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Pangaza
Unbound
Chapter I



Micro E-book



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PANGAEA UNBOUND

2

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DreamQuest

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Elthrai awoke to the absence of sound. A deathly silence had overtaken the frozen mountain plateau. He pushed the dead bodies of his parents to the side. His tears were freezing to the side of his face in the harsh winter wind. He looked about him, to the sky, anywhere but at his mother and father who had sheltered him from the ice storm with their own body heat. His mind could not stand the horror and it fled back to the day his family had set off.

That had been a historic day for him. He had met Magister. Magister was the wisest and most powerful mage on the planet. The wizard had come to the woods of Loren seeking the aid of the best scout in the land, his mother, Sylverleaf. Magister had spoken of omens he had read that told of a coming confrontation with a dark lord who was unifying all the dark foes of the free peoples. His vision was blocked but legends told that Thanan the most potent of soothsayers dwelled with the lost kindred, the Deorsa tribe that had crossed the frozen peaks of the Gray Mountain. If they could find him then they might have a chance to prepare for the coming conflicts.

The need was great and so Sylverleaf agreed to undertake the journey. She wanted to make the journey alone but the trip would be years in the coming and going and Snapdragon decided that they should take the challenge as a family. Elthrai had just turned fifteen and it was time to begin his service to Kurnous, lord of the forests. He often worried

about Elthrai fitting in with the other wood Deorsa. Though he had been raised almost from birth by Sylverleaf and Snapdragon in the garrison, there were many people who did not accept him because of his heritage. This was added to the fact that he was bookish and excelled in things cerebral. He knew his wood lore and could handle a sword without cutting himself but he had no great passion for combat. Snapdragon hoped that this quest might harden his edges and give him a thirst for adventure. Sylverleaf said no at first but she had never been able to deny anything to Snapdragon.

The journey was exciting for Elthrai it was his first time far from home and he was learning new things from his parents every day. They traveled north from their forests of Loren to the foothills of the gray mountains. Their paths took them ever farther north until they reached a great desolate world of snow and rock that seemed to advance ever upward. That was where the true hardship began. Both of Elthrai's parents were adept at living off the land but the cliffs and shallow pathways gave them little to work with. After a month on the range they came upon tracks from a group of Oni. Sylverleaf had not expected to find their black breed here but it seemed no place was too far for their touch. The three of them followed the tracks that led to a frozen plateau where they found a group of Oni slaughtering



various animals they had caught for their fur. The Oni had thrown the unused carcasses to the fire and were busy attaching the furs to their cloaks in a crude fashion. Next to the fire was a cage full of great white cats. They were evidently the next to be skinned. Snapdragon thought for a moment and then sent Elthrai to set the snow leopards free as a distraction while he and Sylverleaf flanked the Oni. Elthrai raced to follow his father's directions. He had been taught well by his mother and he made no noise while he released the cats. The cats locked eyes with him and seemed to sense that they had a common enemy in the Oni. They raced into the camp throwing it into disarray.

The Oni scrambled everywhere grabbing for their weapons as the great cats attacked their former captors and when their forces had been spread out Snapdragon appeared almost out of nowhere and drove his sword into the tallest Oni. A fierce Oni with a long ragged scar across his eye confronted Elthrai as he tried to rejoin his family and for a moment he froze. He had never fought a real foe in his life. The Oni grinned maliciously and started to relentlessly batter at Elthrai's defenses. Elthrai parried every stroke using every move that his father had taught him but could not find an opening. Suddenly the Oni screamed in anguish and turned slightly leaving Elthrai an opening. He drove the point of his sword into the Oni heart and the monster tumbled to the ground. Standing behind the Oni was a white kitten that had

bit deep into the Oni ankle. Elthrai gazed around the battle and saw his father and mother fighting back to back. He hacked and slashed his way to his parents.

The Oni had recovered their wits but they had taken heavy losses and now the battle was more evenly matched and could go either way. That was when the ice storm began. One moment the sky was clear the next a gale force wind drove ice and snow into the melee. The blizzard pelted everyone and soon all thought of fighting was gone. The only thought was survival. Sylverleaf scanned the area but could find no place of refuge. She locked eyes with Snapdragon and then kissed him deeply. Elthrai's adopted parents wrapped their arms and cloaks around him and fell to the ground shielding him from the wind and using their bodies to keep him warm. He fought with them to run and find shelter but they would not relent. Soon all Elthrai could feel were icy darkness and cold and then he felt nothing at all.

