

Plant

Tournament

School

Impeding doom from Outside war

Dark D's

Chapter 1

Two figures hurried through an empty street. The night sky was black, the moon hidden behind a blanket of invisible clouds. The wind whistled through the air. Raindrops lashed harshly against the traveller's faces. They tried in vain to cover themselves, pulling white hoods down past their noses and trudging forward in the cold night.

The street slowly started veering to the right and drifted uphill. The travellers kept moving, staring down at the ground below them. Water rushed between the stone embedded in the street, and tredded down to the streets below.

The travellers kept on their way. Any other night they would be home, beside a fire, with a good book and a good drink. Any night, except tonight.

They continued on until they reached the top of the hill, then two more blocks north. Finally, when they reached a square building, one traveller grabbed ahold of the other. He nodded in towards the door and immediately the other understood.

"This is it?"

The first nodded again.

They both made their way up the stairs to the main entrance, swiftly opened the door and tumbled clumsily inside.

"Is there a light?" one whispered.

"We can't risk it," his voice was barely audible.

"You'll have to lead then."

They crept through the deserted building. It was nearly as dark on the inside as it had been on the city streets outside. Half scoping, half feeling their way around, the two crept silently through the building.

Every so often, a light from the outside would shimmer in, lighting the rooms as they past them by. They were in a massive hallway, with rooms lining either side. Some were empty, some were stored with supplies, and many had their doors shut to the outside world. They continued on, down through the hall, the creaking of the floorboards becoming seemingly louder with every step.

"Do you know where you're going?" one whispered loudly.

There was no response.

Still they stealthily carried on, never moving too quick or too slow, but steadily. 'It's so like him, never commit and never retreat' he thought to himself.

The rooms drifted past, and the lights began to fade as the night settled in and the wanderers found the safety of their homes.

Suddenly there was a loud crunching sound.

“Sorry.”

They stopped and took some time and stared directly at the floor beneath them, giving their eyes a few minutes to adjust to the darkness. Sure enough, the ground was littered with random bits of garbage and litter.

“It looks like the remnants of a celebration!”

“We’re close.”

They took a few steps before they could hear it. It was distant at first, but straining the sound was unmistakable. A distant hum of crying lifted their ears.

They continued forward, still carefully, but unmistakably more excited now. Their footsteps began more swift, and the crying became louder and louder. The sound was unmistakable, it was a child.

They kept forwards, edging swiftly closer and closer to the sound. Soon it became more distinguished. It was not just one child, there were multiple children, all screeching as loud as they could. An entire chorus called the travellers to them.

They moved through the deepening debris.

“You’d think they could have cleaned up after themselves.”

Again the other did not respond, but held up his hand to indicate silence. They crying was louder than ever. It was coming from the room across from them.

They stepped towards the room. There was glass window meant for viewing, but that was not what they were there for. The door to the room was locked, but they quickly jarred it open and forced their way inside.

The sound inside was deafening, the shrieking from each child was unbearable in the otherwise silent night.

“Augh, what do you think they want?”

“Haha, they’re infants, so I’d say food, or company.”

“Or maybe they just can’t stand the noise the other two are making...” He walked around them, peering down and inspecting each of them. “Are you sure?”

“I’m positive.”

“Triplets?”

“No, two are brothers, and the other is-“

“So, when are you going to tell me which one it is?”

The man smiled.

“Is it the one we expected?”

The man took a moment, looking down at each child with thoughtful eyes. He removed his hood, his clothes finally starting to dry in the warm room. He smiled again and turned to the other.

“Yes.”

Six years later

Chapter 2

“Hey!”

“Haha!”

“Stop it!”

“Come on! Lets play Fire Ball!”

“You always want to play Fire Ball!”

“Yeah!”

“You know I can’t play.”

“Yeah, come on forfive, lets just play something else.

“Oh come on, Fire Ball is so much fun!”

Suddenly the ball the boy was holding burst into flames.

“NOOOO... DON’T!!”

“Come on!” the boy hit it toward the other.

“Ahh, forfive!”

A shot of fire appeared from nowhere. It connected with the ball and sent it straight back to forfive.

“Ahh, no advanced moves!” he complained, catching the ball. He turned irritably to the third boy, who was smiling back at him. He took a deep breathe, “fine, whatever. I’m going to find some people who know how to play the *right* way.”

Forfive took the ball and headed off down the street without another word. The other two boys just stood, looking at one another.

“You want to play elementals?”

“You can’t play that!”

“Just pretend!”

“Okay. Lets go to the garden.”

“The maze?”

“Yeah!”

The two boys hurried up the street as fast as they could. They learned to be careful with their steps, as the stones in the road were not always even. They past by many shops and pedestrians.

“You really should try to learn the elements though Seven.”

“Yeah.”

Some people laughed while others sneered as they raced by. It didn't matter though, they only saw their faces for a second before they had blown past them. They carried on, through one street and down another. They both knew the way home by heart, and didn't even need to think about it as they determined the shortest route.

Sprinting the entire way, it wasn't long before a large gate appeared at the end of a long straight road.

“First one to the gate wins!” Seven called to his brother, and he buckled down to push for the last mile.

They ran faster and faster. With each step their smiles grew wider and wider, their ultimate goal drawing near. With just a few meters to go, Seven pulled out in front, and crossed the finish line seconds before his brother.

He turned back to gloat, and his brother rushed past him in a flurry.

“First one to the maze wins!” he called back to Seven.

Not one to be outdone, Seven quickly sprinted forwards and chased his brother across the front lawn, down the side of the house and to the southwest corner of the lot. When he next saw his brother he was standing in the middle of the field waiting for him.

“Earth elemental ground smash!” yelled Seven, jumping up his brother's back and landing on his shoulders. His brother turned and Seven fell off and hit the ground with a thud.

“I'm an Earth elemental too! Ground smash!” he yelled, and belly flopped onto his brother.

“Augghhhh!!!!” Seven yelled, barely able to breathe. “Haha, Forcix, haha. Forcix get off!”

He tried pushing him off but Forcix just made himself go limp and Seven was unable to push off his dead weight. Soon they both gave up and just started laughing. Forcix for amusement, and Seven because he was unable to breathe.

“Forcix get off your brother!” came a shrill voice from the house. He did not listen and soon another, much louder voice repeated, “Forcix!”. He rolled off, crushing Seven as he did so. Now free, Seven tackled his brother and they both rolled through the grass.

“Stop it! Both of you!”

“Oh come on mom.”

“Don’t get me started. You two are always fighting.”

“Yeah but not for real.”

“Yeah not for real.”

“It looks real enough to me, and anyone else who see’s you.”

Rather than quit, the brothers decided that to mean she would rather they enter the maze and continue the battle there. Both knew what the other was thinking, and quickly hopped up and raced for the maze.

They tore through the maze, bumping casually into one another as they turned left, right, left, left and then the final leg stretched out before them. The maze opened to a final straightaway and the brothers raced as fast as they could through the runway.

In the center was an enormous fountain. A stone ring circled the outside, and then an inner ring supported the intimidating stone figure in the center. The soldier in the center wore an impenetrable armor, his chest, arms and legs were clad with heavy armor. His helm was carved in the image of a great bird, with two horns coming off the top and stretching on back of the helmet. Both brothers knew him well, their parents had spoken of him quite often, even though they were still quite young. He was the first great ____ warrior, the protector of their beliefs and their way of life. Their father had often said that, had it not been for this great warrior, the spirit of the ____, and everything they valued would have died long ago.

“I’m an Earth elemental!” Forate exclaimed, and began stomping around in the field.

“Me too!” Seven called out, and followed his brother.

“We have to be different elements,” Forate explained, “like elements don’t fight against each other.”

“But you always get to be the earth elemental.”

“That’s because I’m bigger and stronger than you.”

“No you’re not,” Seven shouted back. He ran at his brother and tackled him. But this time, Forate wasn’t playing and stood tall. Seven slammed into him and fell back onto the ground. Shock spread over his face as he looked up at his brother, but he quickly wiped it from his face with another look. This time he was determined to knock him over.

“Fine, you be the earth elemental. I’m going to be Fire!” Forate held his hands in front of his body. “Fssssssssssshhhhhhhhhhh,” he cried at the top of his lungs. “I just created a fireball and incenerated you.”

“No you didn’t!”

“Yes I did.”

“Nuh-uh, I made a huge mountain to protect myself.”

“You can’t make a mountain that fast.”

“Yup, it reflected the attack back at you”

“Mountains can’t do that!”

“Mine can!”

They continued running through the maze until the sky turned red, and eventually settled in behind the distant hills. Even in the dark, they had no trouble finding their way back through the maze. Seven even reminded his brother as they passed the low branch that poked out at their feet. After finding their way out of the maze, they crossed the large backyard, now empty, up the back steps and into the house.

“Where have you been?”

“In the maze,” the brothers responded simultaneously.

“Well you missed supper. Get cleaned up and then come down and eat,” insisted their mother. They both passed her and headed obediently upstairs.

“Who won?” called out their father, he was unseen in an adjacent room.

“I did!” they both shouted back.

“I fireballed Seven,”

“No I blocked it, you fireballed yourself.”

“Upstairs, both of you!” shoed their mother.

“You both should spend less time killing each other,” he called after them, “and more time killing your enemies!”

“They shouldn’t be spending their time *killing* anyone! Honestly Archon why do you encourage them? Do you really think they need to learn about such things at their age?”

Archon was silent in the lonely room, and Rose, their mother, stormed from the room to attend to the children.

“Hurry and eat your breakfast.”

“Ugh, its so early.”

“I’m not hungry yet.”

“You’ll be starving if you don’t eat something. Hurry up now, you don’t want to be late on your first day.”

The brothers stared down gloomily at the breakfast before them. On any other day it would have been fantastic. But for some reason it did not look as appetizing as usual, and instead of eating they began pushing food around the plate.

“I was excited on my first day,” Rose encouraged. “I still remember it. It was a lot of fun, I got to meet my teacher, and made some new friends.”

“But we don’t need any new friends.”

“Are you nervous about leaving your brother?”

The brothers quickly glanced towards one another and immediately shook their heads.

“Well, if you ask me, I think you both are going to have a great time.” She sighed. “Alright, grab your things and lets get going, we have a long walk ahead of us.”

The brothers slid from the table and went to grab their things. Weeks prior, they had been instructed to grab empty books and painting supplies. At the time it had sounded like fun, but the closer the date became the less excited they had become.

“I’ll be back shortly,” Rose instructed a servant. He nodded and held the door as she and the brothers made their way out the door, down over the entrance stairs, across the main walkway and to the main road.

The walk was fairly silent, or it would have been if not for their mother. Rose was determined to keep their spirits up, and told tales of her past school experiences, good and bad. The boys weren’t sure why she was so upbeat, they didn’t see how anything good could come from the situation. In fact, each of them was dreading the next few minutes.

They continued walking, down through the streets until they came to a large empty field. It was quite large and fairly empty, the perfect spot for sporting events and running. On either side were two ominous buildings.

They walked to the one on the east side of the field first. The field was fenced off, and they followed the fence around until it opened up into a vast, and very intimidating, wooden entrance.

“Well this is it.”

“Are you coming in?”

“You don’t want your mother coming in with you on your first day of school do you?” she asked, smiling.

“No...”

“Do you have all your supplies?”

“Yep.”

“Do you have your lunch?”

“I think so... Yep.”

“Alright Forsix,” she kissed him.

“Mom!”

“Have fun on your first day!” she waved to him. Forsix waved off and slowly made his way towards the building. He pulled the heavy wooden door open and looked back at two of them before going inside.

“Are you ready?” Rose asked, Seven nodded back. They took two steps before Seven voiced a concern they had discussed many times before.

“Mom, how come I can’t go to school with Forsix?”

“Not all children go to that school Seven. Some children go to that school, and others go to the school you are going to.”

“But what about if I want to go to that school?”

“Because your brother is going there?”

“And because I want to learn all the cool moves like he knows!” Seven began punching the air and making ‘whooshing’ sound effects.

“You get to learn lots of other cool stuff though.”

“I want to learn that though!”

“Oh... Seven...”

“Why can’t I?” Seven shouted at her.

“Seven, some people are short right?”

Seven nodded.

“Some people are tall, some people have brown hair, some people have blonde.”

Seven nodded along.

“And some people can learn the elements, and some people don’t.”

“Can I ever learn them?”

“You’ll learn about them, and you’ll learn other things too.”

“Will I be able to beat up Forsix?”

“You’re not beating up your brother! Now, are you ready? Do you have all your supplies and your lunch.”

Seven nodded back at her.

“Alright go on then.”

Seven headed off to the school and did not look back.

“So how was your first day?” Rose asked her sons.

“Great, look at what I painted!” Seven handed her a dirty grey canvas drawing with white paint scribbled all over it.

“Oh...” she stammered. After examining the painting carefully we was forced to ask, “and what is it supposed to be?”

“Its the Air crest. I was the only one in the class to draw it.”

“Its very nice dear.”

“Why did you choose Air?” Archon inquired from across the dinner table. His mouth sounded as though it was half filled with food.

Seven only shrugged, and Rose turne her attention to Forsix. “And how was your day?”

“My day was great!” Forsix replied excitedly. “Watch this!” Forsix reached over and placed his hand on top of his glass. Immediately ripples began to form,

and after a few seconds it looked as though the water was trembling inside the glass.

“Wow,” Rose squealed.

“How long did they teach you this today Forsix?” Archon asked.

“A couple hours. I was the first in the class to get it.”

“Oh, did others get it as well?”

“Some of them, but I did it first! And I’ve never been able to do water before.”

“That’s great Forsix!”

“Tomorrow we are going to start with Fire. I can’t wait to show off my Fireblast.”

“Don’t get carried away though...” his mother warned.

“Most of the people can’t even create one yet. I can’t wait to show them!” Forsix was practically bouncing in his chair.

