, it was only luck and Harry’s power that none of the three Tauren leaders had died. That, and Badrinath seemed to have thought that Lars and Tarn were both dead after he had knocked them unconscious until they started to stir near the end of the battle.

All three would bear the scars of this battle for the rest of their lives.

One of Tarn’s horns had been broken off near the base, and his arm was broken in multiple places to go with several cracked ribs. Although the horn bothered him far more than the other wounds, that wasn’t just because even now, the Shamans were healing him and the other wounded as best they could. Tyrande put that down to some kind of social cue she hadn’t heard about.

Tyre had been knocked out by the pain of being struck by the fire of the dragon as it tore through the earth Totem protecting him and the others with its magic. Trying to block the fire had drained him of all his magic and vitality. Only his strong connection with the elements and the Earth Elemental protecting him allowed Tyre to survive. Even now he was being supported between his surviving Tauren, looking like he had not eaten in weeks.

As her eyes flicked over to the Highmountain Tauren, Tyrande noted they, like the others left behind at the entrance, looked very guilty for not having been involved in the battle. This was especially true of the oddly black-haired Shaman. He seemed unable to look away from Badrinath’s corpse, a snarl on his face.

But High Chief Lars had actually taken more harm in the blow that had knocked him and Tarn out of the battle, having smashed back-first into a corner of one of the central buildings, breaking his spine. Luckily, the Shamans were able to heal him, and he was now walking around under the watchful eyes of the Rivermane tribe Shaman he’d brought along.

However, the leaders got off lightly. None of the other Tauren they had led into the main Drogbar cavern escaped the dragon’s wrath. And while seven of the Drogbar who attacked Badrinath did, the subterranean race had lost far more people in total than the Tauren, despite their Shamans and Earth Elementals.

“While that is true, we should have questioned things. The King has always, he has always been the one, the **leader**, the one who sets policy. Perhaps after this, we should rethink that.” the Drogbar said, although Tyrande could detect no hint of actual hope for such a thing in

his voice. He seemed more resigned to it than anything else, which probably meant that such a change wouldn't occur in the future.

That was mildly worrisome that the Drogbar would keep their current 'follow the leader blindly' attitude. But there was nothing she could do about that beyond converse with Lars about it later. If it really was a mental thing rather than simply a social one, she had no idea how to change it.

Once Lars moved over to join her in talking to the Drogbar, Tyrande stayed there for a time to mediate between the two groups. In return for more meat being sent to them every month, the Drogbar agreed to completely shut down many of their tunnels, filling them in with stone with the magic of their shamans. Of course, they could open those up again, but the Tauren shamans could set up warning systems and traps outside of them, thus being warned if trouble stirred from this area again.

More importantly, the Drogbar agreed to pay recompense to the Tauren for the conflict between them in the form of jewels and metals they mined out of the rock. The Tauren would receive a percentage of all such they mined for two years. While the Tauren had several good smiths among them, they didn't routinely work with metals like that, simply because of how rare they were in Highmountain and because only a few Tauren devoted their craft to mining.

However, Lars pushed for access to the dragon's carcass. Its scales, fangs and claws would make magnificent weapons and armor. Armor which his shamans and artisans were better able to work with than metal. The Drogbar tried to quibble but agreed to it so long as they could keep some of the bones of Badrinath for themselves.

In the end, like most compromises, neither side was fully happy, but they were willing to go along with the final decision. That was all Tyrande could hope for.

As she had mediated between the two groups, Harry and a somewhat revived Quetzal had left, the snake demanding they return to the surface so he could hunt. Blood replenishing potions seemed to have a lot in common with Shaman spells, eating the vitality of the individual to power the spell's effects.

Harry had ignored all the looks Tyrande and Tauren sent in his direction thanks to his far more youthful appearance. While Harry liked the Tauren, he wasn't about to explain everything about his abilities past or anything else to them just yet. Conversely, Harry knew Tyrande probably did deserve an explanation, and he was not looking forward to giving her one.

He needn't have worried. Tyrande was very understanding about why he had kept his odd resurrection ability from her. They hadn't even known each other a year after all, and even if they had been friends for longer, Harry would still be under no obligation to share everything about himself with her, just as Tyrande wouldn't in reverse. However, now that it had come to light, she understood that Harry was an even more unique individual than she had thought.

*Heh, make that a **very** understanding woman to deal with this resurrection of his. This method of longevity would certainly take some getting used to, at least, and his oftentimes childish body would no doubt throw off many.*

“I would say, Harry, that I think you need to figure out a way to control the age you become when you resurrect.” She then smiled, ruffling Harry’s hair. “It is incredibly difficult right now for me to take you seriously, child~,” she teased.

“I still have my magic, you know, so unless you want to be subjected to a tickling spell that will have you laughing for the rest of the night, I suggest you back off the teasing,” Harry retorted, although he was smiling slightly as he did so.

Shy-rotam huffed from beside Tyrande. The young frostsaber was still of the opinion she should have come with her chosen partner but had stopped complaining about it at least. And Quetzal, who no doubt would tease Harry about his new, smaller size, had yet to return from hunting.

The silence extended for several minutes, then Harry frowned. “By the way, do we have any idea what Badrinath was after?”

“Not really. The Drogbar didn’t know. They were simply riled up to make trouble for the Tauren, to force them into a confrontation. Badrinath said something about a prize when he was bragging about how he would kill me, so Lars and I assume he was after the Hammer of Khaz'goroth. It is a weapon of the Ancient Titans which was used to drive Deathwing off.”

Harry’s eyebrows flew up in surprise at that, and he fought back a sudden urge to salivate at the idea of studying such a weapon. *Mind you, I doubt I’d be able to make much headway, but if I learn enough about the local magics and how magic interacts with the world...* “That’s interesting.” Then he frowned, his lips twisting into a pensive scowl. “Still... there seems to be something odd about that. About what Badrinath said...”

A shout from nearby made both of them look around, and they saw that Lars had returned with the rest of the surviving Tauren. With them, the Tauren carried the bodies of their dead, and a funeral pyre had already been erected by two of the Shamans.

Realizing it was time for the funeral rites, Harry and Tyrande stood up, making their way over to the others.

“Are you going to be happy here, Harry?” Tyrande asked as they walked.

“I think so, yes. Tyre has said that he would be happy to house me with the Highmountain tribe for a time, while Lars has officially given me leave to go wherever I wish in Highmountain. Even Tarn says that I would be welcome as a warrior among the Blood Totems, although he looked as if he had bitten into something sour when he said it.”

Harry chuckled. "Seeing a Tauren make that kind of sour face was somewhat hilarious heh, helped by his now mismatched horn. So I will probably move between the tribes for a time, learning more about their shaman traditions and seeing if they can help my own issues."

Tyrande paused then before deciding to share a secret with Harry. A secret that the most senior Shamans of the Tauren and her own people had kept for some time. "If you run into trouble on that path, there is a group here, mostly Kaldorei, hunters, a few Shaman, and explorers. They form a secret society called the Unseen Path, whose task is to help those in need. You and they might be able to bond over your 'people saving thing'."

*And I seem to recall that a few young ladies are among them as well. If any of my race can be open enough to accept Harry's strangeness, it is they. And... well, I am almost certain Harry will eventually meet with our estranged kin as well. When that happens, it is best to have some willing to speak for him.*

"Huh. I might look this Unseen Path up. When I'm ready to travel further than the Highmountain Valley, anyway." Harry answered, amused by the idea of a secret society based around something so prosaic as helping those in need. "And you? Are you going to be happy to get back to your work as leader of the night elves? I'm assuming you need to leave soon."

"Happy is putting it somewhat strongly. Content is a better word, I think. As to my leaving, I will actually be making my farewells after this ceremony. We're closer to the entrance to the Highmountain valley here than we would be if I continued with you and the others back to the high chieftain's town, and... well, leaving like this should be done quickly in my opinion," Tyrande admitted. "Elune is high in the sky, and I can perhaps make it well down the mountain before I must rest. And if I stay, I will continue to find excuses to do so."

Harry laughed at that, saying, "I will take that as a compliment to how good a companion I am."

"Hah, it is not you but Quetzal I will miss," Tyrande retorted, her lips quirking as she fought back a laugh. As they had just reached the Tauren circle around the pyre, that would be grossly inappropriate.

They reached the others, who nodded solemnly at them, making room for the two strangers without complaint even from the Blood Totem tribesmen. If one of the animals had been there, they might have, but as Shy-rotam stayed to the shadows and Quetzal was nowhere in sight, that was not an issue.

When they took their places, Lars began. As the leader of this expedition, it was his role to say the rites. "Earth Mother, An'she, Mu'sha," he intoned, naming the primary spirit the Tauren worshipped and using their names for the spirits of the sun and moon. "We return these brave warriors to the world. They fell fighting against a great evil, obeying the laws of our people and standing shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. Let their spirits fly to the afterlife, as their ashes are consigned to the wind."

With that, Tyre, Tarn and Lars all lifted burning torches, setting it to the pyre from three sides. For several moments there was silence as the fire blossomed quickly, growing from the torches throughout the pyre, fueled by another Shaman spell. Then the Rivermane Shaman began to beat on a small drum, joined by several cymbals among the other survivors as the others started to hum. It was wordless, a simple dirge-like sound, but one full of sadness and more than a fair bit of pride at how the dead had passed.

The music continued for a time, and then at some unseen signal, the Tauren all took a step away, signaling the end of the funeral. If the bodies of the dead were fit to carry with them, they would have been returned for a more formal set of funeral rites among their clans, but none of them had been fit to carry for overlong. Even the bodies of those who had died while covered with Stoneskin had been crushed later in the fight by the dragon.

Seeing the Tauren preparing to leave, Tyrande turned back to Harry, holding her hand out. *It is time to pull off the bandage.* "Farewell for now, Harry Potter. And know wherever you go, you have a friend in me. I expect to see you stop by occasionally, once every decade or so perhaps."

Harry chuckled dryly, wondering how many of his lifetimes it would be before he too often that kind of term, and saw from Tyrande's small smile that she too was wondering that same thing. He also thought that he would have preferred a hug of farewell rather than a mere handshake after all they had been through. *But there is no way I'd do that now, not at my current height. It would place my head right into her chest, and that just isn't going to happen.* "It's been an interesting journey. Shame our destinations are different. Until next time Tyrande Whisperwind. And know you have a friend in me too."

At that, Tyrande's smile widened into a beaming grin that made her look far younger for a moment, then she pulled her hand away from Harry's and looked over at the still disconsolate Shy-rotam patting her on the head before sending a nod towards Lars. "Come, Shy-rotam, it is time for us to run."

