

## Victor BK4: Ch15

Book 4: Chapter 15: Ancestors

Victor felt the rage smoldering in his pathways, felt it surging through his veins with each \*thump\* of his mighty heart. He sat hunched over the little jar, his great fists clenching and unclenching as he heaved in and out each furious breath. Slowly, with a tremendous push of his will, he brought himself under control; he slowed his breathing and gradually relaxed his straining, bunched muscles.

“Hmm,” his voice rumbled forth from his enormous chest, “let’s see here.” He picked up the jar, and his lips pulled back from his straight, white teeth as he felt its warmth. Victor grasped the top of the jar and twisted it loose, breaking the waxen seal. Suddenly the scent of copper, of bloody meat, wafted into his nostrils, and his grin widened.

Victor tilted the jar into his mouth, felt the warm hunk of tangy flesh fall into his mouth, and, with zeal, he began to chew the tough meat into pulp, savoring each squelching burst of hot, coppery liquid that drenched his tongue and rolled down the back of his throat. When he finally swallowed the last bit, Victor grunted, looking around the room in his red-haze-filtered vision, wondering what was supposed to happen.

For a moment, he forgot where he was, forgot why he’d gone Berserk, and nearly let the rage slide out of his pathways and back into his Core, but then something happened. He felt a knot in his stomach, then a searing white-hot pain, and he looked to the ceiling of the strange, round room and screamed. Fire spread through his body like an eruption, and before his long ululating cry wound down, Victor fell back, his massive shoulders thumping against the stone of the pedestal—his vision went dark, and his consciousness slipped away.

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Tenecoalt crouched among the rough-barked boles of the trees, peering down into a lush, verdant vale, the yellow orb of the Sun God hot and heavy in the air, provoking the moisture of the dense plantlife and damp soil to rise in palpable, steamy waves. Tenecoalt loved it. He savored the heat, the humidity on his painted flesh, as he watched the green-scaled wyrm feasting. What a creature! What a worthy opponent! Tenecoalt felt his heart thump in anticipation; here was a beast deserving of his ancestors’ attention.

He gripped his macuahuitl, newly crafted from the star metal he’d won from the clutches of a winged, lightning-riding stranger. So many strange men and creatures had been trespassing on his people’s lands these last hundred years. So many men and creatures that had fallen to the might of the Quinametzin! He grinned savagely, eyes still tracking the mighty green monster below. How easily it had killed the powerful saber-clawed bear! “That was my heart to claim,” Tenecoalt grumbled.

Moving through the trees, between the thick-leaved plants, he crept forward, a huge, white-clay-covered wraith. This fight would bring his ancestors to him; it would be a battle worthy of tales in the Ghost Lands. He glided down the slope, through the last of the trees, charging over the grassy slope toward his quarry. As his stride lengthened and he lifted his macuahuitl into the air, he threw off all pretense of stealth and howled a mighty war cry, flying toward the tremendous reptile’s flank.

Tenecoalt was large for a Quinametzin, often towering head and shoulders over his brethren, but even his mighty frame seemed insignificant in the face of the enormous green wyrm as it whirled to confront his charge. The monstrosity was longer than a tall tree, thicker than five cave bears, with four legs, each big and heavy enough to smash a giant like Tenecoalt into the springy loam. It was dark green along its spine-covered back, but the scales faded to pale yellow where its prodigious belly dragged in the grass.

It was toward the low, hanging gut that Tenecoalt had meant to make his first strike, but he'd underestimated the speed of the mighty creature. It whirled, trampling the ground and whipping its long, deadly tail behind it as the monster brought its toothy maw to bear on him. Each of its hundred yellow-white fangs was as long as a spear, and they showered him with red-tinged saliva as they clamped shut, snapping the air with a thunderous \*crack\*.

The bite had been meant for Tenecoalt, aimed to part his top half from the bottom, but he was faster than that, more crafty, too. He slid under the monster's chin, burst up from the ground, exploding into the air like a springing, fangmaw fish, and dragged his impossibly sharp, unfathomably heavy macuahuitl along the scaly neck of the wyrm, pulling away scales, raking the flesh beneath them, and eliciting a furious roar from the monstrosity, so loud it shook the leaves from the nearby trees.

