

## Chapter 2

### “Lets Fight!”

“A Huge revelation”

The morning started with an amazing sunrise. Max sat on his favorite rock in the training ground. Lili, Gordon and a few others joined him there for the ritual that they had started three years earlier when they joined the academy. Watching the sunrise was done in total silence and they always went their own separate ways after the sun was fully visible. They sat in silence for over an hour watching the red then orange and lastly bright yellow tones of the rising sun. As the shadows of the night retreated before the sunlight the now fourth year students rose and walked together towards the Dremos Arena. Over four hundred had arrived at the arena to find out why the Dremos were recruiting fighters from the fourth year students. The news had traveled fast through the community. There were three very distinct thoughts on the subject: People who disagreed with the decision, People who agreed with the decision and people who don't care and were hoping to see a good fight, as showing off your abilities and skills are normally part of the selection process. Twenty four students were grouped in the center of the arena. Max looked around the arena, *mmm Fifty meters by one hundred and then the ten meter high wall. That is a lot of space*, he thought to himself.

Bossak and his companions had setup a small camp to stay in while they scouted their target. People had said that the mission was a suicide mission, but Bossak had accepted it anyway. This was the first chance he had been given to avenge his family members deaths. Bossak was poking the ground with a stick drawing and marking the last few points that he wanted to recon before he set out to complete his mission. He woke stick from his slumber and set him to work making breakfast and the last of the coffee. The trio faced a long day of hiking and climbing. Bossak new it would take most of the morning to complete. It was a grueling task but was essential. During his training Bossak was known as a tactical genius, he always spent at least twice the amount of time looking at a situation, planning for every situation. This ability put him at the top of his class year after year. The only side effect to his dedication was that he had never made any friends. He became a person that was feared in his village, partially because of who his family was and partially because of who he was becoming and skills he possessed.

Ten meters above the arena floor the seating continued to fill as more and more people arrived to find out if the rumors were true. Some industrious hawkers were selling warm drinks and things to eat to the crowd. Minister Harris took his place and nodded to a man standing to his left. The man named Doske was one of the four level 5 fighters who would be selecting students to join their teams. He called the crowd to order and was about to start the proceedings when a shout came from the crowd.

“We are not happy to send our children to fight, they are too young!” Minister Harris stood up and walked over to the podium and addressed the crowd.

“It has been a very hard task and after weeks of planning and consideration we have found that this is the only solution. We are outnumbered, we are losing the fight and if we don't free up or high level fighters to take on important missions and training we will lose the war. You, your children and your families will be killed or enslaved by Klato and his minions. Is this what you want?” The crowd remained silent. “If you don't want your children to join then please take them away now.” Minister Harris looked down at the students gathered below him. “I know that I am asking a lot from you, you have to decide if you want to continue or not. If you choose not to take part you will not be discriminated against. Now is the time to decide, to make yourself known. No body moved. Minister Harris walked back and took his seat next to grandpa Mo. Doske, who was chosen by Minister Harris to run and judge the selection process, stepped back up to the podium.

“First there will be a written exam, this will cover tactics, strategy and basic fighting knowledge. After that is complete you will be paired off and will have to battle each other for your place in the Dremos. Please listen clearly to the following rules for these matches. Number one, You will fight with the intent to kill. Number two, when I say stop, the match is over. Number three, winning your match doesn’t guarantee a place in the Dremos ranks. Lastly there will be no surrender accepted in these matches. You will fight until there is only one person standing.” Doske signaled some awaiting aids, tables and chairs were brought out. For the next four hours the students attacked their written tests.

After a full morning of scouting, Bossak and his companions had only five hours to wait until sunset and the start of their mission. There seemed to be more activity than normal within the village. The safe house was guarded by four skilled fighters, but today a smaller group of lesser fighters were stationed there.

*Why would they lessen the protection? What are they doing? Have we been discovered and they are planning an ambush?* Bossak sat quietly pondering if he should continue as planned or wait and see if they were planning an ambush.

