

Good Afternoon/morning/Evening/Night guys and girls. Here, as promised, is the long-awaited Death's Avenger chapter.

HOWEVER it has not been edited by Tomon. I have waited, but he has not been able to get it back to me. He has not contact me since the 14th. I am honestly a little concerned about it as he is normally very good about getting back to me. But no email, no message. I checked my trash and spam files, as that's happened before for some reason, but still, nothing. Not good.

This means that if he does get the chapter back to me, I will be updating the changed version. I doubt that anything in terms of the plot will change, but you never know.

Regardless, I hope you all enjoy this. Stay safe, warm/cool/whatever folks!

Chapter 6: Internal Conflicts, External Discoveries

Harry dreamed. Sitting in Dor Redcliff living room, his mind floated with the special herbs that the Tauren used. His first time flying on a broom, the feelings of freedom and elation that had evoked in him. The first time he instigated a hug, when Hermione had been freed from her petrified state, suddenly realizing that girls and boys were different. A few other happy memories dominated his dreams until, with the suddenness of a guillotine, they were suddenly overwhelmed by the memory of his battle with the basilisk. The darkness, the desperation, the fear of this giant creature that he had to defeat somehow.

But then the dreamscape shifted into something he had never seen. It was almost as if he was a snake, swishing through the grass. He could feel the sun on his scales, and the feeling was amazing, the heat of it almost addictive. But he felt too energetic and hungry to find a nice stone to curl up on and enjoy the day. So Harry/Snake hunted his tongue flickering out, tasting the air around him, until he found the spore of something small and squishy. Swiftly moving through the grass, Harry/Snake found the entrance to a small hole in a tree, and when a small creature with long ears hopped out pounced.

Before he could dream of his teeth sinking into the creature or envelop the creature in his maw, the dream shifted again. This time Harry could see a sort of fiery tinge to the dream as if the last setting was being somehow burnt away. When the background reformed, Harry was flying once more. He was flying this time as a bird. The sun was still high in the sky, but he needed no sun to feel heat. Fire was a part of his being, flaring from his wings as he flew, staring around the world with delight, a song of freedom and joy bursting from his throat.

Despite the fact that he couldn't hold a tune to save his life. Indeed, that strangeness nearly knocked Harry out of the dream, but the joy in flight kept him in the dream. Then Harry/Phoenix

spotted something below, a bird that reeked of darkness and death. It almost felt like a dementor, but was also something alive. The feeling of the dream shifted then, but Harry/Phoenix did not flee, instead twisting around and down, falling on the other bird, talons extended.

But as the two birds came together, Harry/Phoenix suddenly realized that the creature was not alone. There was another nearby. Even as he finished off the first dark creature, the second took him in the side. Then he was falling, falling, his wing broken.

He crashed into the ground; his body broken. But where another creature would have simply died, the fire within Harry/Phoenix roared out, burning his body away and renewing it at the same time, ash and rebirth in one.

Through the herbs that had allowed him to reach this point, Harry realized he was dreaming, becoming aware of it now. With that revelation, Harry's conscious mind began to try to control the dream, grabbing at the flames themselves burning all around him, even as he pushed forth the idea that he had crashed along the shoreline of a still lake. *The image, the image, keep the image in mind*, Harry barely sang in his mind, the sound shifting from being unheard to being almost a warble of bird song that joined the background of the dream.

The dream fought Harry, but he kept at it, a single thought filling his conscious mind as he fought with his body. Keep the image of his current body in his mind. They had prepped for this continuously for the past few weeks, and despite the flame's best efforts to force Harry to reform into his smaller, weaker body, the one Harry had when he first became a chimera, Harry kept his current body at the forefront of his brain.

As he leaned over the water, Harry saw his reflection. It wavered, almost like someone had dropped a rock into the still pond. The heavily tanned, slightly weathered face he currently had, the hair that had changed from its original black color to black with a large streak of red in it fought Harry's far more youthful face. The two seemed to fuse, the hair transplanting itself onto his younger body, his older face losing its tan, a mad kaleidoscope of images.

And then, Harry lost it. He lost the dream, the dream shifting suddenly with the abruptness of a blow into a dream from his basilisk side. And like before, where there had been a burst of flame destroying the setting of the dream, this time it was as if everything had shifted with the suddenness of a striking snake.

Once more, Harry was a small snake, well, small in comparison to Quetzal or the basilisk Harry had fought in his second year in Hogwarts. From the images of trees he passed, Harry believed he was traveling about as far off the grassy floor as a beagle or another medium-sized dog would.

He was once more hunting for something. But the scent that reached his tongue was not that of a rabbit or anything else squishy. No, this thing was another predator of some kind, one with

many legs and venom of his own. But for all of that, Harry/Basilisk could sense that it would taste delicious....

But then, the drainage shifted again, almost as if, Harry's conscious mind thought woozily as it was buffeted about, as if the two sides of his chimeric body were in conflict. But this dream was much more to Harry's liking. He was flying again, his wingspan wider than before, feeling the heat of his own fire yet again within his very being as he flew through the daytime sky.

Beside him, Hedwig flew. Where the snowy owl had come from Harry didn't know, but he let loose a glad cry as he spotted her. Hedwig precked in turn, moving through the air over Harry/Pheonix, and reaching down to tenderly pull at one of Harry's feathers, like Hedwig had done back in Hogwarts. Before Hedwig...

For a moment the memory of Hedwig dying, her body exploding in midair as a spell caught her, threatened to end the dream, but Harry's conscious mind, even 'buoyed' by that horrible memory couldn't break through the haze of the herbs. And Harry/Pheonix also felt even more delight in seeing his first friend than he had when he had first begun to fly.

Hedwig pulled ahead of Harry/Phoenix, using the thermals expertly, twitching her head to indicate Harry should follow her. Down below there was something small and squeaky hunt, and Hedwig had decided to allow Harry to hunt with her. She much preferred the night, but for this one day, she would hunt like a lesser bird in order to teach Harry how to fly under his own power.

How Harry/Phoenix could tell all that by the series of looks, wing flaps and precks, Harry/Phoenix didn't know. But he followed nonetheless, his conscious minds no longer able to push through the sheer joy of this image Harry gleefully followed his first friend, adjusting his wings as he saw Hedwig do the same, staring down at what Hedwig was looking at, the beautiful snowy owl precking occasionally, orders that Harry understood somehow as they flew above and then through the forest below. Gradually Harry's flight smoothed out, becoming almost natural and quick.

How long that aspect of the dream went on Harry didn't know, but then it shifted again. It was suddenly nighttime, nighttime over Hogwarts! The castle was laid out below them like a picture, almost matching the way Harry had organized his Occlumentic Realm. Harry/Pheonix warbled in joy, taking delight in the image even in the chill of the nighttime air.

And then Hedwig was winging away. Instead of making for the owlery or one of the windows, she turned entirely away from the castle, instead heading upwards her wings flapping, no thermals to help her. Harry/Phoenix made to follow, but Hedwig turned around, almost hovering in midair for a moment, twisting her head entirely around as only an owl could. "PRECK!"

Somehow, Harry knew that the dream was over. That where Hedwig was going now, he could not follow. That... that it was time he let her go, that he stopped letting her memory, positive memories of her and Fawkes, to empower his phoenix side over his basilisk side.

It was a very deep thought for such a moment and Harry let loose a mournful cry as Hedwig turned, beating her wings up and up again towards the full moon above.

When he opened his eyes back in the real world, Harry was not surprised to find tears running down his face, nor a smile there. "W, well, that was a rush..."

Nearby, Dor nodded brusquely, making no sign that he saw Harry's emotional state. It was not entirely unusual after all for those getting in touch with their animal sides, or even just their subconsciousness, to become emotional. Especially when one who had such massive emotional baggage as Harry did, something any shaman or druid worth his salt could tell.

"I take it you made progress?" He asked instead, busying himself with the small fire between them, placing still more herbs into the fire to add them to smoke. These though worked to negate the ones that Harry had been inhaling previously.

Suddenly quite tired, Harry collapsed onto his side, then rolled onto his back to stare up at the ceiling of Dor's cave. But he still managed to answer Dor's question. "I, I was able to hold the image for a few moments. I even was able to conjure up a lake to look at myself in from the background of the dream. But that image collapsed as my basilisk side interfered."

From there, Harry explained more about his dream, and Dor nodded thoughtfully. Several months into his stay with the sky fall tribe, Dor Redcliff had learned about Harry's issues with method of rebirth, how it would essentially return him to when he was a young boy. Hearing that, Dor had instantly decided to take their training in a new direction, or rather, he had demanded that they do so.

"While I am utterly unfamiliar with that method of resurrection or rebirth, whichever you wish to call it, it would never do to have you become so foolishly weak physically after your death. Considering that such death would no doubt be occurring during battle. Losing a strength and replacing it with a weakness is not something any hunting party would be able to deal with, even if they were somehow prepared for it," he had said at the time, practically lambasting Harry for not making that a priority outside of getting more in touch with his Phoenix and basilisk sides. Even more important than understanding himself was that Harry not lose all the age, physical ability and experience he had built up between one rebirth and the next.

"To say nothing of Harry," Tessa had interjected at the time. "After all, if he dies once, He will simply be weaker the next time someone tries to kill him. Right?"

The older Tauren and harrumphed at that. "Yes of course, it goes without saying that Harry would suffer the most in this instance."

The two youngsters proceeded to roll their eyes in unison, a movement that every species Harry had yet met on Azeroth seemed to share. Which amused Harry no end, even if Kaldorei didn't do it often.

The second reason that Dor had pushed that aspect rather than continuing to work on elemental summoning was that he wanted to set up a more in depth ritual for the next time that Harry tried to summon an elemental. Because despite Dor having an incredibly powerful Air elemental of his own to call upon, the one time Harry attempted to summon an air elemental and forge a contract with it, things went awry...

Flashback:

His hands clenched around one another in prayer, Dor sent all of his willpower and strength into Dugro, his most powerful air elemental, doing battle against the empowering sending being thrust upon the tiny air elemental that had previously been in the ritual bottle. *I did not believe him when Harry told me his communion with the air spirits could go so badly wrong.* He had begun to have second thoughts when Harry had used his magic to remove everything personal from this cave into one of the other two that made up Dor's personal domicile, but he wasn't about to back down at that point. *More fool !!*

All around them, the wind had picked up so much that it was beginning to scour the stone from the sides of the cave they were in. Near the center of the cave, Tessa strained with one of her stone elementals to keep a wall of stone between her, Harry, and the slowly going berserk air elemental. She had not been here at the beginning of the ritual, but had arrived close after Harry had fallen into a trance. Even now, Dor's ears were ringing from her shouts.

Hearing the shrieking noise from outside of stone being torn away, a Tauren warrior, a young man who had been with Tessa when she arrived, quickly tossed a weighted rope loop towards Harry, snagging him as a rancher would a steer despite the wind still picking up. He rapidly pulled him away from the center of the cave, and proceeded to knock Harry unconscious, cutting out the connection between Harry and the air elemental that had responded to his call for friendship.

As the sending fizzled out, Dugro slumped to the ground almost like a flesh and blood creature, looking as exhausted as a large avian with four wings, two heads, and six talons could. Why Dugro chose that form, Dor didn't know. All elementals could form themselves in whatever shape they wished, although as they aged, that form solidified, no longer being so malleable. And Dugro was a quite ancient Air elemental. Which certainly seemed to help it with using body language to show things, like exhaustion in this case.