They continued through their dinner. Forsix spent most of it explaining his first elemental class, which Rose and Archon were very interested to hear. On their first day they had gone through introductions, recess, lunch, and then just gotten into the Fire elemental before breaking for the day.

Seven had a very different day, at his school they hadn’t learned so much about the elements themselves, but they had started in to the history. The teacher had shared some very interesting stories on how the first elements were formed.

“My teacher told me that the first elemental was sitting around a dinner table like us. When he saw the water in his glass he thought he could control it.”

“Water is usually thought to be the easiest for early elementals,” Archon added.

“That’s what we are doing tomorrow!” Forsix exclaimed, a smile beaming on his face.

Chapter 3

Seven was walking along a narrow walkway. It was dark on either side and he could barely see a meter ahead of him. He walked along the corridor, unsure of where he was going or what he was looking for. The darkness around him was so complete, he wasn't sure if he was in a narrow hallway or an open field. 'Where did this blackness come from?' he wondered to himself, continuing to wander forward.

He continued forwards, and even though he had no idea what he was doing, the logic of it all made perfect sense to him.

As he walked he gradually began to notice that the surroundings were not changing. The blackness would not lift, the dirt walkway and the texture seemed to be the same no matter where he went. Also, although the area around him was lit, there was no source. It seemed to be emanating from him, as though he himself was illuminating the total darkness.

At this another realization came in, there was another light far into the distance. Seven peered at it though it was too far away and impossible to make out. He stared at it, and in a flash an enormous burst of flames rushed towards him. Seven lunged out of the way, and the fireball seemed to vanish after it passed him. Then a loud sound rumbled behind him, and Seven instinctively knew he had to run. He ran and ran as fast as he could, and still the sound came closer. A giant boulder, at least five times his height, chased after him through the darkness.

Fear lifted Seven's legs and he instantly began to run faster and faster. He was panting coughing but he dared not slow down. The faster he ran, the closer the boulder seemed to chase him. He was about to give up when the darkness lifted slightly. Ahead of him, to his left was a slight dip.

Seven immediately turned and raced for it. Taking his first step sideways, his shoes sank down almost to his kneecaps. Seven looked down, expecting to see mud or a bog of some kind, but the darkness was too thick. The rumbling instantly became louder and Seven forced his legs up through the murk. It was thick, and he was barely able to maintain his balance. Still the thundering boulder grew louder behind him. Holding his breath and using every muscle he had, Seven forced himself through it. He pulled his legs up and pushed them down with every step, lifting his knees high into the air to plow through the heavy bog.

Ahead of him he could see it, just a tiny hole where he could jump into. The bog here was deeper than ever, and the thundering he knew was just behind him. Seven knew he had only an instant to seek cover. At the last second, he put all he had into a jump towards the hole. His body leapt up, free of the mud clinging to him below. He looked down and an instant of relief came to him as he knew he would make it.

But the hole remained there, and remained, and suddenly Seven realized he wasn't coming down towards it at all, he was suspended in mid air. Instantly petrified, he looked back only to see a giant stone boulder moving at a blistering speed and only inches from his nose.

"Gah!" Seven awoke violently and bolted upright. It took him a few seconds to come to his senses and remember where he was. Panting heavily, Seven closed his eyes and tried to slow his breathing. He remembered he was in his own bed, in his own house, with his family. When he opened his eyes again the room seemed comfortably familiar. Taking a deep breath, Seven removed the blankets from the bed and slid out.

Rubbing his eyes, Seven lumbered towards the door of his room. He stepped outside and closed it softly behind him. Through the windows he could see the stars twilight sprinkling the night sky. 'I wonder what time it is?' he wondered to himself. Although it was quiet in the house at this time of night, the sounds of the house seemed to chase Seven as he walked along the upstairs balcony. Loud creaks and snaps, that he could never hear in the day, seemed to echo down the decorated walls.

Still half asleep, Seven held onto a rail that lined the upstairs walkway. Looking over that, he could see the much of the living area and part of the kitchen below.

Eventually he stumbled across the stairs, and Seven slid down each one carefully. When he reached the bottom he could hear voices coming from the kitchen. Something stopped him, and he strained his ears to hear the conversation.

"Are you worried?"

"I'd rather not discuss it."

"You always say that."

"Honestly Rose, there's nothing we can do about it. If they come, they come, and I'll ... we'll deal with it then." There was an uneasy silence that even Seven could feel. "Can you believe he drew this?" Archon's tone had changed.

"You are obsessed with that," Rose replied.

"I think it is remarkable. He said he was the only one in the class to pick that element."

"Why does it mean so much to you? Maybe he just liked the shape?"

"Haha, maybe" Archon admitted. "Remember that it was only formally recognized nine years ago."

“And about time. You can see the effects everywhere. Just because we can’t see the element itself does not make it any less so.”

“Agreed. And now it is heralded as one of the four basic elements. A cornerstone to our understanding and development. But there are still many who shy away from this element. The mere fact that it was the last element to be accepted is proof of that.”

“Maybe a younger generation will not see it that way.”

“Yes, and he has always been that way. Modern, forward thinking, and not afraid to challenge for what he believes in.”

“And can you believe his brother? I’d never have imagined him to have come so far already.”

“It is remarkable.”

“Do you think... maybe...?”

“I don’t know.”

“He’s years ahead of anyone else in our nation though. You were almost twice his age before you reached his level.”

“His skills are incredible.”

“...but..?”

“Nothing... I’m not sure...” Archon trailed off. “But, if there’s one thing I am sure of,” Archon’s voice became softer, “our boys will take separate paths, but both are destined for greatness.”

Chapter 4

Seven slept very comfortably that night. After hearing his parents speaking the night before, his head was filled with pleasant dreams. He imagined himself, years from now fulfilling a great role. When his mother awoke him that morning for school, he lept out of bed with a smile on his face. Getting himself ready for school, Seven tried desperately to remember the dream that had made him so happy. He tried to recall where he had been or what he was doing, but it had all slipped away before he even went to breakfast.

The following days of school were very similar to the first. Rose walked them to school again that day. Both Forsix and Seven rushed excitedly into the school and came home with interesting stories. At the elemental school, they touched on theory, history, and physical activities. The teacher had even done a few elemental demonstrations which got Forsix even more excited for what awaited him. Seven, on the other hand, learned more the academics. Math, science, communications, and art were the main focus' for non-elementals. Similar to Forsix, they learned history, although sometimes it was a different history.

“My teacher says that earth elementals created the great divide hundreds of years ago!”

“Well my teacher says that the earth moves all by itself.”

“The earth can't move byitself!”

“Yes it does!”

“Mom! Seven is telling lies.”

“And Forsix is being stupid.”

“Don't call your brother stupid Seven.”

“Well the earth can move.”

“Mom can the earth move by itself?”

“It can move together and it can tear itself apart.” Seven smiled defiantly back at his brother. “But, there are great elementals powerful enough to do the same thing.” Forsix grinned smugly back at him.

“So who created the Great Divide then?”

“No one knows that Seven, not everything about our past is known, some things are just a mystery.”

Small arguments such as this were rare, but were present enough that Rose decided to step in.

“There aren’t any other families here who have members going to both schools. You two should learn from each other.”

“That’s boring,” Seven stated.

“Yeah,” agreed Forsix.

“Well, what about if we make it a competition?” The brothers attention peaked. “How about, the person who can tell me something that the other person learned every day gets a treat.”

“I know one! Forsix said after water, fire was the second element to be discovered.”

“Yeah.. well.... Um... ah...” Forsix stumbled for a bit. “Wait, Seven showed me the symbols for each of the elements.”

“That doesn’t count!” Seven shouted.

“Yes it does,” Forsix contended.

“Looks like I’ll have to get you both something for tonight.” Rose stopped thought to herself, and marched off. The brothers eagerly chased after her.

The next few days at school went failry smoothly. At the end of every day, the brothers traded the secrets of what the other had learned that day. At first it was only small, non-important lessons, but as time passed they actually grew an interest in what the other was learning. Forsix had actually brought up a few of the ideas in his own class.

“I’m not sure that is a good idea,” Rose warned him, when he was bragging about correcting the teacher on one of her stories that afternoon.

“Why?”

“Well, Forsix,” Rose struggled to find the words, “you need to respect your teacher, and let her teach the class.”

“But Seven’s teacher said...”

“That’s Seven’s school. You need to respect your teacher and listen to her. If you want to teach the class you can do that when you’re older.”

“I don’t want to be a teacher.”

“Oh?”

“I want to be a soldier!”

Rose’s heart stopped. “You do?” she forced, trying to sound as naturally as possible.

“Yup!”

“Well, you are only young. You still have a lot of time to figure out what you want to be. You might change your mind later on.”

“Nope, I’m going to be a soldier. And everyone in my class is going to become one too!”

Rose sighed to herself. She had brought up these concerns long before. It was well known that the elemental school was practically a military school. Almost every student who graduated became a soldier. It was something she had struggled with when deciding their schools. Looking at her little boy at the age of 6, it was hard to imagine him on the field of war amidst one of the great battles. She secretly wished for a better future for him, for him and his brother. But deep down, she knew that was all it was, a wish.

In the second week of school things began to settle down. The brothers were beginning to get used to attending school everyday. Learning new things and completing their assignments each day. But they still looked forward to the time they spent together. There was only difference. Forsix now needed limitations when wrestling with his brother. It was something he was unused to, and he did not quite understand it. After all, it wasn’t as if Seven had any limitations, he could do whatever he wanted, whatever his abilities allowed him to do. But not Forsix, he was not allowed to use his elemental powers against his brother. Well, at least not in their presence. They still often fought each other in the maze, and when they did it was all out.

Forsix was careful not to use any move that could hurt his brother. Not after their first fight. Seven had lunged straight at Forsix, leaving himself wide open to a fire attack. If he had done nothing, Seven would have tackled him, so Forsix reacted instinctively and sent a fireball in his direction. Seven dodged it and it hit a nearby bush. When Archon found it and learned they had been fighting, he was furious.

But honestly, Forsix didn’t see what the big deal was. Even with his elemental powers, Seven won as many fights as he lost. Forsix loved to train with his brother. Many times, although he wasn’t sure how, Seven would be on the defensive and come out on the strong side of an attack. He had a way of turning the battle to his favour that kept Forsix guessing. But neither brother cared for how it worked, they were just playing with one another.

After only a month, Forsix was well ahead of his class. Concepts that his classmates struggled with were second nature to him, and his elemental prowess skyrocketed up like no other student in the school.

Seven loved it as well, as Forsix often showed off his moves and some were very spectacular. And also, when they did play fight, Forsix was becoming a big challenge, and always had something new to throw at him.

During one of their fights, this one over who was the favorite child, Forsix decided to try a new move he had been working on for days. It was fairly advanced, but Forsix was determined to get it right. Unfortunately, this time was not it, and the move failed. Seven quickly latched onto Forsix and wrestled his unprepared brother to the ground. When Forsix got up, he saw he had a very red, very noticeable scrap along his left arm.

Seven examined it "Mom's going to know we've been fighting again"

"Yeah..." Forsix agreed.

And they were right. When they tried to sneak up to their rooms later that night, Rose caught sight of Forsix's wounded arm, and gave each of them a stern lecture that night.

"I don't know why you both insist on fighting each other so often!" he stated irritably.

"It's just for fun mom."

"Yeah you're making too big a deal out of it."

"This is a big deal!" she declared sternly, grabbing Forsix's arm. "I don't want to see any more of this. Understood?"

The boys nodded their heads. They would always remember that night, as it was the first time they would go to bed without supper.

The next day few days at school were rather ordinary. The weeks and months passed by in a blaze, and both the brothers began to grow up very quickly. There was one day where this was especially true, not because of what happened during school, but because of what happened after.

Rose had stopped walking the boys to school, at their request. Instead, they would meet up before and after school and make the walk together. It wasn't far, only about 20 minutes or so. And this way they were able to save themselves the embarrassment of being the only children whose mother escorted them around the city.

One day was of special note, in the middle of the school year. A fresh snow had fallen the night before, and the ground was blanketed by white. Tiny patterns of footsteps weaved around the buildings and fields, and thousands of footprints showed the adventures of hundreds children from earlier in the day.

A week prior, when Forsix and Seven had just begun walking home by themselves, Seven managed to get out of school early on one day. The teacher had thought it would be nice to let them out a little early with the holiday season upcoming. And while most students raced home to enjoy their afternoon, Seven had decided to wait for his brother. Besides, it would give him a reason to tour the elemental school for once.

Seven had always wanted to see the inside of the school. Forsix's stories about the elemental powers and teacher's demonstrations always sparked Seven's imagination, he imagined it to be a spectacular place.

When he was let out early, Seven did not hesitate to cross over the large playing field and into the other school. He knew non-elementals were not supposed to enter, 'but it's a silly rule anyway', he thought to himself as he entered.

It wasn't at all like he imagined. The walls were bare and made of stone. The entire building had a very natural feel to it. The colors were brown and green, and aside from the rough texture of the stone the walls were very plain. It was quite different from his school, where colored painting and writings from students littered the halls.

Seven wandered through the halls, standing on his toes to peer into classes as he passed them by. He couldn't see Forsix in any of them. He continued wandering, and in what seemed like no time at all a bell had rung. Students immediately began filing out of the rooms and in seconds the hallways were flooded with children. Many of them were much taller than Seven, which made it difficult to find his way back.

What made it even more difficult was that the layout of the classrooms and hallways seemed to wind around. Seven was not used to this, as his school was shaped more like a grid, with every junction at 90 degrees. It was quite easy to navigate, even for someone as young as him.

But this school was not like that. The paths intersected at odd angles. Retracing his steps was more difficult than Seven anticipated, and it wasn't long before he got lost.

Seven wandered aimlessly through the halls for a long time. Rather than becoming familiar, he found himself just becoming more lost. Any exit he found was not the one correct one, and he knew his brother would be waiting for him by now.