With that, the two of them were off, racing away in the direction Lars and the others pointed her toward the exit to the valley.

Behind her, Harry watched her go for a time before turning back to the Tauren, noticing with annoyance that Tarn and several of the others were smirking at him, knowing that had to do with his currently childlike appearance. But for now, Harry ignored it. He would get even with them another time, maybe when he visited the Blood Totem tribe. *I wonder what the Tauren think about pranks?* "So, where to now?"

**End chapter**

### Chapter 3: Learning Comes in Many Forms

“Beware everyone, here comes the short one, don’t step on him,” one young Tauren said to another. Both of them and the Tauren around them were painting a series of marks on wooden totems or repairing torn clothing.

“And remember, he’s fragile,” another voice said, snorting in laughter as a third attempted to trip Harry up.

Harry stepped around the attempt, looking up from where he had just picked up a bowl from one of the communal fireplaces, as another young Tauren tried to bump into him, although he was able to dance around the individual quite easily. Once more, he looked around and wondered if the old Shaman Nog Greenstream was going to step in.

But the older Shaman and his one official apprentice, a blooded warrior named Vol Stoneskimmer, stayed silent, talking quietly to one another. Almost as if they hadn’t noticed, and perhaps that would have been the case a few weeks back, but now? No, they knew and were not stepping in, believing this was either normal or wanting Harry to deal with it.

After Tyrande had left, Harry had met with Lars Proudtree, Tarn Fangsnapper and Tyre Fleetforest. They had decided that he would stay with Lars to take training from the Rivermane Tribe for a year. Harry would then move on to the Highmountain tribe for a similar amount of time and then if Harry so wished, the Skyhorn tribe. In their infinite wisdom, the gathered chiefs had decided that he probably shouldn’t spend time with the Bloodtotem tribe, given how well Tarn and Harry had gotten along during the expedition into the Drogbar caves.

When he had come back to the jointly controlled town, which was named Peacehold, with Lars, Harry had expected to be placed under one of the many Rivermane Shamans. Instead, all of them already had two apprentices, and Harry found out he would have to join a group of youngsters.

This was normal for anyone starting on the path of the Druid or Shaman among the Tauren, regardless of clan. There were always too many youngsters who wanted to be trained as shamans or druids and to discern if they truly had a talent for either, they would train under the most senior clan Shaman or druid of their clan. There was, after all, much in common between the two schools on a basic level, as well as a philosophical one.

Once this year or more was done, the youngsters would meet the other clan druids and shamans and be chosen for apprenticeships, but not before. This time not only served to show the students which school they had talent in but also let their elders get a good idea of the young Tauren’s growing personalities and served as a steppingstone to adulthood, much like the Rites of the Earth Mother.

When he had protested, Nog had explained that from their discussion, he knew Harry still needed training in woodcraft and how to commune with animals before he could be given

one-on-one instruction. Further, he would need to relearn some things from the Tauren perspective that he had already learned from Cenarius, and a bit about their society and religion, to say nothing about how their Shamans and druids saw nature and magic.

When it had been put to him like that, Harry could only agree. But he had demanded that he join the class as a comparative unknown. "I don't want special treatment as the Dragon Slayer I've heard you all call me or as Tyrande's acquaintance. Let them know I'm a Blooded Warrior and nothing else. I'll make my way on my own merits."

This attitude had greatly pleased Nog Greenstream and the others, who had agreed. Thus they had kept the youngster from finding out that Harry had been a part of the Warband to defeat the black dragon posing as king of the Drogbar who had attempted to incite war between them and the Highmountain clans. They knew him as an outsider, obviously, but that and the simple statement that he was a proven warrior was all the information the budding druids and Shaman had been given of their new, quite small, companion.

Yet Harry's desire on this point had somewhat backfired. It wasn't as if the Rivermane youths were against him because Harry was an outsider, although there might have been a bit of real distrust due to the fact Harry was the only human they'd ever seen. *Or, indeed, the only human on the planet*, Harry thought ruefully. While Tyrande and Cenarius had mentioned the cursed Vrykul, Harry was uncertain if they counted honestly.

Whatever the case on that point, his outsider status wasn't the issue here. Instead, Harry's sudden inclusion without any explanation represented a challenge to those who had won the right to be trained in the ways of the Shaman before this. That, and the equally mysterious nature of his being a Blooded Warrior while obviously being younger (and shorter) than the youths, made Harry a challenge they could not ignore.

So ever since he'd joined, Harry had been the butt of a nearly united front from the rest of the 'starter class'. They continually made fun of his appearance, his size being that of a stripling, his strength negligible compared to the other students, who were not fully grown themselves. They left little dolls or other homemade toys on his packs along with nettles, saying they were a perfect symbol of Harry himself: "Small but prickly, and you shouldn't pick him up!"

Harry likened them to a group of teenagers. A group that had already begun to form cliques and who saw him as an unwanted newcomer but still a young teen. Nor was he certain if this kind of hazing was normal among the Tauren or if he was just getting it because he was an outsider, so Harry had wanted to see if Nog would step in.

But as he heard a female voice say, "Oh, no, is that little one lost, oh wait, it's just Harry," Harry decided he'd had enough and began to make... plans.

"Oh look, the short one is next to the big one, pray you don't eat him, Quetzal!" whispered another voice as Harry set beside his large companion.

Quetzal hissed in amusement, raising his head to look in that direction as he replied. "I have yet to try them, so I am uncertain how humans would taste. Further, Harry is the only one of his race around. Would nature not abhor such an action? Perhaps I should try another sentience species first, though, since they are far more abundant around here."

That caused a lull in the conversation around the fire, and Harry smirked up at his large friend, "If you eat me, the last thing I'll do is make certain that you're sick for days, got it?"

Quetzal hissed laughter once more, and Harry turned back to his meal, only for Nog to appear behind Quetzal, bulk. "You have proven your forbearance up to this point, Potter, so whatever I can see you are planning, I will not object to."

One eyebrow cocked, Harry waited until after he had chewed to speak, asking, "Why haven't you or Stoneskimmer stepped in? I would have thought that you two would have stepped in by this point. Unlike this lot, you both know what I'm capable of when riled." He suddenly frowned. "Wait... you let this go on because you were testing me, weren't you?"

"Heh, he now sees the light, or at least some of it, anyway." Greenrange chuckled, looking at Quetzal for permission, then settling his old bones against the side of the giant snake, being careful to not allow his horns and head to rest on the quills that could be used in such a deadly fashion. For some reason, his quills always started to excrete the neurotoxin that allowed them to freeze the individual they struck when Quetzal molted. "We wanted to make certain you had enough self-control to take our training. Your interactions with Tarn showed both your capability but also your temper. Beyond that, is there not such a thing as a pecking order among youngsters of your race?"

"Oh sure," Harry waved his hand airily. "Quite a bit, and a lot of gossip, rumors, name-calling, that kind of thing. I was never subjected to hazing quite like this, though." as the Boy Who Lived, Harry had been either on the top of the pecking order or outside its influence, depending on who you spoke to.

"Regardless, you have taken their childish taunting for much longer than any other Blooded Warrior would have. And now, comes the test to them."

Harry frowned, looking at Greenrange and realizing the old Tauren was also testing the rest of the kids. In what way, Harry didn't know. Before he could ask, though, Quetzal spoke up, asking Harry what he wanted to do. That caused Harry to snort. "I'm going to release my inner Marauder for some fun."

"Just don't injure them," Greenrange stated simply. "Beyond that, anything goes."

"Message understood and received most gleefully. After all, the lack of injuries just leaves so much space to work with," Harry snickered, causing the old Tauren to snort in humor. But then Harry asked, "And how do you think my lessons are going?"

Those lessons didn't have much to do with Cenarius' training in connecting to the Emerald Dream or finding his center just yet. To walk the path of a Shaman, one had to start by learning about nature and the elementals. Learning about what kind of animals there were around the Highmountain, what was poisonous, what trails they lay, the names of trees, what to do if you meant this or that animal in the wild was fine. Learning about the elemental dimensions and how each elemental realm had a hierarchy? That had been fascinating, and Harry was eager to do to learn more about them.

Greenrange had hinted that would take some time but that he would soon introduce Harry and the others to the Water Elemental he had made an agreement to, as well as an Earth Elemental that he occasionally called upon. Harry was interested to see if he could do the same and perhaps merge the mentality of an Earth Elemental into his earth golems. Harry spent several minutes talking to Greenrange about his training for that day, as well as what the others were going to be doing. In turn, the Shaman questioned Harry more closely about his method of resurrection.

They hadn't touched on this subject before, because frankly, Harry was somewhat touchy about it. Harry disliked that he became a child whenever he died as it was a weakness that would probably get him in trouble in the future. Not that it was an issue right now, given that he'd died so recently, but it was best he keep the habit of not sharing it with everyone and anyone.

And the fact that Harry didn't know how to control it was just icing on the top. If the first time he had become this phoenix chimera thing marked his 'molting moment', then how could he change it?

Never having heard of a phoenix before, Greenrange didn't have any crumbs of comfort for Harry on that score. But he did mention that perhaps a solution would be to find a spell or transformation that could change Harry's apparent age before he was called away. Which was intriguing but would obviously be very difficult at the moment, and so Harry set it aside.

As Nog left, Quetzal raised his head from where he had been mock dozing, sleeping off the giant meal of a rather particularly stupid bear that had challenged him earlier that day when he went hunting. "And what exactly is going through that mind of yours? Will you need my help?"

Harry scoffed. "Are you trying to be insulting?"

"Yes," Quetzal answered instantly. "I thought that was clear."

Harry rolled his eyes at his snake leave companion before asking politely, "And how is the itching doing today?"

"All the better for your asking," the snake hissed his good humor abating dramatically. Moltings were difficult for his species due to their spikes and very itchy afterward, but he

couldn't actually scratch his scales since they were still soft somewhat and could be damaged. So avoiding thinking about it was the best way of not doing so, and Harry knew it after the years they'd been together.

The two of them glared at one another and then looked away before Quetzal turned back to look at Harry, asking, "Is there any chance I can have a front-row seat for this? The pranks that you've told me about and shown me have always been somewhat amusing."

"If you want that, I think you should probably wake up a bit early tomorrow."

The next morning, Harry made a point of getting his food a little earlier than normal before perching on a nearby rock as he ate the hearty stew and bread. Tauren fare leaned heavily towards stews, fish and cooked meat, which might well have surprised Harry before, given Tauren looked somewhat bovine. But they weren't bovine in the least in their actions, and their diet consisted of more meat than vegetables, more than Harry liked, really.

