



TIMBERS

Volume 4, Number 23



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[Mooncrest & Wildwood]
[Random & Whisperswift]

Timber Valley Online

Our website featuring updated Character Profiles

<http://www.gcocities.com/Area51/Cavern/2680/online.htm>

Timbers #23

Editorial

It has been four months since I sent out *Timbers* #22 to our small group of members, but I had a response from only just one person on the issue. I *did* say originally that it wasn't mandatory that anyone else submit anything, but it would have been nice to know if anyone even read it. No matter, I suppose. I intend to continue with the project, even if it is for Eileen and myself. I *have* enjoyed getting back into the swing of things. Once again there is a place to put the stories about the Timber Folk on the world of two moons.

Things are going slightly different than planned, however. I had full intentions of creating a whole batch of new stories in the updated timeline, but I seem to have gone backward. Last issue I printed a tale about the elves' discovery of the valley, and this issue has a story dated to the original Troll War (which I now call the Timber Valley War since it involves more than just trolls).

I don't like to leave things unfinished, and due to the official closing of the holt in 1990, the war story was unresolved after only three of the seven planned chapters were printed. With my renewed interest in Timber Valley, I took on the task of continuing the war storyline and picked it up where it was left off in DF 24. I still have my original notes, so I'm following them to write the story. The prologue was printed in issue #12, but the main storyline didn't actually start until issue #18. Below is a list of the stories that make up the Timber Valley War:

Timbers 12	Ill Met At Moonlight	by Nikki Wieleba
Timbers 18	Wandering Spirit	by Ruth Clark
Timbers 19	The Thunder Below	by Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston
Timbers 20	Blood Frenzy	by Linda Woeltjen
Timbers 23	Strange Alliances	by Ted Blasingame
Timbers 24	The Secret Weapon	by Ted Blasingame
Timbers 25	Final Battle	by Ted Blasingame
Timbers 26	Picking Up The Pieces	by Ted Blasingame

These tales alone should run this periodic zine through *Timbers* #26, but I will try to include some other short stories taking place in the current timeline date of DF 39. As before, submissions of other stories by the members are welcomed, and I'm always looking for volunteers to illustrate these tales. However, if my print time draws near and no one has provided any illos, I *will* go to print anyway. Front covers are also *highly* coveted. The deadline for *Timbers* #24 is March 20, 1998.

I only have one suggestion for you before you begin reading this issue. I would recommend that you go back and reread the previous parts of the Timber Valley War, as you may have forgotten details of what happened since 1990. That gives you quite a bit of reading to do. ✦

~ Ted R. Blasingame

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Like A Moth

by Ted Blasingame

(DF 39 H)

Silverhair looked up from his woodcarving and a gentle smile formed on his lips when the small group of females entered the holt through the eastern passage in the thorn barrier. Wavesong, Goldenbraid, Dawnwatch and Freshwind had been out at the lake most of the evening. From the wetness of their clothing and hair he knew they had spent some of their time in the water, though Freshwind's head was as dry as always. No one knew why her hair repelled water as a duck's feathers, but she and her sister, Silverleaf, had always had that quality.

The elder teacher set his tools aside as they approached him on their way to the Father Tree. They traded pleasantries as they passed, but Silverhair noticed that Wavesong watched him with an odd smile. He nodded to her as the females walked on to the largest of the holt's shaped trees and wondered what was on her mind.

Silverhair's grey eyes lingered on the group as they all took seats among the massive roots of the Father Tree. Everyone seemed to be in high spirits as they chatted animatedly among themselves, including the usually taciturn Dawnwatch. Their voices were low enough that he couldn't make out what they were discussing, but he noted uneasily that everyone tended to turn and look at him from time to time, usually accompanied with chuckles. The elder wood-carver sighed inwardly and picked up his tools to resume his work. Whatever they talked about was not his business. He tried to focus on the drinking mug he held in his hands and ignore them.

Silverhair smiled openly at the laughter coming from the boy he held fast in his right arm. He sat near the fire pit in the center of the council clearing with Squirrel draped stomach-down over his lap. He was tickling his grandson's bare toes with his fingers and the boy of thirteen summers was laughing loudly.

The noise drew the attention of several who went about their nightly doings, but only one approached the squirming pair. Wavesong squatted down next to the evening fire with a smile and watched as the teacher struggled with his victim. With gasps and pants, Squirrel managed to break free of his grandsire's grip and scooted across the soft grasses to hide behind Wavesong. The boy continued to laugh from the residual feelings, but rather than chase him, Silverhair laid on his back and breathed heavily.

"What did you do to deserve that?" Wavesong asked the youngster.

Squirrel looked up at her with moist eyes and laughed again. "All I did was throw some leaves in his hair," he replied.

"And then he grabbed you and tickled you?"

The boy nodded. "Yeah."

Wavesong reached around her and snagged one of Squirrel's feet. "Like *this*?" she exclaimed as she quickly repeated Silverhair's earlier motions. Squirrel shrieked and tried to pull away, but all Wavesong did was grab his other foot and give it similar treatment. The raven-haired elder laughed aloud and let the boy go after a moment. Squirrel rolled away from her and got to his feet grinning widely. Random and Teal ran across the far side of the clearing in a mock chase and Squirrel bounded off to join them.

When the youngsters were gone, Wavesong looked back at Silverhair. He was gazing at her steadily as if he were trying to figure out one of her mind puzzles. She smiled at him and tucked her legs underneath her. She looked away from his steady stare and then back at him again. Quietly, he turned his attention to Big Moon shining full through the overhead treetops.

"What's on your mind?" she asked him softly. "You've seemed fairly preoccupied lately."

Silverhair returned his attention to her, but didn't sit up. ***Mostly about family,*** he replied in his usual way. ***It's odd seeing myself having grandchildren. Wavesong. In my mind. Mooncrest and Twilight should still be my little boys, not fathers of their own children.***

Wavesong chuckled. "Silverhair, your sons haven't been little boys for well over sixty years!"

Don't tell me you don't ever still think of Twill as your little boy from time to time.

Wavesong stretched out her short legs on the soft grass. "Oh, I admit I sometimes think back on those times," she admitted. "But Twill has been an adult through four generations of humans. It isn't easy to see him as a child anymore."

Silverhair rolled over onto his side and propped his head up on his right hand. ***I see Mooncrest every time I look at Random,*** he sent, ***and Squirrel reminds me of my little Trilight. If only Dewdrop could see them now...***

Wavesong swallowed. It had been a long, long time since he'd mentioned the mother of his sons. She had been slain by a human and Silverhair had later killed the man in revenge years later. To Silverhair, that had been an end to it and hadn't brought up the subject since.

Her musing was ended abruptly when he asked, ***Do you ever get lonely, Wavesong?****

The direct question took her by surprise, considering her own recent thoughts. "Sometimes," she answered. "Bluetree has been gone a long time."

Silverhair smiled suddenly and gestured at her with his free hand. ***What were you and the other hens cackling about last night over by the Father Tree?****

Wavesong laughed and stood up. "Just girl-talk," she said, evading the answer. She held out a hand to him. "Would you care to join me in a moonlight swim?"

Silverhair raised his eyebrows and took her hand as he gained his own feet. ***Sounds like a good idea. This night is so humid my clothing needs washing anyway.***

Wavesong didn't let go of his hand as they walked toward the east entrance. Silverhair felt a little self-conscious of their contact and wondered if her invitation to the lake had a meaning for more than just a companion. Ever since that war fifteen years ago, Nightstep forbade anyone traveling alone outside the holt. There had been no real trouble since then, but the act had long become routine for the Timber Folk.

The two elders walked quietly together along the well worn trail to the lake. They discussed trivial matters about the holt, but both half-dwelt on certain personal thoughts. Hushleaf passed them going the other way and gave a little wave to the couple. They nodded in return and continued along the moonlit trail.

Wavesong led them off the path toward a small inlet of the lake she favored. The bottom was shallow there, only about chest deep and the sandy beach was a fine white sand. The small bend of the waterway secluded it from sight of the rest of the lake and it was for this reason she swam here often. The long, wide grasses that grew along the tiny beach also gave her a source of material for her weaving hobby.

Silverhair had been there to swim on many occasions with her and others, but his mind was focused on her directly this time. She released his hand when they reached the sand and untied the purple belt to her lavender robe top. Silverhair began his own undressing, though more slowly. He watched her that night as if he were seeing her with new eyes, and although he had seen her without garments many times, he studied her in detail and liked what he saw.

Wavesong dropped the last of her clothing on the sand and went straight to the water. She didn't go in very far, but got down on her knees at a point where only her head was above the cold water. She turned and watched her companion finish his own disrobing and smiled to herself as she studied his physique. Silverhair's muscles were well toned and he carried his broad shoulders well. He entered the water and grit his teeth for the moment it took to acclimate to the temperature. Once up to his neck in the inlet, he turned to face her.

Wavesong, he sent with some hesitation, ***I don't think I've ever told you how lovely you look.***

Wavesong's heart skipped a beat at his sending. The human chief, Seralle, had often commented on her beauty, but it meant nothing compared to Silverhair's attention. "Thank you, Silverhair," she whispered when he moved in close to her. "I'm glad to know that."

The elder teacher slipped an arm around her waist with a smile. ***Shall we swim out a little farther?**** he asked. Wavesong looked into his grey eyes and felt herself putting her arms around his neck. He gazed back into her eyes of reddish-brown and then backed further out into the water, gently pulling her along. Silverhair was happily amazed. Without knowing it beforehand, he could look back now and see how he and Wavesong had been spending more and more time together in recent moons. They'd both lost their Recognized lifemates long ago and neither had taken another mate in all that time.

