

Volume 1 wind and shadow

FeralHeart Chapter 1 - Chapter 1

*lub**blub**lub**blub*

The bubbles floated up with my exhalation into the snorkel and burst near my ear, breaking the silence of the underwater environment.

The noon sunlight broke through the impediment of the water, broken up by the rippling surface into wavy lines of light that illuminated my body, naked except for a loin cloth.

I took in another deep breath through the snorkel and concentrated my mind on the exercises.

Thunderclap Samsara Palms.

The signature technique of my clan, developed and perfected over the five hundred years of its history.

The lead weights on my waist and ankles kept me underwater, preventing me from floating up.

Settling my feet solidly on the bottom of the indoor pool, I squatted slightly and exploded into motion.

Back straight, muscles tense, I lashed out with my right palm in an arcing manner, aiming at an imaginary opponent diagonally from top right to bottom left.

My palm was cupped in a manner that pushed the maximum amount of liquid in its path forward.

At the end of its path, I laid my palm along the line of my forearm and withdrew it back to the starting position along the path of the least water resistance.

I repeated the motion slowly, correcting any flaws I might have picked up in my form and integrating my breathing pattern into the movement.

Inhale, strike, exhale, withdraw...

Moving on to the other five movements; using my right arm, horizontally from right to left, from bottom right to top left, using the left arm for a diagonal strike from top left to bottom right, horizontally from left to right and finally from bottom left to top right, I drilled them repeatedly, slowing down to check for flaws.

Satisfied that I was doing them correctly, I sped up the movements.

The water around me became turbid as my arms began to blur. The streams slowly became an orderly vortex as I continued to repeat the moves.

One set per second...

Two sets per second...

Three sets per second...

When it got to the rate of ten sets a second, my palms were moving so fast that they displaced the water faster than it could fill in the gap, leaving a vacuum in their path.

The surrounding water rushed in to fill the gap, creating an explosive rumble in the process.

The thunderclap.

That's where the technique got its name from.

When practiced to the level of fifty-five sets per second and above, the speed of the strikes broke through the sonic barrier and could cause sonic booms in the air.

The sound accompanying the strikes was directed towards the opponent and penetrated their body to cause internal injury.

In the early stages, the practice was carried on underwater, often with glitter spread in it so the practitioner could observe the trend of the water flow due to their strikes and perfect it so the final sound wave was directed towards their opponent.

As a pure beginner without the advantage of a Barrier to protect my body from the backlash of moving at extreme speeds and as a Hominum without the sturdiness provided by the beast bloodline, it was a miracle I had managed to keep up with my Bestia peers and reach this level of proficiency.

Although a lot of that was due to the expensive medicines my father lavished on me to strengthen my body and the healing of my mother to ensure that I didn't leave behind any latent injuries after my hellish training regimen.

My muscles burned with exertion as I demanded more and more from them and sped up my attacks.

Eleven sets per second...

My chest burned from the lack of air as I was unable to pace my breathing with the strikes.

Twelve sets per second...

The speed of my strikes surpassed my current cognition capacity and I ran them on muscle memory and instinct as the lactic acid continued to build up.

Thirteen sets per second...

My brain grew fuzzy from the lack of oxygen as my arms drew upon it all to fuel the crazed speed at which they were moving. Suddenly, pushed too far beyond its limits, my left bicep cramped, deviating the direction of my strike.

The disorderly stream interfered with the vortex set up around me and caused it to collapse inwards, slamming into me with the speed and force of several of my own strikes, forcing the air out of my lungs in a burst of bubbles.

I stood my ground with my arms crossed in front of me and weathered the beating until the raging water settled.

I slowly stood up straight from my protective crouch and breathed deeply through the snorkel as I closed my eyes and let the warm sunlight ripple on my face through the water.

snap

A sharp pain ran up from my shoulder and my eyes snapped open as I turned my gaze towards my trainer.

I could see a distorted image of him through the water.

He was six-feet-tall with a swimmer's body with wide shoulders and a slim waist with wiry muscles that spoke of great power concealed within their bundles.

