



Lazy gamer finds himself inside a game, has to survive and find a way out. Finds a fairy and the adventure begins.

Telkin, The Rogue: Book 1 of "Telkin" Series

By R.L. Pool

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BOOK 1 OF TELKIN SERIES



TELKIN

THE ROGUE

R.L.POOL

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Chapter 1

“So... It begins...”

So.

You think you’ve got problems?

Mortgage due? Sewer backed up? Car payment due and no money in the bank?

Trade ya!

First, I’ll have to finish skinning this damned rabbit, spit it, and then wait for it to cook. If I get it wrong, I may lose what hit points I have left!

Hit points?

Yeah. You see, I no longer live where you live... or anywhere else as far as I can tell. I *was* Sidney Billingsworth Garner until a month or so ago anyway. I was a short, fat ex-cashier at a grocery chain, Stop-and-Go, convenience store, bartender... whatever.

I remember losing another minimum wage job, retreating to the cabin my father left me way up in the woods of Arkansas, and sitting down to drown myself in *Legions of Battle*, RC Cola and graham crackers. Throw in a couple of bags of Doritos and you have me!

Pops was one of those survivalist guys. He had friends, something I didn’t have, who worked at the power company and helped him out here. They tapped the power grid, wired him up without the necessity

of a meter, and he had lights. Of course, he also had a generator out in the power shack with the “borrowed” transformer.

He also “borrowed” an internet connection from somewhere. He said that, though we would be “off the grid” essentially, he still wanted to keep abreast of any changes during the “zombie apocalypse” or “civil war” that was supposed to happen sometime soon.

Anyway, I told mom about the job situation and that I’d need a little cash to get me by until I could find another job. When she told me no, I was shocked. When she told me to get out, I was totally confused.

I mean, how could she do that to me? Me? Her only son? Her little pookie-bear?

Well, two can play that game! I loaded my rig into the old car pops left me and drove away. That’ll show her.

I remember hearing the thunderstorm coming and hoping it wouldn’t kill the internet. As in the rest of my life, hope *sucks*!

I’m sitting at a rickety desk playing the game, sneaking around stealing stuff from other players, and just making a general nuisance of myself. Then, a loud crash and I’m sure the power, internet and everything else is gone.

Nope. Just me. Whatever happened out there in the real world, I’m now stuck in here.

Here?

Legions of Battle!

Now, I'm Telkin the Rogue. Tall, strong and fit! So far, that is.

Sounds weird? Congratulations! You've described my life in a nutshell! I'm sitting here, in the rain, trying to keep this damned fire going to cook a rabbit that I don't think exists. Just like I don't think *I* exist anymore.

I went from sitting in front of the monitor, to being on this side of the screen in a flash of bright white! Thanks a lot, gods of the internet!!!

Why couldn't I have been playing something else?! Maybe SIMS, or Valheim, or... anything but LoB! Even PUBG would have given me an out, I think!

But nooooo!! I had to be walking through the Farthing Forest from Bifley Bay toward the "Windswept Caverns" far to the southwest! Supposedly, there's a treasure in the area that needs my... uh... attention.

If only I had been watching one of those funny skits those guys in New Zealand put on. Then, instead of landing in Bifley Bay, I would be fishing with that big fisherman, or bantering with the garlic farmer. Anything but sitting in the rain hoping that I can get this damned rabbit cooked before the rain drowns my fire!

I set out from Bifley Bay on my way to Vanderlon... a month ago? Two? I couldn't even steal a horse! I'm just as great at being a rogue as I was a cashier at IGA. Always coming up short.

Anyway, I'm hoping to steal a boat... good luck with that... and getting my wayward ass to the Ruins of Grelthorn. Maybe, with the help of this map I... borrowed, I can find something to set me up until, hopefully, the power comes back on and brings me back to the real world.

Then again, why?

This ain't the best place to be in, and the weather so far sucks, but I can maybe make the best of it without having to appease the bosses.

Okay, there's bosses here too. But at least here you can kill them without going to prison for life!

They can kill me too, but I'm really not sure I know what will happen after that. Or if *anything* will happen! If I die, do I respawn here? Or does my fat-assed body in the cabin expire as well?

Worse, I'm a diabetic. I've been here for about a month and a half I figure. Does time work in here like it does out there? Is my rotting body stinking up the cabin while I try to get this fricken rabbit cooked?

Where is my body anyway? Is this my body, morphed into this manly body, or is it sitting there with rolls of fat slowly leaking gore into my gaming chair? Gross!!!

The biggest problem right now, other than the obvious, is I'm in unknown territory. I can't even see the screen, the map, or even the keyboard to tell me where I am. I don't know if I can even find anyone who can help anyway, because they might not trust me, a stranger in this land. Especially a stranger as well armed as I am.

Well armed? Yeah, right.

I have this worn, Level 5 leather armor (no pluses), a short sword and dagger (also no pluses) and a piece of shit bow with maybe six arrows. I wasted three of my arrows just killing this damned rabbit! I found one, but the rest are gone forever! If I meet a little *Padison* girl with cute little horns circling her pretty pointed ears, and she has a slingshot, I'm toast!

What, you ask? I've been playing video games for years and I only have like Level 5 gear? Yeah! I decided, on a whim, to download this new game. Yay me! My Level 23 knight, or my Level 42 Wizard from other games would have served me well, right? Not in the cards. The Fates dealt the hand and now...

Better add more wood or this damned rabbit will never cook. The rain's slacking off and now I'll have to be on guard for anything or anyone seeing, or *smelling* this smoky fire.

Oh yeah! When you play the game, you can hear and see stuff. When you're *in* the game, all five senses come into play!

Like now. I can *feel* the hit points rolling off of me through exposure. No heals, no saving throws, no nothing! If I don't get something in me to bring my HP up a bit, *and* find shelter to recuperate, I'm done!

A Big Mac would taste soooo good right now. Com'on, rabbit! Cook!!!

I know some of you are wondering, “Well, if all this is true, why not talk to some of the others on the internet and tell them what happened? You can give them directions and...”

Nope! No! Ain’t gonna happen!