Once the written exam was over Minister Harris dismissed everybody for one hour to have lunch. Grandpa Mo, Minister Harris, Gordon, Max and Lili were treated to a simple but delicious lunch. Much to Grandpa Mo’s delight Mrs. Block had brought his Hookah pipe, he puffed away while eating his lunch. After one hour everybody had returned to their respective places. Doske and three others joined the students on the arena floor.

“Well done on completing your written exams, you have all passed. Now you will be competing to join one of four teams. The team leaders are me, my name is Doske. To my right is Baska and on my left is Zuki and Slam. After today some of you will be able to join the Dremos and have the opportunity to fight alongside us and learn from us. The physical exam will begin now. The first match will be between Ras and Max, the rest of you please make your way to the staging area.”

Max and Ras faced each other; this was a new feeling for both of them. Even though they had been competing in class it had never been at this level. Attacking a friend with the intent to kill was not something that they thought they would ever have to do. Ras looked at Max, smiled and took a few steps back. “Well Max, it looks like we have to fight, I hope you are ready because I’m not holding back.”

“Neither will I,” Max said.

Ras rummaged in his pocket and pulled out a small figure and placed it on the ground in front of his feet. The figure began to wobble and shake as Ras poured energy into it. The figure grew and took the form of a man. Max put some distance between Ras and himself. Max gathered energy into his clenched fists allowing Ras to complete the process he had begun. The man next to Ras wore a black outfit with a long trench coat. Over his shoulders were two leather straps that held two swords in place on his back. Ras smiled, “I would like to introduce you to Claudius. Before Max could respond Claudius pulled the two swords from his back and launched himself towards Max. Max dived to his left, dodging Claudius’s swords. With one fluid motion Max rolled and landed back on his feet and shot two energy spheres at Claudius. The resulting shockwave caused the seats in the stands to rattle loudly, this in turn caused the spectators to cheer. Out of the smoke and dust came Claudius swords swinging and slashing, a third energy ball hit him on his shoulder sending him sprawling across the dirt and into the arena wall.

Grandpa Mo loved watching his grandson sparing or battling, every time Max had improved in leaps and bounds. Below him in the arena Max was launching a ferocious attack on Ras and Claudius alternating between the two. Minister Harris nudged Grandpa Mo. “That grandson of yours is the splitting image of his father, he even fights like him.” Grandpa Mo nodded.

“Its like looking at a scene from the past.” Below Max waited for the dust and smoke to clear. He was standing in a puddle of water. Ras and Claudius were both kneeling in the dirt, Ras looked over at Max. *His expression has changed. He seems even more focused. He must be planning on ending this soon. I'm in trouble. Those energy attacks should have weakened him. Where does he get all this stamina? I must do something now.* Both Ras and Claudius launched themselves at Max but two jets of water burst from the puddle at his feet and battered them back into the wall surrounding the arena. When Ras looked up he found that Max was standing on top of a ten meter tall pillar of water as if it were solid ground. Twelve jets of water erupted from the pillar and sprayed in all directions. Within seconds the water was lapping at Ras's feet. Ras and Claudius once again launched themselves at Max and again Max's water sent them sprawling. Ras moved over to the now lifeless form that was Claudius, he was floating in the water drained of all the energy that animated him. Ras put his hand in his pocket and pulled out a small bird figurine. *This is my last chance.* Ras poured the last of his energy reserve into the bird and whispered to it, “Seek and destroy.” With that the bird took flight aimed straight at Max. Without any warning the bird stopped in mid air, held in place by an invisible force. With a crunching sound the bird crumbled to dust and fell into the churning water below it. Ras climbed on top of Claudius to escape the rising water. More and more water flowed out of the pillar until the entire arena was full.

Grandpa Mo and Minister Harris both stood up.

“What is he doing?” Minister Harris asked. Grandpa Mo smiled.

