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DRAGON HERO

THE CURSED DRAGON ARMOR

Prologue

The sound of metal hitting bone filled the air. The heroes were fighting their way through the hordes of undead troops. The old dwarf cleaved through them effortlessly, getting more impatient with each swing. "Xum'gol is a coward to put this fodder in front of us!" yelled the old dwarf.

A man in decorated white armor chimed in while swinging a flaming sword, "Evil is always cowardly!" The two warriors pierced through the ranks of undead minions and made their way closer to a dark and creepy fortress. Visibility was somewhat limited that dark and dreary night, apart from the glowing light created by their wizard friend, Falstrid, upon a ledge high above the combat below. While the light aided his allies, it seemed to weaken the undead forces within the area.

"Wotmire! Look out!" yelled the man in white armor as a hairy creature jumped down onto the dwarf. The dwarf turned to see the chogul coming down on him with a crude short sword. The dwarf quickly extended his left arm toward the filthy beast, exposing a metal blade where once had been his left hand which he had lost in a battle long ago. The force of the falling chogul aided the blade, piercing its torso. It let out loud howl of pain. The dwarf dropped his arm, allowing the corpse to slide off and turned his attention to the undead horde before him. "Filthy beast!" he exclaimed as he raised his axe and returned his attention to his previous targets. "Clagmir! Two of them!" yelled the old dwarf. The man in white armor turned and swung his fire sword slicing through the two choguls, killing them instantly.

"Since when does Xum'gol hire choguls?" asked Wotmire while he fended off some of the undead warriors. A large fireball crashed into a group of the enemy creating a violent explosion. "I'm clearing the path! You two move ahead. I'll take care of the rest of these minions!" yelled Falstrid as he charged up another spell.

"Thanks!" said the two warriors as they sprinted toward the fortress. They encountered a few stray undead soldiers which were quickly dispatched by these two seasoned heroes. They forced open the large doors and rushed in. The hallway was dark and empty with a strong smell of dust and dampness in the air. Wotmire chuckled and joked, "Don't tell me he used all his men outside." Clagmir ran down the hall, "Come on! We must hurry before it's too late!" Wotmire readily followed.

The two heroes made their way through the dark, dank halls and worked their way upstairs to the central tower. When they finally arrived, they broke through the doors to the final chamber. They rushed into a large room with a massive altar in the middle. There was a man in heavy black armor standing on the altar, his face nothing more than a skull with glowing red eyes. His body gave off a faint green fiery aura. He emitted a creepy laugh and boasted in an unnatural voice, "You are too late to stop me!" He raised his arms into the air, and a bright blue and red swirl started to form above the center of the altar. Clagmir charged toward the altar in full fury. Xum'gol pointed his left hand at him and fired a black bolt of lightning at Clagmir. Clagmir quickly covered with his shield but was still sent reeling back.

"You think you can actually stop me?" laughed Xum'gol. "Bah!" yelled Wotmire who seemed to want something clever to say but ended up with just a loud sound. He ran in with his axe held high. "Ha!" Xum'gol blasted another black bolt of lightning at the dwarf. The dwarf turned and barely dodged the bolt, and losing his balance in the process. The dwarf tried to regain his footing and charged at the villain. Xum'gol raised his left hand. It began to glow dark red. Wotmire ran in closer to Xum'gol and lifted his axe, ready for a heavy blow. The dwarf got into range and lowered his axe only to hit a faint red wall surrounding Xum'gol. Xum'gol clenched his left hand into a fist. The red wall quickly darkened and sent the dwarf flying into the air. The dwarf hit the wall with his back and fell to the

ground with a loud thud. His axe fell a few feet from him.

Xum'gol laughed at the two fallen heroes. "Now to finish you off!" He began to chant, powering up a blue orb in his left hand. "Don't worry, your death will be swift," he laughed. The blue orb grew and pulsed. He then lifted back his arm, readying himself to hurl it at the two heroes. A bolt of lightning struck his hand, disrupting his attack. "Ugh! What the...?" he cried in anger.

The old wizard walked into the chamber with his staff glowing, "Now it's my turn!"

Xum'gol let out an angry grunt and began chanting again. Falstrid chanted as well. Soon Xum'gol produced a large blue glowing mass of ice. He launched it at Falstrid. Falstrid quickly tapped the ground with his staff and the glowing projectile shattered in front of him. "Enough!" roared Xum'gol. He then fired a black bolt of lightning at Falstrid who once again repelled the attack with a quick stamp of his staff.

"Your evil magic is useless against me!" Falstrid said as a faint smile grew upon his face. Xum'gol grunted and fired yet another black bolt at him. Once again Falstrid countered. "You think your counter spells can stop me, do you?" questioned Xum'gol. He then began moving his left hand around making signs in the air. Falstrid's smile faded as he quickly began a new chant. Xum'gol's left hand began to glow dark purple and he laughed to himself. "Foolish mortal, you may stop some of my spells but you are still no match for me!". He quickly clenched his left hand into a fist and the dark purple light shattered.

Falstrid screamed in pain and fell to his knees. He still tried to resume his casting and reached for his staff. "I'm... still not finished..." muttered Falstrid as he slammed his hand to his chest and a white energy rushed throughout his body. The pain immediately ceased and he lifted himself to his feet.

Xum'gol just watched in amusement. "So you can dispel it as well... guess you are not such a useless old man after all". Xum'gol looked up and paused for a moment. "I guess I have no other choice but use it after all." Falstrid's eyes grew wide and he gasped in fear. He quickly started chanting in hope of deflecting his enemy's spell. Xum'gol watched and laughed. Then Xum'gol raised his hand and began chanting. A dull red glow spread over Xum'gol. He then turned his palm toward Falstrid.

Falstrid quickly put his staff up in defense. The red glow rushed out of Xum'gol's body through his hand then shattered. The ceiling of the chamber began to rip apart. Chunks of stone and wood from the roof flew out the hole in the ceiling. A strong gust of wind rushed in and formed a swirling vortex. Falstrid grabbed his staff and struggled with the force of the wind. A beam of darkness fired down from the vortex and hit Falstrid. Falstrid struck his staff upon the floor and created a light blue field around him. The dark beam shattered the protective field and hit Falstrid. He fell to the floor lifeless. Xum'gol laughed loudly.

The spell Xum'gol had used exhausted a lot of energy. He decided to get back to his summoning. He would conserve the rest of his energy to summon the arch demon.

"I am not through with you, villain!" Clagmir muttered as he struggled to get up. Xum'gol stared at him in surprise. Clagmir stood and pointed his sword at Xum'gol. He glared at him and yelled, "You will not summon the foul demon into this world!"

Xum'gol stared at the hero slowly advancing toward him. He still focused on his summoning spell. "You can't stop me now, human! Soon, I will summon the arch demon! He will do my bidding, and this world will have no choice but to bow before me or die!" laughed Xum'gol. His excitement grew as the spell began to create a rift above the altar. "Look! It is already too late!" Xum'gol laughed, "Soon it will open and I'll be unstoppable!"

Xum'gol chanted loudly for the final stages of his summon. Clagmir, fighting his pain, ran toward Xum'gol. He pointed his fiery sword and charged. The sword hit the red wall. Xum'gol ignored the threat and carried on with his sinister task. The altar began to shake as the vortex grew.

"I will not let you succeed, villain!" screamed Clagmir as he painfully forced the sword through the

magical wall. Xum'gol turned his head and gazed in fear as the sword penetrated his wall and lunged at his flank. The magical sword burned through the blackened armor and pierced Xum'gol's side. Xum'gol grunted in pain and staggered back. "Gahhhhhhhhhh! My summon!" he screamed in torment. The vortex shook and twirled. Xum'gol backhanded Clagmir's face. Clagmir, already weakened, fell from the impact. Xum'gol stepped up and tried to regain control of the summon. Clagmir watched in horror as the vortex gate began to open. Xum'gol exulted, "Its opening! My minion is entering this world!" Just then, Wotmire awoke to witness the failure of their quest. He stared in disbelief as the vortex gate opened...

Chapter 1

I hate job hunting! Filling out applications gets so tedious especially when you end up getting multiple choices where there are no real right answers. After doing so many applications, you see repeat questions as you go. Still very annoying and I haven't had any luck in finding a job for well over a year now.

