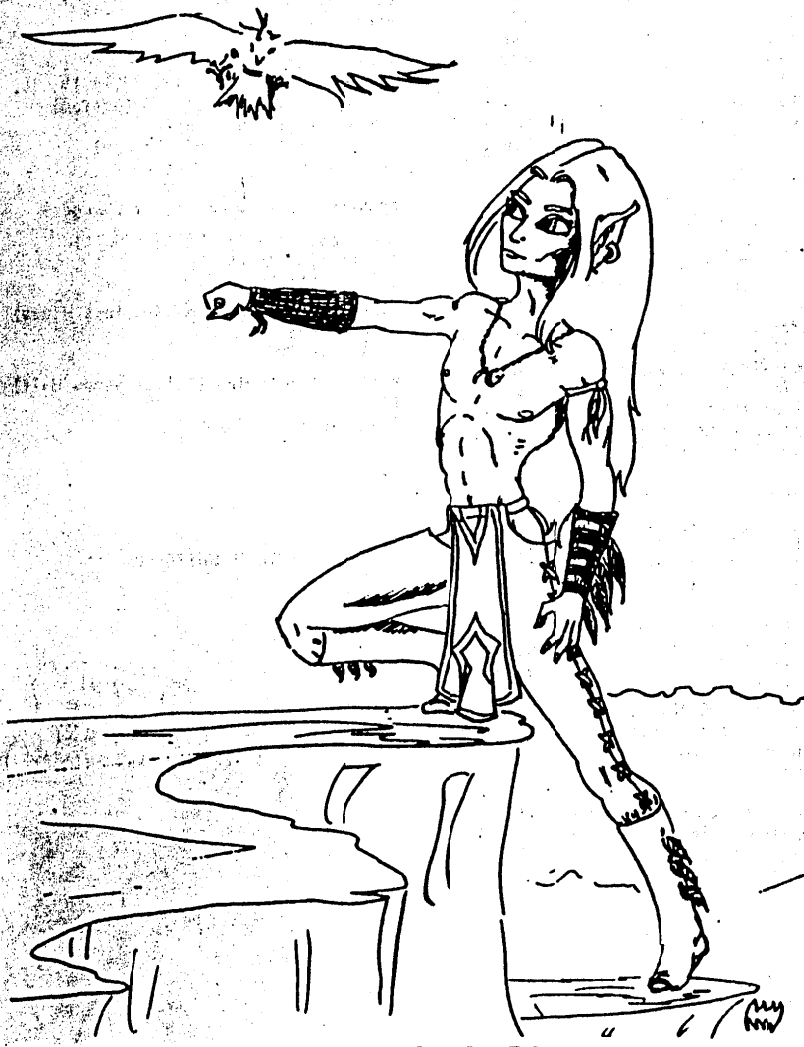


# TIMBERS! 11



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\*\*FIRST CLASS\*\*

TIMBER VALLEY HOLT  
c/o Joanne "Ferret" Papin  
2852 West Henderson  
Chicago IL 60618



No Jokes, now:  
WHAT'S WRONG WITH THIS PICTURE?

Eric Nasser '85

You will be due to renew after you  
receive issue # \_\_\_\_\_ of TIMBERS!

## Takin' Care of Business...

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The Holt address is:

TIMBER VALLEY HOLT  
c/o Joanne "Ferret" Papin  
2852 West Henderson  
Chicago IL 60618

**MEMBERSHIPS:** A year's membership or renewal to TVH is \$6. Dues include four issues of **TIMBERS!**, updated timelines, maps of TVH area, and other goodies as we think of them. Make checks or money orders payable to Joanne Papin. Do not send cash through the mails!

**BACK ISSUES:** Prices include postage...

#1...50c	#5...\$1.00	#9...\$1.00
#2...50c	#6...\$1.25	#10...\$1.50
#3...75c	#7...\$1.00	#11...\$1.00
#4...75c	#8...\$1.25	

**HOLT GUIDE:** The new Holt Guide is in progress. It will be completed after I get in all the CISs and have a chance to write everybody who missed filling something in, and get the timeline straightened out, and etc. That won't be too much longer...as soon as the computer gets here!

**TIMELINE:** The timeline is presently being updated. See **HOLT GUIDE**. A mini-timeline of births, deaths, arrivals, and departures is available. Send me a SASE.

**MAPS:** We have maps for the area. If you haven't received a copy, or if you lost it, send me a SASE and I'll send you a new set.

**CHARACTER INFORMATION SHEETS:** Please fill out the new CIS sheets as soon as possible and send them back. If you need additional copies or have questions, OR ADDITIONS, write me. SASE for CIS sheets.

NOTE: A SASE is a Self-Addressed Stamped Envelope. I appreciate them--or at least stamps--whenever you can send them. It really does help.

### ART CREDITS:

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Bill Nichols - 2, back cover  
Karyn Ojamaa - 3  
David Trimble - 4, 5, 6  
April Lee - 7  
Stacy Lung - 8, 9  
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Eileen Fryer - 22 (top)  
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\*\*OFFICIAL WHITE SPACE\*\*



## DOWN IN THE VALLEY

DF 22 LC

Hah! Fooled ya! This issue is only a little bit late--not nearly as late as I bet you all expected! (Well--actually that depends on whether or not I finish it today...there's still stuff to do and I haven't packed for WindyCon yet, and this is November 13th, the first day of WindyCon, and I should have been at the printer with this two hours ago. Sigh. I think Murphy was a High One....)

Anyway, I've realized something. People don't realize that the date at the top of the editorial page (this is the editorial page, by the way) is the "present" date for Timber Valley. In other words, "DF 22 LC" is "the 22nd year after the Death Flood, season of leaf change", or in human terms, Autumn of 1986. So, if you need to know the present date, look at the latest edition of **TIMBERS!** and there it is.

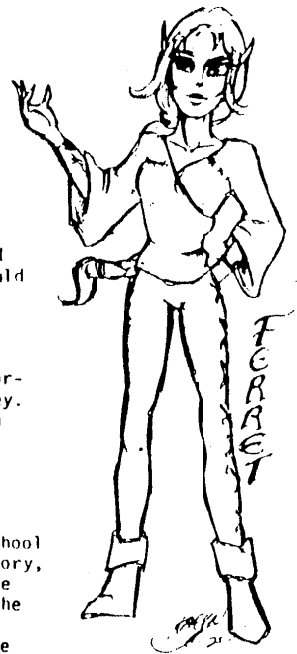
Other stuff...in issues #5 and #6, we featured the first two parts of a story called "Loose Ends" by Jenny Hawthorne. School work (lots of it) has prevented Jenny from completing the story, but she agreed to let me finish it instead. Part three, "the Demon Bear" is in this issue, and part four will appear in the next issue (so renew if you're up for it!) But, because of these unavoidable delays in printing the conclusion of "Loose Ends", TVH now has a policy that we do not print Part One of a continued story until we have the whole thing ready for printing. Okay? Great...now write some stories!!!

Another thing...we have a special kind of story called a "Lifetimes". This is for when you don't have a whole story to tell, just a scene or an event in the lives of the elves that you want to share--perhaps it's something that changes an elf's entire outlook about something, or just something that gives the reader an idea of what the elf is like. We have a "Lifetimes" story in this issue, a fun one. But I'm hoping that some of you might do some "Lifetimes" stories so that we can see what your elf's reaction to the events in "Loose Ends" was. And, when we start working on the Troll Wars, I hope to see lots more.

And yes, I still haven't answered any letters. That's because I've been scrambling to get "Loose Ends" completed on time for this issue, so that approval copies could go out and so that the illustrator had time to draw the illustrations. Many thanks to Melissa Van Houten, by the way, for putting up with an impossible deadline and actually meeting it! Way to go! (That's what makes a Holt work--the members.)

**SIEGE AT BLUE MOUNTAIN**...well, The Quest continues, eh? Has everyone gotten their copy yet? I subscribed, but still haven't received my subscription copy--had to go and buy it at the comic shop instead. Some interesting things happened here, eh? I wish Wendy was inking, but Joe Stator did a great job (except for some of the faces. I still don't think that was Nightfall's face...). The story is a little complex, I thought, but I can hardly wait to find out what happens next--though hopefully it won't get more complicated before we start to find things out. And, as an old-time "Winnowill ain't all bad" type, I was appalled at what ol' Winnie is up to at the Mountain. Sheesh! Unless maybe Auroree isn't a reliable witness.... It was nice to see that Rayek hasn't changed--and a shock to see that Picknose has...or maybe he hasn't and we're just seeing the real Picky? Well, enough of that--don't want to spoil too much for those who don't have their copy yet.

