



The Fempiror Chronicles: Genesis of the Mutation
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October 1785

Chapter One

An Unexpected Reunion

The once proud Fempiror city of Erim rested in silence under the moonlight. The lighting that formerly illuminated the town as a bright oasis in the night landscape was dark now with only a few scant patches of light showing the way through the streets. The businesses that had provided Erim with its bright nightlife now rested empty and hollow in their dark grey walls.

Dominating the new landscape was a huge, seven-storied building with each level smaller than the one beneath it creating a rough pyramid effect. The four walls of this tower were made of the same grey brick that permeated the rest of the town's architecture and faced the four main roads that divided Erim into distinct quarters and led all the way out of town. The Tepish had constructed the monstrosity seven years ago before they had shown their true colors to the townspeople of Erim, driving most of the people out of town and leaving the Tepish largely alone. The local Rastem and Elewo factions called it the "Tepish Fortress."

A lone Elewo looked out across the rooftops from the side

of the Fortress, though she was not on the inside. She had paused to glance at the city she had been introduced to only three years ago as she scaled the outside of the structure to reach a room on the seventh level and retrieve information about a Tepish experiment. Pieces of rumors had reached the Elewo about experimentation by the Tepish of a new serum – one that would supposedly improve on the original serum created four hundred years ago during the Felletterusk war. To her, however, the war was distant history to her, and she had never seen Erim in any state other than its present one. This did not diminish her devotion to the Elewo, nor did it undermine her skill, which was formidable beyond her years. When one had nothing to lose, it was easy to take risks and grow from their successes and failures.

She looked back to the wall and the level she had left to climb. She had been unnoticed for the first five levels, and it would be easy to keep it that way. She had stolen past their ground security without incident to reach the wall, and at this height, no one watched her. Clearly, they did not anticipate anyone traversing the exterior of their building.

She was dressed in the dark garb of the Elewo with her face covered making her nothing more than a shadow on the wall as she held the stones of the wall in her iron grip. Her feet provided minimal balance against the wall as she scaled it; she controlled most of her climb through her hands and arms. Thanks to her Fempiror strength, that was all she needed.

She reached a window on the seventh level and looked in cautiously. The window opened to a stone hallway brightly lit by

the Fempiror lighting system with white walls and a grey floor lined with closed doors. The white was a stark contrast to the grey stone exterior of the Fortress, but the color served to make the halls much brighter under the light, and she had to be careful not to dwell on the view or risk blinding herself to the night.

She glanced to her left to another window. She knew that the room she was seeking was accessible through a window, and walking through the halls of the Fortress was out of the question. She ducked down onto the small ledge afforded by the sixth level and inched her way to the next window. She reached up to the windowsill to pull herself up and look inside. This time, she found it.

Three Fempiror stood inside a room more dimly lit than the hall, but just as white. The most striking features of the room were tables covered in papers, fluid-filled vials, and three bodies. Two of these three were covered and likely dead, but the three Fempiror in the room scrutinized the third, who lay upon a bare table clad only about the loins. Elewo spies had spotted a Levi-Cart rapidly flying this individual into Erim earlier this evening along the Western road, and her Deldral had sent her to learn how this person related to the known Tepish project. In addition, if she discovered any of this new serum formula, she needed to acquire a sample so the Elewo and Rastem could determine its composition.

The three Fempiror in the room were old, and she suspected their transmutation dated back to the Felletterusk War in the late 14th century. She recognized the one dressed in the

classic red and black armor of the Tepish Order as Vladimir, a Fempiror her order had believed to be a Rastem until he had betrayed and murdered the Rastem Zechariah ten years ago. The other two were dressed in more commonplace clothing – breeches, stockings, shirt and waistcoat – with an apparently more scientific than military role in the order.

“Your protégé has found himself quite good with the mixtures,” the first scientist who stood near the head of the unconscious person on the table said. “For the first time, I think we have made significant progress.”

“We still require results,” Vladimir said impatiently. “What has happened so far with this one? Can we expect the same from the others?”