Many of the students had cleared out while Seven was still roaming the halls. He was considering entering the next class and asking one of the teachers for help, when six boys exited one of the classes. They bustled loudly out of the classroom and headed straight for him. Seven eyed them curiously as they approached.

Most of them paid no attention to him, but only boy on the side called out to him.

“Hey kid, where’re you going?”

Seven stopped and just looked at the boy. He was at least twice as tall as Seven, dark hair, and kind of a square face. His tone was not inviting.

“You lost?” one of the others asked.

“I’m... looking for my brother,” Seven responded.

“Follow me, alright?” another boy said, and the group started to walk. Seven trailed along by them as they zigzagged through the school. Seven had no idea where they were headed, but eventually they stopped in front of a set of cupboards. The boys opened them and began to taking out items.

“So how come you didn’t just follow the crowd when everyone else left?” one the boys asked.

“I don’t know, everyone went one way and I wanted to go the other way,” he responded simply.

“That doesn’t make any sense...” the boy laughed. Seven didn’t care for his tone, as though he was mocking him. If it had been Forsix, he would have known exactly how to handle it. But, against someone twice his size and much bigger than him, Seven chose to remain still and quiet.

The boys quickly finished and then made their way down the halls in a different direction.

“So what’s your best element kid?”

“I don’t have one.”

“Everyone’s got a good one. You know, one that they are better at than any other.”

“Not me,” Seven answered truthfully.

“Which one did you pick up easiest?”

“None of them,” he answered back.

The boys just shook their heads and carried on. At length they reached the front door that Seven recognized. They went outside, where only a handful of stragglers were left.

"Is your brother here?" one of them asked.

"Yeah!" Seven shouted, half excited and half relieved. "Forsix is just over there," he pointed out.

"Alright see you around."

"You probably won't see me," Seven stated. The boys turned and stared, puzzled, at him. "I don't even go to school here."

"Where do you go?"

"Across the field."

"There, at J. I. Osmond?" Seven wasn't sure on the name but nodded his head. "You're not an elemental?"

"Nope!" he said proudly, and walked over to join his brother.

The group of boys took glances at both Seven and Forsix before continuing on.

"Where have you been!" Forsix exclaimed, irritated to have been waiting out in the cold all the while.

A week later a similar situation occurred, except this time Forsix was the one that was let out early. Seven got out about a half an hour later, and immediately went to meet his brother. As he approached the school, he saw a group of almost eight boys, and they looked like they were surrounding something. There were a few onlookers in the distance, but no one else wanted to approach whatever the boys were looking at. Since it was on his route anyways, Seven decided he would try and take a peek.

As he approached, his walk paced slowed. Seven tried to peer around the boys but they were too big, and it was difficult to make anything about beyond them. Eventually Seven restarted to standing on his toes to try and peer over them, but still no luck. He was about to pass them by when a familiar voice rang in his ear.

"Just go away!" the voice said. Seven instantly recognized his brother's frustrated tone. He was extremely irritated, and had obviously had his fill of

whatever was going on. The boy's surrounding him just laughed amongst themselves.

Seven immediately went over to the circle to see what all the commotion was about.

"We're just asking a question," he laughed at him.

"I don't want to talk to you anymore, just leave me alone!" Forsix shouted back at them. He tried to break through the circle but two of the boys held him back.

Seven just reacted. He didn't understand what was happening, but he could see the look on his brother's face, and that was enough. He charged at one of the boys and checked him from behind. The boy fell hard to the ground.

"Leave him a-" Seven started to speak but instantly lost his breathe. A sharp needle like pain ripped through his body as a hard shot of water impacted his stomach and sent him to the ground. Winded, and gasping for air, he looked up at the circle of boys.

"Don't mess with us kid!" one of the boys shouted at him. He began to advance on Seven when Forsix lunged at him, tackling him to the ground and rolling off him. Seven got up and ran towards his brother. One of the boys saw this and made a move. But instantly a fireball shot past him and he stopped. The two brothers then made a run for it. They grabbed each other's arms and ran as fast as they could down the field.

Unfortunately for them, the other boys were much bigger, and it did not take long for them to catch up. The brothers continued running, fast. They didn't dare look back but they could feel the older boys just behind them. Then suddenly, both of them tripped over something and the fell and slid along the stone road. They managed to brace themselves with their arms, but skid left them covered in blood. A sharp pain in Seven's side shot through his body again. He felt numb.

A sudden trodding of footsteps meant that the other boys were on them, instinctively, the brothers turned over and readied themselves for a fight. They had spared with each other enough times to know how to push aside the pain. But their wrestling had not prepared them for this fight. This was real.

Two boys approached first, a furious look in their eyes as they readied two water blast attacks. The brothers forced themselves to get up, and had just gotten to their knees when the attacks came.

Forsix shot a fireball that collided with the water blast. But the water dispersed the fire and shot right through. Forsix was hit with the full force of the blast and was knocked back.

The second boy readied the same attack. A sense of desperation took over Seven. He wasn't sure if it was fear or bravery, but he took everything he had and lunged towards the attacker. The boy shot the water blast and Seven held his left arm over his head and turned away his face. He felt the water slam against his arm, and a light spray come down over the back of his head and neck. But, to his own surprise, he was still moving forward.

He slammed himself as hard as he could into the boy. Caught off guard, he stumbled a few steps backwards. The second boy reached out for Seven, and he stepped out of the way, then jumped onto his back and reached up to put his arms around his neck. Seven had just gotten a decent headlock in place when one of the other boys grabbed ahold of his shirt collar and pulled him away. Holding on with all his might, Seven latched on and refused to let go.

Suddenly, the sharp pain shot through his body. This time it was unbearable. He could feel a large fist penetrating through his rib cage, and his body fell limp to the ground.

Seven lay there for what felt like an eternity. Every so often he could feel shots of warmth washing over him. He opened his eyes to see fireballs shooting just over his body. Turning his head, he could make out a figure shooting fireballs as fast and as powerful as he'd ever seen. The figure was blurred and his vision was hazy. His head throbbed with pain. But as the figure approached Seven recognized his brother.

Holding his breath and bracing himself for the pain, Seven forced himself to climb back to his feet. When he did, he could barely stand, and swayed dangerously back and forth on the spot. Seven had to use his full concentration just to stand upright while his vision slowly focused.

Not only that, but as he looked across to see his opponents, he counted all eight of the other boys they had seen in the field. They had all caught up.

"What is going on here?" a deep voice thundered from the school.

Rose was furious as she marched up the walkway to the school. She had been planting in the eastern side garden when one of the servants came to fetch her, holding a letter in his hand. When she first read over the letter, she felt dread, then relief, and then felt an anger bubbling up inside her.

Quickly she had marched into the house, called Archon from his office, and stormed down the street towards the school.

When she entered, she immediately turned right to see the lobby. Archon stepped forward and opened the large solid oak door. She stepped inside and a woman came to greet her, and escort them to the headmaster's office.

When they arrived, Rose saw her two boys sitting on the left side of the office. They were silently looking at their feet as their parents walked in. Even still, Rose gave them an evil stare as she sat down.

The headmaster was behind his desk, and there were many teachers present, all lined up behind the headmaster. Each one had a stern look upon their face. Once their parents had seated themselves, the Headmaster began.

“Archon, Mrs.” He nodded to each of them, “I’m the Headmaster of our elemental school. I wish we could have met under better circumstances.” He took a moment. The headmaster was extremely calm and composed. The brothers weren’t quite sure how to react. Each was secretly hoping they could get off freely.

“As my letter explained, your boys were caught fighting on school grounds. Eight of our level 6 classmen were found with them. We have...” the Headmaster took a moment to review a sheet of paper before him, “This was provided to me by our school nurse. All boys have numerous cuts and scraps, six boys have first degree burns, one has second degree burns, and two broken arms.” Rose inhaled a deep breathe and shot her sons a firey look, Archon wore a look of extreme concern. The boys continued to look down at their feet, not daring to make eye contact with either of their parents. “Seven appears to have suffered a broken rib as well.”

“Seven!” Rose immediately got up from her seat, but her voice was not filled with anger, but concern. “Are you alright?” She went over to him.

“I’m fine,” Seven said shortly.

“What is he still doing here? Why isn’t he at the hospital? Where is the nurse?”

“Your son is fine Mrs. We didn’t want to send him off until we had a chance to discuss-“

“My son has a broken rib and has been sitting in this office for hours?” Rose was incredulous.

“Ma’am, please...”

“Don’t you ma’am me. He needs to see a doctor. Who knows what other injuries he may have?”

“There is something that we need to discuss,” stated the Headmaster firmly, “please, sit down.”

“Inform the hospital we will be arriving shortly,” Rose responded.

“They are on their way,” the Headmaster comprimised. “But there is something that I must discuss with each of you.” Rose turned to listen but would

not sit down. "In a scenario such as this, the school code clearly states that the students in question shall automatically be expelled."

"Headmaster, pardon my interruption but this is a very extreme reaction. In spite of what is stated in the code, I find it unlikely that two junior classmen would pick a fight with eight level six students."

"Agreed. I have discussed the situation with Forsix already, and we have decided to make a very special exemption. Forsix will not be expelled from our school at this time." Archon breathed a noticeable sigh of relief. "However," and the headmaster now turned from the parents to Forsix himself, "any further use of an element against another student, unless under the direct supervision of a superior, will be treated as a violation of our fundamental rules, and you *will* be expelled." The headmaster emphasized the last part gravely. "You will not get off easily though, I'm ordering three weeks detention starting tomorrow. I'll leave it to your teacher to decide how you spend it."

"What happened to the other boys?" Rose questioned. "Will they be punished similarly to Forsix?"

"The other students will be dealt with," the Headmaster assured her. "As for Seven, he is in a special spot. Technically the incident occurred on our school grounds so judgement falls to me, yet he is not a member of the school. This leaves me in an unusual position." He turned and faced the parents. "Can I trust this matter will be dealt with?"

"It will," Rose responded quickly, glaring again at her boys.

The Headmaster nodded and got up from his desk. "Nurse," he called out, and a woman came in and softly opened the door. "Please take these children outside, the medics should be arriving soon."

The woman entered the room and scurried through each of the chairs. She did not stand upright, and walked as though she were hunched over. She went to the brothers and asked in a soft voice "please follow me".

The brothers got up and exited the room. Rose and Archon were about to follow when the Headmaster called to them.

"Archon and Mrs., if I could ask you both to stay behind a moment, there is another issue we would like to discuss."

Rose glanced back meaningfully to her husband. He understood immediately.

"I can stay and discuss any issues."

"We would much prefer to have both of you," he called after Rose. She stopped in the door. "The medics are more than capable of taking care of your sons. And we can even arrange an escort to the hospital if you like."

Rose came back and sat at the desk.

"The offer is appreciated but it's not necessary," Archon responded.

"As you wish. He nodded to one of the teachers and they left the room, closing the door behind them. "I'll be brief, we want to talk about your son."

"I thought you said Forsix would be absolved after the detentions?"

"Forsix is not who I am concerned about. I would like to discuss Seven."

"How we choose to deal with Seven is none of your business," Rose stated shortly, giving the Headmaster a hard look.

"No... we would like to discuss... if you would consider enrolling him in our school.

"Here?" Rose blurted.

"Seven has shown no indications that he possesses elemental powers."

"They may be laying dormant. There have been cases where their abilities have not surfaced until adolescence."

"Those cases are extremely rare..." Archon pointed out.

"It is just as rare to have one family member with elemental abilities, and the other not. In fact I believe your family is the only one in the entire city experiencing this phenomenon."

"Excuse me Headmaster," interrupted one of the teachers behind the desk. "but can we not state what is the real issue here?"

"And you are?" Archon enquired.

"I coordinate the daily physical activities for the students. What they learn in the classroom is practiced and executed with my guidance." Archon nodded. "Today, Seven accomplished something that no one else has."

"No one on record you mean..."

The teacher ignored the banter, "Seven defeated an elemental."

"What do you mean? Seven and Forsix are constantly at one another."

"Does he ever win?" asked the Headmaster.

"He gives as good as he gets," Rose told honestly.

"Well," the teacher spoke, "that may pass for two playfighting brothers, but the eight boys they fought are level 6 students, and some of my top prospects..."

"Maybe your training isn't as good as you thought?" the second teacher quipped.

"They are quite skilled, even compared to the human elementals." The second teacher was impressed. "For one student to take them on is incredible, and for it to be a non-elemental is... unthinkable."

"So what are you saying, you think he has some latent elemental power that helped him to stand up to these boys?"

The teachers were silent, obviously unsure of how to answer that question. It was obvious they weren't entirely sure of this themselves. At length it was the Headmaster that spoke. "Honestly Archon, we are not sure what to expect from the boy. But, we have just witnessed him take on eight level six students. Those that saw the fight said it was serious, the students did not hold back."

"I'm the senior medic at the school," the second teacher announced and stepped forward. "The students had two broken arms, and it is clear that Forsix was not responsible."

"When I found them Seven had one in a headlock," informed the first teacher.

"You think Seven did it?" Archon asked, his voice filled with surprise.

"We are certain he did," the first teacher answered.

"What's more," added the second teacher, "I examined Seven's rib injury. It looks to me like it has moved around a fair bit. If I had to guess, I would say he suffered the injury early in the fight, fought through it, and then had it adjitated somehow, possibly another strike."

"Which means he fought through it. When it approached the students, those two were still standing. They were a little worse for wear but still standing."

"There's a potential opportunity here that we feel we need to explore."

"Oh?"

"The way I see it, there are three outcomes. One is that our training programs are not up to par."

"There proven against the best elementals out there..." the first teacher scowled.

“Two, that perhaps being an elemental isn’t as big an advantage as we thought. Seven may have stumbled across something here, something that we can use against the elementals.

“There’s a big difference between a battle and a school yard fight.”