They had no such thing as pasta or pastries, not even dessert as a part of the meal, beyond simple berries, although they did do something to the berries involving some kind of alcohol which gave them quite the kick. Still, Harry was glumly certain that he would be very bored of the food before the month was out and forced to break out the various spices and other things he had bought back from the night elves.

Except for salt. Although the Tauren used it sparingly, they had quite a bit of salt up here and grew black pepper, but that was about it. The Tauren didn't like spicy things, apparently.

Beside him, Quetzal raised his head, staring at the fire, then around, thinking before going back to the fire. "There, yes?"

The young Shamans-to-be and Harry were situated in a small portion of the town, slightly separated from the rest, with a series of one-man and very impersonal tents. It was much like the area designated for Rangers and Warriors elsewhere around the town. This was meant to signify that the individuals learning here were taking the first step to becoming adults.

It also meant that the fire pit was the area of the small camp that saw the most foot traffic. Which meant that when Harry laid down his little traps, it was the obvious area to do so. Quetzal also noted that both Nog and his apprentice, who, Quetzal understood, was only a year away from becoming a full Shaman, had avoided the area. Instead, they were very obviously arguing about something to one side, some wager, the snake thought from what he could overhear from here.

He turned back to watch as the younger Tauren came up to take their food with a faint smile on his reptilian face. *This could be quite good.*

The various group of ten, males and females, took their food and moved away from the fireplace, talking quietly. And almost immediately, things started to happen, causing Quetzal to twitch and turn his eyes away slightly. "GAAAhh!!! Cul, what in the hells happened to you!?"

“Whaargh, How!?”

“Kill it, kill it with fire!”

“You fool, that will only make it stronger!”

Turning to one side, Ash Stonefellow, Cul’s brother, shook his head to clear it of the dots that looking at his brother, who had been turned into a literally eye-searing color of yellow somehow, before blinking as he had to look up at two of his similarly reeling students.

“Wh... what in the...” Looking around, Ash, who had prided himself on at least being as tall as his brother if not as wide-shouldered, realized with horror he had somehow been shrunk. “How...”

Then he and several others reeled away from two of their fellows as a stench that was akin to a skunk who had rolled in a midden added to the stinging smell of pepper hit them from two of their fellows. Just as another young Tauren, this one a young woman, found herself an equally eye-searing shade of orange.

“Gaaaah! WHY!!!?” My eyes, my nose, I can’t tell which is hurting worse curse it!” One Tauren howled, reeling away.

Another young Tauren fell, rolling and holding a hand to his nose as he used his other arm to cover his eyes, both of them in quite a bit of pain. “Damn it, damn it, by the Earth Mother what is happening!”

The fact he began to shrink was lost on the Tauren, but Ash, who had reeled away with his eyes streaming and his nose in revolt, saw that, and a few of the others also shrinking to around half their normal height. The sight actually calmed him down, knowing he wasn’t the only one being shrunk. “Huh, I um, I think we’re going to have worse problems than just our senses...”

“What is going on!?” Another young Tauren whined, even as he stumbled away from the others, turning his eyes away, his nose red as he shook his head. “Why is this happening to us?”

That brought Ash up short. He was probably the smartest of the youths, or at least the most intuitive, and he looked around wildly before pointing over to where Harry had been sitting quietly. “You! You did this.”

“Did what? I was just sitting here contemplating how a large series of nettles were stuck on the interior of my shirt yesterday when I took it off for physical training.” Harry then deliberately leaned away, waving a hand under his nose. “And would you mind moving downwind of me? You stink like a midden in the middle of a hot summer day.”

“Gah, don’t give me that, you stunted little runt!” Ash bellowed, stomping over to him. “Undo this, return me to my proper size!”

Harry smacked his hand away, standing up abruptly, twitching around another attempt to grab him, staring at Ash, who was now as small as the currently teen Harry was. “I’m not the only one currently ‘stunted’. And really, do you want to get physical with me now when I’ve only turned the tables on you? When I’ve been dealing with your own ‘pranks’, and I use the word loosely, for weeks and haven’t lashed out in turn? Can you not take what you dish out?”

“You are objecting to our little fun?” Fen Brownaxe asked in almost-innocent confusion, although he was also stomping toward Harry angrily. He apparently didn’t like the yellow he currently was from the tips of his short reindeer horns to his hooves. Normally he was a dark blond, both in his fur and hair, but now he was so yellow it was like the sun had come down in among the Tauren, and none of the others, not even Quetzal or Harry, could look at him directly.

“A few days of taunting the new guy is acceptable. A few days’ hazing can even be seen as normal when someone new is dropped into a close-knit environment. Two weeks of it is simply bullying. I have short shrift with bullies, I always have since I was originally this age. It also smacks more about simple racism towards me than anything else. Targeting only me in your fun makes it clear it’s because I’m an outsider, instead of just someone new.”

His words and the grim tone of them made many of his interlocutors pull up, frowning. They weren’t actual bullies for the most part. They were just followers, and like in most societies, they followed a loud voice.

The three ringleaders were really Fen Brownaxe, a student of only middling ability apparently, but an ego to match Tessa Ravenwing, the only female of the three, who stomped over to join Ash, the other leader.

Tessa normally had long black hair and dark red fur, although she was now a bright, painful orange. Harry didn’t honestly know what to make of her, or the last, Ash Stonefellow. Ash seemed to be going along with Tessa because he was sweet on her, but beyond that blind spot, Ash was undoubtedly the leader of the young would-be Shamans, bright, outgoing, and as talented as Tessa was, although he wasn’t as big or strong-looking as his brother, Cul.

In contrast, Cul was a follower. Most of the time, he chose to follow Ash, which was part of the problem, but not a big one. The big issue there was Tessa, a highly advanced student who had already chosen to follow the Shaman route, whose ego was as big as it was fragile.

And now, with Harry calling their fun what it was, simply bullying, they doubled down. For Fen, the pranks on Harry had nothing to do with him being an outsider, although he felt that might be Tessa’s reasoning. Instead, it had to do with the fact that Harry was learning just as fast as they were, despite not putting in the time.

That, and the small number of highly unusual spells, to them anyway, Harry had used since arriving, combined into a challenge that Fen could not deal with. "Listen, you little runt!" he shouted. "I've half a mind to challenge you..."

"I accept," Harry interrupted instantly, causing all three of the young Tauren to be brought up short. He looked over their shoulders at Nog, crossing his arms. "I presume that you will be willing to officiate?"

"I will," that worthy intoned simply, nodding his head. "You all will have 20 minutes to prepare, and...."

"Wai.... wait what!?" Fen interrupted the older Tauren, scowling while Nog's eyes narrowed at the disrespect. "We're students we..."

"Potter is a blooded warrior. He can accept challenges," Tessa reminded them all, biting her lip and only now realizing they might have bitten off more than they could chew here. "But I don't know if Potter's fighting Fen would be fair, Master Greenstream. After all, he has true combat experience, and we do not outside of sparring matches. Further, we have seen only a few of his spells and are at a disadvantage there too."

"Then perhaps you should've thought of that before issuing such challenge," Nog said, before smirking. "Although if you three wish to challenge him as one, that is fine too. Although if you don't wish to, a formal apology will do. But then, if I see any further hint of animosity, I will be forced to take steps."

Tessa's eyes widened, and then they narrowed dangerously. Tessa was a very prideful young female, and a public apology like that would not sit well with her. The threat too was also worrisome. But so was the slap to her pride of being seen as needing the help of two other Tauren to defeat the little creature. *And yet, Potter is a blooded warrior and a veritable unknown. We have seen him use only a few spells in his time here, and those pranks, curse them.*

She looked over at the others. Fen looked furious, but Tessa could see him thinking about it, and he begrudgingly nodded. She then looked over to Ash, who nodded. He had looked ready to back down, but now that Tessa had been backed into a corner, he looked ready to fight. "While I would say our taking him on three to one is a bit much, Master, if you think it is honorable, then I think we should take it. "I'm presuming that we will be allowed to use our own spells as well?"

"You may choose five spells to use in the match as often as you wish," the Shaman stated, his tone and face showing he wasn't going to be moved on this. "You may also use a single training weapon each."

Even though that gave Harry an advantage, after all, the three students, although advanced in many ways, didn't have that many spells, Ash gestured to Tessa. They'd pushed

their teacher enough on this point already. "In that case, I suggest we put our heads together. It is after all three on one, right?"

Nog nodded, and Ash, reluctantly, turned to Harry. "May I ask, Warrior Potter, that you remove this enchantment you placed on me? It will impact my ability to fight you in a way befitting a contest of arms."

"I can accept that," Harry replied just as seriously, impressed that Ash was willing to bend that much before the match even began.

Once Ash was back to his normal size, Tessa and Ash dragged Fen away as the others, including Cul, somewhat sheepishly approached Harry. They all apologized and added that they didn't realize his temper had begun to fray at their jokes. "You're hard to read sometimes, Harry, and because you weren't, you know, retaliating, how were we supposed to know the jokes were bothering you at all?" Cul asked almost innocently.

"Hmmm? And how long would you have put up with it, huh?" Harry questioned, glaring at Cul, who had the grace to look embarrassed. "Just because I'm not a Tauren doesn't mean I will put up with being bullied and taunted any more than you would. Do not judge me just by my appearances as less important or empathic as you Tauren."

They all promised they would, and Harry reflected that maybe, just maybe, they all had learned something from this. *It could happen.*

Regardless, Harry cheerfully canceled the rune-based pranks he had used on the class. Almost all of them came from conversations with the Weasley twins during his Hogwarts days, which he had brought to mind thanks to the new mental abilities he had learned here in Azeroth. His teachings here and under Cenarius had done amazing things for his Occlumency.

However, he had to turn the youths over to Stoneskimmer for healing. The damage to their retinas from the glaring colors and their noses from the runic-created stink didn't fade with the smells themselves.

The morning passed uneventfully after that, with Nog going over the spells he would allow Harry to use. He wouldn't allow Harry to fight alongside Quetzal or conjure snakes or other creatures. He could use a Stupefy spell, Finite Incantatum, his golem transfiguration spell, a conjuration spell of his choosing, and a tickling charm.

He would also be armed with a wooden sword. Fen and Ash would be armed with the training version of the axe-staves that the Tauren favored, staves that had small axeheads on either end. Tessa would be armed with a simple staff. These weapons would bruise but not cut, and the Shaman was on hand to heal any damages done.