The wyrm bucked and thrashed, trying to twist into a position where it could bite at him again, but Tenecoalt was knocked aside by its surging shoulder, thrown, briefly, out of reach. He tumbled over the hot, damp grass and leaped to his feet, bellowing his own roar of challenge. He'd drawn first blood! "Come to me, Ancestors!" he screamed, charging toward the great serpent, rushing headlong at the jaws that would spell certain doom for him should they close over his mighty frame.

"Camaxtli hears your cry, warrior! Take my speed!" Suddenly silver-white Energy bloomed around Tenecoalt, and he felt his arms and bones strain to contain the power. Where before he charged, now he flew over the grass, a comet, streaking too fast for the wyrm to track.

Tenecoalt hacked a terrible gash in its left foreleg as he flew by, leaving a trail of ripped, broken grass in his wake. Then, as he streaked along the length of the great beast, he smashed his dark, glinting macuahuitl into the wyrm's flank, dragging it for twenty lightning-laced steps before his surge of speed wore off, and he had to roll away from the thrashing monster.

Tenecoalt tumbled through the grass, his last burst of Camaxtli's speed sending him flopping away from the wounded terror. He'd parted its scales and flesh, leaving a terrible wound that leaked gouts of gore with each of the monster's frenzied, writhing rolls; it was still trying to smash him, unaware that he'd rolled free.

Tenecoalt straightened up, and the wyrm caught sight of him. It ceased its flopping, rolling fury and stood, staring straight at him. Suddenly a deep, grating voice echoed through the vale, "Worm. Maggot! You dare to strike at the great Tu'vashele'kha'zat? Savor the bite you've taken—it will be your last!"

Tenecoalt held up his bloody macuahuitl and howled at the Sun, his deep, powerful voice ululating through the vale. Then he charged and, again, called on his ancestors, "Join me, Ancient Ones! Let us slay this boastful snake!"

He didn't let fear or panic enter his heart as he neared the monstrous creature—his ancestors didn't come to the aid of weaklings. As he drew close, his feet began to squelch in the hot blood-covered grass, and he knew his ancestors would come or they wouldn't; either way, he was going to drive his macuahuitl into the wyrm's toothy snout.

The monster roared at him, hot breath billowing out over the meadow, ropy strings of bloody saliva accompanying the terrible sound. Still, Tenecoalt charged headlong into it, a grimace of determination on his face. The wyrm charged, Tenecoalt leaped, and then the sound he'd been hoping for came into his mind, "I am Guatamoc! Take my strength!"

An explosion of hot, red Energy erupted at Tenecoalt's Core, and he screamed in fury, pain, and exultation as his body stretched and his bones cracked. As he came down from his leap, he landed in front of the great wyrm with a thunderous crash, and the creature snapped its maw, aiming to remove his leg from his body. Tenecoalt pushed one mighty hand against its snout, holding it back just an inch from his flesh, and the wyrm's teeth clacked together with another powerful \*crack\*.

"I am not a snack for a slithering snake!" he roared, no longer having to look up at the monster but rather down. He hacked his macuahuitl, now tiny in his hand but still heavy, sharp, and more deadly than any weapon born of nature, into the wyrm's head and neck over and over. He drove its full length into the monster's flesh, ripping and shattering scales, pulling out hunks of meat and tendon with each stabbing, hacking blow.

"Ancestors! Savor the blood of our foe!" he screamed as he fought off the wyrm's thrashing, bucking attempts to get past his guard, to bite him, to claw at him, to whip its mighty tail into him. Tenecoalt stood firm, ducking, weaving, and fending off the beast with his free hand while he delivered wound after wound, drenching himself in wyrm blood.

As the monster grew tired and weak, he held it down with a gigantic knee on its snout and punched his star metal studded weapon through its eyes and then into its neck, twisting and yanking it out with great, bloody strands of flesh.