In most all of the other games I’ve played like this one, I was a rogue. I stole things and didn’t care much who I stole them from. I even suggested to a group of “adventurers” that a treasure trove was available in a cave in one game and, after they got inside and were summarily toasted by the dragon, I swooped in, got the kill, and everything they had on them before they could respawn and retrieve it themselves.

Things like that get around! Ya know? Problem is, when I made up this character for this new game, I wasn’t all that original with the name. Telkin was the name I used in... well... almost every other game I played, and always... *always* played the Rogue! I don’t know why I thought I would find noobs in here to steal from. With a game like this, being new, and the ads hyping it all over the place...

Yeah. You guessed it. First tavern I dropped into, I ran right into a group of gamers whose only ambition is to see me dead... in game of course. The “Hunting Party” heard the sailor scream my name when I ripped him off and now I’m running for my... *Telkin’s* life!

Help? Nope.

Right now, I’m hoping that the charred black of this meat means it’s cooked. If I cut into it and it bleeds, that means I burned the outside

and left the inside raw. I have no idea what that would do to me short of food poisoning. With my HP this low, I could die. And, like I said, I don't know *what* would happen next.

Luckily, when I carved the black off with this POS dagger, the meat underneath was nice and cooked, and rather juicy. I don't know how to cook, and don't have a clue as to spices found in the wild, but the meat was pretty good, if not a little chewy.

I watched the thick forest around me for any movement while I ate the sparse meat, and felt a little better. That is, until the sun came out and showed me it was close to sundown.

I needed to wring out and dry my blanket, add a little more wood to the fire, and sleep if I was gonna regain any of my lost HP. The smell, light, and everything else, could draw unwanted company. If I was gonna survive, I was gonna have to learn what I should already know about being an adventurer.

What I really needed right now was a cave. Preferably without bears, cougars, trolls, kobolds or anything else nasty that could kill me. And a big bowl of Ramen Noodles.

The noodles were out, so...

I crawled out of the hastily built lean-to, packed what little I had into the ragged pack, and lifted it to my shoulder. After taking the last scrawny haunch from the bones over the almost dead fire, I trudged toward the mountains to the north. It was over a mile away, but with

this body, that wasn't a problem. The problem was, my waterskin had a leak and I had little left in it.

I stepped over a tiny trickle of water... a brook I guess... knelt to taste it and it almost gave me brain-freeze! Cold! I filled the leaky waterskin, again tried to find the leak in the seam without any luck, and walked cautiously toward the dark spot at the base of the mountain.

A cave, or a fantasy monster? I slung the waterskin to my back, the leaking water immediately soaking my worn leathers and making me colder than I was, and drew the sad excuse for a sword.

It was chipped, bent, and hardly worth carrying. The pommel was loose and the leather wrapped around the handle... uh... hilt was so thin, I had to make sure I didn't scratch it with a fingernail. If I did, the whole thing would come unraveled and even this sad excuse for a sword would be even sadder. But having a sword that was shit was better than not having a sword at all, right?

The cave was barely a hole in the wall of the mountain, but it was kinda deep. I tapped the sword on the side of the cave, just in case there was something in there that wanted out, and listened. Nothing.

I looked into the dark, the sun coming from the wrong direction to give me any light inside, and then looked around. Brush and trees kinda covered the opening, though I saw it from way over there. If I could get in, find a way to hang my blanket over the entrance a few feet inside, I could get a fire going and not only dry my blanket, but

keep some of the warmth inside. I took a deep breath and, bending over in the narrow passage, walked inside.

That was stupid. It was dark! I found a strip of ragged cloth that had probably been there since... okay, for a long time, alright?! Anyway, I wrapped it around a stick I found close by and, after a ton of tries with the flint and dagger, finally got the damned thing lit.

I held it up close to the low ceiling and saw the short passage curving a bit to the left and followed it. It opened into a medium sized chamber with a ceiling tall enough that I could stand up and look around. It wasn't empty.

Over against the far wall, a skeleton was propped. It had this weird-assed helmet sitting crookedly on his... or her... head, and leather armor that looked a helluva lot better than what I had on. It also had a sword and matching dagger in kinda ornate sheaths, attached to a wide leather belt. Its boots looked better than mine too.

I stripped the skeleton...

What?! He's dead! Here, in fantasy central, you don't look a gift horse in the mouth! You strip it, say thanks, and walk away with all their stuff! It's a rule... I think!

Anyway, the pants and shirt under the leather was rotted and only good to use to start a fire. I wrapped the bones in the ratty blanket under it, dragged it out of the cave and into the forest. I dug a hole as deep as my crappy sword would let me, dropped the blanket and bones in, with the weird helmet on top, and covered it. I looked around to

make sure no one and nothing was watching, crossed myself and said a few words over the grave.

No, I'm not Catholic. But when you're trapped in a fantasy world, you talk to any gods you can think of, and hope none of them have you going to voice-mail. Now, that may not be a rule here, but it should be!

On my way back, I picked up as much wood as I could carry. Most of it was kinda wet, but it would dry soon enough if I could get enough dry wood to light. What I needed was food. Shelter and warmth would come in a minute, but my stomach was growling.

I put the wood just inside the cave mouth, checked the bow to make sure it still had a string attached, and nocked an arrow. The sun was going down fast and game was not all that plentiful, no matter what you think.

Forests are not just full of edible game, berries, nuts or anything else one can use to sustain themselves. You gotta work to survive here. If I'd been smart enough to realize that in RL, maybe I wouldn't be in this predicament in the first damned place!

My sick-assed bow was not powerful enough to bring down a deer, even if I could find one. Besides, what the Hell am I gonna do with a big-assed deer anyway? Sure as Hell can't eat the whole thing, and I don't have a freezer! Now, rabbits...

To you, I probably looked stupid as shit crouch-walking through the forest with an arrow stuck in my bow. But when you're starving,

you do whatever you can to put food in your gut. I was hunting, so shut the Hell up!

I heard rustling in the brush about twenty... twenty-five yards away. I raised the bow, but didn't draw it. If it was nothing and I let the arrow go, I'd be down to five.

Okay, four. One of those arrows was so crooked, if I shot it, it might come back around and stick in my back!