The first scientist consulted a book he held. “According to the alchemist’s notes, the initial injection was given ten days ago,” he replied. “Over that time, the subject’s blood supply very slowly dissipated until he finally fell into this comatose state.”

Vladimir shook his head. “Why did it take so long?” he asked.

“Uncertain,” the second scientist who stood near the foot of the table replied. “We’ve all been out to Kelirum to consult with him over this period of dissipation, and none of us have an answer. Where Voivode’s original serum took effect immediately, this mutation of it just takes longer. This is consistent with all of the other tests.”

“But will it do what we need it to?” Vladimir asked.

The Elewo felt this would be her only opportunity to do

anything, and glancing around the room, she spotted what she had come to retrieve. Near their subject's table was another table with a small wooden box that contained several tubes filled with a dark fluid resembling blood. She doubted they would be so careful with their own blood or that of a human's. Silently proving worthy of the Elewo Order, she crawled through the window without a sound and moved behind the table to where the vials rested. She listened as the conversation continued.

"During the transition, it began to affect the subject slowly," the first scientist continued. "Look here."

The Elewo looked over the edge of the table to see the scientist place the book on the table next to the subject, still open to his page, and pull back the lips of their victim. To her surprise, this person had very long, pointed upper canine teeth. The shock of witnessing this very real representation of the myth her race was often associated with disrupted her focus.

"These began elongating after seven days," the first scientist stated.

"Good," Vladimir said. "What does he say about this blood dissipation?"

She shook off her surprise and continued her mission approaching the box of vials slowly.

"The subject did not bleed to death," the second scientist stated, "but the body gives the appearance of doing so. Over the ten day period, the subject grew very pallid and as we attempted to draw blood, his veins provided less and less of it." She reached the table containing the vials and sat silently only a few feet away

from the talking Tepish.

“In your opinion,” Vladimir asked, “what will happen when the subject awakens?”

The first scientist smiled broadly as he closed the book. “We believe he will actively seek replenishment,” he said.

“How actively?” Vladimir asked.

“Blindly,” the scientist replied.

Vladimir smiled in return. “Excellent,” he said. “Cross check his notes with your own tests, and then return the subject to our contact in Kelirum as soon as possible.”

Now was her chance. She looked over the edge. The vials sat only a few inches away. She glanced at the Tepish. Their focus remained on their subject. In a flash, she snatched one of the vials and dropped it in a small satchel attached to her waist. She ducked behind the table and moved swiftly and silently back to the window.

She glanced back to where she had taken the vial to find Vladimir looking curiously at the box, which was now missing one vial. His eyes traced the path she had taken to the window, and for a brief moment, his eyes locked on hers. While she knew who Vladimir was, she had never met his gaze before. It was hypnotic. So much hate behind one set of eyes held her in her place.

Without a change to his grim expression, he said, “Raise the alarm.”

The movement around him broke his lock. She quickly scaled down the outside of the fortress, not pausing for a moment

to look back. She knew that at any moment, Tepish would be pouring out of the lower levels to intercept her. With what she had learned, capture was an avenue she could not risk. Her Order and the Rastem needed to know what she had overheard, and more importantly, they needed the vial she carried.

She leapt the final level to the ground and ran full speed away from the fortress toward an alleyway between a pair of two-story abandoned grey buildings that rested only a few hundred feet from her target. She knew she had to either lose her pursuers or take care of them so that they would not discover the current Elewo outpost.

She glanced behind her to check for pursuit. Four small levitating vehicles rapidly flew out of an opening on the side of the building and headed directly toward her: Chasers. They had a single seat for only one rider who controlled the unusual vehicles through a complex combination of chest level handles and pedals at their feet. This method of propulsion and navigation allowed a rider to fly after someone with both hands available for combat. The first time she had seen one, she had assumed the handles were the sole method of propulsion, like a Levi-Cart, but after she flew one that the Elewo captured, she discovered the advantage of controlling its speed and direction with her feet. These riders held a handle with one hand, and drew their swords with the other, preparing for their attack.