I'm still shopping around for that computer, by the way. That means you still have time to make changes and additions to your Character Information Sheets. Please do let me know about these changes--things like new love/life mates, family, friends (ESPECIALLY FRIENDS!!!) and...oh, High Ones...I have to continue the Editorial page...



2

3

see page 6

# Birth of a Flame

by Ted R. Blasingame  
illustrations by Dave Trimble

DF 2 HT

All day long, the hot breezes had blown through the Valley's timber. Those elves who occasionally moved about in the daylight had felt the hot breath upon them strengthen as the sun made its way across the sky.

By late afternoon, the wind began to cool as thick rain clouds gathered in the blue sky. Not a drop fell, though, as life in the valley went on. Later in the day, the air grew somewhat heavy as the dark clouds blended with the evening sky.

In the midst of the storm winds that rustled the leaves in the Holt, a new life was soon to join the small band of wolf-riding elves. Elf children were rare, but this one was even more special. This child would someday be the next chief of the Timber Folk!

Knowing the time of the birth was near, Freshwind had been living in the Father Tree for the past two moons. All the Timber Folk had been born in that magnificent tree; it was a tradition started millenia ago and Chief Nightstep's child would be no different.

Dawnwatch was serving as mid-wife as the time of

the expected birth drew near. Young Duskdew, wanting to be a mid-wife too, took suggestions and pointers on preparations. She would look on when the time came for the birth. Silverleaf knelt beside her expectant sister to add her support and love. Outside, the entire tribe waited as the storm clouds threatened them with thunder.

Grassy looked up through the trees at the heavy clouds and raised his eyebrows. He flinched when a small blue-white bolt of skyfire zig-zagged across the sky with a sharp crackle.

Silverhair, who stood next to him, noticed the reaction and chuckled. Everyone was nervous with anticipation. Grassy wasn't the only one who had started at the flash; Silverhair had jumped too.

"What do you think it will be, Grassy?" he sent, that being the only way he chose to communicate. "Will it be a girl or a boy?"

The youth grinned at the older elf and replied, "I'll bet you my silver fox fur that it's a girl! Our chiefs have all been male back four generations--it's about time a girl arrived!"

Silverhair chuckled and replied, "A girl, eh? Alright then. Your silver fox fur against my carved dreamberry mug!"

Redlace and Mooncrest stood next to the speaker's stump talking with the newest member of the Timber Folk, a stranger named LongKnife. He had been found in the Valley, wounded, only an eight of nights past. Now fully recovered, LongKnife conversed with the two before him. Mooncrest was making some comment about the fact that both LongKnife and Redlace wore green headbands.

Then suddenly, lightning flashed and thunder filled their ears with a deafening boom, causing many elves to dash a few steps toward cover.

At an exclamation from Ferret, all eyes followed her pointing. High on the edge of the Valley, a lone tree stood bathed in a fiery glow as flames engulfed the splintered wood. Skyfire had scored a hit!

Softwill glanced back toward the Father Tree. "I hope all this wind and noise doesn't mess up everything!" she said, more to herself than to anyone else.

The youth's great-mother, Wavesong, smiled and replied, "No, cub, it won't hurt the birth. Nightstep will see to that." Satisfied, young Softwill smiled and resumed playing with the wolf pup she'd recently bonded with.

Within moments of that skyfire blast, rain began to pour. It came down hard, sending the elves scurrying. LongKnife, having been alone most of his life, wanted to witness the glorious new life come into being, so he huddled near the doorway of the Father Tree, rather than returning to Redlace's home, where he'd been staying



temporarily. From his position, all LongKnife could see was a group of elves huddled around the expectant mother.

Nightstep glanced around the room and noticed the soaked elf standing just outside the door in the rain. The chief sent a silent question to his lifemate, waited a moment, then sent to the newcomer.

"LongKnife, Freshwind says it is alright if you want to come inside, but only if you keep your distance during the birthing. It will be any moment now."

LongKnife smiled and stepped up the remaining steps into the Father Tree. Once inside, he stepped quietly to the side, his eyes wide in wonder at the opportunity to witness the rare birth of an elf child. Nightstep looked up at him and, noticing the stranger's expression, gave him a wink and a smile.

\*\*\*

Windrace waited the time away in the hometree he shared with Rosemist, silently sharpening his blade as the rain and thunder descended outside. Rosemist was

looking after her own young son.

Windrace was just running a finger along the sharpened edge of his thin-bladed knife when it happened. A large finger of skyfire arced across the bottom of the clouds and then shot down into the valley. With a fiery crackle and a deafening boom, it reached out and touched a large bough of the Father Tree!

With much haste and excitement, Timber Folk poured out of the surrounding trees like ants, mouths gaping in horror at the sight of the large demolished limb. Most of it was in splinters which covered the area. Large chunks were thrown into the tops of surrounding trees. The frayed stump of the blown branch was on fire, which was quickly extinguished by the falling rain.

Windrace ran madly toward the Father Tree, fearful of the fate of those inside. His bleeding forefinger was forgotten as he and others raced up the shaped steps.

But, before they managed to enter the main chamber of the huge tree, a crying reached their ears above the sound of the rain and excited voices. The newborn.

Through the destruction of a part of the oldest tree in the Holt, and the storm overhead, a new life emerged triumphant, voicing its victory with small but strong lungs!

A mighty howl issued from every elf in the tribe as Nightstep's proud sending announced, "A son! A healthy male cub has been born!" Many voiced cheered in delight. New life!

Although having lost the wager, Grassy ran to his tree and returned to present his soft silver fox fur to Silverhair with a wide grin. The older elf laughed merrily and slapped the elven scout on the back before passing a handful of ripe dreamberries to the youth.

LongKnife jumped out of the Father Tree gleefully and blindly ran over Windrace in his haste; both elves crashed to the muddy forest floor. Although the birth had made them all joyful, Windrace cursed under his breath and gave the newcomer a hard glare as he scooped mud from his clothing. Windrace had always taken pride in his appearance and LongKnife's blunder irked him. LongKnife apologized sincerely to Foxvine's brother, but Windrace only nodded silently and stalked off toward his hometree.

Nightstep was standing in the Father Tree's doorway. He had been behind the newcomer and had seen the accident. He struck his chin and chuckled lightly. "Don't worry about it, LongKnife," he said. "Windrace's still not used to you being around and it makes him a bit edgy. He'll get over your knocking him down. After all," he waved his



hand, "It's only mud."

Longknife smiled. "Yes, I'm not used to being around all of you yet, either," he said, "Just give me time--I'll fit in."

The brown-haired chief nodded and went back in to his lifemate. Soon afterward, everyone received a message in an open sending.

\*\*Timber Folk, you have a new chief-to-be. When it comes time, he will lead you as I, and my father before me, have lead you. He was born the same instant that skyfire hit the Father Tree, so he is named for this. He will be the ninth chief to lead since the Timber Folk entered the Valley and his name is Skyflame! Rejoice and celebrate!\*\*\*

Almost as if to commemorate the new elf-chief's birth, the rain began to subside as the storm continued moving over and away from the Valley. And, as in a symbolic salute of the gift it had brought, several streamers of sky-fire shot across the sky in brilliant blue-white light.

The son of a chief had been born under the fury of a storm, even in the midst of destruction. Some believed it to be a sign of the High Ones, that Skyflame would lead them one day with strength and stamina that would surpass all the Timber chiefs of the past.

This child, son of the Chief, the first born after the mighty Death Flood, still small and vulnerable, would be protected and raised until his strength and wisdom allowed him to lead the Timber Folk.

Nightstep was proud of Skyflame--rightfully so. All the elves knew a gift from the storm had been sent to Freshwind and their chief, and the rest of the Timber Folk. A celebration was in order, a feast would be prepared.

For many seasons to come, this night would be remembered, for this night had been born among them...a chief-flame.



DOWN IN THE VALLEY...continued from page 3

Where was I? Oh, yeah. So if you have any additions, deletions, corrections or changes in your Character Information Sheet(s), please let me know. If you've already told me, tell me again--I might have forgotten to make a note of them and already filed your letter away. (Worse, you might have told me at a con or on the phone--then I know I don't remember. "Sieve brain", ya know.)

