



A Time Of War

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I imagined a bunch of species from my original world gathering in preparation for war, and I just couldn't help but write it out.

When the ancient Weird Forest comes under threat, species from across Southpoint gather to defend their shared home away from home.

It was a time of battle. The Weird Forest, the central nexus of the Southpoint Alliance, was under threat. Tundrame Rucroe, Headwitch of the Forest Magi, stood on a platform at the Forest's edge. Her Familiar, a miniature Gryphon named Yin, perched on her shoulder. Witch and Familiar were both composed and prim, as if this was another meeting with the Academy staff rather than a gathering of allies to face the coming threat.

The ground shook as a man with skin rough as rock approached, taller than the greatest trees around him. He stepped carefully as to not crush any being under his long, clawed feet. He knelt and lowered his head so that it was level with the platform, his mossy beard trailing in the dirt, and whispered low, "Madame Tundrame of the Magic Kind, I am Cornelius of the Furystone Giants." His breath was like a sudden gust of wind that blew back the hair of everyone around him, but Tundrame hardly seemed to notice it, not so much as flinching nor stepping back even a single step as he continued, "Your people have long given mine sanctuary in this great wood of yours, we would be remiss not to defend it. As long as we stand, our clubs shall be yours."

"The Forest Magi thank you and accept your offer of help," Tundrame told him, nodding in acknowledgment. She watched passively as he rose and moved (still so carefully) to join the impossibly large crowd surrounding the area.

More came after him.

The Liskan ambassador rode up on his turtle, hissing about the loyalty of the Great-shell tribe. The Calican representative was right behind him, purring as she declared that the rest of the Liskan Archipelago were in accordance with the lizards that gave their home its name.

The Pixish Prime Swarm spoke in unison about how their people belonged in the forest and would fight for it.

The leaders of the Tech Magi and Serpentkind Magi spoke as if they would single-handedly turn the tide of the war. The Dream Magi ambassador managed to get through an excited assurance of support, despite being half asleep for most of it, if only because his Familiar kept shaking him awake.

Shaking her head at her younger peers, the ancient Wolfborn Magi Matriarch calmly stated that a threat to the Magi of the forest was a threat to Magi of all kinds.

The Flowerborn Magi didn't send a representative, but word was spread that their compounds would take in all those too young or sick to fight and they would be guarded like the Matrons' own blooms.

Tundrame gave her thanks to each representative, stiff and formal but always genuine. They would need all the help they could get in the coming battle. Her composure only cracked when she blinked in surprise at Eric, her dear best friend's son and her pseudo-nephew, when he hopped onto the platform. The gemstones of his Soulet glowed as he Summoned his most powerful Spirit, Mischief, a rare Concept Spirit born to the Casted. She cackled and darted around, her shadowy smoke changing her Caster's clothes to something formal and dark as he swept into a low bow.

"The Court of Fools wishes to be allowed to assist in defending the Forest," he spoke, his voice carrying the high-pitched giggle he only used in his most shadow-tinged moods. He looked up, his grin wide and sharp but nervous in a way he rarely was, as grinning people throughout the crowd slipped on white theater masks like the one that hung from his belt. He licked his lips. "Criminals we are and trouble we like to spread, but this is our home no matter our addresses. We serve none but our own whims, and our whims are to defend, so let us stand within your army and bring our brand of mischief to those that threaten these dear woods."

"The Forest is glad to accept you as our ally, young King of Fools," Tundrame told him, offering him a small, proud smile. Yin squawked approvingly from her shoulder. The Spirikin boy they'd watched grow was becoming someone whose name could stand beside her own and the other leaders, his group of merry bandits more than mere lawless thieves. Too soon, perhaps, but there was nothing to be done for that.

War always made children age far too quickly, Tundrame mused sadly. She thought of her own children, who even then were helping mix terrible potions to be used in battle.

The Gargoyles were next, their round forms rolling every which way as their leader rasped out that their Gateways would be lent not to the enemies of the Forest. One might think it wasn't much, as it was hardly a promise of warriors like those before, but it was the first travel ban the gatekeepers had enacted in over seven centuries — Tundrame thanked them as genuinely as she had the rest.

The entire crowd gasped when a congregation from one of the Fey Wylds made an appearance, the sound like a thousand trees rustling at once. A Wood Elf Guide with a lantern held high on a stick led the way, followed by tree-like Elves, furry Centaurs, bouncing Goblins, butterfly-winged Fairies, and many other sorts of Wood-based Fey. In their midst was a serene woman almost as tall as Cornelius had been, made of leaves and rushing water and other wild things of the forest.

