

## CHAPTER 2

The battle room was dark, lit only by the magic screen on the large table in the center of the room that displayed a map of Levon. A large group of people gathered around the table to await their orders for the battle ahead.

"Now men," began Hugo Anders, the King's head strategist. "Our target is this cave here next to Breakout Falls." He motioned his hands over the screen, which instantly shifted the focus of the image displayed to show the area in question. "We don't know how many their forces number, but if we use our heads, the Princess should be back in the castle by tomorrow at the latest."

A buff looking human walked to the front, "I just can't understand why the trolls would come and attack us out of the blue like this..."

Anders straightened the narrow glasses which adorned his face, "And you are?"

The buff man patted his chest, "Gall Riviera at your service! Spent 5 years in the royal knights corps, and am currently retired and living with my family."

"I didn't need your life story... Anyway, we don't have any leads as to what could have spurred them to attack, the only thing we can do is rescue our Princess before anything happens to her."

"But what if the trolls have a legitimate reason to abduct your Princess?" A merman just behind Gall said.

"A valid point, but as we have no further data lending to that possibility, I cannot see a resolution to this without any conflict."

He counted the people in the room.

"Alright, there are about 50 of you, 75 with the portion of our royal knights corps we're sending. I say we should take them in waves. Starting off with a small group, we shall work up from there finishing with the largest group at the end which hopefully will hit them hard enough to break through their defenses. But the first group must be strong, hit them hard to start, and each wave from there must have equal or more total power." He looked around the room. "Any volunteers for the first wave?"

Gall shot his hand up.

"Alright, that's one. The first group should be at least 4 people. Anyone else?"

"I might as well." The merman from a minute ago said.

Gall slapped him on the back, "Good to have you, what's your name?"

The merman rubbed his back in pain, "Jericho Tourmaline, and don't hit me."

"I'm gonna call you Jerry then!"

Jericho gave a look of disgust.

"Ermhrm, we need at least two more."

A dwarf from near the door worked his way to the table. He was quite short, though not nearly as short as the fairies.

"I'll do it, be glad ta lead tha way fer tha rest of tha troops. Schraubenzieher Diplum at yer service."

"And I will as well!" A woman shouted from the doorway.

She jumped over the rest of them and landed on the table, not breaking it, but it did shudder a little.

"You can sign Ethel Grampoline up for the first wave."

"Great, the first wave is filled. Now to settle the rest of them."

The waves were quickly settled. There were 5 waves in total, in order they were groups of 4, 11, 15, 20 and 25 for a total of 75 people. After the plan of attack was settled, the force was brought into the armory to gear up and prepare to head out.

Gall grabbed a large broadsword and swung it around lightly with one hand.

"Yeah, this'll do!"

Jericho glared at him, he obviously didn't want anything to do with him. He stepped to the side and reached for a pair of magic enhancing gauntlets.

Immediately, Gall gazed at what his "buddy" had chosen.

"Wow, you must be pretty good at attack magic if you're going for those! What kind of magic do you use?"

Jericho sighed and decided to put up with his annoyance for now.

"If you must know, I use Echo magic. Sonic waves, Echolocation, that sort of thing."

Gall just looked more amazed.

Their comrades, Ethel and Schraubenzieher, came up to them with their own weapons they'd found. Ethel had a Fire magic enhancing bracelet and Schraubenzieher had an imposing battle axe.

"I guess we're all ready to head out." Said Ethel.

"Looks like it." Replied Gall. And 30 minutes later, they commenced their assault.

About half a mile from the cave, there was a hill large enough for their small army to hide behind and spy on the entrance to the cave while they went over their plans one last time.

"Now gentlemen," Anders said, "As we discussed before, the attack shall be in waves, gather together with your wave and wait for my order. I determine that a 10 minute delay between waves should suffice. Any questions?"

The crowd stood at attention and said nothing.

"Good. Now then, wave 1, attack!"

The ragtag group of four ventured out with gusto in their hearts.

Gall was quite talkative.

"So 'Schraubenzieher'?"

"Yes?"

"Your name is quite a mouthful, it alright if I call you 'Ben'?"

"Hoh, I suppose so. How about I call you 'Al' then?"

The two shared a laugh.

While they spoke, Ethel was curious about Jericho.

"Hey, fishy."

"What!?"

"I've seen mermen in books before and they always had a fish tail instead of legs. How come you got legs?"

