

Merry Christmas! Here is the patron-only present, my take on a WoW/HP crossover. Before you read this, remember this is but a teaser chapter!!! It will not be followed up on for a good, long while. I want at least two of my current stories done before I start another. With that being said, I did enjoy the world exploration I did here, so there is the chance I will indeed continue it at that point. The temp name for this fic is **Living Lives as Death's Avenger**.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Or... so Harry had thought.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOOO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"§I agree§," Harry answered blandly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“§Why?§”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Killing is all too easy when it comes to those beasts, and we have more than enough boar meat right now." Harry sighed. The past few weeks, he had toned down his spellwork to the point where he didn't kill everything that attacked him at last. It wasn't the animal's fault that they thought he was easy pickings or an enemy after all.

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

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

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

"Adrenaline. What does that mean?"

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Do you want to keep eating?"

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

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

“Wish me luck?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Have you actually ever seen one of those?”

“No, it just seemed the appropriate term.”

Harry chuckled, then glanced around them, deciding that this place would be a decent area for a camp, beginning to put out the rune stones he’d been making painstakingly over the last few weeks. *Cocking Nora, I wish my handwriting was better, I would think that would carry over to runes.* For every one ward stone he had been able to create Harry had gone through at least seven failures. “Do you think you can find us some mushrooms and some other herbs?” he asked Quetzal. “You’ve seen me do it often enough.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"I do not understand your fascination with them. They are just trees," Quetzal grunted, although he approved of the rest of the plan. With his and Harry's ability to blend in or turn invisible, with the forest around them they would be the next best thing to invisible unless they attacked.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Do you have someplace you want us to go?”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now however, his upper body muscles and arms were slowly becoming more built, actual, if small, muscles beginning to appear there, baby fat disappearing almost entirely. His skin too was now

slowly becoming tanned, ruddy with good health instead of somewhat pale from all the time he'd been forced to spend indoors at the Dursley's, and then of course during winter at Hogwarts. His endurance too was well up from where it had been. He could hike all day, even run for a while, with Quetzal hovering in the air behind him with a mixed Leviosa and Accio spell that acted like a lasso.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry and Quetzal traveled for several days more and Harry noticed as they did that the signs of habitation hadn't increased or decreased. He could still see occasionally signs of the Kaldorei, and their

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this little fight had apparently drawn attention, and at a hissed word of warning Quetzal Harry turned to look through the trees to one side of them as several other creatures charged. They were two-legged beings, their legs like those of goats, the fur covering their legs and waists, with more on their shoulders and arms, which were human-like save for their talons. One of them had hands which

seemed to be gleaming with purple and black magic around its hands, and Harry hissed in surprise as he thrust those hands forward, and a fireball rocketed towards Harry

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

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

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

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

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

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

With a scowl on his lips, Harry moved around the trees to where the harpy that he had stunned earlier had crashed to earth. Quetzal soon joined him, having pulled away from his own victim after tearing the creature's throat out. "Those were satyrs, in case you didn't know," the snake opined, his tongue flicking out and over his lips.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In his invasion of the Harpy's mind, Harry had learned that this was a forward scout group, part of a larger warband band. The warband had been on a raid against a group of creatures that were apparently called Furbolgs. These were the name of the bearlike creatures that Harry had seen on occasion in the distance. The warband had apparently consisted of more than fifty satyrs, accompanied by fifteen harpies, on an attack of a small village of the Furbolgs. The Furbolgs lived there in harmony, and apparently had even had contact with another group of sentients who Harry had not yet seen examples of, giant bull-like creatures that reminded Harry of a Minotaur almost. The name of that species had eluded Harry, and indeed, Harry counted himself lucky to have gotten all he had.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Now completely covered in invisibility cloak and Quetzal's chameleon ability respectively, the two of them moved in the direction the satyrs had come from, looking for any evidence of the way the forward scouts had come through the forest. They swiftly found it, a series of footprints leading deeper into the forest well off the direction from which Harry and Quetzal had been coming.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

{This is the point where I started to use Grammarly. Hopefully from now on you'll not see as many mistakes}

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

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

The hiding wizard noted that both of the speakers were marked by the bloody handprint on their shoulder, marking them as magic-users, and Harry wondered if magic-users represented some kind

of nobility among these creatures. Regardless, he picked them out, and the other six magic-users out of special targets, already preparing his first spell chain mentally. A spell chain, a series of spells tied one to another and then launched in a single flowing moment, was something he'd learned from Professor Flitwick before leaving Hogwarts for the last time.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

amount of their society for not being able to leave off using such around the same time his tribe had settled in their mountains.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOO

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

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

Or worse, the demigod thought to himself grimly.

