

Mentions of guns

Astril woke up with a gasp, feeling a sudden jolt throughout their body, and a sudden feeling of dread. Astril paused, yet the air around them was calm, as crickets chirped outside, yet they couldn't shake the deep sinking feeling that something was wrong. Astril got up out of bed, walking over to the window and opening it to look outside at the farm. Everything was calm and tranquil, then what was this feeling?

“Pleiades?” Astril asked quietly.

“I'm here” Pleiades responded, her voice ringing in the back of Astrils mind.

“Do you feel that too?” Astril asked. “A strange feeling of... dread...” Astril said as their hands gripped the window ledge.

“I don't feel it myself, but I can sense it within you. It's not coming from anywhere in your mind surprisingly. It seems to be rooted in your magic somehow?” Pleiades responded. Shortly after she spoke, rushed footsteps could be heard outside of Astrils door, and a quick knock soon followed.

“Yeah?” Astril called out, the door soon opened, and Ma was standing there. She looked frazzled, but still tried to remain calm.

“Astril, are you alright?” Ma asked quickly, which made Astrils tail twitched with concern.

“Yeah, I'm fine, what's wrong?” Astril asked, Ma seemed to hesitate before responding.

“I'm... not sure... I just woke up with this... strange sense of foreboding... I can't explain it, but I thought I should check on you.” Ma said, worry laced her voice.

“Wait... you too?” Astril asked, which seemed to surprise Ma. “The same thing just happened to me too...” Astril said as they trailed off. Both looked at eachother, and both seemed to simultaneously understand something that filled them with dread.

“We need to return to Sealight.” Ma said quickly, and Astril nodded, quickly following behind Ma.

“So it's that serious huh? Then I'm coming with you.” Pleiades said, her voice inside of Astrils mind, so only they could hear. Astril responded back with a thought, so that Ma couldn't hear their conversation.

“Are you sure Pleiades? You don't have to come, it's best if you stay, there's no telling what could be waiting back on skire for us.” Astril thought, but Pleiades scoffed.

“You say that as if I can't hold my own. Trust me, I'll be fine.” She responded. Astril realized they couldn't really argue, after all, Pleiades was much stronger than them.

As Ma and Astril reached the bottom of the stairs, Astril was quick to get ready, putting on their varsity jacket and satchel, while grabbing their lasso. Ma was going through the kitchen, grabbing any potential food or supplies, grabbing a bag to store it in. Soon however, with all of the commotion and noise, the Farmer had made his way downstairs.

“What's going on, it's two in the morning, what's the rush?” He asked, confused. Ma looked a bit guilty.

“Oh, I'm sorry honey, I was going to leave a note, I should have told you but I didn't want to wake you.” She said quickly, but soon shook her head and took a deep breath. “I'm sorry, but something is wrong back on Skire. I can't explain it, but we need to go back home. I need to make sure my children are safe.” She said, walking up to The Farmer and holding his hands.

“Then we're coming too.” He said firmly, as Bean soon came up from behind, jumping on his shoulder and giving a boof in response.

“What? No no, but the farm-”

“The BeBee bots can take care of the beans while I'm gone, but I'm not letting you leave by yourself, especially if what you say is true and there is danger, I can't let you two go by yourselves.” He said, making it clear he wasn't taking no for an answer. Both looked at each other for a moment before Ma sighed, giving into his demands.

“Oh, Alright, I could never say no to that face.” Ma said with a smile as she put both hands on his face. Both giggled while Astril grimaced at the sight.

“Right, can we go now?” Astril asked as Bingus jumped on their shoulder, also giving a boof as if to ask the same question. Ma nodded.

“Right, let's go” Ma said as the group made their way outside quickly. Wasting no time walking through the farm and into the forest, and eventually, they stood in front of the portal that would take them back to skire. Astril went to the back of the portal, opening the panel and flipping the switch to power it on. The portal sparked and whirled to life in a blaze of light. Astril walked up

to Ma, both had a sense of fear, afraid of what they may find on the other side, yet they both knew they needed to make sure their family and friends on the other were safe, no matter what it was that was causing them this sense of dread. The three of them walked forward, into the portal, and Into the unknown.

Exiting on the other side, they were in the seaside cave. Nothing appeared out of the ordinary at first, but they soon noticed the sand below was wet, which never happened, not even in high tide. Ma and Astril looked at each other before they rushed out of the cave, The Farmer following behind.

Outside of the cave was a grim sight to behold. The skies were a light grayish purple, with what looked like a pale aurora that danced in the sky. The tide was pulled in, nearly touching the cliffside wall, with large chunks of rock scattered near the wall. In the distance, Astril saw a sight that left them with a pit of dread in their stomach. It was the Captain's ship, it had been pushed to shore, and was laying on it's side, surprisingly in one piece, but still heavily damaged with timber scattered about. It seemed the tide had dragged the ship on shore against its will, and left it stranded like a beached whale.

Astril felt a well of anxiety fill them, as they quickly started to run towards the stairs built into the side of the cliff, with Ma and The Farmer running behind. Surprisingly the stairs were mostly intact, enough for them to get up to the top of the cliff. As they stepped foot on the grassy plateau, all of them froze at the sight.

The small town of Sealight lay before them, but in the distance, in the meadows was a large fissure that cut the land. While it had not hit and swallowed the town whole, several smaller cracks reached out like spindly hands to grab the town in its destructive clutches. While no severe damage was visible from where they stood, there was no telling what waited for them, and they didn't waste more time, as they started to run again towards the town.

