

Gabe was relieved to see that, after walking less than an hour, the terrain was becoming rockier and he could make out trees in the distance. Well before dinner, he calculated, they would be in the forest and probably could hunt down something to eat. They should also be able to start a fire in the woods without attracting a lot of attention. At least that was his hope. He also wondered what kinds of mythical creatures existed here. He would love to ride on a unicorn or just see a dragon soar through the air.

“Incoming!” Gabe heard Tanya’s scream as she knocked his legs out from under him. He fell flat on his face but instinctively exhaled to lessen the impact. Gabe turned his head to the right and saw Matt also on the ground staring back at him.

“Tanya, what do you think you’re doing? That wasn’t funny!” screamed Matt as he started to pull himself to his knees. Just then they heard a series of loud cracks and looked up in time to see three giant spears ricochet off the ten-foot-high rock that was only a few steps in front of them.

Gabe pulled his knee into his midsection and pushed against the ground. This caused him to roll forward. Half way into the roll he twisted onto his left shoulder and redirected his momentum, finishing in a kneeling position facing his attackers.

What he saw made him wish they were back in a high school lecture hall. He had to force himself to talk. “Three really ugly creatures behind us; approximately three hundred feet away and coming in fast. Matt and Lian, place Dillon’s sled against the rock and we will stand in front of him.” Gabe’s shaky voice reflected how they all felt once they looked at the humongous monsters plodding toward them.

Except for Tanya. She calmly slid her bow from her back with one hand while grabbing an arrow out of her quiver with the other. The arrow and bow came together in one swift movement, and no sooner did she pull the arrow back than she let it fly. Gabe looked at the flight of the arrow and calculated that it would miss the biggest of the creatures by a good three or four feet.

“Tanya, you need to relax and take a little more time.” Gabe’s voice was calmer now as he assessed what needed to be done. He looked back at the oncoming enemy just in time to see the largest one side-step a four-foot rock in his path, and move right into Tanya’s arrow. The arrow struck him squarely in the throat, and Gabe guessed by the creature’s scream that Tanya had hit a vital artery. The struck enemy grabbed the arrow and pulled it out without stopping. However, its pace slowed down a little. Another of Tanya’s arrows struck it in the chest but merely

bounced off its heavy armor. Now they were less than one hundred feet away and closing fast.

“Matt and Lian, take the center one. Tanya, stay on the one you injured. I will take the other. Make sure to keep them away from Dillon. He dies and our mission and lives are over.” They all assumed a fighting position as their enemy came closer.

“Mother of mercy, they’re freakin’ ogres!” moaned Lian. “I thought first-level players only had to fight rabid dogs or maybe young goblins.” Tanya was the only one to laugh. She still seemed remarkably relaxed.

Gabe counted down in his head to the beginning of the battle. *Five, four, three, two, one.*