

# **Midnight Flight**



# Midnight Flight

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Broken Typewriter Press • Cedar Rapids

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## Chapter 1

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# Approach

Chimípu raced along one of the side roads that lead to Wamifuko City. Her bare feet smacked against the ground but she didn't feel the sharp edges of rocks or the burning heat through her thick calluses. The only thing that intruded on her runner's high was the sand peppering her face and the heat from the ground buffeting against her thighs and arms.

She ran at an easy pace for her, just over a hundred miles an hour. It gave her a chance to watch the surrounding desert for another ambush. In the last few days, there had been at least a dozen attempts on her life. Most of the time they came from assassins from clans that could hide in shadows or in the ripples of heat rising off the ground.

Chimípu grimaced and rubbed her shoulder. Flecks of blood crumbled underneath her fingers and blew away. The last ambush caught her with her pants down in the brief moment she had to relieve herself. The resulting fight was short and embarrassing, not to mention bloody. The assassin had gotten in a few cuts in before Chimípu threw a rock through his chest.

She risked pulling her attention away from the surrounding desert and down to the small, translucent bird that raced in front of her. Barely larger than her fist, the delicate-looking avian easily kept ahead of her supernatural speed. Golden feathers rose from its glowing tail and fluttered around her, streaming along the wind that broke around its body and blossomed behind her into an immense plume of dust, dirt, and rocks that stretched for miles.

The spectral bird was the manifestation of her clan spirit, Shimusògo. As long as she chased him, she could outrun the fastest of horses or a raging sandstorm. On rougher terrain, the spirit would smooth out her trail to ensure her bare feet always struck against solid ground.

Stirring her thoughts, she glanced back across the desert. It was sunset and the brilliant reds and oranges had turned the sands into a sea of fire. Despite her speed, she could clearly see the ripples of heat rising off the ground. A prickle of fear ran down her spine and she peered closer at the wavers in fear of the last assassin who used them to ambush her.

Chimípu bore down and pushed herself to run faster. Despite running since before sunrise, she felt no exhaustion or agony as she accelerated. Her muscles easily kept up with her rapid pace; not even sweat soaked her clothes or glistened on her dark skin. The wind whipped harder against her face, tugging at her hair and buffeting her chest and throat. The ground blurred underneath her in the haze of the dust that the clan spirit kicked up.

Ahead of her, the side road intersected with one of the main roads leading into the city. Looking at the approaching junction, the muscles of her back tightened sharply and a headache pulsed in her skull. A major road meant more opportunities for attack like the one that killed Byochína.

The ashes had not cooled when Chimípu had found the courier's corpse. Ever since, Chimípu had been berating herself for not being there to save the younger woman. She should have been faster, should have been stronger. Then two of them would be running home.

She clamped her jaw tight and pushed herself faster. When she hit the junction, she was racing almost two hundred miles an hour. There were pedestrians and carts on the road heading in both directions. The air snapped around her as she sprinted past them. If they screamed at her, she was already too far away to be hear.

The city loomed before her. Carved out of the bottom of a destroyed mountain, Wamifuko City was the last bastion of the Wamifūko, a clan that once tried to take over the desert before they lost a war. Now, they were forced to remain within a chain, over sixty feet, of their home or risk being destroyed by the Kosòbyo, the same clan currently trying to kill Chimípu.

She pressed her palm against her hip to ensure her knife was still in place. It gave her a small amount of relief.

A quarter mile away from the gate, she stopped sprinting and slammed her feet into the ground. Her callused soles dug into the hard-packed earth and tore out a deep gouge. Rocks and stones shot away from her as she rapidly decelerated from hundreds of miles an hour to a complete stop only feet away from the cliff that surrounded the city.

Shimusògo disappeared as soon as she stopped running. The rush of power faded instantly and she was once again moving without magic.

Breathing lightly, she scanned her surroundings. The space between the wall and the crowds was exactly a chain across. She turned around looking for attackers and then stalked toward the nearest gate. Her joints began to throb

with her closeness to the city, the energies of the Wamifūko interfering with her own clan magic.

When she saw the gates of the city were closed, she hesitated. She had never seen the city sealed up before. She couldn't help but think about the message tube hanging around her neck and wondered if someone already knew her secret.

Chimípu worried as she approached but she knew that the clan had allies in the city. Gichyòbi, the master of the gates, was a close friend to Rutejìmo and she hoped to take advantage of that to have shelter for the night.

