

## **PROTEGE 131**

### Chapter 131: MYSTIC MOUNTAIN:FIRST CRYSTAL CORE

The group had trekked Mystic Mountain for two months, driven by curiosity and a sense of adventure. Each step revealed more of the mountain's enigmatic beauty, blending elements of both reality and fantasy. The soldiers, hardened by training, found themselves in awe of the natural wonders before them.

"The name says it all; there is a lot of mystery here," one soldier mused, his eyes darting around the vibrant landscape.

The trees, with limbs swaying in an almost sentient manner, seemed to react to their presence. Some branches reached out as if to embrace the newcomers, while others recoiled in silent fear. The dwarf plants

employed their own tactics of concealment, curling their leaves tightly or folding them over completely.

A myriad of birds and butterflies flitted around them. But it was a butterfly with luminous wings and a tiny human-like face that captivated their attention.

"They look like the little fairy Tinker Bell in Peter Pan's movie!" Chatty exclaimed, his voice filled with childlike wonder.

"Indeed they do!" echoed another soldier, followed by a chorus of agreement.

The mountain's flora was a riot of colors, with flowers that seemed almost otherworldly in their brilliance. Each petal and bloom was a testament to the mountain's mystical allure, making the soldiers' previous encounters with nature seem mundane. If they describe these flowers, people are unlikely to believe them.

As they ventured deeper, the mixture of excitement and anxiety within the group grew. Every step brought the possibility of discovering new secrets or facing unknown dangers.

"Silent!... Listen..." Jack commanded, his hand raised for silence.

The soldiers froze, straining to hear the faint sound growing louder.

"The sound seems to be coming towards us," Shun said, his voice barely above a whisper.

"Indeed, be prepared. Deploy yourself." Jack whispered an instruction, drawing his sword with a practiced motion while others readied their bows and arrows.

From behind the bushes, an enormous black cat with a regal crest on its head emerged, its eyes fixed on the soldiers. As it moved, its lizard-like tail swished menacingly, cow bristles running down its back, and its front legs, covered in scales, ended in sharp claws were revealed.

This demonic beast is called 'Tatzelwurm.' Also known as 'The Dragon of the Mine-Tunnels' or 'The Alps Dragon.'

The soldiers were stupefied, and their instinct was to move back as far as they could with their weapons prepared in their hands. The soldier standing next to Jack was taken aback to the point of fear, causing him to misstep and get his foot caught in a thick vine.

The beast shrieked, so high-pitched and deafening that they had to duck to shield their ears.

The fallen soldier, closest to the beast, bled from his ears and nose, his face contorted in pain.

Jack, seeing his comrade in distress as the team leader, rushed to his side. He knelt and noticed the soldier's foot tangled in a vein-like plant. With a swift motion, he freed the foot with his dagger.

"My head... it hurts..." the soldier groaned before vomiting a strange blue liquid, which Jack found peculiar because he was aware that blue vomit indicates acid poisoning.

'What could poison him?' Jack was thinking deeply as he ran with the soldier on his back. He laid him down while the other soldiers were on guard with their weapons.

"He is poisoned!" Jack informed the group.

"The beast must have poisoned him!" one soldier speculated.

"But he didn't touch it!" another argued.

"Ask him!" yet another soldier suggested.

"His ears are damaged! He can't hear! And he seems to be hallucinating!" Jack responded.

Four Eyes and Shun are preoccupied with observing every movement of the beast.

As Four Eyes pondered the beasts they had previously encountered within the magical array, "the cat's breath" came to mind. "It must be toxic," Four Eyes said while maintaining his gaze on the beast.

"That's the only possibility! Everyone, wear your gas mask!" Jack ordered.

The soldiers quickly donned their masks, their eyes still on the slowly approaching beast. The Tatzelwurm emitted another high-pitched wail, accompanied by visible toxic fumes.

As the cat advanced, it hissed and bared its fangs, its movements deliberate and menacing. The soldiers, now protected by their gas masks, stood ready to confront the enigmatic creature, their hearts pounding with a mix of fear and determination.