With Wavesong tucked under his right arm, he felt how comfortable they seemed with one another. Nothing had happened suddenly, but he saw now how gradually they had gotten closer since that night they'd

Wavesong closed her eyes briefly when he gently nuzzled her ear. When he stopped, she looked a question to him and saw the embarrassment in his eyes. ***Forgive me,*** he sent quickly. ***I didn't realize what I was doing.***

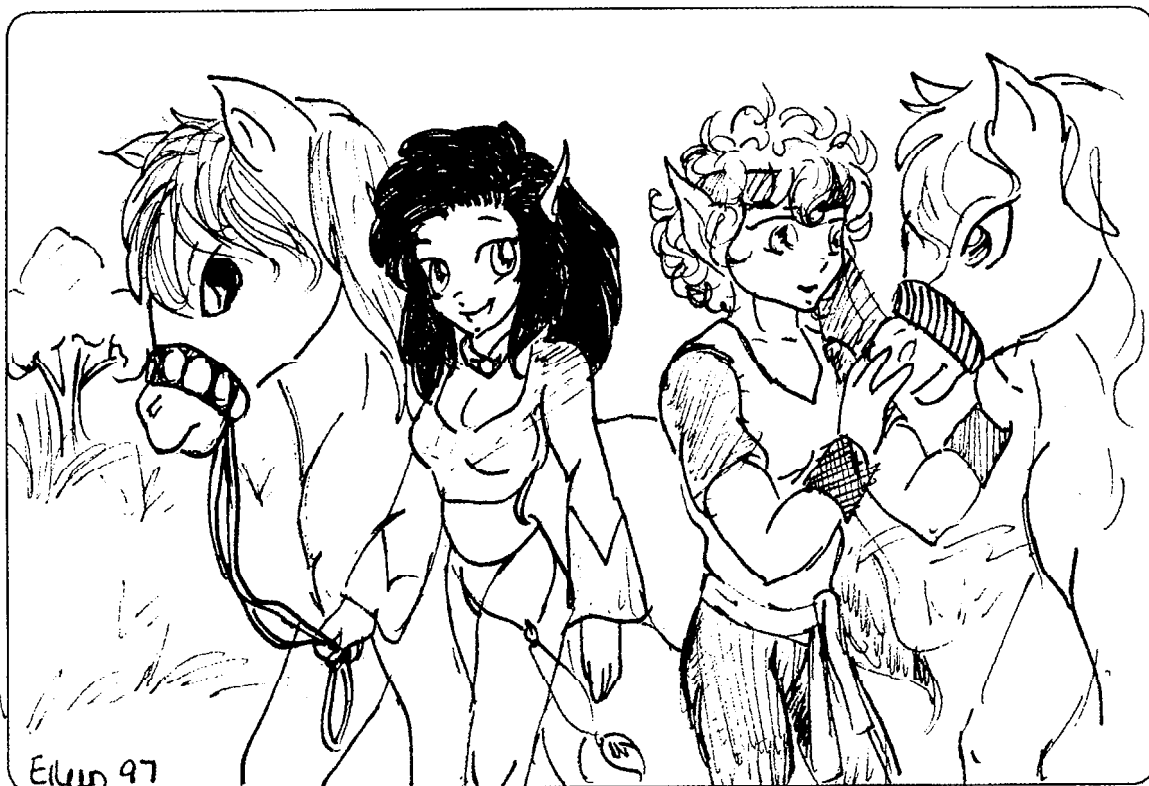
Wavesong gave him a genuine smile as she looked deeply into his moonlit eyes. ***Don't be sorry.*** she sent back sincerely. ***I had forgotten that feeling long ago, Silverhair.*** Her own cheeks flushed and she dropped her eyes. ***I never realized how much I missed it.***

Silverhair drew her to him and softly nuzzled her black wavy hair with his eyes closed. Wavesong wrapped her arms around his waist and simply stood there holding him. She hoped silently that the moment wouldn't end. She didn't know exactly when she had been drawn to him as a moth to a flame, but she was pleased that he seemed to feel the same way. Each had been alone too long, and while she had no foreknowledge of what this new aspect of their relationship would turn out to be, it appeared they would find out together.

The pale-haired teacher turned her gently so that she faced him and when he lowered his face to hers, their lips met and lingered a long while.

Dawnwatch looked up from the deer hide she and Wildwood were scraping with their tanning tools, and she saw Silverhair and Wavesong walking across the holt. The elders had their arms around each other's waist and they laughed between themselves in quiet talk. The midwife smiled to herself and whispered to her companion. "Wildwood, look," she said.

Wildwood glanced up and saw what Dawnwatch indicated. She chuckled and replied, "It's about time those two found one another." The pair of tanners watched as Silverhair led Wavesong to his hometree and the new couple disappeared inside. Wildwood winked at the midwife and then went back to work, whistling quietly to herself. ✦



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[Wildwood & Grassy]

The Timber Valley War, pt 4
Strange Alliances

by Ted Blasingame

(DF 24 H)

Nightstep stepped out of the Father Tree and looked across the holt of his people, his throat tight and dry. The healers had taken care of the injured brought in from the caverns and through reports of those he'd talked to, the elfin chief had a fairly accurate depiction of what had happened. He was distressed that Rogue had not been located and it was anyone's guess exactly why he'd been singled out from the rest. He couldn't expect Rogue to be left alive once the escape of the prisoners was reported to Catgut, but he was unwilling to abandon the slightest hope he was still among the living.

Shrike had wanted to go back immediately, but in the final flight from the caverns the bolt of a crossbow had struck deep into her right thigh muscle. The damage had been repaired, but the leg would be unable to support her weight for a few days. Shrike assured the chief that she could get to Rogue regardless, but Nightstep had forbidden it. She fumed about it in her hometree, but at least she was out of danger.

The elfin leader moved to the Minnowbrook and knelt in the lush grass beside the Father Tree. He cupped his hands in the cool water and took several drinks. His throat felt somewhat better, but it wasn't enough to extinguish his worry. Nightstep stood and searched around him for the only nonresident among them. He saw Redlace's friend huddled in the roots of a large tree near the thorn barrier, quietly talking with LongKnife.

Nightstep walked over to them and then knelt beside the frequent visitor to the holt. "Thunderfoot," he said when the young troll looked at him solemnly. "With what has just happened, my tribefolk do not hold your kind in very high regard."

"I'm not surprised," the troll replied and lowered his gaze to the ground. "But, there are many of us who feel the same way toward Catgut's followers." He looked up at the chief and added, "Some of my close friends in the warrens have been killed by the Queen's own hand. Anyone who was loyal to old Grubmoss was considered a threat."

"How'd you escape the Queen's prior notice?" LongKnife asked as he fiddled with his headband. "You said that your visits outside the caverns were well known to your people."

Thunderfoot smiled slightly. "True, but I'd never had any direct contact with Grubmoss, himself. I was just a silly troll who went off to play with the elves. I was considered harmless and probably didn't warrant Catgut's attention until recently."

Nightstep appeared lost in thought. He stroked his beard slowly and seemed not to be even listening. When he felt the troll's eyes upon him, he met his gaze unflinching. "How does your resistance force think we can help them, or that we would?" he asked bluntly. "You have proven your own word is good, Thunderfoot. Your information helped us to retrieve some of my tribefolk, but there are some among us who suspect it may have been a trap to get more of us captured."

It had always been hard for a troll or human to meet an elf's penetrating stare, but the one before him looked back with steady eyes and answered. "My chief," he said, "I can understand your suspicion, but I assure you that saving the lives of your people was an honest intent. What can I do to make you believe me?"

LongKnife spoke before the chief could reply. "Have your friends bring Rogue out to us alive, if he still lives."

Nightstep nodded in agreement. "I'm not risking any more of my folk into your tunnels, but I want Rogue back alive."

"If we can do that for you, will you help us against Catgut?"

Nightstep was about to reply, but a loud voice broke the silence of the night. "Hey, in there!" a deep troll's voice called out, "Hey, elves, we need to talk to you!" The voice had come from outside the thorn barrier opposite where the chief sat with his companions.

Nightstep sent out a silent command and the gliders, Quicksilver and Thunderhawk floated over the wall

with their weapons ready. Redlace and LongKnife bounded across the holt to the entrance nearest the voice and everyone else went on the alert.

“That’s Rockhammer,” Thunderfoot explained to the elfin chief as they moved across the holt. “He’s part of our resistance.”

“Hey, wait ~ !” Rockhammer’s voice exclaimed. “Don’t shoot! We’re not ~” His words silenced suddenly and Nightstep knew by seeing that Dawnwatch had just shoved her long sword right up to the troll’s large, drooping nose. She only awaited Nightstep’s command and she would drive the point through.

The chief emerged through the thorns and saw three trolls surrounded by eight heavily armed elves. He put his hands on his hips as he surveyed the tense scene and then glanced over at Thunderfoot, who had followed him out of the holt.

“Dripst~” Rockhammer started to say when he saw the young troll, but Dawnwatch had leaned forward on her sword just enough to cause a small bead of blood appear where her sharpened troll-metal tip imprinted his nose. “Ow!” he said through clenched teeth. His hands were partially raised in submission and his eyes rolled back to the chief.

“These aren’t your enemies, Nightstep,” Thunderfoot said quietly. “These are the ones who want your help.”

The chief studied his face a moment more and then sent to Dawnwatch. ***Back away, Dawnwatch.*** he ordered.

But, Nightstep! she replied angrily.

Back off. Now, he repeated without anger.

Dawnwatch swallowed hard and did as commanded, but she only took a step backward and kept her sword raised for any treachery. Rockhammer felt the end of his nose gingerly, but deliberately made sure his movements were slow as so not to cause any undue excitement. Likewise, the weapons trained on his two companions were kept ready, but not at point-blank range.

Rockhammer looked toward the elfin chief. “Did Dripstone there tell you about our problems?”

“He did,” Nightstep said. Silently, he sent Quicksilver and Thunderhawk off to scout the area for more trolls.

“Did he tell you we need you elves’ help?”

“He did.”

“Then why are your people mad at us?” the troll said with an eye on Dawnwatch’s sword tip.

“Because we’re trolls,” one of Rockhammer’s companions said gruffly. “They blame us for what the Queen did to their kin.”

“My chief,” Thunderfoot said to Nightstep. “May I talk to them a moment? I can tell them what you and I just discussed inside.”

“Go ahead.” Nightstep watched the young troll as he moved toward the three newcomers and spoke with them quietly. Rockhammer’s facial expression was set in stone and unreadable, but he nodded once and then looked back to the elfin chief.

“Let me send Fishnibbler here back to the caverns,” he said, pointing to one of his companions. “He’ll contact our resistance force and have them rescue your friend for you.”

“It won’t be easy,” Thunderfoot added. “Catgut has Rogue somewhere near her personal chambers.”

Nightstep made a quick decision. “Windrace, Arrowsong,” he said to two elves nearby, “I want you two to accompany this Fishnibbler to the cavern entrance and wait for him to bring Rogue out to you.” Windrace nodded silently, eying the trolls distrustfully.

Why me?* Arrowsong asked quietly in sending, apprehension clear in her thoughts. ***I’m not even a fighter.***

Both Greeneyes and Goldenbraid are spent from attending the others who just got back. In case Rogue is injured I want a healer there when he’s brought out.

A healer?* she answered in surprise. ***Nightstep, you know my talent’s weak and I can’t really control it.***

I know, Arrow, but whatever you can do to make sure he gets back will help a lot, even if the other healers have to finish up when he gets here.

I don't think I can do it, she sent truthfully.

I wouldn't have called on you if I didn't think you would be of help. Nightstep replied gently.

Do I have to use my talent? I know other non-magical healing skills.

Nightstep sighed inwardly and nodded to himself. ***Just do whatever you can for him, Arrowsong, to make sure we get him back alive. Use your mending skills if you can, and your talent if you have to.***

Okay, she responded a little stronger. ***I'll go for Rogue's sake.***

Thank you. Nightstep nodded to the large troll and said, "All right, send your companion to fetch our friend. Two of my folk will go with them as far as the tunnel and then wait for them there."

"You don't trust us?" Fishnibbler asked with a grumble. Arrowsong and Windrace ducked back inside the thorn barrier to get their gear.