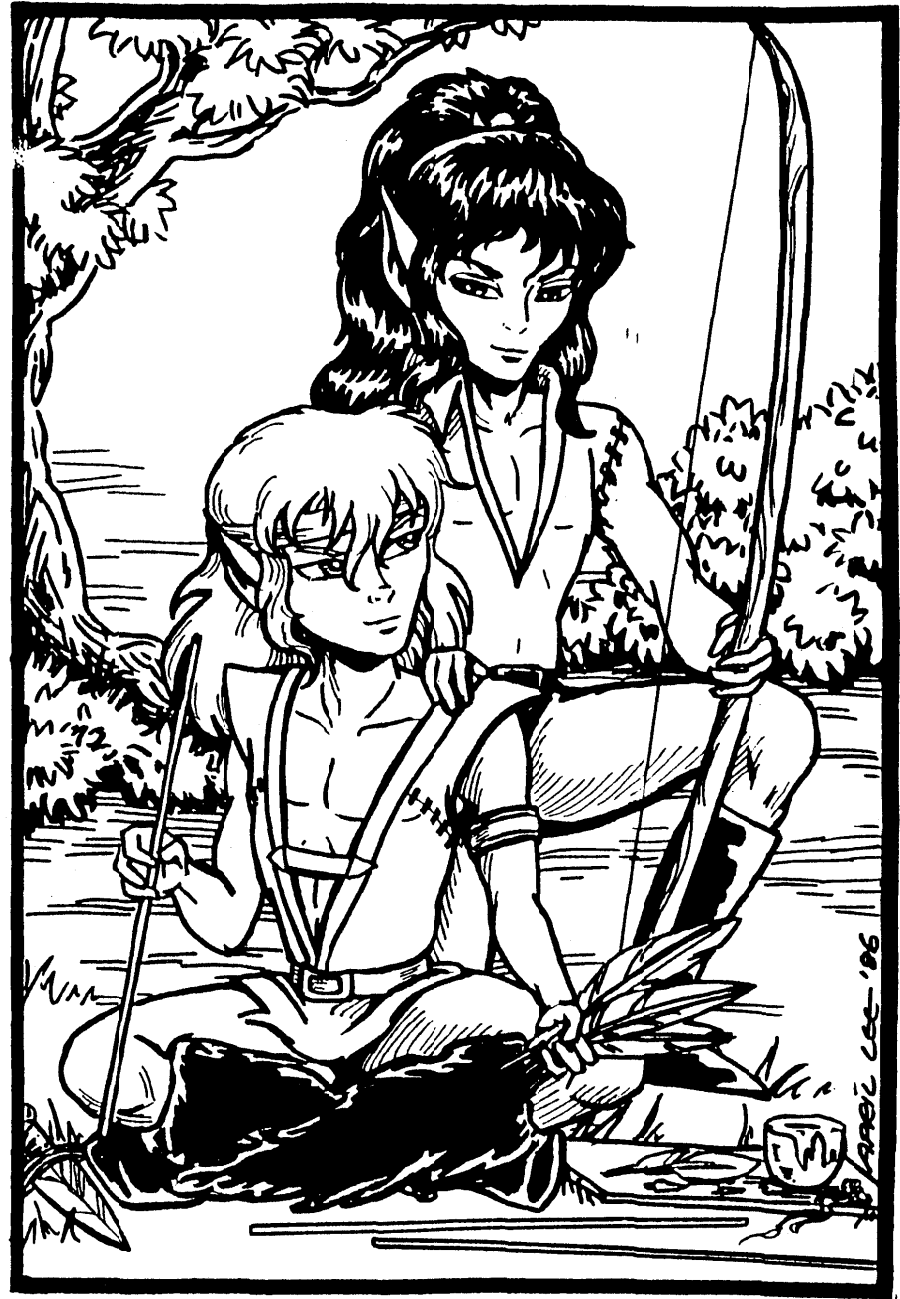
We have a new member! Mary Lopez, who runs Cliff Dweller Holt, joins us with Red Thorn, a female native to the Valley. Welcome, Mary! Anyone want a sister or female cousin? (Wait a minute, that question belongs in Valley Talk!) Mary's address is on the business page (page 2).

Also on page 2 are some changes of address. Who moved...oh, yeah. Melissa Van Houten (and Silver Sands Holt!) have moved. And Nikki Wieleba has a new post office box, as her own mailbox was way too small because Holt of Restless Winds has also moved. What, you say. Why does Nikki's mailbox need to be bigger because HoRW has moved? Because it's moved to Nikki, that's why! Yep, a new HoRW coordinator has arrived, because Marilyn has finally admitted that she's way over-worked. (All Holt Leaders are--Marilyn's just admitted it and is doing something about it.) Nikki is enthusiastic and I'm hoping that we can now get some of Marilyn's beautiful art for TVH. (There, Marilyn, I put it in print. How can you avoid it now?)

If anyone else moves, do please let me know right away. Thanks.

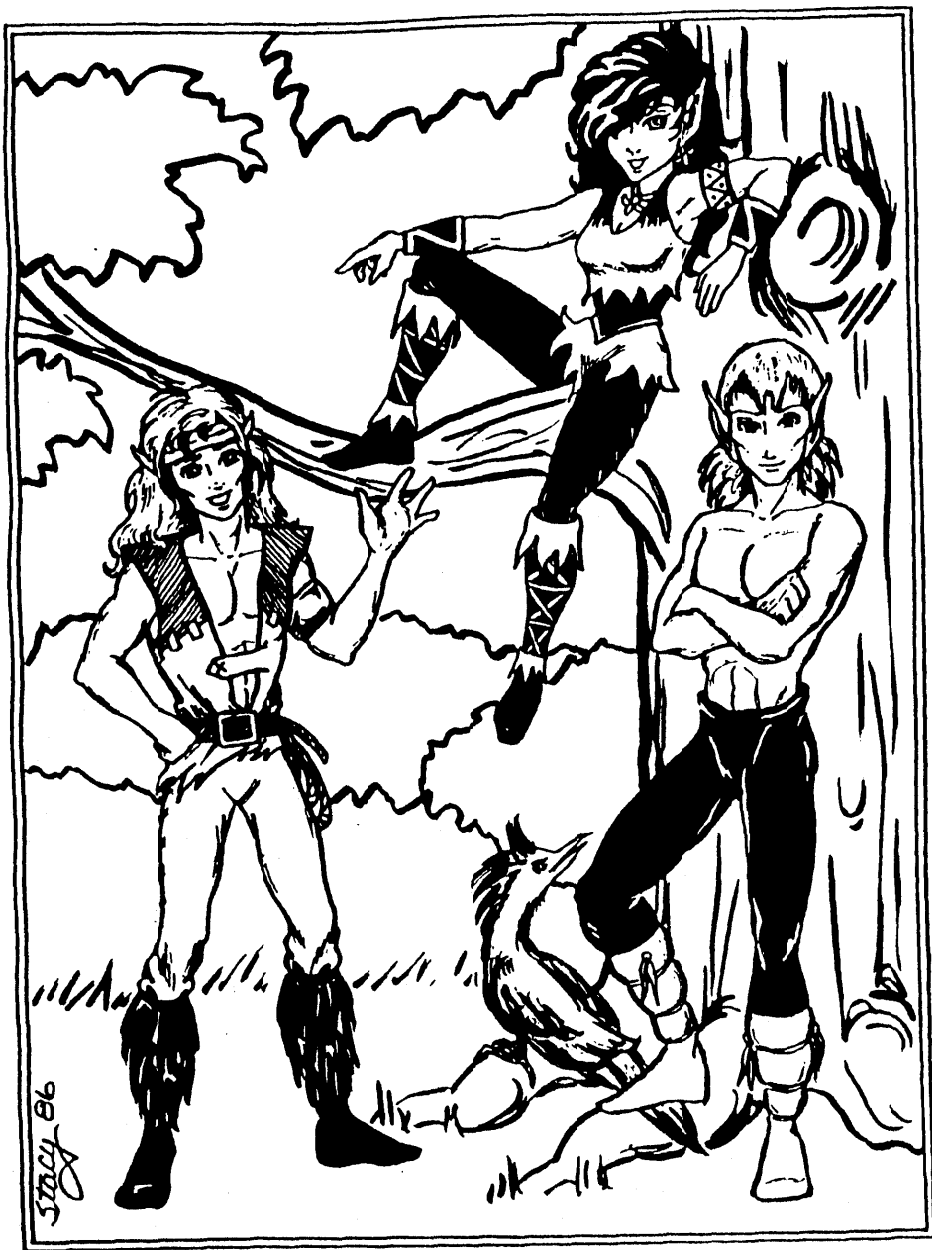
People keep sending me letters asking if I'm still allowing members into TVH. The answer is YES. We do want some more people in here, more elves, more trolls, more humans, more wolves.... Let your friends know. We're no where near my cut-off number.

