

# 《The Forest Spirit who sought the Gods》

## 26 Back on the road

The little group decided to leave Ebb through the north gate, in order to follow the lake shore up to God's Eye Island before crossing the water. While they ate, Thani recounted her adventures and the start of it all to Alice, and the weather took the opportunity to turn sour. When they crossed the bridge over the river outside, Alice still wasn't over the shock ; she'd seen Thani and Fabrice fight, but she assumed they were very skilled at utilising three blessings only, not four. The death of the God-Tree didn't faze her in comparison, as she couldn't relate to it at all.

The next day of running along the bank in the forest was spent under heavy rain, and was mainly used to exchange stories and information. Alice still wore her cloak to ward off the peals of water falling, while Thani experimented a bit and made herself a self-held umbrella with a bit of blood and magic. Oakbud was happily sitting over Thani's newest creation, enjoying in the rain.

As Thani spoke of her life in Pilgrim Woods and of her talents, Alice responded in kind with hers. She is twenty years old, comes from the sea down the river from Ebb, and the proud owner of two blessings from the God of Transgression.

Before coming, she had learnt to fight with a childhood friend who followed after Theomars in the end ; however they were separated by sickness three years before. At that moment, she decided to see the world in his stead and to find a remedy for his affliction ; traditional medicine was gradually abandoned after Deva's ascension, due to her followers' healing arts. But their absence was only felt harder, the few left studying it being the devotees in question.

Concerning her magic, her blessings are shadow magic and [break], with her first magic reinforced. She hoped to get a third soon during her travels. Her magic, as showed in the arena before, enabled her to camouflage herself, and also jump to other close shadows (However the magic consumption of that was huge, and she could only use it once before resting). She'd rather rely on her agility to do the job.

The blessing to [break] was what gave the God Liezel his title of [Transgression]. It allowed one to see through the fabric of things and make them crumble. It could be applied to many things, such as armour, walls, and even the majority of channeled magics. She demonstrated against one of Thani's tattoos, revealing its weakness at the occasion : range. Even though it was separated from Thani's arm and fell to the floor, Alice needed to touch it directly, and couldn't yet apply the blessing through a weapon.

The rain stopped the next morning, and a smell of fresh irrigated soil permeated the air. Sun rays were heating the world again, and Oakbud was completely revitalized by the comfortable setup ; he could feel the well-being and satisfaction of every plant around them.

While the little spirit was busy drugging himself, Thani and Alice were sparring. At first, they banned the use of magic to compete in pure athletic ability, before putting it back into the mix to get more familiar with each other. As it turned out, Thani had a much stronger body, but it didn't prevent her from getting beaten to the ground harshly ; she wasn't used to fighting without her magic, and her physical advantage was completely ignored by Alice's techniques, who was well-acquainted with hand-to-hand fighting and short weapons. However, the situation was reversed with spells allowed, and Alice could barely break even for a minute before being forced to surrendering with nowhere to hide or dodge. Her last-ditch effort to win through a shadow jump into knockout was thwarted by a revolving blood wall to the face ; breaking magic still took a bit of time and effort, and she was thrown down by the force of the blow. Her blessing wasn't a good combat technique in its budding form. Even though she wasn't the best of brawlers, Thani and her new dagger represented walking doom for whoever faced her : the ability to channel a second magic through the weapon over her own was close to invincible in a duel and priceless in a group.

Oakbud decided to join the fight at one point, and the initial exercise turned to a wild goose chase where Alice and Thani kept dashing and slicing roots and vines apart, dodging pitfalls and trip-easy short walls. He couldn't catch them, but they were equally unable to do anything to him ; the time Alice tried to attack, she discovered he could just phase through as a spirit and almost got caught.

Once they were too tired to continue, and after a quick cleanup, the group finally left the cover of trees and continue their trip north.

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Hundreds of kilometers away from them, Harp finally arrived at the Stalwart Oak's clearing to verify his informations. Like the group had said, the God-Tree had drawn his last breath ; he even found the new sapling that Aldo had told him about. His boosted senses helped him avoid danger on the way, and he was thankful for being able to avoid a pack of boars. Now he only needed to make his way home and everything would be alright.

What he could not see though, was the strange little dragon perched atop the tree, far out of his perception range, with his eyes riveted to his returning back.

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Step. Step. Step.

Evenly spaced, ticking like a metronome, Jack's eerie walk was out of everyone's sight thousands of meters into the air, well above the sea. He had been using his time magic continuously for weeks to walk on the earth that was before.

Step. Step. Step.

Fatigue was a foreign concept to undead, and magical reserves were nothing but a joke to God-Children.

Step Step. Step.

"I've lost everything when you stopped my grand spell to change my life... How cold it be too early? Or too late? For someone who masters time? And you had to ruin it all..."

Step. Step. Step.

"There can only be one God of Time. And I am it. And I said that turning Time back was not a good thing. But you were nothing close to strong enough to ignite divinity, you were just an ignorant but lucky human who stumbled upon a great idea. Had you studied more, you would have understood why."

Step. Step. Step.

"You want to break me? Reform me? It's too late, but you won't kill me. So I will break your things in return. Until your tolerance stops. Because you won't turn the harm I do back."

Step. Step. Step.

"Don't overestimate your value to me. I will stop you when I feel like it. Then I will tell you why your idea was mad from the start. Then I will kill you and find another Child. Until then I will continue to watch."

Step. Step. Step.

"Then tell me, and end this farce."

Step. Step. Step.

"No."

Step. Step. Step.

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Next morning.

"Soooo... I feel I should have asked sooner, but. It's great that we're facing the island and can see it, but we don't have a boat. How do you plan on crossing? Do you plan on flying there or something?"

Alice was grimacing, already imagining a useless trip back to Ebb and paying for the cruise.

"Me can fly there! Take bird! But too far for Thani fairy. Alice fairy swim well?"

The first answer came from Thani, more precisely the top of her head.

"Well, I was kind of hoping to improvise. Just think of something, and then Oakbud makes it. It's good to train his magic control, and we have time anyway." She flicked a tattoo at the back of Oakbud's head, while she was chewing on a piece of bread. The other tattoo was currently used to stir a pot of aromatic plants infusion. "Also, don't call people who don't have wings a fairy, idiot."

"Boat works how to go to the island?"

"Uh, you've never seen a boat?" Alice was surprised, and still as confused as before.

"Barely two months old, remember?"

"Oh. Right."

So the lesson began, Thani going first.

"So, you see, there are boats with sails, and some with oars. We're not many so oars are fine if we help you make one." She was drawing shapes in the dirt to illustrate her words.

Alice didn't lose time to start grumbling. "We're only two, remember? How do you plan to row for two days straight without dying from exhaustion?"

"Me make golem for boat! Golem never stops."

The end product looked halfway between a raft and a barque, and was a bit wobbly.

The rowing golem took a tentative step on it, and nothing seemed to creak ominously somewhere. The hull was made from compacted clay held together with vines over heavy strips of bark. Its size reached five meters in length and two in width, leaving the trio plenty of space to move aboard.

Oakbud's golem grabbed his bear-sized heavy oars, made like the hull, and with the infinite magic he was supplied made his first row. The whole boat shook, sending both passengers to the ground ; the golem's strength was proportional to his magic core, and Oakbud getting more familiar with their creation only made it more powerful. The speed kept increasing quickly after fine tuning the movements of the construct a bit, and stabilized around a quick running speed. With this rythm, God's Eye Island would be at arm's reach the next day early afternoon..