At noon, Harry found himself standing across from the three bullies as he waited for the Shaman to step out of the circle of stone he had raised to one side of the regular training area

to contain the challenge. The three stood apart, positioning themselves to cover one another, with Fen and Ash on either side and forward of Tessa.

*A good plan since she's not a hand-to-hand fighter, and while I don't know about the other two, she's used both earth and water elementals over the past few weeks of training with Stoneskimmer. No one's ever called any of these three stupid. Pity none of them are following the druid school. Fighting both a Shaman and a Druid at once would be interesting.*

"This is not a fight to the death, but only to first blood. Further, there will be no attempts to maim or truly injure one another. As Shamans, we revere all life, and it is not our way to even injury another needlessly. This is simply a challenge, and you all will adhere to these rules."

Nog's tone left no room for debate once more, and the four combatants answered in a ritual manner. "By the name of our Ancestors and the spirits of the ancients, so shall it be."

"I have witnessed your words and will hold you to them, as has the world itself," Nog stated. With that, the Shaman took a single step backward from the circle of stones marking the Challenge Arena. "Begin."

Harry was already moving as the others started, not having thought the match would start so abruptly. A tickling charm lashed out towards his most dangerous enemy, and Tessa quickly ducked under the visible spell, slamming her hands up to the ground as she shouted out, "Come, Grumble!"

In front of her, a large elemental of rock and stone began to shape itself, pushing slowly out of the ground, far slower than Harry had seen Drogbar do during the battle against the black dragon. Apparently, experience and a greater connection to the element allowed the Shaman to hasten an elemental's appearance, and Tess didn't have much experience.

More tickling charms flashed out, forcing the three apart, and Harry had to shake his head at that, even as he kept up the barrage of the tickling charm. *They broke up too easy... okay, maybe not.*

Even as they had been dodging around, Ash and Fen had both summoned up totems, two each in fast succession set between the three of them, so fast that they must have been preparing the spells mentally beforehand, just like Tessa. Ash's were both individual-looking totems, one of which Harry recognized from the fight in the drogbar cave, the other though was new to him, a bit larger, and with multiple arms.

Fen's were both the same, but Harry didn't recognize them again. Fen had also not charged forward, instead moving slowly to the side as he concentrated on creating another, which seemed to be taking all his concentration now.

The tickling charms Harry had started the battle with flashed forward, but then the spell's arc changed. Instead of hitting his targets, they were almost pulled into one of Fen's

totems. It glowed, and as the spells were each pulled in its direction, that particular totem started to disappear. But Fen had been creating more, and as Harry lashed out with a Stupefy and saw it be pulled to another totem of Fen's, he realized they would each catch a different spell as he used it.

Fen laughed. "Hahaha, we're going to crush you, midget! You won't show me up any longer!"

If Harry had any doubts before that Fen was taking this personally, those words dispelled it. But Harry simply twitched his hand in his direction and watched as the Stupefy spell was absorbed by the same totem as before. Although the totem also looked to be falling apart far more quickly than the first one which had absorbed the tickling charms.

Not realizing this, Fen laughed once more, and after another totem appeared, he began a new spell. As he did, his wide, strong jaw clenched and his eyes scrunched shut in concentration.

Then Ash was on Harry, charging forwards in tandem with Tessa's rock golem. It raised a large stone fist as Harry dodged around Ash's charge, the attack with his wooden sword blocked by the young Tauren's wooden axe-staff before he had to duck under a whistling blow from the other side of the staff.

A tickling charm to the chest point-blank caught Ash, and this time, the totem attuned to that spell didn't have enough space to work with. The spell hit, forcing Ash to stumble backward, nearly falling to his knees. But even as he started to laugh, the spell's impact on him was quickly drained away from Ash by the multi-armed totem he had created earlier.

Still, this left Harry to deal with Grumble alone and told him something important about the totems.

*So, they are all area-of-effect like the ones I saw in the Droghbar city, and that one Ash summoned will cancel any negative spellwork on a person? I wonder if that will be the case with an immediate one-off impact like a stupefy? After all, the magic in the spell is used up to knock the person out, not create a long-term ailment like a tickling charm. To say nothing of more lethal spells.*

Even as he thought that, Harry slammed his hand down on the ground. And this time, for some reason, the totems couldn't stop his spell from transfiguring a golem out of the ground. The golem, once more made to look like a crude knight, rose out of the ground and Harry barked, "Attack the other earth creature!" before twirling around and under another blow from the recovered Ash, putting more distance between him and Tessa at the other side of the challenge ring.

"Here's to being short, huh?" he quipped, tripping Ash with a leg behind his hoof that sent the youngster tumbling, although Harry had to grimace a bit as that hurt his leg too. Ash

turned the tumble into a roll away from Harry and began to circle him warily, waiting for the other two to get involved once more.

Meanwhile closer to the center of the ring, the two earthen constructs crashed together, but it was quickly apparent that the earth elemental understood how to fight far better than Harry's golem. Harry's golem was tougher and bigger, Hagrid sized and made entirely of stone, while Grumble – and Harry wondered if that was its name or Tessa's label for it – was made of stone and earth alike, even having a bit of grass sticking out in various places.

But while the golem moved ponderously, the smaller earth elemental moved like a living thing, not quick, but fluid and coordinated. It could also use magic, as it sank into the ground before rising again, lashing out with a punch that nearly removed the golem's head. Regardless, it stumbled back and then went on the attack again, but there were now cracks in the stone along the golem's neck and chest.

By that point, Harry had dodged to one, putting the two larger combatants between himself and Ash and sent another spell into the earth elemental, hoping to banish it, and noticing that the totem's range didn't seem to extend this far. *Excellent, the totems they summoned don't cover as much area as the ones I saw in the Drogbar city.*

But to Harry's surprise, the Finite Incantatum still didn't work. *FUCK, they are magical beings and have agreed to be here, not because they were summoned. Grumble's fighting my spell! Huh, that's honestly kind of fascinating.*

"Earth wall!" Shouted Ash, halting Harry's progress towards his side of the field and blocking Ash himself from view.

*Again, pretty smart, Harry reflected. But not smart enough with the range limitations of their totems.* With that, he covered his rear and flank on that side with his conjuration charm, creating a wide swath of a strange white substance.

Then Fen finally finished the fourth spell he had been working on. In front of him, a blaze burst into life, and a fire elemental that looked like a four-armed elephant-monkey thing appeared. On Fen's shout of "Get the pink-skinned one!" it lunged at Harry.

The plan was obvious: use their summoned elementals to attack from the front, while Ash attacked Harry from the flank or the rear. Simple, but effective if not for how Harry had already countered Ash. *And now to turn this fight on its rear. Besides, I've been meaning to check on my immunity to fire anyway. It surely didn't work on the dragon, but hey, I figure an elemental's fire is less powerful than a dragon's, so... always expect the enemy to do something unexpected, folks!*

Thus Instead of backing away, Harry grinned somewhat madly and tossed his sword upwards in an arc like a short spear. Then he raced forward, crashing through the fire golem, trusting his immunity to fire to protect him.

All three of the teens gasped, and Fen stumbled, his eyes widening before he grinned almost delightedly and began to laugh. That lasted until Harry appeared out from the inside of the Fire Elemental and kicked him in the fork. This had much the effect it would have on a human male, and the Tauren howled in pain. Harry then lashed out with a low kick that took him in the back of Fen's knee hard enough to dump Fen on his rear.

Reaching up, Harry grabbed the wooden sword he'd tossed up over the fire elemental a moment ago before thrusting forward, the tip of his sword tapping lightly at Fen's throat. "Dead!" Harry announced.

An instant later, he was forced to duck under a blow from Ash. He had not braved the odd white gunk on the ground, instead doubling back towards his fellow students the way he had come. Harry now twisted around, thrusting out a hand, a Stupefy spell crashing into the youth. But once more, the spell was absorbed by the totem, pulling the spell sideways.

But that totem now disappeared entirely, and Harry smirked. *Ahh, they can be overwhelmed...heh.* Instantly he lashed out with several dozen more Stupefies, and the last magic-absorbing totem Fen had created disappeared, leaving only the ailment removing one that Ash had created along with the Stone Skin totem.

Then Tessa's elemental was there, reaching for Harry. The ruins of Harry's golem lay scattered behind it, and Grumble looked no worse for the short battle.

Harry leaped up over its hands, blasting out with his other hand, using the same conjuration spell he had before, the mass of glue splashing over the Earth elemental. The strongest glue Harry could even think of coated the monster head to toe, and a bit of the stream splashed up and over the short elemental, hitting Tessa.

"Oh yuck, Blessed Mother Earth, what is this stuff!?" Tessa growled, stumbling back, one hand going to her head, before being stuck there her hair and now hand a white, sticky mess. "What..."

The glue now sticking all its surface bits together, the earth elemental couldn't seem to perform that little trick of disappearing into the stone beneath them, which Harry was very thankful for. It also was stuck in place, and Harry dodged out of the range of its arms.

But despite one hand now stuck against her head and blinded in one eye, Tessa wasn't stopping. Instead, another water elemental formed to Tessa's side in a bare second later. This one took on the shape of a very toothy-looking wolf with six legs. But Tessa made a mistake then. She tried to use it on herself to get rid of the glue, which didn't work.

This left Ash alone to fight Harry, but the youth had kept coming, moving around Grumble quickly. He crashed into Harry's side, hurling him sideways and crashing painfully into the ground. But Harry rolled, and the next second a spellchain flashed out, overwhelming the

ailment removing and speed enhancing totem before a final Finite Incantatum smacked into the defensive totems Ash had created earlier.

Totems were symbols of Nature Magic given form and a concept by a shaman. 'make my skin harder', 'make me faster' and so forth. But that just meant they were spells, something like a transfiguration on something or a charm on an individual. There was no will within them like there was in the elementals, which meant they could be dispersed if the one using the Finite Incantatum had enough strength to overwhelm the magic put into the totem.

Harry had magic to spare, and the youths, who were only about as old for their people as Harry had been in his fifth year in Hogwarts, were no match for him in that area. The two totems disappeared, and to one side, Ash stumbled, the sudden removal of the speed buff that had let him keep up with Harry throwing him off.

Before he could recover, Harry shot him point-blank with a Stupefy spell once more. With a grunt, he collapsed, leaving only Tessa.

Seeing that, she snarled and pointed at him. "Forget about getting this stuff off me. Get him!"

Seeing no need for subtlety now, Harry just lashed out with spells toward both watery wolf and elemental. The water elementals form shimmered, but the spell did nothing to it, while Tessa, covered in glue, couldn't dodge. Most of his attacks went wide as he danced backward or struck the water elemental, but only one needed to get through, and Tessa collapsed into dreamland.

