

## Even Honored Teachers Need to Sleep

by

Philip Morris

“I don’t think this is what they had in mind when they came up with the idea of using and forging Umbraerton (armor material made from, valamin, stone-like material only found in the Lands of the Beyond. And, metanium, a lost magemetal from the Kingdoms-era on the mortal plane of Regolan a thousand cycles earlier in history. These two materials are forged together to create Umbraerton. Pronounced ‘Umbray Erton’.) into an individual Warden’s Armor or a suit of ‘Armor of Evenfall’. Ibari Laradin complained to Falkirk the Sixth as she tightened the straps and fixed the buckles to her own personal suit of said armor. “Don’t worry about how it feels right now.” Falkirk advised. “Just make sure all the straps, buckles, and ties are tight so the armor can’t slide around on you or chafe in delicate areas – THAT would be bad. Believe me.”

“So why did you drag me to this Realms-forsaken shard land instead of just training back on our own sky island?” asked Ibari. “Well, I recently received word from the High One that a zeshael (spirit) that escaped from Zhavrimon is staging itself through this shard land in preparation for a return attempt to the mortal plane. This gives me a chance to see how far your combat training has progressed since we started seven months ago. Here take this...” The Avatar handed his trainee a sheathed shortsword and belt to put on. “...Use it along with that Shadowstone dagger you were given by Artisan Daruchan. If you ask me, I think he’s sweet on you Ibari.” The only response he received was a growl of warning. The weapons artisan had made all kinds of excuses over the past half-cycle to pay visits to the Warden female and he often bore gifts for her and tried to, subtly in his own way he thought, let the Chief Conservator know he was interested in her. Ibari, for her part tried everything she could think of to avoid the cloying, stifling, prying, and annoying attentions of her scheming pursuer.

“If Daruchan brings me one more item I’m going to take it and wrap it around his head! If I didn’t know better I’d think you were encouraging him. But you don’t have enough time to come up with all your different training tortures and continue to inspire him to pursue me.” Falkirk let her misperceptions stand for the time being. “Even if he does annoy you by his visits now, you were grateful enough when he first brought you the Shadowstone blade.” He pointed out. Ibari’s hand slapped down on the leather sheath holding the dark dagger whose blade was made of stone native to The Beyond and found nowhere else on Regolan among the living realm or its pocket dimensions.

“True enough. But one tremendously useful gift out of 100 different trinkets otherwise does not mean he gets to keep showing up on my doorstep at all hours of the night or that he can interrupt me every time I’m getting ready to sit down to a meal.” She commented. “That’s not how he views it. Remember, he has been dead for more than twelve centuries, he is as excited as many of the other spirits of the dead to meet the first member of the new Warden race. The Realmspirit has had them building and preparing for your people by creating the environs of Warden Central for the last couple hundred cycles. To see all that hard work finally coming to fruition has all of them excited.” She grimaced as they followed a small trail alongside a stream of aetchari, a type of spiritual afterlife energy that’s thick and viscous in its natural form – several small streams and some rivers of it flow through various areas of the Lands of the Beyond. It is quite useful when it’s altered into a crystalline type of substance incorporated into items with magical effects that only work on this side of the Gates, she swept the area immediately ahead with her Tracking Sense. She could feel the presence of the evil and oozing aura of the spirit somewhere over a rise up ahead.

“Are you going to help me force this thing back to Zhavrimon for judgement and punishment or are you going to make me handle this thing on my own?” The evil smile growing on Falkirk’s face belied the attempt at a wide-eyed look of innocence he was trying to muster. “Ibari, this little trip is to assess how far you’ve come since we started your training. If I were to help you it would negate the effectiveness of the evaluation of your abilities I’ll give you after this little exercise is over. Please...” Falkirk gestured in the direction the trail took over the rise ahead, “...feel free to choose whatever route you want to take or devise some kind of attack strategy. Whatever you choose to do, I would make sure to include the Rimpoca in your deliberations.”

“I know, I know, you keep pushing shortswords and the Rimpoca, (a weapon used by Warden’s-in-training and imbued with the magic ability to send Zeshael’s (Spirits) back to whatever Land in the Afterlife they might have escaped from if they are run through by the blade specifically), for some reason I’m not sure I understand. I’m getting tired of that too. I told you I’d prefer a slimmer version of a broadsword designed for a practice sword.” Ibari pushed her way through some broadleaf brown foliage and stopped speaking as her Tracking Sense told her she was close to her prey. She marveled at the effectiveness of the ability, it was far more useful than her Life Sense or Aura Sight had been when she’d been with the Blood Lords. It was far more detailed and specific in the information it revealed and the distance it reached. Right now it was telling her the escaped spirit was resting directly below her. She could hear sounds of it stirring as it picked up the emanations of power from the approaching Avatar. \*That damn Falkirk is going to give away our presence and make this whole retrieval ten times tougher than it has to be!\*

She waved backwards in the direction of her mentor. She whispered, “SSshhhhtttt! Stay back! The zeshael can sense your power, you’re going to get it agitated if you get too .....