All of them ran, only stopping when they reached the town square. It was quiet, and lifeless. Not a single soul was around, not any animal or insect, human or skiren, it was empty, at least from what they could see. Astril started to panic as they started to call out.

“Azeal!! Anise!! Black Jack, Stephenie, Captain!! Anyone!! Please!!” Astril called out as they frantically paced around, calling out the names of anyone they could think of, but no one answered. Astril continued to yell and scream, begging for a response, before they felt someone grab their arm.

“Astril calm down! This isn't getting us anywhere!” The Farmer said as he tried to calm them down, but before they could respond they heard something, which caused them both to go silent.

Ma also paused as they all looked around, the noise sounded like a strange sloshing, and the sound of heavy footsteps followed with it. They paused before Astril spoke.

“Hello?” They asked as they started to walk towards the sound.

“Astril don't-” The Farmer started, but it was clear his warning would fall on deaf ears. Astril was slow, but kept moving forward, and as they were about to round the corner-

“ASTRIL STOP” A sharp yell came from behind, as Black Jack stood at the entrance of Anise bakery, with Azael and Anise standing behind him. As Astril turned around, from behind the corner emerged a large beast, its body made of a white hard material like bone, with the majority of its body covered in black ichor. It roared, causing Astril to stumble and run. The beast only made it a single step forward, before a loud bang rang out, and a golf ball sized hole ripped through its shoulder, causing it to screech in pain, before making a quick escape. Just as quickly as it had come, it was gone.

As the beast fled, all eyes were on The Farmer, holding his shotgun, a thin line of smoke emanating from the barrel as he let out a long shaky sigh, slowly lowering it as he looked at Astril, not saying a word. The tension was broken by Azael running past Black Jack and over to Astril, embracing Astril in a tight hug that almost knocked them over. It didn't last long as Azael gripped Astril's shoulders and looked at them.

“Why are you guys here?? You should have stayed where you were, it's dangerous here!” Azael said quickly. Black Jack walked up from behind.

“The better question is how you even got here in the first place, I thought all portals were inoperable since this all started.” He said, glancing between Ma and Astril.

“Since what started? What's going on, what was that... thing?” Ma asked quickly. “Is everyone alright?” Ma added on quickly.

“It be the end of times!” a voice came from the bakery as the Captain's walked out, Price following behind.

“Oh skire sake you old fart, don't be scaring them, they've been through enough!” Price sneered as he crossed his arms. Black Jack sighed as he rubbed his temples.

“It started a few weeks ago.” Black Jack started. “The earthquakes were small at first, but then they grew stronger. One of them caused the tide to be pulled in, and washed the Captain's ship onto shore. Then, just a few days ago, a really strong one hit.” Black Jack said as he looked out

at the meadows beyond town. “Suddenly, this huge crack formed out in the meadows, the skies turned this strange color, and portals stopped working. I was In the city when it happened, so I had to fly myself and Price back here, since Price shop got swallowed by another fissure in the city I brought him here. It was safe at first, until the cracks from the fissure started to reach out, and then... that *thing* came out of the ground. We've been hiding in basements to avoid it since yesterday, but thankfully that's been the only one so far.” Black Jack said as he scratched the back of his head.

“That's horrible.” Ma said as she walked over to Black Jack. “Oh my poor babies.” Ma said as she embraced Back Jack, which only caused him to give an annoyed groan.

“Ma I'm fine.” He said as he rolled his eyes. Astril soon spoke up.

“You should come back with us.” Astril said firmly, causing everyone to look at them. “The portal to Savar is still open, and it seems like nowhere on skire is safe, we can't let you stay here.” Astril said firmly. They all looked at eachother, and Azael was the first to speak.

“Astril, we can't, this is our home-”

“Our home isn't safe Azael” Anise cut him off as they all looked over at her. She had come up from the basement. “There are kids and elderly here Azzy, nearly two thousand lives, and with these earthquakes hiding underground won't keep us safe for long, we need to evacuate as many people as we can.” She said firmly. Azael looked at Anise, then over at Astril. He paused before he sighed.

“Fine, Black jack-”

“On it” Black Jack said as he quickly made his way over to the other buildings to gather up as many people in hiding as he could. Anise joined in as well, gathering up as many people as they could. Soon, everyone was gathered in the town square, and in a group, they all moved forward to the beach. All of them slowly made their way down the stairs, helping those who had trouble moving down the stairs. Soon, the entire town had gathered into the seaside cave, the crowd spilling outside of the cave.

Astril wasted no time turning it on, it flickered to life in a flash of light, as the crowd murmured in surprise at the sight.

“We should have the young and elderly enter first, then-” Ma started, before The Farmer had put his hand up to stop her.

“Wait... do you feel that?” He asked. Everyone froze as they started to feel it too. The ground started to quiver, as it quickly grew more violent.

“It's another quake!” Anise yelled, as the crowd started to panic. Rocks from the cave wall started to crumble and fall, and with a loud crack, a large stone fell on the portal, knocking a chunk off of the ring, forcing it to shut down.

“NO!” Astril yelled, running towards the portal, but Black Jack grabbed their arm. “Let me go! I can fix it!” Astril yelled, but Black Jack didn't listen.

“This cave is going to collapse, it's not worth it!” He yelled as he picked up Astril and ran out of the cave, only making it out in the nick of time, as the entrance collapsed, being filled with rubble. Astril squirmed out of his grip, and facing where the cave entrance once was. Their ears dropped before they fell to their knees. Everyone could only look on in shock and fear, not saying a word, until Astril finally spoke, in a terrified whisper, as the reality they faced sunk in deep.

“We're trapped on Skire.”