In the face of this ancient terror, the soldiers knew that every second counted. They prepared for a battle not just for survival but for the truth hidden within Mystic Mountain's depths.

The massive black cat crept closer, hissing and baring its fangs, a menacing gleam in its eyes.

Jack's voice, though authoritative, barely broke through the ringing in their ears. "Let's use our bows!" he yelled, but the soldiers could only faintly make out his command.

Jack sheathed his sword and drew his bow and arrow, setting an example for the rest. Following his lead, they nocked their arrows and took aim, focusing on the creature's head.

As Jack released his arrow, the others followed suit. The projectiles found their mark, embedding in the cat's neck. Despite the success, they quickly realized that the arrows were ineffective against the creature's thickly furred head, which remained unscathed.

"We need to target its body and tail!" Jack shouted, though most couldn't hear him clearly.

Jack and Four Eyes, communicating through a shared look, sheathed their bows and drew their swords once more. They aimed for the tail, hoping to weaken the beast. However, the cat, now wounded and enraged, seemed to anticipate their move. It swung its lizard-like tail viciously, striking out at them.

From a distance, the soldiers continued firing arrows, attempting to distract the beast. Meanwhile, Jack, Four Eyes, Shun, and two other soldiers moved in for a direct assault. Jack struck first, his blade slicing into the cat's tail. A stream of green liquid gushed from the wound, splashing onto Shun's arm. His clothes sizzled and corroded instantly, a clear sign of the acid's potency.

The soldiers exchanged worried glances, realizing the cat's blood was dangerously acidic. Shun quickly tore off his sleeve to prevent the acid from reaching his skin, retreating slightly to regain his composure.

The cat, driven mad by the pain, lashed out with increased ferocity. Its tail whipped back and forth, releasing more shrill cries and toxic fumes. The soldiers' ears bled from the intensity of the sound. Still, they pressed on, determined to protect each other and survive this ordeal.

Chapter 132: MYSTIC MOUNTAIN: JACK OF ALL TRADE

Jack, undeterred, yelled, "Focus on the body!" They adjusted their aim, sending a fresh volley of arrows toward the creature's vulnerable torso. The cat roared, its movements becoming more erratic and desperate.

Two more soldiers' ears bled.

Chatty's anxiety was palpable as his ears buzzed incessantly. He swayed unsteadily until one of his comrades noticed and rushed to his aid. Draping Chatty's arm over his shoulder, he half-carried, half-dragged him to where the earlier injured soldier was recuperating.

The sight of the injured soldier turning blue and struggling to breathe was alarming. The soldier who brought Chatty grabbed a water bottle, splashing the wounded soldier's face to revive him. Meanwhile, Chatty, regaining a bit of his composure, retrieved portable oxygen from his space ring and administered it to the injured.

Seeing Chatty's condition, the other soldier signaled him to stay put, but Chatty gestured back that he couldn't hear. Using sign language, the Class A soldier communicated, ensuring Chatty understood. Then he hurried back to the fray, only to find two more soldiers unconscious, their ears bleeding. He carried them to Chatty and washed their faces with clean water.

Despite the continuous assault on the massive cat, its shrieks had diminished. Now wounded and with its tail swinging lethargically, releasing acidic fumes, the soldiers could only keep their distance.

Shun's gaze met Four Eyes', a silent exchange passing between them. Four Eyes nodded and looked at Jack, trying to convey a plan.

With a decisive flick of his sword, Four Eyes brought the massive cat to the ground, its body slumping heavily. Jack's jaw dropped in shock, but he quickly recovered, watching as Shun charged with his sword. The others followed, striking in unison.

Finally, with one last coordinated effort, the soldiers landed a series of precise blows. The massive cat staggered, let out a final mournful wail, and collapsed to the ground, its menacing form now lifeless.

The massive cat lay lifeless soon after, its formidable presence reduced to a carcass. Jack approached and carefully extracted its crystal core, rolling it on the ground to cleanse it before proudly displaying it to his comrades.