I'd watched this documentary one night when I was bored, all about archery. There was this cute girl who was an Olympic Champ or something and she was giving a step-by-step on how to shoot a bow. I knew how to do it, but I didn't have anything I could use to practice. I'd never done it before and the rabbit from earlier was proof of my lack of prowess.

When I'd started this trek, I had fifteen arrows. There. Now you know how inept I am.

I heard a grunt and a little piggy wandered out of the brush. If I shot this thing and didn't kill it... which was entirely possible considering the lack of power in this bow... it might get pissed! I've heard that pigs in the wild can tear a guy up before they can kill it. Not me! Not this little piggy!

It wandered back into the forest and I was just about to lower the bow. About fifteen feet away, a rabbit hopped out of the foliage and sat there munching on something.

It was fat! Not like that scrawny thing from earlier. This boy was big! It was looking away, so I drew the bowstring back, stuck my pointer finger in the corner of my mouth, looked down the string with both eyes open and lined up the arrow, the string, and the rabbit.

I let it go... and heard the snap. The damned bowstring broke! Shit! That's all I need right now!!!

I had the urge to break the damned thing over my knee, but then I wouldn't have a bow at all! Besides, I might be able to get a bowstring in the next village or something. I sighed and looked out to where the rabbit had been... and it was still there!

The arrow had gone through its body and it just sat there for a minute, and then fell over!

The mighty hunter had succeeded! I almost shouted out my prowess! Of course, I didn't, but I *was* kinda proud of myself. Not only did I kill my food, but the arrow was still there waiting for me to pick it up! Yay me!!!!

Okay. Calm down. Somebody may have heard the bowstring snap. Get low and wait for a second or two.

Nothing.

I crept forward until I was next to the dead rabbit, looked all around me, reached down and grabbed Bugs by the ears. I picked up the arrow, slipped it into the quiver and promised myself I would clean it in a minute. It was my "lucky arrow" and deserved special treatment. Now came the work.

I gutted the little beast. I was getting good at it, having dined on rabbit for the last month or so. Wild veggies too... when I could find them.

While I carefully removed the little bladder, I saw what it had been chewing on. Carrot. So cliché! But if it had a carrot...

With my bunny in one hand, and my broke-ass bow in the other, I moved in the direction the little furball had come from. A few feet in was a clearing. A tiny one. And, yeah, carrot tops popped up promising at least a few veggies for my dinner of rabbit. I pulled three and left the rest. If I remembered, I might be back. Food is food. They might not be cheese-puffs, but they would keep me healthy.

I moved carefully back to the brook, washed the carrots real good, and then got down to the skinning. I cut off the head, threw it into the forest, and peeled the skin off. Then I dunked the naked rabbit into the cold water to wash off any dirt, hair or... anything else that would make my low-HP ass sick. I picked up the carrots, tucked the hide under my worn leather belt and, with my trophy in hand, made my way back into the cave.

The torch I'd made was sputtering and close to going out. If that happened, I would be in pitch darkness. I put the rabbit and the carrots on a slab of rock, ran over and ripped a length of cloth from my deceased benefactor's shirt. I held the end over the sputtering torch until it lit, wrapped it around it, and let out the breath I'd held unconsciously when I thought it would go out.

I started gathering as many of the rocks I could find on the cave floor and made a fire ring over on one side. Then I took a couple of pieces of the wood I'd brought that had a "Y" at the top and wedged them to either side of the ring with more rocks. It would have to do.

I piled a bit more of the cloth in the center of the ring and started shaving a dry... mostly dry, stick over the cloth. When I had a good pile of shavings, I put smaller sticks around it and larger ones around that. Once all that caught, I knew I could break up the even larger sticks and get a fire going to warm this cold... and getting colder... cave up!

I held the torch to the bottom of the kindling and watched as the cloth blazed up and caught the shavings. So far, so good.

I dug the thin rope I found out of my cloth pack, went over to the opening and found a rock jutting out on the right. I tied the rope to it and strung it across to the other side of the opening. No jutting rock on this side. But there was a hole.

I looked around and found a rock that fit the hole, shoved the rope in and pounded the rock in after it. When I pulled tentatively against the rope, it held.

I got my moist blanket from the side of the cave and draped it over the opening, stood back and admired my workmanship. As long as the rock didn't come out, I was golden!

Now, for my rabbit!

I broke up some of the larger sticks and added them to the growing and warmth-giving fire. Then I took one stick that was thin, but rather

strong, and started shaving the bark off. The chips I tossed into the fire, then sharpened one end. After sticking the sharp end through the bunny, and seeing that the fire wasn't too high, I put my evening meal over the fire on top of the "Y" sticks. It didn't tip over so...

There was a little smoke, but not enough to alarm anyone... unless they smelled it and came looking. I hadn't seen a soul, so I let myself relax a little. What smoke there was seemed to be filtering out through the small gap at the top of the blanket and the flutter at the bottom told me fresh air was being drawn in. I knew it was cold air, but it would warm up soon enough.

I grabbed a carrot and bit off a chunk. Nope. Not cheese-puff, but tasted good after not eating anything of substance... except maybe for the skinny rabbit... since earlier this morning. I decided against roasting the carrots and took another crunchy bite.

I pulled the fluffy hide from beneath my belt and sighed. I wasn't interested enough back when I was real to watch any documentaries about how to treat hide from wild rabbits, or anything else for that matter. I held it up and saw the bits of flesh and fat, and knew that had to go.

I tried to sell a few pelts in a village way southeast of here, and the furrier told me I would have to pay him to take them. Just because they were like a week old, smelly and rotted in a few places...

I laid the pelt out on the flat rock and took my POS dagger in hand. I figured to shave the fat and gunk off, maybe rub some dirt into it and

somehow stretch it out on sticks. Indians did that, didn't they? Just as I brought my dagger down to the hide carefully...

“That's not how you do it.”

Chapter 2

“Hello there...”

I dropped the dagger and scrambled to put my back against something solid... like the side of the cave... while trying to get that damned bent sword out of its sheath. After a second, I realized two things.

First, there was no one in the cave with me. And second, the voice sounded like it was coming from a little girl who could not be more than... six? I shook my head and looked at the blanket draped over the opening. Nope. Nothing there either. Okay, I was going nuts.

I scooted back to the hide and picked up the dagger again. I glanced about the cave one more time, and started to clean my bunny skin again.