Perhaps I should introduce myself. My name is Blake. I am twenty five years old and still live at home. Most of my friends live out of state and are either married or in college. I don't have a girlfriend... in fact my luck with women has been legendarily bad. It isn't like I am a bad looking guy or do anything really stupid around them. I just have awful luck and it's been years since I've seen any that are remotely decent to even talk to. Sadly, any girls I liked growing up either have a boyfriend or I was just too shy to even talk to them. I have yet to even kiss a girl which is something most guys would never admit.

Not having a job or a girlfriend or much of a social life sucks. I find it a bit hard to make new friends anyway. I am a bit of an oddball. When I've had friends around we would play video games and board games or play volley ball or even spar with padded swords which is quite fun and a bit nerdy. I do get into nerdy things, but I've always done badly in school. My brain runs differently than most and I'm not the biggest reader there is by a long shot. I enjoy outdoors stuff but, even though I am of a slimmer build, I am still out of shape. One of these days I am going to exercise more.

I am not much of a fighter. I do well when I spar with my friends (even those that take some forms of martial arts) though I get tired after a few rounds. As for real fights, I avoid them as much as I can. I have a little bit of a temper; my last fight-I sort of got crazy and ended up scaring myself. It's not like I'm all that strong; I have a decent threshold of pain but I'd rather not do anything to test that.

I just finished filling out the application and headed back to my pickup truck. Not a fancy truck by any means-there's not even any paint left on the hood. I picked it up real cheap because it was totaled once before. At least there's no threat of anyone stealing it. The truck runs fine and it gets me where I need to go. I let a long sigh and stared at the parking lot. Not my ideal job, working at some hardware store with low pay, but it is a job and will get family off my back.

Speaking of family, my mom wanted me to drop off some boxes filled with mystery novels that she and her friends pass around. The bad part is that her friend lives up in the hills and way across town. No matter, I didn't pay for the gas and have to earn my keep somehow. Living at home still isn't great but it isn't bad either. I try to help out when I can but still feel a bit of a burden without a job and spending my free time at my computer watching old movies. I glanced back at the hardware store. I kind of doubt they would hire me anyways.

My town is not known for great drivers. I used to be nervous when I first started driving until I realized that I was better than a good deal of them. Apparently, to some people, new cars don't have blinkers. "Turn already!" I vented loudly. Driving alone offers the luxury of being able to express your anger. As I watched the car in front of me making a complete stop before turning, I made a list of all the things I needed to do that day. After taking the box of books to my mom's friend, I needed to take out the trash and water the plants, but that was about it.

After a few more red lights, I managed to get closer to the residential area. The hills where my mom's friend lived were still a fair distance but I didn't mind driving up there. It was one of the only areas around that was covered in trees and had some form of wild life. It had been a long time since I last

went camping. I think the last time was when I was in boy scouts. I made it to Eagle Scout. It is one of the few things I am proud of. ~~Not having any friends around makes camping a bit less appealing.~~ I might have a friend or two around this summer and maybe plan something then.

I left the busy streets and turned onto the road that led up into the hills. Seeing only a few scattered houses and lush green trees and shrubs put me more at ease. Last week's rain really helped make the place look pretty. It was such a nice road to drive through, but something had been bothering me... I really needed to go pee!

I gritted my teeth and bore with it until I reached my mom's friend's house. I thought I'd just ask her if I could use her bathroom when I delivered the books. By the time I parked my car I could barely walk. There weren't any cars in the driveway but might have been one or two in the garage. I bit my lower lip and carried the books to the front door. I rang the doorbell and waited. Nothing! I rang it again and still no sound came from the other side of the door. *Crap!* I really needed to go! I knocked on the door a few times and, after an agonizing minute, sat the books by the door and jogged towards the truck.

Driving through the winding road while trying to hold it in is not something you want to do. There is no way I was going to make it back home on time. Coming up was a large shoulder where I could pull over. If I saw no signs of other drivers and hiked down the bank off the side of the road, no one would even see me. That was my plan!

The only sounds I could hear were a few birds and maybe a distant plane flying overhead. Good! I jogged across the road and worked my way down the slope. The dirt was still moist from last week's rain but there were ivy and trees to prevent me from tumbling down. I took several more steps until I was safe from view. There was a large oak tree that looked like a toilet to me. I unzipped my pants and aimed. I pressed my left hand on the side of the tree. At this moment I was feeling pure bliss! That was until I was interrupted by the sound of thunder.

I looked up and saw dark clouds forming overhead. There was hardly a cloud in the sky a little while ago and now there was a swirling mass of dark clouds directly over my head. A bit weird, but I guess I wouldn't need to water the plants today after all. Red and blue veins started forming in the dark clouds. *What the heck?* The veins branched out all over the cloud from the center. As the veins moved outward, the center of the cloud started to glow brightly. My jaw dropped as I saw a bright yellow light forming at the center of the strange cloud. A loud cracking sound echoed in the air as the light shot forth a beam right on me.

My body felt like every hair was standing on end and a million pins were sticking in my skin all at once. It only seemed to last for a few seconds and then everything went dark. My body became limp and I fell to the floor. I could feel cold stone beneath me which really caused my heart to beat faster. The air was cool and everything felt out of place.

I felt really dizzy but slowly worked my way up. The atmosphere just felt completely different. I couldn't put my finger on it, but something wasn't right.

A strange voice caught my attention, "It is here! You all have failed! Now witness..."

Wait! My vision adjusted to the darkness and standing in front of me I saw a figure wearing black armor. Its face looked like something from a horror film. The head was nothing but a skull with glowing red eyes. It lowered its arms and seemed to be staring at me as if it was staring into my soul. At that moment I realized that my zipper was still open.

While making a mess in front of some upset looking, undead creature, thoughts ran through my head. How did I get here and what was this place? Was it some elaborate prank? Was I on TV? I really should stop urinating!

“This... what are you?!” the armored skeleton shouted at me in a strange voice.

I opened my mouth but couldn't figure out what to say. I was fixated on his strange eyes. They looked like tiny red flames lit in the eye sockets. That looked more impressive than cheap lights used for some Halloween decoration.

The armored skeleton turned toward his left, “Curse you! I will incinerate your bones!”

To my right laid a man in white armor. He looked middle aged with a trimmed beard and blood running down his face. He was breathing heavily and didn't appear to have the strength to even lift himself up. I took a deep breath and zipped up my pants, “Um... where am I?” The armored skeleton turned toward me and looked to be really ticked off.

It lifted its arm towards me and opened its palm, “I will first start with you!”

His armored hand started to glow a dull purple. The light became brighter and brighter then shot out several tiny particles towards me. The particles quickly hit my body but did nothing. That was weird. I glanced around to see some form of light from some projection machine but saw nothing.

“What?!” The armored skeleton cried out in surprise. It took a step forward and grabbed my shoulder.

“Dude!” I exclaimed at his surprisingly strong grip. The hand started to glow again with some yellowish flame. I was afraid that the flame would start to burn me but was again surprised it did nothing.

The armored skeleton stood there dumbfounded, “I can't be weakened! How can you resist?!”

He grabbed tighter and I shoved him, “Stop it man!” The armored skeleton grunted loudly and stepped back.

He really looked ticked off. “Something strange about you... but I will erase this mistake...” he muttered while raising both of his hands to the air.

A large mass of fire formed between his hands. I could feel the heat from it and something told me that this was real. My jaw dropped and I took a step back. To my surprise, I fell off a ledge about three or four feet and landed on my back.

My back started to hurt but luckily I didn't bump my head. I laid there staring back at an even larger fireball. This... is real?! What the heck?! I raised my hand towards the armored skeleton as it held the large fireball with one hand. It stared at me and was fully prepared to toss it right at me. Not good!

From the corner of my eye I saw an object fly past me toward him. It hit the right side of his armored chest and penetrated like the armor was nothing. The skeleton screamed with its strange voice and leaned back from the pain. A large axe stuck deeply into it. I turned to see the source of it and saw a short man with a long beard, breathing heavily.

The man grunted, “Take that, Xum'gol!”

The armored skeleton grasped the handle of the axe and tried to pull it out. A strange purple liquid spewed out of his wound then evaporated quickly. “I... am not defeated! I will... return!” the armored skeleton stuttered as he reached for a yellow gem from his belt. The gem exploded in a blinding light. I couldn't see for a few seconds but as soon as my vision came back, he was gone. All that was left was the axe lying on the ground where he stood.