They blasted down the alley after her, gaining on her quickly. She knew she could not out run them, but rather looked for a reasonable escape. The hum grew to a peak behind her, and

she knew she had to deal with them. Each rider swung at her as they passed at high speed. She ducked and avoided each one.

As they spun around at the end of the alley to fly toward her again, she glanced upward. This place would work well enough. With a final glance to the Chasers as they prepared a second attack, she leapt against the wall of one of the buildings. She paused for only an instant and then jumped to the side of the opposite building, landing a short distance higher. She continued this pattern until she emerged on the roof of one of the buildings.

She glanced down the wall behind her and found the riders had turned their Chasers upward against the wall and rapidly followed her. She had no idea that the rear Levi-coil was capable of pushing the small vehicle up a wall, but the surprise was secondary to the fact that it was happening. Despite their speed, she was the one with the advantage now. As the first Chaser crossed the line of the roof, she delivered a crushing blow to its underside, throwing it off balance and sending it and its rider crashing to the ground two stories below. The others avoided their fallen comrade, their hands firmly grasping the handles now, and continued their approach.

The Elewo turned away from the drop hoping for a better battlefield. She ran across the rooftop as the Chasers passed over the roofline. She spared them no glance and leapt the short distance to the next roof. Unfortunately, the Chasers were following close behind her, and although they were out of their element twenty feet above the ground, they deftly avoided roof exits and barricades and kept up with her.

She reached the side of a building that was only one story taller and jumped on the side of it, hoping to scale it to the roof of the next building. Unfortunately, her leap had more distance than height and she missed the top ledge of the building, only managing to grasp one of the many grooves near the top. The stone was brittle beneath her touch and gave way even as it held her weight, so she knew it would never support any additional attempt to pull her weight upward to try for a better handhold. The hum of the Chasers grew behind her again, and she realized she could not escape this way. She turned and noticed one of the riders had drawn his sword and closed in to strike. She back-flipped off the wall and landed on the roof in the midst of them. The three Chasers circled her like a group of sharks preparing for the kill.

She carefully assessed each one. Their faces were neither young nor old, so they would pose a definite threat to her skill. Their vehicles made this even more difficult. She had been able to face off against multiple adversaries before, but never against those mounted on vehicles. She prayed for a miracle.

David Taylor sat atop one of the grey buildings of Erim. Although now twenty-seven, he appeared to be only eighteen due to the peculiar aging effect of the Fempiror serum on his physiology. He was dressed in the timeworn garb of the Rastem with a black tunic, black pants, black boots, and a long, black riding coat, which served to obscure his form against the night.

On his back, he wore a curved scabbard that held his sword. Far from the tailor boy who had refused this service ten years ago, he had long since accepted his fate and faithfully trained with his commander, Tiberius.

Tiberius had sent David along with several other Rastem to watch an Elewo infiltrate the grotesque Tepish Fortress after their spies observed someone arriving earlier this evening on a Tepish Levi-Cart. As the Elewo were more specialized at stealth movement, Tiberius had simply let David and a few others know about the plan, and both Orders had posted warriors around the fortress. This way, in case the Elewo ran into trouble, anyone could report and bring help before the Elewo could be overwhelmed.

It had been some time since David had the chance to overlook Erim at night. The Tepish had ruined this city with their oppressive rules to the point that most people, humans and Fempiror alike, had cleared out. The Rastem and Elewo had collectively tried to undermine the Tepish since they had made their foothold here, but the Tepish had built their forces well over the years, and once their fortress was completed, it was impregnable. When this last convoy had come into town, the Rastem had hoped to capture it before it ever reached the fortress, but the Tepish had readied a small brigade of experienced soldiers to defend it, making it quite impossible for their band of volunteers to take it down. From there, they were left only with the option to send someone in to retrieve what they could.

He glanced back to the Elewo scaling the wall, and the Elewo had reached a window on the seventh tier. He readied himself for the worst as the Elewo climbed in. Whatever their Orders were looking for, it must have been inside that room. Moments later, the Elewo rapidly climbed back out the window and scaled down the wall. A face looked out, following the Elewo's descent. David recognized it instantly as Vladimir, and an old anger boiled within him.

