

Something reptilian briefly swept into view, flashing across the clearing it was gone leaving twigs and leaves to fall in its wake.

‘Wot was that?’

‘Did ya see it?’

Again and again half-glimpsed shapes spun overhead, the buzz of wings and the occasional flash of scales was the only thing to be seen in the near darkness.

The cries and shrieks rose to a fevered pitch, the intense feeling of menace grew and the darkness surrounding the glade pushed further and further into the clearing. The small circle of light in which the Tremens stood shrank and began to dim.

With a thunderous shriek, a wriggling nightmare burst into the light, rows of glinting teeth shone, mesmerising and menacing. Shooting forward the scaled beast hurled through the group of Tremens, snapping and snarling, squirming and writhing. Its worm-like body hovered above the roaring flames of the campsite fire, lashing out at the shocked Tremens it made its way towards Charlie. Biting and slashing it knocked those too slow to get out of its way to the floor.

‘Wurm!’ cried Stotch, ‘It’s a Wurm, Leaf and Shade protect us!’

Charlie, overcome with terror, stared in disbelief at the onrushing monstrosity. It truly was a nightmare vision. A horrifying cross between dragonfly and maggot, its flesh rotten and decomposing. Fetid and decaying it stank. All teeth and hooked claws.

Charlie didn’t doubt for one second what its intention was.

To kill and maim.

The Tremens overcoming their shock burst into motion. Roaring out their defiance they loosed arrow after arrow at the Wurm. Stotch and the other Tremens armed with cudgels danced in and out of striking range, ferociously bludgeoning at its flesh.

Screaming in pain the Wurm hastily backed away. With a frantic buzz of its wings, it disappeared into the darkness.



‘A Wyrml!’ cried Lentol, ‘They’re supposed ta be extinct!’

‘I guess someone forgot ta tell Bane that!’ shouted Jensen, ‘Lentol, help Stotch wid the wounded-’

‘It’s back!’ screamed out Lentol, ‘It’s back!’

Slamming back into the glade the Wyrml shrieked out its fury. A second and a third shape burst snarling into the clearing, then a fourth and a fifth Wyrml, quickly followed by a sixth and seventh.

‘Oh cripes, Leaf, Root an’ Sap save us now!’ muttered Kelko.

Hissing and spitting the Wyrmls snapped and snarled. Circling and spinning around the campsite they drove themselves towards a feeding frenzy. The wind from their wings sent debris, leaves and twigs spinning through the air and caused the flames from the campfire to flare up.

‘Kelko!’ cried Jensen, ‘Get Charlie out of here, get her away! Yer gotta keep her and the Pendant safe!’

‘Wot about ya?’

‘Fer crying out loud! I can handle meself, get the girl outta here while we distract ‘em!’ screamed Jensen.

‘Alright, I’m on it!’

Kelko bundled Charlie into his arms and sprinted into the forest.

‘Sic Boy!’ cried Stotch, ‘Go with them, look after Charlie! Go boy!’

Sic Boy, muscles bunching beneath his fur followed Kelko and Charlie into the dark woods.

The three of them quickly covered a lot of ground and soon the screams and cries of both Wyrml and Tremml faded into the distance. Together they fled deep into the moonlit forest. But they weren’t alone for long. Wyrml-cry and vicious shrieks soon followed.

‘Damn! They’re a determined bunch o’ critters!’

Cursing, Kelko dropped Charlie and with Sic Boy by his side prepared to face the onslaught.

‘Well Blossom, looks like yer going ta have ta make this bit on yer own. Hurry up lass, get running!’

‘Run? I’m not going to leave you!’

‘Charlie, ya have ta, ya have ta get that pendant ta the Jade Circle!’

‘I don’t care, I’m still not leaving you!’

Shrieks and howls echoed down from the trees above.

‘Charlie, now’s not the best time ta be arguing, get going!’

‘No!’

‘Charlie, ye have ta! Yer a Keeper and it’s yer responsibility ta safeguard that pendant!’

One of the Wyrms burst down from above. Growling, Sic Boy leapt onto the creature's scaly back. Biting and clawing he dragged the Wym to the ground.

'Blight me Leaf! I can't spend all day arguing, now GO! Keep heading south, yer'll bump into Sylvaris soon enough! Good luck!'

Kelko flashed Charlie a grin then ran to Sic Boy's aid.

'Why me?' whispered Charlie.

Turning she ran.

