

The first snow had fallen in Lyria and it had been plentiful. The white flakes blanketed every roof in the village, turning it into a winter wonderland- or at least it looked like that to Timothy as he peered out the window while eating his porridge. His mother had forbidden him from going outside today, but he wasn't going to listen to her. He was ten summers old, nearly a man, and this might be the last chance he would have at playing in the snow. Once he had finished his breakfast, he would go outside to search for his friends who might have had the same idea.

"What took ye so long," asked Hovim when Timothy arrived. A young dwarf boy, he already had the beginnings of a beard growing around his chin, something which Timothy envied now with the cold pinching at his cheeks.

"Was eating," Timothy answered bluntly, and looked around to see if the rest of his friends were here. Seeing that everyone else had already arrived, he clambered onto a tree stump to address them. "I'm sure I'm not the only who's been told not to play in the snow," there were few nods among his friends. "But I can't accept the fact that we'd have this much of it and not be allowed to enjoy it. Therefore I suggest we all go outside the village and have a snowball fight so that no adult will stop us!" His friends looked around at each other, unsure of whether to break the rules their parents had set them.

"Timothy is right. We are but young only once and we should enjoy it to the fullest," called Tialvi, a Niflgaardian girl near the front of the group who was shivering even in her warm fur coat. She had always been good with speaking and her proclamation changed the minds of those who were unsure. With everyone agreed, they all headed outside the village to have their battle.

The group found a clearing in the forest near the mountain which was ideal for a snowball fight and formed their teams, but it was clear that old ways were still strong even among children. On one side were the humans while on the other were the dwarves.

"I believe we should give a small advantage to our other team here," said Tialvi, looking up and down at the dwarves. "It wouldn't be fair or fun if we fought like this." It was hard to not agree with her. The dwarves were stocky and short, and even the smallest of the human kids were taller than their tallest. On an open battlefield, they'd be easy targets. Too easy.

"Very well. We'll give you thirty minutes to build some sort of cover for yourself," Timothy agreed.

"We wouldn't need something like that, but if ye want to lose that badly, it's fine with us," said Hovim with a gleam in his eye, the boy already overconfident.

"We just want this to be fun, that's all," Timothy shot back, annoyed by Hovim's tone. "Besides, we'll be making our snowballs while we wait."

The preparations for battle began, the human kids building up their snowball arsenal, putting them in piles so they'd be easy to pick up one after another. While they focused on filling their armory, the dwarven kids started creating defenses. It didn't take long for Timothy to understand what Hovim had meant. The walls of the snow fort were rising at an alarming rate and once they were done, it reminded him of the tales the soldiers had told of Mahakam. Standing next to it, Timmy would have had to crane his neck in order to see the top. The battle might have been lost before it even ever started.

"That's not fair!" shouted one of the kids from the human side, pointing at the defenses the dwarves had built. "How can we even reach them?"

"Ye told us to build this and build it we did. Is fair as far gets!" Hovim called from the top of his battlements. "Besides, don't ye have all of those balls with ye? Surely ye can toss them at us!" He continued laughing. As soon as he had climbed down, the first barrage of snowballs was flung from the human side. None of them hit their intended target, either flying over the wall or splattering against it.

The second volley of snowballs met a similar fate and when the human kids reached for a third, the dwarves retaliated with a barrage of their own. Even if their balls were considerably smaller than those of humans they were deadly accurate, and having nowhere to duck for cover, the only option was to try to dodge them. Several humans took blows from the attack, grumbling and muttering curses under their breath.

"This is all Tialvi's fault! She is a spy for the dwarves," one of the kids shouted accusingly after the flight of snowballs had passed, pointing his finger at Tialvi. "If she hadn't suggested giving the dwarves an advantage, we would be winning now!"

"I-I didn't know the-they'd build something like that!" Tialvi tried to defend herself, looking around for support.

"Liar! You are a Nilfgaardian, everyone knows that they cheat and lie whenever possible!" Came the reply, her words falling on deaf ears. The human children started to throw snowballs at her instead of the dwarves and while Timothy tried to get them stop, his efforts were fruitless. Oblivious to what was happening, the dwarven kids continued their barrage until a shriek of pain silenced the battlefield.

There was blood on the snow, slowly painting it crimson as it dripped from Tialvi's forehead. Someone had thrown a snowball with a rock inside of it and hit her with it.

"Who threw that?!" Timmy shouted angrily, his young voice cutting through the silence and still-falling snow.

"It was the dwarves! They are trying to cover up their spy," cried one of the human kids, pointing towards the dwarven wall.