“I said, that’s not the way it’s done!”

The dagger hit the floor again and my hand went back to the hilt of my crooked sword. I looked all over and still...

“Down here!”

I looked down at a rock just a little way from the fire and saw the most beautiful, perfect woman I have ever seen! She couldn’t have been older than maybe seventeen? Eighteen, maybe? But she was only maybe three inches tall, and she looked annoyed. It took a second, and then...

“You know this game is not for little people, right?” She tilted her tiny head to the side, sending waves of curls along her extremely... for her... long blondish hair. “You need to go get your mommy and tell her a man in the game wants to talk to her.”

“My what?” the tiny thing asked in that tiny, angry voice.

“You know.” I said with what I thought was a gentle smile. “The lady that makes you mac-and-cheese after school? The one who tells you to do your homework and then sends you out to the backyard to play while she cooks dinner for daddy?”

She stood up quickly and three sets of tiny wings sprang up from her back. With a buzz, she came at my face. I didn’t want to bat her away because... because she was so tiny... and perfect... and pretty... and tiny...

I moved my head back away from her, but she kept coming until she had her tiny hand on my forehead. She moved the hand to different spots and then fluttered back with her arms folded across her tiny chest.

“Nope. No fever.” she said petulantly. “You must be addlepatated. Did you get hit in the head?”

“No!” I responded in frustration. “I’m stuck in a video game and I’m trying desperately to get you to go get your mommy so she might be able to get me out! Now! Go... get... your... mommy!”

“Number one.” she said as she held a tiny hand toward me with one finger up. “My... *mommy* died at the hands of someone about your size when he batted her into the side of a cave!”

She held up another finger.

“Number two! I am not a child that you can order me about as you please!”

She held a third finger up and I was wondering...

“And number three, what the heck is a vodo game?”

Okay. I am having a discussion with Tinkerbell! Great! Just great!

“Okay.” I responded as I too folded my arms across my rather impressive chest. “If you’re a real fairy, what kind are you? Woodland? Water?”

“Pfft!” she responded as she flew back to the rock, landed, folded her wings back down behind her and sat. “The names you big people give us! I’ll have you know that *I* am a *Fraeling*! We care for the land and the people trying desperately to scrape a living from it! Of course, many have no idea what damage they are doing, but we try to help them anyway.”

“So...” I said slowly, my brow tightening to a painful degree. “You’re not a fairy, but a... *Fraeling*. So, what kind of magic do you do, and, most importantly, how is it going to affect me?”

“Pfft!” she uttered again as she crossed her tiny ankles and arms at the same time. “We have a certain amount of magic we can summon,

but only to help the plants grow properly. I can't turn you into a frog if that's what you're asking, and I don't know anyone who could!"

Okay. If she's real... I mean *real*-real... I'm in trouble! When I said she was perfect? She was! And, she was wearing little to cover it up! Needless to say, I was getting a bit... aroused. Then again, she was so tee-tiny...

I shook my head. Stop it! You're a big, strong, fake man, and she's a fairy... uh... *Fraeling*!

"Okay." I said while trying not to stare at her tiny perfect breasts. "If all that's true, what the Hell are you doing here?"

"I smelled your fire and I'm cold." she responded softly in that little girl voice. "It's not easy being this little with nowhere to warm yourself."

"I can see that." I replied... a little too quickly. I cleared my throat and added, "My fire is your fire."

"Thanks." she said and held her tiny hands to the fire.

I started to shave the gunk off the hide again and she frowned.

"I told you that's not how it's done." she said softly.

I put the dagger down, sighed and looked at her in frustration.

"Look... uh..."

"Adriella." she replied, with the cutest little grin you ever saw in your life!

"Telkin." I replied. "Okay... Addy." She tilted her head, that smile still in place, and I continued, "I have no idea what I'm doing. I've

never had to tan a hide in my life! When I said I wasn't from here and was trapped in a fantasy world, I meant it! I came from another world where big factories tan hides, make clothing, and all I had to do was go to a store, pick out what I wanted and hand them a credit card. I've ruined so many hides in the past month, I had to burn them to keep from paying the guy I was trying to sell them to!"

She giggled... a tinkling little sound that sent tingles up my spine, and down to...

No! Nope! Hunh-uh! Stop it!

"You need some help then." she said matter-of-factly. "Okay. First you need to scrape it. Then you'll need a brain mash." She looked around and asked. "Where is its head?"

"I threw it away."

"Well, you need to go and find it." she said softly. "Without that brain mash, that hide will rot in a few days. That will *never* do!"

I stood up and, with a look at her that showed my stupidity, started toward the blanket.

"Take your good sword." she said while pointing into the darkness. "You might need it, and the one on your hip sucks!"

I stiffened. Did she have to use phrases like that?! Get over yourself, Sidney! She's three inches tall, for Christ's sake!

I grabbed the torch and walked over to where I'd left the wide belt with the sword and dagger hanging off of it. That's when I noticed the hole in the wall. There was something...

I reached in and felt leather. I grabbed it and pulled. The large leather pack came out and, being kinda heavy, fell to the stone floor. I held my torch up and saw the quiver just *full* of arrows too! I pulled it... and the nicely crafted bow... out of the guy's hidey-hole.

The string for the bow had rotted away a loooooong time ago. I sighed and, leaving the pack where it was, took off my belt. I dropped my sword and dagger to the stone and pulled the wide belt around me. It had a cinch type buckle and I had to figure out how to pull the leather strap through, bring it around, put the strap back through the cinch and then through the loop I'd made.

The sheath for the sword told me this one was a bit longer than my short sword, but a little thinner too. Maybe it wouldn't be too heavy to use. The dagger was longer too.

I started to check the bow and the arrows in the quiver, when I heard that snorting "Pfft" again.

"I'm going." I said and walked back to the blanket, lifted it carefully and crouched through the dark passage.

It had gotten darker, and I had to remember where I was when I threw that bloody head into the forest. It didn't take long before I had the head in hand... literally... and found my way back into the chamber.

I checked my rock and it was still solidly in the hole holding the rope. The blanket was drying, but still damp. I wouldn't be using it tonight so it was gonna be a cold one. I really needed more wood.

