

## **An Elven Interlude Part V: Daggers and Dhakhan**

by Stuart Emmerman

Ryder watched Skylana disappear into the Druidic enclave, the summons had sounded urgent, but he was sure that whatever the problem was, Skylana would be able to handle it. He then turned to salute Te’Jin to relieve him of his escort duty. The Elf Captain returned the salute and strode off with a purpose, leaving the Ranger standing just inside the gates to the great city. Knowing that he had a few hours to kill, Ryder decided to pay a visit to an old friend.

Ryder made his way towards the more “industrial” part of Atlea, a place where the pleasant tranquil sounds of the forest gave way to the ring of anvils and the hiss of cooling metals. However, unlike Dwarven or Gnomish towns, there were no great and clever machines here. The Elves were no tinkerers; they rely on magic and muscle to bring their creations to life. Instead, there were many tents and encampments filled with Elves hammering steel or chopping and carving wood. Ryder moved in and out of the passing Elves, making his way deeper into the maze of workshops. Finally, he came upon a large alcove carved from the base of a giant oak. As he approached it the din of outside noise began to fade away and muffle. Inside the alcove there was a large workbench up against the wall, the surface of it littered with tools. Sitting on the floor next to the bench was a sturdy built Elf, ash smeared on his face and clothes, his long silver hair tied down underneath a green head wrap. He sat there, eyes closed, his legs tucked under him.

“For a Ranger, you do make quite a racket. I could have killed you three times already.” The Elf said without moving.

“Tell me, Hal’min,” Ryder replied with a crooked smile. “Are you really meditating? Or do you just enjoy napping like a kitten in the sun?” Suddenly the outside noise came crashing in as if someone had broken the dam that had been holding it at bay. The Elf sprang into the air and, pulling a knife from his boot, went right for the Ranger’s throat. Ryder met the blade with his own dagger and jumped backwards.

“What’s the matter, Nim’ohtar?” Hal’min asked provokingly. “Have you grown soft from all that Human food and faire?” The Elf came at Ryder again, moving like lightning. The Ranger parried his attack, grabbing hold of Hal’min as he deflected his blade. Ryder used the Elf’s own momentum to roll the pair backwards, burying his boot in Hal’min’s gut. Before the Elf could mount a counter-attack, Ryder thrust him up and over himself and with a crash Hal’min landed hard on the tool scattered workbench. Laying there motionless, the Elf began to cough a bit, but the cough soon became a light chuckle with, Ryder noted, a hint of a mocking tone. The Ranger approached the prostrate Elf who was still laughing away.

“What’s so funny, Old man?” Ryder asked. “Did I finally knock something loose?”

“No, no...” Hal’min replied so softly that Ryder had to lean in to hear it. “I’m laughing...”

because after all this time... you are still far too trusting.” Then with a movement too fast for Ryder to see, Hal’min grabbed one of the Ranger’s legs and swept it out from under him. Ryder fell onto his back with a loud “oomph!” Hal’min sprung up and continued to laugh a bit at the embarrassed Ranger. After a few seconds, Hal’min offered his hand out but Ryder refused to take the bait and got up by himself.

“So, to what do I owe this pleasure, Nim’ohtar? Why have you come to visit me?”

“I need your help.” Ryder stated bluntly. “Skylana and I were attacked by Droga on the outskirts of the forest.”

“I heard, I heard,” The Elf said. “Nasty little things they are.”

“Unfortunately, there is nothing ‘little’ about them. That is part of the problem. My arrows were just bouncing off their hides. I need something stronger.” Hal’min picked his head up at this and a gleam came into his eye. Ryder continued, “Since you are the one who crafted my bow, I figured...”

“I made Darodir for Lady Nightmoon.” Hal’min replied a bit coolly. “Had I known she would give it to a half breed Ranger like you...” The Elf trailed off muttering to himself. He began busying himself tidying up the small shop. Knowing the Elf was just being coy, Ryder played with him a bit.

“Well, never mind then, I have heard tale of Dwarven smiths who can imbue their weapons with the strength of the very Earth itself. Perhaps I’ll just ask-”

“Dwarves!?” Hal’min shot back. “Dwarves wouldn’t know magic unless it came in a tapped barrel. Dwarves... Hmmph! Unless if you want your arrows to smell of booze and fall ‘short’ of their target, then by all means.”