My mouth was agape. I wasn't sure if I should be freaking out or impressed. Maybe this was some elaborate show that I somehow had been a part of. I blinked a few times. “Okay... what the heck happened?” There was no answer. I took a deep breath and laid back down, waiting for someone to come out to tell me I was part of some prank show.

“Curses! He vanished!” the short man shouted in an angry tone.

I lifted my head and saw him walking over towards the platform where I was. The man was in fine silver chain mail and appeared almost as wide as he was tall. He picked up his axe and spit on the

ground.

~~The stout man walked over and helped the other man up. The injured man wore mostly all white armor with a strange shield that almost looked like it was glowing. "Get up Clagmir, you aren't dead yet!"~~
the stout man said.

The man in white armor coughed a bit but finally got himself to stand, "Thank you Wotmire... did he get away?"

The stout man nodded, "Yes, but we at least left him a nasty wound!"

Clagmir smiled, "At least we stopped him for now." He wiped some blood from his face and looked at me, "What the..."

I helped myself up and looked back at two sets of eyes. They both stared at me as if I didn't belong... I fully agreed.

"What are you doing here?" Clagmir asked.

Wotmire shook his head, "I am not sure, but he came out of nowhere in front of Xum'gol."

Clagmir leaned down and picked up a sword, "That means..." he turned and pointed it right at me, "he summoned a demon!"

Clagmir took a few steps while keeping the sword straight at me. To my surprise the blade burst into flames.

I lifted my hands up, "Whoa! Um... I mean no harm!" That blade looked real and I knew that flame was real.

"Clagmir!" a voice shouted from behind me. My eyes were too fixated on the fiery sword to see who was.

"He can't be a demon, you should know that!" the voice called out. Clagmir lowered his sword and looked toward the source.

"How can we be so sure Falstrid?" I turned and saw an old man with a red robe.

The man appeared to be around seventy years old with almost pure white facial hair and broken glasses. He leaned heavily on his staff to pull himself back up. His face was dirty with blood and ash.

"Xum'gol appeared too upset for his agenda to succeed. This does not look like a demon," the old man lectured.

Clagmir stared back at me and pointed his sword back at me, "How can we be sure?"

This guy didn't seem happy that I was there. Sweat ran down the side of my face, "Hey! Um... I am not a demon..."

Clagmir just stared at me and his sword started to burst into flames again. I jumped back in case the flames were to shoot right at me.

Wotmire walked over towards Clagmir, "Easy there Clagmir! You are scaring the boy!"

Clagmir sighed and lowered his weapon. Wotmire took a step and pointed a blade at me, "What should we do now, Falstrid?"

This guy calmed the other guy down but he pointed a blade at me anyway. Wait... was that his hand?

The stout man's hand looked like it was replaced by some short sword. He didn't appear to be so much keeping it at me but more pointing at me.

The old man slowly walked over, "Let me have a closer look at him."

The old man had large bushy eyebrows but his beard was well trimmed. He took off his glasses to wipe them on his red robe then put them back on. One of the lenses was completely broken. I just stood there and stared at him as he slowly inspected me. He rubbed his chin and tapped me on the head with his staff. I flinched and rubbed my head.

"Hey..."

The old man said, "There is something very strange about you but you don't seem to be evil." Falstrid smiled and extended his hand, "I am Falstrid!" He pointed to the other two, "That's Clagmir, and that is Wotmire."

Clagmir just raised a brow and gave me a cold look. Wotmire gave a friendly nod. There was an awkward silence until I got the hint, "Oh! Um... my name is Blake!" Wotmire chuckled, "Blake? Strange name, never heard of it."

Falstrid rubbed his chin, "Not a name I am familiar with... where are you from?" I scratched the back of my head, "Uh... Oregon..."

The three of them looked at each other. "Oregon? Is that by Lyonus Empire?"

Wotmire grunted while looking at his two friends for an answer.

Falstrid scratched his head, "I don't have the foggiest where that is... we should head back to our mounts."

I followed them outside the strange room and down a flight of stairs. A smell took my attention. There was a faint smell of something rotting followed by a strong smell of dust which made the air very stuffy. Each step on the old rug created another cloud of dust. The three of them walked in front of me but they occasionally turned their heads to make sure I followed them. They didn't act like they expected me to follow them, but really where else would I go? The place might have been really nice except for the mass amounts of cobwebs and the smell. That was my thought until we went outside. My mouth opened and moved as if I shouted out words but couldn't think what to say. The smell of rot became almost overwhelming. All over the place were scattered corpses! Some were just bone and some were a bit more fleshy and ripe. The stench nearly caused me to throw up right on the spot. I gagged a bit and even spit a little.

"Try not to breath in too much" Wotmire said with a serious expression.

I pulled my shirt over my nose but it didn't really help at all.

I followed them through the piles of corpses. It felt like I was walking through a mine field. Looking down made my stomach turn but stepping on something that felt like mushy flesh was even worse. There is no way this was fake! I had smelled some awful things including dead things but... this couldn't be healthy! I was really curious about why we were walking over a large number of rotting bodies, but I feared opening my mouth would welcome harmful gasses. I held my breath and followed as quickly as I could.

My effort halted as soon as I found something even freakier.

"What the heck is that!?" I cried out.

Down below me laid a strange creature. It appeared like some sort of ape with the ears and mouth of a wolf. It was obviously dead but just seeing it staring back at me with lifeless eyes and sharp teeth made me glad I had already gone potty.

"What? Oh choguls..." Wotmire mentioned.

Chills ran through me, "Choguls? What are they?"

The three looked at each other and looked at me. Falstrid raised a brow, "You don't know what a chogul is?"

"They are filthy beasts that infest the entire place (land)!" Clagmir explained.

Wotmire took over, "Dumb and weak, but they always come in numbers, nasty things."

My mouth was agape and I just nodded. I couldn't even produce a coherent thought at the moment. This doesn't make any sense...

I followed them out of the pile of death and up a rugged dirt road. The air was somewhat more breathable but still the smell haunted me. We reached three horses and a small covered wagon. Two of the horses were covered in some form of barding while the other stood right next to the wagon. Wotmire leaned back and took a few deep breaths, "We may not have destroyed the wretch, but at

least we stopped him.”

Clagmir grunted, “It’s a disgrace that I couldn’t stop him myself.”

Falstrid shook his head, “Don’t be so hard on yourself. At least we bought time to find out more about his evil scheme and to gather a larger force.”

Wotmire walked over to his horse which was a breed I had never seen. It was a sturdier build of horse but shorter, just like Wotmire. “I hate to depart, but my people need me. Farewell friends!” Wotmire said as he climbed on. He detached his prosthetic blade hand and put on one that looked like some iron gauntlet which I thought was really cool. He waved his fake hand, “Farewell to you too, Blake! Hope you get home to your town of Oregon!” He then rode off.

Town of Oregon?

“I don’t know where your home is but there isn’t anything west of here other than mountains” Clagmir told me.

I looked over toward the west and back at every direction and shrugged, “I really have no clue where I am.”

Falstrid rubbed his chin, “Well, Halatross is east of here. Does that help?”

I shook my head, “I have never heard of it.”

Clagmir chuckled a little, “Maybe he is from way out in the Lyonus Empire.” He climbed up on his horse which had white barding that matched his armor. There was some strange icon on it that resembled a fiery fist. Falstrid sighed, “I am afraid you will have a very long journey before you get home.”

Clagmir waved at the both of us and rode off without any farewell.

Falstrid wiped his glasses and smiled at me, “It would be cruel not to give you a lift to Halatross. You might figure out where you are from there.” I just smiled and nodded. Everything seemed weird to that point where my brain felt like it had crashed. Falstrid slowly climbed to the front of his wagon and I started to climb onto the back. I looked up and something took me by surprise.

“Hmm? What is it?” Falstrid asked casually.

My jaw dropped and my eyes just focused on the two orbs in the sky. “Two... moons?!” I cried out. At that very moment I knew for sure that I was not on Earth. There was a tiny moon that was barely behind the larger moon. The larger moon didn’t even have the same “man in the moon” face on it like the one back on Earth. The stars covered the sky, but I didn’t see any constellations that I could even recognize.