When the wyrm lay still, and Tenecoalt stood exhausted next to its enormous head, he realized his ancestor's strength had left him long before he'd finished his bloody work. Still, it had been enough. He'd bested the monster with his skill; all he'd needed was Guatamoc's might to even the scales. He heaved an exhausted breath, lifted his bloody macuahuitl to the Sun, and screamed his victory into the sky, letting all know that the Quinametzin once again reigned supreme in this part of the jungle.

He stood, heaving for breath, clothed only in blood-caked clay, no longer white but pinkish-red. It wasn't time to rest, though; he owed his ancestors tribute. Now it was time to find the beast's heart; he'd eat some, but the rest he would burn and send to the Ghost Lands to strengthen his ancestors so they might win more battles in those strange climes. "Thank you, Guatamoc and Camaxtli!" he breathed, moving to the wyrm's flank and looking for the best place to begin his bloody work.

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Victor groaned and rolled to his side. He felt like he'd been run over by a bus, a stark contrast to how he'd felt the last time he'd advanced his racial bloodline. Either the heart was a harsher catalyst or the chamber he was in, speeding his recovery, hadn't allowed him to convalesce as thoroughly. He sat up, rubbing at his eyes. In his dulled mental state, he felt like he had something in them, but then he realized a System message was obscuring his view.

"Let's see here," he muttered, trying to focus on the weird floating text.

\*\*\*Congratulations! You have gained a new feat: Ancestral Bond\*\*\*

\*\*\*Ancestral Bond: Your connection to your titanic bloodline has grown robust—like the Quinametzin primogenitors from which you trace your lineage, you have a deep connection to your ancestors. Should they be pleased with your efforts, and should your need be great, you may call on them, and they may come to your aid.\*\*\*

\*\*\*Congratulations! You've learned a new spell: Honor the Spirits - Improved\*\*\*

\*\*\*Honor the Spirits - Improved: You understand, instinctually, what prizes from your conquered foes will please your Ancestral Spirits. With an effort of will, you can cause your Energy to devour your sacrifice, sending it to the Spirit Plane, where your Ancestors will consume it to grow in power. Energy Cost: 1000, Cooldown: Very Long.\*\*\*

"Uh," Victor grunted. "That's cool . . ." as he spoke, reading over the messages, Victor's mind wandered back to his vision, and his eyes bugged out. "Holy shit!" he breathed, remembering how it had felt to be Tenecoalt as his ancestors flooded him with power. "Fucking-A!"

Victor wasn't sure they'd be so generous with him; he'd done nothing to earn their love so far, but somehow, he knew that if he worked at it, if he honored them, those spirits would come to him, too. They'd help him destroy his enemies. While he mulled it over and dismissed the System message, Victor's eyes fell on his hands, and he did a double-take. "What the fuck?"

They were still his, for sure, but they looked different. The skin was darkly tanned, as always, but it had a more robust tint to it, a golden brownness that exuded vibrant strength. His fingers looked leaner, stronger, his nails like perfect, stone-hard pearls at the ends of them. He flexed his fists and felt like he could smash stones in them.

He let his eyes run up his arms and noticed similar changes; his muscles and veins stood out beneath his robust, supple skin, and then he realized something; his scars were gone—every one of them. He stood up in a fluid, graceful motion and smiled at how pain-free he was. Whatever aches or exhaustion he'd felt upon waking up were gone. Looking around the little chamber, he noted his perspective had changed; he'd grown again.

Once leery of becoming "too big," Victor realized he didn't feel that way anymore. Either his experience with the Degh or his connection to his ancestors had altered that perspective—he felt good about it. "Let's see," he said, calling up his status sheet:

Status

Name:

Victor Sandoval

Race:

Human (Quinametzin Bloodline) - Advanced 1

Class:

Spirit Carver - Epic

Level:

36

Core:

Spirit Class - Improved 1

Energy Affinity:

3.1, Fear 9.4, Rage 9.1, Inspiration 7.4

Energy:

3402/3402

Strength:

135

Vitality:

150

Dexterity:

40

Agility:

63

Intelligence:

32

Will:

341

Points Available:

0

Titles & Feats:

Titanic Rage, Ancestral Bond, Flame-Touched

“Woah, advanced,” he said, resting his hand on Lifedrinker, unconsciously covering his chatting with himself by directing his words toward her. “That means I gained . . .” he counted on his fingers, “six ranks? Hell yeah!”