"This is our very first crystal core," Jack announced, handing it to Four Eyes. With the adrenaline fading, Jack turned his attention to the injured soldiers, realizing Chatty was in bad shape.

Breathing heavily, the soldiers regrouped, tending to their wounded and assessing the aftermath. Despite their injuries, a sense of triumph and relief washed over them. They had faced the mystical mountain's horrors and lived to tell the tale—at least for now.

Chatty was battling severe headaches and dizziness, his condition worsening by the minute.

"They need an infusion to purge the toxins faster," Jack stated. But with their ears still buzzing, no one could hear him.

Jack chuckled softly at the irony, pulled out his space sack, and administered the infusion to the most severely injured. Two Class A soldiers followed his lead while Fatty attended to Chatty.

The team was anxious; four were wounded on the first day, and facing their first beast was a daunting start. Jack planned to wait for the infusions to take effect before continuing their journey. He took out a pen and paper, writing down his instructions to ensure everyone was on the same page.

As they rested, the soldiers' resolve solidified. The battle with the massive cat had tested their limits yet also revealed their unyielding determination. Four Eyes, curiosity piqued, approached the fallen beast to inspect its fur. The strange resilience of the creature's hide against their arrows intrigued him.

Shun and his loyal companions followed, observing silently as Four Eyes ran his hand over the cat's head. He was taken aback by the unexpected softness and silkiness of its fur, a stark contrast to its fierce appearance.

Determined to understand the creature's defenses, Four Eyes drew his daggers and attempted to carve out a sample of the fur. To his frustration, the blades couldn't penetrate the skin.

Shun stepped forward, signaling that he wanted to try. Recalling Shi Min's words, Shun unsheathed the sword gifted to him and channeled his internal energy into the blade. With a focused strike, he aimed at the neck that connected the cat's head.

What happened next was both surprising and dangerous. The strike caused the cat's acidic blood to ignite, creating a burst of flame. Four Eyes, quick on his feet, yanked Shun away from the sudden inferno.

Jack, alerted by the commotion, rushed over. Upon seeing the blazing carcass, a grin spread across his face. The others looked on in confusion, wondering what had Jack so pleased.

With a mischievous smile, Jack took out his pen and scribbled a single word: "FOOD."

The reaction was immediate and varied. Each soldier had their own internal monologue.

'No way I'm going to eat that.'

'Who is eating this beast?'

'Are you damned serious?'

'Is it really safe to eat this beast?'

'I already want to vomit.'

But as the massive cat continued to burn, a tantalizing aroma filled the air, causing their stomachs to rumble in unison.

'Damn! This beast smells so good.'

'How can such an ugly demonic beast have such a good aroma?'

Despite their initial reservations, the scent of the cooking meat was undeniably appetizing. The soldiers, driven by both hunger and curiosity, began to reconsider their options.

As the flames subsided and the heat dissipated, Jack donned his protective gloves and set to work on the massive cat. His movements were precise and practiced as he carefully sliced through the body and

tail, removing the skin and revealing the dark, aromatic meat beneath. The enticing smell filled the air, making the soldiers' mouths water.

'Jack truly is a Jack of all trades!' they mused, watching him with admiration. He seemed to possess an uncanny knowledge of survival skills and practical know-how, much like a living MacGyver.

Shun, initially shaken by the accidental fire, marveled at how the situation had turned in their favor. What started as a mishap had ended up roasting the beast perfectly. 'A blessing in disguise, indeed,' Shun silently thought, shaking his head.

Meanwhile, Four Eyes approached the cat's head, which had flattened and roasted with the fur still intact. He saw potential in this unusual find and began cleaning it, removing the inner scraps until it resembled a giant cat mask. Excited, he thought about how useful it could be for Ling Li and the children.

#### Chapter 133: MYSTIC MOUNTAIN: BEAST ARE GETTING STRONGER

As Four Eyes placed the huge cat mask in the space ring Ling Li had given him, he marveled at its vastness. The ring contained separate rooms and partitions, resembling an oversized mansion. He smiled, warmed by his wife's thoughtfulness.