Elthrai surveyed the battlefield again. It appeared he was the only survivor. He dug a crude grave for his parents. The cold earth bit into his hands making them bleed but he did not notice. After he was finished he wandered the area taking what supplies he could from the Oni. He was exhausted from digging and took a snow leopard cloak and after making a crude shelter slept. He woke to a gentle nipping on his arm. He half roused him-



self and found a small white kitten that was trying to curl up with his cloak. Elthrai looked down at it.

"It appears I'm not the only orphan this day. Well my little one I won't leave you alone and homeless. That at least is one lesson my father taught me. I shall name you for the wind that brought us together and cost us our parents. Come, Frostreaver, we have a task to complete."

Frostreaver and Elthrai traveled for another month and grew to be fast friends. They both sensed that they were all that they had in the world. At the end of those two months they came to the edge of a great forest shrouded in mist and darkness. They had finally passed over the mountains but Elthrai was not completely happy. The village seemed dark and unforgiving. Frostreaver whined when Elthrai put his foot on the path that led into the forest but the map that Magister had given his father indicated that this was the way to Thanan. Elthrai had scoffed when Sylverleaf had instructed he to memorize it because they would have the map and if not then he would have her but she had insisted. That he had lost both were now a reality for he been unable to find it after the ice storm. Elthrai walked slowly and then began to feel more at ease. This was a new place but still it was a forest and it felt like home compared to the treacherous mountain passes

Elthrai grew more confident and after a half day his

fear had faded completely. He knew that the destination was close and he thought that soon the hardship would be over, Suddenly Frostreaver stopped, his hackles rising and a low groan issued from the snow leopard. A moment later black shape exploded from the trees. The creature was as tall as two men and covered in fur. Elthrai pulled his sword while he whispered a prayer to Kronus. The creature came at him faster than he would have thought possible for a creature of its size. He swung his blade in a low arc but the creature was quicker and caught him a solid blow to the side of his head and darkness closed in on him.

It seemed hours later when he awoke. He looked about him and discovered that he was in a hut that seemed to have been grown into the tree around it. He turned slightly and saw that Frostreaver slept a few feet away. With a little effort he regained his feet though he was still a bit unsteady. When he rose, a tall lovely elf maiden came into view with hair of golden sunlight. She seemed to bring radiance to the room and Elthrai found himself instantly captivated by her beauty.

"I am Lecai. You are probably wondering how you are still alive. Well, Sasquatch is our guardian. He has the look of a fearsome beast but he is of no danger to friends."



"I . . ."

"You are in the Ashwood. We have lived in these woods since the time of the great journey. It has been almost 1000 years since we have seen anyone from outside our community. Who are you and where are you from? You have the mark of Huyu but I do not smell the taint of chaos on you."

"I am Elthrai a delegate from Magister the descendent of Sarnarion the phoenix king. He sent me to find help for what he feels will be the greatest struggle." Lecai looked happy and sad to hear this news.

"Then the war against Torao continues. We are not many but we will do what we can to help. My father, Thanan, will want to speak with your parents immediately."

"I am sorry he can't. They died on the journey here. Their quest is mine though and I will speak to your father. "

"I will summon him at once."

Lecai left the chamber and Elthrai bent down to examine Frostreaver. The cat was unhurt and merely slept. Elthrai leaned back against one of the ice walls and started to gather his thoughts of what he must tell Thanan. A moment later he was fast asleep again.

A low growling sound awoke him and got to his feet as Lecai entered. He started talking as soon as he was introduced to her father Thanan.

"My name is Elthrai and I bring greetings from Magister, Lord Thanan, my people are will soon be locked in conflict with a foe who dwarfs even Torao in evil and Malice. We are in need of your powers in prophecy if we are to unravel the mystery of his identity. Magister sent this letter with what information we have" Elthrai bowed low and handed Thanan an ornate scroll.

Thanan studied the letter intently for a moment then turned to his daughter.

"Lecai see to our guest's needs. I must make preparation for a great casting. Then I will discuss what I discover with the council of the glade."

The next month flew by for Elthrai. The council met every day. He was asked to speak at length of the present condition of the world and all he knew of the threat. While this was time consuming, it still left enormous amounts of time for him to occupy while the elders debated. Lecai stepped into that void. She taught him their language for much of it had change during the years of separation and began to teach him the rudiments of magic. She was amazed at how quickly he took to it and soon he was on the road to surpassing her. They spent long hours together and soon the beginning of love grew between them. Frostreaver also thrived under the Deorsa care once they were used to the idea of a great



cat who got bigger every day roaming the forest. Finally it was announced that they would reveal their decision in the morning.

