**Fate Touched Chapter 4: Tactics, Training, and Lots of Magic**

The party moved on quickly after finishing with the troll’s cave despite most of the dwarves, Harry, and Bilbo not having gotten any sleep the previous night. The hobbit complained about it once or twice, and they had more problems with the ponies, who were intelligent enough to know that they should've gotten more rest before being loaded up once more. Harry dealt with his first recalcitrant mount because of that, and barely avoided being bitten by his pony. “Bloody hell, you stupid animal; I’m not edible! I thought ponies only ate grass and stuff like that.”

“Hah, yes, but they do tend to become angry and fractious if worked too hard, or if they have had a fright,” said Bombur, chuckling into his beard as he helped Harry to his feet. The fattest dwarf in the company was remarkably quick at times. “Just show them who’s in charge. Use the reins freely and don’t be afraid to thump them a good one to the nose or top of their head.”

“Noted,” Harry said, dodging an attempt by his mount to step on him. He pulled on the reins hard, dragging the head around as he leaped into the saddle, landing like a sack for a moment. The pony’s ears went back, and it seemed to think about acting out further for a moment.

Suddenly having an idea, Harry leaned forward, whispering into the pony’s ear, but not in the local language. Instead, he used Parseltongue. “Quit it, you stupid beast.”

The reaction was instantaneous, the pony stiffening, almost shuddering in place. It couldn’t understand him, of course, but hearing a snake’s hiss from right next to its ear would be enough to make any equine freeze. After a moment, when it wasn’t bitten, the pony started moving forward, still looking around warily, unable to figure out the sound had come from its rider.

After starting off, the group fell once more into a column with Fili splitting out to one side and Bofur the other, and Dwalin guarding the back of the column. Now that Thorin had agreed to meet with Elrond at his home, Gandalf once more took the lead of the column.

This allowed Thorin and Harry time to talk about what Harry called group tactics, or rather about the lack thereof the party had shown. “You can't just charge in and assume you're going to be able to hack anything you meet into pieces. It worked this time because of myself and Bilbo, and admittedly Gandalf’s timely arrival. We need some more organization and teamwork. An organized unit of soldiers will beat any group of barbarian warriors into the ground.”

Harry had loved learning about ancient history, at least until he got to Hogwarts, anyway. He remembered reading about the Roman legions in particular. “In my world there was an empire built on the backbone of their infantry. They had used organization, training, and an understanding of combat engineering and logistics to defeat larger or equivalently sized armies of barbarians, including those of my own homeland. For a time, anyway. I think we can use some of the same tactics they did.”

“Group tactics or formations won't work against trolls, lad,” Balin said with a chuckle from where he was riding a pony behind Thorin. “They’d just smash through it. We dwarves are strong, but not that strong. And though few of us would like to admit it, orcs can become even stronger than us, and their longer reach can make them deadly.”

“He’s right. Oh, I’ve seen polearms deal with trolls before in formation, but even then you have issues. And you’re open to attack from orcs or goblins when they get under your spears,” Thorin said, tugging at his beard as he looked at Harry shrewdly, wondering where his human friend was going with this. Yet after seeing Harry in action several times now. Thorin was willing to hear him out.

“That's no excuse for not trying in the first place. We’re a small group, and we should start training together to emphasize our ability to fight **together**, rather than separately. Organization and training is a force multiplier,” Harry said.

“This coming from the boy who charged his mortal enemy and tackled him through a seemingly deadly mirror rather than work with his fellows to take the man down,” said Thorin and drolly. “Your words do not persuade.”

“But before that I **was** working with a group. A group, furthermore, that I had trained to work together. Sixteen and seventeen year-olds trained to work together in units against grown-ups who had used magic all their lives, and we were winning until Riddle showed up,” Harry replied calmly, though his face twitched at the memory.

Noticing that Balin winced once more, wondering about what, or rather who, the young human had lost. He said nothing, however, as Harry held out a hand.

“Look at this.” Harry imagined what he wanted to conjure up. then he was holding a Roman shield. It wasn’t a perfect example. of course, Harry had never been close to a real one, but it was close enough. Harry knew the weight was wrong the moment he had it in his hand. It wasn’t nearly heavy enough to be the real thing, but the size was accurate at least. He handed it over to Thorin who took it gingerly, at first thinking it would disappear the moment he touched it. He was still not used to Harry's conjuration abilities

“It’s light,” Thorin said after a moment.

“The original was heavier in my world. I think my conjuration of it needs some work,” Harry said with a shrug. “What the ancient Roman warriors of my world would do would be to form what they call the shield wall, each shield slightly overlapping with their allies to either side, holding the line as the attacker advanced. The attacker crashes into them, then they would separate the shields slightly.” Harry described this by pulling his two fists apart, the knuckles almost looking like they interlocked for a moment before he did so. “Then they would thrust out with short swords.”

“Laddie, if we used short swords we'd never be able to hit the enemy! They'd always have a reach advantage,” Balin said with a laugh.

“Not according to the history of my world. Barbarians routinely used broadswords or two-handed axes and swords, but they'd always have to come within range of the short sword to try to get over the shield or break the shield wall.”

That caused Balin to fall silent, thinking.

“Give me another one. Let’s see if you can get the weight and material right, first,” Thorin ordered, holding the shield back out Harry.

Harry nodded and began to change the shield, making it slightly larger, having missed on the size the first time for a dwarf, something he only realized when Thorin was holding it. Then he thickened the wood while adding a metal boss around the rim of the shield as well as in the center. *Just like being back in Transfiguration class trying to create a more elaborate teapot or needle,* he thought whimsically, holding the shield out to Thorin again.

Thorin held it for a moment, moving it up and down on his arm as he mimed thrusting with his other hand. A moment later he pulled his pony to a halt before kicking out of the saddle of the pony, handing the reins to Balin who was watching interestedly. Thorin held the shield, pulling out his new sword with his other hand. The shield was as tall as Thorin was, almost, covering him from hobnail boot up to his nose, and wasn't heavy enough for him to notice much at all.

“Ori, Gloin, get down here,” Thorin ordered. “Harry, conjure up two more shields. Let's see if there is any kind of reasoning behind this idea.”

The two dwarves so named scrambled off of their ponies while the rest of the column came to a halt with Gandalf looking back from the head of the column quizzically. The three dwarves now standing, however, ignored their fellows, moving into a line formation with Thorin in the center as Harry conjured up two more identical shields from the first one, copying its design exactly now.

“I've seen a special on, well, I guess you could call it a play once, where they showed how this worked,” Harry said, getting down from his own pony and moving towards them, adjusting their stances and how they were holding their shields, occasionally.

“See here,” he said, as the shields slid together, one on top of another. “They would overlap just slightly like this, covering their fellows and their sides, then at an order from their officers the shields would come apart, and their short swords would stab out.”

“How do you get over the problem of facing stronger opponents who could just smash your entire shield wall away?” asked Dwalin, crossing his powerful arms over his chest, staring with something approaching contempt at this three dwarves on the ground with their shields. He wilted slightly at Thorin's glare, but even Thorin wondered about that one.