The rest of the soldiers gathered around Jack and the roasted beast, their hunger evident. Some were practically drooling, while others struggled to overcome their initial revulsion at the thought of eating the demonic creature.

Knowing that his comrades couldn't hear him, Jack tested a portion of the cooked meat, ensuring it was safe to handle. The aroma intensified as he cut a small piece and took a tentative bite.

To his surprise, the meat was not only edible but also surprisingly delicious. He gave a thumbs-up to his comrades, who, despite their initial reluctance, gathered around. They began to cut and share pieces of the cooked beast, their earlier disgust slowly fading away with each bite.

Jack, ever mindful of his injured soldiers, quickly penned a note, instructing that the poisoned comrades should avoid eating for now. He feared that they might unknowingly exacerbate their condition.

Once everyone had eaten their fill, Jack directed the soldiers to gather more meat to store in their space rings. Fatty took extra care to ensure Chatty's space ring was well-stocked, his concern for his friend evident. Chatty, recovering from heart surgery and now poisoned, needed all the support he could get.

As the hours passed, most of the soldiers' hearing gradually returned to normal. However, a few still experienced difficulty, and three soldiers seemed to have suffered permanent hearing loss.

Despite these challenges, Jack, seeing his team's morale lift, couldn't help but laugh. Their first encounter with a mystical creature had turned into an unexpected feast. The soldiers, now sated and more at ease, knew they had to remain vigilant.

With Jack's meticulous planning and their newfound camaraderie, they felt ready to face whatever else Mystic Mountain had in store for them. Jack, using pen and paper, laid out their next steps, ensuring everyone understood the plan.

After almost another two weeks, in the heart of the mystical mountain, the air was thick with an eerie tension, and the constant encounters with demonic beasts were taking a toll on the group. The once cohesive team was now fraying at the edges, their morale slowly eroding with each battle. The days had grown longer, the nights more dangerous, and the faces around the campfire fewer.

The loss of four members weighed heavily on them, like a shadow that refused to dissipate. Each night, as the weary survivors huddled around their makeshift campfires, memories of the fallen haunted their dreams. The continuous onslaught of beasts—deer with piercing red eyes, frogs that exhaled toxic fumes, beavers with razor-sharp teeth, pigs that could charge like bulls, serpents that slithered with unnerving speed—left them constantly on edge. The brutality of the mountain seemed unending, a relentless nightmare they couldn't wake from.

Four Eyes, the enigmatic figure whose true powers remained a mystery even to his comrades, had become their linchpin. His ability to hypnotize the beasts was the only thing keeping them from complete destruction. Around the campfire, the men would often cast furtive glances at him, a mix of awe and fear in their eyes. What was this power he wielded? And at what cost?

As they rested one evening, the night's silence was broken only by the crackle of the fire. Shun, his young face lined with worry, approached Four Eyes.

"Uncle, you have been using your magic too often. Will it have a harmful effect on you?" Shun's voice was soft, almost pleading.

Four Eyes looked at his Shun with a weariness that spoke of untold burdens. "From what your Aunt told me, as long as I do not kill the beast directly with my black magic, it won't cause any negative effect on me," he replied, though doubt lingered in his eyes.

"The demonic beasts are getting stronger," Four Eyes added, recalling their last encounter, which had pushed him to his limits. His magic was potent but not infallible. The thought that one day it might not be enough gnawed at him.

Shun nodded, his grip tightening around the hilt of the sword Shi Min had given him. Over the past weeks, he had learned to channel his internal energy through the blade, producing deadly strikes without visible flames. Yet, even he could see that their abilities might soon be outmatched.

The memory of the 'wolpertinger' still sent shivers down his spine. This beast, a grotesque amalgamation of creatures with the head of a rabbit, the body of a squirrel, deer antlers, and jay wings, was unlike anything they had faced before. Agile and cunning, it had toyed with them, its leaps and bounds mocking their every effort. When it unleashed a blast of electricity from its antlers, it caught them off guard, resulting in the tragic loss of one of their comrades.

Everyone was stunned and moved back to rethink their strategy.