“Gorz,” he asked, resting his hand on his chest, “how tall am I now?” No response was forthcoming, so Victor fished the amulet from his shirt and held it in his hand. It was warm where it had been resting against his chest, but he couldn’t feel anything else coming from it. “Gorz?” he tried again, and suddenly a spike of unreasonable panic jolted his heart. Unreasonable because he’d hardly spoken to the spirit fragment over the last few months. As he realized this, his panic turned to hot shame, and he put the amulet back around his neck.

“I don’t know what’s happening with you, Gorz, buddy. If you’re gone, I hope you went to a better place, back to your whole self, even. If not, I’m going to ask an artificer how I can help you.” Victor noted a new resonance to his voice, a deeper register, and he shook his head, wondering just how much he’d changed.

He walked over to the big metal doors, reaching a hand toward them, feeling the hum of Energy still holding them sealed shut. He pushed against the left one, the one Tronk had opened for him, but it didn’t budge. Not knowing what else to do, Victor rapped his knuckles against the metal, smiling at how it echoed and reverberated through the charged metal.

Almost immediately, he felt the Energy field fall away, and then the door clicked, and Tronk pulled it wide, looking into the room with his eyes squinted against the brightness. For the first time, Victor realized he’d never seen any source for the illumination. It seemed to be coming from the stone itself, and he wondered if it was a byproduct of all the Energy sources stored in the cultivation chamber.

“Titan-blood. I feel greater strength within ya; yer aura stands out, even as we bask in the flow from the chamber.” Tronk stepped aside, and Victor stepped out, finally laying eyes on Valla; she’d hung back in the shadow of the giant.

“Ancestors, Victor. You’re up to Tronk’s shoulder now.”

“Aye, big fer someone who ain’t a Degh.”

Victor looked at Tronk, then Valla, and his heart began to thump as he realized she was right. She’d always been smaller than he, but now her head barely came to his stomach, and Tronk, well, Tronk was gigantic, and Victor a lot smaller—Valla had been exaggerating. Still, his perspective had shifted quite a lot. “Shit, man. I already had a hard time fitting through doorways back on Fanwath,” he groused.

“Good luck getting comfortable in a normal bed,” Valla snorted.

“All right, all right. How long was I in there?”

“Maybe an hour or two? Great Mother, Victor! You look like a . . . like you’ve been cut from marble, no bronze. Well, I mean, you don’t look like metal, but Old Bones, you look supernatural!”

“Valla! Did you just cuss at me twice in one sentence? I’ll report you to Rellia; she’ll need to wash that mouth out with soap.”

Valla’s mouth fell open, and her eyes widened, but then they narrowed, and she smiled, “Actually, that was two sentences, and if you think that was bad, you should hear how Rellia speaks!”

Tronk yawned hugely and grunted, rubbing at the top of his head, and Victor turned to him, “What should we do now, Tronk? We still have some time before we have to see the warlord?”

“Nar, not too much. Better stick ‘round the citadel. Your wee blue friend want to try the chamber?” Tronk turned to Valla and pointed toward the still-open door.

“I . . . sure, I would. When will I get another chance like that?” She started toward the open door.

“If ya stay ‘round Coloss fer a while, ya might get his permission to use it more often. If’n Titan-blood, here, agrees to Warlord’s terms . . .”

“Terms?” Victor asked, his voice rising in surprise.

“Yar, he said sommat ‘bout you acceptin’ the champion prize—to fight in Gazra’s Day Tournament. Said I might hafta watch over ya fer a month or more.” Tronk spoke flatly and shrugged as though he weren’t dropping something of a bombshell. Valla paused at the doorway, then looked back at Victor, and she, too, shrugged.

“We wanted more prize tokens, Victor, and I wanted to be here long enough to put that she-wolf in her place.”

“Oh man,” he said, reaching up to run his hand through his hair, and, maddeningly, the only thought that came to his mind and out of his mouth was, “I need a haircut.”