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

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

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

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

OOOOOO

Carrying Quetzal, Harry raced through the woods for several hours as night fell, covered by Harry's Mufilatio so the noise of their passage couldn't give them away. As they moved through the forest as quickly as possible, Harry and Quetzal quickly found signs of what Harry was coming to think of as magical corruption. It wasn't like anything Harry had seen in his previous life, a

disease almost, a disease of the forest. Portions of the forest here and there, scattered at first, but then becoming more numerous as Harry raced through them, were marked by trees that simply looked unhealthy. Others had striations of black energy pulsing up their trunks from their roots. And here and there, he found bits of strange black stone.

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

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

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

As it was night, Harry carefully lit a small Lumos in his hand, then cast it, so the small light moved towards the tree, as Harry and Quetzal stayed away. Both of them stiffened, one in narrow-eyed thought, the other in growing fury. The stone was not natural. Instead, it seemed to have grown out of a skull, pressed into the tree's roots.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry watched for a few moments, as one of the male nymphs seems to shudder, his eyes blinking rapidly, and the blackness receding. This was not unnoticed by the satyrs, and one of them moved over, smirking as he cut his palm, clenching his hand over the creature's mouth, forcing him to drink the satyr's blood. *The blood itself must be tainted,* Harry thought, that was not good. Nor was the fact the male nymph thrashed and bucked before falling still again. Blood, barely visible from where Harry was, began to drip down from the ropes tied around the man.

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

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

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

Harry smiled wanly at that, and the two of them moved around the campsite, scouting it out. Together, they estimated there were at least four-hundred satyrs and nearly three-hundred harpies in the trees above. Most of them were not awake just yet, it being night now, but there was a strong guard all around. They weren't organized, but they made up for that in numbers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOOO

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

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

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

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

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

At that, Cenarius winced. Somehow, he didn't know how the satyrs had discovered a means of corrupting both the forest. This same means seemed to hide the corruption from his nature-fueled gaze. *The Old One, it must be. We will need to strengthen the Sentinels and*

patrol every part of the forest, not just the area around my people's or the Kaldorei's settlements.

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOO

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

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

Harry frowned, looking down at the work he'd been doing on summoning snakes and creating new wards stones. There were several dozen snakes all around him, but Harry had only

created two runic traps and cursed the haste with which he had used so many of the ones he had already prepared in his ambush before. It had proved to be overkill, and he couldn't make up the difference now.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

At this point, Harry also joined the fight, moving forward out of the woods, but still very well hidden under his invisibility cloak as he continued his magical attack. With one hand, Harry

sent out cutting spells, killing several of the magic-users among the satyrs, then moving to another position as a few others had seemingly seen where his spells that come from, lighting up that area of the forest with their fireballs.

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

It looked almost like a mustard kind of color but what it really was, was scattered sneezed powder and pepper spray in aerosol form. It was a very easy compound to make, and Harry, who had come up with this spell on his own, could create it in near-endless amounts without really taxing his abilities.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

With that break, Harry pulled his hood down, covering himself with his cloak and, dispelling his Protego, went on the attack began. He used the advantage of the tree cover to pound several more satyrs before the magic-users behind them could start to bracket his position again. Two of them died trying, but there were still sixteen of them, nearly all of them having come out after Harry.