Harry smirked, looking over at the watching students and Nog and his apprentice. "Well, that was fun. Did you get everything out of this game you wanted, you old fossil?"

Snorting, Nog nodded, looking between the unconscious Tessa and Fen, who his apprentice had taken out of the ring, one large bear-formed arm gripping the younger Tauren's shoulder when he attempted to continue the fight. "Some of it, at least. I..."

He was interrupted then as Harry's bits of clothing that had survived the charge through the fire elemental gave up the ghost, leaving Harry there in nothing but the necklace holding his space expanded trunk. Everyone stared, and Harry blinked, then growled out, "Dammit!"

"Yes, well," Nog said slowly, while Cul and several of the other students collapsed onto their knees, laughing raucously, and the rest of their group just shook their heads and looked away. "I think we need to do something about your clothing first, Harry."

When she came to, Tessa didn't see anything funny in her loss. Instead, she scowled, looking down at herself, grateful that the glue that had been all over her a moment ago was gone now. Then Tessa looked around, finding Harry standing in front of a seated Ash, his head equal to the male Tauren's now, saying something to Ash, who was touching his horns in thought. When Harry looked over at her, Tessa grumbled, "We almost had you."

“Yes, with both hands tied behind my back and limited to five spells, you did almost have me,” Harry answered dryly, puncturing Tessa’s attempt to build up her ego again with ease.

It seemed to take, and Tessa and Ash looked at one another and nodded. “Harry and I were just talking about it,” Ash said hesitantly. “We agreed his magic spells are too unusual for us to combat and far too quick.”

“I guess. While my elementals could beat yours like a war drum, I couldn’t keep up with the number of tricks you had,” Tessa scowled, touching her water elemental’s sending it back to its natural state, droplets of water falling or dissipating into the air. Next, the stone elemental came over, and Tessa rubbed its bullet-shaped head before it too disappeared, shifting downwards into the ground beneath them, disappearing quickly. “I... I suppose that you have what it takes to be here...” her voice trailed off, shaking her head as finally the full embarrassment of their earlier actions came home to her.

“Rule number one then. There’s always a bigger fish.” Ash and Tessa were both from the Rivermane tribe and understood that concept quickly and nodded their heads in agreement with Harry’s statement.

Elsewhere, Fen was now standing in front of Nog and, judging by the angry look on his face, had just been told that he would no longer be training under him. He opened his mouth, barking out words that Harry couldn’t hear from where he was, but the Shaman waved Fen away, saying no more.

For a moment, it almost seemed as if Fen would attack the old man before Stoneskimmer grabbed him by the shoulder. Fen was no Cul, who was almost as large as an adult Tauren, and though no warrior, Stoneskimmer was far taller and stronger, and was also a druid, able to call upon animal spirits and even transform himself in whole or in part, making him deadly in close range. With a last look of anger at the old man and at Harry, Fen marched off towards the town.

“Will Fen cause trouble, do you think?” Harry asked the Shaman.

“Not a bit of it,” Nog said with a shake of his head, the hundreds of beads in his long, white hair tinkling. “Fen will undoubtedly travel back to the Rivermane tribe’s territory, complaining bitterly about his treatment under my tutelage. He will then discover that I have already sent a message there. That will not stop him from searching out less scrupulous Shamans to teach him, but I think even if he can find a teacher, Fen will find that their price is quite a bit higher.”

Harry looked quizzical at that, but the Shaman waved it off, looking at his seven remaining students. “I let you youngsters sort this out because I wanted to make you understand. This was a lesson. For all of you.”

He looked at Harry, who sighed, and looked over at Tessa and Ash. "I might've been taking my training under Shaman Greenstream lightly. The two of you showed me that your combat methods are pretty interesting, and your elementals are way better than my golems, for certain. I still think that you wouldn't have done as well if my hands hadn't been tied as they were by the rules of the match, but then again, the two of you are young. So perhaps against two experienced Shamans, I would've had just as much trouble."

Actually, Harry knew he would still have won that battle if he could use all of his spells with relative ease. His larger array of spells, and the speed with which he could cast a multitude of different types of spells, would likely overwhelm any shaman. Druids would be more trouble in a short-range engagement, and fighting both types at once, especially in a forest, would be tough, but Harry felt he would still win. Yet that didn't make Harry any less eager to learn about the elementals or the spirits the druids could call upon.

"Whereas the two of you have learned not to judge Harry by what you believe his size or appearance dictates, and to curb your egos," The Shaman said, glaring at the two remaining members of the aforesaid bullying trio. "Is that not the case?"

Both of them nodded ruefully, although Tessa still looked annoyed. Still, Nog reflected, there could be something there he could salvage. She at least had looked horrified at Harry's hurling himself through the fire elemental that Fen had conjured, not giddy with the thought like Fen.

After that, his time with the youngsters learning the basics of Shamanistic magic was much more companionable for Harry. Without the trio of advanced students riling the others up, no further attempts to prank, taunt, or otherwise annoy Harry occurred. Ash was the first to truly reach out a hand of friendship to Harry, who was more than willing to take it.

Months later, bar Tessa, Nog put Harry and the other youngsters through a ceremony to discern which of the elements they were mentally closest to. The Elder Shaman, who had mastered all four elements, brought out small glass globes, and in each, the youngsters (and Harry) could see a piece of a different element, visibly moving, a tiny elemental.

The bit of dirt had taken on the form of a mound, shifting wildly up and down the sides of the bottle. The air elemental had taken the form of a tiny tornado, constantly shifting bouncing around randomly. Fire was flickering in the light within another bottle, although Harry knew that bottle couldn't have contained enough air to fuel a fire that size. Several droplets of water shifted and moved, coming together into a blob, and undulating up like a rainbow to the top of the container, then tripping down, as if a child was climbing up to the top of a slide and then sliding down. It was honestly quite fascinating to watch, and looking around, Harry noticed the others were all watching eagerly.

Tess was the only one not taking part in the ceremony, instead standing to one side and looking mildly smug. According to Ash, who was still pursuing her but was no longer so blind to

her ego and had taken to tempering it, Tessa had discovered her element early, during an accident in her youth. She had a strong connection with earth and a secondary affinity toward water, which was the reverse of most Rivermane Shaman. But she had made pacts with several different elementals of both water and earth, although she could not call them into being more than two at a time yet, and that pushed her to the utmost.

And, as Harry had seen, Tessa also lacked any other element-based spells. Which Ash had, with Nog's permission, begun to use to bring her down a peg when needed.

"Sit down, and prepare your minds, reach out to nature and through hit the power of the elements that are part of the world of the Earth Mother," the Shaman whispered as he tossed some kind of leaves onto the fire. The fire blazed light pink as Harry, and the young Tauren sat around it. Twice more, the same kind of leaf was flung into the fire, and Harry shivered, the smell of the incense invading his senses. This wasn't the first time he'd used this particular incense.

It was a relaxant, something that was supposed to help the user commune with the world's spirits. It worked, although Harry could have done without the headaches it gave him. He had also found that it greatly affected his ability to think clearly and react as fast as he normally did. It was an annoyance and something he was kind of leery of but willing to put up with for now.

Moments later, Harry's mind was prepared, as were the others. Hearing their breathing even out, the Shaman went into an obviously routine speech about how finding your element was but one step toward becoming a Shaman. "And remember that the elemental spirits will leave you if you ever do something they do not agree with or you demand of the spirit something that will break the balance of nature. Nature strives for balance, and so must we, as Shamans or Druids. Your elemental affinity doesn't impact your character or your abilities. And to be a true Shaman, you must be able to call upon all elements, not just one."

Harry was pleased to know that, having wondered whether or not his element would be impacted by his Phoenix side, or somehow his basilisk side.

"Further, remember that this is but a preliminary test. The strength of your calling to any one element will impact the strength of the spirits that you can eventually make a contract with. But it is not the contract itself. This is merely to allow us to understand what will be the first element you can call upon."

One after another, the Shaman went around, mumbling which element each of the youths would call first, setting the globes one after another in the cupped hands of the sitting would-be Shamans. Harry came last, and at this point, his Potter Luck began to act up.

The fire elemental within the glass container had instantly leaped towards Harry's hand, warming the glass to the point where Harry almost felt like he had to take his hand away lest it

be burned. And yet, part of Harry hadn't wanted to, the flame calling out to his mind. In contrast, water and earth barely even acknowledged his presence.

And then, they came to air.

Harry laid his hand on the air globe, and instantly, the tornado within began to act almost like a hyperactive child. "Ah," the Shaman said, smiling slightly. "I think Harry, that we have discovered that you have a strong leaning towards..."

That was as far as he got before he blinked, staring down at the glass, which was beginning to crack. "That shouldn't..."

The next second, the global burst, sending shards of glass everywhere, which Harry and the Shaman both blocked. Although Harry's reaction time was far slower than normal thanks to the herbal smoke.

"Calm down, Neve!" Nog shouted, but the air elemental didn't listen even as he used its name.

The reason for this became apparent as Neve's form expanded into a much larger, albeit still formless Air Elemental. The small, peaceable air elemental that had been the Rivermane clan's aide in this ritual for hundreds of years had been replaced by a true monster of the air. The Shaman had never seen a spirit like this, so powerful and deadly, and even this was but a sending, a momentary empowerment of a lesser Air Elemental, by a greater one, not the reality of that more powerful spirit brought into the world of the Earth Mother.

Worse, this sending instantly went wild, acting more like a tornado than a thinking being. The air around it instantly sped up to the point where it shredded everything within its reach. Nog was able to dodge out of the way. Still befuddled by the relaxant, Harry could barely get to his knees before his chest was shredded, and he collapsed to the ground as the air elemental raged and roared above him.

Even outside of the immediate area of effect, Nog and all the others found themselves reeling, and the other six Shaman who had been observing quickly raised their hands. While Two of them joined Nog in trying to communicate with the spirit who had sent such formless power into the world, four Earth Elementals appeared, only to disappear an instant later, their forms torn to shreds by the mad Air Elemental. Yet, they had survived long enough for the youngsters to get to safety. They moved to stand behind the Shaman staring in shock where they stared in shock at Harry's corpse.

"Oh, oh Blessed Mother, that, he's, Potter's..." Tessa stammered, looking sick.

Nearby, Quetzal had been curled up around a tree, watching events lazily. When things started to go wrong, he had slithered over and now loomed behind the group of Tauren like a scaly wall. "Don't worry," he hissed, somewhat amused. "He'll get better."