“My dear friend I no longer have any issues with Max joining the Dremos. As for your question, he has created a barrier around the entire stadium and has filled it with water. This is my sons technique, I think that Max must be reading his dad's journals. Drake kept detailed journals on all of his training missions and the difficulties he faces as well as the milestones and discoveries he made, basically every step that brought him to the day that he took over the Dremos leadership from me.” Down below in the water filled arena Max Jumped into the air, he landed on top of the water and with one motion slammed the water with his hand. The resulting wave washed Ras off of his perch and he fell into the water. Before he could climb back onto Claudius a huge translucent blue, gray colored shark jumped out of the water and swallowed Ras whole. The crowd gasped and Ras's mother let out a blood-curdling scream. The shark made its way over to Max, he could clearly see Ras inside the shark. Ras had a huge grin on his face and showed Max a thumbs up. Max looked at Doske and said. This match is over, my next move is to crush him inside my energy shark. Doske nodded at Max. Max transformed the shark into a platform of energy and stepped onto it next to Ras and helped him to his feet. Max closed his eyes and concentrated, as he opened his eyes the water began to recede. When Ras and Max stepped onto the arena floor Doske was there to greet them. Ras turned to Max, “Good fight, I just couldn't out think you.”

“Well if we were not in the arena we would have been equally matched.” Max replied. The two boys smiled and turned to Doske. “The winner is Max.” The crowd burst into cheer, chanting Max's name over and over again.

Zuki jumped down to the arena floor from her vantage point near Minister Harris and Grandpa Mo. She walked over to Doske and whispered into his ear.

“It seems that five students have pulled out.”

We seem to have some withdrawals from the selection process. So for all the remaining contestants you now have better odds of being accepted into our ranks. The next match will be, the crowd held their breath, Gordon and Nigel. Nigel looked over at Gordon and smiled. *All I have to do is wait until he uses all his energy on one of his fancy moves and then take him out. This will be easy.* As the two boys made their way down to the arena floor they passed Max and

Ras returning to the staging area, Gordon winked at Max and said. "Watch this one closely cousin." Max smiled. "Good luck Gordon."

"He needs it." Nigel replied.

It was late afternoon when the wind picked up. This posed a new problem for Bossak and his two companions. Being cautious he decided to scout the target from a few different angles just to make sure that they were not being ambushed. The process was now more complicated, they had to make their way down wind of the target before advancing. Bossak knew that if they were discovered the mission would be over. Of his two companions Pico, or Stick as he liked to be known, owed Bossak his life. Bossak found Stick wandering in the Northern Wilderness while he was exploring the rebel states five years earlier. The boy was near death, lost and starving. Stick had been cast out of his village after his father had challenged the chief of the village for the leadership of the village. Stick's father and mother were both murdered. Stick was rescued by his uncle. He snuck Stick out of the village before the chief could kill him. After Bossak found the boy he discovered that Stick was a gifted fighter with a very unique skill. Bossak spent the next five years training Stick in missions sent down to him by his leaders. Stick had grown faster than the other students in Bossak's village due to the intense training that Bossak put him through. He became an asset to Bossak in his missions. After they had checked the target they returned to the camp and prepared a meal of Pheasant that they had caught on the way back.

By the time that the two boys reached the arena floor the wind was buffeting the horde of people in the stands.

"Looks like there is going to be a storm." Minister Harris said to Grandpa Mo. He signaled Doske with a nod to start the next match. Bursts of flame and ice flew threw the air, Nigel and Gordon were both unleashing ferocious attacks. Five ice spears flew at Gordon, he counter attacked with five bursts of fire. The attacks nullified each other in a flash of steam. Nigel burst through the steam and planted his fist square in the center of Gordon's face sending the boy sprawling into the dirt. Six solid balls of ice hurtled through the air at Gordon. He dodged just in time and watched the ice hit the ground next to him. Gordon mustered his strength and produced a massive jet of fire that he fired at Nigel who threw up an ice barrier two meters thick, four meters high and four meters wide to protect himself. He could feel the heat from the attack through the ice shield and increased the thickness. The flame ate through the shield quicker than Nigel had expected. *Damn he's gotten strong. I need to get him to waste more energy. This is a perfect chance to use my new skill.* Nigel drew half of his remaining energy and placed his hands on the ground, drawing water from his surroundings and shouted "*igloo defense*" A wall of ice formed up and around him. The dome of ice was four meters thick, on the exterior it had a multitude of small spikes that protruded from it.

