

The Training Pits

Chapter Three

As Jakob continued his journey, he was suddenly confronted by a formidable figure. Standing tall and powerful, the man before him donned the complete armor of a Legionnaire. Although Jakob recognized the voice, he couldn't be certain of the man's identity since his face was concealed by a helmet. Even though Jakob was the prince, he had the utmost respect for the Legionnaires. The man who halted him donned the customary military attire; a deep grey breastplate complemented by a black leather tunic beneath. On the breastplate were symbols synonymous with the Legion, twin waves, a prominent V emblazoned at its center, and atop the breastplate, five stars that gleamed with significance. A dark navy-blue cape, the color of their Nation, billowed behind him, fixed to his armor. One feature that captivated Jakob was the distinctive helm worn by Legionnaires, a prized possession he held in his own quarters. Despite its size being too large for him, he would often walk around the Palace in its formidable glory. Crafted from the same dark grey as the breastplate, the helm boasted a savage spiked crest that curled menacingly from its crown, accompanied by smaller spikes that protruded from every angle. Its faceplate, meticulously carved, mirrored the face of its wearer. As the man removed his helm, Jakob's assumption was confirmed in an instant. The first detail that caught his eye was the man's sharply defined, greyish-black beard, accompanied by a scar that stretched from his nose to just shy of his ear.

“General Frizela!” The man was a General of the Legion Nation named Aurius Frizela, and he was one of Jakob's father's closest allies. Jakob yelled his name as he began to hug him, but as soon as he extended his arms, the General pushed him away.

“No hugs during a time of battle, Prince at the ready!” The General said in a commanding tone as he squared himself away in a fighting stance.

“We aren’t at battle?” Jakob responded confused but then realized quickly what he meant as he grinned back getting himself ready to spar. It was a silly game that he and the General played often when they would see one another. They would spar and throw a few combos back and forth dodging each other. The General and Jakob began to circle.

“You are always at battle Jakob,” pausing for a second Aurius continued, **“Battling against your mind. Don’t let it win.”** Jakob remained quiet and threw a few jabs, missing the general.

“Every day you dealt a hand, don’t complain about it, you’re not a victim of circumstance. Pay your dues, earn the life Mata gives you. Don’t lean too much into your punches” General Frizela was always there to offer Jakob motivation and advice on his technique. The General lightly threw a kick and Jakob skillfully evaded the attack.

“I’m too fast old man.” Jakob reacted as he found an opening. He charged trying his hardest to tackle him. The General let himself fall and they both rolled to the ground laughing.

“Great Jakob, getting stronger every day.” The General rose to his feet and picked Jakob up, continuing to speak.

“Keep following our pillars, duty to the Nation, duty to Self and duty to Mata, you’ll make a great King one day.” As they walked along the path beside the pits, Jakob couldn't help but be intrigued by the General's thrilling adventures. The General would entertain him with tales of chasing down outlaws in the Amber Dunes or battling Shadow-Beasts in the Great Divide Mountains. Each story made Jakob laugh, especially when General Aurius would recount a

different version of how he acquired the scar on his left cheek. One time, it was a face-stabbing incident in a tavern, and another time, it was a skirmish with a Boa in the Azurite Woods that took a chunk from his face. As General Frizela vividly described these events, Jakob's imagination would transport him into those moments. He wanted his own daring and perilous adventures that would take him across the Nations of Hyperion, and hopefully, they would come to fruition soon. As the two companions continued their walk, another man emerged from the forest.

"Seventy-Five!" a man emerged from the forest, calling out to General Frizela. It seemed that seventy-five was the General's nickname, something Jakob had never heard before. The man, carrying a dead Elk on his shoulders with dried blood staining his chest and arms, was none other than Master Ranger Caius Hanes, also known as the Bowhunter. Caius, taller and older than the General with a distinguished white beard, was not only a close companion to Jakob but also part of his father's inner circle.

"Wow, where did you hunt that, Master Hanes?" Jakob asked, his curiosity piqued. Master Ranger Hanes gently placed the animal down from his shoulders and replied,

"You don't have to call me Master, Jakob. You can always call me Bowhunter. I'm here to serve you."

He then leaned down, giving Jakob a firm greeting by grasping his forearm and saying,

"For the Nation." This gesture of respect was customary among the Legion Adult Men, and for Jakob to receive such a greeting from Caius demonstrated the depth of their friendship. The Bowhunter called out to a nearby patrolman, instructing him,

"Brito, take the elk to the kitchen. Get it cleaned and prepped as a birthday gift for our prince here. How's Tiberius?" Caius asked with a smile, looking down at Jakob.

"He's doing great, probably running around somewhere here. Hopefully, one day you can teach him how to hunt with me!" Jakob replied eagerly, his face lighting up.

