

The Tide of Dreams

Training Day, Part 2

“Dream Weaver, awaken.”

The hilt in Luke’s hand began to glow a bright red. The light extended upward, forming the blade of the sword. As the light faded, the Dream Weaver Luke held in his hands was different from the one the Dream Master had summoned. The broadsword’s three-foot blade was dark silver, the grooves of the fullers painted red. The hilt was comprised of the cross guard in the shape of stylized wings, colored deep red in color with white outlines around the feathers, the grip, wrapped in new leather, and the black sphere that was the pommel. On his back, where the hilt had been latched, he felt the scabbard forming.

“Wow,” was all Luke could say as he examined the sword. He was running his hand up the blade when he suddenly lost focus, gazing into nothing. He thought he was losing his mind as images began to flash before his eyes, fires, a large monster he could not begin to describe, and four men, each wearing red and grey armor, faces hidden by shadows, and each holding the Dream Weaver in some form. Luke shook his head and fought to regain focus. When his mind was clear, he began to swing the sword around like an expert swordsman, moving and slicing the air with the grace of a cat. He finished the exhibition with one last thrust. He spun the sword around then sheathed it, the cross guard hitting the throat of the scabbard with a clank.

“Uh, how did I...?” Luke muttered to himself.

“Like I said,” Elaine said, “these weapons accumulate some of the energy and abilities of previous users. The Dream Weaver merely showed you how to use a sword effectively. I mean, I never would have been able to use a bow before I connected with the Dream Seeker.”

“Huh. It was kind of weird the way it just flushed into my head like that.”

“Yeah,” Max said. “Trust me, you’ll get used to it.”

“So what’s next?”

“Field training. We’ll go out and have you fight some small creatures to get you used to what we do and become accustomed to the Dream Weaver. All we have to do...”

A knocking sound interrupted Max.

“Did anyone else hear a knocking?” Luke asked. “Or is it just me?”

“I heard it,” Max replied.

“Me too,” Elaine said. “But it feels like it’s in my head.”

“Yeah,” Max said. “Wait, you don’t think...”

“Luke, are you in there?” they heard.

“Oh hell,” Max muttered.

“Was that my *mom*?” Luke asked.

“Yeah,” Elaine said. “It’s time to go back before your mom bursts into your room and finds us all knocked out.”

“Okay, but how do we get back?”

“Hey, Luke,” Max said. “Here’s your warning.”

Luke had no chance to reply as he awoke with a start, in his bed, his normal clothes. On the other side of the room, Max and Elaine were both waking up. There was another knock on the door, and Luke got out of the bed and answered.

“Mom.”

“Luke, I’ve been out here knocking for ten minutes. I was about to call an ambulance.”

“That’s... not necessary. Max, Elaine, and I were up here working on a project and we all kind of dosed off.” Luke opened the door enough so that his mother could see Max and Elaine.

“Hi, Mrs. Speller,” they said in unison.

“Hi, kids. Would you like to stay for dinner? It’s almost done.”

“Sure, thanks,” Max said.

“Yes, ma’am,” Elaine said.

“Luke, the food will be done in about ten minutes. I’ll call you all down. Just... keep the door open so you’ll hear me.”

“Okay,” Luke groaned as his mother turned and walked down the stairs. Luke turned, yawned, and rubbed his eyes. Max was stretching his arm, and Elaine was running her hands through her hair, doing her best to get rid of her bed head.

“Someone care to explain how we heard my mom’s voice in another dimension?” Luke asked. Then, before either of his friends could answer, added, “Wait, why am I acting like another dimension is normal?”

“He’s kinda slow when he wakes up, huh?” Elaine asked.

“Yeah,” Max groaned as he stretched out more. “It’s simple, really. It’s like how you can be asleep and dreaming away and your alarm clock will go off, but you hear it as part of the dream and not as something that’s supposed to wake you up.”

“That... makes sense,” Luke said. “So I guess field training is out for now, right?”

“For now, yes,” Max said. “But we’ll pick it up tonight.”

“Come again?”

“Tonight, after you go to sleep, we’ll all meet up and do the field training.”