“WH, what by the Earth Mother does that mean!? He’s your friend, and you, that, I knew snakes were cold-blooded but...”

“It has nothing to do with my being right-blooded, youngling. Harry has a very strange ability to be reborn as he dies. Watch,” Quetzal ordered.

As Harry’s body gave out from its horrid injury, the air elemental disappeared.

A second later, as the stunned Tauren watched on incredulously, Harry’s body burst into flame, burning away to leave an ashen husk which shattered a moment later as Harry, back in his spindly, thin and weak 12-year-old body, sat up, staring at the shredded remains of his clothing lying around him.

“Bloody hell, did I just die again?” Harry mumbled, shaking his head and groaning as he pushed himself off the ground.

“Oh yes. Just thank Mu’sha that it was so quick. Otherwise, that kind of death would have been most intensely painful,” Nog announced, causing Harry to look around, only now noticing the damage around him as the old Shaman went on. “And would you mind not doing so again, Potter? It isn’t good for my heart!”

“It isn’t exactly pleasant on this side either, old Moose!” Potter retorted, but to the shock of the youngsters and the other Tauren, he didn’t seem to be any worse for his deadly experience.

“How... how!?” Ash stammered.

“How is this possible? I know not,” one of the other shamans mused, who were getting their balance back much faster than the young ones. “It is certainly astonishing, however.”

“It’s my secret to keep, gentlebeings. I’m sorry for whatever the heck happened, but I...” Harry had pushed himself to his feet as he spoke, but in doing so, his clothing finally decided to give up the ghost and fell away, more shreds than fully formed clothing. “Well, crud.”

“Honestly, Harry, you should be looking into getting some kind of scale coat like my own. You don’t see me leaving my scales everywhere, do you?”

“Not every day, just when you molt!” Harry retorted.

Hearing the two friends talk like Harry’s death was just a random event instead of a traumatizing one helped the young ones get over their horror and shock. The first one to do so, Cul, decided to use humor to help his fellows along. “Is this going to become a theme with Potter? That he loses his clothing somehow? If so, I think I might just give becoming a Hunter a chance instead of staying here.”

“I, indeed, there’s only so much time you can spend staring at pale white rear, especially when it's covered by flesh instead of a goodly layer of fur,” Tessa said in a much louder voice as she got over her shock, causing strained laughter from students and eye rolls from the adults.

“I resent that,” said another one of the students, a rare albino Tauren.

Her comment had all of the youngsters falling around in relived laughter while Harry sighed and pulled out another set of clothes. *Damn, I will have to buy some of the local clothing after this. Alas, for my jeans, they served me well. And if the Tauren seamstress makes any comment about cutting down a child’s clothing for me, I may have to do something vile to her.* The jeans Harry had worn for so long had been burned in the attack from the black dragon that killed Harry in the battle in the drogbar city. “Well, all I can say is, thank goodness for repair charms.”

**OOOOOOO**

In the Elemental Plane known as Skywall, high winds constantly surged, fit to toss anything less than a ton around with ease. There was no set ground here. The very idea was laughable, for here, the element of Air ruled. Stones and bits of metal were visible here; indeed, hundreds of scattered islands, mountains and disks of stone flew everywhere shaped by the winds into fantastical shapes. There were even a few scattered buildings, though they were rare.

One such shape was a vast range of mountains floating in the void, tumbling through the endless plain of wind, buffeted by the greater currents that swirled and eddied, beyond the control of any single elemental. Hundreds of miles long and made out of stone, it had been shaped by the wind into a series of tunnels, funnels and curving shapes over the passage of eons.

Not that air elementals, or any elemental, really understood the passage of time. Elementals didn’t mark out time per se. They simply acknowledged events, uncaring of how much time had passed between them.

This particular floating mountain was near the edge of Skyfall, well away from where most Air Elementals preferred to congregate. And yet, there was a single air elemental here, standing on the rim of a long, curved descent, staring off into the distance.

The elemental’s form was that of a six-foot-tall tornado with a thin funnel of air for legs tapering up into something that could be called a feminine chest only because a large breastplate of copper contained it. On her limbs, the air elemental wore rings of copper and bronze.

Her head was the most...formed portion of her body, with long streams of air acting like dreadlocks and bound by wire that constantly jingled together, and she had two eyes of

profoundly dark purple staring out at the world. Her feet, for want of a better word, were also currently inside a strange bowl-like object made of stone.

Perhaps, however, the most female thing about the air elemental to any other race would be her voice, which was deep, husky, and yet lilting, a young woman's voice. "What a drag. That whole sending thing is way tougher than I thought. Hope I didn't do much damage. That would seriously be harsh considering the strength of that vyrkul's connection to Air. And even better, his personality called out to **me** rather than those shits on the conclave..." She mused, her voice somehow loud yet also warped by the winds all around her.

Swaying this way and that, the young-seeming female elemental went on talking to herself. "I might have to try harder next time to create a more permanent connection. Or maybe I could figure out how to summon myself to Azeroth. That'd be badass, and... eh, I guess it'd let me maybe do something about bringing my old man back together. Meh. whatevs..."

That last was said with a bit of forced lack of care, like a teenager trying to convince herself she really didn't care about what she was talking about, while deep down, she knew she did. "Although if I do, I'll have to be careful about it. The last time I showed myself, those pricks on the conclave tried to imprison me. Bah, as if they could catch me, I'm the wind baby, I go where I want to go!"

Again, that sentence was said with a bit of false bravado but also a bit of smugness. It was true after all: the last time she had shown herself to the rest of her society, the powers-that-be had tried to capture her, and she had escaped a remarkable feat.

With a shrug, the young elemental turned her attention away from her attempt to open a connection back to the vyrkul Shaman. There was nothing she could do now save wait. And waiting had never been this young elemental's strong suit. Not at least when she could be doing something more fun. "Now, let's see if I can hit that last tunnel..."

With that, the young elemental flexed her 'legs' scooting her small bowl of stone off the edge of the halfpipe she was standing on. Crouching down slightly, she pushed with her power behind her, gaining speed as the wind around her whipped up at her command. the next second she was whipping from one side of a halfpipe and into a curve at speed to resemble a fast rollercoaster, and she whooped, pouring on the speed. "Groovy!"

**OOOOOO**

After Harry had used his repair spells to repair anything he could, which had been destroyed by the air elemental's tantrum, he sat with Nog alone to one side of the fire, the rest of them eating a meal Harry had prepared for them all as an apology for the scare he had given them. "So, what does all that mean for me?"

“Honestly, Harry? I have no idea. I’ve never seen someone with such a high affinity for air before. And when you connected to the elemental realm of air, something there answered back. Something extremely powerful took an interest in you.”

Harry frowned in thought for a moment and then blinked suddenly as he understood what that meant. “You mean that some higher-level elemental there has responded to me, and all need to deal with it first, right?”

“Some of the sort. I cannot anticipate how strong a spirit you conjured with a reaction like that. But all of the elementals have a certain hierarchy. Given the violent reaction, I do not think any of the lesser air elementals will be willing to deal with you.”

“What about the other elements?”

The Shaman hesitated. “You had no reaction to earth, unfortunately. That would’ve been interesting, to see if you could convince them to take the shape of your golems. The same with water. Fire elementals might be willing to make a deal with you since you have a slight affinity with that element. But fire and air do not get along, so perhaps not.”

Harry blinked, and the Shaman chuckled. “It’s complicated. Yes, the elements get along quite well. After all, fire could not exist without air. But the elementals do not get along at all. There is an old tale passed around through Shamans and druids that the air elemental and the fire elemental rulers were once lovers during the creation of Azeroth but parted on acrimonious terms. And ever since, their realms have not got along. Mind you, the same can be said of Fire and Water, so who is to say what is the real story.”

Harry’s lips pursed, and then his eyes narrowed. “You’re having me on.”

Shaman laughed, shaking his head, and walking away without answering, and Harry sighed, shaking his head as he wondered if that had been really the truth or not. *Well, I doubt after all these millennia there’s anyone who really knows. Hell, not even Tyrande or one of her people could possibly be old enough to know that. Maybe one of the dragon aspects? Well, whatever, it isn’t like it really matters or has anything do to with me.*

As he looked up at the darkening sky, Harry wondered what Tyrande was up to. *And, heh, how many lifetimes it will be before I meet again?*

**OOOOOO**

Tyrande lay back in her large bathtub, situated on a balcony of her personal quarters in the temple of Elune. If there was one luxury that Tyrande wallowed in as High Priestess of Elune, the private bathing area came with the position. It was a balcony at the top of a staircase high up in the temple of Elune’s inner wall, unseen by any but open to the sky beyond. High above, the light of Elune shown down, and Tyrande smiled up at it, letting herself sink deeper into the water, until just the tip of her ears and the top of her head were out of the water, her

purple hair fanning out around her head like a halo. Then she pushed herself back up, the warmth of the water soothing sore bones.

It had been more than eight months since she had returned, and in that time, she had settled back into her position as leader of the Kaldorei, shouldering that burden once more with the dedication that she had always brought to it. Yet, it had to be said that she hadn't had much time to exercise in those eight months. Today she had finally gotten a full half-day to train with her Sentinel General, Shandris Feathermoon, which had been quite difficult. *Shandris certainly doesn't know how to pull her punches.*

In the bout, Shandris simply took everything Tyrande could do and then just used her greater endurance to outlast Tyrande. *I try not to take much pride in my martial skills, as they are simply another blessing of Elune, but that was most annoying. When was the last time I lost a bout, even to Shandris? I need to remember that exercise must be a daily part of my schedule.*

*Hah, I tell a joke. To keep to a schedule, my various meetings would have to always fit into the time allotted. That is just laughable! But even so, despite the exercise I received on my sabbatical, it has been far too long since I could take part in a real training regimen.*

*Still, Tyrande reflected, it is nice to have moments like this, too.* Tyrande lay there for a few seconds, staring up at Elune, her light soothing her, but then a knock on her door caused Tyrande's ears to twitch. Tyrande swiftly rose out of the water, pushing herself towards the edge of the bath and placing her arms there, looking towards the doorway. "Who is it?"

"Alyssa, High Priestess Whisperwind. I'm here with your change of clothing. And you have about one mark on the dial before you are to meet with the Council once more."

Tyrande nodded and stood up, the water falling away from her. "Very well, if you could but toss me a towel, I will be right with you."