"Sounds like a plan to me. Let's go meet your father, but first, we'll stop and watch Datev in action. I love seeing him whip our Legionnaires into shape." Caius said, turning to General Frizela and teasingly punching his arm.

"You're looking a little heavy there, Seventy-Five." Jakob trailed behind the two men, momentarily forgetting that today's festivities also revolved around his own birthday. Thanks to the Bowhunter, the reminder jolted back into his mind, and he couldn't help but feel slightly annoyed. While Jakob's birthday wasn't typically the cause for a grand celebration, today held an additional significance, it was the commemoration of Hyperion City, a grand event that occurs once every hundred years. Jakob had hoped that his birthday could be overlooked among the excitement. He envisioned the upcoming celebration and found himself dreading it. It only served as reminder that everyone was watching him, he snapped back to reality when he realized the two men were leaving him behind. Quickly, he ran to catch up with them, eager to listen in on their conversations about the news and events unfolding throughout Hyperion. It served as a welcome distraction from his own thoughts.

Aurius turned to Caius and inquired, **"Have you heard anything from Master Jensen?"**

Caius shook his head, a hint of concern in his voice. **"No, I haven't. He, along with two other Rangers, went on a patrol just north of Tavern Way, and they haven't reported back**

yet. There's also been a killing spree at Butters place, but I don't have all the details. I hope these incidents aren't connected."

Aurius nodded in agreement. **"After training, we should report this to the King."**

As Jakob overheard their conversation, his curiosity was instantly piqued, particularly regarding the recent killings they mentioned. He couldn't help but eavesdrop, longing to gather any shred of information. However, he was aware that directly asking for details would only result in vague responses. Nonetheless, Jakob clung onto hope as he anxiously awaited his Uncle Fred's return from his extended journey to the east. He believed that his uncle, if he had discovered anything significant, would surely share the information with him. Jakob's close bond with Uncle Fred had played a role in his rebellious nature, as his uncle often shared details that Jakob probably shouldn't have been privy to. Nonetheless, he liked being in the know, feeling a sense of superiority by possessing exclusive information, eagerly anticipating the opportunity to share it with his friends. In his thoughts, Jakob unintentionally collided with Master Ranger Hanes, his attention briefly diverted. Turning his head towards the direction the men had been looking, Jakob fell silent. The trio then joined together in observing the legendary Datev Gokkins as he trained the skilled Legionnaires. The sound of Datev's voice ignited a surge of motivation within him.

"You don't know me, Son!" Datev bellowed at the men and women that he was instructing, while also lifting a hundred-pound log over his own head.

"I'm out here in the dirt with you son, I've been retired for longer than you've been born. And you will quit before me!"

The Legion Nation had the toughest men and women in all of Hyperion, but even now you could see the pain and suffering on their faces, Datev made it look easy. Alongside the trainees he began lifting logs back and forth over their heads as he continued to walk around them yelling,

“There you go, there you go, energy, let it out, eight, nine, ten. A machine, come on, nobody works like you. They don’t know me son, they don’t know me, Son. Who’s going to carry the ships and the logs. Who’s going to carry the ships!” Datev finished screaming at the trainees.

Jakob's attention was fully fixated on the ongoing training, but suddenly, out of the corner of his eye, he caught sight of his father preparing to train in the neighboring pit. He hurried towards the pit and settled himself on the edge of a stone bench, eager to watch his father's session. Taking a seat beside a group of kids who had already gathered, Jakob leaned forward anxiously looking to see if he was there. His archnemesis. It was none other than William Maguire, the infamous bully whom Jakob despised. William, the son of a high-ranking member of the Legion Order, he was the same age as Jakob but towered over him in height, boasting straight black hair that fell across his face. William always wore an evil smirk and once even threw dirt in Jakob's eye. Frustratingly, Jakob couldn't retaliate against William, as he was instructed to respect everyone in the Nation, a rule reiterated during his lectures. Jakob noticed William a few rows down from his spot but quickly avoided his stare, turning his attention to his father instead. King Joseph Stryder, as usual, drew a captivated audience whenever he trained.

Catching sight of Jakob, Joseph made eye contact, offering a warm smile before refocusing on his training. Watching his father was a cherished experience for Jakob, even if the repetition sometimes caused him to nod off. Throughout the hour-long training session, the King showcased his expertise with various weapons. Jakob particularly enjoyed watching his father

wield the traditional Legion sword and the Choppers. The swords of the Legion Nation, while sharing a similar shape with others, possessed exclusive custom engravings, and were forged from diverse materials. The hilt of these swords had a cylindrical form, exposing a grey blade that perfectly complemented the armor. The grip featured a navy-blue color gilded with elegant white lines, decorated with distinct engravings representing the Legion Nation. Although most swords had comparable designs, everyone's family name was personally engraved on the collar of their own sword. The blades of these exceptional weapons were skillfully crafted from locally sourced Smoky Quartz, a remarkably lightweight yet durable material.