All of the gate guards wore heavy plate armor. The nearest one had a helm shaped like a cat. When Chimípu stopped a respectful distance from them, cat-helmed warrior held up a gauntlet. "I am Figoshìna and I speak for Wamifūko." It was a woman.

Chimípu bowed deeply. "I am Chimípu and I speak for Shimusògo. I need to enter the city to speak with Great Wamifuko Gichyòbi. It is of..."

Her voice trailed off as silence pooled around her. Warily, she trailed her hand to her knife. Looking with the corner of her eye she saw the folks milling near the gate back away.

A flicker of movement in the crowds warned her of the attack.

At her feet, Shimusògo appeared in front of her and raced past her.

She yanked her knife out and surged backwards.

Shimusògo accelerated her movement and she appeared a chain away with a snap.

Two attackers punched the ground where she had been standing. Both immediately lunged again for her again, their knuckles burned with blue flames.



Chimípu rushed them, the world blurring as Shimusògo pushed her to full speed in a single step. Her knife caught one of them in the throat, the blade slicing through his neck.

The second attacker clipped her. Pain exploded along her shoulder, and she slammed into the nearby stone wall. Stars swam across her sight. Levering herself off, she brought her weapon up to parry before her vision cleared.

The remaining man lunged for her, fists glowing.

A giant spear swung out from the stone wall and easily bisected the assassin. A blast of blood and gore painted Chimípu. A large armored man stepped out from the rock as if it wasn't even there. He wore a horse-shaped helm and his armor shimmered with power.

Slamming the butt of his spear into the ground, he took a deep breath and bellowed, "I am Gichyòbi and I speak for Wamifúko! The Chidafúko has sided with the Kosòbyo! Anyone from that clan still in the city is now dead."

Chimípu swayed with relief. She had an ally in the city.

He turned and strode toward her, his metal armor creaking. "Great Shimusogo Chimípu, we must talk. Your clan is in danger."

## D. Moonfire

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## Chapter 2

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# Injury

Tears burning in her eyes, Chimípu rushed into the bedroom of the Wamifuko home and headed straight for the bed. “Great Shimusogo Hyonèku!”

Hyonèku had been propped up against a wooden headboard. Most of his body was covered in blood-soaked bandages. The first thing Chimípu focused on was a cut that went from the right side of his face, underneath the bandage over his right eye, and then down the other side close to his neck. She had seen enough fights and deaths to know how close he had come to his end.

He looked at her and gave a weak smile. “Mípu... you made it.” His voice cracked and he drew in a wet, gurgling breath.

Chimípu dropped her travel pack near the foot of the bed and then sat down next to him. She started to reach for him but then rested a hand on her dirty leg. “What happened?”

“They attacked us without warning. There were... so many.” He coughed violently before he continued, “they killed Ríshi.”

Tears ran down his face. He went to wipe them off but his arm ended just below his shoulder with a bloodied ban-

dage. He stared at it, the tears racing down his cheeks. “They killed my wife. They just killed her because of what you and Jìmo found.”

Chimípu’s sorrow stopped. A strange elation rose up in her throat, choking her off. “R... Rutejìmo is okay?”

Immediately, she felt guilty for being thankful. She was supposed to care for everyone, not just one. Even if it was Rutejìmo.

A strange look came over Hyonèku. “Y-Yes, he is okay.”

Chimípu clutched his blanket with her effort to fight the tears in her eyes. Everyone guessed that Rutejìmo would have been the first to be killed by Kosòbyo assassins. The familiar sorrow that haunted her during her run came back, she hated when Rutejìmo’s brother, Desòchu, suggested they all take separate paths toward home to ensure one survived.

“He was right there yesterday.” Hyonèku gestured to the middle of the floor.

Chimípu glanced over where she saw scorch marks on the floor. They were from resonance feedback; someone besides a Wamifūko had used powerful magic inside the room. She frowned, Rutejìmo wasn’t powerful enough to react to anyone’s magic, his powers were too weak.

Confused, she looked back at Hyonèku. “I don’t understand.”

Hyonèku slumped back, panting. “He was... he spoke for Mifúno.”

Chimípu’s blood ran cold. She shook her head as she spoke in a whisper, “He can’t do that. No one speaks for the desert. Anyone who tries dies. The desert kills them.”

His one good eye shimmered with tears. “We weren’t going to let him... tend to Ríshi but he insisted. He... spoke for the desert and survived.”