“To me and you maybe, Try telling that to a junior classmen with eight angry kids after you.”

“What ‘s the third option?”

“Third is that he does have an element and it simply hasn’t surfaced yet.”

“So what do you propose we do?” Archon asked.

“I propose that we transfer him to this school. Immediately.” The Headmaster had a look of reserved excitement on his face.

“I’m not sure if I like this idea...” Rose admitted. “It is a tremendous offer, and I know six months ago Seven would have been thrilled... But he is doing quite well at the other school. If he came over here, wouldn’t he always be... behind?”

“It would be quite challenging for him,” the Headmaster confirmed. “But, we’ve seen what he can do in the face of adversity,” he coaxed.

“Look, Headmaster,” Archon reasoned. “This all seems a bit much. You’re talking about a drastic life change for my son. And because of what, an after school scirmish? I think we might be getting ahead of ourselves here.”

“Besides, if he moved here he would always be behind the other kids, there’s no way he could keep up...”

The parents had made up their minds, but the Headmaster had one last card to play. “Alright, what about a compromise then? What if he only transferred over for physical activities? That’s only one class per day. He could maintain his current schooling, and we would benefit from his presence.”

The parents eyed each other uneasily.

“Well, perhaps discuss it with Seven...” The Headmaster added at length.

“Don’t forget why you built this school, Archon,” added the first teacher. Archon gave him a challenging look. “This place was built to help us learn to defend ourselves, using the elements. And right now, every student is forced to learn every element, in the hopes that someday one student might emerge. That student may surpass us, and challenge even the great human elementals.”

“He’s just a boy,” Archon reasoned.

“Maybe, but he’s got the most potential I’ve ever seen. And wouldn’t it be something, if the prodigy we’ve been looking for all along was a non-elemental?”

“We’d be the laughing stock in every barracks from here to Kormand...” the Medic stated softly.

Archon and Rose thought hard about it. They didn’t need to speak, each knew what the other was thinking.

“We’ll discuss it him,” they agreed. “You’ll have our answer in one week.”

Chapter 5

"Sir, the latest reports from the border."

"Anything to report?"

"A few skirmishes to the east."

"Which nation?"

"Water. They claim they need the additional land for farming."

"The Fire Nation is burning their lands..."

"It would seem so."

"Any casualties?"

"No sir. Our people have been relocated peacefully."

"Hmmm," Archon signed. "How many is that this year?"

"This makes three."

"Already once more than last year..."

"Sir..."

"Hm?"

"We cannot continue to fall back forever, eventually we will have to fight."

Archon nodded.

"I know."

Chapter 6

“Seven’s coming with me?” Forsix asked his mother, “I thought only elementals could go to my school?”

“They are making an exception this time.”

“Why?”

“Yeah!!” Seven screamed out as he burst into the kitchen. He clattered into his chair and began wolfing down his breakfast as quickly as possible.

“Hurry up, you don’t want to be late on your first day.”

Seven nodded with his mouth full of food.

“How come Seven can go to my school!” Forsix reiterated.

“They want to try it out Forsix.”

“Why?”

“Well, to see if non elementals can compete with elementals.”

“Oh.” Forsix seemed content with the answer and continued with his breakfast.

“Now where did I put...” Rose scrambled around, she was unusually frantic this morning. “Ah.. here... Goodness is that the time. Both of you finish up and get things.” The boys rushed from the table and got their packs and shoes. “Seven do you have all your things for today?” Seven nodded excitedly back to her. “Forsix, you too?”

“Yes mom,” he said irritably.

“Alright take care of each other today.” She bent down and kissed each of them. Scowling, they wiped their cheeks as they left the front door and headed to school.

“So what are we going to do today?” Seven asked his brother.

“I don’t know, its different everyday. Yesterday we did some water training though.”

“Cool, do you think I’ll be able to learn it.”

“I dunno,” Forsix responded honestly.

“Then I could really fight!” Seven shouted excitedly. The prospect of having a real teacher to demonstrate the elements to him was overwhelming.

"You could probably beat most of them already," Forsix mentioned.

"Really?"

"Yeah."

"Awesome!"

They continued onto the school, and this time, instead of parting at the field, they both took the entrance to the elemental school.

Forsix led the way inside, through the winding halls and eventually to a door that led to large room in the back. Mats were lined neatly on the floor, and the students were lining up on the near wall.

"Forsix," called the teacher. Seven recognized him from behind the Headmaster's desk the week before. "Take your place in line." Immediately Forsix ran over and stood at the first in line. "Seven," the teacher continued, "I'm going to ask you to watch this class. Have a seat over here behind me." Seven ran across the room and sat down as instructed. Once everyone was settled the teacher began.

"For today's lesson we are going to continue with water training," he started. "Now, we've already gone over the basics of creation and direction, so today will be our first lesson on dispersion." The teacher walked purposefully to the center of the gym, the eyes of every student fixated on him. "Some of you may be wondering what dispersion is, so I will demonstrate." Taking a deep breath, he closed his eyes and readied himself. The teacher outstretched one of his arms and held it in front of his chest. A small, blue ball began to form in his palm. "So, this is creation, you've all seen this before." Then the ball began to move through the air, drawing patterns and moving around the teacher. "This is direction, and you have all seen this before. "And this," he continued, and the blue ball popped in mid air. Tiny blue droplets exploded outwards and then dissappeared, "is dispersion. Yes?" he addressed one of the students.

"Why do we want to learn that?"

"Well, there are lots of reasons," the teacher explained. "One is that it shows a higher level of control. It's important to have control of your element at all times, and there may be times when it becomes necessary to cancel one of your own techniques. The other reason is that this is imperative to practice training. Pretend I am practicing with you," the teacher motioned the boy to join him in the middle of the floor. He then positioned him so they were facing each other about two meters apart. "Now, if we were practice fighting against each other it would be pretty dangerous right?" the boy agreed. "But with dispersion," the teacher made several sudden strikes and water bubbles were created, shot and then popped just in front of the student. "For our advance training excercises, this will be essential."

“So its only for training?” another student complained.

“Not entirely. That’s where you’ll end up using it most though. But say you were on a battlefield and attacked your enemy. If the enemy dodged your attack then it would continue on. You may want to disperse your attack to prevent it from hitting a comrade or a building.”

The students nodded along eagerly.

“Alright then I’ll let you give it a try. Everyone up! Line up in the center of the gym, and spread out. Alright, does everyone have enough space? Good. Now, I want you to start by creating a ball of water. Excellent. Tenebee are you having trouble.”

Tenebee was looking down, frustrated at her miniscle water blob. The teacher went over to her.

“Have you been practicing like we discussed?”

“Yes I have!” she explained frantically, yelling at the teacher even though he was standing right beside her.

“Alright, alright. Just relax. Remember you aren’t creating it from nothing. Imagine the water coming from the air all around you, and pooling in your palm. There! See!” Tenebee looked down and was thrilled with her own handiwork. A much larger blob of water now hovered in her palm. The teacher then checked on each of the other students. “Alright, very good, very good. Okay,” he continued after verifying they had all reached that stage, “now on this first one I just want you to shot the blast. Don’t overdo it, you’re not attacking anybody. I want you all to pay attention to the spped and direction of your blast. So the slower you shoot the easier this will be. Alright three, two, one!”

The students let their water blasts fly. Seven was proud to see that Forsix’s made the biggest splash of all the other students.

“Very good everyone. Now, same thing although this time we’ll try the dispersion.” The students created their blasts again and waited for the teacher’s order. “Alright, this time, I want you to picture your attack exploding. Your goal is to do it just before it hits the wall. Alright... go.”

The students let their attacks go and every single one smashed into the face of the wall.

“Well, don’t stop there, keep at it and I’ll come around to help you.”

So the students continued on. The teacher walked through each of them; inspecting their form and making corrections were he could. He needed to send a

great deal of time with Tenebee, which took away from many of the other students. After aiding her for awhile, he looked up to see the children still struggling.

“Okay, everyone quiet down for a moment please.” The students ceased their elemental attacks. “I’m seeing a lot of people just forgetting about the attack and hoping it will disperse on its own. In fact, what will happen is the attack will maintain its trajectory, but it will just be uncontrolled. So it will shoot forward until it contacts something or hits the ground.”

The students then resumed their lesson. The teacher did one last loop around each child, and then made his way over to Seven.

“Do you understand what’s going on?” he asked him. Seven looked up and nodded. The teacher had dark eyes and dark hair. He was young but still looked worn and grizzled. “How is your rib? Does it hurt?”

“No.”

The teacher eyed him. “I want you to pay close attention to their movements, you haven’t been here since the beginning, so it will be difficult, but I want you to try your best. Do you understand?” Seven nodded back at him.

The teacher went back to help a few other students while Seven watched them from the sidelines.

“Hah!” a shout came from the far side of the room. Forsix beamed proudly to the other students.

“Did you get it Forsix?”

“Yeah! Watch this!” he shouted and shot a water blast at the wall. Just before impact, the blast seemed to explode, and a mist fell around the wall.

“You’re getting it,” the teacher complimented. “But keep at it, you need to disperse the entire attack, not just a part of it.”

The students continued with their training, and Forsix looked more determined than ever.

Seven watched him closely, trying to determine what he was doing differently from the others. It was difficult to tell though, and to him it looked like all the students were performing identical motions.

“Watch their movements carefully,” the instructor came back to explain to Seven. “See how smooth they are? That’s how you can identify a water elemental, or a water attack. When their movements become very fluid, their motions are smooth and speed is constant, that’s how you can tell they are using the element of water.”

Seven continued to nod along, now watching the students more carefully than ever. The teacher was right, the students who had the stronger water attacks were much more consistent in their movements. Nothing was sharp or erratic. Seven smiled to himself, he couldn't help but think he had just got one-up on Forsix.

"Teacher! I need help!" Tenine called out.

"Coming!" the teacher called back. "Just try to take in whatever you can," he said, and then went to aid the other students. He worked with Tenine until the end of class and still she had trouble with the basics. She could hardly create the water blast, let alone disperse it.

When class was over Forsix couldn't help but brag to his brother. Seven shared his success and admired his brother. He couldn't wait to begin training himself.

Forsix showed Seven through the halls and how to get out of the elemental school. He left with a smile his face as opened the door and went back to his own school.

Chapter 7

“Nothing new to report today sir. Many of the issues from yesterday were dealt with.”

“Anything? Even of minor significance?”

“Nothing along the border or internally.”

“Good, we need to utilize this time to prepare for our next move. What of our forces to the West?”

A tall, burly man stepped forwards. His fierce green eyes peirced out beneath bushy grey eyebrows. “Our forces are positioned outside Mercicelles, Por’al, and Kormand,” he pointed them out on the map.

“Hmm, have them advance to the bridge at Elder’s Pass.”

“Shall we cross the bridge?”

“No. Keep them on our side.”

“No?”

“This is an excellent oppurtunity to push forward sir. We may never see one like this again.”

“Pushing forward would enter Fire Nation territory. I merely want to reestablish our own borders. The bridge acts as a natural funnel, and we can protect our own.”

“Are we never to attack?” the West general questioned irritably.

“Our position is special in that we border on almost five other nations. Wood, Earth, Ice, Water and Fire. We cannot over commit to one campaign or the other nations will capitalize on the moment.”

“But we can never win if we just sit back here? What about when someone wins the war, and then instead of five nations we are bordered by one? Do you think they will simply stop and let us be?”

“I don’t know Firescar, but a lot will have to fall into place for what you’re suggesting. We cannot sacrifice the present in fear of the future. Advance your men to our side of the bridge, and hold them there. What about our forces to the North.”

“We are mostly stationed a few kilometer east of Korhal. With a few stringants-“

Just then the door burst open. A man stumbled in, his face was bright red and he was breathing heavily. "Sir!" he shouted, "I have urgent news." When reached the desk the others could see he was smiling.

"Speak it then," he encouraged, curiosity sparking in his voice.

"It's from our Research and Development Labs," attention peaked in the room. "We've done it!" Looks of disbelief washed over the faces of each person in the room. "We've found a reliable way to create... and control those elements!"

"Elements? You mean both of them?"

The messenger nodded, the smile growing eagerly on his face.

"Incredible..." Firescar mumbled under his breathe. Whispering immediately spread through the meeting hall as they went over this news. It was expected that the research would take considerably longer than this, and results had not been expected for many years.

At length the figure at the head of the table spoke. "Does the speed of your results mean... is there hope that these are in fact-"

"It's too early to make any sort of conclusions Sir." There was more whispering around the table.

"I want you to take every man, woman and resource you need to complete your results." Even more whispering, but now excitement filled the air. Words and phrases like 'wow', 'this could be it', and 'finally!' were blowing through the room like a great wind. "I will require daily reports on your progress."

"Yes Sir!" the messenger stated happily.

"This is the discovery that may finally turn the tides of this war."

Four years later

Chapter 8:

“Seven do you want to go outside.”

“Forsix, leave your brother alone, he needs to study.”

“Come on mom, I always do well on the tests.”

“You’re teacher says you’re way behind on your elemental skills. You need to stay in and make sure you learn it before you go off having fun.”

“Why, I can beat most of the elementals anyways...” Seven whispered under his breath.

“What was that?” Rose asked.

“I’m better than most of them, even without knowing any elemental abilities! I’m always at least in the middle of the class.”

“It doesn’t matter where you are in respect to the class. You need to be the best you can be, that’s all that matters.”

“Forsix is top of the class, and I can beat him...”

“Could not!” Forsix blurted.

“Could too!” Seven retorted.

“Boys! Forsix, leave your brother alone. Seven, finish your homework. Forsix left to play by himself, and Seven remained inside to struggle with his homework. He hated watching Forsix leave to have all the fun, especially on a bright sunny day such as this. But he also knew as soon as he figured this out he would be free as well. There was only one problem, in the past four years of attending the elemental school, he hadn’t learned a single elemental attack. Even with the newly discovered elements, Seven was still having no luck.