Jakob observed his father effortlessly dispatching his fellow swordsmen during their training sessions. In no time, the King shifted his focus to target practice, taking hold of a Chopper. The sight of his father retrieving the Chopper stirred Jakob in his seat. To him, the weapon was something he knew inside out. The Chopper, a single-shot handheld blaster, was crafted and produced by The Grand Reserve. It's worth noting that all blasters were exclusively manufactured and distributed by The Reserve. These weapons were tightly regulated and considered highly lethal within Hyperion. Blasters relied on crystals and could be easily rendered inactive by an electromagnetic pulse. That's why most nations still relied on swords and other conventional forms of artillery, despite having a readily available supply of blasters like Drakos, Burners, Choppers, and Ninas. The King seamlessly alternated between different training forms, captivating the attention of Jakob and the other children who watched in awe. Jakob's eyes fluttered as he struggled to stay awake, but suddenly, a surge of energy jolted through him, instantly waking him up. He blinked, realizing that he was no longer observing his father's training. The world around him had transformed into shades of grey. Confused, he scanned his surroundings and saw two men engaged in intense training, exchanging words with each other.

Jakob stood up and cautiously approached them, noticing that there was no one else around. The training pits seemed ancient and worn, yet there was something oddly familiar about this moment. As he drew nearer to the men, he waved, but it seemed as though they couldn't even see him. One of the men had dark, short hair, and a thick beard, while the other had long, white hair with a clean face. Despite the strangeness of the situation, there was an air of tranquility that enveloped the moment, as if Jakob had experienced it before.

"Is that all you got brother?" the man with dark hair taunted.

"Be patient, Luehtaz. There is always calm before the storm," the man with white hair responded, their movements quickening. Jakob stood in awe, witnessing swordsmanship unlike anything he had ever seen before. The two men moved with a combination of grace and power, almost as if they were lights gliding across the space. Jakob couldn't determine whether this was another dream or a vision, leaving him utterly confused.

"Jakob, Jakob! What are you doing?" a voice called out, shaking him out of his trance. Suddenly, the world around him peeled back, and he found himself back in reality. The transition was so abrupt that Jakob panicked, his body moving without his control. He realized he wasn't in the same spot where he was originally seated, it seemed like he had gotten up and wandered off, but he had no recollection of how or why. Struggling to regain his balance, Jakob stumbled and crashed into a water barrel, causing water to splash everywhere as he fell face-first. Laughter erupted from the other boys, mocking his clumsy accident.

"What a weirdo, that's why they keep him at the palace!" Jakob heard William's voice taunt, and he could feel his anger building up. In an instant, he rose from the ground,

completely drenched, and clenched his fists as he walked fast towards William. But before he could reach him, his father, Joseph, grabbed hold of him.

"Jakob!" Joseph exclaimed, wrapping his arms around Jakob, and spinning him around.

"Let me at him! Let me at him!" Jakob yelled, struggling to free himself from his father's grasp.

"Compose yourself, Prince. Walk away," his father commanded. Reluctantly, Jakob stormed off from the training pits and made his way towards the main road that led back to the forest. His breathing was heavy, his chest heaving with anger. It was a rage unlike anything he had ever felt before. His face and ears burned with heat, turning red.

"I hate him. Ill stab his big a."** Jakob muttered to himself, pacing back and forth. Just then, his father caught up with him.

"Come here, Jakob, right now!" Joseph's tone was firm but concerned. Jakob obediently walked over to him, lowering his head. He felt tears welling up in his eyes as Joseph knelt to his level.

"Why are you crying?" Joseph asked gently.

"I don't know. Sometimes when I get mad, I just feel like crying!" Jakob replied, frustration evident in his voice.

"It's okay, Jakob. Relax, take a deep breath." Joseph softened his tone, attempting to calm his son. Jakob listened and took a deep breath, trying to soothe himself. Joseph continued; his voice filled with fatherly wisdom.

"Hey, listen to me. When people make fun of you, when they hate you, it's because they have something inside themselves that they don't like. You're a leader, Jakob. You're going to be the future King of this Nation. As a leader, not everyone in the world is going to love you, but that comes with the territory. Not everyone likes me. The best thing you can do is sow seeds of love from your heart, and you will be blessed." Joseph reassured his son, doing his best to console him. Jakob began to feel a bit calmer, although the anger still simmered within him. He was accustomed to being told how to treat people, it often felt as though no one cared about how he was treated. However, when his father was around, it made him feel better.

"Come here." Joseph said, pulling Jakob into a hug. **"I love you son."**

They started walking up the path towards the palace, their steps accompanied by silence.

"You weren't really going to stab him, were you son?" The King asked his son jokingly.

This is a work of fiction. Names, characters, places, and incidents either are the product of the author's imagination or are used fictitiously. Any resemblance to actual persons, living or dead, events, or locales is entirely coincidental.

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