

"Moved, I killed some of the bravest, wisest men I have ever known. With a single stroke of the hand, I had just destroyed the only battalion within two days' march that could defeat the JutClan Armies. Worse than that I saw the stars shudder in fear as billows of soot covered them from my eyes. I witnessed men scream in horror as the waves of fire crashed over them. I saw bodies lit with flame scatter and then crumple and fall as if they were embers in a huge roaring fire.

"I am a passive man. I am an ambassador for persuading others to use peace and words. Instead I brought only torture and pain to four-hundred men. And I am sorry, wizard. I am very, very sorry."

"It was your fire, ambassador and woodman! It was your fire that caused the JutClan to retreat. The JutClan were not only preparing to enter the plains, they were already in them. They were barely a day's march away from your camp the night you fled. Seeing the horizon ablaze, they must have known the plains were on fire and that it was moving toward them. They had but one place to turn. It was fleeing the fire that made them run into our battalions which ended the war."

V. "Why do you still live in this world, maven? Is there no home to go back to? Family, and loved ones?"

The wizard was now shuffling bottles around on his shelf, apparently in search of something. I noted a sense of reserve and sadness in his answer, though his back was to me.

"The way in which one conjures a maven from another world is complicated. One thing that must have created is a portal from one world to this one. The door to my birth-world is inside a stone hovel, hidden in this forest. Because of the dangers of open gates to other worlds, it is, by necessity, protected by all magic, including my own. There is but one way to open the stone portal, and that is by a key I no longer have.

"During the winter that we stayed in this valley, the men had little to do, and so, got to taking things that did not belong to them. And in their greed and anxiety, they took my key."

My mind raced back to the metal box I had found buried in the forest, and the items that were within it. My heart fluttered as I felt the outline of a small gold key in the pouch at my waist. I suddenly felt very lighthearted and proud. I felt as if the blood and flesh from a young and courageous dragon were suddenly within me. The strength that had left my body during the day's hike was returning and I smiled, though the old, and compassionate maven's back was still to me.

"This has quite a peculiar taste," I said, and raised a cup of tan to my mouth.

"Yes," spoke the wizard, his arm reaching back into the forest of bottles on the shelf. "Would you like some golden?"