There was no time for these problems, however, as he noticed the Elewo running full speed across the distance between the fortress and a nearby group of buildings tailed by four Chasers. Moments later, the Elewo emerged over the roof to his right, took down one of the pursuing Chasers, and leapt from rooftop to rooftop toward him.

The building where he stood was taller than most of the surrounding ones and the height gave the Elewo problems. As soon as he saw that hand grip the side of the building, he immediately moved to help, but before he reached the hand, the Elewo leapt down just before one of the riders could strike. He watched as the Elewo stood in the midst of a circle of three Chasers who waited for the moment to take him down. He knew he needed to go for help, but leaving this situation could mean the death of the Elewo.

"Elewo!" he shouted, drawing the attention of the warrior as well as the three Tepish riders. He jumped down from the roof and landed next to the lone Elewo. "I am with you, friend." The eyes of the Elewo elicited surprise, and David noted for the first

time that the Elewo was female. David hoped that this lone warrior would appreciate the help, for despite their level demeanor, Elewo were fiercely proud of their skill, and often, the women were more likely to put themselves at risk to exhibit their considerable prowess.

This Elewo nodded and stood back to back with David as the Chasers attacked. David drew his sword. Its thin curve was reminiscent of a Japanese katana and the letters of the Felletterusk language spelled out Rastem on its side. It was his most prized possession for many reasons.

One of the riders attacked David with a swift swing for David's head. David easily blocked the blow and brought his blade around to slice his opponent across the gut as the rider passed him. David's first swing was blocked, but he saw the rider was circling him tightly to keep him engaged. David spun opposite to the rider's direction of travel holding his blade level with the rider's belly, and much to the rider's surprise, the blade found its mark. The rider fell from his mount, which clattered to the surface of the roof and skidded to a stop against the roof edge.

Another rider attacked the Elewo at the same time. She leapt toward him as he attempted to deliver a downward swing to her head, but she was faster. Using her gauntlets, the Elewo blocked the rider's swing and delivered a swift kick to the rider, throwing him from his mount and off the side of the building. She grabbed one of the Chaser's handles to take control of the vehicle.

The final Chaser attacked David. David swung high for the rider's neck, but the rider blocked David's attempt. David immediately tried to slice across the rider's middle, but the rider blocked him again. David watched as the rider circled around for another attack, but before he could make any kind of approach, the Elewo, now in control of her Chaser, rammed into the side of him. The shocked rider looked up in time to see the Elewo use the momentum of the crash to leap from her Chaser on to his and deliver a crushing blow to his face.

The rider's head snapped back with a sharp crack. His sword clattered to the roof. Never stopping for a moment, the Elewo continued her fluid motion off the Chaser and landed softly on the rooftop. She turned to watch the mass of metal and rider crash to the ground at the base of the building.

David stared in wonder for a moment before he removed a cloth from his pocket and wiped the blood from his sword. He walked toward the Elewo as he sheathed his sword and stood beside her. Tiberius had told him once that watching an Elewo was impressive to behold, and this experience did not damage that observation.

"Well done," David said, standing beside his fellow warrior. The Elewo snapped her eyes to David, and strangely, she took a step away from him. He turned to her, curious. He meant no offense by either his assistance or his words. He looked into the deep, brown eyes beneath the mask as they turned to look upon him. Her expression was indecipherable.

"Are you well?" David asked, concerned. "I'm David, a

Rastem." He took a step toward her and held out his hand in friendship. She backed away from it. He looked closely at her eyes and saw tears. This reaction was very unusual for an Elewo when he considered that he had never seen an Elewo cry under any circumstances. Then, she spoke.

"I know who you are," a familiar voice said. His world stopped. Everything became clear to him. Every reaction. Her surprise. Her tears. He had not heard that voice in years. He never knew if he would hear it again when he had lost it. But most undeniably, he would never forget it. He could only gaze at her, world spinning, barely able to stand.

"Beth?"