Chimípu gulped and glanced at the scorch marks. She couldn't imagine it. After a second, she closed her eyes and took a deep breath. "Where is he?"

From the door, Gichyòbi answered, "He went home. Right after the ritual, he started running."

Chimípu opened her eyes to inspect the warrior. Gichyòbi had removed his helm to show an older man with laugh lines that belied the sadness in his green eyes. She could feel the energy inside him, a disharmonious energy that conflicted with her own; if she used her powers near him, it would have created similar scorch marks to the ones on the floor.

He stood away from the door frame and crossed his arms over his shoulders.

She stood up. "I have to go, Jìmo needs me."

"You can't," croaked Hyonèku. "It's almost night. You can't run."

Chimípu tensed. She could feel the sun's last power. It was only a few minutes before it dipped below the horizon and half the clans in the deserts would lose their powers. She shook her head, "I'll run under my own power."

"How long have you been running?" Hyonèku's voice reminded her of when he was schooling her as a little girl.

She looked away.

"How long, girl?"

"Three days." She rubbed the cut on her shoulder.

As she remained silent, the sun fell below the horizon. As one, all three in the room let out a soft sighs as they lost their powers. The discord of energies faded into a dull throb and the itching in her joints relented.

She struggled with her thoughts. While she could run under her own power, it was exhausting. She was already tired from running for so long and a night of racing would only make it worse.

Hyonèku whispered, “He’ll be okay... for tonight.”

Chimípu shook her head, both craving and fighting the desire for a soft bed and warm food.

“He’s... Rutejìmo. He’ll survive.”

With a sigh, she nodded. “I’ll stay.”

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## Chapter 3

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# Called

Chimípu rested on the borrowed bed and stared at the rock ceiling. She could only sleep a short while before she woke up. Many days of sleeping alone had taken their toll on her and she felt like there were assassins approaching even while locked in the room.

Across the hall, Hyonèku snored fitfully. Every few minutes, he would cough wetly or groan in his sleep. He kept shifting in the bed, as if his injuries prevented him from getting comfortable.

She closed her eyes and sighed. Even though it has been days since they fled Kosobyó City, it felt like years. An eternity of no sleep, fighting off assassins, and worrying about the others. Desòchu had given her the longest route because she was the fastest. It also meant long hours of racing while thinking about the others: Desòchu, Nifùni, Mapábyo, Byochína, and Rutejimo.

Byochína had been killed along with an entire caravan heading toward the mountains. She was no doubt hiding inside it but that didn't protect her when warriors came and slaughtered every man, woman, and child to get to her.

When Chimípu had ran by, she almost missed the Shimusògo colors among the burnt corpses.

Sadness caught in Chimípu's throat. They had separated to make it difficult to catch them all but that didn't make the pain any less. She was a warrior, she spent her entire life defending her clan. It was her duty to protect them against death, not let them run alone into oblivion.

She wanted to ask about the others but Hyonèku passed out during dinner. She tried to close her eyes but her thoughts pried them open once again. With a groan, she rolled over. Her unwashed clothes crinkled and the scent of dried blood and ashes rose up. She wasn't going to sleep.

With a groan, she rolled over and then out of bed.

Chimípu double-checked the door lock before backing into a corner. She quickly changed, her eyes never leaving the door. When she finished, she secured her weapon and grabbed the message tube containing the stolen Kosòbyo documents. Everything else she left in the room, though part of her wanted to bring her pack in case she had to run away again.

A few minutes later, she was walking outside of the house. Like every other home, it was a small place shaped from the living rock of the mountain.

"Late night walk?" asked Gichyòbi as he walked up. He was no longer in his armor but wore a simple gray outfit with his clan name embroidered along the hems. He was a broad man with graying hair and an easy smile, Chimípu could see why Rutejìmo was fond of him.

She nodded. "Couldn't sleep."

"The night before a battle? Always the worst." Gichyòbi sat down on a bench near to her. With his broad shoulders and muscles, it looked like there was only a sliver of space to sit in.



She walked over to a bench opposite of him and sat down. “It’s hard to relax,” she said. “There were so many days of watching over my back I can’t relax.”

He nodded but said nothing.

She tugged on her shirt, letting the red fabric run through her fingers. “Do you know what happened to the others?”

“Desòchu is dead.”

Chimípu sighed. “He stayed behind, didn’t he?”

“To slow the Kosòbyo down. He told Jìmo before they parted ways.”