But for all his age, Dugro was not very intelligent, something that Dor lamented when Dor questioned him as Tessa recovered nearby. His companion could not tell them anything about the air elemental that had tried to take over his physical form in this realm.

While Dor began to curse lordly at that, snarling under his breath about pink skinned short creatures having strange affinities and making his life more complicated, Tessa stared all around them at the mirror smooth finish that had been made from the cave walls. "Well teacher, I believe that at this point, I hope you have learned to listen to us, yes? Unless you wanted the cave to have a mirror smooth finish and be more than a bow's length larger to either side?"

"Enough of your cheek!" Thor growled, also staring around at one of the two caves he called home. "Now get your earth elemental out. It's time to put my belongings back. After now on, I think we will set elemental summoning side, until we can prepare a proper area for further experimentation."

Tessa's unvoiced 'I told you so' was so loud in the look she gave the older shaman that the nearby warrior winced. He hefted Harry onto his back and headed out into the winter chill heading towards the cave that Harry and Tessa had been assigned. And only then did he start sniggering.

End flashback

Since then, Dor had begun to instruct Harry for longer periods of time on dream-walking, getting in touch with his basilisk and Phoenix sides. Although even there, Dor's use of the Tauren herbs occasionally ran into issues. At one point, Harry didn't actually fall asleep, but remained awake and as high as a kite, shouting about birds of different kinds, colors, and actually trying to sing.

Which was easily the most horrible sound that Tessa or Dor had ever heard.

But eventually, after many stops and starts, along with the use of a portrait made by one of the other tribesmen, Harry was able to keep his physical self in his mind as the herbs helped him delve deeper into his subconscious. More than a month of experimentation had led to this latest breakthrough, and Harry was happy to see it.

"I was able to keep the image in my mind and push it forward, try to superimpose it over the image in the flames of my being born again in the dream. That part went well. I just couldn't keep it up for long before my basilisk side intruded." Harry frowned as he sipped from some kind of drink that the Tauren made from a local fruit.

It was tart and tangy, but it wasn't anything like cherry or orange. Rather, it was an entirely new flavor, and Harry had become somewhat addicted to it and the other fruit drinks that the Tauren made regardless of what tribe they were part of. Although admittedly, trading for the fruit drinks here would take most people a bit more, since the Skyhorn tribe didn't have nearly as much access to the fruits in question as the Rivermane or Highmountain tribes. For Harry though, with his access to runes, he never needed to worry about having something to trade.

"I, I got the impression almost as if my memories were fueling how the basilisk took the dream over, and my negative feelings towards it, as well as my positive ones towards my phoenix side." Harry grimaced, setting aside the drink and shaking his head. "I think I need to redo my mental realm somehow. I think I might have locked the memories of my battle with the basilisk too hard into my mind, the emotions and feelings from that fight are **still** overwriting my conscious knowledge that the basilisk itself isn't evil. I've been getting closer, but the closer I get, the sharper the dichotomy is between what I consciously know and subconsciously feel."

Harry was honestly getting the idea that this was a rudimentary mistake that he would've known or realized if he had ever actually had any true instruction in the wizard style of creating your own mental realm. But Cenarius, who had helped him categorize and mentally organize his mind, hadn't understood the ramifications of doing so in Harry's case. "I'm thinking that's why Cenarius always mentioned that his mental realm was a forest, and Lunara's was a tree. Growing things, you know? I just thought it was personal preference, now I'm not so sure."

Tessa nodded. Since Dor and Harry had decided to do this instruction in the hut she shared with Harry, she had perforce been there throughout, working on her own evocation time, trying to summon her elementals faster, to use her other spells faster. But Tessa had broken off at what she had felt was a sensible hour while Harry continued to be lost in his dream for hours longer. "I've never heard of someone creating a whole mental realm like that Harry, it wouldn't even occur to a Tauren to do so."

"Bah, foolishness! A mind needs room to grow and change. It is obvious that your attempt to lock your mind in some kind of image taken from your past would inhibit your ability to learn. It is just astonishing it hasn't done so to a greater degree."

Grumbling, Harry shook his head. "Well, thanks. Now where were you several years ago when I first arrived in this world?"

"Enough of your lip, young Potter." Dor stood up, making for the entrance to the hut. Opening the mattress covering it, he gazed out onto the starry night beyond, seeing the piles of snow that had begun to build up on the main thoroughfare of the village, the wood of the walkways creaking and groaning underneath the weight even as other Tauren worked round-the-clock to remove the snow. "That took us practically the entire day and night. We will resume tomorrow afternoon."

With that Dor left, leaving the flap open. Harry stepped out, leaving behind to bed. The chill of the night hit him, but Harry didn't feel it for a moment, simply sitting by the entrance into the cave staring up the nighttime sky, where Elune was a bare crescent shape on the horizon, while the second moon, Blue Child, dominated the view. Then, with a sigh, Harry closed his eyes, and began to meditate once more, this time on his Occlumentic realm rather than diving deeper into his consciousness. *And thus no need for herbal remedies. Even if his instructions have been a major help I am still going to get Dor back for the times he messed up the dosages.*

Yet as obstreperous as he was, Dor was right. His mental image of Hogwarts had to go. Harry had to let yet another aspect of his past life become little more than a fond memory, and had to do something with his memories so they were no longer set in stone so much that they bothered his ability to move forward with understanding his chimeric body. *This is my life, and while I can take the knowledge and experience of my past, I cannot let the memories I made on Earth, the rules of Earth hold me back. Especially when it comes to my own mind.*

And thus, with Elune and Blue Child above him, Harry went to work once more, determined to push past this last hurdle as he had all the others.

Scene break

That same moon beamed down on Tyrande Whisperwind and Shandris Feathermoon, although thanks to the shifting of the world, only Elune was currently a three quarters moon alone in the sky, rather than the barely visible moon and fully formed Blue Child that Harry could see. Both women were smiling the slight smile of elderly Kaldorei, their ears twitching in a far more expressive motion of their good humor. Indeed, to the watchers who bowed towards Tyrande as the two of them moved through the temple to Elune, both of them radiated a sort of exhausted joy. Like athletes who had pushed themselves to the limit and delight in doing so.

The training bout had started at an odd hour, midday the previous day. Kaldorei preferred to be up and doing during the night, but with all the demands on her time, Tyrande simply could not devote as much of her working hours as she wanted to train. Luckily, her adopted daughter had willingly gone along with things, and with her help, Tyrande was now back up to peak physical condition.

The two of them stayed silent as they entered the bathing area, stripping off their training outfits as Tyrande called one of the attendants to prepare her formal ropes for later. Then she turned, taking Shandris by the arm and moving her into the baths. "Come, I will wash and do your hair for you."

"As you won this last bout, honored mother, should I not be the one washing your hair?" Shandris asked, almost trying to fight Tyrande's grip for a moment as propriety warred with amusement and thankfulness.

"Nonsense. It is you have taken time to help this frail woman get back into shape."

Shandris snorted at that but stopped fighting, and the two women entered the baths, their bodies pressing up against one another momentarily on the narrow steps leading into the bath as they stepped down into the warm waters. Had Harry been there, he might have been able to create a extremely powerful Patronus from the mere sight of these two very different but immensely attractive women pressing against one another like this, no matter how innocent.

Both women were immensely fit, beautiful examples of Kaldorei womanhood. Shandris was noticeably younger than Tyrande, her face not as austere, her eyes just a little wider, her hair not as long, cut short to just below her shoulders, and was normally let loose and wild. Her body type leaned heavily into the athletic mold, with visible muscles bulging on her arms and legs in a way that no witch back in Harry's old world had ever had. Her breasts were a smaller than Tyrande's as well, being a low B-cup, in human terms, but also almost aggressively perky.

Tyrande's in contrast drooped very slightly under their own weight, but were large for a Kaldorei woman. Her stomach showed the same toned athleticism as her adopted daughter and her legs, although lacking the visible muscles of Shandris, were as well formed and smooth looking (and to touch as well) as anyone could ask for.

Both of them descended into the water, moving away from one another as they let the water cover their bodies before the need for air brought them back to the surface. Shandris began to float for a moment, while Tyrande sat on her rear in the shallow waters of the pool. The two of them exchanged small talk, laughing at some of Tyrande's earlier adventures when she was younger.

More than just getting her into shape, Tyrande's time training with Shandris over the last two and a half years had reinforced their familial bonds, something that had somewhat eroded over the twin impacts of time and their duties. Tyrande was the chief priestess of the temple of Elune as well as the secular leader of her people. And Shandris was general of the Sentinels. Even in times of peace like they'd had for the past six-hundred years there was still far too much to do, and both of them had allowed their time to be a family to fade away. Now, restored from her most recent sabbatical in a way that the previous ones really hadn't accomplished, Tyrande had pushed for them to renew their acquaintance, not so much as daughter and mother, but as equals.

And Shandris, although she still fought the equal part of that sentiment, had responded.

The pair of women stayed in the baths luxuriating as the warm water soothed aching muscles until Alyssa came in with clothing for them both. The elderly Kaldorei woman laid the clothing neatly near two alcoves set to the side of the baths, where various beauty products had already been set out. Taking to small circular soap balls, Alyssa moved to the side of the baths and handed them to the other women. Both thanked her, and began to soap themselves down, before taking two more, and working that soap into their hair.

Moments later, they exited the baths, and after drying off, Tyrande sat Shandris in front of her, and began to work a comb through her hair, while nearby, tiny felt rings awaited. Even as Shandris' ears began to twitch and a low hum came from her at her mother's attentions, Tyrande looked over at Alyssa nodding, pleased at the glasses she was currently wearing. They had been a gift from Tyrande, which she had come up with after interacting with Harry. The woman had taken to them with fervor. "Thank you, Alyssa. Have there been any changes to the docket for this evening's meeting?"

"No mistress." Alyssa watched as Tyrande began to create intricate braids with Shandris' hair, her eyes twitching slightly downwards, as if envious for a moment before concentrating on more important matters. "The motion you asked for has been voted on and agreed, and a separate area for governmental business will be set up near the center of our city."

The Kaldorei had never named their new city when they began to settle into Nordrassil's boughs. They simply called it Nordrassil, the city being entirely dependent on the tree it resided in. A tree that was several dozen miles across needed no extra name to give it importance after all. But saying the center of the tree sounded somehow off to Alyssa, nor was it particularly accurate in this case. "The area has already been reclaimed from nearby businesses, and those businesses will be moved to new areas by the Sentinels over the next few days."

Using the military as a moving service would probably never have occurred to any human ruler, but it seemed the obvious choice to Tyrande, and Shandris hadn't objected at all, nor had any of her fellows. It was simply another duty to the greater community. And if a sentinel did not feel such duty, they would not be a sentinel in the first place. Certainly not if Shandris had any say in it, anyway.

"Two new architects have come forward with plans to propose to the greater counsel, but I believe that that will not add overmuch to the docket tonight, unless their designs meet with popular acclaim. Fandral has submitted another protest against the further inclusion of women within the Cenarian Circle but I believe that we are fully prepared to defang him on that point again."

"Excellent. Shandris, are you once more ready for your part in that little conflict?"

"I could wish I could simply challenge Fandral and prove my point physically. But I know I cannot," Shandris joked, and Tyrande allowed herself a chuckle at that.