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

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

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

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

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

Several of the cobras died, but a few of them were able to close, biting at hand, leg, or in one case, coiling and launching himself upwards to bite at the throat of one of the satyrs. The most damage was done by the enemy magic-user, who conjured up a blast of fire and flame and sent it heaving towards where Quetzal had been hissing. He ducked low, the blast missing him, but searing one of his fellow snakes to ash, along with the portkey-imbued stick. Now hissing even louder in fury, Quetzal knelt down on the ground, allowing his camouflage ability to activate, while his quills along his back stood up sharply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

A Protego spell appeared all around him, protecting Harry from several more fireballs, as he hurled the sword of Gryffindor through the air towards another magic-user, using a

Leviosa spell to control its flight to impact the spell user. The sword then twisted around, catching two more satyrs lightly. Allowing the poison to do with the work for him, Harry used an Accio spell to pull the sword back just in time as the Protego spell behind him disappeared, overwhelmed by the impact from several different fireballs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

More conjured animals appeared, and then, the snakes started to wind their way into the battle from behind. As the satyrs split their attention, Harry transfigured rock, changing it into yet another golem, and Harry quickly scaled its side, standing on its shoulder and lashing

out down at the satyrs. "I'll call it Hagrid mark two!" He giggled, somewhat insanely. There had been a lot of close calls when the satyrs started to circle him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“And what exactly is this?” Quetzal asked warily.

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOOO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOO

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

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

Harry had barely turned his head wearily upward before the harpies began to drop stones and spears down towards him. Others flew down, their talons outstretched as they clawed at the ground, killing snakes, their legs immune to the snakes' bites as another two went for Harry. Hagrid Mark 2 moved in front of Harry, taking those blows, but it was too slow

to attack the harpies in turn, and the voice of command shouted another word. In response, the golem came apart under some kind of wind spell.

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

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

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

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

OOOOOO

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

And every time he did deal with the harpies, Cenarius had to weep a little inside at how far the followers of Aviana had fallen since the War of the Ancients. Their fall after Aviana's death had been slow, and harpies had never been the most pleasant of neighbors. Because of

this, Cenarius and his allies had never realized that, with their patron demigod gone, that the Harpies too might succumb to the touch of the Old Ones. But they had, and now worked with those satyrs who too had turned aside from even the Burning Legion, eager to bring their fell deities back to the world of Azeroth.

Harpy carcasses fell to the ground or were simply being torn asunder by the number of arrows that struck them. And as his sons continued the attack, Cenarius turned his attention to the dome of Arcane magic over the four people within. None of them had conjured it into being, and as he watched, the energy of the spell began to flag under renewed assault by the harpies. With a grimace, Cenarius created an internal dome of dirt and tree roots to further protect the prisoners. Then he turned his attention back on the harpies, swatting a spell out of the sky and tossing back another bolt of pure Nature Magic, crashing into the head of a magic-using harpy.

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

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

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

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

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

One of the Keepers, the one Zaetar was helping along, declared, "I thought I saw something. I think I woke up for just a second before the harpies attacked. I saw a, a young...

Kaldorei? No. I don't know. He had the same building as a night elf youth. But it didn't have ears, whatever it was. That's all I can say, master."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

OOOOOOO

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

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

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

Weak as he was, Quetzal had to do the hunting, although Harry was more than willing to live off jerky. But Quetzal was not, and was often gone, coming back with a paralyzed boar

occasionally or smaller animals, still too large for Quetzal to eat without Harry around to cut chunks off for him.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In the other direction, they hit the jackpot, as if the forest was rewarding Harry for that forethought. The stream led into a river which had several deep points and a ford upstream. The stream continued on, leading up towards where Harry and Quetzal had seen a mountain range begin when they had climbed a tree. And here, where the tiny stream met the larger river, was a large stone jutting out into the river in the center of a series of even larger trees overlooking the area.

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

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

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

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

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

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

After fishing, Harry would spend the morning going over runes, practicing them diligently. It was during this time that he had his first real breakthrough on runes: he created an intent-based ward around the area. It was primarily made to keep away enemies, but it was a step towards Harry's coveted anti-animal array.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Harry gently flicked the wolf cub that was nibbling his fingers on the nose, then as it growled at him, quickly moved his hand behind his head, ruffling its ears, causing it to pounce on his hand and playfight with him. Harry chuckled, reached into his nearby trunk, and slowly pulled out some jerky, which he held down in front of the Wolf that had been nibbling on his fingers.