“Can’t we do it tomorrow?”

“The faster you get through basic,” Elaine said, “the easier it’ll be. Trust me; the fun stuff doesn’t begin until field training.”

“Oh joy and rapture,” Luke said, bulking at Elaine’s idea of fun.

“Kids!!!” the three heard from downstairs. “Dinner’s ready.”

Luke opened the door and shouted, “Coming!” All three piled down the steps into the dining

room where Luke's mother was bringing the last of the food out.

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Luke sat on his bed, thinking about what had happened to him over the last few days. He held the beaten hilt of the Dream Weaver in his hands, trying to focus on it like he had in the Arena, but he felt nothing.

"I guess it only works when I'm asleep," he said. He laid the hilt on the dresser next to his bed and thought about what Max had told him.

"After you go to sleep, we'll all meet up and do the field training."

All Luke wanted was a peaceful night's sleep, but he knew that when he closed his eyes, the next time he opened them wouldn't be at six in the morning. Luke sighed at the thought. It was 11:30, and Luke needed to go to bed anyway. Max and Elaine had left hours ago and were probably already asleep and waiting for him. He kicked off his shoes and lay on the bed, staring up at the ceiling. Luke was asleep within minutes.

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Luke woke up standing, a strange sensation by itself. Even more strange was the wind whipping at his face. He looked around; noticing that the gravel he was standing on was ended only a few feet away, dropping off into nothingness.

"A roof," he said smugly. "Just great."

He looked up. The sky was the normal starlit sky he was used to. He figured that he was not in the Dream Realm, which did not explain why he was on a random rooftop. Then he looked down at his clothes: red shirt, black pants, black boot, black jacket, red and black gloves.

"Huh. That means they should be showing up right about..."

"Luke," he heard Elaine's voice from behind him.

"Now."

Luke turned and saw Elaine standing there with her hands on her hips. Instead of black pants, she was wearing a short black denim skirt and black knee-high boots to complement the yellow shirt and black jacket.

“What, are our outfits random or something?” he asked.

“Kind of. They generally match the weather.”

“Okay, but... wait. Where’s Max?”

Before Elaine could answer, a blue column of dust appeared between them. There was a flash of blue light, and Max was there, wearing the same outfit as Luke with a blue shirt.

“Sorry I’m late,” he said. “Had to check in with the D.M.”

“D.M.?” Luke questioned.

“Dream Master. Duh. He said there were some low level creatures he wanted us to send back, which will be perfect for your training.”

“So then why are we on the north side of the city?” Elaine asked.

“I thought we would do this close to home, but it really doesn’t matter, does it?”

“No, not really.”

“Okay then,” he said as he turned to Luke. “Welcome to field training. First things first, no, we aren’t in the Dream Realm. We’re in our world, but we are just like the creatures we fight. We can’t be seen or heard by the average person, but we can still manipulate inanimate objects. We’re basically ghosts, so don’t worry about people seeing us. Of course, our targets are also invisible to us, seeing as how we are human, so it’s always a good idea to activate the Waker’s Eye.”

Luke did so, and was happy that his eyes were not burning like the last time. He looked around, noting the orange glow that surrounded his friends. That’s when something else caught his eye. Off in the distance there appeared to be the beginning of a tornado. It had the same orange glow as he and his friends. As he looked around, he noticed more of them all over the city.

“Max,” he said as he pointed to the closest one. “What the hell is that thing?”

“It’s an energy tunnel,” Max said. “Some big creature is trying to tunnel its way through the tide and into our world. It’s through these tunnels that the smaller ones pop through first, then the big guys. They don’t come through all at once, they leak through slowly, until enough of it is through and it can take a physical form in this world. Unfortunately, we can’t just seal them up like sealing a leaky water line. For the smaller creatures, we have an automatic ability that boots them back to the dream realm, but for the bigger one, we have to wait until the tunnel opens up enough for us to push the creature back through in one go. What’s bad about it is that by that time, the creature may have enough of itself in this realm to materialize and start destroying stuff. But that one is pretty small, and so are the rest of them around the city. We keep taps on this side; the D.M. keeps tabs on the other side.”

