

THE SIZE OF THE FIGHT IN THE SOLDIER

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WHY DO I ALWAYS GET STUCK WATCHING THE KIDS?" Major Bristlebrite asked.

Colonel Saraid stifled a smile. The pixie would misinterpret the expression and get irritated, although being a good soldier she would never voice it to her superior. At least while on duty.

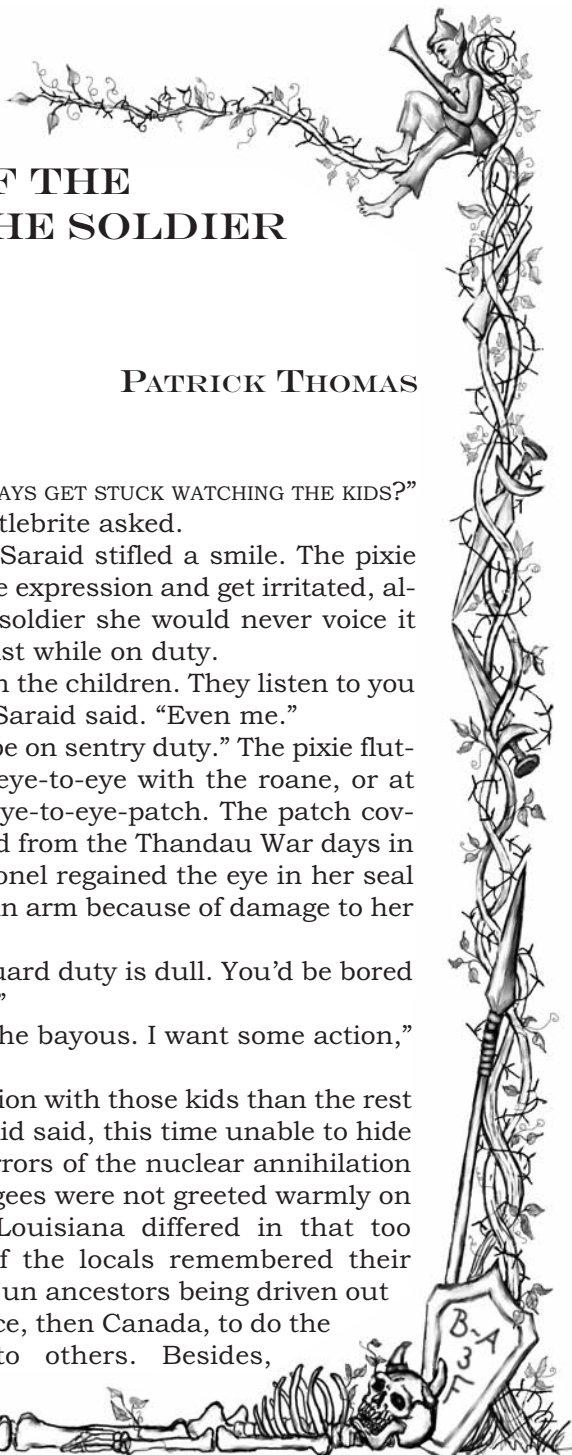
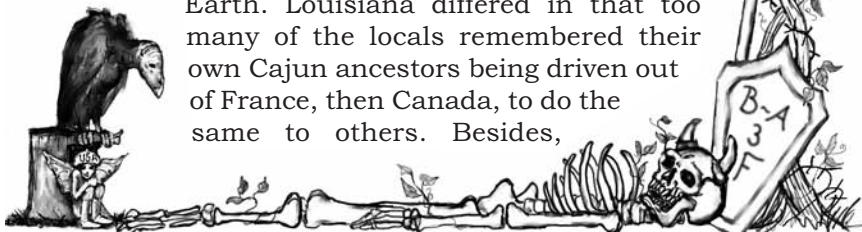
"You are good with the children. They listen to you better than anyone," Saraid said. "Even me."

"But I'd prefer to be on sentry duty." The pixie fluttered up so she was eye-to-eye with the roane, or at least eye-to-eye and eye-to-eye-patch. The patch covered an old war wound from the Thandau War days in Faerie. Oddly, the colonel regained the eye in her seal form, but had a human arm because of damage to her seal skin.

"No, you don't. Guard duty is dull. You'd be bored silly and you know it."

"Then patrolling the bayous. I want some action," Bristlebrite said.

"You see more action with those kids than the rest of us combined," Saraid said, this time unable to hide the grin. After the horrors of the nuclear annihilation of Faerie, the fae refugees were not greeted warmly on Earth. Louisiana differed in that too many of the locals remembered their own Cajun ancestors being driven out of France, then Canada, to do the same to others. Besides,



since the start of the Mysticaust, much worse things had befallen them than Katrina. While they didn't welcome the newcomers with open arms, neither did they offer closed fists.

The governor was smart enough to realize what a natural resource the transplanted fae were, especially those with military experience. Until the destruction of their world, they had lived every day with the good and bad that magic brought in its wake. Humans were still learning and those at the lower end of the curve tended to end up dead. Or worse.

This point was driven home when Saraid saved the governor from assassination. He immediately repaid the favor by appointing her a colonel in the state's National Guard. She insisted on being allowed to recruit for her own unit, nicknamed the Gator Guard because they were given the roughest parish to protect, one that was mostly bayou.

Bristlebite was one of the seal-woman's first recruits.

It had been rough getting organized, but Saraid ran a tight ship and lived up to the LNG's motto of always ready, always there. The Gator Nest, their base, was the most heavily fortified and warded area in the entire parish. Being so, it was the most logical place to house the school and daycare. The only problem was reliable communication. Magic had settled naturally in the bayous and often made cell phones unreliable. CB and short-wave radios were less affected, but even those were not always to be trusted. A series of old-fashioned air raid sirens had been installed for communication and to raise alarms.

An even more old-fashioned method was used as well.

"Help!"

Both women raced toward the cries. Saraid moved through the trees with the same grace with which she swam, but Bristlebite took off like a miniature missile, quickly outdistancing the roane.

Two children were on the shore and another child was caught in the water with a pair of real gators heading toward him. The boy and girl on dry land were screaming, throwing rocks and branches to try to scare off the reptiles but it was having no effect. The boy in the water was sloshing toward land but he was not going to make it before the gators cut him off. The bigger was easily an eleven-footer, the smaller seven-feet long. Both acted hungry, but alligators usually did.

Despite the popular opinion, pixies were not weak. In fact, some were able to lift about the same amount that a human could. Considering few topped ten inches, that was impressive.