Falstrid looked at me and then back up, “What is wrong?”

My whole body quivered and I yelled out again, “This isn’t my world!”

“What did you say?” Falstrid asked in a surprised tone.

I just kept my eyes on the sky, “This isn’t Earth... What is the name of this planet?”

Falstrid sounded even more surprised, “Earth? Planet? This is Talamyr! Wait... you can’t mean...” I slowly lowered my head and stared at him. He stared at me and could see the surprise in my eyes. He shared the same expression. We just stared at each other. Falstrid scratched the back of his head, “Oh my...”

Falstrid sighed and appeared to be in deep thought. He shook his head several times and took several deep sighs. “We have a ways to Halatross, We can talk while we move.”

I just nodded and climbed into the back of the wagon. Inside there was all sorts of clutter. Crates filled with scrolls and blankets, stacks of books, a few staves leaning in the corner and other random items. I had only enough room to sit. The wagon started to move. I feared all the clutter would fall down on me.

The smell of rotting death became a distant memory as we kept moving on the lumpy road. My head started to clear up a bit but still felt paralyzed from the whole situation.

“Are you alright?” Falstrid asked while keeping his eyes on the road. Goosebumps still covered me and I just felt speechless. I closed my eyes and tried to take deep breaths.

Falstrid sighed, “I know this must be quite a bit for you to absorb right now... I can’t fully understand what you must be going through.”

I closed my eyes and lowered my head, “Thank you.”

It felt so weird to see the night sky. Back at home it was around three o’clock and now it looked like was midnight.

Falstrid tried to ease up the situation with some small talk, “So Blake... You seem like a bright boy. How many years of education do you have?”

I shrugged, “At least twelve years... unless you count preschool and kindergarten.”

Falstrid sounded a bit surprised, “That is quite a long education! So are you a scholar or perhaps talented in magic?”

I stared blankly at him, “Um... there is no magic in my world.”

“What? How can that be?” Falstrid exclaimed.

I was slightly surprised by his mention of magic, but from the strange things I saw earlier, magic is about the only real explanation that I could think of.

“I just find it strange that you came from a world without magic... I wonder...” Falstrid mumbled a bit loudly.

I held my breath and then exhaled loudly, “I can’t believe I somehow ended up in a magical world.”

Falstrid laughed, “You must be about as curious as I am about your world... oh this looks like a good spot.”

He turned the wagon away from the crude dirt road and he rode off into a grove. He stopped the wagon at a decent size clearing.

“There are some extra blankets in the box to your left. Can you please take those out for me?” Falstrid instructed.

I nodded, started to climb out of the wagon and pulled out a wad of blankets.

Falstrid detached his horse from the front and slowly walked it to a lone tree. He looked at me and pointed a short distance away. “Just set them over there for me.”

I gave a quick nod and jogged to where he was pointing.

The trees had a very light colored bark and many tiny leaves. The grass was pretty tall-almost reaching my knees at some areas. The light from the two moons kept it fairly visible. Falstrid finally walked over. He looked really tired, as if he would just fall asleep at any moment.

I quickly rolled out the blankets. He smiled and slowly sat down on his blankets. I laid out mine a few feet from him and started to lie down as well.

The air was pretty warm and the ground was softer than I expected. I stared up into the sky wondering if any of the stars up there was the sun from home. A heavy feeling came into my heart, *I might not be able to go back home*. I slowly closed my eyes and turned my head. No sense in dwelling on that. There wasn’t anything I could do about it. No sense in creating more stress and sorrow. Falstrid was already sound asleep. He must have been through a lot that day.

As much as I tried, I still couldn’t help feeling sorry for myself. What if I couldn’t go back home? Would I be stuck here forever? I was struggling to not get too overtaken by worry. I reached into my pockets and could feel my wallet. There was also a cheap pen in there. I wished that I had carried a pocket knife with me but didn’t think I needed one to fill out a job application. I’m not even going to consider items I should have brought with me since no one could have predicted that I would have been transported into a magical world. My mind was all over the place but I finally got myself to sleep. It didn’t seem long before I heard a noise.

Eyes wide open, I quickly turned my head and saw Falstrid sound asleep. I lifted my head up and saw the horse not too far away. Sound filled the air again. It came from the wagon. My pulse quickened and I stood up quietly. Fear and curiosity were competing to decide my next move. Curiosity won. I looked down-Falstrid was still sleeping. It was very tempting to wake him, but it could just be something minor and I was not sure. Maybe I'll just sneak a little closer and then come back if I need to wake him.

I got halfway between Falstrid and the wagon and already felt like an idiot. I could hear the sound of metal and wood banging. Something was rustling inside the wagon. I held my breath and was having second thoughts. Something shot out of the wagon which nearly made me jump. It was a small iron pan. Okay, I thought, I am just going to walk back and wake Falstrid up. Just then, something else came out of the wagon. I saw two beady eyes staring back at me.

A huge chill went down my spine. I instantly recognized what it was. I stuttered, "Ch-ch-chogul!" Another chogul came out from the other side of the wagon, and then another. They stood maybe four feet tall but they had very sharp teeth and claws. The three of them stood there staring at me. Their hairy bodies had bits of metal crudely tied to them like some makeshift armor. Two carried simple clubs and one carried a sharp pointed piece of metal. They snarled at me. They didn't look like they wanted to be my friends.

I looked down and saw a rock. I quickly grabbed it and threw it at them. I missed. They just seemed more motivated to come after me. As soon as the three of them charged, I turned and ran as fast as I could.

"Crap!" I blurted out as I ran and ran and ran. I could hear them gaining on me. Crap! I should have run towards Falstrid! I ended up moving west from the wagon.

The only hope I could think of was getting behind some trees. The closer I got to them the dumber the plan appeared to be. I jumped up and tried to climb up one of the trees. By the time I got half my body up over a branch, I could feel their hands grabbing at my legs. I held on to a branch but the three of them were strong enough to cause me to fall back onto the ground. One was already on top of me-the one with the sharp pointed piece of metal.

I reached out and grabbed the metal before it was used to impale me. I was surprised I had the strength to actually overcome it. Then again, I was fighting for dear life. I turned my elbow and clipped it on the side of the creature's face. The impact of my elbow hurt it enough to cause it to drop the crude weapon. I turned the chogul's pointy weapon back on it and felt a bit of hope... until one of them bit my arm.

I screamed from the pain as he sunk his teeth into my left arm. I thrust the metal spike in his direction but hit nothing but air. Another beast slammed his club on my leg which caused me more pain. Still cringing from the pain of my left forearm, I made another go with my crude weapon. This time it hit flesh. I could hear a loud yelping sound as my new weapon stabbed into the chogul. Finally it unlocked its teeth from my arm, but even that created a fresh burst of pain. That chogul leaned back with the pointed metal piece sticking out of it. The first chogul jumped right back on to me and raised his claws.

I could only move my right arm over my face as it clawed at me. It frantically clawed away at me, and all I could do was keep it from hitting my face. I tried moving it away but I was helpless with only one good arm. My right arm almost felt as bad as my left arm. I was so freaking screwed! I tried rolling but another chogul decided to join in and readied his club for a clean shot to my head.

A flash of light came out of nowhere and exploded against the armed chogul. It jumped back and caused his friend to turn away from me. He stood up just to get hit by another flash of light. I could

hear the air cracking as it impacted him. His body flew overhead right past me and landed a few feet away. I laid there breathing heavily as Falstrid came into view.

“Are you alright?” he asked. He stood there with his staff held tightly.

I practically had tears in my eyes, “Oh thank goodness!”

He smiled, then saw that I was bleeding, “Oh my, stay right there.” He kneeled down and lifted up my right arm, “They got you pretty good, don’t worry I can heal this quickly...” He started to chant and a light blue light formed from his hands which quickly faded as soon as his hands touched my wound. He stared at my arm, “Odd...” He chanted again and once again the light blue glow faded. Falstrid took a moment, “For some reason my magic isn’t working on you.”

“What?” I said disappointed. I was so hoping he could heal me.

He moved over to my left arm, “Let me try again.” he chanted once more and once again his spell failed. He scratched the back of his head, “There is no reason for that not to work.” He stood up, “Wait right here, I have some bandages.”