The main door to her quarters opened, and a second later, a hand flashed out onto the balcony, tossing her a towel which Tyrande caught, then Tyrande began to ask questions about the meeting, which was about Fandral Staghelm and his requests the druids be allowed to start training more male druids, at least three for every current druid who had entered the Emerald Dream forgoing the material world. At the same time, Shandris wanted to cut down on the number of Sentinels, sending more women back into the civilian economy. Whereas others were demanding that those jobs be kept free for men.

When she heard some of it, Tyrande scowled, knowing there was no one around to see it. *Why I was in such a hurry to get back here again?* Tyrande thought to herself, intensely disliking the fact that many of her leaders had seen the same trends she had and didn't see a problem with it. That is that men were being relegated into the ranks of crafter or Druids, while the women were becoming sentinels and priestesses.

Indeed, Fandral, leader of the druids, and several others had even come up with a reason to explain this trend away. *'While they can seemingly understand Elune more because they too are female, women cannot sustain a connection to Nature Magic' my currently wet rear! If Fandral is willing to overlook the fact that there are still female druids, perhaps I could ask Cenarius to send Lunara to speak to him about that concept?*

As that thought went through Tyrande's head, she paused and began to chuckle quietly, looking up at the moon once more as she worked the towel through her hair. "I think Elune, that just between the two of us, Harry's insouciance seems to have rubbed off on me."

Tyrande felt Elune in her mind, a bit of laughter at that, but also determination. **Stop this**, that determination said to her, and Tyrande nodded firmly to herself. That concept, that Elune's call could only be felt strongest by women and that Nature Magic could only be used to its full potential by men was dangerous. It created a false dichotomy, which no society could sustain long, and which the temple of Elune was now beginning to be affected by.

This movement had been going on behind the scenes for a few thousand years, but only now had it begun to really pick up speed and come out into the open. Tyrande had noticed it only vaguely before, but after seeing how few men were in the Sentinels and hearing Fandral's laments about how they needed more druids acting throughout the forest instead of lost to the Emerald Dream, Tyrande knew she could not let this trend continue.

*And stop it I will. I might not willingly be a leader of anything but the Temple of Elune, but I am the leader, and they **will** listen to me. And if I have to smack Fandral over the head with the fact that I outrank him, and he answers to me, thank you very much, I most certainly will. I may even decide to remind him and his circle that they are not my favorite people still because of the Vordrassil Incident.*

Soon she was dressed once more, and, with Shy-rotam padding beside her, Tyrande joined her secretary, an elderly woman, even by the standard of the Kaldorei. Indeed, Alyssa was far older than Tyrande. She had been a priestess of Elune long before the War of the Ancients and had remained in the same position for that amount of time. During the War of the Ancients, Alyssa's eyes had been damaged by a nearby spell going off. This made her eyesight extremely poor, and Tyrande could see Alyssa squinting to see Tyrande as she walked up to her despite the nearby rune lights.

That sight brought to mind Harry Potter once more, reminding Tyrande how Harry had told her at one point that he had been nearsighted in his youth and had needed something he had called spectacles, shaped glass like that found in a spyglass designed to let him see better. The memory gave her an idea, and she asked, "Tell me, Alyssa, your name day is next month, correct?"

Tyrande tried to keep that kind of thing in her head, but with so many aides, and so much else to think about, occasionally she got them wrong even so.

Like once every hundred years or so, really. Though Tyrande didn't know it, her ability to stay on top of the small, indeed personal, things like this and other matters was part of Tyrande's legend among her people, and why so many had never even thought of wanting another leader.

"That's correct, High Priestess," Alyssa answered with a deep, formal bow. She was always formal, even here in the inner environs of the temple of the goddess, where Tyrande had always attempted to keep a more friendly, if still respectful, attitude. "Might I ask why?"

"Allow me a secret, please," Tyrande chuckled quietly, moving towards the doorway into her quarters. Moments later, as they moved through the central garden, Tyrande found Shandris waiting for her, kneeling before a statue of Elune, her moon glaive held out in front of her.

She turned and stood quickly as Tyrande approached, and Tyrande smiled warmly at her adopted daughter.

The other woman smiled back at her, joining the procession. Tyrande and Shandris spoke then, talking about some exercises Tyrande could do daily before Alyssa broke off, handing a portfolio to Tyrande as they left the temple. At that point, Tyrande asked Shandris to find a glass blower and a jewelry maker for her. "I will have a small project for them. They are called spectacles, and I want to see if they can be created for Alyssa and other shortsighted individuals."

Shandris agreed instantly, wondering where Tyrande had gotten that idea. But before she could outright ask that question, they reached the central administration building, which was situated right next to the temple. It was **not** part of its complex and had no direct access between the two. Tyrande had been very firm about that: the worship of Elune was separate from the duties of the government, especially since Elune didn't really care how they governed one another.

Later that day, all of Tyrande's forward motion and energy had failed as she had run into obstinate opposition to her requests that they start to push for more women to join the Druids and more men to join the Sentinels. Even her daughter didn't see the problem with the societal trend of splitting those tasks among gender lines. Thankfully, Shandris would follow Tyrande's opinion on this matter regardless, and with Shandris on her side, Tyrande knew the other Sentinel officers would fall in line, whatever their own thoughts on the matter.

Unfortunately, the dichotomy between the men and women of her race had very much begun to be set in stone. A single day's work wasn't enough to truly start to break that apart, but she had begun the work, and Tyrande vowed once more to Elune above that she would continue that work. *Along with all of my other duties, alas. Although, if you could send me someone who could take over some of this burden for me, I certainly wouldn't object, Elune.*

For the second time that day, Tyrande Whisperwind got the distinct impression that her goddess was smiling down at her. That, she reflected, was enough. It always was. *Although, perhaps my next sabbatical, I might want to rouse Malfurion from the Emerald Dream. It has been a few thousand years, after all. Hmmm...I wonder how he and Harry would get along?*

**OOOOOOO**

The year Harry spent with the Rivermane tribe under High Chief Lars was pleasant enough. During that time, he got the basics of the difference between the Druid and Shaman magical schools and world views hammered into him. But as the next year began, Harry and Quetzal left without any preamble, simply shaking Lars's hand, saying goodbye to the Shaman and the other would-be Shamans. The Tauren were not big on ceremony and after that point, Lars had simply pointed him in the right direction, and Harry left Peacehold using a point-me spell to head towards the Highmountain tribe area, specifically where Terrance was.

As they moved off, Harry looked up at his giant slithering companion. "How are you doing, Quetzal?"

"I am alright, if still quite uncomfortable," Quetzal answered, scowling just a bit on his reptilian face.

Once again, the snake had molted, only this time he hadn't grown any larger. This was probably a good thing, considering he was already well beyond the size even an apex predator should be up here in Highmountain. Thankfully as a snake, Quetzal didn't have that large an appetite. One large meal per week was more than enough for him. Still, since he had been hunting in the same area and killed off most bears and boars, there weren't any more animals who were interested in challenging him. That meant hunting was a bit of an issue.

"Two elk were enough?"

Quetzal nodded judiciously. "They were. Your hunting skills have definitely improved Harry Potter. And that time, you didn't even need to use spell work," he teased.

More often than not, despite the training he had been getting as a woodsman as part of his Shaman/Druid training, Harry would have to use spells to cover the noises he could make as he moved through the forest. Specifically his invisibility cloak. But more often than not when he took Harry and the others out into the forest to train, the Shaman had forbidden him from using it. "How will you know the true sounds of the forest if you know not how to cover your own while moving through it!?"

"In other words," Tessa had said tartly, "Stop cheating, Short One!"

She was the only one that continually teased Harry on his height, but the old, ragged edge of annoyance and true distrust and dislike was no longer there. Nog had proven more than once that he was an excellent judge of character, and Tessa had left behind her egotistical

attitude. Indeed, overall, Harry had learned just as much about the Tauren society as he had about Shamanism in relation to Druidism.

*Damn annoying about my being unable to make an Elemental bond with an air spirit, though. And I didn't make any progress with Water and Earth either.* Despite that, Harry smiled as he had indeed, as Nog had anticipated, been able to make a contract with a minor fire spirit. It wasn't an intelligent one, but the fire spirit, which looked like a giant mole made of fire with an extremely long tail, was named Vasras and could follow Harry's mental commands to a certain extent. It was honestly a very heady feeling being so mentally connected to the odd, not-quite animal but the certainly inhuman mind of the little elemental, and quite fun too.

However, despite that connection, Harry's research, if it could be called that, into his chimera nature, had not gone very far. Still, that was alright. Harry felt he would get further in that area by learning from the Tauren druids. Shamanism was fascinating, and Harry knew he had needed to get the base understanding of the differences and similarities, but from now on, Harry would be concentrating more on learning about his own nature rather than adding new abilities to his skill set.

Quetzal's voice interrupted Harry's ruminations, the snake hissing in annoyance. "It looks as if it is going to rain. How irritating."

Harry looked up and noticed instantly that Quetzal was right. With a sigh, he pulled out a large cloak, one he had made over the last year the old-fashioned way rather than with magic. At the time he had been kind of annoyed about that, but Nog had explained, saying, "We who can harness the power of the body, of Arcane, of Nature and Spirit, must know that those abilities are gifts. To use them for everything we need, to call upon them for every little task, that is the way of weakness. What would happen if we cannot call upon those powers and are left bereft? It is the way of arrogance. For in so doing, we lord our abilities over others. Neither is the way of the Shaman."

However, that didn't mean he couldn't use his spells to help Quetzal stay dry. This he did a moment later, and the Snake thanked him as Harry settled into place on the giant snake's back, the snake slithering forward at a brisk pace.

Their travel was uninterrupted even as the rain began to fall ever heavier. Still, it was a warm spring day, and Harry pulled his hood back, smiling as the rain soaked his upturned face, reflecting that rain or no, it was a lovely day to travel.

So it went until the evening when they made camp. The rain abated early the next day and remained sunny and warm for the rest of the week and a half it took the two of them to start seeing signs of the Highmountain clan. More than a few trees at this point were marked with the markings of the clan. But even so, it was pushing evening once more before they were hailed out of the forest to one side of the trail they were following.

"Ah, there you are, Harry."

Both of them twisted around and watched as Tyre shifted, coming out from a small hide between a rock and a giant tree, having been entirely invisible there.

“Huh... That was impressive,” Harry admitted, while Quetzal hissed in displeasure at having missed his presence.

“Or you just need to work on your situational awareness,” the large Tauren chuckled. He had seen Harry less than a month ago as he went to talk to Lars. Just because most of the Tauren clans lived separately did not mean there wasn’t regular movement between them after all, and Tyre had made a point to seek out Harry whenever he was in the area.