6



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## Timber Folk Profiles



8

SKYFLAME...TVH native, next chief. Wants father to be proud of him--Nightstep is, but doesn't often show it. Charming, cheerful, light-hearted, charismatic, flirtatious, a born leader and a swashbuckler; but also has a serious side when necessary. Mature beyond his years, but knows how to be silly. He is undecided about humans, seeing both sides of the debate; trolls amuse and interest him; he enjoys the antics of Preservers, so long as they bother someones else; likes dreamberries a lot and will occasionally overindulge when partying with friends. Hunter/tracker, archer; very agile and athletic, climber/jumper; curious, good student (hopes learning much will help him be good chief someday); pony rider, explorer. Weapons are recurve bow, short sword, and whip. Clothing is green and brown, with black fur boots and a green headband; winter adds shirt under tunic and hooded black fur coat. Very friendly to everyone; friends include Younghawk, Buckeyes, Rogue, Whirlwind, Archer, Knifeblade, Duskdew, Hatfeather, Grassy, Wildwood, etc. Likes the ladies but hasn't met anyone "special" yet.

SOUL NAME...Famh; MAGIC...Sending, Animal Bonding, Magic sense  
 BIRTHDATE...DF 2 HS; TREEHOME...18 (w-friends); SKIN TONE...light tan  
 SEX...male; HT...3'11"; BLD...athletic, muscular; EYES...iridescent grey  
 HAIR...shadowy pale grey, very thick and straight, hangs to shoulderblades  
 ANIMAL FRIEND...Palemoon (bond-wolf, silvery male); Nimble (pony mare, chestnut)  
 FATHER...Nightstep; MOTHER...Freshwind; AUNT...Silverleaf; GREAT AUNT...Wavesong  
 CREATIVE CONTROL...Timber Valley Holt NPC

WILDWOOD...TVH native, orphaned by Death Flood, sister left valley in DF 4 HS and hasn't returned. Recently Recognized with Mooncrest, causing all sorts of complications for both. Friendly, out-going, creative, dependable, gentle, talkative, thoughtful, independent. She has no opinion on humans, trolls, or Preservers, but likes dreamberries (they make her giggle). Hunter/tracker, climber, swimmer; pony rider; seamstress/tanner; knows non-magical healing; talented symbol-maker. Weapons are bow, javelins, and sword. Clothing is black and grey, with long-sleeved shirt and bearskin parka in winter. Her friends include Nightway, Ferret, Duskdew, Woodwreath, and Quicksilver.

SOUL NAME...Alyne; MAGIC...Sending, Animal bonding, Tree-shaping (minor)  
 BIRTHDATE...DF -8 NL; TREEHOME...10; SKIN TONE...fair; SEX...female  
 HT...3'8"; BLD...slender, hourglass figure; EYES...large, rounded, grey  
 HAIR...dark brown, shoulderblade length, very thick, shaggy, falls over right eye  
 ANIMAL FRIEND...Blackpaw (bond-wolf, black & tan male cub); Spurs (pony stallion)  
 LOVEMATE...Grassy; MOTHER...Lightstreak (dec); FATHER...Windrider (dec);  
 SISTER...Silverlight (dec); NIECE...Silvershadow (at Holt of Restless Winds);  
 AUNT...Woodwreath; COUSIN...Duskdew  
 CREATIVE CONTROL...Eileen Fryer

WHIRLWIND...Wanderer, originally from Safe-Harbor-on-the-Talon, a coastal community to the northeast of TVH. Left hometrice after a love-mating breakup to follow the trail of his father, an explorer. (NOTE: "Whirlwind" is name given to him at TVH; his hometrice uses sound names.) Easy going, friendly, hyper-active, excitable, intense. His opinion of humans is undergoing changes; has never encountered trolls or Preservers before; "learns a true respect" for dreamberries at TVH. Seamanship, navigation, weather prediction (non-magical), swimming, fishing, diving, running, weaving, boat-building, rope-maker/knot-tier; knowledge of kick boxing. Weapons are spear and fishing knife. Black pants, tan boots, add bright patchwork quilt coat and black wool scarf and mittens in winter. Friends: Skyflame, Foxvine, Rogue, Trin, Ferret, etc.

SOUL NAME...not applicable; BIRTH NAME...Jessii; MAGIC...Sending, Animal bonding  
 BIRTHDATE...DF -30 HS; TREEHOME...18; SKIN TONE...brown  
 HT...4'; BLD...slim, muscular; EYES...bright, light grey  
 HAIR...honey-blond, sunbleached, shoulderlength behind with short sides and tapered bangs; ANIMAL FRIEND...Spraysparkle (bonded wave-dancer left at home); Dustdevil (roadrunner/pet); EX-LOVEMATE...Nisse (he is still not over this relationship);  
 FATHER...Raloc (dec); MOTHER...Eleela (at home); BROTHER...Kashalot (at home)  
 CREATIVE CONTROL...Alan Gillispie



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# Quick Getaways

A Timber Valley Lifetimes

by Ruth Clark - art by Terrie Smith

DF 12 NL

Duskdew yawned lazily and rolled over onto her stomach, trying to escape the dying rays of the sunlight that sought to bring her from her sleeping furs. It was too early to wake up! She buried her head under the covers in the hopes of returning to her slumber.

THUMP.

It was a quiet, almost unnoticeable sound, but enough for the young elf to realize that someone was in the tree. She sat up, rubbing her green eyes, and glanced around the room. Her eyes came to rest upon her foster brother, whom she shared the honetree with.

"Silver! Will you be quiet? I'm trying to...hey, what are you doing?" Her eyes narrowed suspiciously as the youth sprang out the entrance of the tree, carrying a bundle of leather.

"QUICKSILVER! My clothes!" she yelled. Wrapping a sleeping fur about her shoulders, she followed him out of the tree. Once outside, she saw him sprint away, his long legs carrying him out of her reach. She knew she'd never catch him. Already the young archer was one of the fleetest runners in the Holt, curse him. She'd break all his toes when he came back! Growling in frustration, she kicked the nearest tree root, then howled in pain, hopping about on one foot. She sank to the grass and nursed her throbbing toes.

"Dusky! Where's Silver going? I just saw him racing away from here as swift as a deer," Windrace said, walking to where she sat. "It, uh, wouldn't have anything to do with your clothes, would it? The furs look great, but they need to be fitted better," he teased.

"Ha ha. Funny man today, aren't you, Windrace?" she snapped back, glaring at him. "I'm supposed to go collect herbs and berries with Greeneyes and Nightway, and a fine sight I'll be prancing about the forest with no clothes on." She finished her examination of her toes, concluding that they would live, and rose to her feet. Silver wouldn't be as lucky as her toes if she ever caught him.

"Forgot. Never talk to Duskdew until she's completely awake. You're terrible company when you've just woken up. Look, I'll see if I can get your clothes back, okay? No hard feelings?" Windrace asked.

"Oh, thank you, Windrace! You're too goot to me," cried the grateful girl, giving him a quick hug. "I'll be down at the lake, plotting Silver's downfall, if you find him. Thanks again!" She waved her goodbye and the two elves departed in their separate directions.

Duskdew soon found her way to the lake, and with a sigh of relief, discarded the warmth of the sleeping furs to wade in the clear water. She hoped Windrace found Quicksilver soon. She was going to tan that boy's hide. Teach him to steal her leathers. She'd have to return the favor. Maybe some over-sunned fish in his boots?

The huntress shook her head. She shouldn't be so hard on the lad. Leaning forward, she cupped her hands together, filling them with water, and splashed it over her face. She could remember "borrowing" a few pairs of pants, with their occupants still wearing them! Maybe if she...

"Oh, Dusky."

Duskdew turned to her caller, gasping in surprise. The object of her thoughts stood on the banks of the lake, holding her sleeping furs in his arms. "See ya back at the Holt, sis," he sing-songed, then trotted away.

"QUICKSILVER!"



# Loose Ends

THE STORY SO FAR... Four elves from the Starbrook Holt community had left their home to see the world. Darkstar and Cedar were newly Recognized and lifemated; they were accompanied by Cedar's soul-brother, Lightfoot, and Lightfoot's love-mate, Larkspur. The group traveled far heward for almost three changes of the seasons before disaster struck. They were attacked by what seemed at first to be a maddened bear. Only Larkspur survived the attack. Severely injured, she fled from the monster. The twisted logic and persistence behind the bear's pursuit of her led the young elf to believe that this was more than a mad beast. Her suspicions were confirmed when the bear sent to her, calling her "little sister". Only Larkspur's new-found Talent, the ability to send excruciating pain, kept the bear from killing her as easily as it had her companions.



Meanwhile, Grassy of Timber Valley Holt had left the Valley secretly to enjoy a private ride on his grass-eater, Charger. Careless of time and distance, the two traveled to the edge of the Endless Sea of Grass where Grassy discovered Larkspur, unconscious from her wounds. Larkspur regained consciousness long enough to warn Grassy just as the "demon bear" attacked again. With Charger's help, the monster was driven off and Larkspur brought to Timber Valley.