Nightstep stared at him and his expression darkened. "Trust comes to those who earn it," he replied as he gave a quick glance to Thunderfoot. "Bring Rogue back to us alive and you'll have our help, and perhaps our trust. The two who go with you are not going so to watch you, but to be there for Rogue."

Rockhammer nodded to his companion. "Go on. Contact Irontongue and tell him what you need to do. Also have him send more of the others out here to get them out of Catgut's reach and so we can start planning something."

Arrowsong and Windrace stepped back out of the thorn barrier a moment later, both with their travel packs and weapons. Fishnibbler correctly assumed these were his chaperones so he gestured to let them know who to go with. "Getting your friend away from the Queen will have to be done at such time as he isn't entertaining her," he said to the elfin chief. "She has no set schedule, so we may have to sit and wait until the proper time."

Nightstep stared at him steadily and gave him a warning. "I will have my folk in contact with these two as they wait outside. If you have not returned to them within two days, I will consider it a betrayal and we will kill any troll still near our holt."

Fishnibbler traded nervous glances with Rockhammer and the other troll, Gotcheye. "Two days, eh? Okay, we'll get word to your guards on your friend by then," he said.

"No," the elfin chief replied. "You'll bring Rogue *out* within two days."

"But, what if~"

Nightstep sent a quick command to Dawnwatch, who immediately moved in closer to Rockhammer. She jabbed the point of her sword at the troll's nose and he squawked in pain as the tip pierced him again. He stumbled backward and sat hard on the ground. "Two days!" he exclaimed to Fishnibbler. "Get their fella out as the chief wants or we're done for, either by the elves or by Catgut!"

Fishnibbler swallowed hard and nodded. "Two days," he said. "Okay." With another glance at Rockhammer, he turned and motioned to his elfin escorts. "Let's get going."

Nightstep sent a few words of encouragement to Arrowsong and instruction to Windrace, and when they had gone, he turned back to the remaining trolls. "Get up, Rockhammer," he said in a more gentle tone. "We have plans to make concerning the Queen."

The troll rubbed a bit of blood from the end of his nose and complied silently. He avoided looking at Dawnwatch, but she moved in close to whisper in his large ear as he followed the chief to the thorn barrier entrance. "My daughter died yesterday in your caverns," she hissed. "I will gladly volunteer to send you to her side if your companion fails to give Rogue back to us." The troll nodded silently to acknowledge his understanding and he wondered if coming to these pointy-eared forest dwellers had been good judgement.

Rockhammer mumbled a low thank-you to Goldenbraid, who had just handed him a bowl of soup and a roasted bird. The council had taken a break from discussion and the trolls were gathered together near the Speaker's Stone. Several more of the underground dwellers had arrived and Rockhammer had to identify and vouch for each one.

The sky overhead was still building up with thunderclouds so makeshift shelters for the visitors were strung up between trees here and there. One troll in particular seemed especially interested in all conversations and Nightstep soon instructed his people to communicate among themselves through sending when possible.

There was something familiar about Brownbat, the curious troll, but the chief couldn't quite identify him with anything. There were many in the holt who were adverse to being anywhere close to the trolls and some had even argued about the sanity of allowing them *inside* the thorn barrier at all. Nightstep wanted them close in case of treachery on the part of Fishnibbler, but few had any peace of mind about it.

Nightstep was inside the Father Tree with Two Star, Goldenbraid, Silverhair, Wavesong and Twill. They quietly debated the situation in sending and no comments were kept from discussion.

If what Rockhammer says is true, Wavesong sent, ***There aren't enough trolls in the resistance to make a successful try at a takeover in the caverns.***

Even if we all joined in the fight, Silverhair replied, ***We still wouldn't have enough to make a difference.***

Perhaps there are more trolls who would join the resistance if they knew about it, Goldenbraid commented. ***But how would they find out there was a resistance without whisperings about it getting back to Catgut?**

Two Star stretched his arms and yawned. ***We already know that Catgut intends to slaughter all of us, whether we help fight against her or not.***

***What about getting aid from elsewhere?** Wavesong asked. Nightstep turned and studied her quietly, waiting for her to continue that thought.

***Who else is there?** Twill asked.

There are other elf tribes in the Upper World that some of our folk have come from, she answered.

Too far away, Silverhair replied with a shake of his head. ***Even if they would come and help fight for a tribe they're not familiar with, it would take too long to get someone there to convince them and then for their fighters to get back here. At the rate Catgut is preparing, outside help would be too late in coming.***

Goldenbraid cleared her throat and made a suggestion that made the others stop and look at her sharply. ***What if we left the valley?**

Nightstep narrowed his eyes, but Wavesong replied, ***Where would we go?**

The Great Wood. It's where we came from originally.

"No," Nightstep said aloud. "Chief Silverstone vowed that no one would ever drive us from our homes again, and although it's been tried many times against us, every chief of the Timber Folk has upheld that vow." He looked around at the eyes focused on him and swallowed quietly. He was hesitant to speak what was on his mind, for he knew what the reaction would be. It had taken all of his courage to even consider such a thing and now would be the really difficult action.

"Wavesong was right," he said slowly. "We need more help than what the troll resistance and our folk can do on our own." He took another breath to say the final words. "We need the help of the humans."

Silverhair jumped to his feet. ***WHAT?!** he sent strongly. ***You want to ask those filthy round-eared murderers to be our allies?! The humans?!?**

Nightstep groaned. Silverhair's outburst had been in an open sending. Now every elf within range knew what he had just proposed.

"Humans!" Two Star exclaimed.

Goldenbraid was stunned and Wavesong backed up against the wall of the tree, her mouth open in disbelief. "You want them to know we *need* their help?" she asked.

Of those present, only Twill seemed calm. He was as surprised as the rest, and he knew the chief had no love for the humans either, but the suggestion was actually a sound one. ***Listen to Nightstep,*** he sent calmly. ***He knows exactly what he's suggesting.***

There was a commotion outside and Rockhammer stuck his head in through the door covering. "Hey, Nightstep," he said in a low voice. "Some of yer elves are upset about something out here."

The elfin chief left his stunned companions and stepped out of the Father Tree. A small crowd of elves was gathered on the opposite side of the Council Clearing. Several were shouting at one another and almost about ready to come to blows. Nightstep was one of the tribe's strongest senders and he used that full potential in a single open sending. ***Stop!** The result was almost instant. Instead of fighting among themselves, they all surged toward the Father Tree together. The trolls began looking around for places to hide. They had all, at one time or another in the safety of the caverns, called the elves stupid, gutless or wimps, but in a mass crowd, the sight was

frightening.

The throng grew as others joined the noisy crowd, but Nightstep crossed his arms and waited for someone to listen to him. After a few moments, most had quieted, but tempers were still hot. The chief finally had everyone's attention, including the trolls.

"What's this all about?" Rockhammer asked from around the curve of the Father Tree. "They're saying something about humans."

"Yes," Nightstep replied in a voice loud enough for everyone to hear. "Someone in my council let slip news we had been discussing." He turned and glared at Silverhair. "Since there aren't enough trolls and elves to fight back at Catgut, I'm going to ask the humans to join us in this war."

"Humans!" Oakstaff exclaimed.

"What makes you think they'll join *us*?" Talon called out.

"What makes you think we'll join *them*?" Starlight countered.

Instinctively, Hushleaf's hand went to his throat. Memories of torture at the hands of humans were all too real and his lack of a voice to cry out his outrage of the chief's comments was their handiwork.

"They're murderers!" Farlance exclaimed.

Nightstep closed his eyes and mustered up his self control. It was just as hard for him to get past the hatred himself, but other reasons were stronger now. The comments raged back and forth and he'd finally had enough. "*Quiet!*" he shouted and sent it forcefully at the same time. "Catgut has plans to either enslave or kill the humans, as well as our own slaughter," he started.

"Good riddance to them!" Starlight shouted. Nightstep silenced her immediately with another send and then continued.

"Normally, I would agree with you," he said with a furrowed brow. "But our situation is getting desperate. With the humans, we have an uneasy truce to stay in our own territories. There has been no open fighting between our tribes for a long time. If we leave one another alone, we usually have relative peace."

He looked around at the tense faces before him, but no one interrupted this time. "With Catgut," he began again, "it's different. She wants to kill us — she wants to kill them. We both now have a common enemy, and I doubt either one of our tribes would survive a direct assault by her forces separately. From experience we know the Ke L'Rhatan are excellent and ruthless fighters. Their lives are hard and so are their bodies. With them at our side as allies, we should have a good chance at defeating Catgut's plans."

"What if they refuse?" Ivory asked.

"They can't afford to refuse," the chief replied. "Just as we don't have a choice about it either. *We need one another.*" Several elves broke from the crowd and stalked or ran to their hometrees, either furious or crying.

"How do you intend to ask them?" Wavesong asked from behind him. "You know it's death to cross over the river into their territory."

Nightstep nodded. "We seem to have a few of our folk skilled in trespassing," he said. He looked straight at a particular dark-haired elf and continued. "I have always been against his excursions in the past, but I think Mooncrest's familiarity with that land, the humans' tongue and his own incredible good luck makes him perfect for this task."

Mooncrest looked worried. "I would do it in a heartbeat," the prankster replied, "but you already know that Wildwood is just about ready to give birth to our child of Recognition. I can't leave her now."

"She'll be well taken care of," the chief assured him, ending the debate. "I want you to take a small party with you, preferably those who know the humans' language." He scanned the crowd until he saw Rockhammer. "Take two or three of our trolls with you."

"Huh?" the large troll was startled. "Why?"

"Not only do we have to convince the humans to help us against Catgut," Nightstep replied, "but we have to let them know there are also trolls they'll be fighting *with*, instead of just *against*."

"Oh. okay."

I don't believe this! Silverhair's pointed sending was open but directed at his chief. ***In an attempt to escape Catgut, you'll feed my son to the humans' sacrificial pit!***

Without looking back at the archer, Nightstep gave him a stern warning. ***Don't cross me, my friend. This is our only chance to survive. No one is being willingly sacrificed.***

We would be better off following Goldenbraid's suggestion, to leave the valley, and let Catgut kill all the humans. Silverhair stepped out of the tree behind the chief and made his way down into the crowd. ***In the Great Wood, we could all live without having to fight a war -- a war that will cost us lives whether we win or not.***

Nightstep's temper was close to boiling that Silverhair would send something like that so openly. ***Leave the valley to save your own hide if you want to, but don't ever return if you do.*** Several gasped at the message, but the chief added, ***But, I ask you to stay. All of you. This **our** home and we'll defend it. We will need everyone's participation to defeat Catgut ... and 'everyone' includes the humans.***

Silverhair walked away through the crowd without looking back. Nightstep sighed and looked at the trolls. They had been unaware of the silent exchange and were discussing among themselves who would have to go see the humans. He turned his attention back to his people and looked at Silverhair's son.

"Mooncrest, we need you to be our voice to talk to the Ke L'Rhatan. Offer them our friendship and pardon for past events and do your best to convince them that *their* danger is as great as ours."