In spite of this, he had done quite well on the tests. At the end of each school year, the students would compete against one another in an elimination-style tournament. The results of tournament would make up a part, but not all, of a students grade for that year. Seven usually made it past the first few rounds, and two years ago he won the year champion title. However, last year he was eliminated second round, and Rose had been extra hard on him all this year. Forsix was named champion last year.

“I don’t know why we get graded on this anyways, the final test should be all that matters...” Seven whispered to himself.

“One day you might not think so...” Rose warned. Seven only rolled his eyes in disagreement.

He went back to doing his work, but it was difficult. Phrases such as ‘feel the element’ or ‘intuition will guide you’ kept popping up in his textbooks. This was extremely frustrating, as he had no feelings or intuition to go on. Although he would never admit it, he never felt anything when focusing on an element. He longed to find a passage, or even a sentence, hidden in one of the books that would tell him something about the elements, something he hadn’t thought of before. He knew if he could just get that one special hint, that the flood gates would come pouring open. But instead, he plodded along through each of the books, day after day, year after year, reading through material that he knew was beyond his ability.

“You know Seven, if you find that work boring, why don’t you go back to your own school?”

“What do you mean?”

“Well, you could always transfer back to your own school if you don’t like what you’re doing now.”

“No way, even if I never get this stuff its still way better than history class.”

“I don’t like that attitude at all. You need to try hard at whichever you choose to do.”

“I know I know. But ergggghhh,” Seven vented, “this is so frustrating sometimes. Not one of these books will say how to control an element. Even my teacher won’t tell me.”

“Well, controlling them isn’t really something you can tell people how to do. You’re either born with it, or your not.”

“But you and dad and Forsix can all use them. What’s so different about me?”

Rose went over to her son and gave him a tight hug. “Oh Seven, I don’t know. And your father and I know you are trying very hard.” She let go of him and faced him eye to eye. “But maybe this just isn’t the right fit for you. You’re already in all the special classes at school. We hired a tutor to try and help you. And its been a few years now. Maybe its time we try something else.”

“I don’t want to give up though.”

“You’re not giving up. It’s not saying that you can’t do it, just that its not the right fit for you right now.” Rose patted down a strand of hair waving irratically on Seven’s head. “Besides, I don’t want to see you get hurt again.”

“Come on mom that was hardly a scratch.”

“And what about the year before? You had to break your arm in two places to win that championship. And the year before that?”

Seven nodded. He knew she was right, he had been beaten up pretty badly at times, and even moreso in the later years with the students becoming more powerful.

“Well, you need to do what’s right for you,” Rose finished. “You’re not giving up, you’ll just switch your classes back and take those instead. You can’t always do what others expect, sometimes you have to do what’s best for you.”

“Hmmm. Can I think about it?” Seven asked.

“Think about it and we’ll discuss it later,” Rose

Seven went back to his homework, studying through the night and making little progress.

The next morning the two brothers followed their usual routine. They scarfed down breakfast as quickly as possible before embarking on their journey to school. Their gardens and walkways were relatively quiet, but once they reached the main city streets the bustle of the city came to greet them. People scattering across the streets, walking their way to work, the usual clamour of the early morning as the city prepared for another day.

“Hey, Seven!” a voice called. A boy ran up from behind them. He had a circular face but a pointed chin. He was thin, and a little shorter than both Forsix and Seven. His eyes were a dark brown, almost black and matched his wavy dark hair, and they had a certain glow this morning

“Hi Forate.”

“Nope!” he beamed back.

“Huh?”

“From now on, call me Keeper.”

“What?” Seven shouted back, “really? How did you get it so fast?”

“I don’t know, my dad decided last night.”

“Awesome,” Seven replied in awe. “Yup. Seven, did you hear what we are talking about in history today?”

“Um, I don’t remember.”

"It's the first battle between the elements, its going to be exciting. Apparently one of the elemental teachers is even coming over to show us some moves."

"Really? That's gonna be so great! Oh yeah, this is my brother Forsix. He goes to the elemental school."

"Hi," he said to Forsix, who greeted him in return.

The three boys talked for the entire walk to the school. Forsix had never met one of Forsix's friends from the non-elemental school, and he found it interesting to meet someone new. When they made the final turn down towards the school a tall man in a white robe passed them by.

"Ugh," Forsix complained. "Those guys give me the creeps."

"Why?" Seven asked.

"They're strange looking. Plus I heard that they can read your mind!"

"That's not true!" Keeper told him.

"It happened to a girl in my class. She tried to take some food from the market, and they caught her. When they caught her she lied to them, and said she didn't take it. But somehow they knew it was in her right pocket!"

"Maybe they just saw her take it...?"

"No she said they weren't around. They make their eyes glow and they can read your mind!"

"That is creepy, have you seen them do that?" The brothers answered no. "It is weird I don't like it at all."

"Why?"

"Its just creepy looking. One second their eyes are normal and the next they are glowing lights? Its weird."

"Hmmm. So what happened to the girl?"

"Nothing, they just took back the fruit and told her not to do it again."

"Well at least they caught her."

"Yeah served her right for stealing anyways."

They carried on, talking and laughing all the way to the schools. The two boys left Forsix at the entrance to the elemental school and carried on to their own.

The day was fairly typical, attending numerous classes and each one assigning something to be completed over the next few days. In the afternoon Seven visited the elemental school for his daily class. He was not taking them with Forsix anymore, instead he was in a special needs class. It was an odd feeling to be in such a class. Discouraging, but also motivating as well. Seven was determined not to be the worst in this class, although, unfortunately, he was. They at least showed some elemental talents were Seven showed none. Still, he kept at it. And, unlike the rest of the students, a special pardon was given to him to compete in the annual testing with the metric (ma - trick not met- trick) students. Which meant every year he would get to face Forsix, assuming he made it that far in the tournament.

That night the three boys walked home together. Keeper said goodbye to them at their front gate, and was thoroughly impressed by their house.

"Wow you live here?" he exclaimed.

"Yeah," Seven replied, he had never thought of it as being a big deal before.

"This has to be the biggest house in the entire city! We should play here sometime!"

"Sure," Seven agreed.

"Want to play now?"

"I think my supper is going to be ready now, but maybe later?"

"Awesome!"

The boys parted ways. Forsix and Seven rushed into the house where dinner was waiting for them. There was no one at the table, even though places had been set for four.

"You boys come sit down," one of the servants offered, "while the food is still hot."

"Where's mom and dad?" asked Forsix.

"They're in a meeting," the servant explained, "they left instructions for you to start without them." The boys were confused but thought nothing more of it. They quickly finished dinner and went out to play. With their parents of the way, it would be easy to procrastinate on homework and studying for a night.

The boys did just that, and spent the entire evening outside running through the maze. Once it got dark, they found each other again and went inside. The house itself was desolate now. The servants had all gone to their quarters, and without their mom and dad around, the brothers found the house eerily quiet. Forsix told his brother he was going up to his room, which was fine because Seven

wanted time to speak to his parents. He knew exactly where they would be, and headed directly for the boardroom.

He walked through the long hallways, twisting and turning his way through the house, until he came upon an enormous double door, behind which was the largest and most busy room in the house. As he approached the thunder of voices rumbled through the door, and instantly ceased at the knock on the door.

“Come in,” called a familiar voice.

Seven quietly opened the door. When he walked inside he was shocked, and his eyes went wide with surprise. He had expected to see three, or maybe five visitors. Instead well over thirty people were sitting at the table and crowded around the sides.

“What is it Seven.”

Seven cleared his throat nervously “When are you going to be done?”

“Later tonight.”

“Ok, I have a question to ask you.”

“Can it wait?” Archon asked earnestly. Seven didn’t answer right away. “What is it about.”

“Its about...” Seven suddenly became very self concious with everyone staring at him in the room, “my name.”

A puzzled look dawned on Arkun’s face. “Alright. I’ll have to excuse myself gentlemen, but please, continue on without me.” Whatever look of shock they had on their faces before was nothing to what washed over them after this comment. Many eyebrows furrowed, and mouths gapped open as Arkun removed himself from the table. One of the servants even followed Arkun around the table, apparently whispering in his ear, although Arkun did not seem the least bit interesting in what the man was saying.

When they reached the door, Arkun opened it and allowed his son to go through first. The servant took ahold of Arkun’s forarm.

“Sir, it is highly irregular to leave during this type of proceeding

“I’m not leaving, just taking a short break.”

“Sir,” the servant reaffirmed, his tone becoming quite grave, “it is inappropriate to see your children when discussing the future of our entire people!”

“If I followed that advice, I’d never see them,” Arkun quipped back. “I’ll return later.”

Arkun led Seven away from the boardroom and out to the porch. "So whats on your mind?"

"Dad... did I get you in trouble."

"Haha," Archon laughed out loud. "You'll never get me in trouble," he reassured. "So why are you thinking about names?"

"A boy in my class got his name today."

"Oh?" Arkun thought for a moment, "what is his name?"

"Keeper."

"Keeper? Hmm, that's an interesting name." Arkun needed to think carefully again. "Did he say how he got it?"

"No."

Arkun nodded.

"Dad?"

"Yes?"

"How come I don't have a name?"

"That's a difficult question to answer. There are many reasons why you do not have a name. One is that you are too young."

"Some of my classmates have names though? Why not me?"

Arkun thought carefully again, and turned to face his son. "Everyone has different ideas on what names really are. Some believe that a name should be a gift from your people. Furthermore, they believe it is something that should be given at birth, and carried with that person throughout their lives. Others believe it should describe something about the person. Something like a trait, like if they like a certain color or a flower."

"Like mom?"

"Exactly. But, there are some of us that believe that a name is something that you must earn. It is something that you will carry with you forever. It is how others will know you, and how you will be remembered in years to come. As such, we believe that your name must be something that represents you."

"So how do I get my name?"

“Well, I believe that there will be moments in your life that will become very important. There will be some critical times in your life that will shape who you are, and who you will become. How you react to moments like these, I believe that shows the true essence of one’s character, and I believe that is what should be reflected in your name.”

“But what if I don’t have a moment like that?”

“You will.”

“But what if I don’t?”

“You will.”

“But-“

“I know you will.”

“But what about if I make the wrong call? What happens if I mess up? Does that mean I’ll never get a name?”

“Haha, no. You’ll get a name, I’m sure if it.”

“Does everyone get a name?”

“Not everyone, but most people do.”

“What happens if I don’t get one then?”

“Seven, why are you so worried about this?”

“I... don’t know... I just am!”

“You can’t be worried about things like this at your age. I know you’ll get you’re name.” Seven still did not look satisfied. “Don’t worry about it, I know it will.” Arkun hoped this would end the conversation, but the unhappy looked still covered Seven’s face.

“You don’t really know that... you’re just saying it to make me feel better.”

“Seven,” Arkun thought again, ‘how did he know that’s what I was doing, he’s ten...?’. “Seven, sometimes you just know something. I’m not sure how to explain it. But even though there’s no evidence and no guarantee, you just know its... its... Seven, sometimes you know something is right, just because you believe in it.”

Seven seemed more accepting of this response than any other. It surprised Arkun, believing he had done a terrible job explaining himself.

“Alright then, time for you to be off to bed, and for me to get back to my meeting.”

“Alright dad,” Seven agreed and tore upstairs.

1 year later

Chapter 9:

It was winter in the capital city. The wind carried a nasty bite to it, and all around people were wearing their heavy clothes. Everyone could be seen with a thick jacket and warm boots. Compared to the rest of the world, it wasn't really that cold in Cambia, not even freezing temperatures. But to the locals, who were used to forty degrees plus, it felt deathly cold.

It was a weekend, which meant that the brothers were enjoying a day without school. But it wasn't just the two of them anymore. Keeper had become a valued member of the group, and that was saying something. It took a special person to mix with the bond that Forsix and Seven had.

Today they were wandering about the town. Each of them was bundled in warm clothing to protect themselves from the cold. The streets themselves were empty, as people scurried from one place to another with their heads down to protect themselves from the wind. The brothers and Keeper didn't seem to mind as much though. While walking outside, Forsix created a fire in the palm of his hand. He walked between the other two. With the wind blowing the warmth of the fire on them, they felt really quite warm.

They walked along the street for sometime, passing shops, restaurants, and office buildings. Without a specific destination in mind, they were happy to wander through the town just to see it. Eventually though, even with Forsix's fire in front of them, it became rather chilly and they ducked into one of the shops.

"Howdy," the shopkeeper greeted. They all nodded back to him and explored the store.

"Wow I am starving," Keeper expressed.

"How are you still hungry, we just had a snack an hour ago?" replied Forsix.

They explored the shop, only to find that there wasn't really much there. It was quite small and quaint. But when he reached to the back, Forsix found something he hadn't seen in years.

"Seven! Seven come here, remember these?" he showed him. Seven ran up behind his brother to see him pointing at a colored drink. 'Lightning Lemon' was written on it.

"I haven't seen those in years," said Seven.

"Yeah, lets get some. Do you think they'll be as good as we remember?"

"Probably not..." Seven smiled.

“Yeah,” said Forsix, only half listening, and going through the drinks. “Here you want this one?” he asked, passing him the blue drink. The word ‘Icebreaker’ was written across it in jagged letters.

“Sure,” Seven replied, taking the drink. Forsix took the yellow one and they walked up to the register. Seven put down his drink, and took out three different sized coins. The store clerk did not move for it, instead they just stared at each other, each expecting the other to do something. Then something caught Seven’s eye, and he realized why. Forsix had snuck his drink in with Seven’s.

“What’re you doing?” Seven asked his brother.

“Come on, I don’t have any money.”

“I hate it when you do that...” Seven retorted. He took out a very large coin and placed it on the table. The clerk took it and wished them all a happy day.

They were leaving for the door when Forsix turned to Keeper. “Are you getting anything?”