Gordon stopped his attack of fire and looked at Nigel inside his ice dome. *Think Gordon, think. Ok, Nigel's skill relies on the fact that everything has water in it, he draws that water and converts it into ice which he can then use to attack or defend himself. So all I need to do is get rid of all the water around us.* Something caught Gordon's eye, the spikes on Nigel's dome were extending outward. Six spikes shot forwards at Gordon, he didn't flinch or move the spikes flew straight past Gordon missing him by millimeters. Gordon smiled, Nigel looked confused. *I never miss.* He thought. Gordon looked up to the judging area and then to the staging area and found what he was looking for. Grandpa Mo and Max were standing together watching him battle Nigel. Four more ice spears sailed past Gordon's head again missing him by millimeters. Grandpa Mo and Max both looked at Gordon who was staring at them. Gordon shouted at the top of his voice.

"WATCH THIS!"

Gordon opened his hands two small whirlwinds appeared, one on each palm. Gordon threw them both and created more and more and more until there were over thirty small whirlwinds making their way around the wall of the arena. Gordon summoned more energy and infused it into the whirlwinds, he summoned fire and proceeded to fuse each whirlwind with fire as they flew past him in their clockwise rotation of the arena.

"Did he just do what I think he just did?" Max asked. Grandpa Mo and Max both stared in disbelief at the spectacle that was taking place below them. Minister Harris appeared next to Max and his Grandfather.

"Why didn't you tell me he was *Kuera*?"

"I didn't know." Grandpa Mo replied.

"I don't he knew, because if he did he would have been bragging about it yesterday when he fought me." Max said. Minister Harris and Grandpa Mo both nodded.

"How and when did he discover this talent?"

"Mrs. Block spent some time with him yesterday healing him, she must have discovered it while fixing his energy system."

"That's incredible." Max mumbled. "He is using both wind and fire elements at the same time."

"He's a *Kuera*." Grandpa Mo said.

The three men stood staring as Gordon poured more and more energy, wind and fire into his whirlwinds. The whirlwinds had decreased in number but increased in size. Gordon walked to the center of the arena floor all the time ice spears just missing him.

Stick watched the horizon as the sun slipped behind a stand of trees. Orange, pink, red and yellow tones swept through the forest where the three men were camped. The shadows grew longer and longer until they blended into a ghostly blanket of darkness claiming back its domain until the sun rises again. He had to wake Bossak; he also knew that their journey was about to get more interesting. If they completed their mission they would be hunted and maybe even killed. *We are so far away from any support, no allies nearby. It's taken us four weeks to get here and it will take probably twice as long to get back they would have to cover their tracks even more carefully than they had over the last four weeks.* They had spent an entire day hiding from a particularly determined enemy agent who had found their trail. That day however Bossak had shown why his family had been feared by so many for so long. Stick stood up and walked over to where Bossak was sleeping.

"Bossak." He said quietly.

"Yes Stick?" Came the reply.

"It is time."

"I know, pack up your gear and lets get going."

Stick kicked sand onto the embers left by the cooking fire and packed up his small bag of belongings. Once he was finished he walked over to where Bossak was standing.

"Let us be on our way, our destiny awaits."

Stick nodded. The pair set a slow but steady pace followed by the third man in their group towards the safe house, their dark clothing concealing them in the darkness.

Gordon pushed more energy into the now only remaining whirlwind witch had swelled in size and now encompassed the entire fighting arena and had reached a height of over fifty meters. If it were not for the energy barrier that Grandpa Mo, Max and Minister Harris had erected around all the stands, the heat the vortex generated would have burnt the spectators. Gordon, now standing in the middle of the vortex of wind, energy and fire, looked over to where Nigel was encased in his dome of ice. *I wonder how much more he can take. I wonder how much more I can take. This new way of using my energy is a lot better than how I used to use it but there must be a limit.*

Nigel was near his limit, his ice shield was beginning to fail under the heat and pressure exerted by Gordon's fire vortex attack. Gordon saw a flash of horror cross Nigel's face as his shield failed

and disappeared. Gordon immediately drew all the heat away from the area that Nigel was in and let the vortex dissipate. Gordon looked back at Nigel was shocked to see that grandpa Mo was standing next to Nigel with an energy field around them both.