The prankster swallowed and looked back in the direction his father had gone. His thoughts went to Wildwood and the unborn child and then turned to memories of his trek across that cursed sea of grass to the Great Wood. He made up his mind quickly and nodded to his chief. "I'll go," he said. "I'd like to have Grassy with me, but I'd rather him stay with Wildwood."

Nightstep allowed him a small smile and nodded. "Pick out who you want on your party and make your preparations. You'll need to leave as soon as you can, in case Catgut somehow gets wind of this and tries to stop you." He then switched to sending to add, ***I want Two Star to go with you to the village. He's strong enough to send as far as Rock Span, and I'll have Dawnwatch and Archer waiting there to relay any messages you need to get back to us here. They're all strong senders, so we should have a semi-direct line of communication between us.*** He turned to the rest of the assembled crowd and said, "We need to stockpile provisions of food, clothing, furs and weapons. Get to it now, since we may not have much time."

The gathering dispersed slowly amidst grumbling and energetic conversations. Rockhammer led some trolls over to Mooncrest and told him, "Gotcheye and Dopper will go with you to the human village. I don't know what you plan to tell them, but make it good."

"Neither one of us knows the human language," Gotcheye admitted. His permanently squinting left eye gave him the appearance of leering and made Mooncrest uncomfortable. Dopper was a young troll about Thunderfoot's age and seemed completely at ease with the whole situation. He didn't say a word, but just nodded to the prankster.

"One of us will translate for you," Mooncrest told him. He turned to go and added, "Wait for us here and we'll be ready to leave shortly."

Mooncrest was worried. It was too quiet. His party had left Dawnwatch and Archer at Rock Span and crossed over the river some time ago, and were now not far from the human village. They had encountered no scouts or guards, nor any other sign of humans. With all his excursions to spy on the Ke L'Rhatan over the years, he'd never made it this far without seeing some activity.

***Do you think Catgut's already killed them all off?** Sandstorm asked him.

Mooncrest frowned. ***Possibly, but I hope not.***

I never thought I'd ever say this. Sandstorm added, ***but I hope the humans are okay.***

Me, too. sent Hoodvink.

Two Star brought up the rear of the line, behind the trolls, and kept an uneasy watch on their backs. They had traveled most of the night and dawn was fast approaching. The sky was overcast still and the air humid. The clouds promised more rain, but it had not yet fallen.

The elder was pleased with Mooncrest in leading the task. The usually prankish elf had kept a clear head and took them unerringly through the enemy territory. Nightstep had asked Two Star to keep an eye on Mooncrest and keep him in line if needed, but so far the younger elf carried his responsibility well. The prankster usually traveled by way of the trees above when in this area, but because of their troll companions he led them through the underbrush.

"Are we there yet?" Dopper asked rather loudly. He wasn't comfortable walking on dirt, grass and twigs.

They made his feet sore and he wished he were back in the damp and musty caverns.

Gotcheye cuffed his ear and whispered, "Keep yer voice down, idiot. The humans could be watching for us."

"I thought we *wanted* to contact them," the other complained. "Why all the hush-hush?"

"Because if we don't do this right," Two Star whispered between them, "we'll be strung upside down on a tree and probably gutted slowly if we're caught by surprise."

"Oh."

Mooncrest held up a hand and halted the procession. No one made a noise as he turned his head to listen carefully. ***Do you hear that, Sandstorm?** he sent.

***A single drum, beating slowly,** the archer replied. ***It almost sounds like a heartbeat.**

***They usually only do that for ceremony,** Hoodwink added, ***for someone dying.**

***How would you know that?** Two Star asked.

Hoodwink looked at the faces around him and he shrugged his shoulders. ***I have a human friend who told me so,** he admitted slowly to Two Star's gaze. ***That's why I volunteered for this trip.**

***A human friend, eh?** Mooncrest was impressed. In all his daring (or foolish, as Nightstep would say) ventures to spy on the humans, he'd never made one into a friend. Hoodwink was braver than he thought. ***How did that happen?**

Hoodwink didn't think they had time enough for a story so he kept it simple. ***Their shaman's apprentice once caught me in a snare, but let me go.**

***Why?** Sandstorm asked. ***Their shaman hates us more than anyone else in their tribe. Surely his apprentice would too.**

***Not all of them feel that way. Tana is one of them.** Hoodwink explained. ***She and I have met and talked many times.**

Two Star crossed his arms and chewed on his bottom lip. ***Does Nightstep know about this?**

Hoodwink grinned. ***Of course not, I've seen Mooncrest's punishments. They're not for me!**

"Hey," Gotcheye whispered. "You elves in a trance by the drum I hear, or do you just like staring at one another?"

Hoodwink chuckled as Mooncrest started walking through the brush again. "We were just listening to the drum to see if it had any meaning," Two Star told them quietly. The troll shrugged his wide shoulders and followed the others. Their path paralleled the shoreline of the lake and they drew closer to the drum sound with every step. As they walked, the elves resumed their sending.

***Your human friend is apprenticed to the shaman, eh?** Two Star mused. ***If she is sympathetic to us, perhaps she can help convince them to join us.**

***I'm afraid she doesn't have much say in her tribe,** Hoodwink replied. ***Not as long as Ariv is there giving counsel to their leader.**

Mooncrest listened to the exchange in silence. He wished Redlace were here as well, but the hunter was too withdrawn lately to be of help. No one blamed Redlace for the death of Blackfire but himself. He was taking it hard and refused to talk to anyone about it. Mooncrest was aware the hunter had befriended a small human child two years earlier when he saved her from a rattlesnake, but didn't know if that would be of any help now. He shook his head quietly as if to clear his thoughts and put his mind on how to convince their ancient enemies to be their allies. It wouldn't be easy.

They walked in silence as they neared the drum beat and everyone was on the alert for any attack. ***Sandstorm,** Mooncrest said to his friend. ***Scout ahead in the trees for their guards.**

***I'm gone!** She sprang up into the nearest large tree and disappeared.

"Where's she going?" Doppet asked in a squeaky voice. Gotcheye popped him on the back of the head and put a finger to his lips.

"To scout ahead," Two Star whispered lowly. A moment later, Sandstorm's sending touched the elves.

***It looks like the whole human tribe is gathered in the village. Some are kneeling and crying and others are just standing around looking around at nothing. Everyone looks morose and no one seems to be on guard.**

***Where are you?** Mooncrest asked.

High up in a tree overlooking their huts.

***Can you see their chief?** Two Star asked.

No.

Mooncrest motioned to Hoodwink. ***Get closer and see if you can hear anything they are saying.***

Hoodwink nodded and moved off into the brush.

"Now, where's *he* going?" Dopper asked.

"So help me," Gotcheve whispered, "If you don't shut up and keep it shut, I'm gonna bop yer ears clean off!"

"Sorry," Dopper whispered.

Mooncrest stopped them again, but this time they were at the edge of the clearing. They looked through the concealing branches of the surrounding brush and saw about twenty huts made of grass and wood. The ground was fairly bare from constant traffic and humans were everywhere.

The Ke L'Rhatan were darkly tanned and their hair colors were either black or brown. Mooncrest noted brightly painted lines drawn on many of their cheeks and foreheads and beaded designs on all their clothing. Fire burned in torches around the village and had probably been lit all night. The east side of the valley was still in heavy shadows of the sheercliffs and the opposite walls were in full sunlight.

Mooncrest yawned widely and studied the village. This is as close as he'd ever come to the humans before, and one stood not far from the hidden group.

Mooncrest, Hoodwink reported. ***From what I can gather, their chief is dying. He's been on his deathbed since yesterday and everyone is in shock.***

***What happened to him?** Sandstorm asked.

He's old and weak. Hoodwink answered casually. ***They don't live as long as we do.***

Two Star whispered to the two trolls and explained what was going on, but declined to tell them how he knew about it. Sending was still a secret of the elves. Dopper wet his lips and whispered back, very quietly. "Perhaps this isn't a good time for a visit."

Mooncrest looked over at him. "The time is perfect. They'll be confused, and will perhaps listen to us before attacking."

Two Star put a finger to his lips and gestured toward the village. ***Someone's coming!**

A girl with light hair wearing a simple tunic had left the central hut and walked straight through the village toward them. She passed the man nearest the brush and carried an empty woven basket with her.

"Hide!" Two Star whispered to the trolls.

The girl approached the woods and boldly pushed into the foliage. She had only taken a few steps when Hoodwink emerged from the shadows before her.

["Hello, Tana,"] he said to her in her own language.

The woman gasped but otherwise restrained her reaction at seeing him. ["Houdwing!"] she whispered. She ran to him and hugged him tightly. ["You shouldn't be here!"] she told him. ["Not this close and *not* at this time."] She turned at a noise and almost shrieked when the rest of the party moved out of the shadows and surrounded her. Hoodwink gently put a hand over her mouth, but didn't restrain her. When it looked like her yell was back down into her lungs, he released her.

["We've come to ask your help, Tana,"] he said quietly to her.

["My help?"] She was afraid of the other elves surrounding her, especially the two short green men with them. Something about them was familiar, but she couldn't think of what it might be.

["Don't be afraid,"] Hoodwink told her. ["We've all come in friendship."]

Tana looked from one face to another, and when her eyes rested on Mooncrest, she lingered a moment. ["I've seen you before,"] she said with a sudden smile.

["Me?"] Mooncrest asked in surprise.

["I've watched you watching us."]

Mooncrest stepped forward slowly. ["I've never meant any harm,"] he told her. ["I was only curious."]

["I realized that some time ago,"] she said with a smile. She looked back to Hoodwink. ["Houdwing has told me."]

["Have you told anyone else?"]

She shook her head. ["No, I value my secrets."] She jumped slightly when Sandstorm appeared out of the shadows behind Mooncrest, but then she turned quickly to the trolls. ["Who... what are they?"]

Two Star had been translating the conversation to the trolls, but he stopped suddenly and sent a quick message to Hoodwink.

["Tana,"] he said to her in a quiet voice. ["We need to talk to you, but we should do it away from your village."]

["I'm supposed to be gathering tipweed roots for Ariv,"] she replied as her attention stayed on the trolls. ["Deta is sick and I must help care for him."]

["This is important,"] Hoodwink insisted. ["It concerns the whole valley."]

Tana listened to the slow heartbeat drum and willed it to continue. It would do so as long as Deta was on his deathbed and would only stop if he either died or managed to stand up on his own. He was old, however, and no one in the village expected him to linger much longer.

["If you must talk to me,"] she said at last, ["let me collect my tipweed roots and take them to Ariv first. We will talk after he dismisses me."]

["Okay, I'll help you gather your roots,"] Hoodwink told her. Mooncrest nodded his approval.

["Tell your friends to meet us at the corral."]

Hoodwink turned to his party and described the horse and sheep pens in a grassy clearing a little ways from the village where he often met with her in the past. The two of them then left and Mooncrest led the others away to the meeting place.

