

## Domain of War

Nayra took a quick look around, making sure that there were no threats. The dragon had dropped them off on the edge of the region ruled by the Grand Spirit of War and its two partners, Grand Spirit of Mysteries and Grand Spirit of Transition.

Finding that all was quiet, Nayra took the lead as Ryun couldn't see. Her arm was tightly in Ryun's grip so he could keep up with her. She wasn't sure what they would gain from talking to these spirits, but Ryun seemed eager for it. Soon enough, they arrived at a ledge, and Nayra stopped short upon seeing what lay beyond.

"What do you see?" Ryun asked.

Before them a valley stretched as far as the eye can see, made out of the black sand that was softly rippling in the breeze like silk. On it, massive armies of spirits were fighting each other. Many looked like people, others were more beast like, while some were spirits whose natures made them appear in all kinds of shapes and forms. Thousands upon thousands of different shapes and sizes rolled over the ground, like plumes of cracking mist and waterfalls on fire. Colorful banners were planted atop mighty hills, standing triumphant, and others lined the ground.

The sounds of battle raged on all around them, the clangs and crashes, the war cries and screams, the groans and yells and growls.

The earth shook with each step of the armies as they trudged across the land. Their footsteps were synchronized, as if they were all trained to move together. The attacks of weapons against shields, some heavier than others, echoed through the valley.

"A battlefield filled with spirits," Nayra answered. "I see a massive camp in the center of it." At least that was what it looked like to Nayra. "I

think that there is a path through the battles that is kept clear of any fighting.”

It was as if someone had carved a road leading through the heart of the battles, straight to the camp in the center. The camp itself was immense, great tents in all colors stood taller than some buildings. Long banners rippled between the spires of color standing tall overhead like standards. Spirits moved through them as if they were dancing a grand parade.

Nayra and Ryun climbed down into the valley, then started walking down the road. As they walked, she couldn't help but feel slightly apprehensive as to the response they would get from those currently locked in battle. Though, the more they walked, the more she realized that the spirits didn't even seem to be noticing them. For the most part, they ignored them, their attention focused on their battles. Seeing them fighting, she realized that the spirits didn't seem to be fighting to kill each other. They were fighting seriously, but they weren't going for the killing blows. She wondered why that was, but before she could put any serious thought into it, several spirits noticed them, then stopped their fighting and turning their heads after them. After a few seconds of studying, they approached them.

There were three spirits, two had stone-like bodies covered with moss and vines and were twice as tall as Nayra. The last one had an elongated, slender muzzle that looked like it was made out of porous rock and deep-scarred eyes. It seemed to glow in the darkness and looked like a wolf and a cat smashed together. Its golden whiskers caught what little sun there was and sent sparks through the gloom.

“Chosen? Here?” One of them said in a voice that was like two stones grinding against each other.

The wolf-like one glanced at the speaker then spoke. “No chosen comes here.”

The last one just nodded its head.

Nayra glanced around at the other spirits, still fighting just a bit away from the road. She didn't want to... provoke them, they didn't come here to fight.

Nayra stilled her nerves, then spoke for both herself and Ryun. "We are seeking an audience with the Grand Spirit of War," she said firmly yet politely. The other spirits exchanged questioning looks, something passing by them.

"Oh, new supplicants, perhaps," the tall one said. The wolf-like one tilted its head then seemed to agree. "Grand War's vision is vast, to have even chosen come to him."

The last one just nodded its head again dumbly. Then, they seemed to lose all interest in them, turning around.

Nayra interrupted them by calling after them.

"Why are you all fighting?" Nayra asked while gesturing out to the valley of battle before her with a sweep of her arm.

The tall spirit turned around for a moment. "We are preparing for something grand."

Then he continued on, joining back in the fighting.

Nayra frowned, then glanced at Ryun.

"Supplicant?" He whispered.

"Looks like the Grand Spirit of War is making an army of spirits," Nayra said.

Ryun tilted his head. "It would appear so."