She shook her head. “That’s what warriors do, right? None of us are going to die of old age.”

Gichyòbi chuckled. He drummed his fingers along the stone bench. “No. It sucks rotten eggs, doesn’t it?”

“Yes.”

“Rutejìmo said that Nifùni was desecrated, had his head cut off.”

“What about Mapábyo, his wife?”

Gichyòbi held out his hands to indicate he didn’t know. “Safe, I hope. We all love Pábyo. She’s been our guest many times and we were looking forward to seeing the children next year.”

She said nothing for a long moment. She prayed that Rutejìmo and Mapábyo were both safe. After a moment, she had to ask a question that haunted her. “Did he really speak for Mifúno?”

Gichyòbi’s dark face paled slightly and the easy smile faded. “It was singularly the most terrifying moment of my life. It felt like having the personification of death standing right in front of me. I was judged by a force as powerful as the sun.”

She shook her head, trying to comprehend it. “What happened to him?”

“He should tell you himself.”

Chimípu gave him a sad smile. “I loved to hear his stories when he’s telling his children. He sees the world so differently than us warriors.”

“I bet he’d love to tell this story to the rest of his family.”

She stared at him for a long moment. She let the shirt fall from her fingers. “You know we aren’t supposed to have family of our own, not after becoming warriors.”

Gichyòbi raised an eyebrow. “You could adopt like me.”

She smiled weakly. “I guess I did. I adopted Jimo when his own brother turned his back on him. He was my little brother.”

He nodded again.

Chimípu shook her head. “I feel bad about it sometimes. I was worried about the others, but when I heard that he was alive... I was so happy. It felt like a weight had been lifted from me.”

“Don’t worry, you’ll be with him soon—”

A screech interrupted him. It was the sound of a bird being tortured and crying out for its mother. It pierced the stone walls of the city and she felt her heart ripping in half from the sound of it. Her power—Shimusògo’s—rose up inside her reflexively as an overwhelming urge to run toward the screech echoed endlessly in her head. She lifted her hand to find flames running along her skin.

Across from her, Gichyòbi tensed. His own energies flared up and she felt it scraping against her nerves. Magenta sparks formed between them, scorching both of their clothes.

They backed away from each other. She felt the magic throbbing in her joints. Glancing down the street, she saw that the other Wamifūko warriors were shifting slightly as they stood at attention. They had heard the screech also.

Her heart beat faster. It was a distant call for help and she knew who needed her. “Jìmo.”

Gichyòbi’s jaw tightened. “I have never heard the Call from anyone outside of my clan before,” he said in a stern voice.

“I have to go.” She started toward the house to gather her supplies but stopped after two steps. If she survived, she could get them back later. Gulping, she turned. “I need to get to him, now.”

“He has to be hundreds of miles away.”

She snarled at him. Her body ignited into flames, the golden glow flickering against his face and the stones around them. Balling her hands into fists, she stepped toward him. “Are you trying to stop me? I won’t—”

“No,” he said. He stiffly pointed in one direction. “Head that way for the eastern gate nineteen.”

The screech came from the west, she could feel it in her heart. “No, I have—”

“There is a straight road that runs through the city from that gate. That will give you enough time to accelerate before you exit the city.”

She stopped despite the overwhelming need to run to Jìmo. Her body vibrated as she forced herself to be still and look at him.

He gestured to the west. “If I heard it, then every warrior, day and night, also heard his cry. Those against you are already getting ready to stop you. I can only promise that you will have the length of this city to gather your power, then you are alone.”

“T-Thank you.” Her eyes unfocused for a moment as she concentrated on the image of Shimusògo. Heat rose inside of her as she focused on it, summoning the clan spirit with her own energies. Sweat prickled her brow from the effort.

“Jimo has been my friend for years. I would declare war on the sun to save him. I expect no less from his sister.” He gave her a sad smile.

She bowed deeply. As she did, the image in her head sharpened and Shimusògo flashed past her. She spun on her heels and launched after it, accelerating fast enough to snap the air.

It took her a second to reach the eastern gate. Without slowing, she raced around a block to orient herself and started down the street toward the western side.

To her surprise, Wamifūko warriors were already clearing out the path down the street. They rose out of the stone ground and walls. Wordlessly, they yanked people away from the center.

Chimípu’s feet struck the ground in a fast beat, thudding against the stone as she tore down the street. The flames over her body grew brighter until golden feathers swirled around her body and trailed behind her.