Tana walked back into the village nonchalantly and went straight to the large central hut. She passed the hunters who had stripes painted on their cheeks to honor their chief and all seemed depressed. In his day, Deta had been an excellent hunter and tracker, and there were several songs about his exploits. Normally such an aged chief would have been replaced long before he'd gotten so old and weak, but he had been the most well respected leader in their history and no one had even considered following anyone else. His passing would be felt by many.

The heartbeat drum was still sounding, however, so at least for now he still lived. He had appointed the tribe's chief hunter as his successor, a tall man with broad shoulders, a deep bronze tan and arm muscles that resembled a troll's metal wire bundle cable. His thin mustache and head hair were as black as the night. He was dressed in tan pants with fringe along the seams, knee high moccasins and a simple vest of woven dark green cloth. He wore a necklace with three dangling gold nuggets that rested upon his chest. Seralle was flattered to be selected to lead his people, but not at the expense of their father figure's life.

He nodded to Tana as she came into the hut, but paid her little attention. The shaman stood beside Deta's bed and it occurred to her briefly that he resembled a carrion bird waiting patiently for his prey to die. His long, hooked nose and small dark eyes made him look oppressive in the heavy shadows thrown by the single torch in the room. He was reed thin and the muscles of his neck stood out even when he wasn't upset about something. He was clothed in a simple brown tunic, pants and a pair of sandals.

The shaman's eyes missed nothing and he noted immediately that the girl seemed apprehensive. That could be her emotion over their leader's health, however, he mused. He thought well of his apprentice and was pleased with her learning progress, but there was always something about her that made him suspicious. Then again, almost everyone made him suspicious; it was his nature.

["The tipweed roots you gathered earlier have worked well,"] he told her in a grumbling voice. ["He's no longer delirious."]

["Then he's come back to himself?"] she asked. Ariv nodded his bald head and walked toward the door.

["Watch him carefully, Tana,"] he said. ["I'm going out to relieve myself. I knew I shouldn't have eaten that tarito."] The gangly shaman left the hut without waiting for a response and Tana sighed in relief. She moved to Deta's side and took the old man's hand. He opened his deep blue eyes and smiled when he saw her.

["Dear child,"] he said in a voice that still retained its strength, ["Ariv tells me you have been a great help in caring for me."]

["Indeed?"] she said with a wide smile of her own. ["He gives praise so sparingly."] She leaned closer to him. ["Deta, there is something I must tell you."]

["What is it?"]

She glanced quickly at Seralle, but he was gazing thoughtfully out into the morning light. She lowered her voice and spoke quickly to the old chief. ["I have seen the Small Ones in our forest. They spoke to me."]

Deta's eyes grew wide and he pulled in a deep breath to shout a command to Seralle, but instead had a coughing fit. Before he could try it again, Tana moved closer to his ear and continued. ["They want peace between us,"] she said earnestly, ["and they want our help to fight against a greater enemy that threatens the life of *everything* in our valley."]

Deta looked at her with a hardness in his eyes. ["You're mad, girl."] He spat out the words as if they tasted of bile.

["No, my head is clear,"] she told him.

["Did they have weapons?"]

["Yes, but they were sheathed. Not once was I threatened."]

["What are you whispering about?"] Ariv said irritably as he stepped in through the door past the chief hunter.

["Ke L'Rhatan! Ke L'Rhatan!"] a voice shouted loudly from outside. Seralle bolted out the door and Ariv followed him in haste.

Tana glanced back at her leader and said, ["It's them."]. She knelt beside his bed again and began talking quickly while she had the time alone with him.

The humans were in a panic. Never before had a party of the Small Ones come directly into their own village. So bold was the action that all but three hunters retreated away from the intruders behind or inside their huts. Seralle rushed to join his hunter-guards and his heart was beating wildly from fear. This was his first real encounter with the legendary creatures and his mind was numb.

["Don't stand there gawking like idiots!"] Ariv shouted. ["Kill them! Kill them!"]

Mooncrest stood with his feet planted firmly apart and his hands on his hips. Sandstorm stood on his right and Hoodwink was on his left. Two Star stood behind them just slightly inside the morning shadows. The humans started forward as one, but a new voice called out in a deep booming voice. ["Stop!"]

Gotcheye and Dopper stepped out of the shadows, both with their right hands raised to shade their night-tuned eyes from the sunlight. To the humans, the hand gesture was a friendly greeting and they stopped in their tracks at the sight of the short green men. Legends about the *masters of the lands under the lands* were older than those of the Small Ones. The humans did not know what to do, and even Ariv had frozen in his tracks.

The shaman's memories of the old legends were dim, but all he really seemed to remember was that his people had once served the green ones and were rewarded with tools of curious metals for obedience. No one had seen them for a hundred generations and no one had even thought them still around. Ariv's brain couldn't comprehend the ancient legends alive and in the company of the ones he hated, so he did the only thing he could: he fainted.

Gotcheye chanced a glance over his shoulder at Two Star and whispered, "What now?" The word he had shouted to the humans had only been taught to him a few moments ago and he knew nothing more of the language.

Two Star answered quickly. "Go stand next to Mooncrest when he talks and just stand there looking important. Sandstorm will whisper translations to you." Gotcheye nodded and did as suggested as Two Star sent instructions to his daughter. Dopper faded back into the shadows and waited behind the elder elf.

["Ke L'Rhatan,"] Mooncrest repeated. ["We come now as friends, not enemies."]

Seralle took a step closer, his spear ready to fight, but he hesitated to hear more. He was also aware of the legendary green men and as the one who would soon lead his people, he wanted to know more before he would attack blindly.

["Who is the leader of your people, that we may talk with him?"] the elf asked.

Seralle swallowed and dimly heard that Deta's drummer was still at his task despite the situation. He pulled himself up slowly to his full height and said in a voice that was stronger than he felt. ["I am Seralle. I am leader while our chief is ill. Speak to me."]

Mooncrest began talking in the simplest words of their language he knew. ["Our two tribes have been enemies a long time,"] he said, ["but with a boundary between our territories, we have each lived in a kind of peace."]

Don't remind them of our feud too much, Two Star advised him.

Seralle listened quietly while others behind him talked between themselves. He turned and barked an order of silence and then turned his attention back to the elf.

["In our own ways,"] Mooncrest continued, ["each of us have a great love for this valley of timber. Me and my companions have come to warn you of a great threat to every living thing in the valley."]

Ariv regained his senses in time to hear the last of the elf's words. He sat up quickly and pointed a shaking finger at the elves. ["The Small Ones *are* the threat!"] he shouted. ["We must kill them!"]

["Stop!"] the troll said again. Gotcheye stormed forward and stuck his glaring face up close to the shaman's. Ariv's breathing became rapid and he almost fainted again at the troll's proximity and foul breath.

[Ariv!] Seralle shouted, ["let the talk continue without your interruption. I want to hear."] The shaman slunk away from the troll and retreated to a safer distance. Gotcheye snorted his distaste for the birdlike little man and returned to his place beside Mooncrest so Sandstorm could translate for him in soft whispers.

["What is this threat you speak of?"] Seralle said in an annoyed tone. Strangely enough, his irritation wasn't for his enemies, but his own medicine man.

Mooncrest swallowed and took a step forward slowly. He gestured toward Gotcheye and began again. ["Long before either tribe of ours came into this valley, the land beneath us was the domain of trolls like this one."]

["Trulls?"] Seralle repeated in his tribal accent.

["They had a vast territory underground and their magic with metals was great."] Gotcheye smiled proudly at Sandstorm's whispered translation. ["However,"] Mooncrest continued, ["a war divided them and the destructive results of their fighting caused the creation of this valley."] Murmurs broke out among the humans and Seralle took a step closer to the elves. ["The fighting ended and their true king retained his leadership. The one who had started the trouble escaped and was never seen again — until now."]

Seralle raised an eyebrow and set the butt of his spear staff on the ground at his feet. He leaned forward on it and asked, ["This bad trull still lives? My people have lived here a hundred generations!"]

Mooncrest nodded and smiled. ["You speak true, Seralle, but so do I. Trolls live lives that are long indeed. However, there is a bad troll here under the valley who is just like the one who escaped. She may or may not be the same troll, but she intends similar trouble. Her name is Catgut."]

["How does this concern us?"] Ariv called. ["The trulls have been unseen for a hundred lifetimes. Our legends say nothing of the lies you've told."] Seralle held his own tongue and waited for the reply.

Mooncrest was nervous from being within range of their spears, but the humans were listening to him, at least. ["Catgut plans to kill your people as well as mine, leaving none of us alive."]

["Why?"] Seralle asked. ["We have made no fight against trulls. We did not even know they still existed."]

["Do your legends say why you fight my tribe?"] Mooncrest asked.

Ariv answered angrily. ["Because you came into our lands and took game food that was to be ours! We had the whole valley and all the food in it for ourselves and you stole away half of it!"]

Mooncrest nodded. ["*That* is the way Catgut thinks of your people."] The murmuring stopped immediately. Seralle took another step forward.

["What are you saying?"] he asked.

["This valley was created by the trolls. Your tribe moved in and occupied their land and ate its food. Catgut thinks both of our tribes stole the valley from *her*, and now she wants to kill us all."]

Seralle looked shocked and stared at Gotcheye. ["If... if this is truth, why is this trull with you if they want us dead?"]

Mooncrest sighed and took another step closer to the man. This was the opening he'd waited for. ["A war is dividing the trolls once again. A great number of them don't want Catgut's evil rule. They believe the valley has plenty of food and room for us all without having to fight one another for it."] He turned and gestured toward Gotcheye. ["This troll represents those who do not mind if our two tribes continue to live here as we've done for so long. His people want our help to defeat Catgut and restore peace in the valley."]

Ariv uttered a growl of contempt and darted to the central hut. He disappeared inside and Seralle barely gave him a glance.

Two Star had watched the entire proceedings from the shadows, quietly sending the occasional instruction to Mooncrest and wondered if they honestly had a chance of turning their ancient enemies into allies. That

Nightstep would suggest such a thing surprised even him, and the elder believed he knew his best friend better than anyone else. The chief had wisdom enough to try to keep his folk from openly fighting the humans, but he'd made it clear enough to the tribe in times past that he had a deeply rooted hatred of the Tall Ones. Was Nightstep really desperate enough to ally himself with humans to fight Catgut because of what she'd done to his tribe, or had he gone mad from the stress of leadership?

Two Star!

The elder looked up at the locked sending and concentrated on a long distance reply.

