

Warrior

Spike Woods had once been a location of fun and adventure for the children of Tolbe, MO. Before the mall was built on the other side, it was the only place to escape from the dredges of daily life. Imagination could take over. Magical worlds of kings and dragons became the more important thing. More important than school. More important than bullies. More important than absent parents. After all, the fictional trials they subjected themselves to, no matter how harrowing, had a resolution. Whether they lived or died, they did so with integrity. There was no time for complacency to spoil anything

Duke recalled the memories of these good times as he and Misty walked quickly through the dim twilight. He looked briefly as they passed the place where he and Sophia sat when he cut himself bad enough to scar his shoulder on the large thorns. Then, another place where he comforted Sophia after their father forgot about her middle school recital; though, pink freeze pops had probably been the real hero that day.

Eventually they came to the place where he knew Sophia's voice had come from. There was no time to question how he knew, but it was something stronger than a feeling.

"Where could she be?" Asked Misty, "You said you heard her in here but I still don't understand how."

"Neither do I," Answered Duke.

"That's not helpful," Misty replied after waiting for further explanation.

It is important to note that neither of them could see the rippling wall beside them at this time. Their perception had not been blessed in the same manner as the others. Nonetheless, they

searched diligently for any sign of Sophia's presence, until Misty suddenly fell into the wall herself.

She let out a scream that was cut short when her head disappeared. Then her torso. Then her legs. Duke witnessed this and did not hesitate to act, running into what looked like the shadow of a tree.

As he crossed the boundary, there was a slight pressure that fell upon his body, as though he were passing through a thin shower of rain. He stumbled in and fell beside Misty. Thick grass and damp earth chilled him. Sunlight flooded the space surrounding them.

Directly in front of them, opposite where they had appeared from, there stood a silvery tower with a pointy top. Two people were approaching them from that direction. Duke looked at them, and then turned to Misty, "Stay behind me," He said with a rigid tone that struck a chord with her. He was afraid. They got up to their feet, and she did what he said.

When the two figures were clearer to see, it was obvious that they did not walk but floated just above the ground. As they moved forward their bare, thin feet kicked slightly as if treading water. They wore skirts that sat low on their hips, were thin and bony with big bald heads, tiny pointy chins, and narrow noses. The iris in their eyes were completely black, and the tips of their ears were pointed. Duke would describe them as "humanoid". At that time, the sight gave him an unnerving sense of uncanny valley. They stopped only a few yards away.

"Halt," A deep, metallic voice rang in the airwaves. There was no doubt it came from any other person than one of those floating, "How is it you have come here?"

A second voice, pitched slightly higher than the first, rattled Duke's brain, "Are they related to the girls from earlier?"

Duke began to feel his feet under him again, “What is this? Are you talking about my sister?”

The two beings stared back without blinking. Then, the deeper voice spoke, “So they are related. Also, this one is capable of hearing us. We must capture them.”

“But what about Malsifus? He is still dealing with the female humans,” Asked the second voice.

“Duke,” Misty pressed gently on his shoulder, “Why are those things just staring at us?”

“You can’t hear them speaking?” He replied without taking his eyes off of them.

“What? No,” fear gripped her.

The first voice spoke, “We don’t need Malsifus, take her and I’ll get the male.”

“You can try!” Duke charged the being on the left but stopped short of grabbing him. He felt something holding him back. A force like gravity. Initially, it was like running into a strong current, but its strength slowly lessened.

“This one is strong,” spoke the first voice, which unconsciously confirmed to Duke that this force had been radiating from the being closest to him, “Quickly-,” it tried to continue his command but was cut short, as Duke grabbed ahold of him.

He slammed the humanoid into the ground. The second one realized all too late that they had underestimated their enemy.

“Zekbir!” It cried out to its companion, whose body laid broken in the dirt under the weight of Duke’s shoulder. It did not respond.

Duke did not realize the fragility of his opponent's body when he attacked. Nonetheless, the fires in him had been stoked. His rage was now boundless without the fear of his opponents. He shouted, “Where is my sister!”

The second being lifted a hand, palm out, with two fingers raised. Another wave of pressure his Duke's shoulders, but he pushed through faster than the last time and grabbed the second being by cupping its jaw.

In one swift motion, he slammed it into the ground more gently than the first one. A crass, unrefined shriek escaped the mouth of the bizarre creature, as if it were using its voice for the first time.

"Answer me!" Duke leaned in and looked into its large, black eyes, "Where is my sister? Is she in there?" He pointed to the tower.

Misty approached cautiously. She knew that Duke had come ready for a fight, but this situation had turned eerie. Though Duke's mind was occupied with the safety of his sister, Misty's mind was free to hypothesize on what they were seeing.

"Duke, I think we should turn back and get help," She said.

At that moment, a hole unraveled in the wall of the tower, and another being came out. It was moving towards them much faster, and flying much higher. Misty could now feel a pressure on her body, as if gravity had become more intense. She dropped to her knees.

The being came down and stopped before Duke, who held his captured opponent up by its neck, "Release him, Duke."

"I guess you read minds? I don't know who you all are, or what's going on, but you know where my sister is," Duke's anger shook his voice.

This new being was slightly larger than the first two. Its head was also ornamented with a silver band. It levitated casually over to the limp body of its companion on the ground, and placed two fingers on its large forehead.

The front of the unconscious being's skull clicked. A circle line materialized with another straight line drawn across its diameter. That line split open, and a metal cylinder raised from the circular opening in its head.

“So, you destroyed Zekbir’s frame. No matter. We will build him another one,” The being who Duke realized was Malsifus, threw the cylinder up and watched as it sailed through the air toward the silver tower on its own.

Duke struck the being in his hand so it stopped responding, and threw it aside before charging at Malsifus. He moved with confidence in his ability to push through the strange power these humanoids appeared to have on his body. That confidence, he soon realized, was misguided, when he found his body frozen mid-stride.

“You are resisting my power, human,” a voice like that of two men rattled Duke’s mind, “A mind that can sense Urja, and a body built to crush foes. It is young and still regenerates. Because of this, you are soft. Not as firm as the adult ones. I suppose that is a benefit to you in this case. It’s amusing how your body gives off a different tone.”

“Give me my sister back you freak!” With great effort, Duke began to move again.

The being raised its hand, causing Duke to freeze again, “Stop. Resist further and I will have to crush you.”

Duke did not stop, and soon lost consciousness. As the darkness took him, Duke could still hear the cry of his sister's voice calling to him. Misty, who sat in horror, unable to move from the sheer pressure emitted by this mysterious foe, also slipped into a deep sleep.