Magenta lightning crackled ahead of her in an increasingly larger wave. She saw the runes protecting store fronts and the lights over the city flare into brilliance before they exploded. People screamed as she accelerated through the cleared path. The power of Shimusògo filled her veins with the liquid euphoria. It sang to her and pushed away the discomfort and the fear until there was only the overwhelming desire to run.

The gate shattered when she blew past it. Shards of rocks and metal flew in a spiral behind her as she sprinted across the sand. She was moving too fast to avoid the camps that had set up outside of the city but the ropes and fire pits were only the slight tug against her legs and arms when she destroyed them.

Before she knew it, she was racing alone in a pool of light against the night.

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## Chapter 4

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# Speed

Chimípu hated running at night. Even with her flames, her incredible speed didn't give her much chance to see obstacles before she approached them. Rocks, cliffs, and chasms would rush into view and disappear before she could blink.

The only way she could survive was keeping Shimusògo in her thoughts and the bird racing ahead of her. He angled through the desert, leading her around low-hanging branches and holes that would snap her bones. After fifteen years of running after Shimusògo, she trusted the spirit to keep her safe but that didn't stop the little skip in her heart as she narrowly avoided sharp rocks by inches.

The cautious part of her mind screamed for her to stop, to turn around and wait until morning. But it was drowned out by the fear for Rutejìmo. He had depended on her for protection and defense: from other clans trying to stop his deliveries, from his own brother who cast him out of the clan, and now from assassins trying to hide a secret that could kill everyone.

Tears burned in her eyes. Rutejìmo was supposed to be safe. He was a *kojinōmi*, no one attacked a caretaker of the dead. He was weak and knew it, he never started fights and

he only defended himself with his weapons. He was the quiet man in the corner who struggled with everything but kept trudging forward just because it was the only thing he could do.

Chimípu pushed herself to race faster, concentrated on moving her arms and legs to get as much speed out of her as possible. Her bare feet slammed against the icy sand and she was grateful that Shimusogo kept her from tripping.

There was a flash of blue ahead of her and then a rumble of an explosion. There was a fight. Inside her heart, she knew that he was still in danger.

Screaming, she prayed to Shimusògo to give her more speed and raced after the bird, desperate to push faster and harder. She didn't have time, she couldn't afford to be late.

To her surprise, she began to catch up to her clan's spirit. In all her years of running, it had always raced a second ahead of her. For the first time, she closed the distance. The golden flames around her body brightened, lighting up the way as she inched closer to her spirit, the uncatchable bird.

The world grew painfully fast, blurring fast enough that she no longer saw the obstacles she was passing but felt them in her heart.

Then she was head to head with Shimusògo. The world was surrounded in a golden flames, her feet barely touched the ground as she raced over it. The bird no longer paved the way, it was both of them running together that created a path.

The sights of the battle grew closer, she had just run hundreds of miles in less than twenty minutes. There were fifty or sixty warriors facing against her little brother. All of them had flame surrounding them, gold and yellow for the day clans and blue and greens for the night. She could feel the power even from there, a cloud of discordant magic.

Despite the distance, she could see Rutejìmo clearly. Blood stained his dark skin black and he slouched from exhaustion. Blood dripped from his weapon, a fighting spike, but he held angled toward the ground. He was ready to parry, not attack.

The lead warrior was a woman in a feathered headdress who stood before him. She talked as she spread out her bare hands. She had no weapons but Chimípu could feel poisonous energies gathering along her body.

With a silent snarl, she sprinted forward and passed her clan spirit. The world blurred around her and then there was silence. No sound, no howl, nothing. Just the pressure of air around her as Rutejìmo's opponent zoomed closer as Chimípu covered the distance in a flash.

Just as the feathered woman pulled back to flick her hand, Chimípu reached her. She punched the woman in the chest, intending to shove her back. Instead, her fist carried through flesh and bone. The explosion of blood followed her as she raced past the corpse who had been threatening her brother.

Chimípu tried to turn around quickly, but she was going too fast and something ripped inside her. Fighting the pain, she dug her bare feet into the ground to stop.

When she came to a halt, her breath came out in ragged gasps. Exhaustion sapped at her strength, pulling her down. She staggered and almost collapsed. She gasped and prayed to Shimusògo for help.

A giant translucent bird blossomed over her and then sank into her body. Fresh energy filled her along with the taste of blood and bile in her throat. She could feel that she had torn her muscles but she wasn't done.