They left the spirits to their practice as they continued on, heading for the encampment in the center. The landscape here was remarkable compared to any place they had seen before; tent-towers jutting into the air seemingly against all logic or sense as if defying gravity itself. Thousands upon thousands of brilliant torches lit up every corner while drums played music louder than thunder. Under the tents and banners,

unique spirits moved around. Painted wolf-like spirits howling prayerful melodies, stone spirits carrying hammers with heads of purest black that felt as if they carried the Essence of the darkest and deepest stone.

A sound of metal ringing turned her eyes to a massive open tent, with forges set up inside that blazed like the heart of fire. She blinked as she saw spirits making weapons and armor in ways that she hadn't seen before.

Ryun paused and looked in their direction, for a few minutes. Then, he turned to her as if only just realizing that he had stopped. He gestured, and they continued on.

None of the spirits seemed to pay them much mind, nor did they seem to question their presence. It was as if something had taken hold of them all that made them ignore them completely.

Eventually, Nayra and Ryun arrived at the grand tent in the center of it all, the last ring of tents. Here, the spirits were different. There were less spirits who looked like beasts or those whose nature was clearly elemental. Here, most looked like armored warriors, like any army she could see in the Real Realm. Only on second look would you notice the differences. Some seemed to be just empty suits of armor, their visors concealing a darkness inside. Others seemed to be melted into their armor and weapons, as if it was their body. Then, she paused as she noticed another group near a tent with a unique banner. She frowned as she realized that all of those spirits looked like the races in the Real Realm. It didn't take her long to notice that they were not spirits at all. Their eyes were the mirror copies of the banner flying above their tent. A multi-ringed eye.

"Shades," Ryun whispered from next to her.

Nayra frowned. This place was becoming stranger and stranger by the moment. Everything that she knew about shades told her that they were supposed to be insane. These ones at least didn't rage around.

They moved away, leaving them behind them along with their questions.

As they walked through the center area of the camp, the spirits started to take notice of their passage, and as Nayra and Ryun reached the largest tent, they were intercepted. Two spirits shrouded in elaborate armors approached and blocked their way. They were identical, suits of armor that had no face plate. Inside, she saw only two glowing blue embers as eyes. Their limbs melted into blades, and their legs had inverted knees. They towered over her and Ryun.

“What is your business in the War Camp, chosen?” They asked at the same time, their voices deep and even.

Ryun just tilted his head, and Nayra recognized the gesture for what it was, so she answered.

“We’ve come to speak with the Grand Spirit of War.”

“The Grand Spirit is not taking visitors,” they said.

Nayra narrowed her eyes; she noticed that a lot of the spirits around them had stopped what they were doing and were watching them. It was a threat, though it wasn’t much of one. Being in the center of an enemy camp alone would be the worst place for most people to be, but not for the two of them.

“We’ve come because we wish to discuss an important matter,” Nayra said slowly. “We wish to discuss the yeti, Ra’azel Equinar.”

At the name everything around them quieted. One of the spirits in front of them turned and pulled the entrance flap open, and then walked into the tent. The other one remained in front of them, his two blue orbs staring blankly at them.

Then, the spirit spoke. “The Grand Spirit will meet with you.”

With that, the spirit turned and opened the tent flap, beckoning them in.

They followed.

## **Grand Spirit of War**

Ryun followed after Nayra into the tent, his hand still holding her forearm. It was much easier for him to see in the camp, there were so many spirits, each made out of different Essence, that he had enough information to distinguish things, but it was good to have someone help guide him. He had been pushing his senses constantly since they arrived in the Ethereal Realm, even now he was constantly changing which Essence he was focusing on, increasing and narrowing the range, and just all around practicing. It was still disorienting if he ever allowed it to sense everything, but he was getting very good at switching quickly and not allowing it to expand.

Once inside, the tent suddenly felt different. He could still sense everything going on outside if he focused on specific Essence and around them, but at the same time it was like an invisible barrier had been created outside of the tent that dampened his senses to some extent. The Grand Spirit of War must have done this as soon as they stepped in for protection against any possible attack or espionage. If this was anything like a war camp in the Real Realm. Something about the way the tent felt to his senses made him curious, so he let his limits on his skill go, allowing it to fully take in everything inside the tent. He knew that he was correct that something was different immediately, as he didn't have any reaction to the Essences around him. The tent was locked in place, the Ethereal Realm wasn't changing here, and it was filled with enough different Essences that he could discern everything.