“Why did you shield him Grandpa? Do you really think that I would kill him?”

“I’m sorry Gordon, I see now that I was too hasty and didn’t think. Please accept my apology.”

Gordon smiled. “Its ok Grandpa.”

Doske joined the trio on the now scorched arena floor.

“The winner is Gordon.” Doske announced.

The crowd went wild with cheering for Gordon. Grandpa mo looked up at the judging podium. He then walked over to Gordon and placed his left hand on his grandsons shoulder. Half a second later they were standing next to Mrs. Block. Grandpa Mo put his right hand on Mrs. Block’s shoulder and the three disappeared. The grass was soft and the night air crisp.

“what have you too been up to?” Grandpa Mo’s voice was not angry, but rather quizzical and amazed.

“He was not supposed to attempt to use that power, I only showed him how to tell the difference between the two elements not how to use them together. I’m as shocked as you are.” Mrs. Block said. Gordon looked around him, it was dark but he could make out clearly that they were standing on his grandpa’s back lawn near to where he had fought Max the day before. Gordon dropped to a sitting position on the grass with a loud huff.

“Mrs. Block I don’t feel to good, I might have over done it again.”

Mrs. Block placed her hand on Gordon’s shoulder and let her mind and consciousness flow into Gordon’s body.

The street was busy with people moving from shop to shop purchasing food, clothing and other consumable goods. A black cat scurried between the shoppers avoiding the mass of feet while at the same time looking for scraps of food to eat. An untrained eye would not have noticed the four men walking down the street. They were not walking together, however Bossak knew that they were the night watch at the safe house and were about to take over the task of protecting the safe house and its contents. There were a few subtle hints that gave away who they were. The way they carried themselves was different from most of the shoppers, shoulders and backs were square and also they had a very purposeful look on their faces. They had adopted a typical form of concealing themselves as they moved towards the safe house. Walking at an appropriate distance from each other, close to support each other in case of a fight but also far away enough to make sure that they didn’t draw attention to themselves as a group. The first of the group reached the safe house, which was disguised as a hotel, a man walked out into the throng of people outside and followed the flow down the street as his replacement moved into the doorway of the hotel and disappeared inside. The scene played out three more times unnoticed by the commoners making their rounds. Bossak continued to watch the safe house, he knew that he would have to make his move before the streets emptied and him and his companions were noticed. Bossak looked at Stick who had positioned himself three shops down the road and nodded. Bossak walked across the street to the entrance of the hotel, placed his hand on the guards shoulder and greeted him. After ten or so seconds he stepped through the door and disappeared inside the building. Five minutes later Stick looked over to the entrance again. *He should have been out by now. Has something gone wrong? Has he been captured? Five more minutes that’s all I can wait.* As Stick was thinking of what to do next Bossak walked out of the building and towards the shop that he had positioned himself in. Stick noticed an all to familiar look on his master’s face, one he had encountered many times when he had made mistakes or not followed directions. Bossak was mad. He entered the shop and pushed a scroll into Stick’s hands. “Lets go” Bossak said in a low tone and made his way out of the shop. The scroll, only one meter in length was a lot heavier than it looked. Stick stowed it into the bag strapped over his shoulders and followed his master down the street and out of the village.

Doske sighed. *This has been very interesting.*

“The next match will be between Lili and Mizta.”

Lili and Mizta made their way down to the scorched arena floor. The arenas lights had been switched on after Gordon’s fight and everything now had four shadows due to the four massive lights that beamed down into the arena. For the third time Doske ordered the start of a selection match. Mizta knew that he was no match for Lili. *She is just too fast and my skills can’t match hers. I am so screwed. Maybe just maybe I can hold her to a stalemate if I’m lucky.*

Lili looked at Doske and then at her opponent. Most of the other students wore clothing that would not hinder their movement and also camouflage them but Mizta was wearing his normal garb. Baggy brightly coloured clothing and long loosely hanging dreadlocks.