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

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

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

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

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

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

There was a tremendous splash, and Harry whooped as he surfaced, doing the backstroke for a second as he looked up at the sky above. “While I can’t say I like the speed which I was hustled into this new life, I can’t complain about the results,” he murmured, grinning to himself, before turning his attention to the nearby yipping of wolf cubs.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“Interesting, rebirth? Not resurrected?”

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

“A creature of rebirth and light,” Cenarius nodded slowly in thought, his antlers gently scraping along the underside of a few branches above his head. “Yet you are not from around here. Are you a planar traveler?” The question came out hesitantly, the demigod suddenly worried. After all, the Burning Legion had come from outside of this world. But Harry was certainly no demon, nor did he feel as if he would ever have truck with, there was note tainted Harry that Cenarius could discern, and he with his connection to Nature Magic, Cenarius certainly would have felt it.

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

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

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

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

“You’re not concerned about that? I want to be clear on this,” Harry went on hesitantly.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

In this, the two of them gained one another's trust to a greater degree, and slowly, as the journey continued, friendship too. It wasn't quite a friendship of equals. Cenarius, after all, was not mortal in any way. He was a demigod and could, perhaps, live forever. Harry, for all his ability to simply be rebirthed, still had the mindset of a mortal, and Cenarius could see his eyes cross every time Cenarius idly mentioned how long it had been since the War of the Ancients, let alone how long it had been since Cenarius himself had been formed from the mating of Elune and Marrone. Moreover, Cenarius was far more powerful, magically and physically, than Harry. And that wasn't something that would change as Harry's physical body grew.

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

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

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

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

the little creature that saved Anthelia and Neerja!? He's so cute I just want to pick him up and hug him!"

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

Watching this, Cenarius boomed out laughter as his oldest daughter Lunara squeezed his new friend as if he was a toy. "Now now Lunara, remember, other species are sometimes very breakable. You can't just pick them up and shake them willy-nilly. But in answer to your actual question, yes, this young man," he emphasized the words as if Harry was a night elf of similar age, "is the one who did all that amazing magic that saved six of our folk."

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

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

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

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

"Accursed hormones," he muttered, shaking his head, and Cenarius chuckled, squeezing his shoulder gently and moving Harry around his still giggling daughter. "Concentrate on the

Nature Magic beneath your feet, Lunara. Pull it up into your body, and you will be able to dispel Harry's little charm."

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

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

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

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

"Harry," Cenarius asked again, still smirking.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

As he looked away, Lunara gasped, shaking her head. With her Nature Magic, she could discern things about Harry that Harry himself couldn't say. She could see the Death magic

within him, the Life magic within him, signs of his being related to a bird somehow, and signs of a serpent within his body too. "Wow! So, how old are you really? And what are you really? You're definitely not a vrykul like the Kaldorei court used to keep as exotic attractions back in the bad old days."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Over the next year, Harry stayed in that dwelling place with Cenarius, learning from him, or Lunara, who though flighty was actually quite a good teacher. During that time, Harry got to know Cenarius' sons as well, Zaetar and Remulos. All the demigod's daughters, who were collectively called dryads, seemed to get along with Harry quite well. Like Lunara, they all treated him somewhere between a toy and a child at first, then a toy and a playmate later. But his relationship with Cenarius' sons was more formal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Cenarius had been immensely pleased by how much progress Harry made, somewhat astonished by it, in point of fact, but he knew that Harry had to have a change of pace before

they could continue their training. So when Harry came to him and confessed that he wanted to take a few months' breaks, it being summer again here in this area of the forest, Cenarius acquiesced before thinking deeply.

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

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

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

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

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

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

But he did look as if he was listening to Cenarius, who smiled faintly. "Beyond that, you have not tried to get in touch with your basilisk side either, beyond speaking Parseltongue, which I understand was an ability of your human body, not something you received upon resurrecting in this new form. You need to accept those two sides of you, Harry before you can

truly take your learning of Nature Magic beyond where you have already. If not, part of your body and spirit will continue to reject it, whatever you do.”