Ibari's whispering trailed off as a dark shadow overhung the place where she was standing. "Oh, drake droppings." Was all she got out before a large dark and shadowy cloud of substance fell from above and she barely managed to roll to one side off the trail before it swallowed the spot she'd been standing in. The Warden kept her momentum going and flung herself backward several more yards before stopping. She rose to her feet and drew the Shadowstone blade from its sheath first. Now she was ready for the twisted spirit. She started circling to the right of the last place she'd seen it before she went one way in the brush and it had taken cover in a different part. She was sure it was lingering in the area, waiting for her to make a mistake. Of course, Falkirk was safe since he was several times more powerful than this thing. But she was still in training and hadn't accessed her full powers yet, let alone managed to sense her own personal weapon.

"Did you call for me?" a male voice asked off to her left. "Shut Up!" she hissed at her trainer. She only had a few beats to herself before her special sense told her to move again. The dark cloud of the spirits form split in two to come from two different directions at her this time. "Falkirk you Coloseanta!" she cried as she dodged again, this time she was slapped across the chest by a tendril of its power. Ibari went flying off into yet another direction among the bushes and plants in the area. When she impacted the ground she put her hands below her and levered herself back to her feet. She took a pulse to look at the chest armor of her suit, a nice deep dent stood out just below the area meant to fit over her breasts, looks like it was back to the drawing board for her personal suit of armor.

The First One knew she needed to get clear of all the underbrush and plant growth and find an open space she could use to counterattack the Lost Soul or Grasping Spirit class entity. She used her supernatural senses to locate the closest clearing and headed straight for it as fast as she could. Bursting out of the last bit of cover, Ibari moved to the middle of the clearing and turned to face the spirit who was coming along fast behind. Brandishing her Shadowstone .....the Warden looked at her hands, where was her dagger? "Crap, crap, crap!" she muttered. Tightening the straps holding her gauntlets to the sleeves of her armor she quickly chanted under her breath, "Wemnasi asabatali hydrosha fiztalis." A globe of water covered each hand and she looked up just as the eight foot high cloud oozed into the clearing from the way she'd just ran.

She could feel its satisfaction that it had finally caught up with the woman who'd been running from it. The cloud shot out tentacles and tendrils of black smoke with small bursts inside them that looked like miniature lightning bolts. Ibari watched and waited, when the spirit lashed out with a larger tentacle she timed the strike and hit it with one of her englobed hands. As the watery sphere over her hand popped a wave of water shot from behind her and drenched the cloud in a disorienting wave of liquid. "Zapst chargis lasta boomnoar!" She called and pointed at the cloud. There was a brief flash of white light and the woman was knocked

from her feet and flat to the ground. The black cloud seemed to deflate, similar to how a balloon flattens when punctured.

Ibari stood up and drew the Rimpoca from its sheath. The cloud was wavering, trying to find a way to re-energize itself. When a cluster of its protrusions sensed the Warden it decided to try draining her of her energies. Ibari stood still as it lassoed her with a ropelike limb. When the spirit tried to drain her it was surprised to find its own energies drawn away and weakened itself further – slowly fluttering to rest on the ground. The Warden walked over to the cloud, raised the sword high, point downward, and plunged it through the remaining body of the dark zeshael. There was a nearly audible sighing sound and the fugitive spirit POPPED! back to the land of Zhavrimon where it had come from, so the Judges who ruled there could decide the punishment for the wayward entity.

“One less escaped spirit to worry about, eh Ibari?” Falkirk offered in a jovial mood. “Falkirk.” She said. “Yes, my young apprentice warrior?” “I hope you enjoy this as much as I did when you messed with my mission to recapture the escaped dark spirit.” Taking the sword she still held in one hand, the Warden turned it so the flat of the blade was presented, swung upside the Avatar’s head and watched as he fell unconscious between two pungent smelling stink bushes. “Enjoy your nap honored teacher. I’ll wait for you back at Warden Central.” She told the prone figure. Ibari focused her will for a pulse and called for a Warden’s Archway to appear, sheathing her Rimpoca she walked across it’s threshold and disappeared through it.