Immediately he sensed two powerful Essences in the middle of the tent. He immediately identified them as Grand Spirits, there wasn't anything else that they could be. One was a tall female drake, and the other... was changing constantly. Rippling from one shape to another so fast that even Ryun could barely keep up. They were speaking in hushed tones, and something surrounding them, preventing sound from leaving their bubble. It didn't do anything against Ryun though, his sense spread

through the bubble and detected the vibrations in the air at their source. He overheard the conversation.

“... not know why they would send them so openly, with our foe’s voice on their lips,” the one that changed said. The voice flickering, one moment coming from a single source, the next a dozen, or a handful, as if the speaker was growing mouths then losing them.

“Two chosen cannot matter,” the one that looked like a drake said. “We cannot be stopped now.”

“Don’t delay,” the shifting one said. “Ra’azel grows stronger and you know that his designs are on more than the Real Realm. You felt his greed, he will attempt to bring down the heavens on our heads.”

The drake nodded and the bubble burst, then the one that changed flicker away, teleporting out of the tent in a manner that made Ryun’s head spin. He stumbled and Nayra caught him.

“You alright?” She asked.

“I’m fine,” Ryun said, but didn’t release her hand.

The spirit led them through the tent, going in a circle until they reached the room that was in the middle.

It was a large room, with the center of it taken up by a figure that was both tall in stature and power, their presence seeming to fill every space. He had already identified her to be The Grand Spirit of War, but laying eyes on her, the Essence was unmistakable. The Grand Spirit was in a form of a female drake, sitting on a throne, wearing a multitude of weapons, armor, and items that all blazed with powerful Essence.

To the side of the room was an elevated platform where four figures stood together wearing intricate armor pieces layered over exquisite fabrics that glimmered when touched gently by the light shining down from above them: this group seemed to be important, commanders perhaps. Behind them was a table, with a map on top of it. Ryun switched the Essence he was focusing on and took a look from across the room.



The map didn't instantly make sense to him, the only thing that he could gather was that it showed different troop placements. Each of the commanders possessed a unique feature; two bore different animal masks around their heads while another showed off their impressive wingspan behind them, one's face hidden beneath deep purple-blue cloth bandanna hung low enough to cover half his face while showing only piercing eyes.

Ryun turned his eyes back to the Grand Spirit of War. She wore an elaborate armor that seemed to pulse and change according to minute movements, rippling as if it was made out of water. He didn't immediately recognize what Essence it was made out of, so he focused on it more closely.

Then, he blinked, realizing what it was. The armor that shrouded War was in fact another spirit, molded into an armor. It occurred to Ryun that it was very similar to how people in the Real Realm might have awakened objects.

Before he could give it some more thought, the Grand Spirit of War spoke.

"Chosen," the Grand Spirit said slowly. "Who are you, and who sent you here?"

Ryun took in the Grand Spirit for a few seconds. There was a sense of power to her that Ryun could feel in his own soul. The spirit was powerful, and the Essence of War pulsed around her. There were touches in it that he recognized, like Violence, Anger, but also things like Order, Inspiration, Essences that were concepts. The Grand Spirit was powerful, but Ryun had faced powerful individuals before.

Nayra didn't answer, instead she glanced at him. They had agreed that he would speak with the spirit, after all he was the one that wanted to come here.

"My name is Ryun Nacht," he stepped forward. "I've come of my own accord."

The Grand Spirit leaned forward on her throne, and her voice thundered like a raging avalanche, demanding an answer to her question. “Why?”, she growled, the intensity of her presence causing the air around them to quiver with anticipation.

Ryun ignored the threat. “Because we share an enemy. Ra’azel Equinar has struck against my own, I have come here to seek your aid in bringing him down.”

War narrowed her eyes, her nostrils flared, and her lips pulled back to show rows of sharp teeth. “You would have me believe that you found me on your own? You are not a Summoner or any kind of spirit whisperer,” she said slowly. “How did come here?”