“Ahh, but you have wizards with you,” Harry said with a chuckle. “Place your shields down onto the ground, you three.”

They did so, hunkering down behind them for a moment as Harry waved his hands, muttering an incantation under his breath.

“Ahh, that is a fascinating concept,” Gandalf said suddenly, having come up on them from the front of the column without Harry noticing. Harry turned, and Gandalf winked at him. “I was able to follow the magic for that one, and indeed I might be able to replicate that spell, with difficulty admittedly for that second part.”

“Interesting,” Harry said, before looking over at the objector. “Try to smash their shields, Dwalin, and you too, Dori.”

Shrugging his shoulders the bald dwarf got off his pony and moved forward as Dori did the same, pulling out his warhammer. Without warning Dwalin charged the short distance between where he had been in the column and the three dwarves to one side of it, his axes flashing out. A second later the blows bounced off causing no harm, and he cursed, the vibrations of the impact almost causing him to drop his weapons. He shouted angrily at the top of his lungs in dwarfish as he glared over at Harry. “You could’ve warned me, you emerald-eyed ass!”

Dori came at the problem more cautiously. He stood at the farthest point he could from the shield wall and his fellows while still being able to hit them with his warhammer, then swung as powerful a blow as he could right at the center of the leftmost shield. The blow bounced off like it had hit a rock and Dori turned with the blow, taking the vibrations somewhat better with his hammer than Dwalin had with his axes. “That’s amazing!”

I used three spells to first connect the shields to the ground, then to make them unbreakable, and also added weight to them,” Harry explained. “I can make the entire shield wall almost unbreakable for a short amount of time. Though you wouldn't be able to go on the offensive like that. I'd have to cancel the spells and let you be able to pick the shields up again and break the line to stab out, then redo them after.”

Thorin picked up the shield again, hefting it thoughtfully. “This has promise, Harry, but…” Thorin wasn't certain he was enthusiastic about this change to their ”tactics,” as Harry called it, but then again Thorin was one of the four best warriors in the group and had a lot of confidence in his own abilities. However, he could not deny that not everyone in the party was as good a warrior as he would've liked. *Oin, Ori, Nori, Dori, Balin, and Bombur, at the very least, should learn to work together like this.*

On the other hand Balin was enthusiastic about the idea. He shouted something in dwarfish that made Thorin blink for a moment before slowly nodding agreement even if he didn’t look convinced.

Gandalf leaned over and said softly, “Balin has already spotted a bit of an issue with that kind of tactic, that you can be flanked. But if you back it up with pike and are in a tunnel? Much of the war against the orcs in the mountains occurred underground in just such an environment. You could save yourself a lot of casualties while slaughtering the enemy with this kind of tactic. It's a very interesting concept, but it would take a lot of training, would it not, to pull off the shield wall like your Romans?”

“In my world it took **constant** training. I think the term a soldier would have to sign up for was ten to fifteen years, something like that. Training would be practically constant from that point on. Six months to a year before he was put out into the actual legions, and then constant training in camp and even on the march. Like I said, the Romans faced armies larger than them, more maneuverable and sometimes with better weapons and certainly better bows at times. Organization and working together were the main weapons against that kind of thing.”

Gandalf nodded thoughtfully, watching as Balin argued with a few of the other dwarves in their own tongue. “They are objecting to it, saying it isn’t honorable to hide behind shields like that. Odd that Dwalin, Balin, and the other more experienced among them in warfare are not the ones arguing.”

“Honor,” Harry said loudly, getting everyone's attention, “is coming home again victorious.” With a faint smile towards Thorin he went on as the other dwarves all looked at him. “Warfare is not honorable; it is simply necessary at times. Never go into battle looking for glory or you’ll just find death. Enter war like you are a tradesman, say a blacksmith, at his trade, and the enemy the metal you are going to pound. The enemy doesn’t have any rights, and dealing with it gives you know pleasure or joy, but it must be done. Take pleasure from a job well done after the battle is over.”

Thorin had remained silent throughout this discussion, simply watching, before tying the shield to the saddle of his pony as Harry finished, barely hiding a smirk beyond his beard. “How long will that last, Harry?”

“About half an hour, or so I think. Conjurations like that never last very long.”

“It's a good idea for facing orcs and other groups of it enemies, but we need to think of the Dragon and regular tactics now, not training for later,” Thorin said seriously as the column began to move once more. “But your magic, Harry, can be a game changer, and I think we've just discovered ways you can help. Support spells like those you just used, and after last night...”

“Agreed. I was thinking of three stages for myself in a fight. One, illusions and conjured beasts to bolster our company’s position and disrupt the enemy.”

“Yes, the conjured beasts helped quite a lot last night,” Bilbo said helpfully from where he had been listening to the exchange, rather sleepily and disinterestedly, it had to be said. He wasn't used to going without a full night’s sleep any longer, although he had toughened up noticeably since this journey began. On top of that Bilbo would be the last person in the company to be part of a shield wall like that for various reasons.

“They were, indeed,” Balin said musingly, looking over Gandalf. “Can you do that kind of spell, Gandalf?”

“Alas no, Balin. My powers rely on a different method, or rather school of thought than Harry’s. His is about controlling, or adding to the environment. Mine is about working with natural forces.”

Harry nodded to that. “We’ve talked about this, and we think that Gandalf’s magic is more powerful, but it’s raw ore rather than refined, as it were, compare to mine. To use another analogy, my magic is a full set of tools for several hundred different jobs, while Gandalf’s magic is a set of tools designed to perform a dozen specific tasks where they work far better than my own tools.”

There were several nods at that since that was an analogy most of the dwarves could understand, and Harry went on. “Anyway, that would be stage one. Then I'd follow that up with support spells. Conjuring up defenses or weapons or anything else of that nature for you all would be stage two. Direct attack spells would be stage three.”

“And charging in with your sword at the very end?” Thorin asked archly. “You still need training with that blade of yours. Furthermore,” he went on before Harry could say anything, “your conjured weapons aren’t very good. I tested one of them before they disappeared last night, and it shattered on the first blow. Do you even know what steel is?”

Harry looked confused for a moment, staring down at the sword riding at his side. “Um, I know it's created through mixing different ores, but I have no idea about their right mix, if that's what you're asking. A sword is rather more work than a needle or something of that nature.”

“Nodding his head at that Thorin replied. “There's no harm in that. A farmer or wizard shouldn't have to know that kind of thing. But if you're going to be conjuring weapons for us, I think you need to learn now.” After that he'd launched into a long discussion on the proper weight balance and makeup of a sword, with Oin, a miner of some renown in the Blue Mountains, joining in.

Nearby, Fili, who had just rejoined the column, replaced at his position by Gloin, winced. Shaking his head he leaned over toward Harry, whispering, “Sorry, our uncle’s a bit of a perfectionist with such things.”

Harry shrugged. “I find it interesting, and he’s right, I do need to know this stuff. Conjured weapons or even shields wouldn’t do much if they fell apart in battle the moment I removed my spells.”