I took the head over to Addy, set it on a stone just away from her and sighed.

“Okay.” I said. “Now what?”

“Split it.” she replied simply. “Then you’ll need a pot to mix the brain mash in.”

“Brain mash?” I asked while looking from the tiny... person to the bloody head of the rabbit. “You mean like... *brain* mash?”

“Yes.” she replied with that cute little giggle. “Every animal has enough brain to cure its own hide. You’ll need to split its skull, scoop out the brain and, after mixing in a little water, make a mush out of it. After scraping all of the flesh and fat from the hide, you’ll rub the mash into the leather and roll it up for a day or so.”

“And that will...”

“That will cure the leather so it doesn’t rot, and make it supple without losing the soft pretty fur.”

“Oh.”

I sounded like I understood, but...

I pulled the long sword from its sheath, rubbed the tiny spot of surface rust from the shining silver-ish blade, and raised it over my head... and hit the ceiling.

“You probably should use the big knife strapped to the side of your leather pack over there.” Addy said with another giggle. “You might damage the blade of your sword when it hits the rock below the skull.”

I looked back into the darkness... over there... and again wondered how the Hell she saw anything in the dark! I sheathed my new, shiny sword and grabbed the torch again. I picked up the heavy pack, carried it into the light of the fire, and set it down. Addy flew over and started on one of the two buckles while I undid the other one. I was gonna help her with the other, but she had it undone and was lifting the top by grabbing the edge and buzzing up on those tiny wings.

“Isn’t that a bit heavy for you?” I asked.

She “Pfft” again and, holding to the leather flap, lifted the pack from the ground.

“I may be little, but I’m very strong.”

“So I see.” I replied as she let the pack back to the floor and crossed her little, tiny arms again. “Sorry.”

Just as she started to fly over and sit to fume at my insolence, she glanced into the pack.

“You will need that pot too.” she tossed at me as she flitted over and sank to the stone with her back to me.

“I said I was sorry.” I muttered. “Can’t blame a guy for wanting to help.”

She sighed and turned around, her sad little face making me wanna hug her real tight. Of course, that would probably crush her, but...

The small pot was wrapped in rotting clothing. I lifted it from the confines and, with my other hand, pulled the long, heavy, single-

bladed knife out of its sheath. It was strapped to the side of the pack as if used as an alternate weapon, or tool to chop wood. I figured it would come in handy. Right now, though...

I took the handle of the heavy knife in both hands and started to raise it up.

"You should probably use a rock to tap the back of the knife." Addy said softly. "Set the blade at the exact center of the skull and use the rock to drive the blade through. It should slice the brain perfectly into two pieces. You'll have to make certain to scoop all of the brain out and put it into the pot for the mixture."

"All of it?" I asked inanely.

"All of it." she replied with a curt nod.

After I cut the skull in two, the brain kinda plopped out into the pot. Addy inspected the skull and dug a couple of small chunks out with her tiny dagger. After she added the little pieces to the pot, she told me to add a little water and warm it up. Not boil, but warm. Then... and this is the icky part... she had me scrunch it up with my fingers until it was the consistency of watery mashed potatoes. Yuck!!!

I set the pot to the side, close to the fire to keep it warm, wiped my gucky hands on the rotted clothing, and, under Addy's direction, scraped all of the membrane, flesh and yuck from the hide. When she was satisfied, she had me rub the brain muck into the leather with my hand. I used it all and she inspected my work again.

“Wonderful!” she told me with another tinkling giggle. “Now, roll it up and let it sit for a day and then we’ll wash it and stretch it until it dries.”

After I rolled the fur up, I reached my brain covered hands to her with a nasty grin. She fluttered back, scrunched up her pretty nose with a grin and said, “Ewwwww... Go wash up! The meat is almost done and dinner will be ready soon.”

“Yes ma’am.” I said as I pushed through the now dry blanket into the cold of the outside.

I washed my hands, face, knife, and the pot in the brook, looked around again and saw... nothing.

No fires, no smoke... nothing. I kinda liked it that way.

Chapter 3

“Things are looking up...”

I woke the next morning with the cutest little fairy snuggled under my shirt in the patch of chest hair I didn't have in RL. I nudged her with a finger and she moaned a bit before pulling herself out, stretching real big. Well, as big as a tiny fairy could stretch, and then fluttered up and away.

I felt the cold coming into the cave under the blanket and looked at the weakly smoking coals of last night's fire. I broke a couple of the remaining sticks and, after stirring the coals a little, put the sticks on top. When they caught, I added a few more. I remembered the thought I had last night about getting more wood and stood up.

That's when I heard the “ka-chink”.

I turned quickly and saw Addy diving back into the pack again. The old clothing was in a pile next to the pack, as was a rather large pouch. She fluttered up and brought a set of bracers out, one inside the other, and dropped them on top of the clothing. Then she buzzed back to the pack and dove in again.

“What the Hell are you doing?” I asked as I stepped over and sat down.

“Investigating.” she responded, her voice muffled inside the pack.

She flew up with another large pouch in her little hands and, though I wanted to help, watched as she lowered it next to the “ka-

chink” pouch. While she dove back into the pack, I picked up that rather heavy pouch and opened it. Whatever was in there had turned into a grainy, white rock.

Sugar?

I touched my finger to my tongue and touched the top of the grainy rock. When I touched the grains to my tongue... Salt.

Addy came out of the pack with another large pouch and set it next to my salt block. It didn't “ka-chink” so I picked it up and opened it. The smell was... wonderful!

Coffee! Okay. It had been in that pack for... I don't know how long, was probably dry and ancient considering the skeleton guy who originally owned it. But it was coffee! Now if I only had a cup. I could...

“Ka-chunk!”

The metal cup bounced off of the stone floor and Addy dove back into the pack.

“I'm going to get some water and firewood.” I said as I got up, grabbed the pot and the leaky waterskin.

“Okay.” came the tiny, disinterested voice from inside the pack.

I lifted the blanket to walk out and heard the soft, “Oooo...” I grinned and went out to fill the pot and my waterskin.

When I came back, I glanced at the pack and figured she was in there somewhere poking around. I hung the waterskin on the jut of rock, dropped the few branches of wood behind the firepit, moved

some of the red-hot coals around and, after setting two large sticks on top of the coals, set the half-filled pot on top.