'Wolpertinger' is known for its fur's ability to store electricity and discharge it when attacked through its antler.

Jack has divided the team into three: the first team is the swordsmen for close combats, the second team is the archers for range support, and the third is the lookouts to see the overall situation from afar and give them warnings about uncertainties.

Jack's commanding and resolute voice cut through the chaos, "Spread out and find your positions!" Everyone knew what to do and ready themselves with their assigned weapons.

The wolpertinger, sensing the shift in their strategy, took to the air, its wings carrying it high above. But the archers were ready, their arrows piercing the night sky. The beast screeched as the arrows found their mark, its flight faltering. With a crash, it landed back on the forest floor and retreated into the shadows.

"It's injured! Let's follow; we must get its crystal core!" Jack commanded, his voice firm and unwavering. The urgency in his tone galvanized the group, who quickly fell into formation and followed the bloodied trail of the rabbit-like beast.

#### Chapter 134: MYSTIC MOUNTAIN: WOLPERTINGER

The demonic creature, a master of deception and evasion, led them through dense undergrowth and treacherous terrain. Every branch that snapped underfoot, every rustle of leaves, heightened their senses, knowing that the beast could attack at any moment. It was a relentless chase, each step taking them deeper into the labyrinthine woods.

Finally, the beast found refuge, burrowing itself into the ground with only its antlers protruding—a silent taunt to the group, a signal that the fight was far from over. Jack's keen eyes scanned the area, deciphering the position of its hidden body with practiced precision.

"We can't attack its antlers!" Jack reminded, his voice cutting through the tense silence. He circled the beast, his mind mapping out the creature's likely position beneath the earth.

"The body must be here. Let us try to attack with our swords. Archers on standby. Swordsmen, let's attack here," Jack instructed, pointing decisively.

The team moved with the practiced efficiency like of seasoned warriors. Swordsmen took their positions, their hands steady on the hilts of their swords, while the archers nocked arrows, ready to strike at a moment's notice.

"Master Shun, try to burn it if you can," Jack added, handing the signal to Shun, who nodded, his resolve hardening.

"Ready? Attack!" Jack's command was the spark that ignited the battle.

The swordsmen launched their assault on the ground, their blades striking with rhythmic precision. The beast let out a blood-curdling shriek, a sound that reverberated through the forest and sent shivers down their spines. The giant beast unexpectedly jumped from the ground, a blur of fur and antlers, its agility defying the wounds they thought they had inflicted.

Shun, his focus unwavering, channeled his internal energy into his strikes. Flames flickered along his blade, but as he struck, the beast evaded with preternatural speed. Shun's frustration mounted. 'This beast is much stronger,' he thought grimly, his determination only growing.

The wolpertinger stood before them, its eyes gleaming with feral intelligence. Both Jack and Shun turned to Four Eyes, their silent plea evident. Four Eyes, his face a mask of concentration, acknowledged their need. With a swift flick of his sword, Four Eyes cast his spell, attempting to bind the beast with his black magic through his sword.

The wolpertinger fought against the enchantment, its powerful limbs thrashing. The swordsmen advanced, their blades ready, but the beast's sudden movements forced them to retreat.

"Make it fast. I will try again," Four Eyes said, his voice strained. He knew he couldn't maintain the spell for long.

"Remember, stay away from its antlers! Archers, be ready to attack when it's on the ground!" Jack instructed, and his leadership was unshaken.

Four Eyes concentrated once more, the arcane energy flowing through him. At his signal, Jack yelled, "Attack!" The swordsmen and archers coordinated their assault, their movements a deadly dance of steel and skill.

The beast's shrieks grew more desperate, its agility waning. It leaped to its feet again, but the relentless attacks from the archers and the searing strikes from Shun's blade were taking their toll.

"Archers, give it your best shot and attack!" Jack's voice rang out once more. With a final, collective effort, the archers loosed their arrows. The wolpertinger, unable to withstand the onslaught, collapsed to the ground, its lifeless body a testament to their hard-won victory.