Truly, a lot of how Kaldorei society was run, and in particular the governmental part of it, would have been completely alien to humans, just as several comments that Harry had made about his old world had befuddled Tyrande. Taxes? Money taken willing or no from the people to pay for what the government was doing? Why? If the government could not convince the people to support it in whatever endeavor, large or small, they were undertaking, then what was the point? But one thing that Tyrande had been trying to do since becoming the leader of her people was to separate the temple of Elune from the day to day organization of her people as a whole.

Given the importance of the worship of Elune and Tyrande's own position as chief priestess, the two could never be separated as completely as she might wish. As in Tyrande would hand over all of her authority outside of the Temple itself to someone else. But having a physical symbol of the distinction between the temple and the government was an important idea. One she had come up with after speaking to Harry several times of the months spent with him.

This was part and parcel with the other changes to Kaldorei society that she had been trying to make. No longer was the ruling Council composed entirely of members of the Sisterhood of Elune and the Cenarian Circle. Instead, a Grand Council led her people. Thirty-two men and women appointed by their fellows made up that council. Some were chosen on a rotational basis, others based off simple intelligence or skill in their craft. Combined, these worthies took up the night-to-night running of the government.

Tyrande still had a greater voice in that council than she would like. Worse in a way, the changes she had made had made her even more venerated among her people rather than less. A consequence she simply had to live with. But overall, Tyrande was extremely happy with how the past few years had gone on that score.

And on a more social score as well, one that Shandris put voice to now as she leaned back, her eyes closed as she gave herself to her mother's ministrations of her hair. It had been more than a thousand years since Shandris had ever bothered to do anything with her hair, and this was magnificent. "Myself and the other Commanders have agreed that Larash Birdsong and Shol Springtone are to be raised to Commander status."

Each commander was chosen to lead either a two-hundred Sentinel troop, or command a outpost of particular significance. Those outposts could vary wildly in size but the level of responsibility was the same regardless. "That makes a little under half of my commanders male. I do not believe that the numbers are there in the lower ranks, but we have inducted at least two hundred more men into the Sentinels in the past month, despite cutting our overall numbers down."

Tyrande smiled at that, nodding as Alyssa announced that a near equal number of women had joined the various Druid lodges. "I do not believe it is a sustainable number going forward, but we could see an upsurge in numbers both in Sentinels and Druids once every decade or so from now on. And the precedent will have been set. Men or women, it matters not, you can follow whatever path you wish in service to both forest and people, social, religious, mystical, or military."

That had been Tyrande's mission since coming back from her sabbatical. The disparity in numbers between men and women among the Druids and Sentinels, the idea that only Druids could connect with nature, the idea that only women could serve in combat. Both ideas had grown in the six thousand years since the War of the Ancients, growing stronger as more male Druids entered the Emerald Dream and remained there to help combat the corruption of the Old God that slept beneath Kalimdor.

Tyrande had tried to combat it before but only in a lukewarm manner until she had returned from her sabbatical with more energy and drive than Tyrande had felt for more than a thousand years. Malfurion's continued absence from her side and the duties of being the leader of her people wore on Tyrande with every passing decade. But being around Harry, gaining a new bonded animal in Shy-rotam, had invigorated Tyrande. And then, mere weeks into her

return, she had felt Elune's approval of her idea of creating more equality in both the Sentinel and Druid sects.

"Fandral is still going to be a problem going forward," Alyssa warned. "His power base has been curtailed, but he is still the only arch Druid at the present moment, and surviving the scandal with Vordrassil actually raised his status in the eyes of many druids throughout the lodges. Worse yet, he is still the most powerful Druid not staying within the emerald dream. And his words carry a lot of weight in the various Druid lodges, particularly among the Druids of the Claw. Despite Janthese Shadeleaf being voted to be the Druid's other representative on the grand Council, there is no doubt who leads them."

"True. But I have always seen Fandral's pushy, demanding nature and dealing with it and him in person a weight I must take on as leader of our people," Tyrande said somewhat philosophically. "So long as he cannot stop young women from pursuing a vocation in learning about nature arcana, I will be satisfied."

"I am just glad that he is no longer making advances on me," Shandris murmured, while behind her, Tyrande finished up her work on the younger Kaldorei's hair. That hair was now set in a series of ringlets falling down her neck and shoulders, while one thicker braid fell to the side of her place. In the center of it was a small silver torque. That was a gift that Tyrande had given Shandris when she was very young, silver enchanted by the light of Elune and bearing the mark of an owl.

At her daughter's words, Tyrande's face shifted into one of disgust, her ears lowering, her mouth twitching almost as if to sneer, which among Kaldorei would have been a massively powerful sign of disgust. "Yes, that was somewhat... **annoying** to watch the past four hundred years. And him with a grown son almost your age too."

Not that there was anything really wrong with a widow or widower looking for a new companionship, it was just the very idea that Fandral and Shandris could get together at all was disturbing to anyone who knew either of them. A more different woman than Fandral's original wife you could not find than Shandris. The woman had been a craftsman of some skill, working with wood Tyrande recalled. But she had died during the War of the Ancients. The demons saw no difference between civilian and soldier.

That was six thousand years ago, and Fandral looking for a new wife was perhaps past time. Kaldorei married for life of course, but that simply meant that no Kaldorei would stray from his or her spouse. *Or multiples thereof*, Tyrande thought with some amusement, remembering a story that Shandris had told her about a young Sentinel who was apparently involved with two men, both of whom were fishermen. So long as there was honesty and a true emotional connection, and physical things happen behind closed doors of course, Kaldorei society didn't really forbid anything.

But wedding vows were serious, and it was not entirely unknown for a couple to live together for several thousand years before deciding to wed. *Mind you, I would very much like if Malfurion would have agreed to marry me before entering the Emerald Dream. We had certainly been together through good times and bad by that point.* That was an old wound though, one that had long scabbed over, although Harry's... attempts to keep his reactions to Tyrande under wraps had brought her own lack of companionship near to the surface of Tyrande's thoughts.

Regardless, the age difference between Shandris and Fandral was one issue. The extremely different personalities, the different loyalties, and how very outspoken Shandris was all meant that Fandral's interest in her was beyond bizarre. *And the fact he once approached me, not a decade after Malfurion entered the Emerald Dream, is also a reason to have issues with his trying to court my daughter.*

Shaking that thought off for now, as well as the personal side of her issues with Fandral, Tyrande concentrated on his antipathy towards the changes Tyrande had pushed for over the last few years. "But we all must treat him with the respect his positions demand. As Alyssa said, despite his many mistakes and his opinions, he is still the arch Druid, and has long been a voice for growth and stability among our folk."

With that minor warning given, both Alyssa and Shandris nodded. Then it became Tyrande's turn to be pampered a little bit, which both women took too with a will.

The meeting with the Council of Thirty-Two was tedious as Tyrande had expected, but Alyssa had done a magnificent job as usual in preparing Tyrande for it. Even better, and something she had hoped to see, with the greater number of voices, no one individual's grievances or problems could halt the proceedings. Tyrande found herself in the uncomfortable, but well trodden, position of still being the voice of mediation between various groups on the Council. But all in all it went very well.

Better, looking at the different architectural designs for the new Council building was fascinating. Eventually they decided on an austere style. The Council's meeting area would be built out of a branch of Nordrassil with a view over the city that would be amazing when the platform was built. The building itself would be built both above and below that platform into the flesh of the tree. Much of the frippery and richness that other designs were put forth would not show up anywhere within the administrative building.

That was all to the good in Tyrande's mind. Being a leader was a duty, not a privilege. Certainly it was not a way to enrich oneself save in service to your people.

Afterwards, as Elune began to disappear and Dawn began to rise, she mingled with the other leaders and their followers for a time. In this manner she felt out how her folk felt towards the changes she had made. In that, she was well-served. There were still proponents of having women dominate the military arm of their society, and still more felt men had a natural

advantage when it came to understanding the secrets of nature mysticism. But they were a minority.

They group of leaders and aides only slowly broke apart, heading to bed, or to work as the individual required. Farmers, for instance, needed to be up and about with their animals, and certain craftsmen too needed the natural light of day for their work, despite most Kaldorei preferring the night. Tyrande herself had some paperwork she needed to get to before retiring for the day.

As the sun rose into the sky, Tyrande continued her work only to pause and look at a report that Shandris had forwarded to her from the officer who had replaced Nightshade at Danavia. Tyrande had indeed, as she had promised herself, made demoting the woman one of the first bits of paperwork she saw to when she returned to Nordrassil. She had been instead moved into Nordrassil to join one of the training cadres there. The woman no doubt saw that as a reward, but it also removed Nightshade from a position where she could influence sentinels or civilians without a counter voice.

Better even than that though was this particular paper which indicated that one of the young Sentinels that Tyrande had traveled with to the broken aisles had decided to retire from the Sentinels. Sylina Sungaze had indicated to her officer that she wanted to explore the world, and had taken passage on a ship bound for someplace else.

Tyrande wondered if that someplace else would be the Broken Isles and the unseen Order. That was a secret sect of Kaldorei, Tauren, and even so-called high elves at this point, if the last missive she had from them was to be believed. *And if she is even just deciding to travel and explore the Broken Isles, she will undoubtedly meet Harry at some point. And of the two girls who worked with him closest, Sylina seemed the most interested in Harry as an individual. Good. That young man could use a minder. And perhaps more...*

Tyrande let loose a little giggle at that, startling Alyssa where she was also working nearby. Tyrande hastily waved that off, and turned her attention back to work. In a few dozen years or so she could come back to thinking about playing matchmaker for Harry. And even avoid thinking about why doing so tickled her so much. Right now there was work to do.

Scene break

Harry shivered as he came out of the cave, quickly hitting himself with a warming charm as he looked around the snow covered mountain scape around him. It was deep winter now, and up here in the mountains, 'deep' was not just a way to say that winter was far along. *Rather, it's a very accurate summation of how much damn snow is around,* Harry reflected.

He had not been prepared for winter up here in the mountains that surrounded the Highmountain valley to be so different from the two winters he'd seen before this. Harry had seen snow before down in the valley itself, but not like this. Nor had he seen chill like this. First,

the winter started with wind. A freezing, biting wind coming out of the mountains around them to make life up here miserable for someone who didn't have Harry's spells or Tauren fur. Even then they could only make it livable rather than comfortable.

Thankfully, Harry's runic business was still bringing in anything he could wish, and a heavy bear cloak was around Harry even now, the hood pulled up. Beyond runes, he had begun to fully immerse himself into the local culture's derision for using magic for everything, and that meant not using it to keep himself warm.

But worse than the wind and the initial cold, was the snow. Practically every night or day it snowed up here, several feet worth of snow, enough snow to make Harry remember a children's book Hermione had him read once in which a similar winter had seemingly brought Britain to a standstill. Up here it meant that every day young and old had to work at making sure the snow was cleared from the main thoroughfare along with all of the rope bridges, less the snow pile on so much the wood start to break under the weight of snow. Noise was frowned upon out in the open, and watchers were perched above the village watching for any sign of an avalanche.

Visibility was bad even at the height of day when the snow was falling, and Harry knew that at least two middle-aged Tauren had been lost, putting their feet down on the wrong spot and tumbling to their deaths. It was not easy life up here in the winter for certain, even with the shamans and Druids doing what they could and Harry more than willing to set aside his own advancement to help as best he could with warming arrays and other things.

Shaking those thoughts off, Harry waved at Tessa, who was making her way up towards their shared cave, plowing through three feet of snow with an aplomb that made Harry shiver just to look at it. Behind her, one of the younger men of the tribe followed trying to talk to her, and Harry snorted, murmuring under his breath, "Yeah boyo, that is one massive mountain you've chosen to challenge. Good luck to you, just beware the falls."