"We didn't throw it! We don't have any rocks here- and even if we did, do you think we'd waste it as ammunition?" Hovim shouted from his place on the battlements, defending his team.

"You love rocks! You must have some in your pockets," came the angry reply. All the while Tialvi cried, ignored by both sides as they started hurling insults and snowballs alike at one another.

"Glitterocks, glitterocks, glitter all the way," sang Shupe while walking in his cave. It was then that he heard a scream from the entrance, followed by crying and angry shouting. He went to investigate and noticed a strange white wall in front of his cave's opening. It hadn't been there yesterday, and now he could hear the crying and shouting coming from the other side. Normally he would ignore it, but he had recently been to the Imperial Court's Military Academy on his day off, where he had learned to help those in need. Whoever was crying outside sure sounded like they needed rescue. He took few steps back before running through the strange white wall, yelling his fierce battlecry.

“SHUUUUUUPE! SHUUUUUUPE!”

The fighting between the humans and dwarves quickly came to an end as the massive rock troll burst from what looked like the side of the mountain. The snow had covered up the entrance to the cave, hiding it from plain sight. The kids immediately fell silent in fear, freezing in place and dropping their snowballs.

“Why human yell and cry?” Shupe asked, looking around the kids before seeing Tialvi still kneeling in the red-spattered snow. “Human hurt?” He sat down as gently as he was able but still created a mighty thud when he landed next to Tialvi. She looked up at him and nodded.

“Ye-yeah. It hurt at first but not so much anymore...” The girl was whimpering quietly and still sniffling. Shupe grunted and looked around.

“Who hurt human? Shupe rockdrop idgit!” The kids looked nervously at each other. They had heard the stories about trolls making elf and onion soup. It wouldn’t be that different for human or dwarf and onion soup.

“I-it’s alright. We started fighting over something stupid and things escalated from there. But thank you for coming to check on me,” Tialvi looked up at the troll and smiled.

“Human smart is. But Shupe happy is not. Idgit humans and idgit dwarves sorry say must!” Shupe grumbled, standing up and glaring at both the human and dwarf kids. They were all trying to avoid his gaze, either looking at the ground or the sky.

It was Timothy who first stepped up and helped Tialvi to her feet. “I’m sorry that this happened, Tialvi. I should have defended you better.” Next came Hovim with rest of the dwarves following behind him.

“I’m sorry that ye got hurt. None of us meant that.” After the dwarf boy’s apology, the rest of the human kids came to her as well, each apologizing for accusing her as well as apologizing to the dwarves for calling them cheaters. Both Tialvi and the dwarves accepted the apologies and forgave each other in turn.

“Idgit humans and idgit dwarves good are! Shupe give gifts!” Shupe reached for the keg he was carrying on his back and smashed it open, shouting “Shupe smash smash!” Inside the barrel were many colourful cards, which Shupe gave to each child one by one.

“Bloody hell, that’s Yarpen Zigrin! Heard he killed a dragon!” Hovim shouted as he looked at his card. There were other excited cries among the kids as they recognised some of their favourite heroes depicted in the cards from the stories they had been told.

“Th-thank you for all of this, Mister Shupe,” Tialvi said, bowing to the troll. “Without you, I don’t know what could have happened”

“Human welcome,” Shupe mumbled, slightly embarrassed by all the attention, “Shupe hope little ones be good, even idgit ones.”

“We will, I promise you that,” swore Timothy. His promise was quickly echoed by everyone in the group, the children nodding eagerly.

“Smart little ones.” Shupe smiled before taking out his wizard hat and staff which he had gotten from visiting Ban Ard Academy on another one of his days off and creating a portal which pulled him into the air like a whirlwind. “Shupe away,” cried the troll before

disappearing, leaving only tracks of his massive footprints and the remains of his keg to show he was ever there.

"Wow, I can see now why witchers hate portals," Timothy said, looking up at the sky before realizing how quickly it had gotten dark.

"We should probably head home," nodded Tialvi, the swelling on her forehead already starting to go down.

"Agreed. My mom is probably wondering if the earth has swallowed me or something," said Hovim, scratching his patchy beard.

And so the kids headed back to their homes, each carrying a memory of the day when it first snowed in Lyria. In the following years, stories were told that on the first day it snowed in the village, a troll with a keg would come out from his cave and hand out beautifully crafted cards to children who were good of heart, and brave enough to go there and receive his gifts. Even now, they say you can hear the troll singing during the night through the snow and starry sky. Whether the story is truth or legend, one thing is for certain; It brings joy to the children each year to hear the tale.