She glided gracefully across the clearing, stopping in front of Tundrame's platform. Unlike the giant, she didn't kneel to get closer before speaking, her voice ancient and echoing and carrying the secrets of the longest lasting trees in every breath. "Ms. Tundrame of the Forest, I am known by many as Queen Hibiscus of the Woods. I have chosen to not stand by while this most ancient of Forests is destroyed. The Fey of my Wyld will assist in its defense as long as I command them."

Tundrame nodded her head in acknowledgment, but was careful not to offer thanks. The Elf had chosen to frame her offer of aid as merely being in her nature as a Wood Elf to protect the wild places, and the Headwitch knew better than to insult her by treating it as a favor instead.

Eric squeaked in delight when representatives from the Penock Kingdom showed up, running out of the crowd to hug the king's son. A member of the Court, a serious-looking Vampyr hiding under the shade of an umbrella, smacked his forehead with one of his four arms at his leader's lack of composure.

"Princey!" Eric cooed, nuzzling under the Prince's chin in the shameless way of the Spirikin.

"My favorite advisor," the Prince greeted warmly, being unminding towards the sudden close contact in the way that those used to the Spirikin tend to be. He patted Eric's head, chuckling at the purr he got in return for his action.

"My son is insistent that we offer our support to your cause," King Penock, a man who was somewhat overweight and covered in the finest of robes and jewels, explained jovially to Tundrame as the two boys whispered in the background. "I have taken his advice to heart. We may not have strength enough to match your magic, but our swords are sharp and our armor is sturdy."

"Our iron forgers are the best in the land," the Prince added after his father waved him forward. He stood at attention, his tone respectful but not submissive. In that moment, Tundrame could see why even rebellious creatures like her nephew were approving of the young king-to-be. "They can craft nearly anything, even the most delicate of runes, despite our kingdom's lack of magic. We are willing to offer their skill in smithing weapons for your kind to enchant, along with warriors to fight with you, if you will have us."

"We are grateful for your help, your majesties," Tundrame said sincerely. Unlike some of her kind, she did not look down on those without magic, even if her Magish nature meant she couldn't help but feel above them. She had been saved too many times by ones who had trained their bodies rather than with wands to not value them.

"What a delight, working alongside humans," Queen Hibiscus said serenely. If one did not know of the tensions between human and elven kinds, they might just think her serious.

"Oh, be nice, my queen," her Guide, a halfling named Jacaranda 'Jackie' O'Lynn, admonished without fear. "Humans can be quite fun, you know."

"A cheeky creature, you are," Queen Hibiscus told him with a smile.

"It's the Magish way, my Lady." Jackie chuckled, crouching to pat his caracal Familiar. He grinned at King Penock and his son. "You two in particular look *fun*."

"Should we be frightened?" the Prince whispered loudly to Eric as he followed his father to join the crowd, glancing at the suddenly mischievous-looking Fey congregation.

"Oh, most certainly, Highness," Eric confirmed, cackling as he cartwheeled away back to his Court. The energetic boy flinched, only half playfully, as his Vampyric subordinate began scolding him. "But Hen," Eric could be heard whining, "he's my friend, I can't just not say hi..."

The Elder Storm was another surprise, the ancient Wyrms coiling his long body down so his silver-white head was just above the clearing, blocking out the Sunbeasts' light (the Shadows present nodded approvingly at this development, even as the Lights purposely turned up their glow to counteract it).

The sky shook and rumbled when the Elder promised his Cloud's service in the Forest's defense. He said something vague about old debts before leaving his daughter

Stryke Starborn, a Spirikin child created with three parents yet without any of their knowledge, behind to represent the Stormlings of their Cloud while he rose to protectively circle the Forest in the sky above.

The Dragons were after that, swarming the skies by the hundreds, species large and small offering their support.

Even the Plantonians and Weedians called a truce in the interests of the Forest, though the two ambassadors whipped their roots at each other angrily when they thought no-one was looking.

The Dusties, the Smoke Maidens, the Rockeater Lizards — all those that made their homes in or around the Forest showed up to declare their alliance in the upcoming conflict.

The leaders of the seven Spiripa tribes made quite the entrance, dazzling in their majesty and grace, the Spirikin representatives accompanied by Casted Spirits of all shapes and sizes. The effect was somewhat ruined when Councilwoman Starborn, representing the most respectable Stargem Tribe, broke her composed expression with a grin and tackled Tundrame in a hug.

"You're worse than your son, Trix," Tundrame muttered, pushing her closest friend in the world off her and to the ground. Trixie just laughed, explaining breathlessly that all seven Tribes were in agreement that the forest was worth defending.

"Isn't that wonderful, Tunny?" Trixie asked. Tundrame didn't get to answer before her friend was drawn away by her children's calls, the Councilwoman being replaced by the Mother as she cooed over how proud she was that they were both representing their own groups.