As Harry spoke, Tessa turned and sent the man off with what was undoubtedly a harsh word judging by how the man stumbled back and seemed to shrink in on himself. With a final glare, Tessa turned back continued on her way up to the cave, slumping down next to Harry. She too was sporting a new for cloak, hers made of snow leopard skin, which she had earned during her own work over the winter, disdaining some of the gifts some of the young men of the tribe had tried to woo her with. "I hope that one at least will take no for an answer. The more insistent ones are so annoying," she grumbled. "Be thankful you don't have to deal with that Harry, thanks to you being a vrykul. Your runes and general attitude would make you prime marriage material."

"Chance would be a lovely thing," Harry quipped back, for a moment feeling the lack of female companionship keenly but trying hard not to show it. While Tessa was attractive to other Tauren, enough that she got attention wherever she went, she certainly wasn't attractive to

him personally, nor were any other Tauren. *Fur hooves and cow-like faces just did not do it for me.*

And Harry felt that despite having mellowed over the past few years, Tessa was still far too high maintenance for even her personality to be all that attractive to him. They were good friends, and Harry appreciated that, but the lack of women his own race... or even just more human... was beginning to get to Harry a little as he grew up into his high teen years. There was only so much Occlumency, especially with the continued reworking Harry was doing to his mental realm, could do to the rush of hormones and other mental and physical changes that humans went through at this point in their lives. Harry had been dealing with that since before he met Cenarius and his daughter, Lunara, but it was getting more acute these past few months.

Tessa twitched her head to one side, acknowledging the point with a touch to one ear,, acknowledging Harry's point, then waving her hands towards the young man who was trooping morosely away through the thoroughfare below them. "But would you like to deal with suitors like Furbrand?"

"Ah ah, no. His arrogance would have been a severe turnoff even in a woman, I'll agree. What is on your agenda for today?" He asked as he took the plate of food she offered him, warming it up with a heating charm and doing the same to Tessa's. The hearty stew was made by combining some kind of sauce that they made from a type of flower that grew up here and a mix of vegetables, and was really quite tasty. Harry had tried to get the recipe out of the tribeswomen to no avail.

"I'm going to try for my next Earth elemental, Dor says I am ready for it. Then he and I are heading up to perform the funeral rites on old Pol Blackstone. He died last night while on duty clearing the snow. Rock fall took him and three others, but the others survived."

Harry grimaced at that, nodding in commiseration. With all the snow around, avalanches were a major problem, and keeping them away from the tribe was a difficult matter. But Harry consoled himself with the fact that life for the Skyhorn tribe was much easier now in various ways thanks to his runic arrays. And indeed, the first ones he tried to sell, the heating arrays and refuse removal arrays were the least part of it. Not a family among them any longer was lacking in shield arrays, stone necklaces with shield-type runic arrays on them from Harry. And most of the young also had tracking arrays on them that allowed parents to track their younglings, something that had come in handy dozens of times over the winter, and made him a minor celebrity with mother and father alike.

"What about you?" Tessa asked before taking a bite of her own stew

"We're going to experiment with distances today. My new idea of transferring messages, you understand," Harry answered.

Tessa shook her head. "I can't believe how many different ways you have built on my idea for just getting rid of refuse. You went from simply vanishing it entirely, to transferring it down to a single place down on the farms, and now you're using the same concept to exchange messages."

"That last sleep was a little harder, because after all you don't care if refuse comes apart on the other end of the transfer but messages have to stay in one piece. Still, yeah, I been very happy with that. In fact, I think of all of the runic arrays are developed since coming to Highmountain, that's the one I want to send information on to the Kaldorei the most. Sending messages like that i is going to be a major help to any society."

While she understood that it would save a tremendous amount of effort between the tribes, she didn't understand why it was so important, but Harry knew that Tessa wasn't all that interested in that kind of thing either. So we let the subject dropped saying that, "Beyond that, I have a meeting with one of the needlewoman and I'm putting down a heating array in a new family's cave."

"Whereas I am going to go hunting," Quincy hissed, as if that was just as important as the things Tessa and Harry were up to. "I saw a large squirrel and it looked far too fat and lazy to allow to live."

Harry and Tessa both rolled their eyes at that, although Harry felt a little queasy at the mention of meat. For the past month and a half, he hadn't been able to stomach meet at all, despite his instincts as a human, and perhaps basilisk had to admit, pushing him to continue to try and eat it. The phoenix side of him was currently too strong however, and he'd been unable to ignore his aversion to meet despite his best efforts.

Shaking that off, Harry patted Quincy on the head, and nodded to Tessa as he stood up. "Well, with that, I've got to get going."

"Just remember that tomorrow Dor is going to be ready to help you with your dream walk again," Tessa warned. Then smirked. She too had noticed Harry's issues with meat lately and although she was willing to accommodate it, that didn't mean she wasn't going to needle him about it. "Maybe this time you will be able to empower your basilisk side to convince you to eat meat again."

"We can only hope," Harry answered without rising to her taunt, waving her off as he began to make his way down to the thoroughfare and beyond.

The next day, as Tessa had warned Harry, Dor came by in the early morning, and throughout the rest of that day and well into the night, he prepared Harry for dream-walking. This time, it would be to get in touch with his basilisk side, to hopefully bring up Harry's understanding of that aspect of his chimeric body to the same level he had reached with his phoenix side.

A large scrap of Quincy's skin lay over Harry's hands as he sat in the lotus position. A hint of grass and burnt pine had been added into the mixture of herbs smoking in the fire. Quincy had also spent several hours waxing eloquent on what it meant to be a snake, with questions from Dor guiding the snake with question in order to impart his 'vast knowledge' to Harry in a way he not done so before. He spoke more about how his senses worked, something that had greatly confused Harry in the dreams leading up to this one. He spoke about feelings and mating, which was nowhere near as important to snakes, as it was for other more warm-blooded creatures and how snakes viewed them.

And then, Quincy spoke about something that was uniquely his own. "One aspect of my nature that sets me apart from most other snakes, which I believe the basilisk might have in common with me, is that we are alpha predators. Many snake are willing to take the leavings of other, greater predators. They are willing to feed on small animals. But if I am my full size, I do not, even hunting dozens of smaller prey is beneath me. Further, I do not lie in wait for prey either as I did when I was young, hiding with my camouflage skills until something small and stupid passed me by. Once I reached my full development, my hunting methods had to change. The basilisk would be an alpha predator, king of all it surveyed."

"In other words, it might be a little haughty, very arrogant, and certain in its power and strength. Further, judging by the fact that you said the basilisk you fought was able to think and communicate, think and communicate it will not be a simple beast. Think of how an intelligent snake like Quincy would hunt, would view the world. And do not get locked in on the fact that he basilisk is a predator, or that it hunts. Despite his preoccupation with food, Quincy is more than his hunger." Dor emphasized.

Harry nodded and closed his eyes for the final time as he breathed in the smoke deeply, letting it carry him into his subconscious. Faster than ever before, Harry found himself dreaming he was a snake.

Harry/Snake was now so big that he estimated that he would come up to regular Harry's shoulder at present, and was almost as thick across as well. Harry/Snake took in the world around him, concentrating on his senses one after another, as he moved through the forest. With Quincy's help, he was better able to figure out how to smell things now through his tongue, and was able to ignore the sharp fangs that protruded from his bottom and upper lip as he opened his mouth to taste the world around him.

Instantly, senses began to flood into his perception. It was like seeing a timestamp reel going back in time, he could smell both where birds and other animals were now, and where they had been moments ago. A squirrel was frozen in fear nearby where seconds ago it had been skittering across the boughs of a few trees. A badger grumbled, but kept moving on its way heading away from its den for some reason of its own, the smell of the badger much stronger where it had been than where it was now. Deer raced on, flitting through the trees, panic clear in their odor. Even birds had a scent trail to them, although they didn't seem as fearful of Harry/Snake as the other animals were.

None of those interested him, and the one creature that did initially, forest jaguar nearby was quickly moving away in the way of cats, trying not to seem as if it was in a hurry, but actually speeding along as fast as possible away from Harry/Snake. That was all to the good Harry/Snake felt. Such a creature obviously knew its place on the food chain. Other snakes came out of their little holes or rose from where they had laid out in the sun, bowing towards Harry/Snake, and Harry/Snake acknowledged them with eye flicks. His deadly gaze under control for now, a second, clear membrane cover covering his eyes to make the magic within impotent for now, a very strange sensation that threatened to make Harry lose his connection to the dream.

But he fought through it, and then, Harry felt himself slowly getting used to the feeling. As he did, Harry could feel the magic within his eye, the deadly **weight** of his gaze now contained, like a raging torrent of water behind a slim, easily removed dam. This was something else that Harry had never felt in his life as a normal human, and once more, Harry had to fight to retain his connection to the dream.

Slowly, so slowly, the feeling of dissonance between Harry and the basilisk faded, and the feeling of the magic in his eyes was pushed to the side. Harry could try and get used to that feeling later. For now, he needed to deepen his connection to the basilisk side of him entirely.

But then, he caught a small sent on the wind, a scent that did not belong, and should certainly not have been as strong. The conflict over his eyes faded instantly, and Harry/Snake turned, sniffing the air once more. When growing, that smell had meant a small meal for Harry/Snake, but to find it in such strength now that he was nearly fully grown, that was unusual and worrying.

Harry/Snake lowered his body to the forest floor and began to slither forward, heading in the direction of that smell, before breaking off and moving at a parallel, looking to encircle it and to pass through a field of clover and other flowers. The smell from the clover would help mask Harry's musk, and would allow him to ambush the owner of that unusually powerful scent.

By this point in the dream, Harry felt more of a connection to his snake side from ever before, and could actually pull from his own memories to try and figure out the nature of that scent, and why it bothered Harry/Snake so much. *The prey of a basilisk is spiders... an acromantula.*

With that thought in mind, Harry/Snake began to plan his ambush of whatever it was he was hunting. While his scent was now masked, he was still an extremely large animal, without any of the camouflage abilities Quincy had. There was only so much surprise he could achieve. Speed, striking power and his magic would be his strength.

And true to Harry's prediction, as he moved forward, the forest changed. The forest grew darker, the sun obscured by thousands of strange of webbing. The trees all around were tied to one another by the silken, gooey threads. Any human or even a bear or other large animal would have been caught by such, and indeed, there were a dozen cocoons nearby.

But Harry/Snake felt no fear. Instead, he continued slithering forward, his mouth open in delight as he hissed in delight. This here was a prey that would fight back. A prey that did not belong, and was killing the rightful food of the king of this forest. No, that could not be allowed.

Slithering forward, Harry/Snake burst through the webs of the acromantula, warning them of his presence, but that did not matter. Indeed, the basilisk felt that was all to the good. The acromantula would come to him. A few might flee, the youngest perhaps, but the majority would stay and fight, and fill the basilisk's bellies.

Swiftly Harry/Snake's invasion drew a response. High up in a tree nearby, an acromantula skittered, before shooting down a web net, trying to hold the king of serpents still. It failed, Harry/Snake seeing it coming and slithering to the side.

Twisting around, Harry/Snake brought his eyes to bear like a gunman bringing his rifle around. The creature above, a giant spider just like Harry had predicted, froze midleap, turning into stone and shattering a second later as Harry/Snake moved aside. Two more came at Harry/Snake from the other side, webbing nets flashing out, as another two charged forward, mandibles flaring as they chattered at one another in their own language.