The night before the Deorsa made their decision Lecai came to Elthrai telling him that he must leave. The council had decided that what happened in the outside world was not their problem and that Elthrai could never leave because he might reveal their location. Elthrai gathered his belongings and called to Frostreaver. . They traveled far that night and only camped when they neared exhaustion. They made camp at the edge of the forest and huddled together for warmth and comfort froth. Elthrai was awakened the next day by a cry of anger, and pain from Frostreaver. He vaulted from the tent and found himself with Thanan, Frostreaver in a net at his feet.

"You come in peace then steal my daughter. I should have slain you the moment you entered my kingdom."

"Better to die for something you believe in then hide from the cruelties of the world, old man. My parents died to bring that message to you and you were going to ignore it. Kill me quickly I can not bear to be polluted by you coward-ice anymore." Elthrai did not know where the strength he now spoke with had come but it resonated in his soul like the spirit of his father.

Thanan held his blade in anger and disbelief that the

Elthrai had spoken to him thus. His knuckles whitened with the force of grip. The blade began to descend when a cry came from the scouts to the South.

"You should be happy Elthrai you have brought death to us." Thanan dropped the blade at Elthrai's feet and turned to face the threat heralded by the scout's horns. The lost Deorsa rallied around their king. They had not seen evil for over a thousand years but they faced it with determination. Elthrai and Lecai raced to Thanan's side and despair entered their soul as they watched. A contingent of Oni marched across the mountain pass, at their forefront was a knight bedecked in chaos armor and bearing a scroll sealed with the sigil of Magister. The Deorsa let loose with a volley of arrows and death fell among the Oni. The Knight lifted his hands and suddenly a huge monstrous abomination rose from the back ranks. It stood almost twelve feet tall with great black wings that flowed from its back. The beast held a bloodstained axe in one hand and a barbed whip in the other. The Deorsa froze where they stood for a moment, all save Thanan who carried a blade that ad been made by the same smith that had crafted Sarnarion's armor. He leapt to the attack. The Mantikhorne swung at the tall elf as he charged but Thanan ducked under its slash and brought his great sword to bear, slicing the Beast across the chest and cutting almost to his heart. The



creature lashed out with his whip in retaliation plucking the blade from Thaana's hand leaving him defenseless to the Demon's counterstroke that decapitated the Deorsa king.

The horror snapped Lecai out of the fear that had possessed her and she yelled out a great battle cry and the Deorsa leapt to the attack. Elthrai raced with the Lecai and found himself confronted with the Knight. The knight attacked and Elthrai brought his blade up to parry but the axe cleaved through the Deorsa steel as if it was butter. The sword deflected the attack enough that the ax ripped clothing not skin and tore Elthrai's helm from his head. Elthrai's long black hair fell down his back and the mark of Huyu pulsed on his neck. The knight stumbled back.

"Master. . ." Elthrai had no idea what he was talking about but took the opening anyway and embedded the broken shard of his sword into the visor of the knight's armor. The knight dropped without a sound.

The Deorsa swept through the ranks of the Oni but wherever the Mantikhorne was, there was death and soon only Lecai and Elthrai were left standing. The Demon strode over the dead Deorsa bodies and lashed out with his whip entrapping the Deorsa princess in its coils. Lecai screamed in rage and horror and let loose a cry that was not meant for human ears. Elthrai had heard Lecai use it to communicate with the Sasquatch. The Mantikhorne snapped the whip and Lecai was

flung from her feet toward him. Elthrai grabbed Lecai's hand but was only dragged along. Elthrai and Lecai landed at the Abomination's feet and he laughed then brought one enormous hoof down onto Lecai's back snapping it like a twig. Elthrai struggled to his feet and brought his sword up. The Mantikhorne sneered and its gaze froze Elthrai where he stood paralyzed by its evil presence. Elthrai felt more than saw the guardian of the woods burst onto the scene. The Demon could not bring his great axe to bear and the Oni stopped in the tracks to watch the struggle. The battle seemed frozen for a long moment and then the Mantikhorne's head shot out and its teeth sank deep into the throat of the Sasquatch. The great hairy beast fell backward dead before it hit the ground.

Elthrai knew that his life could be measured in seconds but all he could feel was rage. This world had taken everything from him and he had enough. Somewhere deep within him a door opened and a vast knowledge of magic unleashed itself within his mind. He brought his hands up and focused all his will, his rage and sorrow and used that new power to give his emotions form. An explosion of fire and raw chaos erupted around the approaching army. Nothing that was within the conflagration remained standing and after the blast died down there was just ashes of the Mantikhorne. Elthrai fell to



the ground spent and exhausted. Mercifully he passed out.





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