I closed my eyes and held my left arm tightly below the wound. I couldn’t even feel my left hand. Falstrid came back and quickly wrapped both of my arms firmly. “It is quite odd that I am unable to heal you with my magic. Wait!” He finished up his first aid, “Didn’t Xum’gol try to use magic on you?”

I was feeling too lightheaded to answer right away but he immediately answered for me.

“Yes, he did cast something on you and it appeared to fail as well.” He rubbed his chin, “It seems that you have an amazing resistance to magic!”

Falstrid helped me up. My forearms stung like crazy, but at least with the bandages I wouldn’t bleed to death. I took a few steps and looked at the dead choguls. I managed to kill one. The sharp piece of metal stood out from its neck. The others laid there with big burn marks on their chests. Smoke was still coming out of them. There was a little smell of burning fur. Compared to the earlier walk over the pile of rotting corpses, this smelled nice.

Falstrid and I went back to our camp. “We shouldn’t have any more trouble tonight. Choguls may scavenge at night but if they see their own dead at a place, they tend to avoid it,” he lectured. He let out a big yawn, rolled to his side and slept. I almost did the same but cringed when a sharp pain from my arms surged through my body. I decided I would sleep on my back.

I woke up hoping it was all a dream but the pain in my arms told me otherwise. Falstrid was awake and eating some dried fruit.

He gave me a warm smile, “Morning! How are your arms?” He walked over and checked them. My left arm was in constant pain and I couldn’t move my hand much at all. My right arm was in pain too, but at least I could use it somewhat. Falstrid handed me some dried fruit which looked like a kind of peach. It ended up being tarter than I expected.

We rode on the rutted dirt road. I leaned my back against a crate and tried to get comfortable. The road was much too bumpy and the pain in my arms made the trip unpleasant. I was feeling a little lightheaded from blood loss and a bad night’s sleep.

Falstrid asked about my world. He couldn’t quite believe that we built machines that traveled through the sky and horseless carriages that traveled on the roads. As a mage he couldn’t really understand how such technology could work without magic. I tried to explain electricity but he just laughed and said it sounded a bit crazy.

“So your world only has humans and beasts?” he asked with curiosity.

I nodded, “Yup, just humans and animals.”

Falstrid laughed, “We have all sorts of races here.” He paused and pointed southeast. “Further that way, we have elves which are like humans but they don’t age and they have pointy ears.”

I kind of felt that he was explaining it like you would to a child but I didn’t mind.

He continued and pointed north. "Up north, we have dwarves. That man you met earlier, Wotmire, is their king."

My eyes widened, "Him, a king?" I wasn't too surprised that he was a dwarf; he fit the description perfectly.

Falstrid smiled, "Wotmire is really humble for a king. He is a good friend to Clagmir and me."

Falstrid thought for a moment, "Let me see ... we have minotaurs that have horns and hooves and ogres that are like larger humans but more simple minded. Further north, we have lizard men. I'm assuming you know what a lizard looks like."

I laughed, "Yes I can picture how they look."

Falstrid laughed, "Sorry for explaining it like I am. You are just so new to this world."

I laughed, "No worries."

We arrived at a fork in the dirt road. Our road lead eastward but the fork looked like it went directly south.

I pointed with my right arm slowly. "What is down that way?"

Falstrid sighed, "That road leads straight to Silmuth where the dark elves live."

I raised a brow, "Dark elves?"

Falstrid nodded. "Long ago the elves had a civil war, and those that dabbled in darker magic fled to the west. They are not too friendly to outsiders but mostly keep to themselves. It's not the safest place to venture."

Falstrid and I kept going on the road for several more hours. We stopped when his horse wanted to get a drink from the river that ran along the road. Falstrid filled up a wineskin and offered me some water. I was a bit worried about bacteria in the water, but he didn't seem to be concerned about it. He'd lived that long without problems from the water, and I was thirsty so I guessed it was okay.

"We should reach Halatross by noon tomorrow," Falstrid said cheerfully. I was hoping we would've arrived that day. I was spoiled from living in a world with cars.

The trip was a bit more pleasant when we got on a dirt road that wasn't entirely bumpy. It was quiet for a while. I tried to force my left hand to open and close but it was difficult and painful. That stupid thing bit me really hard! My right hand could move fine, but my forearm had a few areas that stung like crazy even if I lightly touched the bandages.

By nightfall we camped and I had my fill of stale bread and dried fruit. Falstrid smiled while finishing a mouthful of food. "Tomorrow, I am going to see Ayjestus... um. I do believe she will be curious about you," Falstrid explained.

I smiled, "Who is she?"

Falstrid smiled, "She is a Silthrym. I don't think I explained them yet, did I?"

I shook my head.

Falstrid continued, "They are a mysterious race of great power. She is the only one around these lands. She pretty much rules Halatross."

I laughed, "If she is so strong, how come she didn't come here to help you stop that guy?"

Falstrid laughed, "Silthrym may be powerful, but they are physically weak and avoid conflicts as much as they can." He cleared his throat and continued, "They have the ability to sense all around them, feeling what others feel."

I slowly laid back and listened.

Falstrid picked at his beard. "We barely had time to stop Xum'gol, so there wasn't a chance for her to aid us. She wouldn't be among the front lines. It's hard to explain."

I filled in the rest, "So, she is a pacifist and being in a battle would hurt her, in a way?"

Falstrid chuckled, "I guess it is a draw back of her ability, but it is also her strength. She helps keep Halatross one of the safest places. I also think she keeps the dark elves at bay."

I raised a brow but waited to hear more.

Falstrid stared out into the sky and collected his thoughts. A moment passed and he explained, "There were once two of them. They both helped end the long elf war. The exiled dark elves retaliated and killed one of them. Ever since then, Ayjestus has stayed at Halatross to act as a presence to prevent another war from breaking out between the elves and the dark elves." Falstrid sighed, "There is a legend that the royal bloodline of the dark elves got their grey skin from a curse for killing one of the Silthrym. I can't be too sure."

My eyelids felt heavy. Maybe I was adjusting to the time difference. I closed my eyes as I spoke. "So the dark elves are really that evil?"

Falstrid chuckled, "I wouldn't say that. They just don't like outsiders. They keep to themselves. Now there is one that everyone fears."

I opened one eye, "So there is one bad one, eh?"

Falstrid laughed, "Yeah, but she is mostly a story meant to scare the kids. She's some witch that lives isolated from the other dark elves. She has a moat filled with the bones of all those that have trespassed her domain. It is a silly story."

I laughed, "A moat filled with bones, huh? Doesn't sound like a person I want to meet."

Falstrid and I laughed.

I slept throughout the night. Falstrid tapped me gently with his staff, "Time to get up! We have a lot of road to travel!"

I mumbled and tried to get my brain to wake up with the rest of me. My back felt a bit sore, but I managed to push myself up to my feet. My right arm felt a bit better, not great but I could actually use it without all the pain. My left arm still felt sore as heck, but I could move my fingers better.

Falstrid walked over. "How are you doing?"

He lifted up part of the bandage on my right arm, "I hope there aren't any infections..." He let out a gasp.

I looked over, "What?"

He started to pull away more bandages, "Your wounds have already scabbed over and healed faster than I could ever have expected."

I looked at my right forearm. There were several claw marks on my arm that did scab over. Falstrid walked around and peeked at my left forearm. Air went into the wound and I cringed from the pain. "This was a nasty wound, but even it looks better. So strange!" he mumbled to himself. "There was some damage to your muscles. Try moving your hand," he mumbled some more.

I moved my fingers around slowly, "Anything wrong?"

Falstrid chuckled, "Do people in your world heal this fast?"

I stared at him, "Um... no..." It did seem weird how much better I felt that morning compared to the day before.

He closed up the bandage, "Normally this kind of damage would heal over a much greater period of time..." He stared blankly for a moment and was trying to figure out something. He chuckled, "I really don't quite understand. You appear to have a strange reaction to this world."

Falstrid went quiet shortly after, and we both climbed on the wagon and rode off. He mumbled to himself a bit but didn't seem to want to discuss any more of it. I stared at my bandages. Do I really heal that fast? My right arm felt quite different. It still hurt. My left arm was also still hurting but quite a bit less than day before. The fact that I could move my fingers was a bit strange. Maybe when we reached Halatross and met this weird girl... I wondered what a Silthrym looked like.