But Harry/Snake was too strong. With a twitch of his body the webbing over his body burst, as his gaze frozen the second web slinger before the webbing could leave its rear. The two other spiders charging him died as Harry/Snake struck, his upper body undulating forward like a coiled spring, one was smashed aside by a blunt nose that struck like a battering ram, breaking the Acromantula's body. The other snake tried to leap away, but Harry/Snake was still too fast, flicking his upper body up and lashing out with a bite, rending it asunder and swallowing half of it whole.

And it was then, as the stragne, but amazing tastes of the spider washed through his dream-self, that Harry woke up. A loud grumbling noise reached his ears and he tapped his stomach. "I have a hankering for meat, I think, which is a good si--" Harry paused as a queasy feeling came over him, his Phoenix side voicing its displeasure at the idea.

Dor must have seen his face go green as he began to laugh, and Harry sighed. "This is going to get annoying."

So it went for another month. Harry spent one day dream walking. Continuing his work with the sky riders as he had since that first flight, his second day of the week was spent doing that or working with the chieftain on learning more about how the Sky Riders fought, which also helped Harry get further in touch with his phoenix side.

Unfortunately, at this point his basilisk side actually began to interfere in that. The king of serpents within Harry was very certain it's place was on the ground, and its instincts went to war with his phoenix side. Dealing with the growing cognitive dissonance within his instincts

was extremely difficult, and more than once concentrating on that had taken too much attention away from the real world around him.

It didn't interfere with the rest of Harry's schedule, though, and every third day Harry spent first experimenting with runes, and then working on his latest project for one member or another of the Skyhorn tribe. His experiments with passing messages via the runic array he had created to get rid of refuse was his primary thrust at this time.

It was almost hilarious to Harry when he thought of it. The array he used was practically taken verbatim from one of the books on runes from his old world. Hogwarts had used that array on all of its toilets. But no wizard had seemingly realized that the array could be used to transfer other things. Nothing living, though, there at least the Floo Network was necessary. But even so, the ability to transfer items was almost as fantastic as the ability to use expanding pouches only even more so. Indeed, they could be used in a way to the same results.

The problem with it was twofold. One, the refuse didn't exactly stay together on the other end, turning into so much slurry. And second, the original refuse removal arrays was quite large, being about as large as a Tauren's upper body.

That made a lot of sense in terms of areas to go to the bathroom in. Back in Hogwarts it would have covered the floor of a single stall or the back of the wall where the urinals were. The egress point was also large, which the Tauren farmers preferred. It made shifting it and spreading it throughout the farms easier. Even in winter it was easier to store. The destruction of it also seemed to take away the smell for a time.

That didn't make so much sense for sending messages. So beyond the need to make certain items arrive on the other end in one piece, Harry was working on minimizing the array. That way, they could be used on smaller items and objects. Harry was determined to get his scribing side down to where runic arrays could be at least used on something the size of a pouch or a message tube, and thus usable for scouts and other people on the move before spring came around.

Not that spring seemed in any hurry to arrive up here in the mountains surrounding Highmountain for a time. For more than a month, snow fell every day and night, and wind whipped through the mountain, bringing with it such a chill that even the Tauren rarely went out and about save on jobs for the tribe such as clearing the snow, a hourly battle, patrolling the skies or keeping watch for avalanches. And even then, the sky riders had their shamans imbue their bodies with heat and cold resistance magic.

But that month seemed to serve as a final gasp of winter's full fury. The first day of the fifth week after Harry's successful basilisk dream dawned bright and clear, with a hint of warmth coming up from the valley below and the volcanic plumes there. Not much, not yet, but there didn't seem to be any snow on the way any longer. Although it was still extremely windy and

cold enough to cause frostbite, most of the Skyhorn tribe would take a day without snow and a bright clear sun in the sky.

Four days passed thusly, and on the fourth day of clear weather, Dor announced that he was ready to help Harry once more with elemental summoning.

Harry shook his head as he heard that, frowning faintly. "I don't know. I'm doing so well with the dreaming I feel as if I'm close to a breakthrough there. I realize you've not been as much help with that lately and that getting in touch with air elementals is one of the primary reasons why I'm here, but it feels as if we're changing direction midstream."

"We are. However, you should not consider it in such a manner. At this point, you are at a level of communion with your chimeric sides that you can continue on your own. But your issues with summoning Air Elementals are still ongoing. We need to solve that, and for that, you need help," Dor answered. "Besides providing you with herbs, there is nothing else I can do to help you with your dream walking."

"... I suppose not." Harry was quite reluctant to leave his current training, as he didn't yet feel as if he was able to control his rebirth process, although he had begun to be able to transform his body in different ways. The rebirth process, the enforced restart point from when he had first become a chimera was still too strong for him to overcome. He could now control his dreams to a far greater degree, but that goal still eluded him. And he was very concerned that the next time he died he would run into severe issues with that.

And yet, he really hadn't made much progress with his elementals. Earth and water elementals didn't respond at all, and fire Elementals seemed wary of him beyond the smallest and least powerful, like Tricky.

Besides Tricky, he hadn't been able to make any agreements with any others. His air affinity seemingly overrode everything else. So he needed to solve this issue if he wanted to continue his exploration of that school of magic. And Harry did. He had seen what Tessa and other shamans had been able to do. Winds of such strength they turned avalanches aside or shredded everything making them up. Fires that moved at the command of the individual with enough heat to match Fiendfyre but without the need to fight the fire itself for control, which he had seen once when he went hunting with Tessa. Buttresses of stone so strong they could stop a rampaging wyvern, continually renewed even as they were attacked. All controlled by the minds of the elemental under the instruction of a shaman who could then turn his attention to other things. Oh yes, Harry wanted that.

"Very well, what are we going to be doing?"

The answer to that was leaving the Skyhorn tribe's territory behind and ascending further up into the mountains. Dor led Harry to what looked like a small crevasse, a crack in the mountain side, but which turned out to be a very slim trail, so slim that the Tauren had trouble moving

through it. Indeed, Dor had to actually turn to the side shuffling along, muttering in ill grace as he did. It sounded as if it was a well-rehearsed mutter though, so Harry ignored it, following after him with far more ease.

Eventually, they ascended higher into the mountain than Harry had thought anyone on foot could go, and he was thankful that he had used lightening charms on himself to make the journey easier.

Eventually, the two of them had to actually resort to climbing, whereupon Harry began to use his magic more liberally, floating up himself and then pulling Dor behind him when he finally reached the ledge.

That ledge wound around a portion of the mountain, and then enlarged into a tiny valley, if such a term could be used for a place only about 200 feet across. It's floor was, however, quite level, if made entirely of stone. And the wind was almost dead here thanks to being blocked out on three sides, with the mountain coming together once more above them almost enough to make it into a cave, but not quite.

Tessa waited for them there, her two earth elementals waiting beside her docilely. One looked like a large four-legged creature of some kind, while the other actually looked like a Kaldorei man, although built to a scale that was more in keeping with a Tauren. Harry had never seen Tessa use that particular elemental before, which meant it was her newest Earth type. The earth elemental nodded to the newcomers as Tessa did, and then moved to the side of the valley where he touched the stone of the mountain underneath, and began to mold it, creating a dip in the center of the area.

Dor led Harry into this, gesturing him to sit down as the earth below them settled into his new position. He then set down the same kind of bottle that Harry had seen several times. As Harry sat down, he looked up at Dor and amusement. "No more herbs then?"

"Despite my humor from yesterday, truly you have reached the point in your training where you no longer need them to connect with the elements or your mind. You might still require them to go into your subconscious, which is somewhat unusual, but I put that down to you being a squishy 'human'," Dor answered, before letting his lips widen into a Tauren style smirk as he raised a hand to pull at his long beard. "Do not prove me wrong. I didn't bring any of the herbs with me, and coming all this way was annoying as it was."

Harry grimaced at that, but nodded, knowing it was the truth. He hadn't needed the herbs the last few times he had dream walked, and honestly, he was worried that the herbs might create a mild addiction in him. They hadn't ever been used on 'cursed' vrykul after all. "Fine. Just tell me when to start."

Dor moved well back from the indent in the ground, and began to summon his own air elementals. Dugro appeared first, followed by two more Air Elementals. Both were less

powerful in comparison, but still strong enough to hopefully make a difference here. At the same time, Tessa nodded to her two Earth Elementals, and they began to manipulate the stone once more around where Harry was sitting. The ground directly in front of him between Harry and the ceremonial glass bottle rose, creating a kind of don't half-dome covering most of Harry's body but leaving his head and eyes able to see the bottle where it lay. Within the bottle Harry could see the air moving gently as the extremely weak Air Elemental that the Skyhorn tribe used for its young aspirants shifted lazily.

As Harry examined the bottle, two similar walls rose up in front of Tessa and Dor, and both Earth elementals stood forward, ready to protect their bonded master. "We're ready when you are," Tessa said, before crouching down behind her wall, grimacing and wishing that she had her own air elementals to help with that layer of defense. But the three that she had contacted with since arriving in Skyhorn territory were on the weaker side, especially in comparison to her water and earth elementals.

Harry nodded, and began, and can, closing his eyes and raising his hands as he began to send out his mind towards the air elemental, and through it, to the realm of air beyond. He found it astonishingly easy to create a link, something that almost startled him out of his semi-meditation.

Almost instantly there was a connection, as if the elemental on the other side had been waiting for a chance. He could feel the tiny elemental within the bottle becoming overwhelmed, becoming replaced with this new version of a sending from the Greater Air Elemental as it tried to form itself in the material plane. The vial shattered, the glass first cracking then being torn asunder like paper in the wind as it began to form to a loud, *SHRAAAAKKK!* sound as the glass was turned into so much dust.

But at the same time, thanks to his training, Harry tried to control that connection. He tried to gain an impression of the elemental on the other side, and strove to control the connection between the elemental realm of Skyfall and the material plane his own spell had created.

Nearby, Dor send his own elementals forward, trying to regain control of the local air from the foreigner. *Whatever elemental this was, it is truly powerful!* Indeed far more powerful than Dugro, perhaps a little too powerful to even appear fully in this plane. Already, even as Tessa's elementals renewed the dome protecting Harry, growing it over his head and maintained the walls protecting her and Dor, they came under attack. The shriek and scream of tortured stone rose with the wind as it began to bite into them, shaving away the stone like a whittler at a piece of wood.

The Air Elemental continued to form continued to ravage the world around them, as Harry tried to communicate with it, tried to calm the spirit down somehow, through the mental connection, but he couldn't quite get through. That was, until the now violet eyes of the Air Elemental's sending locked onto his own.

Then, several images came to Harry, a vision of a wind-wrapped mountainside floating in an endless ocean of air, a vision of what Harry took to be a powerful Air Elemental standing in front of the one he was communicating with. A feeling of deep grief, and then, an image, an image of a place, a location so clear and perfect it was like looking at a picture in comparison to the previous images. This image was of a blasted, fire-racked landscape. Magma flowed across it in streams from two volcanoes that dominated the forwardmost horizon within the image.

One had seemingly exploded in the ancient past, but was now docily venting magma out around it, making Harry remember lessons from his time in the nonmagical world about the type of volcanoes for a moment. *That one is a shield.* The other had a gentle starting slope but with a steeper center, making it a composite. In the distance, water could be seen to the left, covering the horizon in that direction, and occasionally sending sizzling fog into the air.