Ryun tilted his head. “We were brought by the Explorer’s Soul. He has said that you would be willing to help us.”

At the mention of the dragon’s name, the Grand Spirit’s entire demeanor changed, growing confused for a moment, and then contemplative.

“The Explorer’s Soul, not—” the Grand Spirit caught itself, then nodded. The spirits hidden in the shadows of the tent melted away, and Ryun relaxed his touch on his Qi. He was ready to blast them all to nothingness.

“So, you wish my aid against the yeti,” the Grand Spirit continued.

Ryun nodded. “My people,” he said, hedging a bit. “Have already faced the yeti and injured him greatly. We understand his power and the threat he poses. I understand that your kind cannot easily enter the Real Realm, but perhaps you can offer us something else. Anything you can give us in the service of our common goal, we will appreciate.”

The Grand Spirit glanced at the spirits standing next to the table and something seemed to pass between them.

Then she looked back at Ryun, her eyes unreadable. “Your proposal is unusual and not something that should be taken lightly. There are rules

in place amongst us spirits. I have wanted to end the threat of the yeti for a long time, and I had been thwarted on all sides.”

The Grand Spirit rose to her feet and stepped forward so that Ryun could suddenly feel the full force of her spirit around him. The entire tent felt like it was shaking as if preparing for some kind of onslaught.

“I am uncertain of what you could provide,” She said after a few moments pause but kept on looking at them with an expression that wasn’t all serious anymore but seemed more understanding, almost amused in its own way. “Though we always need more beings for our cause.”

“And what exactly is your purpose here?” Ryun asked.

“We are preparing for a war,” the Grand Spirit said.

“That much is obvious,” Ryun added.

The Grand Spirit narrowed her eyes, then spoke. “I’ve made a bargain with a powerful chosen, if I fulfill my part of it, I will get to have what I want.”

“The yeti?” Ryun guessed.

“Just so,” she answered. “But there are... delays. I can tell you are powerful. I do not know the ways of the chosen, but perhaps you could provide some aid. I must think about it Meanwhile, you are both welcome to stay in my camp. There are many great spirits and beings gathered here under my banner. Some might be able to give you what you are seeking.”

Ryun held her eyes for a long few seconds, then nodded. He recognized a dismissal when he heard one, but still he didn’t move to leave. Instead, he spoke again.

“I’ve been told that you have joined forces with the Grand Spirits of Transition and Mysteries,” Ryun said slowly. “If it is alright, I would like to talk with them as well.”

The Grand Spirit of War paused, but Ryun detected the minute stiffening of her body. She didn't like that question.

"Transition and Mysteries are not here," she told him. "We've parted ways for this cause."

Ryun narrowed his eyes but didn't ask for more. He had a suspicion that the other being in the tent before they arrived was another Grand Spirit. He was interested in knowing who exactly that was, but instead he turned around and let Nayra help guide him out of the tent. Something strange was happening in this camp, he didn't know what, but he would find out eventually. He always did.

## The Mystery

A spirit guide present, the same one that escorted them in, ushered them away from the main tent to a small tent on the outskirts of the camp. Nayra wasn't sure why they were even staying. The Grand Spirit didn't seem like it was eager to help. Though, she would wait and see what Ryun had to say. The two of them ducked inside and she was relieved to find that it was mostly furnished with soft blankets and pillows strewn over its circular flooring, which seemed almost too nice for such a place in comparison to what else surrounded them around this war camp. She had feared that they would find inside would be more suitable for spirits.

“You may move freely through the camp and the battlefields,” the spirit said. “If you decide to test yourself on the fields, know that death is not what we seek here,” it leaned down so that it was almost on a level with them, then continued. “Though accidents do happen. And you chosen are all so very vulnerable in our realm.”

With that, he turned around and left. Nayra wondered for a moment if that was a threat or just a friendly warning. She honestly couldn't tell, the spirit's tone of voice gave little away. She shook her head and glanced at Ryun who had walked to a corner and taken a seat on the ground with his legs crossed.

“So,” she started. “What do we do?”