Much to Larkspur's shock, Grassy left Charger out on the plains and they continued their journey to the Holt upon Nutcracker, Grassy's bond-wolf. Larkspur urged Grassy to hurry for the bear was gaining on them. At first Grassy couldn't believe the monster had followed them--that wasn't the way bears behaved. Then he heard its roar.

They reached the Thorn Barrier just as the bear reached them. As Nightway shaped a door from inside, Grassy and Nutcracker held the bear off. Finally the two elves escaped through the Barrier and Nutcracker fled safely into the deep forest. Silverleaf helped Nightway close the Barrier as the bear tried to force its way through. Failing to penetrate the shaped thorn bushes, it sent a threat to Larkspur and Grassy, who was finally forced to believe Larkspur's claim that this was more than a bear. Then the creature left.

When Greeneyes attempted to heal Larkspur, she was knocked unconscious by Larkspur's pain-sending. Confused and exhausted, Larkspur had thought she was defending herself against another attack! Goldenbraid arrived with Two Star and the native Healer restored Greeneyes, explaining that Larkspur's Talent was the Healing talent turned inside out by Larkspur's desperate attempts to save herself from the bear. Greeneyes turned to heal Grassy,

who had been injured without realizing it while fighting the bear. Goldenbraid tended to Larkspur.

As Goldenbraid began to heal the stranger, she found something oddly familiar about her. Understanding of what it was brought her abruptly out of her healing trance. Years ago, her father Chestnut had disappeared from the Valley, never to be seen again. To Goldenbraid's shock, she sensed her father in Larkspur--somehow, Larkspur was Chestnut's daughter and her own sister!

\*\*\*\*\*

## PART THREE: THE DEMON BEAR

by Joanne Papin

illustrated by Melissa Van Houten

from an original idea by Jennifer Hawthorne

DF 19 LC

Tenderly, Goldenbraid tucked the soft fur cover around her new-found sister. Poor cub--what an ordeal she'd been through! The Healer exchanged glances with Greeneyes, seated beside Larkspur's sleeping form, before descending into the main living area of the hometree she shared with her lifemate, Two Star. Long familiarity

with the space limitations of a hometree instinctively prevented her from bumping her head as she half-slid, half-climbed from the sleeping nook that had once belonged to their daughter Sandstorm.

"You're very silent now."

Goldenbraid started at the unexpected voice, by her tensed muscles relaxed almost instantly as she identified the speaker. \*\*Juhm, I didn't hear you return. You're back sooner than I expected.\*\*

Two Star rose from the bench where he'd been sitting and moved silently to her side. \*\*A fine tracker I'd be if you had heard me,\*\* he half-joked. Then his expression turned serious. \*\*How is she doing?\*\* A shift of his eyes indicated the sleeping nook and Larkspur.

Goldenbraid sighed tiredly. \*\*Not so well as I'd first thought. The healing is definitely underway, but she's lucky to still have her arm. That kind of tissue damage needs time as well as magic for healing. I don't know how I could have thought her healed earlier...\*\*

The silver-haired hunter gathered his lifemate into the circle of his arms. \*\*You've found a sister today and through her learned news of your father. With such distractions I doubt you'd be much faulted for a simple mistake.\*\*

For a moment Goldenbraid stood still in his embrace. Then she pulled away to look into his eyes. \*\*If I were just anyone, perhaps. But as a Healer, such an error is inexcusable. Now then,\*\* firmly she changed the subject before Two Star could argue further. \*\*What brings you home so soon from your council with Nightstep?\*

\*\*I'm here to fetch you. Nightstep wants all the elders to hear about this bear-monster and try to make sense of it before the open Council meets. He was hoping Larkspur would be recovered enough to join us and tell her story, but I take it that won't be possible?\*

\*\*I'm afraid not. He'll have to settle for whatever Grassy can tell us--it may be days before Larkspur is well enough to talk.\*\*



\* \* \*

Rogue shifted nervously, chafing at his enforced inactivity. He wanted to be out and doing something, not stuck here on guard duty. But he remembered Nightstep's words clearly: "Don't go out of the Thorn Barrier. Don't let anything through it. And if you hear anything--ANYTHING AT ALL--you call me immediately." Even Rogue knew better than to argue with that tone, but one of the treeslayers--Rainshy, a newcomer to the Valley--had protested. The fool female had wanted to go out and check the damage that had been done to the bushes outside the Barrier. Nightstep had refused harshly. She'd finally give in with bad grace and the last Rogue had seen of her, she'd been heading off somewhere to sulk.

\*\*Rogue--everything quiet where you are?\*

Mooncrest's sending pulled him back from his memories. \*\*No, nothing. I mean, all quiet here.\*\* High Ones, all this talk of demon bears that could send was putting him on edge. And being up and around in the eerie light of the Valley's dusk wasn't helping either.

\*\*Good. Ask on down the line. Remember Nightstep said we should keep in touch.\*\*

\*\*Right.\*\* Rogue sent to Diver who was guarding the section of Barrier on his other side. The talkative scout reported at length that all was quiet, but eventually Rogue was able to persuade him to check with Starlight on his other side.

The third time the sending report came around to Rogue, Mooncrest's "voice" suddenly faltered. Rogue sent a wordless alert to Diver as his head instinctively turned in the direction Mooncrest was guarding. \*\*Mooncrest--what's going on? Answer me, humans take you!\*

\*\*Sorry, Rogue...thought I heard some--\*

Then Rogue heard something too. A scream, high-pitched and shrill with terror. It was echoed by an all-too-familiar roar, bone-chilling and triumphant. Forgetting all about Nightstep's orders, Rogue headed as fast as he could towards Mooncrest's section of the Barrier.

\* \* \*

The elders of Timber Valley, both native and adopted tribekin, were meeting in the spacious main chamber of the Holt's ancient Father Tree. Thick furs had been spread across the floor and atop the raised surfaces of sitting platforms that had been shaped from the living wood of the tree. Nightstep sat crosslegged, his back straight and his entire body vibrating with his alertness. Two Star sat nearby, one arm around Goldenbraid who leaned wearily against him. Wavesong, across the room, had a work basket before her and was deftly twisting some fibrous plant matter into sturdy yarn for her weaving. Silverhair sat beside her, slowly winding his old friend's yarn around a shuttle as its length increased. Freshwind, seated between Big Axe and Sapphire, watched Nightstep lovingly from her vantage point on one of the higher platforms. She smiled indulgently at the stern frown he was directing Grassy, who stood in the room's center, carefully narrating the events of the past day. Off in one corner, Jasmine sat quietly watching everyone. She'd been surprised to be included in the elders' council, and flattered, but now her natural shyness was causing her to try to be as invisible as possible.

In the center of the room, Grassy came to the end of his story.

"Thank you, Grassy. Very thorough." Nightstep nodded sternly at the youth, then lock-sent to him, "We won't go into why you were in the Upper World alone--with no companion for backup in case of trouble. Not now. But be sure that we will discuss it later." Aloud he continued, "Any further questions?"

\*\*One more time, lad, tell us about this...creature... sending.\*\* Silverhair had not spoken since the death of his Recognized mate Dewdrop at the hands of humans long ago. His own sending had become very strong, as had his interest in the sending of others.

"What more is there to tell about that? It threatened to have us all dead before the first snowfall. There's something sick and twisted about its sending, but that



didn't make the meaning any less clear.\*\*

Goldenbraid stirred. "Grassy, did you feel pain from the bear's send?"

"No, I wasn't making accusations, Grassy. I meant--" A strange look came over Goldenbraid's features and she broke off her sentence, turning toward the outer door of the chamber. Grassy and the elders all followed her gaze as Rogue came stumbling through the portal. The normally confident hunter was white-faced and shaking. Blood coozed sluggishly from a set of shallow parallel slashes on one of his shoulders. For a moment his mouth moved soundlessly, then he shook his head as though to clear his thoughts. The slight movement became a wracking shudder that shook his whole frame.

"Nightstep, come quick...it was horrible...the bear came back...attacked..." Words and images jumbled confusedly, of the bear, of Diver and Mooncrest, and of blood--so much blood...

Nightstep leaped to his feet and was halfway through the door past Rogue before anyone else could move. Sapphire and Two Star were right behind him.

As the trio disappeared into the deepening night, Goldenbraid stood to join them. "I'll get after them. They'll need a Healer out there."

Rogue's good hand caught her arm as she moved past him. "No...don't bother." His usual self-possession was fast returning and he looked grimly into Goldenbraid's eyes. "You're already too late."

\* \* \*

After Rogue's disjointed message, Nightstep hadn't known quite what to expect when he reached the Thorn Barrier. The night felt alien, strange and hostile. Before Nightstep could pass into one of the barrier's pathways, Two Star stopped him. "No, old friend. A chief leads better from behind--that way he lives to lead wisely through a ripe old age. I'll go first."