“Lets get this started” Mizta said to Lili.

“Catch me if you can.” Lili said and disappeared from right in front of Mizta’s eyes leaving behind a small puff of dust.

“BOO!” Lili’s voice came from behind Mizta.

“Common! Fight me!” Lili was standing in front of Mizta, her nose almost touching his. Again she disappeared reappearing behind him, then in front, then to his left. A sharp pain on his left side alerted Mizta to the fact that two of his ribs had been snapped a second before by a well placed strike from Lili. Mizta turned his head to the left and right trying to follow and predict Lili’s next move. From behind him came her voice again.

“Common Mizt.....”

“I got you now Lili” Mizta said grabbing her wrist, pulling her in front of him he put all his might into a punch directly to the gut. Lili didn’t have a chance to think before she hit the dirt sprawling like a limp rag doll.

*I only stopped for half a second, how did he read my move so well. There is no way that he can predict my moves.*

“You finished playing yet Lili?” Mizta asked with a hint of uneasiness in his voice. Knowing what was to come Mizta pulled at his store of energy and focussed it into his iron skin transformation process. Lili looked on as Mizta’s skin took on a metallic sheen. Lili stood up focussing her energy, two roots shot up from below Mizta and wrapped them around his arms, legs, neck and torso. Before Mizta could complete his transformation the root system squeezed tight just as two sharp looking roots made their way up his body and positioned themselves in each of his ears. Lili looked satisfied with what she had achieved and continued to pour energy into the process of trapping the metallic man that stood in front of her. The girl looked up at the examiner and shouted.

“This fight is over. If he moves he will die.”

“I concede.” Came Mizta’s voice, now much deeper than before. Mizta’s ability to coat his whole body in Iron had not been complete when the two roots entered his ears, he was unable to completely protect himself in time and he knew that the fight was over.

Grandpa Mo stood speechless as Mrs Block checked Gordon’s energy system for damage caused by his selection exam battle. She opened her eyes and looked at Gordon and grandpa Mo.

“Don’t worry Gordon, you have not damaged yourself, but I think that for now you have found your limit. Remember that if you damage yourself like you did when you fought Max, I might not be around to help you.” She woman turned her attention to her long time friend.

“Mo I think that you need to take Gordon and Max to see Tiko. Both of these boys need to get energy stones. You will have to spend some time with both of them and show them how to judge their limits. You Tarmo boys always seem to over do it when you fight. From what I saw tonight both these boys were near their limits when they finished their matches. We can’t risk them destroying themselves just to complete a mission. There might not be a healer around on all of their missions.” Grandpa Mo still had a look of amazement on his face.

“Thank you Vera I appreciate what you have done with Gordon. However you should have come to me and told me about Gordon’s new found skills.”

“I only assumed that he had the Kuera skills I was going to help him unlock it today with your help.”

“Well it looks like we were not needed after all Vera.” Minister Harris chuckled and walked over to Gordon.

“Gordon how are you feeling?” He asked. “If you are feeling better we must get back to the arena, I still need to judge the fights.”

“I’m feeling better now, Grandpa”

Grandpa Mo placed his hands on Gordon and Mrs Block and a second later they were back in the judging booth in the Dremos arena. The rest of the matches flashed by in a blur, weeding out the weak from the strong and the skilled from the untalented. It was past midnight when the last match came to an abrupt end as one of the fighters knocked the other one unconscious. Long after everybody had retired to the homes and warm beds Grandpa Mo, Minister Harris and the four-team leaders deliberated about whom they would include into the Dremos ranks. After only two hours of sleep Grandpa Mo dragged himself out of bed. His knees creaked, he groaned and then the inevitable crack.

“Damn I am to old for this.” He said. The aid that had brought him his coffee chuckled softly. After getting dressed and eating a quick breakfast Grandpa Mo made his way to the arena to meet the other judges, students and parents.