Though he was quite insulted by her initial statement, he tried to be polite. "My people can survive on land or in the sea, when our tails dry out they separate into human legs. It is something of a genetic magic we all have."

"Huh, and here I thought your daddy was a human or something."

Jericho's patience was growing thin.

After about 10 minutes, they finally reached the front of the cave.

"The next wave musta left by now, doncha think?" 'Ben' said.

"Probably, which means we should get fighting!"

The group heartily agreed.

With their weapons raised high, they charged into the cave to save the Princess.

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At castle Nogard, King Radius was pacing back and forth in front of his throne.

"Ohhhh, I am so worried I can't stand it. If only I could have sent more of my royal knights with them, but I couldn't leave the castle defenseless as well! What if the whole plan was to get the defenses down so they could destroy the rest of us! Ohh...I don't know what to do now..."

The King's messenger burst into the room.

"King Radius! News from the battlefield!"

"What?! What is it?!"

He grabbed the messenger and began to shake him.

"Hugo Anders reports that at 1500 hours today, the force of 75..."

The King perspired in suspense, awaiting the result of his force's attack.

"...Were defeated by the troll army and are currently being brought back to the kingdom for treatment."

The King's face seemed to hollow out. He slumped into his throne, nearly missing it.

"It's over, it's all over. I'll never see my baby girl again..."  
"I-I'm sorry to have to present you with this terrible news, your majesty."  
He promptly exited the throne room so as to let the King think.

The infirmary was stuffed to the brim with injured warriors. The King's doctors were having trouble keeping track of everything so they recruited some of the castle fairies to assist them.

They were just the help they needed, being so small, they could fly over everyone and bring them the tools needed for whatever their patient was suffering from.

"Murasako, bring me another vial of blood from the left cabinet!" Head doctor Levon shouted.

"Yes, sir!"

She flew straight to the cabinet and grabbed the blood.

"The other cabinet!"

"O-oh, sorry!" She quickly corrected herself and flew back over with the blood.

Over on an operating table by the door to the room, Gall Riviera lay, next to the table where his "Buddy" Jericho lay.

"We sure didn't stand a chance against those trolls."

"You put up a better fight than I did at least..."

"Aw, don't be like that buddy! You did great! Your magic was awesome, the only magic I can do is some small healing magic, and I can't even use it very well. See, Watch."

He raised his hand, which glowed a faint yellow.

A tiny cut on Jericho's arm slowly faded, but not completely.

"Hmm, that is weak..."

"See? You've got much better control of your magic than I do."

"A bit of training, and you'd be quite a formidable fighter though, strength like yours with healing magic as well? I know I'd be wary to fight you."

Gall grinned mockingly, "Did you just compliment me? Hee hee hee."

Jericho turned away from him and frowned, "Of course not, you're imagining things."

"Excuse me, do you need anything?"

Ginko had approached the two of them during their conversation. She had been assigned to help the lowest priority injured, the ones whose lives were not in danger.

"Oh, what a cute fairy you are." Gall answered her.

She blushed, "W-why thank you, u-um, did you need anything?"

"I could totally use a cold glass of Strangleberry juice! You need anything, bud?"

"...Dried kelp."

"A-alright, I'll get them for you right away. Be right back!"

She zipped off and headed for the kitchen.

The kitchen was also in a tizzy, preparing medicinal foods for aiding the injured.

Ginko rushed over to the fridge and tried to open the door, but the door barely budged. Just when she was about to give up, the door miraculously swung open, knocking her backwards in the air.

"Oh, I'm sorry, I saw you struggling to get the door so I thought I'd help you."

Ginko steadied herself and brushed off her dress.

"I'm fine, don't worry about it."

She grabbed the juice and then flew over to the dry goods pantry to get the kelp. She flew back into the infirmary, and she nearly dropped the refreshments she brought.

Lying on a table next to Gall was a merman with a cloth draped over his face.

"No!" She flew over to check his wrist for a pulse.

Nothing.

"B-b-but, you were fine a minute ago..."

She started sobbing profusely at the loss of this unfortunate merman.

"Pfft."

She looked up at Gall, who was chuckling mischievously in her direction.

"H-huh?"

Jericho sat up and removed the cloth on his face.

"...Who put this cloth on my face?"

"Gahahahaha! I got you!"

Ginko fainted from the stress.

She awoke in the fairy common room, Aoko had been tending to her.