***Dawnwatch? What is it? ***

***I'm on my way there with a small fighting party. What is the situation there? ***

Believe it or not, ** he replied, **the humans are actually listening to Mooncrest. I'm not sure if the humans will agree to help us, but they seem to be swallowing his words. He's doing a good job. **

***How much of what he's telling them is truth? ***

***All of it. He's embellished nothing. ***

Amazing! We should be there shortly, ** Dawnwatch told him. **I have Diver, Shadowstar, LongKnife and Talon with me. **

Two Star glanced back at Mooncrest's continuing negotiations and then sent back to Dawnwatch, ***Why the fighting party? Is it in case the humans turn against us? ***

That's a possibility, but not our reason, ** she replied. **Apparently there's a spy in our holt who tipped off Catgut to what you're trying to do. The resistance trolls dispatched word to us that Catgut hadn't anticipated an alliance between us and the humans and is furious. She believes you may be successful and has sent out a raiding party of her own to wipe out the village before they can organize to help us. **

Wait, ** Two Star sent, **both LongKnife and Talon hate humans. Why are they with you? **

***Both are excellent fighters, and like our dear Nightstep, have agreed that Catgut poses a greater threat. We left the holt as quickly as we could. ***

***Any idea where the troll warriors are? ***

***None. They're probably advancing on your position now through some underground tunnel. ***

Two Star frowned as he looked back at Mooncrest and the others. ***Get here as quick as you can, *** he urged Dawnwatch.

[*"If the trulls had magic enough to make the valley,"*] Seralle said to Mooncrest, [*"then why do they need our help?"*]

[*"Those who want to stop Catgut are too few in number. With your warriors and mine fighting together with them as allies, we can win our lives and our freedom to go on living here in the valley."*]

Seralle became quiet as he thought over what the elf had told him. He only stood three paces from Mooncrest but he wasn't afraid any longer. Suddenly the heartbeat drum stopped and Seralle's blood turned to ice. He turned around quickly and was about to run to the central hut, but what he saw caught him by an even bigger surprise. Deta stood in the doorway of the structure on his own two feet.

Ariv was at his leader's side whispering into the old man's left ear. Deta surveyed the situation and his dark eyebrows were drawn close together in displeasure. He took a step away from the door frame and almost fell, but Tana was there in an instant to keep him steady. He took a walking stick from her, waved her behind him and then shuffled slowly toward Seralle. Everyone was in awe of their leader's strength and courage to leave his deathbed for an important meeting as this. A few of the women were weeping openly.

Nothing was said as Deta, Tana and Ariv slowly approached Mooncrest and Seralle. The old man stared long and hard at the elf and cleared his throat to speak. [*"I have heard your words,"*] he said, [*"and I am touched by your attempt for peace for our two peoples. But, a war between you and the trulls is of no concern to us. If you must fight them, do so in your own territory and leave us alone in ours."*]

Mooncrest's heart sank. He had been sure that Seralle was listening and believing and that the resistance would have the help they needed. He opened his mouth to try again with their chief, but the old man held up a shaking hand.

[*"We will hear no more of your words, Small One,"*] he said. [*"However, since you came in peace, we will let you go in peace. My warriors will escort you unharmed back to the rock across the river. As long as your*

people remain out of our territory, we will have no fight with you."]

Mooncrest saw the look in Seralle's eyes as he turned to face him. The man's expression was apologetic toward the elves, but showed that he would follow his chief's decree. Sandstorm put a hand on his shoulder and he turned to go. Hoodwink traded glances with Tana, but neither spoke. Only Ariv seemed to be pleased with the results of the meeting. Gotcheye shrugged his shoulders and walked with them toward the place Two Star and Dopper hid in the bushes.

"We're all gonna die under Catgut's swords," he muttered to no one in particular.

A spark of hope rekindled in Hoodwink's heart, however, when he heard Deta's words to his own people. ["I don't know if anything the Small One said was true,"] the old leader said in a strengthening voice. ["But, we will take no chances. Put the women and children at the center of the village and all warriors are to be watchful for any action against us, whether it be by troll or the Small Ones."]

Hoodwink nodded to himself. Even if the humans would not become their allies, at least they might have a fighting chance against a troll surprise attack. He chanced a last look back at his human friend, but all he saw was the chest of a large man behind him. The fellow saw his expression of sudden fear and leaned down to speak to him. ["Don't worry, little one,"] the brutish-looking man said. ["We will obey Deta and will not hurt you."] He then lowered his voice to a whisper. ["Personally, I think your intentions were good. Too bad we can't be friends."]

Hoodwink looked up at the human and gave him a thin smile.

["Me, too,"] he replied.

Two Star stayed out of sight so he wouldn't alarm the human escorts, but he remained in sending contact with the party. Mooncrest became apprehensive at the news the elder gave them and he put all his senses on the alert.

We also have another problem, Two Star told them. ***Dopper's vanished into the forest.***

That's not good, Sandstorm replied. ***Where is Dawnwatch's group?**

They're already here, up in the trees. I told them to stay hidden. There's no use alarming the humans into thinking we brought a war party to fight since they refused us.

Since none of the humans knew the common language spoken by trolls and elves, Mooncrest spoke openly to Gotcheye. "Catgut is sending warriors to attack the human village."

The troll looked at him as they passed beneath a huge oak tree. "How would you know that?"

"Two Star whispered it to me as we passed that last large bush," he lied. "Dopper has also taken off alone."

"Dopper!" Gotcheye spat. "He's probably one of Catgut's ears! When I get my hands on him..."

A terrified scream pierced the air and everyone jumped. ["That was Wilsa!"] one of the humans exclaimed. ["Back to the village!"] Everyone began running back the way they'd come, including the elves and troll. The humans outdistanced the others with their long strides, though one of them, a man named Trin, looked back in surprise to find the elves following them. He stopped suddenly and brandished his spear.

["Do not,"] he said. ["Go away!"]

Trin nervously touched the silky blue headband he wore and then looked back toward the village as more screams sounded out. He hesitated between running to the screams and staying to warn away the elves, but then they all heard Seralle's voice yell out, ["It's the trulls!"]

Trin locked eyes with Mooncrest and then said, ["Come on!"]

The elves drew their weapons and ran after the man. They burst into the clearing and saw nearly four hands of trolls running through the village trying to kill anything that moved. Some of them had crossbows while others were armed with spiked clubs, maces or spears. Three were hurling torches at the grass huts and the fires spread rapidly.

Mooncrest saw the humans at their fighting best and had no doubts as to why Nightstep wanted their help. One was involved in a punching match with a hearty troll and he was doing well. After the initial surprise of the trolls firing off bolts from their weapons, the man had rushed the invaders and impaled one troll through the eye with his spear. He had then swung at the nearest troll and was pounding him repeatedly with powerful punches.

Another man was hurling stones from a sling at trolls, and while they did nothing more than anger one attacker, he was distracted long enough for another human to smash his head in with a thick log. Mooncrest saw a troll bearing down on a wounded man with his spiked club, but he had no time to react. Another troll jumped for

the prankster out of the bushes and his instinctive reflexes whipped his large double-edge blade up and neatly severed the attacker's right arm from his body at the shoulder. The troll screamed in agony and Mooncrest silenced him with another thrust.

He looked back at the human he'd seen wounded and was surprised to see Gotcheye standing in front of the man, fighting off the one with the club. He saw movement to his left and he ran to Talon's aid. A troll swung his mace hard with the power of his well toned muscles and the impact caught the elf on the left arm, shattering it immediately. Mooncrest hurled his blade and with sheer luck, it impaled the troll cleanly through the heart. He went to retrieve his sword and knelt next to Talon.

The wounded elf was in agony and Mooncrest reached out to him. He felt the air move past his right ear and the club that just missed him hit Talon's skull with a tremendous impact. The troll backhanded the prankster before he could react and Mooncrest lost consciousness.

The warrior laughed and raised his bloody club for another strike, but all he managed to do was drop it and claw at the wide slice that had just appeared deeply across his throat. LongKnife swung his long blade again and the headless body collapsed at his feet. He knelt beside his friend and saw the prankster was merely knocked out and was about to try to wake him, but a human child ran across the village screaming with a troll gaining on the boy with a huge war club. The elf jumped up and ran to the child's aid.

Sandstorm had just put an arrow through another invader's heart when she saw Mooncrest's body. She stifled a scream of her own, thinking him dead, but a troll archer came at her with a crossbow in one hand and a torch in the other. Sandstorm was no coward, but she ran from him toward the central hut. The troll hurled his torch, not at her, but into the structure's grass walls. The flames caught instantly near the door.

Sandstorm felt a sudden thud and instant fire and looked down at her side. The bolt of a crossbow was in deep just under her lower rib and blackness claimed her quickly. Dawnwatch yelled when she saw Two Star's daughter collapse inside the burning hut's doorway. With a sudden strength, she beheaded her foe without another thought and rushed to the hut. The one who shot Sandstorm laughed and ran off toward a woman who fled the burning structure. When she got there, a middle aged woman was holding Sandstorm in her arms. She looked up at the elf and said, ["Help me get her out into the woods!"]

Dawnwatch didn't understand the language but saw the message in the woman's eyes. She took Sandstorm's feet while the human took her arms. They carried her swiftly out of the fighting and Dawnwatch left her in the human's care, silently hoping she could trust her. She ran back into the melee and ungracefully tripped over a body riddled with cross bolts. It was Shadowstar. She set her teeth together and got back up to find someone to kill.

Seralle was tiring from the fighting, but he was determined to defend his people. He launched himself from the ground with a running start and landed with both feet in a troll's gut. Before the downed adversary could regain his balance, Seralle snatched up a discarded crossbolt from the ground and shoved it deep into the troll's eye. The troll screamed only a few heartbeats before he fell twitching to the ground. The human stood up beside the corpse, panting heavily and took a few seconds to look around.

He heard a terrified shriek and saw the bony Ariv running full out from a pursuing troll. Unfortunately, the shaman was not fast on his feet and the troll caught the back of his tunic in a massive hand and hurled him to the ground. The troll stomped on the human's foot with a *crunch* and lifted his spiked mace. Ariv screamed from pain and terror and raised his hands, but he was silenced quickly as the weapon descended with a sickening thud.

Seralle clutched his stomach and vomited onto the troll he'd just killed. When he raised his tearing eyes, he saw Two Star hacking the arms off the one who'd just slain Ariv. The gentle storyteller was methodical and seemed impossibly calm as he removed his opponent's head next, even to the point of wiping the blood off his blade onto the troll's shirt.

Trin ran past him with his spear upraised and Seralle watched with pride as the younger man matched skills with another invader, also armed with a spear. Trin stepped in and faked his opponent twice and then swung the staff around quickly to take the legs out from under him. Once the troll was down, Trin pinned him to the ground through the lungs and watched panting as the invader gurgled and died. He stood up and wiped sweat from his face, looking around at the mad fighting.

On the far side of the village, Gotcheye was pleased with himself. He had just beaten a troll he'd hated for years and they both had put up a good fight. Better yet, he had killed his opponent with his bare hands. He grunted in satisfaction and looked up at movement off to his right.

Dopper had a crossbow in his hands and approached a pile of boulders that had long ago fallen from the sheer cliffs above. Gotcheye didn't know what the runt was after, but he hadn't been seen yet. Gotcheye muttered *traitor* under his breath and picked up the mace of his fallen opponent.