Having perfectly awakened his Royal Bengal tiger bloodline, minor bestial traits had seeped into his features.

His dark orange hair was kept cropped close to his skull with dark stripes running through it. There was a 王 marking on his forehead and his eyes were a brilliant gold without any sclera. His ears were rounded with soft fur filling them.

His orange and black striped tail lashed out in impatience as he overlooked me from the side of the pool.

He also happened to be my father, the head of the Felidae clan.

Flicking his finger at me again, a tiny bullet of compressed wind howled through the air, pierced the water and snapped against my other shoulder. His immaculate control of wind, his bloodline talent.

A thin thread of wind formed, linking his mouth with my ear and his growl reverberated within my ear: "Again."

So, I ran through my forms again and again until he was finally satisfied and I was utterly exhausted and could barely raise my hands.

Dragging my weights along, I ponderously dragged my body out of the water, discarded the snorkel and collapsed by the poolside, my chest rising and falling with my deep breaths.

A shadow covered the sun and I looked up to the golden eyes of my father.

A stoic man, his square jawed, emotionless visage gave nothing away as we locked gazes. Then an appreciative light filled his eyes and he squeezed out the word, "Good" from his mouth and turned around to walk away.

A warmth filled my chest. Father's praise was a very rare thing and I appreciated every instance of it.

Groaning as I dragged my protesting body up to my feet and divested myself of the weights, depositing them in a designated box by the poolside, I made my way to the infirmary.

My entire body was black and blue from the collapsing water currents. My arms were specially covered with bruises from the air bullets shot at them by father to correct my form whenever I went astray.

Chapter 2: Chapter 2

Entering the infirmary from the back door, I was greeted with a gaggle of voices and bustling activity as the rest of the clan members had arrived after the morning practice to have their bodies recuperated to avoid any hidden wounds accumulated from limit breaking practise.

I weaved my way through the crowd of sweaty, semi-clad warriors and bustling nurses and doctors. Those of the branch families who recognized me gave way and bowed respectfully while the odd member of the main family threw hostile and contemptuous looks my way.

All as it should be.

I finally reached my mother. A petite woman with jet black short hair and feline ears. Her bloodline talent was healing and her blood relationship was very honoured, dating back to the sacred cats of Bubastis.

She looked up from where she was healing the twisted ankle of female clan member and gave me a warm smile, running her eyes on the myriad bruises I had accumulated. Soft white rays of light illuminated the swollen area around the girl's foot and the inflammation subsided at a speed observable by the naked eye.

Within minutes, it was back to its original state.

The girl got up and tested her weight on her foot. Detecting no trouble, she thanked mother and curtsied to me... although it looked quite funny as she had to do it with an imaginary skirt in her exercise attire, which was barely more than underwear.

I nodded my acknowledgement and she moved away.

Mother healed my wounds while asking about my progress before sending me away with a kiss on my forehead. She was too busy now to talk. All the medical personnel were.

I walked into the male section of the hot spring connected with the infirmary, scrubbing off the sweat with some soap and rinsing off the suds with water before stepping into the steaming pool.

I let out an involuntary sigh as the warm water relaxed my knotted muscles, letting the built up lactic acid dissipate.

There were several others in similar states of lethargic bliss in various positions in the hot spring. They were mostly from the branch family and nodded at me whenever their gazes met mine.

Suddenly there was a commotion at the entrance and I lazily turned around to see what was going on.

It was Bruno and his lackeys. He was my cousin, making him my main competitor for the position of heir. That and due to another reason, our relationship was just like fire and water.

Just seeing the surly ass stomping into the bath, I knew that the moment he saw me, my peaceful soak would be interrupted.

His bloodline was that of a Siberian White tiger. Those majestic creatures held the title of being the heaviest members of the Felidae family and as such, Bruno's strength was no small matter.

Standing at five feet eight inches tall, his muscular arms were nearly as thick as an average man's thigh. His ripped back muscles showed how solid his foundation was and allowed him to leverage the entirety of his arm strength without straining his back.

