

Longest Night

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Longest Night

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Summary

Age of Makto: An apprentice enters into his final test, where he must face his master in combat -- he has but one night to win one contest. But as the apprentice learns, there is more to combat than just force.



The twin suns had set and the hairs on his arms seemed to stand on end. The time had arrived. Standing in the large, well-lit chamber, he stood in the center circle and waited for his master to speak.

Master Okesh stared at his apprentice. “Are you ready?”

Ikar stood tall — his height dwarfed his master by a head and a half — and gave a subtle nod. “I will succeed.”

Okesh chuckled and began to walk around Ikar. “Your youth will serve you well on the battlefield, but don’t be so foolish as to believe you will pass this test, this night.” Okesh stood before him again, took three steps back, and bowed. “You are challenged, apprentice.”

In the space between them a weapon rack materialized — six weapons, each of traditional make, were before them.

“First choice is yours,” Okesh announced.

Ikar glanced at the rack and then at his master. “The first choice belongs to you, as tradition dictates.”

“Tradition does not command me!” Okesh jutted a finger at the weapon rack. “How I choose to perform this test is my choice and mine *alone*, apprentice. Is that understood?”

Ikar bowed his head. “It is.”

“Then choose — and choose wisely.”

Ikar reached for his preferred weapon — a long staff with a sharpened blade on each end, each blade capable of a deadly energy burst. Out of all the weapons his people had invented over the long existence of their empire, this remained his favorite: simple but versatile.

Okesh gave a small nod. “An understandable choice.” With a wave of his hand the weapon rack vanished. “I choose none of those remaining.” With another wave of his hand a staff appeared in his empty hand. “This is my choice.”

Ikar couldn’t suppress his laughter. “You wish to fight me with a simple *stick*?”

Okesh took up a defensive position with his staff and smirked. “A weapon is as simple or as complicated as its wielder.”

“You truly wish this?”

Okesh answered with a swing of his staff, forcing Ikar to block it. “Defend yourself!”

The two traded multiple strikes with each other, but each was blocked — Ikar knew he could overpower his master. He was more physically capable and unburdened by years of combat injuries.

“You hold back!” Okesh unleashed a flurry of moves, each faster than the last, as he whirled his staff with an uncanny mastery. “Are you not the younger? Are you not the stronger?”

Ikar scowled. “You wish a true battle? Very well!” Using the shaft of his own weapon, he pushed Okesh back, throwing the older man off balance. With his next move he closed the distance between the two, took his weapon in his left hand, and used his right to grab Okesh by the throat.

With a heave, he threw his master across the chamber.

Okesh landed in a roll, stood to his feet, and smiled. “Good, you show passion. But is all you have to bring to the battlefield raw emotion?”

Ikar snarled and rushed the older man, determined to win this bout, pass this test, and survive the longest night of his life in victory.

Okesh didn’t run or beg. He assumed a standing position as Ikar came ever closer ... until Ikar was too close. Less than an arm’s length away, Okesh slammed the end of his staff into the floor, releasing a force that pushed Ikar to the far side of the chamber, slamming the younger man against the wall.

Pain radiated throughout Ikar’s body as he laid on the floor, dazed.

Okesh walked over with an amused grin. “I have bested you.”

Ikar tried to reach for his weapon but found his limbs uncooperative; it was as if every nerve in his body was aflame. “What ... what ...”

Okesh slammed his staff into the floor again and suddenly the pain in Ikar’s body vanished — he was free. “You judged. You assumed. You lost.” His master took up a defensive position. “Again?”

Ikar stood from the floor, staff in hand, feeling like a child. He had been a fool. He understood why this test lasted all night long.

Okesh smirked. “Good ... defend yourself!”