More and more came, until the Sunbeasts migrated below the horizon and the sky grew dark. Lesser groups that were not technically nations showed up to swear protection, such as the artificial Diamond Hivemind led by a Spirikin girl, and the Florazoolo-gical army led by a rather mad Flowerborn botanist.

The last to show up was a human girl named Lyla, clutching a silver mirror in one hand. Most had heard of her, as she was good at gaining the friendships of the strangest beings. The Court of Fools all gave her exaggerated but fond bows, while random people in the crowd waved or saluted or called out to her.

None knew why she was there. Known and connected as she was, she was still just a healer's apprentice and an amateur jewelry maker. She had no armies or kingdom to

offer in aid. Tundrame gave her a questioning look as she made her way onto the platform, somewhat worried by the unending chuckles Eric was making under his breath — whenever he got that excited about something, Tundrame inevitably developed a terrible stress headache.

Taking a deep breath, Lyla held up the mirror. The sky brightened and the forest faded away. The inside of an ethereal temple formed around them, a green serpent with four leathery wings coiled on a throne at one end. All the Spiripa present howled out a wordless song in acknowledgment of their Lord Strenjling, the Concept Spirit of Life and Creation.

It was not Strenjling that addressed them, however, but rather the twinned Spirits of Time wearing human form. Order began with, "We of the Aligned Concepts have voted to help your delightful little Forest survive this next catastrophe."

"We can't help you mortals too much, else you'll never grow," Peace added in warning. Matching his brother's excited nature, he continued, "But the Weird Forest houses magic far too ancient for us to let it be risked. So we get to help you out!"

"This is going to be so much fun," Order crowed, his brother nodding in agreement. "We haven't actually openly joined in on a war in *millennium*!"

Many Concepts appeared to give their agreement; the Spirits of Love and their children; the Pathfinder; Reality and Delusion; the Spirit of Questions; the Spirit of Song; the Spirits of Theater; even the youngest Concept, the Spirit of Games, was allowed to join in. The Spirit of Winter, Strenjling's little brother, would not be allowed to fight, despite being older and more powerful than nearly all of them — but his many icy pets and monstrous snow beasts would be sent in his stead.

The young Spirit of Honesty tried to explain that he wasn't much of a fighter and would instead be baking them all some nice pastries to fuel them for battle, but his words were cut off by Mischief tackling him — the Spirit of Deception was growing bored of all the war preparations, and having her boyfriend chuckle at her tall tales of what she'd been up to seemed an appealing distraction.

"Lyla will represent us in your meetings," Strenjling explained. With a playful smirk, he added, "I trust her opinion far more than I do these ancient buffoons'." He spread a wing to gesture to his fellow Concepts, some of which actually weren't that ancient, laughing and ducking as offended exclamations were accompanied with sharp bolts of power.

Lyla lowered the mirror and the forest faded back into sight. The Time twins, along with the Spirits of Honesty and Deception, were the only Concepts to remain. Besides the Spirit of Knowledge, Tundrame internally corrected herself, but Booksmarts was almost always at her family's — and thus the Forest's — side. He didn't really count, even though he counted more to her than nearly anything else.

Tundrame looked out at the army before her. The Giants thumping their clubs in battle song. The Court playing small tricks in their boredom. The Spell Spirits and Gargoyles squabbling over whose portals were better. The Magi on their brooms racing Stormlings across the sky. The Fey dancing Fairy Rings into being. Creatures of water poking their heads out of the river to join their landbound compatriots. Humans and Ogres and Merkind and so many more.

The Forest had been grown long before any of them, even the most ancient of immortals, could remember. Beyond the Time Twins, anyways. It was led by the Forest Magi, and usually by Tundrame's own family, but was populated by thousands of species. It was one of the only mixed territories in all of Southpoint, and it was messy, loud, chaotic. It was filled with disputes and explosions and the rampaging experiments that resulted from different species' scientists getting to play together. It was a mysterious place changed and charged by eons of magical exposure. It was a home away from home, or just a home in general, for uncounted beings.

And now it was under threat, wicked forces taking up arms and declaring it an easy target due to the disorganized nature of its peoples. But when it came down to it, the Forest wasn't just a hodgepodge of bickering species and cultures.

It was a hodgepodge of bickering species and cultures that would do anything to defend it.

^I almost feel bad for our opponents, Mage Mine,^ Yin squawked in amusement. Tundrame very nearly agreed...

...but then a group of Mer convinced some Harpies to carry them so they could spray the Giants in the face with water, and all Voidrealms broke loose as a domino effect led the clearing to explode into chaos. It didn't help that Eric, influenced by Mischief's boredom and left unsupervised by his mother for 0.2 seconds, was having his Court actively make things worse.

Tundrame sighed deeply. This was going to be a long war...

— end of "A Time Of War" —