And as Harry nearly lost himself in the details of this image, he felt... almost compelled to explore. He wasn't certain, wasn't certain what he was seeing it at all, but that was the impression he got. Still, he couldn't let himself dwell on that, couldn't let the Air Elemental on the other side of this sending dictate matters without telling it something in turn. *Stop, STOP. You are going to kill me and damage the world around you!*

It was like taking a chisel to a mountain, but finally, Harry got that idea through to the air elemental, that it was in fact endangering him and the world around him with its actions. Almost instantly after he was able to feel he got through, the winds began to subside, and the connection slowly died down, then disappeared entirely. The violet eyes was the last sign of the Air Elemental to disappear, leaving behind nothing at all but the feeling of shocked regret.

As the eyes disappeared, it left nothing behind. The little Air elemental that had originally been in the bottle had been entirely overwhelmed, disincorporated by the greater spirit. Both of Dor's lesser Air Elementals were barely there, their forms wavering badly for a few seconds, and even Dugro's strange animal shape had flopped onto it's stomach, utterly exhausted.

Harry looked down and saw that the dome of several feet thick stone had been worn away to the point where he could actually see through the stone like it was crystal, it was so thin. "... Well," he muttered as he looked around, seeing the damage done to the previously tiny valley. It was a real valley now, the area around him and forward towards the back of the valley been hollowed out to a significant degree, the stone smooth to the point that it could be used as a slide. The area directly above had also been worn away, leaving far more sky to be seen. The same thing happened to both sides, and towards Tessa and Dor, though the two shamans still stood behind the stones walls.

"Well..." He repeated, "I think we made some progress..."

At that, Tessa pulled herself out from behind her wall, as Dor raised a hand and began to rub at his horns in a way that many Tauren did when they were in distress, exhausted, or otherwise surprised by events. "You had better Potter, I am not doing this again!"

Tessa turned to her Kaldorei-like elemental. "Felnar, can you tell us anything?"

The earth elemental looked tired, and his form wavered for a moment, before he slowly sank to his knees underneath, sitting as Harry was as he looked at Tessa, not acknowledging Harry or Dor. "Mistress, I can tell a few things. First, the elemental that Harry had seemingly a connection with is young, as we measure things anyway. Inexperienced would perhaps be a better term. It did not know its own strength when funneled into this plane of existence."

"That makes a lot of sense and was something I had considered before," Dor said, finishing rubbing his horns for a moment and setting down on the remnants of the wall that had protected him, pulling out a large flask of something and swinging it for several moments before going on. "Elementals who have never been to the material plane often do not understand how destructive their powers can be. But most of the time they understand it quickly when the shaman summoning them into being explains it via that initial connection. This one didn't, which means either it is unintelligent, for all its power, which would be astonishing, or simply easily excitable, like a child almost."

"Not quite. Not in comparison to one of your younglings which you label child anyway. Naïve certainly, but not that young. No spirit of a comparative age would be so powerful," Felnar disagreed mildly when Tessa asked his opinion of the matter. "You could see that the spirit became apologetic near the end. It willingly subsided, rather than being overwhelmed by Dugro and the other air elementals."

"True. And we were able to communicate this time, which is a major step in the right direction. I convinced it that it was actually in danger of killing me, and it instantly began to cut down on the connection," Harry explained. "Although why it couldn't cut down the connection and still perform a lesser sending I don't know."

Here, Dor was more helpful. "I believe that the being is also quite intelligent, and intelligent powerful spirits like that often times which to test their summoner. Many a tree or nature spirit does the same, and Dugro did when I first bonded with him."

"That tracks. I got the impression of a place, a task I needed to do, although I have no idea where that place is, or what the task is. Only that it is going to be very hot when I get there" Harry grumbled, staring at where the stone wall had once been again. A stone wall he had covered with a protective spell before concentrating on sending his mind out to connect to the elemental planes. The wind had shredded the shield, magic or no and that was mildly terrifying.

"Then I am afraid we are at the end of what I can help you with in this area as well," Dor announced. "If you must be sent on a quest, like someone performing the Rites of Wind of the Earth Mother, that is something you must accomplish yourself. I might be able to point you in the right direction, but it is doubtful. My own Rights of the wind took me deeper into the mountains rather than exploring the rest of the Broken Isles."

"What else can you tell about the spirit?" Tessa asked, looking over at Felnar.

"The spirit was female mistress, and immensely powerful. I could almost say a member of the Air Elemental nobility, although I do not know of their organization enough to say more on that score," Felnar answered his mistress' question. He then smiled faintly, the stone of his face moving to emulate the smile of a Tauren rather than a Kaldorei, which looked very odd on his face, the stone distending and shifting in a manner to make it clear this being was not a normal flesh and blood mortal. "I could also tell that it was very willful, and curious. That is a dangerous combination, regardless of species, or gender."

Both Tessa and Dor looked around them and then nodded in agreement as Harry sarcastically drawled, "You don't say..."

Scene break

With his training in elementals coming to an abrupt halt, Harry spent the rest of winter getting further in touch with his chimeric side, and finishing up his new message array. The final product for the message array was a thin cylinder of beaten copper, with the runic array inscribed on the interior, and then the cylinder cold-folded into shape. When the top, the final portion of the runic array, was in place, whatever was within the tube would be sent to the corresponding tube someplace else.

That had taken quite a lot of time, and Harry had decided on using metal because metal was lighter than a corresponding amount of stone, although he had experimented with stone cylinders as well, and Soros, the chieftain of the Skyhorn tribe had decided to use stone for the receiving end when he and Harry had discussed it. The last month of winter, as winter turned into spring which up here meant less snow, more wind, and scant rain, Harry spent teaching two of the tribes younger Druids this specific runic array, adding it to the refuse array, which he knew the tribe would continue to use going forward. They were not nearly as quick to learn runes as the two young men that Harry had worked with in the Highmountain tribe, but they eventually got it.

Which was a good thing, because Harry had decided that rather than returning to the Rivermane tribe for another rotation through the three Tribes that welcomed a foreign being among them, it was time for him to leave the Tauren. It was time to explore the world beyond Highmountain.

His vision from the air elemental was but one reason for this decision. Tessa's teasing months back was another reason. But more than anything else, Harry wanted to **explore**. By this point, he had learned all he could for now from the shamans and Druids. He had learned many of their spells, although most were things he didn't see himself, while others he had already begun to master. Now all he needed was to hasten his casting time to the point that they would be useful in combat. And frankly, there were too many demands on his time here among the

Tauren for runes that he could not concentrate on that training. No, it would be better to get on the road, where he could make his own hours much better.

When spring came, and the way back down into the valley proper was clear, Harry made his farewells to the Skyhorn tribe, and he and Tessa both made their way down to the valley floor. At that point, Tessa bade him farewell, and after a last few taunts and barbs in either direction, Harry and Quincy, now enlarged to his normal body size for the first time in over a year, made their way through the valley, heading towards Thunder Totem to speak to the High Chief.

Several days later, as Harry was pushing through what he knew to be in neutral territory between the four tribes of the valley, he watched as Quincy paused. The snake had pushed his head up through the top of the foliage to seemingly stare at a creature there that had simply been laying there watching them, without reacting at all to their presence. Now however, Quincy turned back to look down at Harry, twitching his head back the other way to indicate something ahead and visible above the foliage. "You might want to take a look at this. It seems as if the Tauren have been very busy."

Harry looked at him in confusion, but shrugged, stood up, and moved to the nearest tree, which he began to climb. After his time with the Skyhorn tribe, climbing a tree was easy. *And much easier on my hands to boot.* Soon, he was perched alongside Quincy's head, pushing some branches out of the way to stare up into the distance. There, his eyes widened in surprise at what he saw there.

When last he had been in the town the four tribes of Highmountain used as a meeting area between the clans, it'd been a decent sized town, made mostly of the long houses and huts that the Tauren favored. He had been told there were plans for more, and he had seen the foundation of something going up near the center of the planned town.

That foundation was covered now, and arising out from the rest of the huts and tents surrounding it was a Tauren-made hill. The top of which rose like a cylinder, shaped to look like the first segment of a totem, a giant eagle's beak protruding. Across it more than a dozen Tauren could be seen painting it in various colors. Stranger, and yet adding to the surreal nature of what Harry was seeing was the fact that the two nearby rivers, whose confluence had been the reason why the town was based here, had been diverted to run directly underneath the hill. And as he concentrated, he could see at least one, possibly more areas from near where the top of the totem currently was where waterfalls were cascading down in a series of rivulets to various flattened areas around the hill.

"Damn! I think we're seeing an example of what the Tauren can do when backed up by their Druids and Shamans. And wanting to make something impressive," Harry said aloud, shaking his head from side to side. "I didn't think they'd ever go into something so grandiose, but I suppose if their numbers continue to grow, having a capital city with that thing in the center of it would be a sign of their strength and unity as a people."

Uncaring of such things, after all snakes didn't create societies, Quincy began to lower his upper body back down towards the ground. "It is interesting, and you can tell they are not yet done. I wonder how large that totem will be by the time they are finished."

"I've no idea. On that scale, that place already makes the Kaldorei town back in Ashenvale look tiny. Although it will probably take months to just paint the one totem face they've already finished." With that, Harry dropped back down as well, and the two of them made their way through the forest towards Thunder Totem, as Harry snickered quietly of the name, not having understood how pointed a name that was.

It had been near to three years since Harry had been in this town, and as he closed, walking through the area devoted to farmland, he wasn't surprised to see strange, wary looks coming his way or Quincy's. A few screams at Quincy's appearance was a bit much though, but he still held up his hands peaceably as a group of warriors came towards them, holding hunting spears and bows for the most part. Luckily as they closed, one of them recognized Quincy and Harry, and waved the others off. "Welcome back, Harry Dragonslayer. Are you here to speak to the high chief, or are you simply passing through to Rivermane territory?"

"I'm going to speak to the high chief first, then maybe do some shopping. This town's definitely grown, and I mean that in more ways than one, since I was here last," Harry replied.

"HAH! Yes, we've begun work on building the first true Tauren city. It's called Thunder Totem now, for obvious reasons. It will take decades to finish, but eventually the central-most totem will be tall enough to see the edge of the valley from. But come, I will show you two to the High Chief."

Where Lars was holding court had also changed. Before, Lars Proudtree, the chief of the Rivermane tribe who had been elected to the high chief position, had lived in one of the larger huts. Although, most of it had been devoted to a conference room. Now however, he still lived in a hut, but it was much larger one, built near where the new river ran, and a soft backdrop of running water filled the area, competing with the rumblings of Tauren looking to purchase or sell something from the market nearby. A series of staircases led upwards onto the first of the bluffs that circled the lower portions of the giant totem where another house could be seen on the edge of the bluff.

Lars nodded brusquely towards Harry, but did not turn away to greet him, hip deep in an argument with several other Tauren. Since Harry recognized the beads of two of them as belonging to the Bloodhoof tribe, Harry decided to make himself scarce lest his presence make the argument going on even worse.

Once more shrunken down to a manageable size, Quincy hissed into Harry's ear turned left. "Look over there, it's Tyre."

Harry was surprised. While Thunder Totem acted as a capital for the Tauren that didn't mean that the various tribe chieftains would journey there often. Indeed, it would probably take around four days for a normal Tauren to make the trip from Highmountain territory to the recently named Thunder Totem. Still, Harry was quite grateful to see his friend, and clasped forearms with the Tauren chieftain gladly. "Welcome, Harry! What brings you to Thunder Totem?"