“Nah, I’m good,” Keeper replied, and scuttled out the door ahead of the brothers.

“Eghh,” Forsix exclaimed as he took the first swig.

“Haha, they are just sugar” added Seven.

“I don’t remember them being like this. I even really like sugar, but this is insane.”

“Its still probably better than some of the things we used to it, some of that was basically just hardened sugar,”

“Yeah. Hey Keeper, what are you eating?” questioned Forsix. Keeper was half through a package of some candy.

“Oh just some stuff I had, I told you I was hungry.”

“Where’d you get it from?” Forsix continued on. He hadn’t seen Keeper take out the package at all, and he knew him well enough that, had he brought it, it would have been gone long before now.

“I just found it in my coat, I got it a few days ago and must’ve forgotten about it!” he explained.

“Oh...” Forsix replied, but dropped it from there.

They continued walking on the street, carrying on with one another. Although, they had been walking all afternoon, and soon decided to call it a day. They decided to head home, and began cutting down streets to take the most direct route home.

On the way back, they noticed that there was no one on the street. The entire city was quite bare. When they came across a couple, and a family walking the same direction, even though they didn't talk to them, Seven couldn't help but feel a little comforted.

The couple was walking quite slowly, and the trio passed them by. They had hoods pulled over their faces to protect themselves from the wind. After that they turned down an alley. They were sheltered from the wind here by the large brick building to their left. It was not narrow, in fact approximately four people could walk abreast here between the tall building on one side, and a high fence on the other. Unfortunately for the three friends, the family of four was walking four abreast, and barely crawling along in the alley. They walked up directly behind them, looking at one another to see if they should mention something. None of them was willing to raise a fuss about it, so they quietly followed behind. It wasn't long before the couple caught up behind them. It was at this point, that something strange happened. Two of the family members, the one closest to the building, and the one closest to the fence, began to walk even more slowly. They continued to drop back until they were in line with the three boys.

Each of the boys could feel their hearts beating strongly in their chests. This entire situation was becoming strange. Even though nothing had happened, they could feel something odd about the entire situation. Then, it happened. The figure to the left of them made a sudden move for the nearest boy. It was Keeper. He tried to pull away but it was too late.

In the same moment, arms grabbed Forsix and Seven from behind and pulled them backwards. The other members in front of them turned around, hoods over their faces so they remained hidden.

Fear took hold of Seven and he reacted. He didn't even think about it, he just picked up his foot and slammed it as hard as he could on the much larger toes of whoever was grabbing him from behind. He then jumped up and smashed his head into the lower jaw of the assailant. The move hurt Seven but he was so high on adrenaline that he hardly noticed. One of the other men made a move for him, but Seven was able to squirm out of the way and ended up behind him. He reached up and grabbed the hood over his face. Seven gave a sudden yank, as hard as he could manage. The hood came off to reveal a man with pure white hair. Seven had never seen him before. The man pulled back awkwardly and grabbed at his neck.

Forsix reacted just as quickly. The fire he had been using to keep warm, he reached up and grabbed onto the attacker's arm. The man quickly tried to pull away. But Forsix held on tightly. He quickly began wrenching and tried and shortly after was yelling out in pain. Forsix could feel the man's skin peeling away and blistering in the heat. Only an instant later the man was able to jerk his arm away. Seven immediately used the same fire and attacked the figure holding Keeper. They jumped back, but the attack separated the two.

One of the two remaining figures lifted their arms in the form of attack. Seven gave one last hard tug on man's hood and he fell backwards. Seven then harpooned himself at the man. It didn't knock him down, but it was enough to knock him off balance. An intense blast of fire shot from his hand, and just missed its intended target. Forsix then ran towards the two men and with the stomp of his feet the earth began to crack and break. He rushed towards the man, now off balance, and tackled his leg. The man spun around but fell over. He tried to brace himself for the fall, only to find that a small stump of stone had raised up to greet him. His head hit the ground with a crack.

Now free, Keeper quickly charged at the last figure. He wasn't able to do much, but kept him occupied for long enough that the brothers could take care of the others. After only a few moments, the last figure looked around to see that he was the only one left. He immediately took off backwards and ran up the ally.

The boys chased after him, not because they wanted to catch him, but they wanted to get as far away from this point as possible. They knew they had merely surprised their assailants, and many of them were far from disabled. Most of them would recover quickly, and the boys needed to disappear before that happened.

They ran down to the end of the ally. Forsix, who was quite angry and still had adrenaline pumping through his veins, charged up a fireball attack, aimed it carefully, and shot it at the last figure. He was quite far away at this point but managed to find the mark. The hit was confirmed by a yell of pain as the figure stumbled and knelt down. He grabbed onto his right arm and pressed it in towards his body. Then he got up, and continued running.

After exiting the ally, the boys continued running down the empty streets. They still had a ways to go before they would be home. They felt light as their feet forced them home, and each of them was aware of every movement and sound that occurred on the street. Luckily for them, all was quiet, but it didn't stop their imaginations from conjuring shadows in the corners of their eyes.

They ran all the way home. It didn't need to be said, but Keeper was unwilling to make the remainder of the journey home alone. Instead he followed the brothers up the front lawn and into their house.

Red faced and out of breath, the brother immediately knew what to do now. They called for their parents.

“Mom! Dad!”

“Mom, Dad, where are you?” they ran frantically around the house. When Rose finally came out to greet them, she took one look at her sons and instantly knew something was wrong.

“What happened to the two of you?” she exclaimed. She went over and put her hand on their foreheads, “you’re faces are all flushed!”

“We went into an ally and some guys jumped us!” Forsix exclaimed dramatically.

“What?” she exclaimed. It took a moment for the shock to sink in, but after studying Forsix’s face for several seconds, she determined he was not joking, and immediately the concern was prevalent in her face. “Are you alright?” she cried and ran over to her son. She passed her hand under his bangs and pressed it firmly against his forehead. While Forsix was trying to explain, she began examining his arms and shoulders.

“And then one of them, mom, are you even listening?”

“Yes Forsix,” she responded immediately. What happened? Where were you?

“I just explained that to you! We were-“

“Oh my goodness!” she called out concernedly. She pulled back his shirt and exposed his shoulder. There was a large scrap there and what looked like a light burn.

“Mom-“ Forsix tried to continue on, but Rose wasn’t interested in that right now.

“Follow me Forsix,” she instructed. She half walked, half pushed him into the kitchen and pulled out a make-shift first aid kit. She quickly unravelled a bandage and ordered Forsix to take off his shirt. He complained at the beginning, and even moreso as he took it off. The fibers clung to his skin as he slowly peeled it off. Seven and Keeper had to look away. Rose wasted no time, and began bandaging up her son. “Are you hurt anywhere else?” she asked while in the midst of her patch work.

“No I’m fine.”

“Are you sure?” Forsix nodded. “Seven, how are you?”

"I'm fine," he reassured. "I'm not as delicate as Forsix!" he teased, but Forsix was too busy rotating his shoulder and examining the patchwork completed on him to notice.

"What about you Keeper?"

"They only got me around the neck," he explained, and showed her with a reenactment as he headlocked himself. The move prompted Rose to resume her questioning.

"Tell me what happened," Rose asked again. She seemed much calmer now and ready to listen. Frustrated by his earlier attempts Forsix remained quiet, pretending to be more interested in his bandages. It didn't stop Keeper however.

"We went to the ally between the big shopping mart and the large white house, the one with the really tall fence."

"What? Just down here?" Rose blurted, astonished that something like this could happen so close to her home. "That is a very upscale neighborhood..." she said to herself.

"Yeah. When we got halfway down they surrounded us."

"Who did?"

"I don't know, some people in black cloaks. I didn't see any of their faces."

"I saw one," Seven piped up, "but I've never seen him before."

"Someone from school?" Rose questioned.

"No they weren't from school. They were grown-ups."

"They were adults!" fear suddenly washed over Rose's face and she went pale white. "Wels, go to the main council and get Arkun, immediately!" she exclaimed.

"What's going on?" Seven questioned.

"I want your father here for this," she said, as though that explained everything. She began pacing. The boy all exchanged puzzled glances, and waited in silence for Arkun to arrive. In just a few minutes he was there, a look of great concern on his face.

"What's going on?" he asked, looking first to his wife, then to the three boys around her.

"Forsix, I want you to tell your father what you just told me."

“Alright...” Forsix said hesitantly, even at his age he could tell that the next words out of his mouth were going to be treated with the utmost importance. “On our way home today we got surrounded by some people, we don’t know who, and they attacked us.”

Arkun’s eyes suddenly became very fierce, but his voice was just as steady and calm as ever. “Could you tell who any of them were?”

“No, we didn’t really see any of them.”

“I pulled one of their hoods off,” Seven added. The parents turned around immediately.

“And...?”

“Well, he had white hair, he looked kind of older.”

“Did you see his face?”

“Not really. I just saw the back of his head, and maybe a little of the side. He had white hair down to here,” he motioned with his hand to just above his ear. “And he had really bushy white eyebrows too.”

The grave look never left Arkun’s face, but he sighed. It would be impossible to locate anyone with only that restriction to go on. He took a deep breath, and at length came to a conclusion. He called over two of his servants, who rushed over immediately. “One of you, go to Keeper’s house and inform his family that their boy is here and he is safe. The other, call the Contributors,” Rose gasped at their name, “tell them to send two men over here right away.”

“Arkun...” stammered Rose, “you can’t seriously... They are our son’s!” she finished passionately, with anger seeping through her voice.

“Everything will be alright Rose, there is no need to panic.”

Then, as though something finally snapped inside her, cried out angrily at her husband. “I told you this could happen!” Her voice filled with every emotion from fear to rage to frustration. Crying, she fled up the flight of stairs behind her to the shelter of the level above. Arkun remained silent, and watched his wife run all the way up the stairs, until she slammed the door with a loud crack.

Almost an hour later two men dressed in white appeared at the front door. They introduced themselves to every servant on the way in, and then finally to Rose and Arkun. Arkun did not seem the least bit concerned, but Rose’s face read just the opposite. She looked worse than when Forsix had first told her what happened that

afternoon. Her face was deathly pale, and she nervously watched every movement the newcomers made.

After speaking briefly with both Arkun and Rose, the two visitors turned their attention to the three boys. They were sitting in the kitchen now, and the trio was sitting on chairs set up in a line for them. Still unsure of what was going on, they swung their legs around boredly.

The two men walked up to the boys and knelt down in front of them.

“How are you boys?” one introduced.

“Good,” they replied shyly.

“Your parents want us to ask you some questions about what happened to you today. Is that alright.”

“We already told them,” Keeper informed.

“We know that,” the man explained, “but we are specially trained for this. When we ask you the questions, we might be able to help you remember certain things, even if you couldn’t before.”

“How?” inquired Seven.

“It’s just a special trait that we have. It’s the same as your dad being the leader, or your mom making good bandages. We are good at helping people remember.”

Seven wasn’t quite satisfied, but wanted to see them in action so he remained quiet.

“Now, some people are sometimes afraid of us when we do this, so if you become afraid I want you to tell us. Alright?”

“Afraid of what?”

“Our eyes will glow.”

“What?”

“Really? No way!” Seven exclaimed excitedly. “Show me.”

The man smiled. The color and pupil of his eyes dissappeared, and then quickly transformed to white and then finally started to glow.

“Awesome!” Seven told them, he thought it was one of the neatest things he had ever seen. It was much different than anything he had ever seen before, elemental or non-elemental.

“Alright, well that’s good,” the man laughed, and turned to his partner. “But if any of you get scared, just tell us and we’ll stop immediately. Alright?” he asked, the boys nodded back excitedly to him.

“Alright,” he partner said. His eyes were glowing now as well. “Can you describe what you were doing earlier today, before the attack.”

“Well, we were just walking around,”

“Yeah, we walked for most of the day.”

“We went to the store earlier though,” Keeper told them, “that was the only place that we went inside.”

“What happened in the store?”

“We just went in, bought a few items and left.”

“What did you buy?”

“Why does that matter?”

“Please answer the question.”

“A couple drinks.”

“Is that all?”

“Yes. Why?”

“Hmmm... nothing. Please continue on.”

“After that we walked down the street for a little bit, and then eventually decided to come home.” Forsix continued on, explaining the every moment with considerable detail. Whenever he skipped past something, the Contributors would stop him and make him repeat the event. He would repeat it over and over until one of the three of them would remember something. Seven spent much of the time trying to guess if they were trying to help buried memories resurface, or if they somehow already knew what the missing detail was and were just trying to get them to realize it. Either way Seven was memorized by the entire procedure.

When it got to the fight the Contributors insisted on extreme details. They wanted to know what the assailants looked like, how tall they were, how strong they were, which hands were used for grappling and which were just for attacks. They often switched between each of the boys for different aspects. That is, they switched between Forsix and Seven quite often. They were asking questions to Keeper at the beginning, but Seven noticed that, as the story wore on, they began to question Keeper less and less, while constantly pressuring each of the brothers.

It was odd, but Seven figure that, since the brothers had done the majority of the fighting, that perhaps they had the most valuable information.

They spent hours going through every detail, and continued on until the sun had long since set behind the trees. However, in the end, the questions only led to the description of an old man. It was hardly enough to go on, and certainly not enough to start a search on.

“Unfortunately, the images are not enough to go on. Seven seems to have only seen the back of his head, while Forsix’s images are blurry, probably only seeing him while turning his head, or possibly from a distance.”

Arkun nodded reluctantly.

“What about Keeper?” Rose questioned. The Contributors merely shook their heads, and took a quick look back at the boy. To their surprise, he was eating.

“What are you doing?” one of the Contributors asked.

“You weren’t asking me any questions, and I got bored.”

Puzzled, they both moved over to him, seemingly inspecting him. Seven knew now why some people would be uncomfortable with these men. Watching their peircing stare into Keeper was almost unbearable. Keeper himself though, was unphased.