"Ah, you're awake. Don't worry, we're taking care of that guy who scared you. Honestly... I don't understand some humans' sense of humor."

Ginko sat up and, after remembering what had occurred, started to well up with tears.

"What is it now?"

"I checked \*sniff\* his pulse \*sniff\* and he didn't have one \*sniff\* ."

"Oh, well merman biology is different from humans and fairies. The veins in their arms and neck are much more buried in the body, so you can't get a reading from them there, the best place to read a merperson's pulse is either in the center of the chest or at the hip."

"\*sniff\* O-oh."

The two of them sat in silence for a minute.

The tea kettle began to whistle, so Aoko flew over to the stove and poured Ginko a cup. She flew back to her and handed her the cup.

"Here. This'll make you feel better."

Ginko looked down at the steaming cup of chamomile tea. Looking at her reflection in the hot liquid, she realized something she had been afraid of all this time.

"I really am useless."

"Come on Ginko, not everybody knows merpeople biology. Anyone could have made that mistake."

"But I'm not just anybody! I mess up at the smallest task, It's a wonder I translated that guy for the king correctly!"

They sat silent for another minute.

"I'm sorry Aoko, I shouldn't have yelled at you like that."

"It's fine. I can understand how you feel."

"How could someone as perfect as you possibly understand how I feel?"

Aoko smirked slightly, "Heh, when I first joined the royal knights corps, nobody took me seriously, it took almost a month before I got any orders more than 'clean this', 'sort out that room' and stuff like that. It wasn't until that small fire in Prince Apex's room a few years back that I finally got to prove myself."

"I heard about that! They say it started spontaneously, they still haven't found out how it happened, you were the one who saved him Aoko?"

"Yeah, nobody could get into the room, but there was a hole burned in the door just big enough for me to squeeze through. I grabbed the Prince and we escaped out of the window to safety. After that, the King's water mages arrived and were able to put the fire out. My reputation skyrocketed from that incident."

Aoko looked oddly distant after telling her this.

"So you had it hard too for a while..." Ginko said. "But I don't know if there's a way I can make an big impact like that in this situation."

"You could always try to find someone else strong enough to save the Princess, but that scanning spell should have gotten all the tough people in the kingdom."

Ginko pondered her options. Just when she was about to give up again, she got an idea. It was a long shot, but it might work.

"I think I've got it, thanks Aoko!"

She zipped out of the common room like a flash of lightning.

"I wonder what she came up with?"

The King was sitting at his throne, sulking in despair from the defeat of his forces. The Queen and Prince were elsewhere, taking care of important matters.

"I can't go on like this. But what can I do?"

Just then, a flash of light zipped in front of his face and startled him so bad

he fell over onto the floor.

"Oh my gosh, I'm sorry!"

Ginko flew down to her King and profusely apologized.

"Ugh, don't worry about it. Now what is the matter?"

Ginko perked up immediately.

"King Radius, I may have a way to still save your daughter!"

The King looked suspicious, "This better not be some sort of gag. I'm liable to send you to the dungeon for such a thing."

She shook her head firmly, "I would never do something like that at a time like this!"

"Okay then," The King said, standing his throne back up, "What is your idea?"

"Well, you see, I'm not very good with magic, but the one magic I do have is quite efficient, I can sometimes even use it without thinking."

"What is this magic?"

"It lets me find strong people."

The King looked like he gave up hope.

"Is that all? We already got everybody strong in the entire kingdom with the great scan. Anybody left can't be stronger than all of them."

"That may be true, but my magic is special, it tells me what a person's latent ability will be. I can bring somebody who will become strong to the castle, and we can train them!"

The King looked intrigued.

"Hmm, quite interesting. There is one problem though, with the turmoil the castle has been in since the kidnapping, we hardly have enough staff to take care of everything as it is, not to mention if we were to start training a near novice to fight well."

Ginko was getting desperate.

"W-what if I train them?! I'll find them, train them, AND lead them to the cave so the castle can operate smoothly."

The King thought about it.

"Hmm, I approve it! Better than doing nothing. Perhaps it will take a bit longer to get my dear daughter back, but at this point I'm willing to do whatever it takes. Go, prepare for your journey, and find the savior of my daughter!"

"Right, thank you sir!"

Ginko had a great big smile on her face as she flew back to her room, took a quick shower, put on a more suitable dress, and got herself ready for the big task that awaited her.

END OF CHAPTER 2