“Well, shields are entirely different from swords, of course, even in the metal you’d like to see around the rim…” Thorin replied, before going on to that topic.

That discussion lasted the rest the day, interspersed with both Thorin and Harry taking turns breaking trail with Gandalf. But despite what he had said about thinking of tactics to deal with the dragon, Thorin sent Bilbo ahead to find a spot for them to stop for the night a little earlier than he would have before the battle with the trolls.

They stopped in a rather nice, if small, clearing just off the route they had been following. It was almost hidden between two trees which had grown so close together they seemed to almost be touching one trunk to the other about seven feet up. But you could lead your ponies through on foot one at a time, finding the clearing on the other side defended on every side by rocks and other trees. It was a small space, but a very easily defensible one.

Putting the ponies at the far back next to the rocky outcrop, the rest of the dwarves gathered near the entrance to the glade and began to prepare the rest of the camp as Gandalf looked around thoughtfully. “This place is a bit too perfect. I wonder…” he said before stooping and smiling at something he picked up from the ground. It was a small stone with a mark of some kind on it. “Well, Mr. Baggins, this was indeed a fortunate find. This is a Rangers’ camp.

Bilbo blinked in shock at that, having heard of the Rangers a time or two. “Truly?”

The dwarves however looked blank as did Harry, and Gandalf perforce had to explain. “The Rangers are a group of men who patrol the Badlands around Angmar and elsewhere in Middle Earth. They bow to no nation, but they hunt dark things that move from the Western Sea to the mountains of Mordor, guarding all the other nations from them.”

Thorin nodded thoughtfully at that. “The human nation of Minas Terrace is the stout shield, and these the hunters in the dark. Are we likely to meet any such on the road?”

“No. Their numbers have never been great, so it would be indeed be a lucky chance if we were to meet any such.” For a moment he looked over at Harry, then away, his thoughts hidden, though no one had seen his look in any event.

“Then, at least we can make use of this camp of theirs for the night. Harry, conjure up those shields again. Bombur, Ori, Nori, Dori, Oin, and Bifur, get over here. Let's try that shield tactic, three on three I think, for now, pushing against one another. I want to see how it works with weapons other than swords, and how well it would work without Harry’s magic backing it up.”

It turned out that it worked all right with other weapons, but the slashing attacks most weapons other than swords demanded took long enough to open up the user for counter blows from the enemy. Thrusting with the sword was really the best way to both attack and let your shield do the work of defending yourself.

After some time spent helping the dwarves with that idea, Harry worked with Balin to create a pike, taking a massively long spear and putting a pike head on the end of it. The billhook was sharp, heavy, and deadly in a thrust, having slightly more range than even the clubs the trolls had been using the evening before. “Aye, that’s it laddie! That’s the kind of thing I saw the dwarves of the Stiffbeards use in the war against the orcs.”

“Stiffbeards? They’d be another clan based on the seven fathers of the dwarves, correct?” Harry asked, clicking his fingers as he tried to bring them to mind. “Thorin told me they sent a small unit to the war, but it was one of the best trained.”

“Aye, they only sent eight hundred to the war, given how far they had to come from the east, aye and through a lot of hostile territory too. Rhun is a land of ancient peoples, and ones who have never been friendly to outsiders. The other Eastern clans also sent troops. Twas a magnificent moment of unity between the dwarven clans, but…” Balin sighed. “All for merely a partial victory, not the total. Khazad Dum still lies within the hands of the orcs.”

Shaking his head, Balin described how the Stiffbeards had used the pikes. They worked well enough against trolls, and even against orcs, but not so well against goblins that were quick enough to duck underneath the heavy, unwieldy weapons. Second and third pike rows could deal with that, but then the group of pikes were not wieldy enough to deal with trolls.

Despite this Balin was already thinking up ways of using the pike and the shield wall in tandem with Harry's magic. “One row of shield and short sword users, then two rows of pike, I think. Some illusions spells to confuse the trolls, then the pike charge in, killing it, only to retreat back behind the shield line. It could work even in enclosed spaces, I think. And orcs can only rarely bring more than two or three trolls to a fight at a time. They are stupid creatures, for the most part, that must be goaded in the right direction.”

Thorin also liked the idea. During the war against the orcs of the Misty Mountains trolls had been few and far between, never used in more than groups of three, but they had still been deadly for all but the Stiffbeards. However, Thorin felt that the training necessary for most of Balin’s ideas would be something they would have to start their young on before dwarves got set into their ways.

That, Balin willfully agreed with. “Our people are stone hard. It makes us hard to influence us against our will, but it also makes us slow to change or take in new ideas, and it gets worse as we grow older.”

“Really, I hadn’t noticed,” Harry said far too innocently, while Bilbo and the three youngest dwarves hid chuckles behind their hands.

Dwalin smacked Harry upside the head, growling good-naturedly at the human who he’d come to see as a friend just like his king did. “And now I think it's time for personal training. Why don't you go conjure yourself a sword, Harry, and we’ll get started?”

Groaning, Harry did so and was thoroughly thrashed by a series of dwarves, only able to hold his own in a pure sword contest against Fili and Kili. One preferred to stay at range with a bow, while Kili preferred mobility and dodging attacks rather than parrying just like Harry did. But Harry was faster at it and had a longer reach, which gave him an advantage.

The group set out early the next morning, and for the next four days they traversed the forests quickly and efficiently, stopping early every night to train with the new tactics. Harry spent the journey talking magic with Gandalf, coming away with more respect for the older man's form of magic and its sheer brute power, while Gandalf came away with a better understanding of the malleable nature of Harry's magic. It was exactly as Harry had described: Gandalf could do fewer actual things with his magic than Harry, but what he could do he did to a level that Harry couldn’t match.

For another thing, unlike Harry’s magic, Gandalf’s magic automatically fought against the aura of darkness that groups of orcs or goblins created. He had never felt the debilitating effect Harry had described, and his spells, light and air based, were polar opposites to the magic inherent in the fell creation of the dark races. That gave him an edge against them that Harry didn’t have.

Moreover, they talked further about the magic elves and wizards could both use in this realm. The enchantments Gandalf described had effects that seemed to last far longer than any in Harry’s realm, and were also far more powerful. The notice me not arrays that covered the Wizarding world were decent and powerful, but they were actually more runic work than enchantments.

But while they worked very well, Harry had no idea if they could have stood up to millions of people actually looking for where they were hidden. And they certainly would not have stood up to confusing or keeping a literal Dark God at bay as some of the Elven nations in the past had. The arrays back home were also passive things, while the enchantments of the elven lands were aggressive in keeping their borders or warning those within of intruders, which would have been an entirely different spell back home.