Dopper scrambled up on top of a boulder and searched for a way upon another. Gotcheye walked boldly up to the rocks and cleared his throat. The small troll spun around and saw his companion, but he didn't raise the weapon. "You startled me," he said.

"I'm gonna do more to you than that, little squealer," Gotcheye said. His squinting eye quivered in anger as he raised his mace to throw.

"Squealer?" Dopper exclaimed. "I'm no squealer!"

"Yeah, then why'd you disappear on Two Star?"

Dopper started to speak, but instead flipped up his crossbow and fired its bolt. Gotcheye didn't have time to react, but the dart passed him harmlessly. He was about to utter a curse, but he heard a thud behind him. He spun around and saw a troll warrior lying in the grass at his feet with the crossbolt between the eyes. He looked back at Dopper and saw the runt reloading his weapon.

"You missed me and shot your own warrior!" Gotcheye growled. "Your time is over now."

Dopper glanced up as he struggled with the tension of the weapon's band. "What're you babbling about?" he said irritably. "I just saved yer neck, you ingrate!"

Another warrior burst out of the bushes and hesitated when he saw the pair of trolls. He raised his spear quickly and hurled it at the one up high on the rocks. Dopper screamed as the razor-sharp blade pierced his leg above the knee and he toppled off the boulder to land hard.

Gotcheye roared and hurled his mace at the intruder. The warrior dodged the missile and laughed as he pulled a curved knife out of a belt sheath. Gotcheye rushed him but try as he might, he couldn't get past the slashing blade. Both trolls circled the other in search of an advantage, but they looked up in unison at a loud yell. Seralle jumped out onto the warrior with his flint spear in front of him. Both went down, but the human was the one who stood up after a brief struggle. He pulled the spear out of the body and noted with remorse that the tip was broken. He tossed the worthless weapon aside and turned to his ally.

["Are you okay?"] Seralle asked him.

Gotcheye didn't understand his words, so he patted the man on the shoulder and then turned back to Dopper. He trotted over to the runt, who was holding his leg in severe pain. The large troll knelt next to him, but was unsure what to do for him. "I'm sorry I thought you were a traitor," he said truthfully.

Seralle knelt down and examined the troll's wound. He fought back another wave of nausea at the sight. He'd never seen troll blood before this day and its difference in texture repulsed him. The troll was one who had come with the Small Ones to warn them and, repulsive or not, he was severely wounded. He hoped their bodies were similar enough for first aid for what he needed to do. He whipped off his cloth vest and began to tie it tightly above the spear point. He didn't waste any words and motioned for Gotcheye to hold the other troll down. When he saw that the large troll understood and complied, Seralle took hold of the spear and pulled it out. Dopper screamed, convulsed, and then cried in loud sobs.

When the runt had stopped writhing, Gotcheye pulled off his own shirt and tore it into strips to bind up the wound. Seralle took a second to study the troll-made blade of the spear and then set it on the ground next to the trolls. Gotcheye grunted and picked up the spear after he finished with the bandage, and handed it to the human. Seralle's eyes grew wide and then he grinned at the gift. He patted the troll on the shoulder as he'd done to him earlier. Sounds of the battle continued and the future leader of the humans took off with his new spear to rejoin the fray.

Dopper looked up at Gotcheye with tear stains on his face and he calmed his voice enough to speak. "I saw Catgut's warriors sneaking up out of a tunnel near me and went to investigate," he explained. "That's why I left the elf."

When Mooncrest awoke, it was all over. Two Star shook him gently awake and then helped him to his feet. "Are you okay?" he asked the elder.

"That's what I should ask you," Two Star said with a nod. "I'm fine."

Mooncrest looked around him at the ruined village. Only two huts were still standing amidst smoldering

clumps of the others. Troll bodies were stacked in a pile near the forest trees. The human dead were laid out in a row with wailing families or friends around them. Likewise, three elfin bodies were set alongside them, Diver, Shadowstar, and what was left of Talon. LongKnife knelt silently beside them, his expression as lifeless as his tribe-mates before him.

"What happened, Two Star?" Mooncrest asked with a tight throat.

"Fighting together with the humans," the elder replied, "we killed all but three of the attacking trolls. The others fled into the woods with human warriors at their heels. We've been helping one another try to straighten up the mess and it hasn't been pretty."

"What of the human leader?"

"Thanks to Tana and Hoodwink, he still lives," Two Star answered with a nod. "In the midst of the fighting, they managed to get him out of the village to a safe hiding place among some boulders."

Dawnwatch walked over to them and said to the elder, "I can't find Sandstorm. She was badly wounded and a human woman was caring for her the last I know."

"Have you sent to her?" Mooncrest asked.

"Yes. She's unconscious somewhere, but still alive. I just can't find her or the woman." Dawnwatch was clearly worried about the elder's daughter.

Seralle appeared at the edge of the clearing, talking with Trin. When he saw Mooncrest he approached the elves. ["I'm glad to see you up and around,"] he told the prankster in a gentle voice. ["Had you not come to us when you did, we would not have been as alert for trouble. We have seven dead. It might have been a lot more."]

Mooncrest's eyes were moist at their own losses. ["We have three down, and maybe another that we can't find."]

["You mean the other female?"] Seralle asked. He pointed to one of the remaining huts. ["Moiya is caring for her in there. She had to cut your friend to remove the troll dart, but she had skill to sew her back up when it was out."] Seralle watched Two Star and Dawnwatch leave without a word and run to the indicated hut. ["Do not worry about your friend. Moiya is well experienced in such things."]

LongKnife stood up from his kneeling and approached them. He was spattered with troll blood, but otherwise unhurt. "Are you well, Mooncrest?" he asked.

The prankster nodded and replied, "The left side of my face is numb and I have a whopping headache, but I'll live."

Seralle listened to their soft musical speech and smiled. He found he liked the sound of it even if he couldn't understand it. ["If you are well enough,"] he said, ["Deta would request to speak with you."]

Mooncrest nodded after a quick send from Two Star and then he followed the chief hunter to the last remaining hut. LongKnife trotted to the other hut to check on Sandstorm.

Mooncrest walked into the hut and saw the aged leader sitting up on a pallet against some pillows woven with colorful designs. Tana and Hoodwink talked quietly between themselves and looked up only when Seralle cleared his throat. Deta gave the dark-haired elf a friendly smile and motioned for Mooncrest to sit on a short stool near him. Quietly, the elf complied. Deta searched his face for a long moment and then spoke.

["What is your name?"]

Mooncrest pronounced it for him, with a quick explanation of its meaning, but the human's tongue tangled over the elfin syllables. Finally, he looked up at the elf apologetically and used the closest translation he could come up with in his own language.

["Moonedge,"] he said, ["I was in error with you. I should have listened to your words. Ariv had long put his whisperings into my ears and I let him lead me without my really knowing it. Tana is now shaman of my people and I feel she has some wisdom already."] The old man smiled with what teeth he had left and gave her a wink. ["I should probably punish her, since it appears she has been in contact with one of your own for some time, but at this moment it looks as if she did right."] His smile faded to an expression of respect and added, ["I have been told that your people fought along with my own today, and some of our lives were defended by some of yours."]

Deta rubbed his sweaty hands on a pillow and continued in a softer voice. ["I regret your losses, Moonedge, but now I know you spoke truth. A change has happened somewhere in the hearts of our two tribes, and although I imagine there will still be resentment with some for lives lost to the other in the past, I believe we can now be

allies."]

Mooncrest felt his heart thumping hard. Nightstep's plan against Catgut might actually have a chance. Two Star stepped into the room and moved silently to stand behind the prankster. Through sending, he told Mooncrest that Sandstorm would be fine for now until they could get her back to a healer.

Mooncrest cleared his throat lightly and leaned forward, resting his elbows on his knees. ["Your people fought against trolls today,"] he said. ["You should know that all trolls are not out to kill us and we will have some as allies against Catgut."]

["Yes, I heard your words to Seralle about them,"] the aged leader replied. ["The two who came with you also fought against our attackers."] Deta took a sip from a bowl Tana handed him and then looked back up at the elf. ["However, to my people, the trulls are a worse enemy than you ever were, so the alliance with them may be difficult. Our village is all but destroyed and because of this war we have no time to gather materials to rebuild our homes."]

["You could move into our holt until there's time for you to rebuild,"] Mooncrest replied. He stopped at what he'd just said and was dismayed for speaking before thinking. He felt Two Star's grip tighten on his shoulders, but no other response.

Deta looked up at Mooncrest with surprise. ["You would open your own homes to us as well?"] he asked in a voice of awe.

Mooncrest swallowed. He was in too deep to back out now, so he plunged on ahead with a nod of his head. ["If we are to band together to fight Catgut, it will be better if we are all together in one place to do our planning against her."]

Deta nodded. ["That sounds wise, Moonedge,"] he replied. ["For my people, I accept your offer. First we have a traditional ceremony to perform for the dead, and then we will gather up what we can and go to your home."]

Nightstep was stunned when he received Archer's long distance sending. ***He did what?!*** the chief sent back sharply. ***I wanted Mooncrest to convince the humans to help us fight, not to become our treemates!*** ***Two Star said it was a surprise to him as well,*** Archer replied. ***But, he said Mooncrest's reason was sound.***

Nightstep resisted the urge to throw something and stomped out of the Father Tree. He growled to himself and looked up into the midday sky. The storm clouds were still thick and so was the heaviness in the air. He wasn't used to being up this far into the daytime and he was more than a little grouchy at the moment, especially as some of his own tribe members had taken up his earlier threat and had already packed up and left the valley.

The elfin chief stroked his beard with a frown and walked quickly toward the lean-to where Rockhammer slept. As he moved, he sent out strongly to his elder council. ***Wake up and meet me at the Father Tree.*** he broadcast through their sleeping minds. ***Humans are coming to our holt!***

To Be Continued In
"The Secret Weapon"

A dark chamber was suddenly pierced by the yellow dancing light of a torch as two troll guards entered the room. They carried a small, beaten captive between them and dropped him roughly to the floor. He didn't make a sound, but the pain he felt showed clearly in his eyes. In the beginning, those eyes spoke of defiance, but now the strong will had been beaten down. His spirit was nearly broken, like the grasseaters occasionally caught and trained. Nearly — but not yet.

Timbers

Newsletter History of the Holt

Timbers

Volume 1: #1, May 1984 - #8, February 1986

Volume 2: #9, May 1986 - #12, February 1987

Volume 3: #13, August 1988 - #21, May 1990

Volume 4: #22, August 1997 -

Volume One

Timbers #1 - May 1984

Introduction

Tribe Member List

CIS - Nightstep

CIS - Freshwind

CIS - Mooncrest

Map of the Valley

Background History of the Tribe

Timber Folk Family Tree

Timbers #2 - August 1984

New Members : John Lucy, Virginia Howard, Daniel Jones, John Hunter, Teresa Arellanes, Whitney Ware, Melody Luke, Cyndy Haywood, Bill Nichols, Ruth Clark, Mark Barnard

"*Death Flood, pt 1*" by Ted Blasingame. [The great flood of the valley.]