“Strangely, that makes sense,” Luke said. “So we aren’t dealing with the big ones tonight, just some small ones?”

“Yep. Let’s get to it.”

“Okay.”

Elaine, who had been strangely quiet during Max’s lecture, walked up to Luke and took his hand.

“Don’t worry, this won’t hurt a bit,” she said.

“Huh?” was all Luke could muster before being engulfed in red and yellow light. When it disappeared, Luke rubbed his eyes and looked around. They were in one of the parks in the southern section of the city.

“How did we...?” Luke started to ask.

“Teleportation,” Elaine said. “It’s easy, really. Just focus on where you want to go, and imagine yourself there, and you’re there.”

“Uh huh.”

“Alright, Luke,” Max said, “It is time to get started. Our first target is right over there.” He points just to the right, at a small penguin waddling through the park.

“Wait, is that a... a penguin? Why is there a penguin in the fucking park?”

“Some kid must have been dreaming about a trip to the zoo and dreamt up a penguin. It doesn’t really matter why, really, so much as it matters that it needs to go back. Elaine?”

“I’ll show you,” she said to Luke as she pulled out the Dream Seeker. “Dream Seeker, awaken.” In a flash of light, the full bow was in her hand, the quiver on her back. She drew an arrow and fitted it to the string. She pulled the string back, activating the pulley system that bent the limbs, and took aim. After a few seconds of lining up her shot, she fired, sending the arrow rocketing toward the unsuspecting target. The arrow hit the penguin in the side, and it let out a squawk on impact before it quickly dissolved away.

“See,” she said, “the thing you have to do is cause enough damage to it that it can’t hold its physical form here, and it will dissolve and its energy will go back to the Dream Realm to reform itself.”

“Then what about us?” Luke asked. “Right now, we just like them, right? So if we take too many blows, do we die or something?”

“No,” Max said. “We go back into the Dream Realm, through the Tide, and back into our bodies. Which is much better than dying.”

“That’s good to know.”

“Okay, rookie, your turn.”

“Don’t call me ‘rookie’,” Luke said sternly.

“I’ve just always wanted to say that. Come on.” Max led Elaine and Luke to the nearest street, a large six-lane avenue that was completely empty. In the middle of the street was a large snake wrapped up in a coil almost as tall as Luke.

“That’s it,” Max said.

“What?” Luke exclaimed. “Why does she get the little penguin and I get the big ass man-eater snake?”

“Because it is just as easy a target. Besides, we’re right here, and we’ll help you if you need it.”

“Yeah, that’s fair,” he shot sarcastically. Seeing no other choice, he drew his weapon. “Dream Weaver, awaken.” When the sword appeared, he held it in front of him with both hands and took a deep breath. He charged the snake, which raised its head lazily to look at Luke. It slowly began to uncoil itself, but Luke was already on top of it. He swung at the snake’s head, catching it just above the left eye. The blade went cleanly through, separating most of the snake’s head from its body, and it began to dissolve. Luke stood there, surprised that it was felled so easily. He turned back to his friends.

“Hey, you were right, that was easy.”

“Told you, it’s not always about size, it’s about... oh shit, behind you!” Max exclaimed. He watched as another creature, a gray wolf, bounded out from a nearby alley and toward Luke, whose back was turned to it. Max ran towards Luke, who was turning and readying himself. “Dream Crusher, awaken! Assault Mode!” The shield appeared on his arm in a second, and the two front edges extended. He ran past Luke and intercepted the wolf, landing a crushing blow to its head that sent it crashing into the building across the street. It hit the ground with a thud, and got back to its feet.

“Damn, this one’s a bit tougher,” Max said as he backed up until he was side by side with Luke.

“What’s with this one?” Luke asked. “It just came out of nowhere.”

“I know. Typically, the worse a dream is, the more aggressive its creature is. And the more aggressive ones are usually the stronger ones.”

“Someone must not like wolves, then.”

“Tell me about it,” Max said. He turned to Elaine. “Give us some covering fire.”

“Got it.” She held out the Dream Seeker. “Rapid Fire Mode.”