Falstrid occasionally reached over and grabbed a book but still kept quiet. I just leaned back and tried

to get as much rest as I could. It had been really crazy. First I was transported to that world. Then I met some interesting people. Then got attacked by crazy monkey things called choguls and then found out I could heal faster than normal. There was also the fact that magic didn't seem to affect me. I was almost afraid to see what Halatross had to offer.

Falstrid's mumbling woke me up from a very brief nap. I let out a big yawn, "So what are you thinking?"

Falstrid ignored me at first, but he perked up. "Oh, sorry. I was just trying to understand you a bit."

I laughed, "What? About how magic doesn't really affect me and that I can heal a little faster?"

Falstrid chuckled, "Don't you think that is a bit strange?"

I laughed, "I think just being here is a bit strange!"

Falstrid smiled and closed his book, "I really think Ayjestus will want to see you."

I leaned back again and closed my eyes. My brain was running around too fast to concentrate on a single thought for longer than a moment. I admit, I was feeling a bit excited to see Halatross. I was also a bit nervous about visiting someone of such great importance and power. Someone of a race that I had no clue what they looked like.

The wagon hit a rock and I bumped my arm. I bit my lower lip from the pain. I might be able to heal faster than normal creatures, but not fast enough.

Falstrid turned his head. "Here we are!"

I peeked out of the front of the wagon and in the distance saw the city of Halatross.

Chapter 2

Halatross was more booming than I had expected. It was filled with busy people moving around doing their daily business. Most of the buildings were single story but there were a few exceptions. There was a large stone temple towering over the center of the town.

“It’s such a lovely town, don’t you think?” Falstrid said cheerfully.

I stared out from the back of the wagon and nodded. I saw a few dwarves hauling various items from the wagon. There were many humans walking around. There was a very large man that I assumed was an ogre helping someone push a cart around. We kept moving towards the center of the town and finally I saw my first minotaur.

He was about the same size as the ogre but with large horns and the face of a cow. The minotaur had short brown fur as well as hooves and a tail. He looked like he was laughing with a few other guys. That was so cool!

Falstrid stopped the wagon right outside the temple.

A man in a white robe walked over, “Grand Master Falstrid! Pleasure to see you!”

Falstrid climbed down, “Thank you. I hope Lady Ayjestus is available.”

The robed man bowed his head, “Of course, please come inside. We will take care of your horse and wagon.”

I was about to hop down but saw my first elf. Holy cow, she was hot!

“Blake . . . when you are done...?” Falstrid instructed.

I put my jaw back in my mouth and followed Falstrid.

One of my legs was asleep as we walked towards the temple. The doors stood at least twice my height. They reported loudly as the two guards opened them for us. Inside the temple stood several columns. There was a clean blue carpet that went straight down the room toward the middle and intersected another long stretch of carpet that went across the full width of the room. There were a large number of people walking around and talking inside. Most were wearing white robes or white armor, but there were regular people there as well.

The man in the white robe jogged over to us, “Please follow me.”

He led us up through the main room and through smaller double doors. Behind the doors wound a spiraling staircase. Falstrid sighed to himself and slowly climbed. I followed behind him and put my arm on the rail but felt a bit of pain from my wound as I bumped the rail.

After the third window I felt a bit uneasy. I forgot to mention that I hate heights! I held my breath and just stared down at the stairs the rest of the way.

Several flights later we arrived at our destination. I glanced out the window and regretted it. I quickly turned and followed Falstrid. At the end of the stairs there was displayed a good size room with hanging plants and water features. The water features went along the walls and occasionally dripped water down to the hanging plants. I am not sure how they managed to get water to flow way up here unless people in this world discovered water pressure and plumbing.

On the floor stood several wooden benches and up at the front stood a nicely carved desk. Behind the desk sat a very attractive woman in a white robe. She was busy writing on a scroll but raised her head and smiled at us.

“Oh, Falstrid! Lady Ayjestus is busy at the moment. Please have a seat.”

Falstrid tapped me lightly with his staff as he chuckled a little and sat down. I got the hint and sat down. I notice that the girl had long pointed ears. They stood out about three inches longer than a human’s ears. She had light brown hair and stunning green eyes. It had been a long time since I’d

really seen a girl that hot. I felt kind of guilty just looking at her. It is amazing how time flies when you're in the presence of a really hot girl. I almost forgot about my injuries for a moment.

The door behind her opened and a man in white armor popped out. It was Clagmir. He glanced toward us and did a double take. "Oh, Falstrid, you're here already!"

Falstrid stood up, "I am not as fast as you but I still keep a good pace."

Clagmir smiled, "Oh, that young man is still with you."

Falstrid looked at me, "I found that our friend here came from a place further than we thought."

Falstrid explained to Clagmir who found the story difficult to believe at first. The elf girl overheard the conversation and looked over at me. I turned away and could tell that I was blushing. I'm not sure if she looked at me for any good reason other than I was some sort of a freak, but I didn't care.

A female voice called out from the other room, "Falstrid? Do come in."

Clagmir shook Falstrid's hand, "I should get going. I'll see you in Vunash." He waved and walked down the stairs.

My heart was beating fast as we walked in. Ayjestus was supposed to be this very powerful being, and I was about to meet her. I stared down at the floor as we stepped in.

"Welcome Falstrid! I see you brought a friend," Ayjestus greeted. The kindness in her voice eased my nervousness. I looked up and saw something I never would have expected.

Ayjestus... well, Falstrid should have told me she had blue skin! That wasn't her only strange feature. She also had four arms and a third eye! She looked far younger than I expected, especially for a person as old as she was. She had very straight black hair which trailed down her back. She wore a simple white dress and stood maybe five and a half feet tall. Her eyes were grey but shone with intelligence. After the shock of her inhuman features, she wasn't bad looking.

"I can see your friend has never seen one of my kind before," she laughed.

Falstrid chuckled, "I explained much to him but must have forgotten to explain enough about your race."

I felt a little embarrassed.

She made a gesture with one of her hands, "Please sit."

Three cushioned chairs faced her. She sat on a similar chair and placed her arms on her lap. I just then noticed that the room was nearly all glass and was filled with all sorts of decorations.

"I am sure Clagmir shared you our recent adventures," Falstrid told Ayjestus with a grim tone.

Ayjestus frowned, "It is a shame he escaped you, but at least he failed in his plans." She glanced at me, "Clagmir told me he summoned a human by mistake, I presume you are he?"

I smiled and nodded.

Falstrid sighed, "Blake here is from another world..."

Ayjestus' eyes widened, "I knew there was something strange about him, but I didn't think he was from another world!"

I shrugged.

She looked over, "You are wounded... do you wish me to heal you?"

Falstrid smiled a little, "It won't work... magic doesn't affect him."

Ayjestus stared at me, "Is that so? That is strange."

She slowly stood up and walked over towards me. She got right up to me, leaned over and stared into my eyes.

I couldn't help but blush.

She laughed, "Do not worry, this will not cause any pain." She placed a hand at each side of my head and closed her eyes.

It was awkward. I had this strange, four-armed, blue girl placing her hands on my head with her face just a few inches away from me. Her eyes were closed but it appeared as though she were struggling

with something in my head. I just glanced around wondering how long it was going to take. A few moments passed before she opened her eyes and stood back. She looked a bit intrigued and rubbed her fingers through her hair.

She looked over at Falstrid, "He is quite interesting."

Falstrid and I leaned forward to hear what she had to say.

She sat back down on her chair. "I never had so much trouble defining someone before. His resistance to magic is astounding!" She placed her hands back on her lap, "If he is a normal human, his presence in this world must have brought him some changes."

Falstrid rubbed his chin, "What kind of changes?"

I bit my lower lip. I couldn't help but feel excited.

Ayjestus shook her head, "First is the magical immunity. I don't think any spell would even affect him. Except maybe magic that takes a physical form."

I looked at her, "Physical form?"

Falstrid answered, "That's magic that creates a tangible entity such as a bolt of lightning or a ball of fire."

I got a mental image of that Xum'gol guy holding a huge fireball over his head. So glad he wasn't able to use that on me!

Ayjestus continued, "His body also seems to regenerate at a faster speed and his aging process has halted."

My jaw dropped, "Wait! You mean I don't age?"