I figured that it would be better to boil the water and add the coffee after. I'd had burned coffee before at the diner down from the apartment I used to have before I lost my last job. It was nasty!

That done, I looked over at the pack. Then I heard the soft moan coming from the pile of blue... silk?

"Watcha got, Addy?" I asked as I smiled at the pretty little face in the folds of the blue silk hanky.

"It's so soft, Telkin!" she replied dreamily. "It's so warm and soft!"

"It's yours." I said as I came over to sit next to her and next to the stuff she'd set out of the pack.

"Really?!" Her eyes opened wide and they... sparkled. "I mean... *really?!'*"

"Really, really, pretty girl."

You would have thought I'd given her the Hope Diamond! She squealed and tried to pull the silk hanky closer about her tiny body. Any closer and it would become her second skin! I liked the skin she had, thank you.

Now, you gotta understand something right here. Sidney is five-foot nothin', and almost as round. Yeah, I'm really ugly, okay?

Thing is, girls don't look at Sidney like this little fairy is looking at me. That, and I... *Sidney* gets a bit tongue tied when girls talk to

him. To have this beautiful girl looking at me like this is causing all sorts of mental... and physical... difficulties.

“Maybe we can find a needle and thread and make you a pretty dress out of it.” I suggested.

“Or...” she said as she suddenly stood up and held the soft, flowing fabric out to look it over.

She giggled and folded it in half. She flipped it out and waited while it slowly drifted back to the stone. Then she skipped to the center of the fold and, with her tiny arms stretched way out, picked the folded silk up and held it to her body just above her tiny, perfect breasts.

The double edge fell to the middle of her little calves and she squealed again. Then she looked up at me with those sparkling, happy eyes.

“It’s perfect!” she exclaimed, and then flipped it out to float down to the stone again.

She carefully laid it out and did some pretty accurate eye measurements, squatted at the very center of the fold and pulled that tiny dagger from its sheath. She looked both ways again... to get it exactly at the center, and sliced through the two layers of silk with about a half to three-quarter inch cut that didn’t come up to the fold. She grabbed it as far as her tiny arms could reach and held it toward me.

“Hold this for me?” she asked breathlessly.

I took the folded corners in my fingers and held it right there. She giggled and... disrobed.

My breath caught in my throat and I immediately found a spot on the cave wall up and to the left. I could still see her in my peripheral, but... Damn!

Problem was... other than the fact that I would not be standing up any time soon... she was now holding her arms down and her head was tilted a little. I glanced down real quick, and then found the spot on the wall. I looked back when I saw the sad look on her tiny face.

"Am I that ugly?" she asked in the saddest voice I had ever heard in my life!

"Baby girl." I replied, hardly able to breathe as I forced my eyes not to linger on that naked body. "You are the most perfect... beautiful... *gorgeous* woman I have ever seen in my life! But... you're naked!"

"Oh!" she said as, in my peripheral vision, she looked down at her perfect body. Then, she giggled. "Is *that* all!"

She spun around on her toes and looked over her shoulder coyly as I looked down at her again. She fluttered her six tiny wings a little and...

"I need you to slip my wings through the cut."

"But what if I break one... or more?!" I asked as I held the hanky up a little more to cover her cute little butt from my vision.

“You won’t.” she replied with another giggle. “Besides, if you did, I’d just grow a new one.”

“Really?” I asked, not able to keep the incredulity from my voice.

“Really.” she replied softly, but with still another giggle. “Hurry. I’m getting cold.”

I started to ask how I was going to get this cut around those six fragile looking wings, but she folded them together and, with the tips touching, they jutted out from her tiny back. Very carefully... and forcing my hands not to shake... I slipped the cut over those wings until the fabric settled onto her perfect skin.

She lifted her arms and motioned for me to wrap the silk around her. Then, with her tiny hands close to my fingertips, she guided the ends past each other and up over her shoulders.

“Cross them in the back over my wings and bring them back under my arms.”

I did as directed and she took the ends from me.

“Thanks!” she giggled as she fiddled with those ends for a moment.

She flipped her long hair from beneath the cloth, spun back around and held her arms out to show where she’d tied those ends just beneath her tiny breasts.

“What do you think?”

“Absolutely breathtaking.” I replied, the rapid heartbeat and breathy tone showing the truth. “And the dress isn’t bad either.”

“Telkin!” she exclaimed with a giggle, as she fluttered up, spun around two or three times and ran her tiny hands down the soft silk... now gracing that beautiful, tiny body.

Okay! Change of subject!

I looked away from Addy and down on the stuff sitting just outside of the pack.

“Let’s see what we have here.” I said as I reached over and picked up the “ka-chink” pouch.

It was heavy. I slipped the leather keeper down to loosen the drawstring and opened it. Gold and silver coins glinted in the firelight and I smiled. At least I had money to use for a while.

I closed it and started to reach for the bracers.

“What’s this?” I asked as I picked up the heavy gold chain with the golden key as a pendant.

“I don’t know.” Addy said as she fluttered down next to the pile of rotting clothing. “It was wrapped in this wonderful material! I figured you would know.”

“Nope.” I replied as I tossed it back onto the clothing. “Haven’t got a clue. The pack was here when I got here.”

Okay. So far, we have a lot of gold, silver, and probably a few copper coins, a heavy gold chain with a key to... whatever, salt and coffee. I looked into the pack and saw another hard leather pouch, reached in and pulled it out.

“That stinks.” Addy commented as I lifted the hard leather case out and opened it.

Yeah, it stinks. The pipe was burned around the bowl, and the dried-out tobacco... or whatever passes for tobacco here... stunk! I closed the case, looked around inside the pack and, with the exception of a couple of copper coins, it was now empty.

I unbuckled the flap for the large pocket on the back of the pack and reached in. I yanked my hand out and stuck my thumb into my mouth. When I looked, there was a tiny hole in my thumb and blood was slowly seeping out.

“That’s why you should always let me look first.” Addy chided.

The pocket was made that the larger flap for the pack would cover it. Addy lifted the flap for the pocket and let it fall into the open pack before she pulled the pocket open to peer in.

“Hold this open for me.” she said softly. “Okay?”