The bow began to glow, and when it reform, it was basically the same. The only differences were a square metal carrier attached to the arrow rest and a horizontal counterweight on the opposite side of the bow. In the carrier were ten arrows, held just above the fletching. With a slight twist of her wrist, an arrow was released from the carrier and dropped into the arrow rest. Elaine easily readied the arrow and drew the string.

“Where’d that come from?” Luke asked.

“Later,” Max said as he took a defensive stance, “here it comes.”

The wolf bounded toward Max and Luke, and Elaine let her arrow fly, right between the two of the and into the wolf’s side with little effect. Max charged, Luke behind him. Before the combatants reached each other Elaine had already loaded another arrow and sent it flying in. The wolf ducked under it, then leaped at Max. Elaine ran to the right, around the combat, for a better shot, nocking an arrow on the run. The wolf met Max’s shield muzzle first, knocking him onto his back. The wolf was dazed from the impact, which Luke used as an opportunity to strike. He swung downward, but the wolf had composed itself enough to leap to its right. Luke followed with a leveling swing that, in his weaker left hand, completely missed the ducking wolf and left him completely open to attack. It readied itself to spring on Luke, but a third arrow flew in, catching it in the front right leg. Luke had time to gather himself and go in for the finisher. He ran in and used his momentum to fuel a rising, sweeping swing that caught the wolf in the jaw. It flipped onto its back and rolled away from Luke.

“The hell?” he muttered in frustration. “Just die already.”

The wolf got up yet again and ran toward Luke. Before he could take a swing, Max stepped in front of him, shield arm raised, all of the outer edges extended. When the wolf hit the shield, instead of knocking Max back, what looked like a wall of water emanating from the shield blocked it and bounced it back. The wall disappeared, and the shield’s edges retracted into their normal positions. The wolf struggled to get to its feet as Elaine, who had circled back around to her original spot, quickly put

two arrows into it. It fell over and dissolved away.

“Finally,” Luke exclaimed.

Max sighed. “That was not how I had planned it to go, but now you understand. A creature can be huge, and be incredibly weak, or normal sized and really tough. The easiest way to tell is to look at the aura around it. The bigger and brighter it is, that stronger the creature.”

“Duly noted,” Luke said. Elaine joined them in the street. “Now what about what you and Elaine did with your weapons just now.”

“These are not your average weapons,” Elaine said. “Like we told you before, these weapons have different abilities, such as my bow adding an auto feeder for quicker shooting. And Max’s shield has its Guardian Mode that can extend a shield completely around him, and Assault Mode, using the front edges as blades. The Dream Weaver has some kind of additional ability, but you have to find it on your own. We can’t help you with it.”

“But you can swing the sword just fine,” Max said. “So what do you think, should we go after some more?”

Luke thought about it for a few seconds. “Hell yeah.”

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Three hours later, the three Guardians were on another rooftop, Luke taking down a small pink elephant that reminded him of Dumbo.

“Man, it’s amazing what people can dream up,” he said as he turned to Max and Elaine, who were staring off into the distance. “Uh, guys?”

“Luke, we have a problem,” Max said. He pointed to an energy tunnel that looked to be a few miles away. It was not the gray color of the others, but a bright red with a thick line of purple on the inside. It also was no longer ending in mid-air, but looked as though it had touched ground.

“That can’t be good,” Luke groaned.

“No,” Elaine said, “especially since it wasn’t that big to begin with. There’s no way it should have grown that big that quickly.”

“You mean that whatever creature made that tunnel is almost through?”

There came a roar that shook the building, followed by a crash.

“No,” Max said, “It’s already here. Luke, Elaine, we have to go.”

“Luke?” Elaine questioned. “He’s not ready, not for a nightmare creature.”

“We don’t have much of a choice, do we?”

“Send him back to his body.”

“I could, but...” Max looked at Luke. He could see it in Luke’s eyes that he did not want to leave his friends. “No, he’s coming with us. That okay with you?”

Elaine sighed. “Yeah.”

“Luke?”

“Let’s go.”

Luke took Elaine’s hand and was engulfed in light.