He might not be the fastest or the most agile but I had seen him smash a stone larger than me with his two-handed war-hammer.

His icy blue eyes met my crimson pupils and sparks seem to fly. He ran a hand through his white hair that had dark stripes in it and stalked towards the bank of the hot spring opposite to me, settling into the water facing me accompanied by his lackeys.

My eyes narrowed and my muscles tightened as I felt the bloodlust radiating off them. It was as if an ominous beast was facing me and my body reacted in a manner that readied me for fight or flight.

My goal in the hot spring was to relax all my overworked muscles and rid them of their accumulation of lactic acid, preventing later cramping and muscular pain. But if they continued to take turns to lock me with their bloodlust, my muscles would automatically tighten, preventing me from achieving my goal.

I sighed... I could fight them but I was outnumbered and exhausted after my training. Also, it would be seen as a demerit to react to such childish provocation. As the future heir I was expected to show greater poise than that.

I got up from the water and left the bathhouse, followed by the sound of their jeers.

Even though I felt like punching the living daylights out of that brat, I actually understood why he resented me so.

Sighing again and shaking my head at the memory of the beginning of our grudges, I walked into the adjoining dressing room and picked out one of the standard clan uniforms hanging there that fit me.

On my way out, I paused in front of a full-length mirror and inspected myself.

At five feet ten inches, I was just a bit shorter than father and had a body type similar to his. It was to be expected as I had inherited his love of the water and had spent hundreds of hours over the years, swimming in the various bodies of water in our locality.

Broad backed and narrow waisted, I had inherited my mother's oval face and sleek hair, although my locks were crimson, matching my pupils.

My parents named me Mars after the crimson comet that passed over Ea on the day I was born. Mars had an orbital period of eighty-eight years and the next time I saw my namesake, I'd be an old man.

I made my way to the library after a quick trip to the pantry to fill my rumbling stomach, pausing for a bit to have my identity verified by the librarian.

Books were extremely rare and valuable commodities and the librarian was one of the strongest members of our clan... although he was getting on in years now and his martial prowess was sure to have declined from his heyday when he was known as the Duke of Blood.

I sat down on a stool, leaning my back against the wall by a small table that had been set aside for my reading, what with the frequency of my visits.

I loved reading about astronomy due to my namesake and the behaviour of animals in the wild due to my pet theory that observing animals can help in predicting the personalities of those who carry their bloodlines.

I flipped open the book I had been reading to the bookmarked page.

It was an old tome that detailed the history of the post-war period. After the Demon Lord's spell took effect and the Bestia were born as the only sentient race in Ea, non-sentient beings driven by their instincts called animals appeared.

Their bodies were similar to the original beasts but they had none of their intelligence or their magical talents. But their formidable mortal bodies and keen survival instincts meant that they prospered in the wild lands that had been the former den of the beasts.

The book I was reading talked about the habits of the Royal Bengal tiger, a majestic creature that lived in the extensive mangroves of the south-eastern part of the continent. It spent a lot of its time in the waters, hunting for fish.

They were also formidable predators of the land, jointly holding the title of the king of beasts with lions. Hence the term royal in their name.

Glancing up from the book, I noticed that the sunlight streaming through the window had caught a red tinge. A maid stood silently nearby. Seeing me awake from my immersed condition, she informed me that father and mother would not be able to join me for dinner and that I didn't need to wait for them.

I thanked her and walked to the pantry again, filling my empty stomach with a plate of the generic nutrition meal they served. It was mother's creation... a supremely bland mix of all the necessary nutrients tailored to suit the high energy demands of warriors. Head nutritionist of the clan she might be, but mother was no cook.

Finishing my meal, I walked down the corridors of the keep as the servants bustled about, lighting the smokeless torches in the sconces. They each carried two pouches. One had fire stones and the other had ignition powder. Pouring equal amounts of both

into the torches caused them to react and emit a steady white flame, illuminating their surroundings.

I finally reached my room... well, Deimos, Phobos and my room... and pushed the door and entered, causing the chimes at the top of the gate to tinkle.