“Okay.” I replied around the thumb still in my mouth.

I held the kind of accordion like pocket open, and Addy fluttered carefully inside. When she came out again, she was lifting a soft leather pouch with silver points sticking through it. She set it to the stone floor and put her little hands on her hips.

“Now, be careful this time.”

“Yes ma’am.” I replied as I... very carefully... loosened the drawstrings and dumped the six silver arrow heads... I think they call them broadheads... on the floor. I picked up one by the end that fits

over an arrow and looked at the exceedingly sharp blades, four of them.

Why would anyone put something this sharp in a bag that it could cut through at a thought? Probably because they thought that smoking was more important!

I dumped the tobacco pouch, pipe and all, into the fire, brushed it out with a finger and dumped the residue. I picked up a stick that looked like it would fit inside on the bottom, sliced it the long way and pushed it into the pouch all the way. Then, I took each broadhead, stuck the sharp end into the wood and stuck the next one in close to it. All six broadheads fit snugly, and the blades would have a hard time cutting through the thick, stiff leather. I closed the flap and set it aside, safe now for tiny hands... and big bumbling ones.

“Next?” I stated more than asked as I held the pocket open.

Addy giggled and hovered over the opening for a moment. Then, as if deciding what to bring out next, she lowered herself on buzzing wings into the pocket. When she fluttered up again, she was holding a large bundle wrapped in waxy looking paper, tied with thick thread. It didn’t look heavy, her one hand holding the string in the center easily as she fluttered up and out of the pocket.

She dropped it and floated down beside it to pull on one end of the thread to release the bow. I took the end of the thread and unwound it from the rather fluffy pack and unwrapped... feathers.

I looked from the large pile of feathers to the quiver lying with the bow just there in the firelight, and knew they matched... mostly. So, my benefactor made his own arrows, or at least repaired the ones he had. I guess that's something else I'll have to learn if I have to stay here forever.

That thought wasn't as dire as you might think. I was a waste of human flesh out there in the "Real World". The RL chewed me up on a daily basis actually, and spat out an obese, short, ugly little man whose only talent it seemed was losing jobs and playing video games.

In here, I survived. I was rather tall, not quite six feet, was ruggedly handsome, in a rough kinda way, and I had talents of sorts. I mean, I could use a sword, a bow and a dagger, though how well was still up for grabs.

I liked it here. It was freer, even with the hardships that come with "free", untainted with so many spiteful people, though there were certainly some of those, and I could breathe. Yeah, it got cold, wet and miserable at times, but I found my way through on my own!

I had this cave, this fire, this... stuff, and the most beautiful, tiny woman who liked me! I was good, thank you. At least for now.

I rewrapped the package of feathers and held the pocket open again. Addy fluttered up, looked down into the pocket and sank. When she came up again, she had another one of those waxy-paper packages in her hand and dropped it in my palm. It was a lot smaller than the

package of feathers and, from the outside, told me nothing. It wasn't tied, but folded together with a kinda beeswax oozing out of the ends.

I had to be careful with this one, the wax slowly giving way to my fingers prying at the paper. When it finally opened, I know my mouth fell open.

Here, in my hand, was a perfectly preserved bowstring coated in beeswax. The documentary came to mind again with that girl in some kinda Olympic type uniform talking about how you needed to keep the string protected with beeswax to keep it from rotting.

There were three of them, all thickly covered in wax. Okay, if beeswax kept this from rotting, maybe...

I stuck a finger through the loop at the end, it wrapped tightly in more of the thread he used to keep the package of feathers together, and ran the length of the bowstring between my thumb and forefinger, the beeswax jelling together beneath them in an ever-growing ball.

I'm not stupid. After I got to the other end, and the loop there, I set the mass of beeswax on my finger and thumb carefully back onto the paper. No sense tossing something aside I might need later, right?

I stuck a finger from my other hand through the bottom loop, brought my hands together and then snapped them apart. Okay, the string didn't break, so...

"What are you doing, Telkin?" Addy asked as she fluttered up to see.

“I think I have a new bowstring, sweetie.” I replied distractedly as I stood, draped the waxed bowstring over my shoulder, and reached for my POS bow.

I stopped and shook my head. I had a new bow and, if it didn’t break from age, it might be better to string it first. Besides, these were made for it, right?

“Sweetie.” I heard in a whisper as I reached for the smooth bow with the curved limbs... *recurve* the Olympic girl had said. “I like that.”

I smiled, but didn’t look back at the pretty little fairy. Yeah, I was smitten. If I could just figure a way to shrink to three inches... Okay, maybe three and a *half* inches. I had to be taller than my dreamgirl, right?

I didn’t really know what I was looking for. I checked it for cracks, splinters and stuff like that. I let my mind drift back to the documentary while looking at the smooth, seemingly laminated limbs and the soft shine of the wood along the length of it. Where the limbs of my sorry-assed excuse for a bow were kinda twisted, this one was straight when you looked down the length of it. No twist in the wood at all.

Okay, Miss Olympic archer girl, what next?

The end of the bowstring hanging at my chest had that loop in it. I took it and looped it over the leather... condom on the tip of the bow and made sure it fit into the grooves there. Then, following the instructions in my head from the archer girl, I set that end across my

ankle, the slightly curved end nestled there to hold it when I tried to bend the bow. I stepped between the string and bow with my other leg and, with the wood of the bow against it, used that leverage to bend the bow enough to put the loop on the other end over the notch in the limb of the bow.

I almost had it, but the damned bow was way stronger than I was! Okay. No worries. I'll try again later.

I set it on top of the quiver, the string still looped on one end. And sat down where I was before.

"No luck?" Addy asked as she hovered just in front of my face.

"I'll need to get a little stronger, sweetheart." I replied. And then sighed.

"You'll get it done... sweetie." she replied with her eyes sparkling and that adorable smile. "I just *know* you will."

It's kinda nice having someone with faith in you around. It makes your chest expand a little and your heart beat a little faster. You're damned right I'll get it done! My tiny woman needs me at my best!

I folded the other two bowstrings into the mass of beeswax and set it to the side. I guess that guy either snapped a lotta strings for that really insanely powerful bow, or he just wanted to make sure he had an extra. But three? I figured he was some kind of medieval survivalist. Better to be prepared than to be without. I reached again for the bracers and picked them up.