Voices issuing from far below snapped them back to reality. The Tepish had seen the Chasers fall, and very shortly, they were going to have more problems. They needed to get out of here, but as David turned back to Beth, he found she was already on the move. She ran to the opposite side of the building and leapt from the roof. He ran after her and looked over the edge to where she landed easily on the ground far below. Without a glance behind her, she ran into the night. He had to stay with her.

He leapt off the building as well. The drop was significant, but part of their strength allowed them to make these kinds of jumps, as long as they landed well enough. He landed softly on the ground and looked in the direction where he saw Beth disappear. Dressed in black, she was invisible in the night.

He was momentarily conflicted, but with the sounds of

the Tepish approaching, he could not risk an attempt to determine her path. He turned to run to a known Rastem outlet nearby to escape, but a group of Tepish guards emerged ahead of him. He turned and found another group emerging behind him.

Running now would risk leading them to a Rastem outpost. He was trapped.

The Tepish formed a tight circle around him. David drew his sword and prepared himself for an onslaught, but only one large Tepish approached him from the circle. This Tepish Champion was at least a head taller than David was with a shoulder span that was twice David's width. He wore a sneer on his face as he stared down at David like a boy might gaze upon an ant.

"A young one," he stated. "And I was hoping for a challenge."

David did not give the Champion the benefit of a reply, but only waited patiently for him to make his move. The Champion drew his sword and slashed at David. David found the Champion's size was no indication of fencing skill. He easily deflected the blow with a wrist gauntlet and stepped back.

David hoped that Beth would report the situation quickly, and possibly send help for him, if she had seen the Tepish approach. Given the sheer number of Tepish around him, David knew that if he defeated this large one, the others would attack and overwhelm him. He needed to hold off the attack until he had help.

The Champion attacked him again, and again, David

deflected his strike. This time, David swung his sword in a lazy arc toward the Champion that he easily blocked. David felt that he needed to give this Tepish someone to fight against, or it would not be convincing. The Champion swung again, this time making several attempts to penetrate David's defense. David blocked all of the strikes and then swung at the Champion allowing him another easy block.

David glanced behind the Tepish circle, but he could see no one coming out of the darkness. The Champion had stepped up his attack, swinging faster and harder than he had been. David had to work a little harder to keep the large warrior at bay, and resorted to simply blocking the rapid onslaught, continuing to hope that help was just beyond the shadows.

"Somebody hold him!" the Champion shouted. That was the signal for David to finish this. He could not risk being held as a pawn for nothing more than an overzealous bully. The Tepish in the circle closed in as David blocked the last swing the large Tepish Champion would ever make.

He pushed up on the Champion's blade, swung once more to knock his opponent's sword completely out of the way, and then ran his blade through the Champion's chest. The Champion stared at David in surprise before his eyes rolled back into his head. David withdrew his blade quickly as the large man fell to the ground. The circle of warriors looked on their fallen champion for only a moment before turning their gaze to David. He held his sword at the ready.

As one, the warriors rushed him. He desperately worked

to defend himself from their blows using his sword and his wrist and ankle gauntlets, but found himself quickly overwhelmed by their numbers. He was grateful that at the end, he at least knew that Beth was all right.

Then a commotion arose outside of the throng and the warriors dispersed to defend themselves against a group of both Rastem and Elewo warriors. He looked up to find Beth leading Tiberius and Ulrich along with a dozen warriors to him. She had gone for help.

The Tepish group tried to hold their own against the sudden onslaught of fighters, but the influx quickly defeated them. Several Tepish broke away from the group and ran back to the fortress in defeat, but the Rastem and Elewo did not give chase. Their battle here was done, and they needed to get back into hiding.

David wiped his sword clean again as he looked to Tiberius, who approached him. "Thanks," David said. He sheathed his sword.

"I hope you weren't out looking for trouble," Tiberius said.

David looked over to Beth, who spared him a glance from beneath her mask before turning to walk away with Ulrich and the other Elewo. As their eyes met, she quickly looked away.

"No," David responded, "but I found it."

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Genesis of the Mutation

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