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

“They do not. The frost giants have just enough intelligence to not be considered animals, but not enough intelligence to actually converse with others beyond their own kind,” Cenarius scowled, shaking his head. “I do not even know how numerous they are in that range. I just know that they are a threat to travelers moving between the Kaldorei settlements at the base of those mountains.”

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

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

OOOOOO

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

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

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

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

As he walked, Cenarius was met with awe and delight by many of the Kaldorei, who bowed, clapping their hands in front of them as they offered reverence towards him, which

made Cenarius somewhat uncomfortable. He had a strong relationship with the Sentinels, the Sisters of Elune, a few other more warlike or explorative groups, and the druids. But most of the druids were locked in the Emerald Dream, doing battle with the corruption within alongside the Green Dragon Flight under his stepmother, Ysera's, leadership.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Tyrande cocked her head thoughtfully, staring up at the far larger Cenarius, then nodded slowly, a smile appearing on her face once more that seemed to banish the fears and concerns of leadership from her face. "It seems as if Shan'do Cenarius has found another student, perhaps?"

Chuckling, Cenarius shook his head. "Perhaps."

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

OOOOOOO

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Eventually, they found a flat bit of ground around a single tree before the mountain again became extremely steep, although there was a bit of a dirt area they could have followed. And normally, the two travelers would have done just that, pushing on into the night, not tired just yet thanks to their Nature Magic given endurance. And indeed, Cenarius had slowly started to tell them to do so in preparation for the time when Harry would interact with the Kaldorei, who were largely nocturnal.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

Luckily, the two of them were not bothered that night, nor the two days following. Yet at night, Harry felt violence once more occurring someplace nearby. Something was hunting something else and taking great delight in the killing. And after that second night, Harry got a better idea of the minds of the creatures involved. He could barely sense one of them, a mass of anger, fury, delight in the carnage, and animal-like cunning. The other was the mind of an intelligent predator, but a predator who had suddenly found itself pray, panicking, fearful, yet snarling defiance as it tried to think its way out of whatever trap he had discovered himself in.

Why the phrase snarling occurred to Harry, he didn't know, but at that point, Harry made the decision that the two of them would start traveling at night through the mountainous

forest, resting during the day. "Whoever is out there is active at night, and I think we need to figure out what's going on."

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

But this didn't help him understand what was being bellowed at him from the giants above him. The Giants were not in point of fact conversing. They were simply bellowing and hooting and hollering in bellicose laughter. It was evident to Harry that while possessing brains, they were not truly bright. They were human-shaped, but they certainly didn't have any kind of

native intelligence beyond that of perhaps Neanderthals. And beyond that, they were consumed with hatred of Harry for some reason. The very sight of him seems to infuriate them.

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

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

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

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

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

In this manner, the two friends saw several other bands of the frost giants moving around. They definitely seem to be the dominant creature in these mountains and also seemed to just love chaos and violence. Most of the time, they were fighting one another. Other times, they spotted some small animal and rushed off after it, hooting and bashing their massive clubs on the ground into rocks or trees indiscriminately. Yet Harry only rarely saw them actually eat the things they killed, and when they did, the frost giants ate their squashed prey raw.

Harry saw them do this to goats, squirrels, even at one time of flight of birds. The birds all got away. The rest didn't and disappeared down a frost giant's throat. Even squirrels

couldn't always get away if the frost giants surrounded them and bashed everything within the circle.

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

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

"Truly, I believe much the same Harry Potter. Cenarius hinted at the fact that I would be having an interesting meeting if I came up to these mountains, although he did not tell me anything about you, wishing I would make my own determination about you." As she spoke, Tyrande was studying Harry from head to toe. She had seen the shrunken titans before, back in the rain of Azshara, when several of the high elves had taken them as pets or simple objects of amusement.

But there was something in Harry's face that none of those pets had ever had: a self-awareness and intelligence to go with the magic he had previously shown. And while that magic had been indeed Arcane, he wasn't a Kaldorei, and he certainly hadn't used any spells big enough to attract... undue attention. Moreover, the spells he used seem to come from within himself, not powered by an external source of mana.