She smiled, "Yes, your body has stopped aging."

The hairs on my body stood on end. "I don't age! Holy crap! I am immune to magic and can heal fast too. I'm like some kind of super-hero!"

Ayjestus giggled, "You don't seem upset by this."

Falstrid shook his head and laughed, "Quite interesting indeed."

She stared at the floor a bit, "There are some drawbacks. Because of your immunity to magic, you would never be able to use magic yourself."

Falstrid added, "Also beneficial magic wouldn't work as well."

Ayjestus nodded, "I believe your body would reject any diseases or poisons, as well, but I wouldn't advise you to test that."

Falstrid looked over toward me, "Is there a way to send him back to his home world?"

Ayjestus played with her hair and looked at me. She had a sad look in her eyes and said, "No..."

My heart sank. The excitement of having these abilities died a bit. I took a deep breath, "I can never go back home?"

Ayjestus felt almost as upset as I did, "I am so sorry. Someone coming here from another world has never happened. Even if we had the power to cast you out, we have no way to send you back to your world."

Falstrid nodded, "It might be possible to send you out of this world but the chances of it being to your world is as slim as guessing the right star in the sky."

I lowered my head and ran the fingers of my right hand through my hair. It was depressing. There was a moment of silence. I just couldn't believe I was stuck there. My family and friends... I would never see them again.

Ayjestus walked over and gave me a hug. Having a four-armed girl hug me distracted me momentarily. Falstrid was right-her race did feel what others felt. She had a few tears in her eyes which prompted me to shed a few.

After a while she sat back on her chair. Wiping away a tear, she asked Falstrid, "What should we do with him?"

Falstrid shook his head and nodded, "I guess he could come with me to Vunash, but I am going to be very busy trying to figure Xum'gol's next move."

Ayjestus looked at me. "He has a kind heart and the potential to bring good into this world."

Falstrid pondered a moment and then perked up. He turned toward me, "I know of a simple job he can do."

I took a few deep breaths. I was still feeling too crushed about not being able to go home to really care.

Falstrid smiled, "There is a small branch of mages in Halatross. There are always a few students needing someone to run errands with them. It isn't much but it's honest work."

Ayjestus smiled, "I think it is a good idea. Maybe you will feel better helping someone out. Perhaps you'll even make a new friend."

I shrugged, "Sure I guess."

Falstrid stood, "Here, let me write a note of recommendation." He took out a small piece of paper and a tiny piece of coal. He scribbled on it and handed it to me. "Just show this to the magic guild east of town and they will get you a job."

I stared at the words but the language was something I had never seen before.

Ayjestus smiled at me, "I will give you some money so you can get yourself some basics to live on."

She leaned over to a small cabinet and then leaned back and handed me a few copper coins.

I smiled, "Thank you so much."

She smiled back. "It isn't much, just enough for you to get started in this new world. Repay me by doing good."

I walked out of the room with mixed feelings. I was depressed about being stuck there but also excited about my powers and being in such a world. Falstrid and Ayjestus were still talking to each other. It felt a bit strange to be cast aside, but they were talking about that skeleton guy and other serious things. They must have felt that there was no need to drag me in to it.

The cute elf girl flashed a smile as I walked by but went back to her work. I was much too shy to even approach her. A good looking girl is one thing, but an elf girl in a new world is even harder to approach!

It looked like I was alone. Ayjestus and Falstrid seemed friendly enough to give me some aid if I really needed it or if I were to see them again. Still, it was a bit weird being out on my own. I examined the copper coins. There were some engravings on the coins but I had no clue what they meant. The coins were thin and half of them were faded and worn. I guess the currency was based on the mass of the metal and not on what was noted. I counted twenty copper coins.

Walking out of the temple, I felt out of sorts. Wounded, depressed, and confused. Twenty copper coins in my pocket and a vague idea where I was supposed to go. There was still plenty of daylight so no pressure in locating the magic place before dark.

After heading eastward a short distance, I really wished I could read their language. Falstrid and Ayjestus must have thought that I was fully capable of functioning on my own with what I had. Still, I felt like they handed me a few bucks and dismissed me with a pat on the back.

I got a fair amount of stares-my clothes did stand out. I wondered if I should have gone and bought some new clothes. I thought it might have been wiser to see if I could afford some basics first. After a while I found myself a bit lost. I really hated to ask a random person, but seeing I really didn't have any choice...

A middle aged man stood next to a wagon of produce that I had never seen before.

He smiled at me as I walked up to him. "Hello there, Sir! My prices are the best in town!"

I stared at his selection and my stomach started to growl, "Um sure, how much is this?" I pointed at some red colored fruit that was shaped much like a pear but with bumps on it.

"Everything here is just one copper," the man said cheerfully.

I handed him a copper and grabbed the fruit and took a bite, he seemed a bit surprised.

All right, that didn't taste like I expected it too. It kind of tasted like a bell pepper with a hint of onion-not bad, but I was hoping for something that tasted sweeter. I tried to act casual and took another bite. He stared at me oddly but didn't say a word. The vegetable wasn't that bad. It could have used some salad dressing or it might have been good roasted.

I swallowed and asked, "Um ... do you know where the magic guild building is?"

The man chuckled and pointed right behind me, "It is on the other side of that building." I felt really stupid, but I thanked the man and walked that direction.

The building I walked around was smaller than I expected. It looked just like any other building and could easily have been mistaken for a small inn. The front of the building had a small sign in a language I had yet to learn. A few people in blue robes sat outside on a long bench with a small wooden table. They were reading and talking to each other. They stopped and looked at me as I walked past them into the building.

The main room looked like a library. That's not what I expected but I really didn't know what to expect. There were several large bookshelves and even more tables with people in blue robes reading and discussing things with each other.

A large desk stood in my path. An older-looking woman in a red robe sat by it. She was writing something on a large notebook but stopped to watch me as I walked.

She wrote a little more carefully then put down her quill and stared back at me, "May I help you?"

I put the half-eaten vegetable in my mouth so I could have a free hand to take out the piece of paper.

My left arm was still mostly useless but at least my right arm worked. I sat the folded up piece of paper on the desk and grabbed the vegetable from my mouth. The old woman looked puzzled. I opened up the piece of paper and handed it to her, "Falstrid told me to show this and something about work."

She grabbed the piece of paper and turned it around so she could read it. Now she looked surprised, "How do you know Grand Master Falstrid?"

She stood up and walked over to a file cabinet. I continued eating; it wasn't that bad. The old woman pulled out a drawer and thumbed through some papers mumbling to herself. Finally, she pulled out this one piece of paper.

"Ah, yes, we do have someone that could use an aid."

She handed me the piece of paper and I just pretended to read it. I must have held it upside down since she flipped it over for me. I felt really stupid.

"Just head down the hall and you will see a tall man named Bolam. He will fill you in on the rest," she instructed.

She looked at me like I was some kind of an idiot and, at the moment, I could understand why. I walked the direction she was pointing while finishing my snack. All that was left of it was the stem but I didn't see a single trash can, so I put it in my pocket. Bolam, huh? I hoped I wouldn't mess up finding him.

I lucked out. Down the hall stood a large man in a blue robe and glasses. There was no one else down the hall at the time. He had dark, black hair that was slicked back and tied into a short ponytail. He also had a short mustache and beard, and it didn't seem his glasses had any lenses in them.

I quietly walked toward him. He seemed too preoccupied with stuffing a pack full of books and other things to even take notice of me. I stopped and cleared my throat then asked, "Um, Bolam?"

He looked up at me and smiled, "Yes?"

Yeah! I lucked out. I handed him the piece of paper, "Um, I'm supposed to show this to you?"

He looked a bit puzzled and grabbed the piece of paper. He towered over me and could easily have been mistaken for some big thug rather than a mage.

He just smiled, "Oh, good! I was afraid I wouldn't get anyone to help me!"

He extended his hand, "My name is Bolam. And your name?"

I smiled and shook his hand. Even his hand was large.

"My name is Blake. Nice to meet you."

Bolam adjusted his glasses. "Are you alright?"

I stared at him but then saw that he was referring to my arms. I just laughed, "Oh, I'm fine. I'm a fast healer."

Bolam chuckled, "Well that is fine. We shouldn't have any problems anyway."

I was a little confused, but before I could ask what he meant, he spoke again.