From there they discussed how Harry could learn some of Gandalf’s tricks, in particular his ability to sense things beyond his line of sight and hiding his own aura, something Gandalf was very firm that Harry needed to learn. Gandalf, in turn, would have a bit of an easier time learning Harry’s spells, for the most part anyway. He could track the magical energies as Harry formed them and could already duplicate a few of the pranks spells he had seen Harry use, though he could not transfigure or conjure. Those skills lay well outside his area as a follower of Manwe and Varda rather than Aule, or rather, Mahal, as the dwarves called him.

Two days travel and training found them once more making camp, though they were noticeably closer to the Misty Mountains then they had been. Currently they were travelling along a low ravine between hills. It was somewhat less strenuous travel than going over the hills would be, though the terrain was tougher since there were far more trees in the ravine than on the hills leading up to the Misty Mountains. This had forced them to go in single file several times, and the scouts to either side had not been able to move very far away from the rest of the group before losing them in the trees.

After the dwarves and their companions had finished training, they sat around the fire as the cooks fought their nightly battle against Bombur while trying to finish the night’s meal. The fire was a low one since they were wary of running into any other trolls, or worse, orcs in the area, but Bilbo had nabbed two rabbits that afternoon, adding some meat to the meal.

Harry sat leaning back against one of the rucksacks as he winced, massaging his thigh and knee. Thorin had thumped him a good one with the flat of his training blade, and the wound was only now slowly disappearing. It was ironic that his magic could so quickly deal with such small wounds, yet the scars on his hands and chest remained. *Curse scars are like that, I guess,* Harry thought ruefully, touching his lightning bolt scar lightly for a moment. *Then again, even those scars are nothing to the pain inside.*

Feeling his thoughts turn dark at that moment, Harry looked up from his thigh and was about to start up another prank war with Fili and Kili when one of the other dwarves, Oin, came over to him holding something in his hand. “Er, Mr. Potter…” the dwarf began.

“Just Harry, please, Oin. I think after slaying three trolls and so many day on the road together we’re well past the last name stage,” Harry quipped, smiling both at the dwarf’s odd formality and at the interruption.

“Heh, well, it’s good you mentioned the trolls since that were what I wanted to talk to ya about. Didn’t know if you noticed at the time, but that troll whose arm ya smashed, it had me dead ta rights, Harry.” Oin actually shivered a moment. “I swear I saw me life flashing before me eyes, and t’was far too short a journey!” He coughed, looking down at his beard for a moment, which Harry noticed was white and rather shorter than most of the others’, before thrusting out his hand. “Anyway, I remember you and Gandalf smoking the morning we left Bag End, but haven’t seen ya do so since, so I figured this might help you.”

Harry took the object Oin held out to him. It was a crude but decently made pipe, shorter than Gandalf’s, with a far simpler end to it, without the carvings that adorned Gandalf’s. He put it to his mouth and found the end of it actually tasted of pine, which he thought would add a bit to the pleasure of the smoke.

“Thank you for the gift Oin, but you should know that such things between friends aren’t necessary.” Harry grinned suddenly, gesturing past Oin to where Gloin had turned to watch his brother and the human. “On the other hand, if you could convince your brother to share some of his mead…”

Oin laughed, as did the other dwarves. “If he is going to share with anyone it should be his own brother!” Oin said addressing Gloin.

“Away with the lot of you! You know this is the last mead we’ve got, and I’ll not be sharing it with anyone until we’re within sight of the Lonely Mountain! That’ll be a moment worthy of celebration!” Gloin bellowed, getting to his feet and making for his brother, one fist raised in mock-threat. “And as for you, you mead thief, you’ve stolen enough of it from me over the years to equal your share of the treasure when we finish this journey!”

Watching the two brothers fall into a familial argument, Harry leaned back once more, as Gandalf moved over to him with Thorin, holding a bag of pipe-weed. A moment later the three of them were smoking away on their pipes.

Harry smiled lazily, watching his smoke be turned into shapes of ships and animals under Gandalf’s magic. He tried to do the same thing, reaching out to control the air with his magic and will rather than with a specific spell, but Gandalf merely chuckled, beating off his attempts with ease. Despite that defeat, however, Harry felt this was a most pleasant way to end the day.

**OOOOOOO**

**“They are going towards the Misty mountains!”** growled a rangy orc, dropping out of the saddle of his mount as several others scattered around him. The rest of his hunting band followed his example quickly, examining the dead trolls.

The fact two of those trolls had been killed before they were turned to stone was worrying, but they still had a task to do. **“Send word to all the ranging packs: they are to join us here. Once we are all gathered we will go after them with all speed! We must take them before they reach the cursed house of the filthy half-elf!”**

**OOOOOOO**

The next day Gandalf let drop a bit of a revelation as they were once more riding along the ravine in single file. “Has it occurred to you, young Harry, that there are a few fast and dirty rules of magic that you mentioned in your world that remain the case here, only more so?”

“We've talked about those before, Gandalf. You've mentioned a few of them: conservation of water, air, that kind of thing,” Harry said from around the top of his new pipe. Even if he didn't actually like smoking all that much, he was not going to turn down the gift, and perhaps he would acquire a taste for it. Certainly it seemed the normal thing to do around here.

“You mentioned that this headmaster, he who thought himself wise,” Gandalf started, his teeth gritting on the term. He did **not** like talking about that man. The very idea of someone in such a position of power doing nothing with that power and letting someone else do all his fighting for him was abhorrent to Gandalf. “That he lived for, what was it, 170 years? And was still spry?”

“Quite spry, yes,” Harry said with a nod. “But he wasn’t the oldest witch or wizard I knew of. There was another one, Griselda, I think her name was. She was at least 100 years older than that.”

Gandalf nodded. “How old do you think I am?”

“As old as dirt?” Harry asked, winking at the older man.

Gandalf chuckled. “Not quite.”

*Although you’re closer than you might think,* he thought, amused. After all, Gandalf, or Oronin, had been among those who sang the song of this world. He could remember it even now, the Great Song. He could remember the discordant note introduced by Melkor, then how the music changed as Eru Ilúvatar turned that darkness to his own design, and thus the song became even fuller, more vibrant and alive. *Yet at the same time, darkness and sin was built into the very world from that moment on. I sometimes wonder if Eru Ilúvatar intended that as well, or simply did not understand what it would entail for mortal beings upon this world.*

Shaking himself out of his memories, Gandalf went on in a lower voice, conjuring up a bit of magic to keep their words from moving beyond a small sphere which neatly encompassed the two wizards and their mounts. “You see, there is a connection between magic and lifespan, young Harry. Elves are inherently magical to a degree that no other race can even come close to, and can live practically forever. There are thousands of elves in the Land beyond Belegaer that remember all of the ages of this world.”

Gandalf gestured down to himself. “As for myself, I may look human, but I have even more magic than most elves save those of the First-born who have made a study of it. And I will live until my task is done as you see me, unchanging.” He laughed suddenly, a gay, almost young sound that at the same time spoke of experience somehow in a way Harry could not understand. “Except for a few more gray hairs, a bit more dirt on the robe, perhaps even a scar here and there. Such things help to remember what you have done and seen, and I would not be without them.”