The leather felt stiff, but there was a feeling here...

I pulled the one out of the other and unbuckled the four straps that obviously held it to your arm. There was a kind of glove on the hand end that, with the exception of the pointer and the next two fingers, was cut off like those powerlifter guys used to make themselves look so much tougher. The tips of the finger parts were a little worn, but the leather wasn't rotted at all!

How long had my buddy lain here to have been nothing but bones? How long did it take a body to get that way? I never watched a documentary on that kind of shit, so...

That one was for the right arm. I slipped it on, my fingers just the right size for the soft leather, and started buckling the straps.

"It has runes carved into the leather, Telkin." Addy said as she hovered around watching me buckle the thing to my arm.

I held it still and looked at Addy for a second.

"What does it say?"

"I'm not certain." she responded as she fluttered from one end to the other. "It's written in archaic Fae."

I have... no idea.

"Maybe..."

She closed her eyes for a second and then opened them again. I saw a... kinda... shine coming from them as she looked at the leather again.

"When bad comes... No." She sighed and tried again. *"When evil approaches, call on me. My calm strength is yours."*

“So?” I asked.

She shrugged and fluttered back to watch me slip the other one on. This one didn’t have the fingers. Just the cut off part that gave you the padding at your palm, without your fingers losing the feel. After buckling them, I held them out and smiled at the tiny, fluttering dreamboat.

“Whadya think?”

“Perfect!” she replied with that sweet smile and a quick nod.

I flexed my hands and wrists and the leather seemed to move with me. Weird.

Anyway...

“Anything else in there?”

“Yep.” she said as she fluttered back to the pocket and waited.

I held it open again and she fluttered down. She came up with a small tin in her hands and I took it as she cleared the top of the pocket. It wasn’t heavy, but it looked like she was struggling with the awkwardness of the three inch across, inch and a half deep, round metal container.

The metal top was one of those that fit exactly over the can and, when I turned it, it had a little, slicky resistance. The top came off and I smiled. More beeswax. This guy didn’t wanna have to go to a store to get the things he needed. When he did, he bought as much as he needed, and then a bit extra.

“Anything else?” I asked.

“Just two more... and you can get them yourself if you want.” she replied. “There’s nothing in there that will cut you, clumsy.” Then she giggled.

I laughed and, looking inside the pocket, I saw what looked like a spool wrapped in the waxy paper, and a dark brown bottle. I reached in for the spool first.

The paper had that beeswax on the edges and there was a piece of that thick thread coming out to a notch in the spool. It was the same thread that was used to tie the feathers together and make the bowstring. Wish that guy was still around. I could learn something from him.

I reached back in for the bottle and Addy hovered right next to my head.

“That stuff smells funny.” she whispered.

I held the wooden cork close and smelled it. There was something there. Something in my memory that...

I tried to pry the cork out gently, but it was stuck. I twisted it and felt the little snap. I stopped and looked at the neck of the bottle, worried that I had somehow broken it. When I tilted it, the liquid inside kinda flowed to the side.

Through the dark brown glass, I saw what looked like some kind of shaft that came from the wooden cork down into the thick looking liquid. I twisted the cork again and it moved. With a twisting, pulling motion, the cork came out and I smelled it.

“Glue.” I said softly to the tiny, hovering girl.

I pulled the cork and lifted the attached shaft up carefully. There was a small square brush on the end and I grinned. I pushed the cork back into the bottle until it fit snugly and set the bottle next to the tin of beeswax.

I reached way over for the leather quiver and, after pulling the strap toward me enough to get to them, pulled one of the arrows out. It had a point like the silver ones, but were more a black, sharp steel with no rust showing. Right there at the collar that held it to the arrow, I saw the thin sheen of glue that held it on.

I looked at the fletching and the sheen was there too! He used the glue to attach the feathers... fletching... and, after wrapping the thread around and through the feathers, had applied a thin sheen of the glue over the thread as well. Damn I wish this guy was still alive!

That was it. I had a bag of coins to spend on whatever I needed. I had a golden key to sell... but if you ever played these games, you *never* sell, lose or give away a key! *Ever*! We had salt, coffee, the stuff I could use to fix my arrows, and extra bowstrings. I was all set!

Well... Only if I could get the damned bowstring on the bow.

I got up, slipped the arrow back into the quiver with the other twenty or so perfectly straight arrows still there, and picked up the bow again. I checked to see that the loop was still securely in the notch at the bottom, hooked the recurve over one ankle and stepped through the string and bow to give me that leverage... again. I held the end of

the string with the loop wide open and summoned all of my strength. I started pushing, felt the resistance and pushed harder.

Something happened. I felt something. Something weird. Like I was stronger or something. The bow began to bend and... and it was like it *wanted* the loop on the other end. It just bent over and let me set the loop on the end, adjust it to the notch and, when I released it, the string tightened.

I didn't know what I'd done differently. I checked the loop on the bottom to make sure it was still there. It was.

I pulled my leg out and brought the bow up to look at it, still not able to believe I had actually done it in one go! It was perfect! I brought it up to see if I could pull it back and... I could!

With those three leather covered fingers on the string where they should be, I pulled the string back and touched the corner of my mouth with the pointer finger. I let it down, and then pulled it again. Weird! No strain, no shakes, no nothing!

But I also felt the power in that bow. I know. That's not even a thing, right? But I'm telling you it was! I knew that, if I put an arrow in that bow, drew it back like I was supposed to, and let it go, it would scream away faster than my sorry bow could ever have done!

Add Addy's little hands clapping at my success, and I was on cloud nine!

I picked up the quiver and slid it over my head so the arrows were at my right shoulder and across my back, and headed for the blanket and the outside.

“Where are you going?”

“Hunting.” I said haughtily. “I need to bring home the bacon for my girl!”

“Mmmmm...” the little fairy replied as she spun while climbing to eye level. “I *love* bacon! Can I come?”

“Of course!” I held the blanket back for her and added, “M’lady?”

She buzzed past me giggling and I followed, crouching through the low passage to keep the arrows from scratching along the ceiling.

My baby wants bacon? All pigs better run!



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