“Where did you get those?” they asked at length.

“I got them at the store.”

They continued gawking at him. Finally one turned to the other and whispered something in his ear. The second one nodded and they pulled back. Seven was relieved when they did.

“What was that about?” Rose questioned.

“Ahem, We don’t sense anything regarding that man with Keeper.”

“What about any of the other men?”

“Nothing, unfortunately.”

“The only clue, was that Forsix grabbed one of their arms during the battle. He remembered feeling, on one of the arms, a bracelet or a piece of jewelry of some kind.”

“We don’t know much more than that, it was underneath the cloak, so he could just feel it with his hands, and only for an instant. It is smooth, braided, and had a specific pattern to it.”

“What?” Arkun questioned immediately, desperate for some news.

The two Contributors hesitated. They turned to one another, unsure of what to do. Eventually one forced an answer. “Sir, we would like more time to review the images described by your boys. Jumping to conclusions now would be hasty.”

Arkun wasn't falling for it, instantly he picked up that they knew something. “What was the pattern?”

“Sir, it could be anything, it might have been a stitch or a fold in the clothing...”

“The pattern! What is it!” Arkun demanded.

They each took a deep breath to regain themselves. “It's the Lightning emblem.”

“Lightning?” Arkun questioned, more confused than ever. They had no previous dealings with the Lightning elementals. “How?” he asked.

Of course, no one could answer that, they each stared blankly back to him. At length the Contributors spoke.

“We'll investigate the site of the attack, to see if there is anything left behind.”

“Hmm...” Arkun agreed, but he was lost in thought. A million possibilities were flashing through his head, although each was impossible. They all stood in silence for several moments while Arkun stared into space, his mind a thousand miles from where he stood.

“Sir?” one asked, it took Arkun a moment to snap back to reality. “Are you sure you need us to tell you who is really behind this?”

Immediately the other Contributor grabbed his partner. When he looked back, he saw that his partner's eyes were no longer glowing. They were staring at him with a deadly glare, and he subtly shook his head. They said nothing, but when the first Contributor looked back to Arkun, his eyes had returned to normal.

“We are sorry sir,” he apologized.

“We'll let you know if our investigation turns up anything,” added the other.

Arkun nodded, and the Contributors left hastily.

Chapter 10

“What does it mean?”

“I don’t know”

“Well who are they?”

“I don’t know...”

“Well those men obviously thought you did.”

“I don’t know what they were talking about.”

“Are you sure? You better not be keeping something from me.”

“I’m not.”

“Especially not after today!”

“I’m not” Arkun’s responses were unwavering. He stared calmly at his wife, who had reached the breach of hysteria multiple times that evening. He did shout, get angry, raise his voice, or even defend himself. He merely let his wife have her way, and eventually he knew the feelings would pass and she would remain calm. That was how he maintained the peace, even outside his house.

“I don’t know that I can believe you... They knew something about you!” she shouted. Arkun remained perfectly still.

“Rose...” She began to cry and Arkun came to embrace her. Feeling arms around him, she hugged him back, sobbing into his shoulder.

“What are we going to do?” her words were fuzzy as she forced them out between sobs.

Arkun held her tightly. He didn’t know the answer to that question. ‘How could anyone know the answer?’ he thought to himself.

“I don’t know what I’m going to do when you’re gone...” she trailed off.

Arkun held her more tightly than ever, more than anything he wished he could stay there with her and find some way to lift her pain.

“When I’m gone, you won’t have to worry about things like this anymore,” he joked.

Rose continued weeping. “Yes I will,” she replied softly.

Five years later

Chapter 11:

The brothers quickly made their way to school on a warm sunny day. They were entering the last few years of school. Both were feeling excited to be nearing the end, but terrified of getting a real job. Neither of them had any idea what their future would look like in a few years.

They arrived late to class that day, and hoped that the groups would be busy with sparing and they could slip in unnoticed. Peering in through the classroom window, they saw this was not the case. They scuttled in to the back of the class as silently as possible. The elemental teacher had the students sitting around him. It was quite unusual for this type of class, and the brothers couldn't help but wonder what was going on.

"Now, everyone will have a chance to enter. And not just you, anyone in the town."

One of the students raised their hands, and the teacher pointed her out. "Anybody? What about non-elementals?"

"They can enter if they wish."

"What about my younger brother? He's only eight?"

"He can enter too, if he wants. It is kept open to anyone who wishes to join."

The brothers were quickly becoming interested, and wishing they had come just a few minutes earlier to understand what was happening.

"Once they enter their names," the teacher continued, "a committee will place each contestant for the qualifying rounds. They typically try to match certain things such as age, height, body size, experience, and element. After that is done, you enter the qualifying rounds!"

The brothers took a quick glance to one another. Neither of them knew what the teacher was referring to. Knowing he would not repeat himself simply because they were late, they remained quiet and listened hard for clues. But, unfortunately for them, he mentioned nothing more on the subject. Before they knew it, they were back doing regular drills in the class.

For the rest of the day they asked around the school, but no one seemed to know. Forsix was told by a few students about a tournament, but Forsix had never heard of anything like this before. Things were even worse for Seven as the students could only give vague details. It was even worse when he went back to his

own school, as it seemed no one had even heard of the tournament there. So, they spent the morning in wonder, and by the afternoon they had almost completely forgotten about it. It wasn't until they were home again much later that day, that their questions would be answered.

When they walked in the front door, they removed their shoes and packs, and raced inside to the kitchen, when they got there Rose was sitting alone at the table, a somber look etched on her face.

"Forsix, Seven," her voice was cold and distant, "please go see your father." They turned to one another, neither knowing what to make of this request. Their mother was acting quite strange. They went to follow her request, and headed for the boardroom. "He's in the bedroom," she corrected them. This was quite odd again, but thought better than to question her. Instead, they just followed her instructions and went to the master bedroom. When they arrived, their father was lying in the bed with the medic looking down over him.

Seven could feel his heart pumping fast and strong in his chest. He had no idea what to expect as he approached the bed. His legs felt like iron weights at every step.

When he first saw his boys, Arkun attempted to heave himself up. The medic, however, placed his hand firmly on his head. Arkun looked up at him, and the doctor shook his head. So, instead, Arkun whispered something to the doctor's ear. Seven's could feel his heart beating harder than ever before in his life. The medic nodded, quickly packed up his items that were sprawled across the bed, and left. Arkun waited until the door was shut and then motioned for his sons to join him. They did so, approaching the bed cautiously. When they were close enough, they saw their father looking up at them through a pale, frail mask.

"So, how was your day at school?" he asked casually.

Both boys responded, "good."

Arkun nodded awkwardly, looking as though he was at a loss for words. He put his hand under his body and forced himself to sit up in the bed. With a grimace on his face, he managed to hold himself upright. He pushed himself back to sit against the back of the bed. When he was finally sitting comfortably, a look of exhaustion was on his face, as though he had been fighting a long battle that was finally coming to an end. Seven couldn't help but notice that the small bit of movement had caused his father to be out of breath. Seven couldn't believe how his face looked old and worn. Just yesterday his father had looked fine.

"Boys," he breathed. His voice was deep and raspy. "I have something to tell you." Forsix and Seven suddenly became silent. "I am quite sick right now. I have, what's called, Forun's disease. Have either of you heard of it already?" The brothers

shook their heads. Arkun took a deep, hoarse breath, and continued. "Forun's disease is something you are born with. The people who are born with it can lead a very normal life. But, this disease will slowly eat away at the body, until eventually, they die."

Seven's heart plummeted into his chest, where he could still feel it beating a thousand times a minute.

"There's still a lot that isn't known about the disease. In fact, its quite rare," Arkun explained quickly. "There is no timetable for how this will play out. Some people live until they are very old, others die when they are only children. But, there is no cure, and eventually I will die from this disease."

The boys were stunned. They had no idea what to say. Only a few hours ago their lives had been so normal. Their biggest worries about tests, school, classmates, they all seemed very unimportant now.

"Now, I want you both to know that there is no guarantee about how this will go. I may have days, or I may be alive for twenty years more!" he laughed. "There's just no way to know."

"So why are you telling us now?"

"Well, because you're old enough. And, because the medic felt as though now would be a good time to tell you. We wanted to absorb the shock as much as possible."

"Shock! Shock of what? You just told us you could die at any time! What could possibly be more-" but Forsix never finished his sentence. Arkun moved his shoulder slightly, and both brothers saw it. It was surprising that they hadn't seen it before, but now that they knew, it was impossible not to see. Arkun's left arm was missing.

Forsix went into total shock. His breathing changed and after a few seconds he looked as though he could pass out. The three just stared at each other for several minutes. Neither had anything to say. Neither knew what to say. But there was one question that burned in Seven's mind, and it took awhile, but eventually he worked up the courage to ask.

"Dad?"

Arkun looked to his son, his gaze unwavering.

"Are you going to die tomorrow?"

A smile crept onto Arkun's face. But not a happy smile, one filled with the sadness that shone through in his glistening eyes. He was forced to answer truthfully, "I don't know."

The father and the boys stayed in the room and talked for a long time. There were parts where there was a lot to discuss, and times where it was difficult to fill the awkward silence. The boys had many questions on the disease that had infected him for so long. They asked about his plans for the future, his plans for their mother and for their family. And though it was difficult to think about now, they wanted to know what would happen when he was gone.

Arkun did his best to answer these questions. He wanted his sons to know that, even if he died, that life would still go on. He needed them to understand that they would go on living and, though he would always be with them in spirit, they would have to forge their own path.

The three sat talking for many hours. Rose came to join them as well. It was a very difficult conversation to have. Seeing his family sitting in a room, Seven couldn't help but imagine them living without their father. The whole thing seemed very surreal.

Rose was there for support for a few hours, but eventually decided to leave to give Arkun and the boys time to discuss things amongst themselves. She knew they would want some time alone. This is when Arkun decided to bring up something he had been contemplating for a long time.

"Seven, Forsix, you may have heard about the tournament that is to take place in the next couple months?" they both nodded. Arkun smiled, "even though it hasn't been publicly released yet, news seems to travel quickly doesn't it?" he asked rhetorically. "The tournament is the Alta tournament. Have you heard of it?"

Forsix's face was a look of puzzlement, and then of nausea. His face went pale white and he looked as though he were ready to pass out. Seven's face was that of confusion, he had never heard of the Alta tournament except in passing at the school. "It's a tournament for the elementals isn't it?"

Arkun looked sharply at Seven. "Who told you that?"

"My teacher."

"The tournament has nothing to do with elementals, he said, but it has everything to do with the city." Seven scrunched up his face as he tried to remember his lessons from a year ago. He thought for a few minutes before speaking up again.

"I thought the tournament was a bunch of battles to see who will become..." Seven trailed off, now remembering the lesson. The tournament would decide who was to be the next leader of the city. In other words, who was to succeed his father. To his knowledge, the tournament was only called when the leader was killed or

otherwise incapable of fulfilling their duties. Many of the city leaders remained in power throughout their entire lives. Most simply retired at an old age, while a few died at their posts. As such, the tournament was usually only called once per generation.

With a sudden pit in his stomach, Seven suddenly understood his brother's reaction. The realization hit him like a ton of bricks. His father was preparing to die.

"I've called the tournament to start one month from today," Arkun continued on. "And, I would like you two to join in."

"Oh?" said Seven.

"What?" exasperated Forsix. "Can't anyone from the city enter that tournament?"

"Anyone under rule of our nation can enter the tournament," Arkun confirmed.

"That means we'd have to go up against older students, adults, teachers."

Arkun nodded back to them.

"How are we supposed to beat any of those people. If my teacher entered, how can I beat him? He taught me everything I know about the elements!" Forsix challenged. His voice was filled with anger towards his father for this request.

Arkun smiled. "Well, I defeated my teacher to become Arkun."

"Really?" exclaimed Seven, he was quite interested in this story.

"Yes. I was a few years older than you are now. I had just graduated school and I was working at the market."

"That's where you met mom right?"

"That's right. After working there for a few years I knew I wanted to do something more with my life. When the tournament came up, I knew I wanted to enter. Even though there were way more experienced people in the city, I knew I wanted to try for it."

"How did you beat them?"

"Haha, it's difficult to say, it's mostly a blur now," Arkun chuckled. "It just kindof... happened." He shrugged, the memories of his coronation, the celebration, they all stuck vividly in his head. The details of many of the battles themselves were too quick to remember. But he remembered every opponent, and every step he took towards his goal. There was one fight he remembered in particular. "The fight against my teacher was quite special though."

“Was he the last guy you fought?”

“No. In fact he was one of the first. It was my second match of the qualification round, and I had lost my first match. Because I was quite tall for my age, in the second round I went up against my elemental teacher. It was supposed to be a very lopsided match, but I surprised many people when I managed to keep it close. I remember it being a very long fight, it was back and forth quite a bit. There was a moment where he had me pinned, and I remember thinking, ‘this is it’. But at the same time, I knew that I couldn’t let it end there. Something inside me just told me I could still win. I managed to throw him off me and, somehow, I beat him.” Arkun took a moment for himself. “I remember that moment so well because that was the moment where I gained my confidence. That’s when I truly started believing in myself, that I could win. And not just that fight, I believed I could win the whole tournament. From that moment on I kept going forward and never looked back.”

“Yeah, but dad,” Forsix stated firmly, “we are only sixteen years old. If the best people from the city come to this tournament, what chance do we have? Really?”

“Forsix,” Arkun reasoned, “I can’t tell you that you are going to win. I can’t promise you’ll make it to the final matches or even get out of the preliminary’s. What I do know, is that I have raised you both the best I know how. And if I do say, I’ve done a damn fine job. The two of you are exactly the rulers that this city needs. You’re both incredibly smart, smarter than I was at your age. And you both possess great abilities that you are just beginning to discover. And even though the odds are stacked against you, this is something that you were both destined to do. So, the real question is, will you turn your backs on it, or can you give it your best shot?”