CIS - Silverleaf

CIS - Sandstorm

CIS - Foxvine

Timbers #3 - November 1984

New Members : Renne Brock, Jennifer Crosby, Jennifer Hawthorne, Stewart Robertson, David Vargo.

"*Greeneyes Spinrider*" by Teresa Arellanes. [A tornado snatches Greeneyes from her home tribe and is deposited in the valley.]

CIS - Two Star

CIS - Diver

CIS - Greeneyes

CIS - Rogue

"*Death Flood, pt 2*" by Ted Blasingame. [The great flood of the valley.]

Logo contest

Timbers #4 - February 1985

New Members : PJ Boyd, Eon Harry, Melissa Van Houten, Kitty Moon, Laurey Moon, Robert Pierce, Ann Purtell, Bill Spurlock, Nikki Wieleba.

"*Death Flood, pt 3*" by Ted Blasingame. [The great flood of the valley.]

CIS - Redlace

CIS - Duskdew

CIS - Larkspur

CIS - Ivory

Timber Folk mini CIS info

Timbers #5 - August 1985

New Members : Wess Gentle, Alan Gillespie, April Lee, Marilyn Morey, Joanne Papin, Barbara Pike, Frank Strom, Chris Willis, Carrey Wolf, Rachel Wolf.

"*Death Flood, pt 4*" by Ted Blasingame. [The great flood of the valley comes to an end.]

"*Rogue of the Black Spear*" by Bill Nichols [A fin-haired stranger named Rogue arrives in the valley.]

CIS - Goldenbraid

CIS - Blackfire

CIS - Big Axe

"*Loose Ends, pt 1*" by Jennifer Hawthorne [Following the attack of a maddened bear, Larkspur makes her way to the valley.]

Poem, "*The Forest, Land of Life*" by Virginia Howard

Timbers #6 - May 1985

New Members : Michelle Benoit, Buzz Clore, Karen Ojamaa, Lisa Ruiz, Sharon Jane Smith, Diana Stein, Sue Tretina.

"*Grassy's Secret*" by Teresa Arellanes. [Grassy tames a grasseater on the Upper World plains.]

CIS - Grassy

CIS - Frost

CIS - Shadowstar

"*Lifetimes: Mooncrest*" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest spies on the humans.]

Portrait of Skywise by Wendy Pini

"*Loose Ends, pt 2*" by Jennifer Hawthorne [The mad bear follows Larkspur into the valley.]

Timbers #7 - November 1985

New Members : Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston, Terri Barnard, Ted Delorme, Eileen Fryer, Yvonne Gugin, Lauren Janoff, Maria Manemann, Roger Sorenson, David Trimble, Sarah Wooten.

"*One Night*" graphic story by Bill Nichols

"*Lifetimes: Rogue*" by Bill Nichols. [Rogue acquires a wolf cub.]

"*Exile*" by Melody Luke. [Ivory is banned from her tribe and her wanderings bring her to the valley.]

CIS - Thunderhawk

CIS - Ferret

CIS - Hatfeather

"*The Power*" by Teresa Arellanes. [Young Nightway discovers her treeshaping talent.]

"*Scenes of Departure*" by Joanne Papin [Ferret leaves the valley to wander the Upper World.]

Timbers #8 - February 1986

New Members : Marcela Fabela, Mercedes Fabela, Michael Hirtes

"*Homecoming*" by Joanne Papin [Ferret returns to the valley.]

"*One Day*" graphic story by Bill Nichols

"*Lifetimes: Greeneyes*" by Teresa Arellanes. [Greeneyes becomes lovmates with LongKnife.]

"*Stranger to the Valley*" by John Lucy and Ted Blasingame. [LongKnife, the first elfin stranger to the valley in four thousand years shows up.]

CIS - LongKnife

CIS - Trace

CIS - Windrace

CIS - Nightfire

Elfsearch Puzzle

Volume Two

Timbers #9 - May 1986

Down in the Valley - introductory editorial by Joanne Papin

"How Not To Go Swimming" by Melissa Van Houten. [Smoke and Starlight stumble into the valley.]

Who's Where When - timeline and character listing

Hometree locations

CIS - Smoke

CIS - Starlight

"Some Days It Doesn't Pay To Get Out Of The Old Sleeping Furs, pt 1" graphic story by Bill Nichols

Answers to the Elfsearch Puzzle

Timbers #10 - August 1986

New Members : Linda Gerhart, Linda Payne, Terrie Smith, Dale Allen, Gary Milsten

"Home is Where the Heart Is" by Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston. [Shrike, Oriole and Woodblaze find the valley.]

"Timber Tails" graphic short by Ted Delorme

CIS - Jasmine

CIS - Talon

CIS - Woodwreath

CIS - Quicksilver

CIS - Farlance

CIS - Evenfell

"Some Days It Doesn't Pay To Get Out Of The Old Sleeping Furs, pt 2" graphic story by Bill Nichols

Timbers #11 - November 1986

New Members : Mary Lopez

"Birth of a Flame" by Ted Blasingame. [Birth of the chief's son, Skyflame.]

CIS - Skyflame

CIS - Wildwood

CIS - Whirlwind

"Quick Getaways" by Ruth Clark. [Quicksilver plays mischievous pranks on Duskdew.]

"Loose Ends, pt 3" by Joanne Papin [The mad bear attacks the holt.]

Timbers #12 - February 1987

New Members : Becky Slocombe, Joycelyn Poon, Lynne Joseph, Shelley Davis, Lisa Keim, Laura Lionson, Jeff Rawson, Philip Shaw, Becky Behler, William Shawcross, Ryan Galiotto, Maria Dodson, Stacy Lucas, Johannes Huber, Dana Evans.

"Tying up Loose Ends, pt 4" by Joanne Papin. [The bear is caught and discovered to be an elfin shapeshifter stuck in bear form and gone mad. He is restored to normal and allowed to stay in the valley, but Larkspur leaves on her own.]

CIS - Woodblaze

CIS - Oriole

CIS - Shrike

"Ill Met by Moonlight" by Nikki Wieleba. [Prologue to the War story. A hunched trollup is discovered in the valley and taken to the Caverns.]

Valley Elves - character pictorial

Volume Three

Timbers #13 - August 1988

"*Nightstep's Beard*" by Teresa Arellanes and Ted Blasingame. [Tale of why Nightstep has a beard.]
The History - background of the Timber Folk
Meet The Chief - updated CIS - Nightstep
Back cover profile : Chief Greylock

Timbers #14 - November 1988

New Members : Rich Kinney, Deb Whitmer
"Pushover" by Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston. [Starlight and Hatfeather seduce Jag.]
"Other Things" by Ruth Clark. [Duskdew is in a lustful mood.]
"Changing Ideals" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest accepts that he can't keep everyone from leaving the valley.]
CIS - Jag
CIS - Hushleaf
CIS - Sapphire
The Timeline
Back cover profile : Skyflame

Timbers #15 - February 1989

New Members : Valerie Bowe, Ruth Dempsey, Eugene Gryniewicz
"Mocker's Song" by Linda Woeltjen. [Tale of a small child whose animal calls nearly get him killed.]
CIS - Dripstone
"Can't Run From Fear" by Dana Evans. [Torisen arrives in the valley.]
Artist Guidelines
"A Meeting of the Eyes" by Bill Nichols and Melissa Van Houten. [Starlight invites Rogue into the sleepfurs with her.]
Back cover profile : Hushleaf

Timbers #16 - May 1989

"The Snare" by Sharon Jane Smith. [A human girl, Tana, catches Hoodwink on her side of the valley.]
"Cool Off" by Ruth Clark. [Duskdew gets drunk on dreamberry wine.]
"Surprise" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest and Wildwood Recognize.]
"The Wrong Treesaper" by Teresa Arellanes [Nightway is devastated at witnessing Mooncrest and Wildwood's Recognition.]
CIS - Hoodwink
CIS - Tana
Back cover profile : Wavesong, Knifeblade & Sapphire

Timbers #17 - August 1989

"He's Grassy" by Teresa Arellanes. [Newborn Grassy is named by Nightway.]
"The Elf's Prayer" poetry by Nancy Stratten
Story File listing
"The Thing In The Forest" by Nancy Stratten. [Redlace saves a human child from a large snake.]
CIS - Archer
CIS - Redthorn
CIS - Season
CIS - Silverhair
CIS - Spicurl
"The Decision, pt 1" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest attempts to get over his fear of wide, open spaces.]
Back cover profile : Season

Timbers #18 - November 1989

"*The Decision, pt 2*" by Ted Blasingame [Mooncrest returns in shock from his trip to the Upper World.]
CIS - Coppermane
CIS - Skylight
CIS - Wavesong
"*Wandering Spirit*" by Ruth Clark. [Timber Valley War pt 1.]
Back cover profile : Shadowstar, Evenfell, Ivory

Timbers #19/20 - February 1990

"*The Taming*" by Dana Evans. [Torisen befriends a grasseater in the Upper World.]
"*The Thunder Below*" by Melissa Ackroyd-Livingston. [Timber Valley War pt 2.]
CIS - Catgut
CIS - Dawnwatch
CIS - Nightway
CIS - Torisen
CIS - Twill
"*Blood Frenzy*" by Linda Woeltjen. [Timber Valley War pt 3.]
Back cover profile : How Hushleaf Lost His Tongue

Timbers #21 - May 1990

"*Soul's Touch*" by Rich Kinney. [Due to a foolish accident, Windrace and Trilight become soul brothers.]
"*Howl*" by Maria Manemann. [An elf named Sya passed by the valley.]
"*Golden One*" poetry by Nancy Stratten
"*Relatively Speaking*" by Valerie Bowe. [Coppermane and Skylight discover they're related.]
The Complete Timber Valley War Overview
"*The Secret Word*" by Bill Nichols. [Rogue's Recognition with Bolt.]
"*Something Left Behind*" by Ruth Clark. [Duskdew's forced Recognition with a stranger who takes away her memories of the meeting.]
The New Blood of Timber Valley, portrait of the kids
"*Changes*" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest reflects on how things have gone since the War.]
Timeline Additions
Back cover profile : Skylight & Arrowsong

Volume Four

Timbers #22 - August 1997

Return To Timber Valley : Editor's Introduction
"*Timber Valley Beginnings*" by Ted Blasingame. [Two Star relates a tale of when the Timber Folk first discovered the valley.]
The Ladies of Timber Valley, pictorial of the female elves by Eileen Fryer
"*Something Fishy*" by Ted Blasingame. [Mooncrest and Stormer come back from the lake with a tale of the one that got away.]

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"*Like A Moth*" by Ted Blasingame. [Silverhair and Wavesong, both longtime widowers, begin a relationship together.]
"*Strange Alliances*" by Ted Blasingame. [Timber Valley War pt 4.]
Timbers - newsletter history of the Timber Valley Holt.