Ryun didn't answer immediately, instead she felt his Qi spread around the inside of their tent. Suddenly, all sounds coming from the outside fell away as he used one of his techniques {Field of Twilight's Calm}. Then he turned his eyes on her.

“Well,” he started. “I think that we should take the Grand Spirit’s offer, and explore the camp, see if some of these spirits can help us.”

Nayra frowned. “I doubt it.”

“Don’t discount what you can learn here. I am sure that we could find a spirit of Death or two around here somewhere.”

Nayra opened her mouth, then closed it. That would be... interesting actually, she had to admit. If she could talk with a spirit of Death, she could learn a lot. Maybe even something that would help her understand her own power more.

“And what about you?” Nayra asked.

They had come to this place in order for all of them to gain power, after all.

“I would very much like to take a look at those forges we saw,” Ryun answered.

Nayra narrowed her eyes at him. “What are you not telling me?”

“How do you know that there is anything not to tell?” He smiled.

“You let the Grand Spirit just send us away for one,” Nayra told him. “I never knew you to be that patient, or just letting others brush you aside.”

Ryun smiled, and then he told her.

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“So, how do you plan on finding out what is really happening when you, you know?” Nayra said as the two of them walked through the camp.

Ryun grimaced, he did know. She was referring to him not being able to use the full breadth of his skill to sense everything around him, which limited his information gathering by a significant margin. Sadly, the only place in the camp that seemed to be fixed in place was the main tent. Already they had experienced some Ethereal Realm nonsense. He was pretty sure that the tents have swapped places. They’ve been looking for the smiths area for the past hour.

“Keep your eyes and ears open,” was what he answered her with.

He didn’t exactly know how they would find that out, nor, if he was being honest with himself was he really in much of a rush to find out. The fact that the Grand Spirit of War was planning something, that she had gathered so many spirits and even shades here, wasn’t that important to him. What he was here for had little to do with that. Increasing his power was what mattered at the end of the day. Either he would secure an ally that would join its strength with his against the yeti, or he would learn something to help him advance.

Finally, Ryun perked up as he saw a lot of fire-related Essence in the distance, and a moment later Nayra confirmed to him that it was indeed the forge tents area.

They made their way over.

As Ryun approached, he was immediately enthralled by the craft of the spirits. Some work was done by a single spirit, in a mock image of a smith from the Real Realm. Other work was being accomplished in ways that Ryun could barely follow, with several spirits working in unison.

The weapons and armor being crafted was, likewise, as strange as could be. In most cases, the material seemed to be just Ethereal Essence, somehow drawn out of the world and given shape and form that mimicked other Essence. In other cases it was as if the spirits were actively giving a part of their own being to create something.

Ryun approached a forge where a stocky spirit of some kind of metal related Essence, with seven arms, worked on a piece of armor. The spirit shaped liquid Essence taken from his chest into the shapes he wished and forced them to become physical through will alone.

It was fascinating, and as Ryun kept his eyes and sense on it, he felt like he could almost grasp what was being done. It felt eerily similar to what he and Selia did when they gave a piece of their soul to create a spiritual tool.

Another spirit walked up, and Ryun turned his eyes to see a mirror image of the smith spirit, come to stand next to him. Its eyes were glowing crystals in its head, and its body silvery in appearance.

“You are interested in the smith art of the great Ank’alui Clan?” The spirit asked.

“It is very intriguing,” Ryun answered. “We don’t do things quite like this in the Real Realm.”

“A chosen, here? And a smith at that? This is a surprise,” the spirit said.

“Why is that?” Ryun asked.

“I have never seen your kind before,” the spirit leaned down to take a closer look at Ryun. “Though, I was told that you are a lot more... fleshy. You feel like you are made of a different Essence.”



Ryun didn't respond to that, instead he introduced himself. "I am Ryun Nacht."

The spirit looked at him then seemed to realize that he was expecting its name. "Ah, I've heard of this! Names you call it, yes? This one would be Eager Smith in your ways."

Ryun blinked. "You don't have names?"

"Some do, those who are great spirits," the spirit said.

Ryun nodded, storing that information. Then he pointed next to him. "This is Nayra Ornn-Dagda."