Harry looked at him, then down to Quetzal, who was still carrying him, then back to the Tauren, one eyebrow rising. “Do I?”

Quetzal hissed in amusement, greeting the Tauren with a nod of his head. “Indeed, while situational awareness is always good, I doubt that any single creature would willingly assault one such as I. Not unless there are magical beasts around here.”

“There are, but you’re right as with magic comes intelligence, and I rather doubt that any of them will be willing to fight you,” Tyre admitted, holding out his arm.

Harry shook the man’s hand, grateful that the Tauren had that act as part of their society as well. The Kaldorei didn’t, and the Tauren also, strangely enough, given how different they looked to humans, had quite a few of the same physical mannerisms, their faces and body language being much more open than any Kaldorei he had yet met.

“And I suppose I should say that was a druid spell, Forest Melding. We literally become one with the forest so that no one can discover our presence bar those of the most discerning.” With that, the Highmountain chieftain turned aside, gesturing Harry on. “Of course, with your invisibility cloak, you don’t need it. But that spell is part of the most basic druid spells. Did Great Cenarius not tell you of it?”

The two of them chatted, talking about Harry’s training under Cenarius and Nog and what he expected to learn among the Highmountain tribe. When Harry mentioned that he felt that it was time for him to start to get in touch with his inner self and wanted Tyre to help that along, Tyre agreed, although he did ask Harry if his people had anything like the Druidic ability to shapeshift. “

“Yes, we call them Animagus. But if you’re going to say that it’s like reaching out to your chosen element would for a Shaman, then I have to disabuse you. To become an Animagus, you just drink a potion with a bit of the animal in it, then spend weeks practicing changing your body to that of the animal in parts. You always retain your sentient mind, but it’s an extremely difficult and regulated magical art. I once knew a woman who could transform into a fly, but she could still problem solve and think as well as she could as a human,” Harry warned. “Cenarius tried that.”

“Hmm... well, that is quite annoying, but I think that the druidic method of looking inward and finding your inner animal will still work,” Tyre grumbled. “We will have to do more meditation exercises first, though. Why is it that whenever you go into detail about your magic and world, Harry, that it always makes me think it’s a little too simple?”

“Probably because it is,” Harry laughed. “That’s what happens when you’re born with magical cores like wizards such as myself, rather than needing to connect to other magical sources.”

“In other words, you cheat,” Tyre replied drolly.

Remembering how that had been Tessa’s most used refrain, Harry laughed, and Tyre chuckled with him, although Tyre had been telling the truth when he was saying that he was a little annoyed that there was no spiritual aspect to becoming an Animagus, no connecting to the essence or mind of the animal in question. If there had been, Harry would have had someplace to start with to create what druids called ‘the mental animal’, the mental image of the animal they wished to transform into. From doing that to getting in touch with his two animal sides would have been somewhat easy.

Here, that wasn’t going to be the case. “Well, you already have a good grasp of reaching out to Nature Magic, elemental magic, and the very basics of the Shaman and Druid school. That is good. Since it is pushing into winter, it’s also perfect for a time to start you on meditation and further imbuing your mind and inner animal with Nature Magic. That will help you in further understanding and connecting to your chimera-self.”

“Do not speak to me of winter,” Quetzal grumbled. “Even with the most amazing spell in the whole world, wintertime is not pleasant.”

Tyre looked at Harry, and Harry chuckled. “He’s talking about warming charms.”

Tyre blinked at that, then frowned thoughtfully. That sounded like something a Druid could come up with, although why they would is a question. Only the weakest of their people cared much about the seasons, as in were bothered by the cold. Indeed, the exact opposite was true. Extreme heat bothered his people more than extreme cold given their fur.

Soon, they came upon the main Highmountain village. This village was built into and around a series of winding, monstrously sized trees. Not huge trees like Nordrassil was supposed to be, but certainly bigger than most trees grew. A few were also twined together, creating a series of walls, defensive berms perhaps in the distant past, but which had now been turned into the walls of large huts, huts which were otherwise very near to the large tents that Harry had seen in Peacehold.

There weren’t as many Highmountain tribesmen in sight here, but Tyre explained that was simply because around Peacehold, the town was the purpose for many people living there. Here, the town was simply a gathering place. There were dozens of smaller tents elsewhere,

each centering on a family unit. Only the metalworkers and other artisans who needed to be close to one another were gathered here.

As they walked into the town, Harry and Tyre were greeted by nods and waved hands. Harry found he was recognized here not only by his being the only non-Tauren around or as Tyrande's friend as he had been occasionally when he entered Peacehold but as the one who had helped to stop the budding war between the Tauren and the Drogbar. Of course, they did this in their own inimitable fashion. "Ho, Dragon Slayer!" was the call from many a Tauren, with respect but no awe or deference. Harry found himself far happier with that kind of recognition.

But one of the Tauren in the small town was **not** pleased to see him. The black-furred Shaman who had come along with the Highmountain contingent on the mission into the drogbar caves stared at Harry, seemingly frozen where he was standing half in, half out of his tent.

He stood there for so long that Harry noticed this odd reaction through the rest of the bustling town. *Huh, I wonder what that is about? And who is that anyway?* For a moment, Harry thought about just asking but decided against it. After all, it was only the first day. Whatever the black-furred Tauren's problem was, Harry would discover in time.

"Would you mind living with my family and me?" Tyre's voice broke into Harry's mind as the chieftain frowned, cocking his head to one side. "And I hate to ask, but you seem as if you haven't grown as much as you should have in the past year. Indeed, you look almost the same as the last time I saw you."

"Two reasons for that. My people don't grow as quickly as yours do physically at the age my body currently is. And... I died again during training. Let's just say that my connection to the air elemental dimension is quite high, and leave it at that," Harry answered dryly.

Tyre laughed and demanded the full story, coming away somewhat astonished at how badly Harry had, somehow, messed up. Harry settled in over the next week, with Quetzal taking a certain amount of amusement later that week that news of his presence had not spread all that far throughout High Mountain. There were indeed other apex predators in this area who were stupid enough to try to take him on. That made hunting far easier for the massive snake.

After he settled in, Tyre began to give Harry one-on-one instruction for several hours a day, whenever his duties as chieftain permitted. This wasn't a set schedule and left Harry to his own devices occasionally, and Harry began to interact with the rest of the Highmountain tribe in a way he hadn't been able to during his time with Nog. With no one here seeing Harry as an unwanted rival or a danger to their position, he got along far better with the Highmountain tribe than he had at first with the young Shamans in training, and on top of continuing his physical training and sword work, Harry began to work with the locals to create his own permanent tent. The leather that the Highmountain tribe created was simply much better than

had been available at the High Chieftain's town, although the stonework and metalwork were of lower quality, and there wasn't near as much bread in the clan's diet.

Harry actually struggled to come up with something he could use in trade for the leatherwork and other items he would need. The Tauren preferred to not use gold, not having a set monetary system. Indeed, gold itself wasn't really welcome among them, not even worked gold beyond wedding beads and bangles. So there was a limit to how much gold he could dump into the local market.

But then, Quetzal came to his rescue with a dose of the obvious. "What about your runes? Your runic arrays can do quite a lot of things the locals would no doubt trade for."

Harry stared at Quetzal, then moved over to a nearby tree, and promptly began to smack his head against its trunk. "Merlin curse it! I was so into learning about their magic that I completely forgot I had something to offer the Tauren in turn. I'm an idiot! If Tyrande were here she'd be smacking me upside the head so hard my brain would ring."

Quetzal's tail smacked into Harry's head, sending him sprawling, and Harry glared up from the ground at his giant companion. "What," Quetzal questioned innocently. "You just said that if Tyrande were here, she would be doing that. I'm just filling in for Mistress Whisperwind."

Regardless, Quetzal was right. The Tauren were amazed and very interested in the runic arrays Harry could create, and indeed several other druids and Shaman were interested in the runes themselves. Thus his time with Tyre became even smaller, as half the time, Harry would be the teacher instead.

But thanks to selling several runic arrays and trading more for physical help, about a month after moving in, Harry's tent was finished. It was a wonder in terms of quality and the charms Harry had put on it. The outer shell was leather, its shape much like the octagon-shaped tent that the Tauren favored, stiff and thick enough to keep out rain, wind, and after Harry was done with it, any manner of assault. In size, the tent barely seemed large enough for Quetzal to stick his head into, but the inside was now enlarged, Harry having perfected the area enlarging charm.

Inside, there had been a few changes too. For one thing, Harry's sleeping bag had been enhanced, the sleeping bag's material taken and stretched into a blanket and put onto an actual bed, a simple one made of wooden slats and a stand, but that was enough. A light was enchanted to light up at verbal commands set into the tip of the tent's interior. Cooking gear of all sorts hung from the wooden poles, and the center area was situated around a wide flat stone that could be enchanted to serve as a heating pad, either for warmth or food, up to actually lighting on fire. A large, sandy area had been constructed in a box covering one side of the tent for Quetzal.

All of that was work Harry had finished, but there were still a few things Harry wanted to work on before adding the shrinking charm that would let him shrink it down to the same size as his expanded trunk.

Harry was putting the last touches on a runic array that would further strengthen the tent's exterior when Quetzal entered, hissing proudly but also showing some worry in his tone as he spoke. "I was finally able to track down that black-furred Tauren."

Harry looked up from his work, setting it to one side. Despite the months Harry had spent here with the Highmountain clan, and despite how friendly he had gotten with them, the black-furred Shaman, whose name was Ebonhorn, had avoided him. This despite Harry engaging the many druids and Shamans in discussions every few days about history and magic. Whenever he saw him, Ebonhorn would flinch and disappear somehow. So while Harry still hadn't felt right asking the others about him, Harry had decided to see what Quetzal could tell him about the odd Tauren.

"Close enough to tell us something about him, I take it?"

"Exactly so. And I can tell you, whatever Ebonhorn's form might be now, Ebonhorn isn't a Tauren. He acts the part very well and seems well-respected and even liked by many of the locals. But he is not a Tauren."

For a moment, Harry didn't get it. "If he's not a Tauren, what is he?"

Closing his eyes, Quetzal brought to mind Ebonhorn's scent once more. "To my physical olfactory senses, Ebonhorn is just like any Tauren. But to the enhanced magical senses my kind possesses, he reeks of magic, more magic than even a shaman or druid should, and moreover underneath it is a, a magical scent call it, that is like that black dragon we all fought in the Drogbar city."

Harry's eyes widened, and he scowled. "Alright, solving that little mystery just jumped up my priority list..."

**End Chapter**