

Hey all! Here is the next episode style update for *Death's Avenger*. I apologize; this could have been out a few days sooner, but I missed that Tomon had attached it to an early email in our discussions. That isn't to say our email talks didn't help make this a better episode, but I feel like I should put the dunce cap on for missing it. Regardless, here it is!

Death's Avenger Episode 5, Chapter 3

"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 faire 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. "GAAAah!!! 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 Drogbar 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 Droghar 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 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 be 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 globe 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 scaley 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 vrykul'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 vrykul 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