With those words there was no doubt in Seven’s mind. He and his brother would win this tournament.

It took some time to get over the shock with their father, but eventually they were able to put it aside, and focus on what was at stake. The best warriors from around the nation would assemble at the Grand Hall on just a few short weeks. If Forsix and Seven were to have any chance, they needed to practice hard. Over the next month, the brothers became completely dedicated to training for the tournament. Arkun even decided to pull them out of school, so they could train with one of the greatest masters in the ____ Nation.

When the brothers first discovered they were skipping school to train, they were ecstatic. Visions of sleeping in and early days flashed through their heads. And without so much as a second thought they hastily agreed to the new

arrangement. The never thought twice about it, that is, until their first day of training.

The next morning, the boys were sleeping soundly in their warm beds when a loud cackling voice called out from the hallway.

“Alright! Time to get up, the day is half over!” an irritable voice screamed out. The brothers awoke in a daze. The first thing Seven did was look out the window. It was still black outside. But, the voice continued to call out from beyond their doors and, inevitably, both brothers were forced to pry themselves from the warmth of their beds to discover what was going on.

Seven met Forsix at the top of the hall. His face was half covered as he rubbed his eyes. “What’s going on?” he yawned. Seven merely shrugged, his eyes still half closed.

An old man appeared at the bottom of the staircase. He wore a cloak, so many of his features were hidden. He was bent over slightly in the back, and seemed to have some trouble walking around. “It’s only the first day and you’re already late!”

“It isn’t even dawn yet? Forsix called to him.”

“Well training started ten minutes ago!” he shouted back. He then scuttled off, mumbling something about the younger generations as he went to the back garden. Neither Forsix or Seven was interested in training at this time, but instantly they knew what had happened. Their father, Arkun, could never do something at a pace. Things needed to be done and they needed to be done right away. Arkun was always pushing to see how far he could go. The brothers knew, instantly, that this must be the master their father had hired for them.

The brothers were quickly changed into their fighting gear and went to meet their new master. When passing through the kitchen, they were astounded to see that Rose was already up. She stopped them before they got outside, and insisted they eat something before they left. Their new master gave them an evil eye from the backyard, but the brother’s felt it wiser, and more advantageous, to follow their mother’s advice. So they enjoyed a hearty breakfast and managed to wait out another few minutes before finally making their way out to the chilly morning air. When they did, the sun had just risen over the distant horizon, and a clear, deep red blanketed the entire sky.

The master was none other than Arkun’s old master. He was quite old now, his proud elemental skills replaced with a sore hip and a hunched back. Physically, he had changed to a completely from the man who taught Arkun so many years ago. Mentally, he still had the same smarts, toughness, and passion for teaching he had always had.

"Alright, so, your father has told me that you boys would like to enter the tournament? So, alright then, lets see what you've got!" The old man got into, what Seven could only guess what a ready position. The man was so far bent over that it was difficult to tell. Neither of the brothers looked convinced that they should actually attack the old man, and instead stood staring awkwardly at one another for some time. "Alright then, I'll start," the old man stated.

With the slight movement of his left hand the ground beneath them began to shake. Both Forsix and Seven were caught by surprise and fell over. Before they knew what was happening, a giant ball of fire lobbed through the air and crashed down near them. The brothers rolled over to protect themselves. When the fireball hit, an explosion of smoke rang over them. The brother's could feel the heat from the wave and smell the smoke from the burning grass.

When they tried to roll over again, they found that their hands and feet had been frozen to the ground. It was awkward and uncomfortable, but they managed to squirm their way around so they were at least didn't have their face in the dirt. But instead of the sky, the old man was staring down at each of them.

"We have a lot of work to do..." he mumbled coldly.

"No no! You can't commit yourself like that!" the master scolded, "you leave yourself vulnerable to any direct strike when you start lunging like that. You need to take your time, slow the fight down. See everything as it comes at you, and then strike when you see your moment."

"But by that time they know I'm about to counter, and they just get out of the way!"

Forsix was having trouble following orders from the master. It seemed the more he was taught, the worse he did.

He and Seven had been battling all morning, and while Forsix had the upper hand before, he had certainly fallen behind in the last few spares, and Forsix was beginning to get irritable. Seven loved it, he knew how frustrated his brother could get. It had been the same even when they were kids.

"Then you have to find a way! Make sure they don't expect it. If your enemy learns your tendencies then they can anticipate your movements. If that happens, you will surely lose. You must be stealthy, unpredictable. Your enemy must not know what is coming! Alright, begin!"

So they spared. Again, and again, and again. They were careful not to hurt one another, but even without that the boys quickly began to tire. To fight hard for even fifteen minutes straight was a long time. Especially when Forsix began using

his elemental powers, Seven always knew he needed a few seconds to recharge himself. If he was quick, and a little lucky, he was able to end many of the matches during this delay.

Over the course of the morning, they took place in countless mini-matches. The master would start them in different positions, or on different types of terrain throughout their yard. Some of which gave Forsix a huge advantage. For example, if they were in the yard or by a fountain. Other places, such as the deck, or places with many obstacles, helped Seven. They found that the type of landscape greatly affected the outcome of the battle. But regardless of the outcomes, the master was not impressed by what he saw from the two boys. He constantly scolded them for tiring too quickly, and he did not care for their technique at all.

“Gah, you boys fight like you are in school.” The brother weren’t entirely sure what to make of this comment. At first they thought it might be a compliment, but the master came over and corrected them. He told Seven to block an attack coming for his mid section, when Seven motioned with his arms, the master came over and corrected him. “There, see?” he gawked. Seven did not see though, in fact, according to his school teacher, his form was flawless. “You move both your arms around for one block! You need to be more efficient!” When the master spoke the last word he quickly jabbed Seven in the stomach. Seven just simply reacted and swatted his arm away. “There, see? How come you didn’t do the block you used in school?”

“I don’t know, its too slow?”

“Exactly. There’s a large difference between martial arts and self defense. One is meant for practice fighting and sparring in classrooms. The other is meant for real life. If you’re going to get by in this tournament, you need to fight like you mean it! And that means,” he grabbed his arm and held it firmly, “one hand for blocking. Make your movements quick and to the point. And then be ready for the next attack,” the old man instructed. “Oh, and next time your about to take a blow, exhale sharply it will tighten your muscles and lessen the impact on your body.”

The rest of the day was like this as the master was consistently changing their tactics and correcting their forms. In fact, in a single day he had almost completely changed the way they fought. The master’s fighting style was quite a bit different from what they had been taught. Seven couldn’t help but think back to the ally where they had been cornered years before. In that scenario he hadn’t used anything he used in school. None of the movements his school teacher covered being caught from behind, or charging into an enemy until they fell over. Now, the moves that their new master taught were not quite as reckless as these, but Seven got the same feeling from them. The moves felt much more applicable to a real fight. Even after a single day, Seven could feel an enormous shift in the way he was fighting, and he liked it.

The next day was much the same as the first. And the day after, and the day after that. The master continued to alter almost everything about how they fought, and the two brothers did their best to keep up with the meriad of changes. One thing that the master began to press was a weapon for Seven.

“You must have something you can use? No matter how good you are, your feet and your fists are not going to be enough against the elementals in the tournament.”

“Well, I used to practice with a sword...” Seven told him.

“Excellent, go get it!”

“Umm...” Seven hesitated. In actuality, the sword was not his, and had never been his. When he was much younger, Seven found an old sword in a chest in a dark corner of the cellar. He had taken it and used it for some time. That was, until Arkun found out that his child was playing with a sharp blade. After that, the sword was taken and Seven was forbidden to play with it again. “Will I be allowed to use a sharp blade in the tournament?” Seven asked, suddenly realizing how dangerous that would be.

“Of course not...” the master sighed. “I’ll bring a practice sword tomorrow. If you like it, you can even use it in the tournament.”

The master did bring the practice sword. Forsix immediately made fun of the weapon, and perhaps rightly so. It was a very simple wooden sword. It had a long, flat, curved blade and a small circular guard at the bottom. The hilt was long enough to hold with two hands if he needed. Although the entire weapon was no more than a meter and a half long.

“What’s he going to do if he runs into a Fire elemental, won’t it just burn? Or what about a wood elemental?” Forsix questioned, but the master brushed his comments aside and continued with the training.

Seven found fighting quite a bit different with a weapon. Not having both hands free meant a slight decrease in his agility. But more overpowering than this was that Seven felt like he could actually take the offensive for once. Typically when he was battling Forsix he would be on the defensive for most of the battle. He needed to dodge attacks until Forsix presented him with an opening. And if he never did, then Seven was almost certain to lose the fight. In the training sessions, Seven still spent much of the time on the defensive, as Forsix quickly altered his strategy to use more ranged attacks to prevent Seven from getting close. But, when Seven did, he had the quick strike ability and could give Forsix something more to think about.

They continued training with one another for the first week, but after that the master insisted that the brothers attempt to fight him. At first they were allowed to

team up against him. But, after only a few days, the brothers were able to grow beyond this exercise and move to one on one battles versus the master.

The brothers found it much different fighting the master as opposed to one another. Forsix was unacustomed to fighting another powerful elemental, which made it a challenge. He had fought his classmates in the classes at school, but he was much more powerful than them, and could usually just overpower them to win. The master was equal or more powerful than Forsix with almost every element, and Forsix took some time to get used to fighting an equal.

Seven also found the adjustment quite difficult. He was used to fighting an opponent with superior elemental skills (since that included any elemental). But, the master's movements were much more precise than Forsix. Every time the master moved it was for a purpose. No movement, and no time, was wasted. It forced Seven to react much quicker than usual, and he constantly found himself getting caught in traps set by the master's distant attacks.

This made up the majority of their training for the next few weeks. They would take turns facing off against the master. When one of them was beaten and needed to recover, they would rest and the other brother would take over. Both of them were amazed at the endurance of the master. He seemed tireless when he was training them. Even though they were taking breaks so often, it was the teacher who was pushing them to try harder.

"Come on, you are better than that!" the master taunted after defeating Forsix in only a few minutes. "Even when you are exhausted and don't think you can move anymore, you have to find something inside yourself that pushes you to keep going!"

"You've been studying the elements for years!" complained Forsix, frustrated by the old man. "How am I supposed to beat you, I'm only a kid!"

"Your father was able to beat me when he was only a few years older than you."

"That was a long time ago."

"That's right, Arkun beat me when I could still walk! You need to be much stronger if you expect to have any hope of winning the tournament. I can guarantee there will be many people more skilled than I with the elements. And more agile as well. You won't catch them easily in traps."

"So how do you suggest we beat them?" Seven asked.

"To stay alive, and wait for your moment. It will come," the master nodded. "Alright Seven, you haven't had much of a rest, but attack!"

The next few weeks were very similar to this. But to Forsix and Seven's dismay, they hardly improved at all. It seemed like no matter what they tried, or how hard they tried, the master continued to win. Fight after fight, day after day, the two brothers stepped in to the ring and were thrown out. Rather than improve their skills, the training only seemed to destroy their confidence.

Their master's reaction was odd, his words showed his constant disappointment with them. He was consistently telling them they should be better than they were, coaching them on how to improve, reiterating old, and forgotten, lessons over and over. 'Keep your head up! Keep your guard up! Don't attack so recklessly!' the words rang through Seven's head each night before going to sleep. Eventually he even began to dream about the training sessions. He never understood why, but even in his dreams the master still got the better of him.

The lessons continued until the day before the tournament. The brothers insisted they needed at least a day to recover, but their master disagreed, reminding each of them that they had not defeated him yet.

"Tell you what, if one of you is victorious, I will give you the day off," the master challenged. The brothers merely looked to one another, neither was excited by this as they knew it was unlikely either of them could win in a fight. Seeing the looks on their faces, the master continued. "Not liking that challenge? Well, how about if I take you both on, two against one?"

Their faces brightened instantly.

The master raised his arms, "alright then, I'm waiting on you." The brothers readied themselves. They both knew it was still a long shot, but both of them felt much better about this fight.

As if reading one another's minds, they attacked in unison. Both dashed forwards as fast as they could, hoping to take the master off guard.

It didn't work. The master snapped one hand and cracks appeared in the earth at Forsix and Seven's feet. Both caught their feet and stumbled awkwardly to the ground.

"What about the soldiers?" asked Seven. "You said anyone under the current rule, does that mean that soldiers can join as well?"

Seven v fire guy

Forsix vs lightning

Seven vs Air

Forsix vs Earth, he dominates and becomes a captian

Point system for captians

Group Battles

Seven vs

Forsix vs

Seven vs the water/wood guys

Forsix vs. Wood / earth (separate the group using and then attack one at a time, Forsix beats them all, earth walls vertical and wood beams horizontal), forsix breaks through the walls.

Wood, Water, Fire, Air, Ice, Lightning, Earth

“Keeper must not be allowed to lead!”

“Why?”

Arkun tried to answer, but his voice was crackled and weak. “The power that he... I fear... it could ... consume us all.

This day at started like any other day.

Add in them getting picked on on the way home from school, not fighting just taunting

Something here I don't know what

Ask the father about ___s name.

Their talk and the elemental secrets for seven comes up

“Just put me in with the people I beat up”

“Those are intermediate classmen!” then the dean smiled to himself. “How about a compromise? And you stick with your brother in the second year program?”

School 3 years from now

Getting picked on in school

7 struggling, may get put into special class or moved to non elemental school

6 is the prodigy child

They get attacked, and 7 saves them, surprises everyone

Turns out someone wanted to kidnap them and use them as ransom

Police Force is implemented, everyone is kind of creeped out

For privacy, they element of darkness is born.

War Convo's

B/w dad and mom

b/w dad and general

At the tournament:

“We're just lucky this isn't real.”

“That's it...!”

The Warrior turned to the Protector, “it seems the world has Forons' disease.”

“We'll call them the Demon race, after all, they've earned it.”