He went on more seriously, however, after his brief moment of humor. “But you are magical to a degree that no human has ever been. You could live for hundreds upon hundreds of years, even more than a Numenorean.”

“The Numenoreans? You've mentioned the sinking of an island of that name, and the bending of the world by Eru Ilúvatar. But this is the first time you've mentioned that the people there lived longer than other humans,” Harry said, his eyes narrowed in thought.

“Yes, that never came out, did it? But in any event, it is so. They live far longer than mere normal men, and your lifespan could possibly exceed theirs.”

“That’s, that's interesting.” *As is the fact you just used present tense to describe them. I wonder what that could mean?* Harry thought.

“I say this for a reason, Harry,” Gandalf said, moving his horse closer to Harry's pony, reaching over and down to the younger man's shoulder, squeezing it. “There is a sadness in you, a grief that eats at you. It comes through to those about you at times despite your normal japery.”

Harry stiffened, and his mouth quirked into a rictus of a smile as if he were about to say something that would have either diffused the moment or attempted to cover his grief with some joke or other. But Gandalf’s stare halted him. “I know it, and you have not yet healed. But I ask you to at least be open to the possibility of healing in time. You do not do those you loved any justice by holding on to your grief, Harry Potter. Let the grief go and keep the memories. Live for them; don’t live your life in grief.”

Harry stared at him for a moment before nodding his head slowly and turning away, hurrying his pony along. From behind Gandalf, Balin sighed, moving up to join the wizard. While he had been unable to hear anything the two said, the young human’s face was practically an open book to one of his years. “He lost his One, I can feel it. That kind of pain will never go away, Gandalf,” he said sadly.

“Humans do not have ‘Ones’ as you dwarves do. I often think it would be better all-around if humans do, but they do not. And even you dwarves can move past that pain, can you not? Still feeling it, but not letting it hurl you into death,” Gandalf asked, looking over at Balin shrewdly.

Balin slowly nodded, his eyes far away, remembering happier times. “Aye, we can that. I'd recommend staying away from him for the rest of the day though. Let Harry settle down again.”

“Teach your grandfather to dig coal,” Gandalf said in dwarfish, and Balin surprised himself by laughing.

The next day the trip seemed normal until around midday, when the dwarf riding scout downhill of the column turned up to them fast, coming through the woods with more haste than he normally would, pulling his pony to a stop quickly at the front of the column where Harry, Thorin, and Gandalf were riding. “There's something coming up from the south of us. It’s coming fast, whatever it is, and there’s some kind of banging I heard a time or two, like wood smacking into wood. It’s not in sight yet, but it will be soon.”

Thorin looked around, thinking quickly. It wasn’t an ideal spot, but if Kili was right they wouldn't be able to evade something moving at that speed. “Take the ponies over there,” he ordered, gesturing to a large rocky outcropping uphill from their current position. “Ori, Nori, take care of them. The rest of you get armed.”

“There is no such thing as coincidence,” Gandalf said grimly as he clambered off his horse, grabbing his staff and his new sword. It wasn't glowing yet, but if there was an enemy out there it soon would. “This cannot be coincidence.”

Harry frowned, one hand on the hilt of his sword, his other twitching occasionally at his side as he thought of what spells to use. Gandalf caught that and shook his head quickly. “Wait until my sword is glowing, at the very least.”

Harry nodded, but he was not prepared for the sight that came over the low rise to the trail they were on, racing through the trees towards them. “What the…”

It was a sled of some kind, small and of light but durable construction, made mostly of wood. It was being pulled by twelve giant rabbits, rabbits of a size that standing on their hind legs their ears reached Bilbo’s shoulders. On the back of the contraption was a man who had to be another wizard.

“Radagast!” Gandalf exclaimed, waving his hands in the air quickly. “He's a friend; let him approach.”

“You told your order about our movements, Gandalf?!” Thorin exclaimed, glaring over at the wizard.

“No, I did not, Thorin Oakenshield,” Gandalf said, glaring at the dwarf, his beard bristling. “But those of my order have ways of finding one another that have nothing whatsoever to do with prior knowledge of our movement.”

By this point Radagast had crisscrossed through the trees towards them. His sled came to a halt just a little lower on the incline of the hill they were on then the majority of the column. “Gandalf! I've been looking for you.”

Harry looked at the newcomer with his head cocked to one side. He was younger looking than Gandalf, or perhaps simply not as weathered as the gray wizard. He wore brown: brown cloak, brown pants, and a brown undershirt and hat. His beard wasn't as long as Gandalf's and was bushy and bristling, and it also seemingly had life within it. *There’s a bird in his hat, and is that a porcupine or squirrel in his beard?* Twigs and other things stuck out here and there, along with flowers blooming from a few of them.

“Gandalf,” Harry said thoughtfully as Gandalf got down from his horse and moved toward the newcomer. “Is there something you want to tell me about your Order of the Sacred Fire? Perhaps what its fueled by, a certain weed methinks, or perhaps some variety of mushrooms?”

“Yes well, this is Radagast. He is an excellent Wizard it his own way of things, though what he is doing here I don’t know,” Gandalf said in a low tone. “He’s not a fighter by any means, but his knowledge of forest and animal is matchless.”

Nearing his fellow wizard Gandalf’s eyes narrowed behind his bushy brows. Holding out his hand towards Radagast he stared at the other man. “You're sweating, Radagast,” he said softly. “What is it that has brought you so far from home?”

Glancing behind Gandalf's shoulder Radagast took in all the dwarves, nodded companionably to them, then pulled Gandalf to the back of his sled. “Something is stirring, Gandalf. Some darkness is upon my forest.”

Harry and Thorin had moved up to take part in the conversation. Gandalf was about to wave them both off, then thought better of it, waving them to join them instead. Radagast blinked at that, looking over at the dwarf and the young human before his eyes widened in surprise at something he saw in Harry. “Gandalf, what have you found!?”

“I rather think we just sort of found one another. Though maybe these higher powers that you two serve might have a hand in that,” Harry said shrugging his shoulders. “Not certain how I feel about that if it is indeed the case.”

Radagast took this with surprising aplomb, simply nodding his head and then turning back to Gandalf. “I’ve been looking for you, Gandalf. Something is…” he trailed off for a moment. “Er, wait a moment. I had it; it was on the tip of my tongue…”

Harry and Thorin watched as the apparently scatter-brained wizard pulled a stick insect out of his mouth. However when he began to talk once more he was far more serious. Harry thought it was as if he had needed a moment of revelry before turning to more serious matters. “There is a sickness in the Greenwood, Gandalf, a sickness in the air and the earth. The air is foul with decay. Trees and plants are turning dark, evil of soul or simply dying.”

“Greenwood?” Harry asked Thorin out of the corner of his mouth.

“An ancient name for Mirkwood, from before the fall of Erebor,” Thorin replied, his eyes narrowed as he leaned forward.

Radagast had continued speaking while Harry asked his question, and was now answering a question from Gandalf. “Spiders, Gandalf. Giant spiders the size of a man, some foul get of Ungoliant, or I’m not a wizard.”