"You don't mind if we leave right away, right?" Bolam chuckled, "Sorry, I am just excited to investigate the ruins west of here!"

I just stood there, and he went off again.

"I've been stuck here for several days and I was afraid I wouldn't be able to get someone to help me. Traveling alone is somewhat dangerous and none of my peers want to go out there. They said it might be dangerous and my superiors wouldn't let me travel without someone else to help me out. Though, I don't know why no one would come with me. There should be all sorts of interesting things for my research."

Man, did he sound excited. I just chuckled, "Okay, um, do you mind if I get supplies?"

Bolam cheerfully walked with me outside of the building. "How much money do you have?" he asked.

I shrugged, "Nineteen copper... is that enough?"

Bolam smiled, "Maybe, but we will see."

He carried around a large book and a staff like he was trying to show others he was a mage. The only thing he needed was a large pointy hat to complete the look. There was something odd about it. The fact that he wore glasses without the lenses bothered me, but he didn't seem to be an idiot. Maybe he was just eccentric.

We walked into a shop that carried all sorts of tools and goods. I saw small notes by items but couldn't understand what they meant. Bolam walked off looking around while I stared at the tools.

He soon walked over with a heavy cloth pack. "This is actually a good price. Now, I already have some supplies you can use but you need your own basics."

I spotted a small wooden box. Inside it were some writing tools but didn't think I needed them so I put the box down. I had a feeling I was under a tight budget.

With the help of Bolam I now owned a pack, two small pouches, a heavy blanket, a small leather case, a simple looking toothbrush and a knife that was about an inch long. The pack and blanket looked a bit old, but they were clean and in good shape.

I handed the merchant my copper and ended up using every coin.

Bolam smiled, "Now I will fund you for your food, so don't worry about that."

That was a relief, but I felt the need to ask the shopkeeper a very important question. I took out the toothbrush, "Please tell me this hasn't been used."

I walked out of the store feeling a bit better. I had a job, I didn't have to worry about buying my food and the toothbrush was brand new. Regardless, I decided I would still wash it before using it.

"So what's your expertise?" Bolam asked me.

I shrugged, "I really don't know."

Bolam adjusted his glasses, "You don't have a weapon so I doubt you are a fighter. You don't look like a mage. Um... you also have strange clothes."

I laughed, "Yeah, about that..." It was tempting to tell Bolam the whole story, but I really didn't want

others to hear. I knew all sorts of complications could arise. I couldn't think of what I was really good at. He interrupted me again.

"We can discuss that after we get our provisions."

Our packs were stuffed with dried meat, bread, dried fruit and some powdery stuff in cloth sacks. Bolam's pack was much larger than mine, but it was full of his books and other things. I ended up carrying the bulk of the food but I didn't mind. The pack was heavy walking out of there, but it would get lighter as we traveled.

"I think that is all we need, though I would feel better if you had some sort of weapon," he muttered.

I put my hand in my right pocket and felt my wallet and pen. "How much does one cost?"

Bolam looked at me oddly. He seemed to be feeling a bit concerned about who he was hiring. I felt under qualified but decided to boost myself up a little.

"Oh, I know how to use a sword pretty well. I just don't own one" I explained.

It was somewhat true. I did spar a good deal growing up but never really got into a serious fight with sword. Actually, no one really did back home.

Bolam looked at me and shrugged. "That is fine but I don't have the money for a decent sword for you.

"Um..." I laughed, "Maybe when we go out, I'll make myself a club to use."

Bolam smiled, "Sounds fine with me."

We eventually made it outside of Halatross. I was not very happy about leaving so late. Bolam seemed excited and antsy from waiting to travel.

"So, what's the name of the place we're going to?" I asked.

Bolam grinned, "Nevar's Bog."

I raised an eyebrow, "What's so special about that place?"

Bolam pushed his glasses up. "It was named after an exiled elf hero. There should be some interesting things there for me to research."

I was a bit confused, "What are exiled elves?"

Bolam looked at me strangely. "Dark elves... you didn't know?"

I decided that since there was no one else on the road, I would tell Bolam about myself. There was a good stretch of farmland. The nearest person was way out in the field. Far enough out to where you couldn't even tell what they were. The terrain was filled with tall grass and short hills. There were clusters of wild flowers in all sorts of colors.

Bolam laughed, "I am supposed to believe that you came from another world?"

I sighed, "Yeah, some guy named Xum'gol summoned me by mistake and Falstrid brought me to Halatross..."

Bolam shook his head, "Now you are telling me you know Grand Master Falstrid and met the great Lich Xum'gol? You are too funny!"

I wasn't surprised that he didn't believe me. Heck, I had trouble accepting the fact that the ground I was walking on wasn't Earth. I pulled out my wallet and took out a credit card and my driver's license and handed them to him. He adjusted his glasses and stared at them.

"What are these supposed to be? Wait, this one has a portrait of you."

I nodded, "Yup, that's a picture of me when I registered for my driver's license. It was taken by a device called a camera."

Bolam's curiosity was evident. "Camera? It is too finely detailed to be done by hand. He looked at my credit card and seemed really impressed with the tiny hologram image on it.

I explained a bit more about my world like there was no magic and about several machines and such.

Bolam handed me back the cards and sighed, "That is really interesting, but forgive me for not believing you."

I smiled, "That's fine, I barely believe that I am here myself." I then had an idea, "Hey Bolam, you know all sorts of magic right?"

Bolam looked almost insulted, "Of course, I am skilled in fire and knowledge based magic, what about it?"

I thought about how Falstrid and Xum'gol were unable to do anything to me with magic. So I thought that maybe someone like Bolam wouldn't be able to do much either.

"Okay... um, cast any spell on me. Something other than some sort of fireball," I explained.

Bolam laughed, "Are you serious?"

I smiled, "Xum'gol wasn't able to cast anything on me and Falstrid's magic didn't work either. So maybe you will believe me if you try to and can't. Don't do one that makes me sleepy."

Bolam laughed, "I don't know that spell but I know what to cast." We stopped walking and he started to chant. I could see his hands started to glow a bright orange color. I was sure hoping that he wasn't going to light me on fire or anything.

"Huh... that is strange... let me try again," Bolam said in a confused tone.

He started to chant once more. His hands started to glow again and then died down, nothing happened.

He scratched the back of his head. "Let me try something else."

Bolam opened up his large book. He thumbed through the pages and began to chant. This time his hands started to glow a greenish color but then died down to nothing.

He closed his book and laughed. "Wow, you just might be telling the truth!"

We then left the main road and turned onto a dirt road that runs right along the river. "So how long will it take to reach this bog?" I asked.

Bolam smiled, "Two days, but we started late so I'm not sure." This was a farther hike than I was used to.

It had been a long time since I had done any serious hiking back in Boy Scouts and I was a bit out of shape. Having two wounded arms didn't help either. The left arm still hurt and felt a bit useless. I stared at my right arm and worried about having to face something nasty.

There was a good deal of farmland and small communities that made me feel a bit safer. I spent the rest of the day talking with Bolam about my world and the events that brought me here to this world. Thankfully I found an ideal piece of wood on the ground that made for a decent club. It was a fallen branch with tiny twigs sticking out of it. I carefully snapped off the twigs as we walked. The handle area was good enough to grip with one hand. That made me feel a little safer.

That night, Bolam set up the campfire by some large boulders. There was enough wind that would have been a little miserable except for the large boulders blocking the bulk of it. I laid out my blankets and carefully ground off some of the pointy bits on the area of the club that I wished to grab. It would have been easier with the use of both hands.

Bolam was preparing a simple meal by the fire and turned toward me. "Food will be ready in a while. How are your injuries?"

I peeked at both wounds. The right forearm was scabbed over but still felt sore. The left hand was not so great.

After our burnt meal of some form of wild potatoes, I laid down to rest.

Bolam wiped his mouth, "Not much flavor but it is a blessing for travelers within these areas."

I burped a little which brought back the burnt taste, but I was too hungry to complain. It was a weird potato. Looked like some small weed from the ground up. Thankfully Bolam knew what they were because I would never have thought uprooting it would have produced a large edible root below.

Bolam jammed his staff onto the dirt. A moment later the top of the staff started to glow.

He cleared his throat, took out a book and started to read to himself.

"What are you reading?" I asked.

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