Stalking back, she walked in a pool of golden flames, tracing the bloody smear of the woman she had just killed.

She unsheathed her fighting knife and held it tightly in her grip.

Coming closer, she inspected Rutejìmo. He swayed as he stared at her, hope on his face. There was also pain in his eyes, a sorrow that burned itself into her memory. He had seen things that had changed him. The man she left a few days ago had been irrevocably damaged by his flight.

Anger surged inside her. She glared at the men and woman still standing. “That’s my little brother you attacked,” she said. To her surprise, she could barely talk over her panting. She had never run so fast; she could feel her body shaking with the effort to keep standing.

She gestured with her knife to everyone but her little brother. “I’m going to kill all of you.”

Rutejìmo let out a sob.

A warrior stepped forward. “There is only one—”

She didn’t let him finish. With a surge of power, she crossed the two hundred feet and brought her knife through his neck. Her momentum carried her through another rod before she stopped.

A ripple of fear and surprise ran through the surrounding warriors.

Chimípu gasped for breath and looked around. “Jìmo.”

He jumped and staggered back.

Sweat blinded her and she wiped it away from her face. “Are you seriously injured?”

“C-Cuts and burns. I-I’ll live. Thank you, Great—”

She was going to kill everyone. Looking at his haunted eyes, she didn’t want him to remember it. “Good. Go to sleep.”

Someone snorted with amusement.

Rutejìmo stared at her, his dark face pale. “W-What?”

“I-I don’t want you to see this.”

The warrior who snorted interrupted her. “Just like that?”



She glared at him, gathering power.

“Go to sleep in the middle of—”

Chimípu surged forward, using her speed to bring her knife through his torso, slicing through flesh and bone before stopping another rod past him.

“—a fight?” finished the corpse.

Looking back at Rutejìmo, she saw the horror rising. Taking a deep breath, she gave him an order, “Jìmo, go to sleep. I promise you will wake up in the morning.”

There were smirks around her. The smiles faded when Rutejìmo, shaking like grains of sand in a storm, sank to his knees and then to the ground. He laid down in the middle of blood and gore and closed his eyes.

Chimípu turned to the others and got a tight grip on her knife. No one will touch her little brother.

They all lunged at the same time, a glare of powers rising up as the warriors all activated their powers of death and destruction.

Chimípu took out the nearest one with a slash across the throat and then decapitated another. She moved with short bursts of speed. She expected Shimusògo to appear at her feet but he didn't. Instead, she felt the power inside her as she stopped only long enough to turn and move again.

Once they regained their wits, they were able to withstand her charges. Her knife bounced off invisible shields of air and scraped metal limbs. Flaming blades cut through her clothes and into her body. The taste of blood grew stronger in her mouth; soon it dribbled down the corners of her mouth and soaked her legs. She dismissed her injuries as she slashed and punched at her attackers.

A man in leather grabbed her throat and yanked back. His strength pulled her off balance.

She let out a cry and fell back, rolling against his chest.

His knife punched into her side, right under the ribs.

With her speed, she pulled away from him before it could reach her heart but agony burst from the wound. She raced back and grabbed him by his hair. Without pausing, she spun around. Energy flared from inside her and the flames spun around in a vortex of heat and raw power. Her opponent's feet flew off the ground with her speed.

He flailed helplessly, his scream rising up into a high-pitched cry.

She spun faster.

With a wet ripping noise, his neck snapped and the body tore off. It flew into a warrior with a shield, crushing both of them into a shower of gore.

Chimípu channeled more power into spinning, the flames rose up in a howling storm, and then she threw the head with all her might. Shimusògo's power took her momentum and poured it into the head. When she released it, the skull ignited into flames. It punched through the chest of two warriors before crushing the skull of a third.

Movement near Rutejìmo caught her attention, there was a snake racing toward him from one direction and a woman with a knife from the other. The woman's body blurred with darkness and it was hard to focus on her.

"Not my brother!" Chimípu started forward but agony exploded from her injury. Her insides tore further and blood spurting from her side. With a scream, she forced herself past her injuries to sprint forward. She gutted the woman before crushing the snake.

Before it died, the snake snapped out. Its teeth punched into Chimípu's leg.

She grabbed it with her hand and spun twice before launching it into the face of one of her opponents.

More warriors attacked. She stood over Rutejìmo and fought them off, moving as fast as she could as poison surged through her veins and blood poured from her side.

Her knife was a blur as she parried four blades with her own.