“I thought Ungoliant was dead?” Harry interrupted, moving forward with Thorin. “Killed by the followers of Morgoth after they turned on one another.”

“Alas no, Harry,” Gandalf said while Radagast blinked, seemingly having forgotten he and his brother wizard were not alone in this discussion. “Ungoliant fled from Morgoth’s Balrogs, and where she finally died none know, though it is known that before she passed she sired many species of giant spiders.”

Harry frowned at that, exchanging a glance with Thorin, but Radagast spoke up once more preventing any further questions just yet. “I followed the initial infestation’s trail. They came from Dol Goldur, Gandalf!”

At the name Dol Goldur it was as if a shadow had passed over the small clearing, blotting out the sun for a moment. All of them felt it, but it was Gandalf who replied. “Dol Goldur? That fortress is abandoned…”

“No Gandalf… it is not. There is a power there. The Necromancer, you've heard of him, surely? He's back, or perhaps never left. Regardless, he is there, and he is… **powerful**.” Radagast shuddered. “As powerful as this one perhaps. He is a shadow of an ancient evil,” he said gesturing to Harry. “He was able to summon up ghosts of ancient dead to guard himself, but I still saw him. Such darkness I never wish to feel again,” Radagast finished, shivering as if he had been dunked into ice.

“These giant spiders, how prevalent are they in the Northwest of the forest?” Thorin asked, his thoughts centered on what this news meant for his company and quest. Harry remained silent, staring between the two wizards, wondering what this Necromancer was and what his presence meant. Or rather, how it tied into Gandalf, his Order, and the history the old wizard had told him about.

“They have begun to encroach even on Elven lands in the forest, take of that what you will,” Radagast said sharply. “The road through the forest might be safe; there are enchantments laid upon it that protect those who stay within its bounds. But those enchantments have become twisted as well, both by the design of Thranduil and by the darkness’ growing power. Its corrupting effect goes before even the spiders.”

“It would take us months, possibly even a year out of our way to try to go around it,” Thorin said, growling the words. “We have no choice but to attempt it!”

“This darkness, can it be expelled?” Harry asked intently. The spells on the path worried him less than the darkness, given how seriously Radagast and Gandalf were taking it.

“We have spells for such, yes,” Radagast said. “I did that very thing back in my home of Rhosgobel when the darkness tried to encroach there. Whether you do so or not, I cannot say.”

“That's all right, then,” Harry said thoughtfully. “I can perform a spell that might be able to do the same thing. It works in my world to see off a monster that feeds off happiness and good emotions, it could work in the same fashion against this encroaching corruption.” *Though I don’t even know at this point if I’ll be able to cast it…* Harry shrugged off that dark thought, looking over at Gandalf.

“You’ll have to show me that spell at some point,” Gandalf said musingly. “But still, I highly doubt a merely mortal wizard could gain such power...”

“It is just not the Necromancer, it is what he might be allied with,” Radagast said, shaking his head and puffing on his pipe, a long necked, simple-looking thing, irritably. “There is more to it than the spiders or the corruption…”

With that Radagast looked searchingly at Harry and Thorin for a moment before turning back to his sled, reaching into it for a bundle. It was covered by a bit of brown cloth, but when he pulled it back it revealed a sword, a simple, almost crude looking thing all of gray metal. But that was only what it looked like, not like what it felt to those with magic to see it.

Harry flinched away from the thing as Gandalf gasped, but in the younger man’s case it wasn’t just the magical feel of the thing that had caused him to flinch away, or at least not entirely. Harry’s scars burned with the cold, as if they had been doused in ice or something even colder, and he jerked away, cursing for a moment. Luckily the effect didn’t spread out beyond the sword very far. Wringing his hands out Harry glared at the sword. “That feels almost like a Dementor, the monsters I mentioned!”

Thorin glared at the thing, his hand going to his sword. “Such abominations should be destroyed!” he said, gritting his teeth. He didn't feel the thing’s miasma of evil as the three wizards did, or indeed as humans or even elves would have. Dwarves were hardy folk, and pretty much immune to such influences. Even the mighty rings of power could not change dwarves overmuch, though they could influence the luck of their owners. But he could feel the cold of the grave the blade emitted, and that was enough to tell him what it was.

“What the hell is it?” Harry asked, still staring at the thing, his hands now clenched into fists despite the lingering pain in them.

“A fell blade of Mordor. Such blades were habitually held in the hands of those whose souls have been turned to evil, held from going to their rightful rest both by the mind of their master and their own tainted will…” Gandalf said slowly, not able to turn his eyes away from the blade. Then he looked up at Harry, his eyes compassionate. “They come from beyond the grave, you could almost say, and they partake of the cold of it.”

“I take it finding this blade is a VBT, or very bad thing, then?” Harry tried to make a joke, his teeth showing in a rictus grin for a moment, but it fell flat. He did understand what Gandalf had said, however. His scars had been created by a creature much like the one Gandalf was describing, save in Riddle’s case he had no master. The fact that being near even the weapon of a similar creature could cause his scars to act up was concerning, but Harry had no idea what to do about it.

“I took this from a ghost which attacked me at Dol Goldur under the command of the Necromancer,” Radagast said grimly. “After dispersing it, that was when I saw the Necromancer. I had no choice but to flee at that point, but I was able to take this with me despite the Necromancer’s creatures of the air coming after me.”

“You did well, my friend. Leave this with me for now. Our company is making for Imladris already. I will show it to Elrond, and he and I will convene the White Council to decide what we should do.”

Thorin’s eyes narrowed. “This Necromancer seems to be a threat, but not one our company can deal with, Gandalf, and indeed he is not a direct threat to us. Yet I can tell it concerns you greatly. Did you know of this Necromancer before joining up with us?”

Just then the four of them were interrupted by the rear scout,Bofur, coming up at a rapid pace. He looked almost frantic as he pointed over his shoulder, stumbling down the hill of rock, moss, and trees to where the four had moved to talk privately away from the rest of the company. “We’ve got wolves out there somewhere; you’ll be able to hear them in a minute! And they are moving right along our back-trail!”

A second after he said that a wolf came over the crest of the hill behind them, moving quickly through the small gorge they had been following before meeting with Radagast. It was struck through the eye by an arrow from Bilbo, but the giant wolf, large as a horse, had a rider. The rider, a small goblin, rolled as his mount collapsed under him but was brained almost at once by Ori.

Gulping, Bofur shrugged his shoulders. “All right, so they were a lot closer than I thought they were. And a lot bigger too…”

Thorin cursed, staring at the two corpses before looking all around them. “Wargs! They must have trailed myself and Harry from the destruction of their outpost. I would not have thought there would be enough of them that we missed in our attack left alive for them to go looking for trouble, though.”

“The White Orc, Thorin,” Balin said slowly. “You mentioned his name. If he is alive he'd be looking for you to avenge his lost hand. And we seem to have been found.”