“Then you’ll help me?” Ryder asked plainly.

“Fine, fine,” The Elf conceded. “Grab an apron. I will require some assistance.”

Hal’min began the crafting of new arrows for the Ranger, imbued with Elven magicks to give them powers far beyond that of ordinary wood and steel. To start, he took a bar of Dwarven Earth-Metal from his own special reserve and melted it down to shape the heads of the first batch. Then, the Elf closed his eyes and became very still. With deep concentration, he clapped his hands together loudly. Ryder suddenly became very cold as, with a sharp crack, Hal’min summoned to himself all the heat from the within the small room. His hands began to glow white as he raised them over his head. Ryder could see the air around Hal’min distorting from the heat. The Elf began chanting something that Ryder couldn’t quite make out. He heard some words he recognized, but the weapon crafter was barely more than muttering. Ryder watched as Hal’min bent over his workbench and began handling the Earth-Metal arrowheads. Each one he grasped tightly, whispering to it, releasing energy into them until the glow from his hands had faded. He picked one up and tossed it to the Ranger, Ryder flinched but the metal was cool to the touch.

However, one would not know by looking at it. The arrowhead appeared to be smoldering, as if it were nestled in a bed of hot coals. Seething and smoking like an angry dragon.

“Amazing!” said the Ranger.

“Just wait until you see them in action.” Hal’min replied. “Now stop playing with it, we’ve got work to do.” Ryder tossed the arrowhead back to Hal’min and went back to his fletching, eager to see what else the old Elf had in store.

Later, Hal’min made Ryder wait outside while he assembled the final components, “Trade secrets,” he claimed. So Ryder busied himself by practicing a few simple spells. He asked a squirrel about its day, and helped a sproutling grow a bit. When he was in the middle of summoning an Ale to drink, Hal’min finally emerged with an armful of arrows.

“I hope thats for me,” said the Elf with a half-smile. “I’d hate to think I did all this for no reason.” Hal’min laid the bushel of arrows at Ryder’s feet and plucked 2 of them from the pile. “This arrow,” he said holding out the dark one with red and orange feathers. “is imbued with the power of fire. It is made, as you saw, with dwarven metal, capable of holding such raw energy within itself. Also I used fire-willow reeds for the shaft, sturdy and light as a feather, not to mention flame proof. These arrows will explode on impact, engulfing any target in a column of hellfire.

“Most impressive,” Ryder said honestly. Then with a more sarcastic note, “Master Ignis would be most pleased, im sure.”

“Even the Fire Master would burn himself playing with these arrows.” Hal’min said with a bit of a proud smile. The two chuckled together a bit, then the Elf held out a second arrow. This one was white as snow, the shaft glittered like ice and the feathers were white and blue. “This, my friend,” he said curtly, nodding at the arrow, “would freeze the ass-hairs off a polar bear. I have used evergreen stalks for the shaft and I have infused them with the essence of Dhakhan, the very spirit of ice and winter itself. They will lock any enemy in an icy block, or solidify any amount of water with its freezing touch.

“You never cease to amaze me Hal’min. These are better than I had hoped.” Ryder made to take the arrows, but the Elf held him back.

“Wait; there is one more I must show you.” Hal’min bent down and picked up another arrow. This one was a sickly color, with black and green feathers. It brought about images of a dangerous snake to the Ranger; he could tell these were deadly. “You are wise to be wary, Nim’ohtar. These are quite hazardous indeed. I made use of the treacherous viper plant to make the shaft and soaked the whole thing in the venom of an Anoshian Basilisk. Take much care with these.” Hal’min collected the arrows together in a bundle again and handed them to Ryder with a deep bow.

“Thank you, old friend.” Ryder said, accepting the package. “You have gone above and beyond.”

“Just watch your back, Ranger.” The Elf said with a smile. “And take care of that Druid with you, they tend to get a bit distracted sometimes.”

“Tell me about it.” Ryder sighed. “Again, thank you, Hal’min. I will make good use of these.”

“I have no doubt of it, my friend. Now be off, it is almost time for your meeting and I will not have the council blame me for your tardiness.” The Elf waved Ryder off, bidding him farewell. Ryder walked back through the throng of activity and cluster of tents that was the industrial quarter and made his way to meet back up with Skylana.