The spirit turned its eyes to her, then spoke again. "This one is more like the stories I've heard told in my clan. All squishy and filled with meat parts."

The spirit reached out with a hand to poke her. Narya frowned and slapped the spirit's hand away.

"We don't like being touched," Ryun told him.

The spirit tilted its head, then shrugged. "I've always wondered. How do you chosen create more of you?" The spirit asked.

Ryun frowned. "What do you mean?"

"How do you draw the spark to create more of your kind? It must be really hard with all those fleshy parts, how do you know what you can take?"

Ryun blinked as he realized what the spirit was asking. He also realized that he didn't exactly know how spirits reproduced.

“How do you do it?” Ryun asked.

The spirit pointed at the smith. “A spirit is born through a gift of a spark, then given shape and form by will of its creator.”

Ryun looked back at the smith, pulling Essence out of its own chest. “That is a new spirit being born?”

“Just a lowly armor spirit,” he answered. “Giving birth to someone like me takes a lot more effort.”

Ryun tilted his head, a few ideas coming into his head.

“Perhaps you would consent to a conversation with the clan master?” The Spirit asked. “I am sure that he will enjoy learning how chosen smiths work their craft.”

Ryun inclined his head. “It would be my honor.”

“You are staying in the camp? Yes? I shall send for you once the clan master is free. We have a quota to fulfill.”

Ryun glanced around the forges. “I can see that. You are preparing for war?”

The spirit laughed. “We are in the domain of War, we are always preparing for war.”

Ryun opened his mouth to ask another question, when something hit his leg. He looked down to see a small spirit.

It had tan fur, mossy eyes, and it was clinging to his leg.

The small woodland spirit looked up at Ryun apologetically and bowed its head in apology, "I'm so sorry for running into you Great One!"

Ryun blinked. "It is of no concern."

"Shoo, shoo, pest!" The smith spirit waved its hands at it. "You shouldn't be at the forges! What if you catch on fire?"

"No, no, no, I must make amends," the small spirit said, its eyes looking up at Ryun. It put its hand into its coat and pulled out something, then it then proceeded to offer it to Ryun. He glanced down and saw a wooden cube no bigger than the palm of his hand.

"There is no need," Ryun said to the small spirit.

The spirit shook its head furiously. "You must take it!" It seemed on the verge of tears. Enough so that Ryun decided that he didn't want to see what would follow if he refused again. He reached down and took the cube. It was completely smooth to his touch, and appeared to be made out of pure Wood Essence to his eyes.

"Get away from here, little pest!" The smith said and the little spirit hurried away. "Apologies, the sprites are a nuisance. They never pledge to any cause, but you can always find them where they aren't welcome. I guess that is why many often use them as messengers. They can get anywhere."

"Pledge to a cause?" Ryun asked.

The spirit nodded. "That is the way of a spirit's life. Of us who are not great enough to hold our own domains at least. We pledge to the spirits greater than us, fulfilling the terms of the cause before moving on to join another. It is how we grow in power, by getting a piece of spark from the one we serve."

Ryun realized just how little he knew about the way spirits lived their lives.

“Well, I must return to work, I shall send for you once the clam master is free,” the spirit said, and Ryun nodded.

With one last look at the forge, he turned and they walked away.

“Well, that was interesting,” Nayra said. “At least you’ll get to learn more about smithing. Not that I see how that will help you get more power.”

“You shouldn’t discount it. The more I know, the more powerful things I can create,” Ryun said as he walked and looked down at the wooden cube in his hand. “You do want a spiritual tool of your own?”

“Right, right,” she said, conceding the point.

Ryun suddenly stopped in his tracks, his eyes focused on the cube.

“What is it?” Nayra asked when she noticed.

Ryun had used his sense on the cube, more out of habit than anything else. Which was why he was very surprised to find that it was actually hollow. And that suspended inside of it was another cube, this one with writing on it.

“It looks like we have a meeting to get to,” Ryun answered.

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The message that Ryun got was a simple instruction on how to reach a small glade outside of the valley of battlefields. Nayra wasn't sure if it was smart for them to go, but had eventually agreed. The two of them made their way out of camp, trying as best as they could to make sure that they weren't followed. Though, it didn't seem like it was any concern, the spirits weren't that interested in them. They were a curiosity it seemed, but not an important one.