Thorin was still looking around at the forest woodlands shaking his head. “We can't fight them here: we’re too strung out on this trail, the ground’s too uneven to fight from.” Wolves could move through terrain like this far better than any two-legged person could, and the trees were far too close here for the dwarves to use their bows. “We have to get some distance!”

“I'll try to lead them off for you,” Radagast said.

“They will catch you; those are Gundabad wargs out there!” Gandalf shouted, also looking around in thought.

“These are Rhosgobel rabbits; I’d like to see them try!” Radagast snapped back, and suddenly Harry had no trouble seeing he connection between these two wizards, seeing a fierceness in Radagast that hadn’t been there a moment ago.

“I might be able to help, if you’re willing to try it, Radagast” Harry said, looking over at Gandalf. “Illusions to cover him with the likeness of our party. Though I have no idea how long they’ll remain in place. And there’s no way I could control conjured animals that far away from me.”

“Conjured animals?” Radagast asked intently, his smile becoming something that reminded Harry of Luna Lovegood for a moment, eliciting a grin from Harry.

A moment later Radagast’s sled was racing off through the woodland, banging and scrapping its way over rocks and through trees as Radagast shouted something aloud in dwarfish, a list of words that should not be spoken in polite company. Instead of the eight rabbits that had previously been pulling his sled, there were now sixteen, all of them obeying his commands just like the originals. Around him were harts, racing through the woods with him like an honor guard. Each of them in turn was covered by an illusion of a dwarf on a pony.

Harry breathed deeply, the effort of creating such lifelike animals, and imbuing them with enough magic to last for a few hours had taken it out of him for a moment. “I hope that works.”

“Hah, never fear my young friend! Radagast will lead them a merry chase!” Gandalf said, helping Harry over to his pony while Thorin organized the others.

Ponies were sure footed creatures who could subsist off the land far more easily than most horses, and intelligent to boot. But they were not fast, especially in terrain like this. Nonetheless, the party broke out of the ravine out onto a flat top of the hill without running into further enemies.

However not all of the warg-riders had been fooled by Radagast. Several of them had remained on the trail, coming out of the ravine after the dwarves. Bilbo, riding at the back of the column, saw them and hissed a warning. The dwarves all hid among the scattered rocks of white and gray stone scattered around the hillside, while Bilbo and Fili readied their bows just in case.

Hiding with his pony under a Mufilatio with Gandalf and Dwalin, Harry smacked his forehead. “Damnit, scent. The wargs didn’t smell my illusions.”

“I would think that the smell of Radagast and his rabbits would have driven the wargs to chase them in any event, Harry. Don’t beat yourself over the head with it; it’s not your fault,” Gandalf muttered, summoning up a bit of air. “Nonetheless, that gives me an idea.” He began to work the air with the skill of an artist, pulling the scent of the dwarves and their ponies away from the wargs, letting the trail disappear in front of them.

However, before he could do so entirely one of the wargs spotted Ori. He had hidden in a small dip in the land between two rocks hidden from the first few wargs, but not after they had begun sniffing all around. It howled, calling its pack to the hunt and rocketed towards the young dwarf’s position.

Before it could attack him, however, two arrows flew, and rider and warg both fell dead to arrows through the eye.

Despite that, the damage was done, the beast’s howl having already summoned its fellows. Answering howls resounded from the ravine and the hills all around the dwarves’ current position.

Nearer to hand the warg-riders in view turned and raced for Ori and their pack-mates’ killers. The three of them broke cover, racing away, and the rest of the party soon followed, coming together quickly.

“That’s torn it, we’ll have to fight! Fili, Kili, any large rock we can put our backs to?” Thorin shouted over the ever increasing noise of their pursuers.

“Over there!” Kili shouted, urging his mule forward, though the animal needed little urging, hearing the dirge of the wargs behind them. The group saw where he was pointing, a large rocky outcropping about two hundred feet away and about two stories tall, with wide sides. It looked like a decent place to make a stand.

Harry turned once to send a wide area cutting spell behind them, and Gandalf turned as well, lashing out with his own blast of air pressure which hurled clumps of their assailants away, but not enough to stop them, though they became more circumspect for a time, running around the group as far as they could while keeping an eye on them. Harry estimated the two magic attacks had killed seven or nine of the attackers, but there were still at least forty warg-riders around them.

They didn’t close yet, however, and the company made for the rock Kili had spotted. Fili immediately climbed up the rock face with Bilbo following. The two archers exchanged a glance, then stared out past the warg-riders the others could see to the mass still coming out of the woodlands. “Gandalf was right. Running was the only thing we could do, but ah well. It’s been nice knowing you, Bilbo.”

“It’s been an adventure knowing you as well, Fili, but don’t give up just yet! We’re still alive, after all.” So saying Bilbo drew back his hobbit bow, letting fly. A Warg Rider fell off his beast, an arrow through its throat. *I was aiming for its chest, but that will do.* “And besides, we have two wizards with us. If they can’t change the odds against us I don’t know what power in this world could!”

“Harry, we need those shields now!” Thorin barked, then began to order the dwarves around into a semi-circle.

Harry nodded and began to conjure up the shields. Soon all of the dwarves save Ori, Dwalin, Thorin, and Kili had shields. Those four stood behind the other dwarves who grabbed up the shields, pulling out their swords. The mules were pressed to the rock, and Gandalf muttered something as he moved among them. Each mule stilled as if under a spell, and the dwarves formed a shield wall in a semi-circle around the rock.

“Here they come!” shouted Fili from above as he and Bilbo began to duel with some archers among the warg-riders. The two archers moved around on top of the rock, but it was Gandalf who provided most of their protection. Every time the enemy launched arrows he would raise his staff and a wind would pick up, blowing the arrows off-course. Then he would lower it, and the two archers would be able to aim true.

“Call it out, Thorin!” Harry shouted over the din of the approaching wolves and their rider’s bellows as he moved to join Dwalin and the others, back of the line.

Thorin hopped up onto the side of the rocky outcropping to see the battle, while above them Bilbo's next arrow took one of the wolves in the eye, dumping it to the ground, crushing its rider, and taking out another. Fili’s shot didn't do as well, taking out one of the riders with an arrow through the chest, hurling him off his warg, but the warg kept on coming, baying for blood.

Harry waited his magic crackling around one hand behind his body as he stared at the oncoming group of around forty or so. They were trying to spread out, but Gandalf was having none of it. He waved his hand and cracks of air lashed out from the top of his staff, swirling through the air like small hurricanes, lashing out and tossing them back occasionally or just blocking their arrows. The attackers seemingly paused for a moment, taking that and the defense of the dwarves in, then more of them came out of the woods, charging forward to join the group already present.

Just as the first of the wolves were about to impact the line of shield bearing dwarves Thorin shouted aloud, and those shields clanked together then down onto the ground as the dwarves holding them huddled down behind them. “Now, Harry!” Harry cast his spells, and the charge slammed home onto the shield wall.