Jack wasted no time, kneeling beside the fallen beast. With practiced hands, he extracted the crystal core, a pulsating gem that held immense power. The group gathered around, their breaths ragged but triumphant. They had won this battle, but the mountain's challenges were far from over.

"Let's roast this beast," one Class A soldier suggested, his voice breaking the tense silence that had settled over the group.

"Gather some firewood, and let us camp here for the night," Jack instructed, his tone leaving no room for argument. The men dispersed, each taking on their tasks with a sense of urgency and relief. The promise of a hot meal and a brief respite from the relentless battles was a welcome distraction.

Four Eyes, however, was lost in thought. The memory of the beast they had fought earlier weighed heavily on his mind. Its strength and cunning had been unlike anything they had encountered before. As he pondered, Shun's question brought him back, his face etched with concern.

"Uncle, why did you insist that we eat all the internal organs of the beast tonight?" Shun asked, recalling Four Eyes' earlier directive.

"I remembered Mushu mentioned it once. It will help us break through," Four Eyes replied, his voice tinged with a mix of hope and uncertainty.

"Then we must eat them; otherwise, we won't have a chance to fight these demonic beasts if we don't break through," Shun said, determination hardening his features.

Four Eyes nodded, appreciating his future son-in-law's resolve. "Uncle, get some rest," Shun urged, his concern for Four Eyes evident.

Four Eyes patted Shun's shoulder, a silent acknowledgment of his gratitude, and leaned back against a tree. As he closed his eyes, the sounds of the camp preparing for the night faded into the background.

The crackling of the fire, the rustle of leaves, and the murmurs of his comrades became a distant hum.

The night was still, the air heavy with the scent of pine and the lingering tension of the day's battles. The fire cast flickering shadows on the ground, creating a dance of light and dark that mirrored the group's internal struggles. They were warriors, bound by a common goal, yet each carried their own burdens and fears.

As the beast's organs were roasted over the fire, the men gathered around, their faces illuminated by the warm glow. The meal was more than sustenance; it was a ritual, a way to fortify their bodies and spirits for the challenges ahead. Each bite was taken with a silent prayer for strength and resilience.

Four Eyes and Shun, leaning against the tree, found a moment of peace in the midst of chaos. Their eyes closed, and they allowed themselves to drift into a light sleep, knowing that the battles were far from over. The mystical mountain loomed above them, a constant reminder of the journey that lay ahead. But for now, they rested, drawing strength from each other and the knowledge that they were not alone in this fight.

#### Chapter 135: MYSTIC MOUNTAIN: THE ENFIELD

After two months of relentless fighting and consuming demonic beasts, the team's efforts bore fruit as they experienced breakthroughs. Jack, Shun, and the two Class A soldiers, Nicu and Ailu, Shun's close friends, reached the mid-stage of the condensation realm. Four Eyes is on the brink of entering the True Origin Realm and finds himself stuck at a bottleneck, unable to advance further. The rest of the group either lingered in the middle of the Gathering Realm or stood a step away from condensation.

However, despite their progress, anxiety gnawed at them. From an initial twenty-eight, only twelve remained, and they still faced another month in this treacherous mystic mountain. The loss of their comrades weighed heavily on their minds, creating a somber atmosphere that pervaded their every interaction.

As the twelve men gathered for lunch, their faces were etched with worry and exhaustion. The once bustling group was now eerily quiet, the absence of their fallen comrades casting a long shadow over them.

Four Eyes finished his meal quickly, the food tasteless in his mouth as his mind wandered to their precarious situation. Deciding he needed to clear his head, he rose silently and made his way out of the camp to scout the area.

As Four Eyes wandered through the dense forest, the sounds of nature provided a stark contrast to the constant tension he felt. Suddenly, the harshness of a fierce battle caught his attention. Moving cautiously towards the noise, he soon spotted the source: two beasts locked in a vicious struggle.

From a distance, he observed one beast—a menacing lizard resembling a dragon, its tail bristling with spikes and its scales glinting menacingly in the dappled sunlight. Measuring about seven meters long, it was agile, leaping fifteen feet into the air without a running start and climbing effortlessly, even upside down. Its eyes glowed with a predatory intensity.