\*\*You'll wait also.\*\* Sapphire's sending was calm and very forceful. \*\*A chief needs wise counselors and trustworthy old friends too. I'll go first.\*\* Before either male could object, she had slipped past them into the thorns. Nightstep and Two Star exchanged startled glances before hastening to follow.

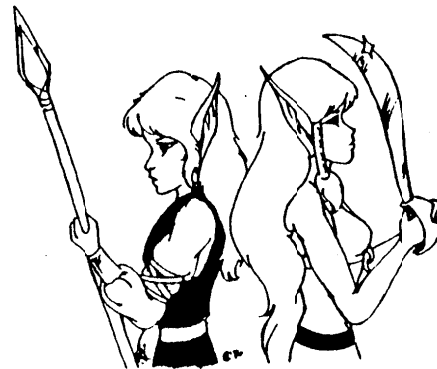
They emerged from the Thorn Barrier very close to the spot Rogue's sending had shown them. Buckeye and Starlight stood back to back, weapons at the ready, a few feet away. Their faces were expressionless. After a quick glance to identify the newcomers, they both both quickly turned back. The smell of fresh blood was sickeningly strong and mixed with the other odors of a new kill. It was all overlaid by the rank odor of bear.

\*\*High Ones help us.\*\* Two Star was the first to react to the results of the bear's handiwork. Nightstep moved past where he had stopped and knelt by the torn and mangled torso that lay on the ground before them. Swallowing the bile that rose in his throat, he forced himself to look around, suppressing a shudder as he located an arm ten paces from the body. He finally found the head, stuffed in among the branches of the thorn bushes and staring out at him with vacant, dead eyes.

While Nightstep and Two Star examined the body, Sapphire moved over to join the two guards. \*\*Any sign of movement?\*

she asked, casually assuming a position that complimented their stances. \*\*Not since this happened. I got here after...it had left.\*\* Buckeye's mental voice was as expressionless as his face. The carnage the bear had left behind had affected him deeply, for normally he was carefree and flirtatious, the slyest of hunters, and a dedicated gamester. \*\*I got here sooner...Grassy was right. Whatever that thing is, it sends... and it hates...\*\*

Nightstep interrupted their tense conversation. \*\*Alright, I've seen enough. We're moving the body--that thing won't have a chance to do anything more to it. But make it fast--the living are more important than the dead and I'll see that





monster in the Black Hole personally before I allow this to happen to another of the tribe. When we've done, gather everyone in the Council Clearing--it's past time for the open council.\*\*

\*\*\*

The night was still new as the last of the Holt members found places in the Council Clearing. The only elves missing were those sent to replace the first watch at the Thorn Barrier--Blackfire, Sandstorm, Frost, Ivory, Longknife, and Smoke. Rogue was sitting between Skyflame and Younghawk, nursing his newly healed but still tender arm. He looked up as a shape moved between him and the light of the council fire. \*\*Mooncrest!\*\* Forgetting his recent injury, he reached up and snagged his friend's wrist, pulling him down beside him. \*\*How's Diver doing?\*

Mooncrest shoved his unruly hair back from his forehead and shrugged. \*\*Not too badly. He and Rainshy were only close in her mind. I think he mainly feels guilty that he doesn't feel worse--it was a horrible way for someone to die.\*\*

\*\*Yes...it was...\*\* For a moment, both friends were silent, remembering the sight that had met their eyes when they burst through the Thorn Barrier. Rogue had been right on Mooncrest's heels and with his usual foolhardiness had charged the monster, spear lowered, just as it was tossing Rainshy's lifeless form toward the thorn bushes that had so fascinated her. The bear had fled from so direct an attack, but not before it had marked Rogue with its claws for getting too close. And as it fled, it had sent, words and emotions of pure vitriol that had seemed almost as deadly as its claws.

Mooncrest suddenly smiled, though a little lopsidedly. \*\*One thing's for sure,\*\* he said, trying to lighten the mood, \*\*I'll think twice the next time I'm tempted to disobey Nightstep's orders.\*\*

\*\*You mean you'll decide to obey?\*

Rogue asked, joining into the spirit behind Mooncrest's words. \*\*Don't be crazy! I'll just think twice about it!\*\* The two pranksters exchanged smirks that might have turned into hysteria-tinged laughter if Nightstep hadn't chosen that moment to call Council to order.

"As most of you have heard by now, the Holt is under attack by a monster in the shape of a bear." The chief of the Timber Folk had a rich, mellow voice, notable for its carrying quality. Despite the size of the Clearing and the number of elves there, all heard him plainly. And, at his choice of words, Jasmine looked up from her usual secluded corner with a sudden strange look of speculation in her large green eyes.

"The bear followed the stranger, Larkspur--" he held up a restraining hand at Goldenbraid's soft murmur of protest. "After it attacked her traveling party and killed her companions, it followed her onto the plains where Grassy found her. And it followed her into the Valley when Grassy brought her to the Holt. It attacked the Thorn Barrier and a short time ago, it attacked and killed Rainshy while she was working to repair the damaged areas of the Barrier. I believe it's safe to say we haven't seen the last of this thing. It'll come back and when it does, that will be our turn to attack. Now...any suggestions?"

It was soon obvious that most of the tribe favored a barrage of arrows from the treetops, accompanied by thrown spears and other distance weapons. Except for Hatfeather, Tempest, and Knifeblade--who joined in urging a frontal attack with swords--no one wanted to get within striking range of the bear.

"My chief," Ferret had left her spot beside Trace to speak with Goldenbraid while methods of attack were debated. Now she was giving Nightstep her notorious I'm-going-to-get-yelled-at-for-suggesting-this--but-I'm-going-to-suggest-it-

anyway look. The last time she had been so obvious was the day she'd announced her plan to leave the Valley to explore the Upper World. She'd been gone nearly an eight of seasons and became the first of the native Timber Folk to return to the Valley after so long an absence.

"Yes, Ferret?" Nightstep knew he'd regret letting her speak; things always became more complicated when Ferret made a suggestion.

"I don't think it's a good idea to kill this bear-creature so quickly. We still don't know what it is...it might be important to know."

"Your nose is quivering, love," commented Trace lazily, but Mooncrest interrupted angrily.

"You don't think...by the High Ones, it's obvious you don't think! You didn't see what that monster did to Rainshy, you haven't felt its sendings--and you want to make a pet out of it!" In his anger, Mooncrest had risen to his feet and now glared down at the blond trapper, his hands balled into fists at his sides.

\*\*She may have a point, cub.\*\* Silverhair's sending cut firmly across his son's anger. \*\*This idea should be discussed before we dismiss it out of hand. It will be too late after the creature is dead.\*\*

"I also agree, Nightstep." Goldenbraid's expression was troubled, but her voice was firm. "Something doesn't feel right about this bear, or monster, or--whatever this thing is--and if we can find out what it is without endangering any of the tribe, I think we should do so."

The normally gentle Trilight surprised them with a sudden violent outburst. "You're all crazy! This--this thing is a killer. We can't just forget that--and we can't give it a chance to kill again!"

Twill broke the silence that followed Trilight's words. "I've heard the humans call us 'demons'," he began slowly, choosing his words with care. "I've never quite understood what they meant by that word until today. I believe that they don't really know themselves--and that they can thank their 'high ones' for it. This...thing that is attacking us is a demon...a demon bear." Murmurs of agreement echoed around the Clearing as he paused. Trilight and Mooncrest began to nod their agreement. "But naming this thing 'demon' doesn't mean that we should kill without thinking as the humans would. I also think we should find out more about it first."

Complications! What an understatement, thought Nightstep, glancing over at Ferret. She sat beside Goldenbraid, her eyes wide in astonishment at the debate her words had sparked. Listening as the noise level steadily rose, Nightstep decided it was time to interrupt before the discussion became a brawl. He moved closer to the light of the Council fire and assumed an attitude of "patience"--arms folded across his chest, head tilted back to gaze unseeing at the stars, his posture pointedly very straight. So that his meaning would be unmistakable, he added a throat clearing to the effect.

Quickly the tribesfolk settled back down to regard their chief expectantly. When Nightstep was sure of their attention, he spoke. "Ferret--since this was your idea originally...do you have any plan of how to capture this creature alive without endangering any of the tribe?"

"Wha--oh...well...we build a trap, of course!"

\*\*\*

The Great Moon was high in the sky when the Council finally ended. The basic details of the trap had been settled; now all that was needed was time to prepare it. Nightstep decided to keep the guard at the Thorn Barrier. Though there had been no reports that night of the bear, he had no desire to take such a chance.