The wargs were large and should have been able to blast through the dwarves just like the troll clubs Dwalin had been worried about when Harry first described the shield wall. But thanks to Harry’s spells on the shields, that didn’t happen. Instead, the chaotic charge shattered, bouncing away in places as the wolves smashed off the shields, turning in place, snarling at one another, or just whimpering in pain as if they had run into wall.

Thorin shouted once more. “Loose and stab!”

At that Harry undid the spells and the dwarves holding the shields rose up, pressing the wargs and dismounted goblins back, off-balance. Now that the momentum of their charge was gone, the dwarves were strong enough to overcome the warg’s size, and goblins were weaker than dwarves by far. The dwarves of the line now began stabbing forward with their swords. Several wargs and goblins died immediately, and more fell back.

“Now move apart!” Thorin shouted, racing forward. At that command the dwarves holding the line parted slightly, while the second line of the charging attackers tried to get itself under control. Thorin and the others, including Harry, charged through.

Harry ran a dismounted goblin through the chest, turning to cast a point blank cutting spell at a warg recovering slowly from the impact with the unbreakable shield wall. He then ducked under a blade aimed for his head, dodged another spear thrust for his heart, and cut its owner down while Dwalin cut the goblin sword wielder down before killing two wounded wargs in quick succession.

Nearby Kili and Thorin fought, the older Oakenshield’s blade glowing as he hacked at the goblins, who gasped and snarled trying to get away from the fell blade as they shouted imprecations in their own tongue. Kili, too, held his own, his sword flashing faster as he protected his uncle’s side. Ori stood on Thorin’s other side, not as lethal as the two kinsmen, but his blows had a monstrous power to them. Once, his hammer flung a warg back several dozen paces from the force of the blow to the head.

“More wargs incoming!” shouted Bilbo. “Get back, Thorin!”

“Back!” Thorin bellowed, and he and his team retreated, pulling back behind the shield line. Without any order from Thorin that shield line shrank once more, their shields clanking into place.

“That was magnificent!” Harry shouted, backing away further and joining Gandalf on the small step of the rocky outcropping. Once there he began to lash the attackers with spells.

First he tried to use illusions, conjuring up a group of dwarves trying to run off, but it didn't seem to work on the wargs. Harry couldn't conjure up smells to go with the illusions quickly enough for them to fool the animals’ senses, and the goblins learned quickly to follow their beasts’ lead. Worse, the orcs and wargs dealt with his following attempt of conjured animals quickly, so quickly Harry didn't really want to use that attack again: he'd feel sorry for the little critters.

How long the battle went on, Harry didn’t know. Goblin reinforcements came out from the woods several more times, joining the battle, adding to the attackers numbers. Harry estimated there were at least three-hundred or so wargs and goblins out there.

They couldn’t seem to get a handle on the shield tactics, and whenever Thorin and his group of warriors charged out, they positively slaughtered the enemy for a few moments before retreating behind the shields again. The other dwarves in that shield wall also did some damage when they let loose with their short swords.

At one point Harry nearly fell, stumbling over a downed goblin as an orc, larger than the goblins by far, attacked him. He stared at the sword coming for his chest. *At least I’ll see Hermione soon this way…*

Then Thorin was there, cutting the orc in half at the waist before pulling up Harry in a grip of iron. “Move, you foolish Man, move!” With that the two of them once more retreated behind the shield wall with the others.

However, eventually the attacking goblins got over their own bloodlust and began to circle the group, launching arrow upon arrow at them. In return Gandalf defended the company’s position from the arrows while Harry, Bilbo and Fili fired back. Harry’s attack spells did a lot of damage, but the attackers learned quickly to not bunch up, constantly moving around the group on their wargs so he couldn’t kill more than two of them with any one spell..

Feeling himself weaken, Harry looked down at Gandalf. He was intent on asking him if the older wizard had any idea how to get out of this, but he saw the older wizard suddenly smile. “Ah, I believe help is about to arrive.”

Cocking an eyebrow, Harry turned his attention back to the battle ,only to watch as something new was added to the battlefield. Arrows flew from one side of the battle, impacting the group of orcs and goblins, smashing several dozen of them out of the saddle in as many seconds. Then sixty of what could only be elves charged into view over the ridgeline, firing arrows as they came, then closing with sword and lance to finish those their arrow barrage hadn't killed.

The dwarves stood watching this activity behind the pile of corpses they had made, waiting. Soon enough the elves had finished off the warg-riders, and one of them left the others behind, moving his horse daintily through the littered corpses before halting beyond the ring of dead the dwarves had caused, the bodies too thick for his horse to traverse safely.

He pulled off his helmet revealing an aquiline face of middle years with long straight brown hair draping down his neck and shoulders. His ears were pointed, rising up out of his hair, and his eyes were warm as he gazed upon Gandalf. “Mithrandir, so you are the reason orcs and their ilk dare to come so close to my realm?”

Frowning, Harry hit the elf with a spell, which the man seemed to sense, his hand flying down to his sword. “Peace, Elrond. My rude friend here merely used a translation spell on you.” Gandalf said quickly as both elves and dwarves bristled.

“Sorry if you took offense, but where I come from its rude to speak in a language not everyone in the conversation can follow,” Harry said glibly, casting the same spell on the nearest dwarves, who smirked at his comment.

“I see you found the strange magic user who has been making so much noise in the ether of late, Mithrandir,” Elrond said dryly, though his mouth twitched as the human seemingly addressed him in perfect Elven. “Welcome, unknown one, to Middle Earth. Though you travel in odd company for a seeming-human.”

“I am Thorin, son of Thrain, King Under the Mountain, Lord Elrond. Harry Potter is my ally and friend, Lord Elrond,” Thorin said formally, hiding a smil by kneeling to clean his blade, feeling that Harry’s translation spell was getting up the elf’s nose enough at the moment. This thought was compounded as Elrond looked amazed at his own speaking of the Elven tongue. “He came to Middle Earth in great distress, and I aided him in getting onto his feet. Since then we have become friends and travel together.”

“And why would thirteen dwarves, a hobbit, and an unknown human wizard be travelling with you, Mithrandir? I have to wonder if perhaps you have overstepped yourself,” Elrond said in the trade tongue, staring hard at Gandalf, before allowing a faint smile to appear on his face as he looked at Harry and the dwarves. “Yet nonetheless, you and your company, Thorin, and you, Mithrandir, are welcome in Imladris. Follow us and you will have as much rest and welcome as you would allow us to give.”

With that Elrond turned away, and the dwarves, after looking at one another for a few moments, gathered their packs and once more climbed into the saddle to follow the elves.

**End chapter**

Originally I had intended to have this chapter cover the events in Rivendell, but looking at the notes I had on that bit, I felt I was not giving enough attention to all the undercurrents, and certainly not to the first meeting between Harry, Galadriel and Saruman. So that will all happen in the next chapter. But having realized that, I have to think about how I want to play that aspect once more so this story will not appear in July’s poll. Sorry, need to think about that, do some more research, and think about how I want to play the difference between Harry’s magic and those of the Istari going forward. Also need to seriously think about how to portray Saruman, need to make certain of a few facts of his fall from grace etc.