

*Elanor*

*Birion*

The trumpets sounded, a clear silver tone echoing in the tree branches. The elven ranger readied her bow, arrow notched, and waited. The human army, amassed at the foot of the hill, aimed their weapons at the Elder host riding out of the forest, the silver armour shining in the morning sun. It was her first battle, and though she tried to look calm, inside she was equal parts excited and terrified.

“Don’t worry,” her partner, an old lieutenant in the scouting unit, put his hand on her shoulder for reassurance. His face was as calm as she willed hers to be. “The humans won’t even make it past the sword singers. Besides,” he chuckled, “you can always kill them before they can even see you.” He hefted his own bow and aimed it between the trees at the rusted glint of the mortal iron.

She nodded and looked away, checking for threats as she had been taught. “All clear in the east,” she reported. He chuckled again and replied, his voice amused, “The west’s clear.” Then he vanished.

She sighed. The life among the Protectors wasn’t as glamorous as her mother had made it out to be. *Still, at least I got to the Rangers*, she mused and shivered as she imagined herself among the sword singers, out on the battlefield, facing the hairless apes face to face.

The trumpets sounded again, this time joined by a brass sound of bugles. The armies moved, the humans in a barely organised chaos, the elves in lethal co-ordination and precision. Even here, so far from the battle, the leaves shivered when iron met steel and silver. The cries of dying humans filled the air. She gripped her bow tighter.

Below the hill, the battle was nearly over. The human army, another one in their endless hunger for expansion, soaked the ground with crimson blood. The ranger watched as a small group of humans turned from the battlefield and ran towards her. An arrow flew through the air and pierced a human throat – one of her companions would add another notch to their bow. She prepared.

The humans, heedless of the feathery death waiting for them in the forest, drew closer. *Gods, they are an ugly species*. The elf narrowed her eyes. There. The one in the middle. Squat, dirty, with barely enough muscles to carry his patched leather armour. She aimed, the arrow an extension of her sight, and let loose.

The ranger watched with grim satisfaction as her arrow pierced through the hard leather and her target fell to the ground, already dead. *Not even caring for their comrade. They’re worse than animals*, she thought as she watched the humans run past their fallen. Another arrow, another death.

Some of the humans got through and reached the forest. She put her bow away – it would be of little use now that her enemies could hide behind the trees – and drew a short curved sword, little more than a long dagger. She noticed a human coming near her. She concentrated and a strange calm engulfed her, masking her from his senses. A quick slash across the throat.

She cursed as some of the blood spilled on her clothes and kicked the corpse in disgust. All of a sudden, a silence fell on the forest, only the alarmed bird calls sounding in the distance. The battle was over, the enemy lay dead. Glory awaited back in the Foresthome.

The ranger smiled. *This is not so bad, after all.*