"I could say the same thing about you. I thought that you and your wife were trying for a child," Harry rejoined.

Tyre winced a little, looking away. His companion however, who wore the beads of another Highmountain tribe member, smirked a bit. "I don't think you and I have ever met Harry Potter, but Tyre's description of you was spot on. Have you ever had the pleasure to converse with Lyra Highmountain?"

"Oh yes. And if you think that is a pleasure, I'm certain that around here someone has a whip or some chains they can sell you," Harry joked, causing both Tauren to laugh.

The un-introduced Tauren continued on, smiling in the toothless manner that most of the Tauren did save when showing aggression. "Well, it turns out that Alys has more in common with her sister than anyone might've thought. It only apparently comes out when she is expecting, but she definitely makes up for lost time. I have heard of expectant mothers having tempers and temper tantrums to say nothing of tongues that would scour the rust off of metal. But Alys takes it to extremes, and is also a thrower."

Harry enjoyed Tyre's dyspeptic look of discomfort, and decided to keep the conversation going, smirking slightly. "I feel as if I don't have to ask, but 'Thrower', what does that mean?"

"She throws things when she's angry or in pain. Which unfortunately seems to be all the time now," Tyre answered for himself. "Harry, be known to Luval Rightpaw. He wishes to open a store here, and I, well, I jumped on the chance to get out for of the hut for a bit and decided to both the score aid Luval, and to get some business done with the High Chief at the same time."

"Ah. Well, far be it for me to tell anyone that they were wrong to look for a way to make a strategic retreat," Harry snickered. "However, I hope that you are intending to return? Among my folks, it is a point of pride and familial obligation for the father to be there when his children are born."

"Yes, I will return. Eight days away from her however has been a blessing. But are you here to shop, speak with the High Chief yourself, or simply as a place to stay before heading back to the Rivermane tribe?"

"No, I thought I would stop in here before heading to the blood totem drive, they are next in line for my rotation aren't they?" Harry asked disingenuously. Both men looked at him as if he

had gone taken leave of his senses, and Harry laughed, waving his hand from side to side. “That was a joke. Although, I might look into making certain that the blood totem tribe is also receiving some of my runic arrays. Not all of them, but some. I don’t want that to become a point of contention between them and the other tribes of Highmountain.”

“Makes sense to me, but you didn’t tell us why you are here.” Tyre seemed to sense that Harry was prevaricating a little, and pushed him on it.

“I’m not heading back to the Rivermane tribe. It’s been three years since I arrived here, and while I know there’s a lot more I could learn from your shamans and Druids in terms of magical spells, I’ve gotten far enough that I can continue my own education in many ways. And I want to get back to exploring the world. This valley is amazing, and your people have been incredibly accommodating, yet there is a wide, wide world out there for me to explore.”

Tyre nodded slowly, gestured Harry to walk with him and Luval. “Come. We were about to go looking for places for Luval to set up his shop. I will take you to see the high chief afterwards, and then, you and I will speak of your plans going forward.”

That night, after speaking with Lars and a representative of the Bloodtotem tribe (who Lars had carefully chosen from the officials sent to Thunder Totem by their chief) for several hours, and handing over examples of his runic arrays, along with the names of the students he had made in the Highmountain and Skyhorn tribes, Harry found himself entering a large three-story hut. It was set up as an inn, the first one that Harry had seen among the Tauren. *Then again, I suppose it makes sense for it to be here if it was anywhere. None of the tribe villages I’ve stayed in were big enough to need them.*

Luval was also there, apparently having rented out a room for several weeks as he worked on getting his shop and home situated. But he left the two friends to talk alone, seemingly trying to get to know one of the bar workers. *I refuse to call them barmaids. They don’t dress the part as in all those fantasy tales. Cowmaids maybe.*

Harry paid for his own room with some trade goods from the skyhorn tribe. It turned out that the rock squirrels which had been Quincy’s main meal during their time with the tribe had for pelts that were actually quite sought after by the other tribes for how warm the fur was. Only one was enough to give them a room for the night, two meals and a series of twelve arrowheads Harry wanted to experiment with.

Quickly, Harry and Tyre sat across from one another at a table, watching the crowd around them for a time in silence. Tyre tapped a long, extremely artistically crafted pipe full of some of the herbs that the Tauren grew. As smoke began to wreath up from the end of the pipe, he puffed on it for a time, looking across at Harry. “I will not gainsay you or your desire to leave. After all, you and I met when I myself was very far away from here.”

Harry chuckled at that reminder, lifting his stein of ale. It's cold ale anyway, it was a little too fruity to be real ale and Harry's opinion, but it was alcoholic, and quite tasty, as most of the drinks the Tauren made were. "True. I haven't seen any Furbolgs here on the broken Isles, do they have a community here?"

"No, or at least not to the best of my knowledge. You might ask around, perhaps someone else's rights of courage took them to other portions of the islands as mine took me into Kalimdor proper. Do you specifically about your plans. Do you remember Tracy speaking to you of..." Tyre lowered his voice, murmuring, "the Unseen Path?"

Harry frowned, leaning back in his own chair for a moment. "I think I remember. A sect of her people who are here in the broken Isles somewhere? She said I might want to look them up."

"Hahaha, yes, I think you will. They are a... call it in an order I suppose something like the various lodges the Kaldorei druids form, made up of both night elves and my own folk. They look to do good in the world, and to do so, they explore it to a far greater degree than even my own folk with our Rite of Wind, let alone though far more insular night elves. They're mostly organized, but are affiliated with both the Highmountain clan, and the night elves."

"Tell me more. What do they actually do?"

"As I said, they look to do good in the world. From what I can recall of my lesson about them when I became chieftain of the Highmountain tribe, they began as a group which was trying to combat the slow decline into sadism and opulence that the night elves fell into prior to the War of the Ancients. They fought during the war, and became far more militant doing so, but they were also practically wiped out. Afterward, Huhn Highmountain welcomed them into our mountains, and then helped them find a home for themselves with the help of an Ancient Spirit."

He grimaced a little, shaking his head. "I could wish that I knew more about that aspect of their history, but I'm afraid I do not. My people do not use many written records. What I do know is that afterward, they reorganized themselves into a group of explorers, hunters, Rangers, and even navigators, searching out evil and combating it in any form it came in. Specifically, they have devoted themselves to making certain that demons cannot find their way into Azeroth again. In that, I know that several of their members journeyed with the exiled nobility of the night elves, to make certain that their continuing use of magic did not draw the attention of demons once more to this world."

Tyre's lips twitched around his pipe, and he took a long drag on it before continuing. "Tell me, does that not sound something that is... I believe you have used the phrase 'right up your alley' before?"

"I have, and you definitely are using it correctly." Humming thoughtfully, Harry leaned back, scratching at his chin. "I don't actually know much about the exiles, other than the fact that

they call themselves the High Elves now. That's about all that apparently got back to Tracy about them, other than the fact that they had indeed found a place to settle, and had begun to build their own nation there."

"From what I know, it is on the other side of the maelstrom somewhere. But I too do not know all that much. More to the point, the Unseen Path. If you are looking for information about the world, or just to explore, why not do it with some kind of support base?" He leaned forward then, jabbing the end of his pipe towards Harry. "And if you are going to look for trouble, do not argue that you are, if you do not, trouble will find you. That is the sort of person you are Harry. Far better that you do so with allies beside you. The Unseen Path can be those allies better than either my folk, or the night elves themselves as a society would be willing to be beyond our borders."

Henry nodded at that, acknowledging all of Tyre's points in that one amused motion. "It is, perhaps you can tell me more about the Unseen Path, and how to find them."

"I can do better than that. I can lead you to the small entrance way into the side valley that will eventually lead you to the Trueshot Lodge. I'm afraid I don't know if that is their only lodge, but I do know it is their organizational home. From what I was told by Ebonhorn, it will take a normal Tauren a week or so to travel there from the edge of our valley, and you might run into some trouble along the way."

"What else is new?" Harry snorted. "Wherever you're going, getting there is always part of the adventure. That's truer on this world than it has ever was in my old." Pausing Harry cocked an eyebrow at Tyre. "And Ebonhorn? The old shaman with the black fur?"

"Indeed. After you left, I learned that he was a close friend of the Highmountain family, and he and I made our acquaintances," Tyre answered mildly, his lips again twitching around his pipe, and Harry snorted. By that, he understood then that Tyre had also been read into the secret of what Ebonhorn was, although he still wondered how that particular secret had been kept for so long. Harry decided to set that aside for now, concentrating more on what Tyre could tell him of the Unseen Path and how to get there.

More than a week later, Harry, Tyre and Quincy began to see the far end of the valley from the Skyhorn tribe, although Harry estimated that the actual edge was still more than a week or more away. Thankfully, they didn't have to go that far. The ground of the valley had been going downhill slightly for several days, but yesterday, Tyre had begun to lead them towards the easternmost portion of the valley. When they reached it, after several hours of searching, they found what Harry took to be a boulder jutting out from the edge of the valley underneath a tree. But behind it, there was a hidden pathway.

Staring at it, Harry shook his head slightly, murmuring, "The next time I'm among you horned folk, I am going to concentrate more on learning woodcraft particularly hiding things in the forests and stuff like that without the use of magic. I don't know if there's actually a single word

for that kind of thing, but I would never have thought that there was something here without you guiding me.”

“Huln did chose it well, and concealed it. This tree, Harry, was planted by Huln and one of Cenarius’s Keepers, who traveled here specifically to help it grow for a few hundred years before returning to Kalimdor. It was a sign of Huln’s favor with the night elves and Cenarius that a Keeper was sent across the ocean like that, even if it was for just a short amount of time to such a being.”

Harry could feel the pride with which Tyre spoke of his tribe’s ancient patriarch, and nodded his head, reflecting that Huln would probably have been a man Harry would’ve liked to make the acquaintance of. Then he shook his head, and held out a hand to the massive Tauren. “Well, in that case, I think this is where we part. You have a pregnant wife to get back to, and I... I hopefully have some new friends to meet.”

“It’s been fascinating to travel with you once more Harry, and I wish you well on your journey. And more particularly in finding more friends. Perhaps the Rangers among the Unseen Path might even know of this world’s version of humans, and you can learn what you can of them. I hope you can,” Tyre answered, sympathy plain in his tone. “No being, no matter how unique, deserves to be entirely on their own.”

Quincy huffed at that, and went on to indicate with word and body language (snake style) that he was more than enough of a companion for Harry, which brought rather strongly to mind that mating and so forth was not something that his folk looked at in the same manner that warm-blooded individuals did. But Harry simply shook Tyre’s forearm firmly, thanked him for his words, not reacting to Quincy’s point. He then watched as Tyre turned, and began to make his way back through the valley. Once Tyre was out of sight, Harry turned to Quincy, and gestured his snakely friend on. “Come on Quincy, perhaps we might actually find something in this little offshoot valley that is foolish enough to try and fight you. It’s been a remarkably boring trip so far.”

Quincy’s eyes widened as only a snakes could, and he headbutted Harry hard, sending Harry to the earth as before slithering on, saying over his shoulder, “why did you have to jinx it? Do you not understand d how your own life works yet!? I am not going to stick around if lightning strikes you down for such foolishness.”

Harry laughed from where he’d fallen, and was still laughing as he got to his feet and headed after his friend.