A strike caught her wrist, scraping against bone and slicing through the tendons. Her blade slipped from her fingers, splashing in the rivers of blood before settling on a rock.

Chimípu fought the agony as she staggered back, clutching her wrist. Searing hot blood poured out from her fingers. It splattered on the ground and her leg.

She looked around for her opponents, but there was only one left. The rest were corpses on the ground, their flames fading as they died.

Her opponent panted for breath. “Give up and live.”

The world spun around her and she fought to remain conscious.

Agony pulsed throughout her body. She was covered in gore. Her life poured out from her fingers. But she couldn't sleep until her brother was safe. Biting down on her lip, she summoned her flames and directed them into the wound in her wrist.

She gulped and spat out blood. “No, I won't...”

The smell of burning flesh filled the air and her vision blurred from the pain.

When she could speak again, she finished. “... but he will.”

She barely had enough energy to stand. She bore down and drew the last dredges of power but there was none. She had used everything she had and they were still hours from sunrise.

The warrior grinned and his blue glow grew stronger.

Anger filled her. She took a deep breath and another, preparing herself to sprint forward. She didn't know where the power would come from but she would give everything she had.

With a burst of movement, she blew past him. Her fist caught him right below the ribs and her blow punched through his armor and the soft organs of his body. She carried through with her attack, bringing her blood-soaked arm around in a spray of gore.

She collapsed to the ground, his sword buried in her stomach. A gout of blood poured out of her mouth before her face smacked against another corpse.

Behind her, she heard the last opponent hit the ground. With a smile, she closed her eyes.

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## Chapter 5

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# Dying

Chimípu woke up in agony. Her body throbbed with pain and she was in a pool of cooling blood. She managed to pull the sword from her stomach without passing out again. Panting against the agony, she clutched her stomach and rolled over to look for Rutejìmo.

He was curled up in a fetal position in the middle of the battlefield. Blood splattered across his dark skin, both of them were nearly black in the false dawn.

Her heart almost stopped at the sight.

He coughed.

Chimípu let out a choking sob. He was alive. Groaning, she forced herself on her knees and her good wrist. She crawled over to him. With tears running down her cheeks, she forced herself up into a sitting position and brought his head to rest on her lap. The effort left her dizzy and nauseous.

Her movement reopened the wound on her side and she felt hot blood dribbling down her wrist. A thousand other cuts, burns, and bruises reported themselves along her body. Swallowing the blood filling her mouth, she looked down at him with a sad smile. “My... little brother.”

Brushing the matted hair from his face, she watched him breathe fitfully as the light grew brighter. He would wake with the sun, she knew that.

She was so tired. It would be easy just to close her eyes and rest for a moment.

Shaking her head, she summoned the last dredges of her life. A thin wisp of flame rose along her body. It sluggishly ran through her veins and pushed back the agony enough to remain conscious.

She watched over Rutejimo, her blurry vision scanning the horizon before returning to him. She kept one hand on his cheek, just to feel his heartbeat.

He woke up crying, a soft sob of nightmares and terror.

Chimípu fought back her own tears as she listened to him.

When he pushed himself up and looked around in sorrow, she almost passed out. Gulping, she answered his silent question. “No, it’s okay.”

“I... I didn’t mean for this.”

It wasn’t his fault, he was just caught up in a plot by clans far more powerful than the Shimusògo. “I know, little brother.”

His eyes grew wider as he inspected her. Her hopes fell. If a warrior had looked at her that way, she knew there was no hope for survival. Despite not being a warrior, Rute had seen far more people die than her from his years of tending to the diseased, injured, and infirm.

He licked his lips. “Mípu? H-How?”

She struggled to give him a comforting smile. “I promised... my little brother would wake up.”

He grabbed her shoulders. “No! No, you are the warrior! You are supposed to save us. You were the one that was going to make it!”

The effort caused the world to blur and blackness crept up along the edges of her vision. She tried to keep her head up but she slumped against him as her heart strained to keep beating.

“No, Mípu, no. You can’t die! No, not for me!”

Chimípu struggled to speak. “Prom...”

“Mípu!?” Rutejìmo leaned her back and stared into her eyes.

Her vision was growing narrower, consumed by the blackness. She couldn’t see anything but Rutejìmo. She could see the determination burning inside his gaze, she already knew what he was planning. “P-Promise me.”

“What? Anything!”

“Don’t stay for me.”