They reached the meeting place written in the wooden box quickly enough. The glade was surrounded by tall and vibrant trees. It was an oasis of Life Essence and an island of calm in a sea of violence in the valley down below. It was occupied by a single spirit, the one that had run into Ryun and given him the box in the first place.

It startled when it saw them, then stood up from the rock it was sitting on. "You are here! Already!"

"Your message said to come," Ryun said and Nayra kept her eyes on their surrounding, making sure that there was no ambush.

"Not my message, only a messenger," the spirit said, its eyes darting back and forth in panic. "You weren't supposed to be this fast, how did you solve the puzzle so quickly?"

"Puzzle?" Ryun asked, then glanced back at the box, he seemed to be looking at it intensely for a few seconds, then his expression changed into surprise. "Right, that puzzle."

Nayra snorted next to him. He rounded on her and she turned away, trying to pretend like she wasn't trying to hold back laughter. It was like him to miss something like that and just get straight to the source.

"Anyways, we are here now," Ryun said after.

The spirit fidgeted, then spoke. “But they are not here! I need to go get them!”

“They?” Ryun asked, but before he even finished the question, the spirit winked out of existence. Ryun frowned, then exchanged a look with Nayra. “Get ready. We don’t know who this is.”

She equipped her armor and pulled out her shield and spear. Ryun pulled out his scepter and she felt him prepare his techniques. Nayra spread a thin layer of her aura through the glade, increasing the temperature and allowing Ryun to see better.

They didn’t have to wait for long. Suddenly, Nayra’s aura was pushed back in a small area ahead of them, in the shadow behind a few trees. Something had arrived.

“Show yourself,” Ryun called out.

Two beings walked out of the shadows, allowing her to see them clearly.

One was a big bird covered in white and black feathers that seemed like they would be as soft as clouds. The bird’s feathers were not simple white and black, but a mixture of each, like waves cresting with foam. Its neck seemed to be only a couple of inches thick and was long enough to reach from Nayra’s shoulders to well beyond her head. The bird’s head had a narrow beak and a grand crest made up of many feathers. Its eyes though spoke of great intelligence. There was something about it that called to Nayra, something that made her feel kinship with the spirit.

The second spirit was a hunched figure swathed in a cloak of silvery moonlight. The cloak’s material sparkled and glowed softly as the being turned to look at her. Its great shoulders were draped with strands of shimmering silver that resembled spider silk. The second spirit was a

hunched figure swathed in a cloak of silvery moonlight. The cloak's material sparkled and glowed softly as the being turned to look at her. Its great shoulders were draped with strands of shimmering silver that resembled spider silk.

“Greetings, chosen,” the bird whispered.

Nayra was certain that these two were Grand Spirits, they had the same aura about them that War had.

“Greetings,” Ryun returned. “Transition and Mysteries, I presume?”

The two spirits exchanged looks, then turned back to look at them. “You know of us? This is unexpected.”

“We’ve come to the Ethereal Realm in search of you,” Ryun said. “The Explorer’s Soul has told us that you are opposed to the yeti. We’ve come seeking aid against him.”

The spirits looked at each other once again, then the cloaked spirit spoke. Its voice deep and filled with meaning that couldn’t be understood.

“This is both fortunate, and not. When we heard that new chosen had arrived at the camp, we hurried to set up a meeting. But now... it seems like the Ethereal weaves its mysteries closer than ever.”

Nayra didn’t know what that meant, but the spirit fell silent for a few seconds before continuing.

“Regardless, our purpose still stands.”

The bird spirit, the Grand Spirit of Transition stepped forward. “We are in need of aid, and a chosen is the only one that can help us. Will you hear our words?”

Ryun glanced at Nayra, his eyes narrowing in a way that showed interest. But there was also a gleam of something very Ryun-like. The way he got when he could see the violence coming ahead.

“We will listen,” Ryun answered, and Nayra rolled her shoulders.

It looked like there were challenges ahead.