He sent Duskdew, Softwill, Redthorn, and Prairie Fire to relieve the first watch. They would be relieved themselves at dawn. \*\*And remember,\*\* he cautioned them fiercely, \*\*do not go outside the Barrier alone for any reason.\*\*

Nightstep turned away from the departing hunters-turned-guards and almost knocked over Jasmine. Gently, he helped her catch her balance. The chief felt more protective than usual about this adopted member of his tribe. She was a more than just competent hunter, an excellent tracker, and on the few times since her arrival in the Valley that she had ventured to speak an opinion, he had found her to be intelligent and



shrewd. If only she weren't so skittish around others. As he began to walk away, he was surprised to feel her hand catch at his arm.

"Wait, my chief," she sent with surprising urgency. "Here's something I need to tell you--it might be important..."

Nightstep listened in growing amazement to the tale of her birth-tribe, of how in a desperate attempt to help his tribe survive, a legendary elder of her people had summoned the forgotten powers of the High Ones to change himself into a wolf and then been unable to change back. "There is still a deep blood-bond between the wolves and the tribe--our bonding is different from yours," she finished.

At first, Nightstep was inclined to dismiss the story as a Howl-tale. But she was so certain... Taking her hand, he pulled her past the patiently-waiting Freshwind toward Goldenbraid's hometree. This was something he needed to discuss with the Healer.

The next eight of days passed in a flurry of activity. Silverleaf, Wildwood, Hushleaf, and Nightway--the Holt's remaining tree-shapers--worked to repair the damaged sections of the Thorn Barrier. They also shaped some necessary camouflage around and over the pit trap dug by others. The pit was to be deep, with steep, unclimbable sides. The soft dirt of the forest floor would not be staped by Twill and they could not ask a troll to help them dig while the demon bear still roamed through the forest.

A select group of the Holt's fastest and most agile hunters and scouts kept track of the demon creature's movements, often luring it back into the deep forest when it came too close to the group working on the pit trap. The decoys worked in pairs or even threes to further confuse the monster, keeping it off balance to lessen the danger of confronting it. The creature became steadily more enraged with each passing encounter, more determined to continue its vendetta against the tribe, but less capable of rational attacks. Quicksilver, Knifblade, and Windrace proved especially skilled at this undertaking--they were chosen finally for the task of luring the demon bear over the disguised pit when all was ready.

And there were difficulties beyond keeping the bear away. Elves strained muscles digging the pit; once when the soft loamy walls collapsed, Skyflame and Season were almost buried alive. The demon bear's twisted sendings sometimes caused unprepared elves on decoy duty to become confused and hesitate at the wrong moment. Only Nightstep's insistence that no one leave the Barrier unaccompanied prevented more deaths like Rainshy's, and even so, Blackfire was badly clawed and several others received painful scratches.

The presence of the monster in the Valley severely limited the range of the Holt's hunters and foragers. Win-winter was fast approaching and this was normally the time when the Timber Folk finished laying up stores to last through the lean White Time. Silverhair, Ivory, and Freshwind organized small hunting parties, and once Big Axe, Dawnwatch, and Sapphire acted as guards while Wavesong and Rosemist went out to gather plants and nuts, but these were tokens compared to what should have been done.

Buckeye took the pony-riders on an expedition to the Upper World. Grassy was glad for an opportunity to check the wounds Charger had received in his battle against the demon bear. Wildwood and Hushleaf, however, had to stay behind to work with the other tree-shapers. The small group that went brought back two thunder-runners and several baskets of herbs and berries, but one of the thunder-runners had to be left behind when the demon bear came upon the party unexpectedly. The creature did not pursue them, instead it tore hungrily into the meat. Grassy later commented that it seemed much thinner than when he'd first seen it on the plains. This was generally regarded as a mixed blessing. If it wasn't hunting, perhaps the lack of food would weaken it and make it easier to trap. On the other hand, perhaps hunger would make it more vicious...if that were possible.

Those who had originally been against the plan to trap the bear were slowly reconciling themselves to it as the time grew near. Knowledge of Nightstep gave them faith in his judgement. Mooncrest even went so far as to allow Rogue to persuade him to take a turn at decoy duty.

Larkspur did not know Nightstep. As she regained her strength and began to join in Holt life, she was appalled at the tribe's plans to capture her old tormentor. Her moods ranged from fear to anger as she tried to convince the tribe to abandon their plan. On the night before the vent, she wept in Goldenbraid's arms while the Healer comforted her. Much as Goldenbraid loved her new sister, however,



she was convinced that what the tribe had prepared was the right thing to do. And she could not get Jasmine's words--and what her Healer's talent told her about the huntress's ancestry--from her mind.

\*\*\*

Then, suddenly they were ready. Everything that could be done had been--now they could only hope that nothing had been forgotten.

As dusk settled over the Valley, Dawnwatch reported the demon bear's location. Quicksilver and Windrace left to find the spot; Knifblade was already there.

'Silver was first to spot the bear--somewhere along the way he'd lost track of where Windrace was. The demon creature was stalking slowly towards a small huddled figure seated at the base of a tree. 'Silver's eyes went wide as he saw the elf wasn't moving. Didn't he realize the monster was almost within striking distance?! Picking up a rock, he took aim for the bear's head.

'Silver was drawing his arm back, about to release the rock, when the elf suddenly tumbled to his feet and took off at a dead run toward the distant Holt. 'Silver stopped his toss with difficulty and watched, impressed despite himself, as Knifblade started to lead the bear back to their trap. He had waited till the last possible second to move, 'Silver realized.

"Well, what are you waiting for? Get moving, cub! That idiot's luck won't hold forever!" Dawnwatch's strong send and acerbic words startled the youth from his reverie and he almost stumbled in his hurry to follow Knifblade and the bear.

\*\*\*

Back at the Holt, Nightstep had ordered all unnecessary tribesmembers back inside the Thorn Barrier. "This isn't a Howl, no matter what you think. The more people, the more confusion, and the more chance of someone getting hurt--not necessarily by the bear, either. You too, Ferret." The trapper made a face, but obeyed.

Two Star moved up behind Nightstep. "You also, old friend. Time to get under cover."

Nightstep turned a frustrated face to the elder. "I know--it's just that I hate having cubs in danger while I do nothing. I hate this waiting."

"Then have some sympathy for the rest of the tribe. How do you think they feel? Come along--they also serve who only wait."

"Is that something your mother used to say?"

"No--Foxvine when he's 'fishing'. Now, behind the Barrier with you."

Nightstep hesitated. "No, my old friend. This time you are wrong. I cannot ask my people to face such danger without me." As Two Star opened his mouth to protest, he continued mockingly, "But don't worry--I promise to stay up in a tree the whole time, and to keep my head and feet covered!" At the old mother's caution to her cub, Two Star reluctantly grinned and nodded.

"As you will, my chief," he replied with resignation. "But if you get yourself hurt, don't expect Goldenbraid to heal you!"

\*\*\*

Knifblade's legs ached from running, his lungs hurt from his ragged breathing, and his head felt it would split open at any second from the demon bear's sending. It wasn't that the thing sent pain, as Larkspur



was supposed to have done. It was the hate and anger of the sending, the violence of the images projected with such intensity. Hatfeather's sending was sometimes so strong it gave whoever was on the receiving end a headache, but Knifeblade thought this bear-monster was probably stronger. Then he stopped thinking and concentrated on just running.

"Hey, stupid! Over here--what're you chasing that bit of nothing for?"

Pursuer and prey did not even pause as they continued their headlong crash through the undergrowth. Likely they hadn't even heard Windrace's words, so intent were they on the chase. But Windrace could see that Knifeblade was weakening. He'd been out half the night tracking the monster with Dawn-

watch--no wonder he was nearing exhaustion. Windrace had to get the demon bear off the youngster's trail. Besides, why should Knifeblade have all the fun?

"\*\*Hey, hairy!\*\*" To his surprise, the monster stopped dead in its tracks, turning its huge head toward him. There was something beyond frightening in the deadness of those red eyes, and Windrace took an involuntary step backwards at the silent menace it projected. At his movement, the thing raised on its hind legs. It towered above him, nearly three times his height. Windrace froze in sudden dread as a wordless sending invaded his mind. This was not like the threats and images of carnage the creature had sent in the past, it was a deliberate and frighteningly systematic attempt to discover his soul name. The shock of such an attack drove all thoughts of flight from Windrace's mind.