“It is indeed a lizard,” Four Eyes muttered to himself, watching as it lashed its tail and slammed at its smaller adversary.

This demonic beast was a ‘Riding Lizard.’ Its opponent, an ‘Enfield,’ was much smaller, only 70 centimeters long and 20 centimeters high. The Enfield had a fox’s head, eagle talons for front legs, a greyhound’s chest, a lion’s body, a wolf’s hindquarters, and an eagle’s wings. It was an odd combination, yet its agility was impressive as it darted around the lizard.

Four Eyes had to squint to confirm what he saw.

Despite its size and agility, the ‘Enfield’ stood little chance against the mighty ‘Riding Lizard.’ Four Eyes felt a pang of pity for the tiny creature. He unsheathed his swords, moving cautiously towards the battling beasts, waiting for the right moment to launch a sneak attack on the lizard.

The lizard, jumping up and down from the trees, finally landed near Four Eyes’ hiding spot. Seizing the opportunity, Four Eyes lunged, striking the lizard and severing its tail. The lizard screeched in pain while the Enfield barked, its cries alerting Four Eyes’ comrades.

“What’s that noise?” Shun asked, glancing around the camp with a frown. “Where’s Uncle?” Shun’s voice carried a note of panic as he noticed Four Eyes’ absence. Jack’s heart skipped a beat, his mind racing.

“We need to find him!” Jack yelled, already sprinting toward the source of the noise with his sword drawn. The others followed quickly, their footsteps pounding the forest floor in a desperate rush.

Reaching the scene, they found Four Eyes embroiled in a fight with the lizard's detached tail, which seemed to have a life of its own, thrashing violently. The rest of the lizard aimed to bite him, its jaws snapping dangerously close. The Enfield perched on Four Eyes' shoulder, adding an unexpected element to the chaos.

"Archers, attack!" Jack commanded, seeing Four Eyes struggle with two opponents, the lizard and its detached tail. He rushed to assist while Shun, Fatty, and Chatty stared in disbelief at the odd beast on Four Eyes' shoulder.

"Chu Yan! There's a beast on your shoulder!" Chatty shouted, drawing his bow and arrow, his hands shaking with tension.

"Don't harm it!" Four Eyes yelled back, the urgency in his voice unmistakable. The little Enfield rubbed its face against his head, showing gratitude as it clung to him.

With the giant lizard finally slain, Jack turned to Four Eyes, his voice trembling with a mixture of relief and anger.

"Master, how could you engage a beast on your own! I nearly had a heart attack! What would I tell the Supreme Commander if something happened to you?!"

Jack's outburst drew the attention of the entire group to the small beast on Four Eyes' shoulder.

"That!" Jack almost screamed, his eyes wide with shock.

"I am sorry I made everyone worry." Four Eyes said, his tone is sincere. "This little guy and the lizard were fighting."

"And you saved a little beast while you put your own life at stake fighting a large beast!" Jack roared, the worry and frustration boiling over. He was truly anxious when he saw Four Eyes fighting alone; not only was Jack afraid of Ling Li, but he had been fighting with Four Eyes side by side since the battleground and had considered him his best friend.

“Do you have any idea what you put us through?” Jack continued, his voice cracking with emotion. “We can’t afford to lose you. Master, you’re like an elder brother to us.”

The little fox barked at Jack as if he knew that his newfound friend was being reprimanded. Its eyes sparkled with intelligence, and it seemed to understand the gravity of the situation.

Shun stepped forward, trying to calm the situation. “Team leader, let’s not forget that Uncle just saved this creature. There must be something special about it.”

Four Eyes patted its head gently and grabbed it as he put the wolf on the ground.

"OK, you are free. Go." Four Eyes patted its head again, his voice soft and coaxing. But the little fellow stared back at him and cried loudly, its eyes full of emotion, as if it were pleading to stay.

Shun, noticing the Enfield’s reluctance to leave, added, “Maybe it wants to stay with us. It seems grateful to you, Uncle.”