“B-But,” he sobbed, “you are my friend. My best friend. My big sister.”

“I’m... also a warrior. Tachìra will take... me.”

Trembling, she lifted her good hand up to him. She had to ignore the missing fingers and cuts that had cut clear to the bone. She shoved his chest, but it was a weak motion. “Shimusògo... run.”

Rutejìmo shook his head violently. “No, I can’t. I can’t leave you. I left Desòchu when I should have—”

He was going to stay all the night for the bonfire. She had seen his rituals many times over the years: after burning until sunrise, he would walk naked across the desert for the entire day to purify himself. The assassin would find him and slaughter him.

She closed her eyes and prayed to Shimusògo and Tachìra, the sun spirit from where her clan gained their powers. “Please,” she mouthed, “don’t let him stay.”

The translucent form of Shimusògo raced past her. As it did, her heart almost burst from the power being sucked

out of her. She gasped and struggled to form the words. “Shimusògo—”

It took all of her effort to pull her hand back and wrap her individual fingers into a fist.

“—run!”

She hit him with a weak strike but a blast of wind threw him back.

Rutejìmo rolled over before coming to a stop. He looked up. Her heart almost broke at the devastated look on his face. “Mípu!?”

Chimípu didn’t think he would listen. She tried to push herself up but the crunch of bone stopped her. “Shimusògo... run,” she gasped.

He staggered to his feet. “No... no, I’ll run. I promise. I’ll run, Mípu.”

Thankful, she thumped back to the ground. “You better, J-Jìmo. I know about Sòchu... and Nèku... and Ríshi. You will make it. If you... run.”

Tears rolling down his cheeks, he looked around. He grabbed her scroll case and transferred the damning documents into his own. Everything else, he left behind.

As she watched him, the run rose up behind his body. His dark form became a blot of darkness but the light streaming around him felt good. The welcoming energy flowed back into her but it was too late, she was dying.

Finally, he finished. Standing up, he looked at her with fresh tears on his cheeks. “I... I’m sorry.”

She coughed and a fresh dribble of blood ran from the corner of her mouth. She knew there wasn’t much left, only a few seconds to speak. It only took her a strained heartbeat to figure out what to say. “I’m not. Not... for a single moment. I love you...”

The sunlight grew brighter. It seemed to focus on her, scraping against her skin and blurring her vision.



“... little...”

She couldn't see him anymore. She kept moving her mouth, hoping to get out the final words. “... brother...”

Fire filled her lungs, sucking out all the heat. There was no pain, just a sense of peace, a moment of crossing into death. She smiled and choked out her last words through her burning throat. “Shimusògo run.”

Then her world became nothing but flame and heat as Tachìra, the sun spirit, claimed her as one of his own, a warrior who sacrificed everything for her clan.

## D. Moonfire

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## About D. Moonfire

D. Moonfire is the remarkable intersection of a computer nerd and a scientist. He inherited a desire for learning, endless curiosity, and a talent for being a polymath from both of his parents. Instead of focusing on a single genre, he writes stories and novels in many different settings ranging from fantasy to science fiction. He also throws in the occasional romance or forensics murder mystery to mix things up.

In addition to having a borderline unhealthy obsession with the written word, he is also a developer who loves to code as much as he loves writing.

He lives near Cedar Rapids, Iowa with his wife, numerous pet computers, and a pair of highly mobile things of the male variety.

You can see more work by D. Moonfire at his website at <https://d.moonfire.us/>. His fantasy world, Fedran, can be found at <https://fedran.com/>.

## D. Moonfire

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# Fedran

Fedran is a world caught on the cusp of two great ages.

For centuries, the Crystal Age shaped society through the exploration of magic. Every creature had the ability to affect the world using talents and spells. The only limitation was imagination, will, and the inescapable rules of resonance. But as society grew more civilized, magic became less reliable and weaker.

When an unexpected epiphany seemingly breaks the laws of resonance, everything changed. Artifacts no longer exploded when exposed to spells, but only if they were wrapped in cocoons of steel and brass. The humble fire rune becomes the fuel for new devices, ones powered by steam and pressure. These machines herald the birth of a new age, the Industrial Age.

Now, the powers of the old age struggle against the onslaught of new technologies and an alien way of approaching magic. Either the world will adapt or it will be washed away in the relentless march of innovation.

To explore the world of Fedran, check out <https://fedran.com/>. There you'll find stories, novels, character write-ups and more.

D. Moonfire

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