"Hey, Windrace! Run!" This time, Quicksilver got to throw the rock. It glanced off the side of the bear's skull. For a moment, nothing seemed to be happening, then Windrace began

to run. Slowly the bear turned to face Quicksilver, who took off at right angles to Windrace's path. With a shake of its massive head, the bear shifted back and began to follow Windrace, still on only two legs. At first its speed wasn't much, but then it began to get faster.... \* \* \*

Windrace burst onto one of the Holt's paths--onto, across, and past it. He wasn't going to race with that thing without undergrowth to slow its bulk down. He could tell it was gaining on him. What had happened to 'Silver? He was supposed to draw the thing off and slow it down. Thankfully he recognized one of the markers for the location of the trap. He veered toward it and heard the crashing in the bushes behind him move closer. Finding reserves of speed he wouldn't have believed he possessed, Windrace came close to flying across the small clearing where the pit trap was located. (He came closer to flight than he realized, as the stress of the moment caused his submerged air-walking Talent to begin to manifest.)

The demon bear followed close behind him. As Windrace reached the safety of the far side of the clearing, the bear sped across after him. Hidden in the treetops around the clearing, a dozen pairs of eyes watched as the bear's weight came to bear on the camouflage branches over the pit. The branches groaned and bent under its weight--but held!

"\*\*Oh, no!\*\*" Wildwood sent a desperate look at her friend, Nightway, in the tree beside her.



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"\*\*It's going to catch Windra--\*\*" Her sending stopped abruptly as she caught sight of what was happening in the clearing.

Hushleaf had dropped down from his perch in another of the trees. With a graceful flourish, the mute tree-shaper danced across the bear's path. Startled, the bear stopped, skidding slightly, and turned to watch as Hushleaf gambolled atop the center of the camouflaged pit.

"\*\*Hushleaf, what are you doing? Get out of there!\*\*" Nightway sent desperately.

"\*\*It's no use, Nightway. He can't 'hear' your sending.\*\*" Wildwood grimly reached for her bow. Nocking an arrow, she took aim for the bear's head, for the vulnerable eyes. Nightway was not an archer and could only look on helplessly, cursing her lack of hunting skills.

Meanwhile, on the clearing floor, Hushleaf waited for the bear to move towards him. It had been so frustrating for him to stay behind and work with the other tree-shapers while those without the Talent played their dangerous game of hide-and-seek with this creature. Now that the chance had fallen so providentially before him, he intended to make the most of it. With the muffled cough that passed for a laugh in his tongueless mouth, he pantomimed every broad, rude gesture he could think of toward the demon bear. Slowly the creature began to move in his direction. As it drew closer, it tried to send to him. Vaguely he could sense it, like an unpleasant tickling at the bottom of his mind. He stopped his pantomime and stood very still. Let it think he was afraid--it was in for a big surprise.

The bear was almost in striking range when it felt the constriction upon its ankles. With a grunt of bewilderment, it looked down to find creeper vines curling around its lower legs. Tearing at the creepers, it forgot all about Hushleaf, who was slowly moving off the area of the pit. Only when he was certain he was on solid ground did he kneel and focus his Talent on the too-strong pit covering.

crrr-CRACK! With an enraged bellow, the bear tumbled into the pit.

\*\*\*\*\*

to be continued...



EDITOR'S NOTE: Never fear, Part Four of "Loose Ends" is finished. Only space limitations prevent it from being included in this issue of TIMBERS! Part Four, the final section, will appear in TIMBERS! 12. See you then....

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# VALLEY TALK

And the response on the TROLL WARS has been terrific! (Though no one has offered an elf to die yet...) This weekend I'll be meeting with Diana Stein and all sorts of people from TVH who will vote yes or no about some of the basic plot twists. Then, we'll send out some short "basic plot outline" fliers to everyone who SENDS ME A Self-Adressed Stamped Envelope with TROLL WARS written on it somewhere. You want to participate, you gotta send that envelope! Then you'll get the flier with what we're up to and be able to let us know where your elf might end up involved--or suggest some scenes for him/her. I've heard some wonderful tentative ideas from those who've responded so far. Oh boy, this is going to be exciting!

Side note...though "Troll Wars" the story will have a certain limit, the things that happen in the Valley as a result of it will continue into the future. That means that, if you participate in the Troll Wars, you will be helping to decide the direction that the Holt will move in for the next few years.

On to other things. Everybody still wants friends and lovers. Now, tell me about them! In the editorial I asked people to let me know what's been happening with their characters--now I'll ask again. I know a couple of elves (Smoke, Evenfell, and Rogue, to name a few) have lots of lovmates, Woodwreath has a huge family, and all sorts of other relationships are going on. But could you guys just send me a list? I'm getting confused....

ORIGINS...Somebody suggested, I meant to say! (Bill Nichols/Rogue, to be precise) that we should try to get the wanderers into TVH to share origins. Rogue, who had no good opinion of his hometribe, was from a wolf-bonding Holt. Anybody else from a wolf-bonding Holt who'd like to be from the same tribe as Rogue? NOTE: Rogue was not necessarily correct in his judgements of his hometribe, Bill wants to make that clear.

HEY MOM! WILL YOU  
RELAX ON THE LOVMATES?  
A GUY'S GOTTA  
SLEEP  
SOMETIME!

OTHER ORIGINS...Whirlwind, from our Profiles page, is from "Safe-Harbor-on-the-Talon". This is a TVH source holt. Anyone who's curious, send me a SASE and I'll send you back the write-up on the Talon community.

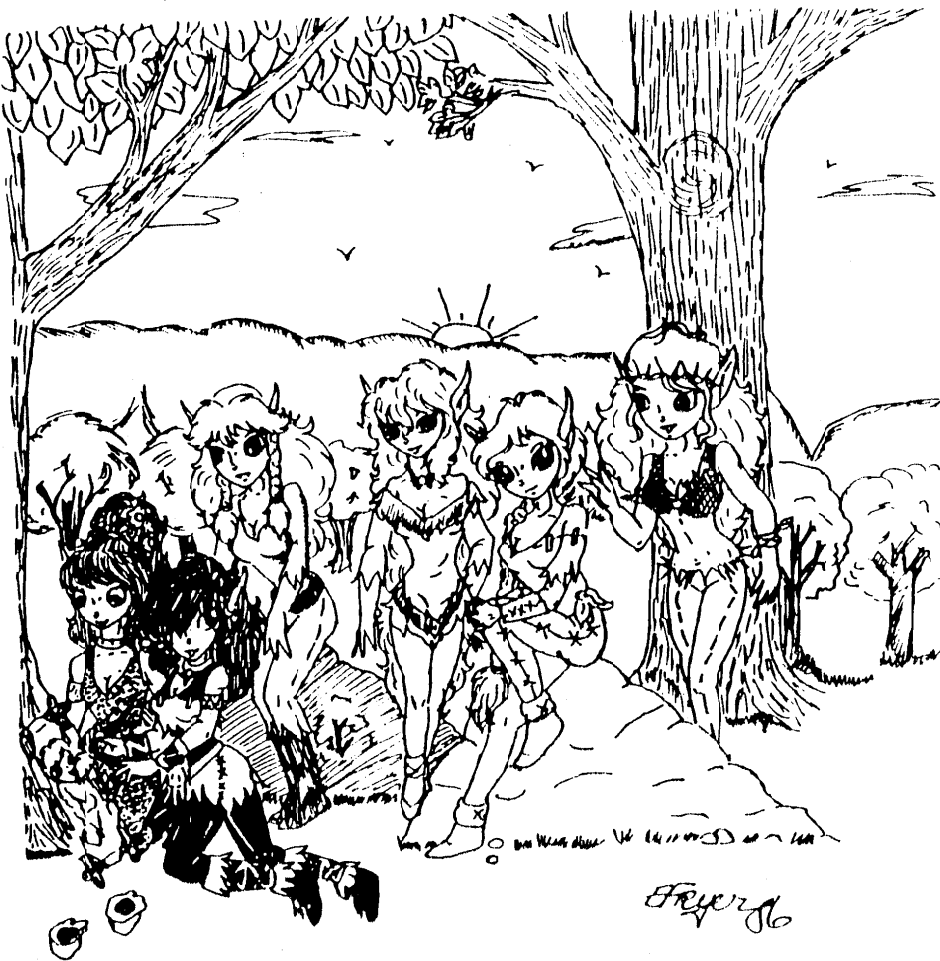
EAGLE MOUNTAIN HOLT...LongKnife is from there. Windspanner and Morningdew are from the survivors camp. Eagle Mountain Holt was destroyed by humans. They did not bond with wolves, they bonded with birds (usually eagles, though there were a few exceptions). Again, is anyone else interested in this Holt?

We also have people from various "established" Holts (other clubs). As long as I and the other Holt leader say it's okay, it's okay. Okay?

Running out of room...next issue I'm going to have a want ads page in Valley talk. If you're looking for a lovmate, lifemate, family, friends, etc--write soon!



DUCKSILVER  
SWELLS HER FEET  
OFF HER FEET...



Freyja