But in the same vein, Harry looked young, far too young to wield that kind of power. He was perhaps 14, perhaps as much a 16-year-old if his body grew as a Kaldorei's would, and she could tell by his bone structure that he had a good bit of growing to do yet. He looked somewhat handsome, even without ears, and in the light of the moon, those emerald eyes gleamed amazingly.

It was those very same eyes, and his former ruthlessness against the Frost giants, which made Tyrande wonder about the evidence of her eyes compared to how old Harry Potter really was. Looking at him with her senses as a priestess of the Moon Goddess, there was no doubt in Tyrande's mind that this was the stone in the pond that Elune had told her about. And as she thought that, and what it might mean for her people, a stream of moonlight broke through a cloud directly above Harry, the bathing both him, Tyrande, and the scene in moonlight, as if Elune was blessing this meeting, and what they had done.

Tyrande smiled at that and set aside her worries about this young being using Arcane power as he had. If the goddess was willing to look beyond that, then Tyrande would look beyond the prejudices of her own people and do the same. "That is much better, Harry Potter, thank you." She would have said more, but one of the cubs had just pumped into her leg, and she knelt down, rubbing the little cub's ears. "Hello, little one. How do you do?"

This was followed by another, larger frostsaber moving to stand in front of her. It was the same one who had spoken to Harry before, and Tyrande noticed that it had faint marks around its head, which could almost look like a crown. The hub looked up at her, and she looked at it in, ruffling it's fur as the older Frostsaber spoke, interrupting her and Harry. Luckily Harry had already hit Tyrande with his spell.

"//We thank you as well, Lady. We know that the Kaldorei are protectors of the forest, but this was not your fight. And yet, you helped to rescue my clan and me from certain death. You and the young magic-user. As such, we owe you a debt.//"

"No debt," Harry said, shaking his head. "I would've done the same for anything being attacked by those frost giants. I've tried to communicate with them, and they're just smart enough to be deadly, not smart enough to make peace with."

"Truly, Harry Potter speaks for me as well. I saw you are in trouble, and I decided to get involved," Tyrande added, grateful that Harry had hit her with the Lingua Franca spell as the frostsaber started to speak.

“//And yet, my people elsewhere are still in danger. The frost giants breed like rats, and they have wiped out many other species in these mountains. You will not find bears, wolves, nor even the majestic Roc in these mountains any longer. The Rocs fled, the bears and wolves died. Only my own people have been able to fight back, and even then, that simply slowed our destruction.” The frostsaber scowled, showing more than a bit of fang, before going on with a sad note to his growl. “Therefore, we must ask for your aid further. But we would not do so without offering some manner of recompense.”//”

Tyrande didn't even look up at the king as he was speaking, staring down at the face of the young frostsaber, then very gently picking her up and rubbing her nose against the young female cub's nose, who purred happily.

At that sight, the king's tone changed to one of amusement. “//What we would offer is an alliance between our focus and the Kaldorei. We know that you Kaldorei ride lesser tigers and panthers into battle. We would offer ourselves as such mounds, with my young daughter, Shy-rotam, becoming yours.”//”

“//Yes!//” the little cub growled. “//You smell good, you have strength, I wish to be with you, to fight with you!//”

“I agree,” Tyrande answered instantly, before tapping the nose of the little frostsaber and smiling up at the king. “Although she is too short for me to use as a mount just yet. I will have to teach her her other ways to fight beside me.”

“//Good!//” the young Shy-rotam purred, nuzzling her head against Tyrande's face.

“I agree too,” Harry said, “and you don't have to offer an alliance with me or anything. I think helping you is why Cenarius sets me up here. Well that, and meeting this one,” he added, bowing grandly towards the Kaldorei woman. “Although I would like the name of my new companion before we get down to planning this expedition.”

She smiled back, nodding her head. “I apologize for my momentary lapse of manners Harry Potter, student of Shan'do Cenarius. My name is Tyrande Whisperwind, high priestess of the Elune, the moon goddess who shines above us even now. And I believe Harry Potter, that this is the beginning of a most interesting acquaintance.”

End Chapter