The small path that Tyre had led them to continued for a few hours to be a narrow gap between sheer rock faces, making Harry feeling almost claustrophobic, and Quincy demanding he get shrunk down again as they continued on. But after those few hours, it opened out into another valley. Once more, heat vents could be seen nearby, giving warmth to this area, but Harry could also see that this valley was noticeably further down towards the ground than the

Highmountain valley, and he wondered if it continued to do so, if this was another secret way up towards the primary valley. *Actually, that makes sense, considering that the Unseen Path have to travel a lot, and the way Tracy and I reached the valley certainly didn't seem all that well-traveled even if the Tauren had left markers enough to show the way.*

The valley was narrow. Narrow enough that Harry could see both sides as they continued down it, finding a small river going in the same direction, which began to dominate the center of the valley. There were trees, most of them just as large as in the Highmountain valley, with several even larger than most. Scene there, true giants of their breed that were so large that Harry and Quincy had to move over and through their roots where they stuck out of the ground.

In terms of animal life, two fights with a pair of cougars proved Harry could was correct, that there were indeed animals this far away from the Tauren and would Quincy had hunted before that didn't know to run away from the giant snake. Several dozen squirrels around and birds above them rounded out the animal life seen so far. Indeed, Harry estimated that he saw far more birds than anything else. Luckily, the birds didn't seem to be in any hurry to approach him, which Harry was thankful for. After all, this was an entirely new area, and who knew what was out there that might react to seeing birds flock to one position?

Quincy handled both of those fights easily enough on his own, and the pair of them simply continued on their way. Right up until Harry began to see signs that someone else was around here. And not only signs that someone was around here, but specific signs that he had seen once before, in the forest of Kalimdor.

Torn feathers, sticking out of the ground like they had been hurled with deadly force, and lots of bird poo what was quite a bit of more solid than the average bird poo. "Quincy, am I going a little crazy--"

"No, you're already crazy, little has nothing to do with it." Quincy interrupted.

"Or am I seeing signs that harpies are around somewhere?" Harry went on as if Quincy hadn't spoken.

Quincy scowled, shaking his head as he stared from side to side, his tongue flicking out occasionally. "I am afraid I cannot help you there. While my memory is good, it's been years since I've smelled a harpy. It smells familiar yes, but all I can say."

"I think it's time to start going incognito." With that, Harry tapped Quincy, and the snake disappeared from sight of anyone else, with Harry following suit a moment later. Harry then hit them both with another spell, one that would mask their sound. A third masked their scents, although there, Harry knew that his own understanding of smell as a primary scent would probably mean that most animals would still be able to tell where they were. *Harpies though, probably not. And in the future as I get to know my basilisk side it will get better.*

With that, the two of them went forward, and quickly began to see signs of small skirmishes. An arrow here, a territory of earth that had been ripped up there. , Quincy paused, sniffing the arrows, and then looking at Harry in confusion. "Harry, again we have come upon a scent that I have smelled before. I still cannot tell you where however."

Harry shrugged his shoulders at that, and then as night fell, the two of them took turns being on watch for more trouble. Occasionally, a loud screech in the distance reached their ears, but the night passed uneventfully.

So too did the next two nights. Occasionally they spotted more signs of previous trouble, and on their third day in this small valley they found four bodies. Three of them were harpies, while the fourth was a Furbolg. That surprised Harry somewhat, but then again, the Furbolgs did live throughout the interior of the mountains up here. *Who is to say they couldn't turn up here?* And regardless of the conflict with them several years ago, Harry knew that they were a peaceful people. *So long as a black Dragon or someone else isn't around to needle them into war anyway.*

"It looks as if the Furbolg was carrying something, a large bag," Quincy said, sniffing the area around the Furbolg. "This one's footsteps are too heavy for his weight. And that is saying something with one of these creatures."

"Supplies maybe? Maybe this one had some business with the Unseen Path at Trueshot Lodge? Although, if the members of the Unseen Path are forces for good, why are there harpies so close to their lodge like this?"

To that Quincy had no answer, and the journey continued. On the sixth day in this smaller valley though, Quincy indicated a halt by the simple expedient of coiling around Harry and holding him back for a moment, then twitching to the side and leading Harry up the slight incline to the rightmost side of the valley. They continued forward as Quincy hissed his explanation, "the smell, it became much stronger."

Harry nodded, and quickly began to run through some of his newer additions to his combat repertoire. "If we come upon harpies, will ambush them. Remember, straight up fights are for fools."

Quincy hissed in amusement of that, and the two of them now moved forward far slower, checking around them and up into the trees for traps, harpies, or anything that might indicate away for the harpies to discover their location. Within moments, Harry saw movement ahead of them, and a little bit after that, began to hear screeching on the wind, the harpies talking to the one another in their own language which sounded just as vile as the harpies themselves were.

A part of me is sorry for them. Learning that they are descendants of an Ancient Spirit driven insane by her death during the war of the ancients made me feel some sympathy for their current straits. But far too many of them have given themselves over to worship of the Old Gods,

or simply preying on people as best they can do to their own now-evil nature, Harry lamented, before getting ready to ambush and kill whatever harpies were ahead of them.

Quincy reported that he could now make out distinct smells, different sense of different harpies. "There are fifteen of them, perhaps sixteen. Two of them are too close to one another for me to discern more."

With that in mind, Harry began to plan, summoning up a dozen snakes, and sending them out in different directions, promising payment of mice for their troubles. He then conjured on himself the Barkskin spell that he had learned among the Highmountain tribe, and then called Tricksy into being. For a moment, the little hummingbird made of fire darted around, but the shared magic between them allowed him to see through Harry's illusion, something they had tested early on in their acquaintance.

When the little fire creature flew into his face, Harry whispered, "Enemies about, creatures with wings and talons for arms and legs. When I give the signal, move forward and get their attention. Some of them might have magic and be able to hurt you, so be careful."

Tricksy nodded its head, and flitted behind a nearby tree, hiding itself from sight as Harry and Quincy moved into position to where they could finally see the harpies through the dense foliage that dominated this area of the valley. Several dozen small young trees grew here, perhaps in the opening left behind when one of their larger older brethren fell. Regardless, it was a good area for the harpies to have chosen as a resting place.

As Quincy had indicated, fifteen of them were there, spread out through the trees, squawking at one another in their language. Harry could have used a translation spell, but it would have given the game away. The spell wasn't invisible and had to travel from the caster to the target. And frankly, he doubted that they had anything worth listening to. Harry still remembered his one attempt to interrogate a harpy, and it hadn't gone very well.

Taking in the sight of the harpies above them, Harry found himself arrested by one specific area of the harpy's current base camp, if such a term could be used to describe the gaggle of harpies above them. Because there, two of the harpies were engaged in an intense make out session. Their wings around one another hid most of their bodies from view, but the humping motions the mound of conjoined fathers made as suggestive to say the least, as was the moaning and the sight, barely visible from his hiding place, of tongues twining in midair between them before disappearing as the kiss deepened.

Huh, I knew the race was almost entirely female, but I didn't really connect that to what the relationships among themselves would be like... And annoying and loud and dirty they might be, but they're also damn pretty. Since Harry hadn't had much in the way of companionship his own shape the past three years, the sight of two extremely attractive women kissing - and the fact that they weren't making any harpy noises helped - caused him to pause for several moments, simply staring.

That lasted until arrows began to hammer into the harpies from the other side of their camp. Three of them fell, although only one of them was dead, the other two were merely wounded. All of the harpies began to flap their wings and take to the air, screeching, and four of them began to use magic, much like the ones that Harry had fought previously to attack the place the arrows had come from

This was more than enough to shake Harry out of his momentary stupor, and he instantly decided to announce himself, sending out a cutting spell that intercepted one of the magic users among the harpies, slicing her into pieces. Instantly, the snakes which had waited underneath the gaggle slithered towards the two harpies who had fallen to the ground wounded. Before either of them could get to the air once more, the snakes struck, and Harry turned his attention away from those two, trusting the poison of the snakes to do its work. Quincy barreled forward too, launching the needles from his back up towards the harpies as the two still-hidden shooters continued their own assault.

Two of the harpy magic users turned in the direction Harry's spell had come from, but he had already moved. Their magic struck the tree behind where he had previously been standing, as well as the ground. Then another spell from Harry struck, removing the head of one of the magic users. This is at that point, all heart seemed to go out of the harpies, or at least, it looked that way for the first few seconds. But Harry realized that they were all still flying together, working under the direction of the last magic user as it shrieked orders to the others.

Their feathers flew down, impacting the area where the two shooters have been, and where Harry's second spell had come from. But Harry once more had moved, and now, Tricksy flew upwards, zooming through the harpies formation, pulling their attention away from Harry. *Little guy must have been annoyed that he didn't get his moment to shine.*

Several more of the harpies fell to Quincy's needles and Harry's spell as the archers seemingly fell silent for a few seconds. Then their bows twanged once more, and struck two more of the harpies from the air. The paralyzed harpies also fell towards the ground with bone crunching force, where they were finished off by Quincy or the other snakes, leaving only three in the air. Once more, Harry's spell struck out, cleaving the leader of the group into pieces, and single arrows flew, hitting one of the last two survivors. The survivor, realizing it was alone now, screeched in outrage and winged higher into the air, circling once before moving off hastily southward, dodging another spell from Harry.

While more than willing to work under the impression that the enemy of my enemy is my friend, Harry wasn't that trusting once the battle ended. He waited, unseen for a few moments, until a surprisingly familiar voice sounded from the forest. "Quincy, that is you, isn't it? You're even bigger than I remember."

Harry blinked, and canceled the Illusion spell on him, although he still kept the Ironbark spell on him as he moved forward, looking around. "Silva? That is you, right? It's been a few years, but I think I still remember your voice."

Silva appeared from out of the forest from an area where Harry could have sworn that no one without magic would've been able to hide. Still, that tracked against what Harry had seen previously from Sentinels and the wide, beaming grin and wildly twitching ears on the svelte, athletic night elf girl was just as Harry remembered. "Harry! It is you. Why am I not surprised that you're seeking the Unseen Path too?"

"Too? You are looking to join up?"

"Yes." Silva moved forward, and, instead of clasping forearms with Harry, actually brought him into a hug. "I have long wanted to explore beyond the forests, and the trip across to these isles simply wetted my appetite for more. I could have wished that I had convinced Berena to join me, but she refuses to leave Danavia. I had indicated a desire to travel, and Master Feltstep approached me. Together we made our way here."

Harry returned the hug somewhat awkwardly, not having anticipated it and needing to use all of his occlumentic skills to keep a faint blush off his face as Sylina released the hug and stood back. *Damn, I am out of practice with this. Eyes on hers, boy! You're now as tall as she is, so there's no excuse to stare at her chest and just because you've lacked anything remotely interesting to look at for the past three years is no reason to act like a barbarian.*

Despite those thoughts though, Harry couldn't help but take in Sylina's body again. She still seemed to have that nervous energy to her, shifting from one foot to another. Her small, barely perceptible bust hadn't grown, but they still looked nice to Harry when attached to the far more human body of a Kaldorei rather than the large jugs Tauren women, and her skin was still the same violet skin, contrasting sharply to her white hair. No longer done up in long braids, Sylina's hair fell free, now. But more importantly, the shy, almost self-effacing nature Sylina had back when they first met in Danavia was gone. She seemed more confident than before, and more certain of herself.

"That's sad to hear, that Berona didn't want to travel with you, I mean," Harry said, trying hard not to sound tongue-tied. "But it is nice to see you again. Although the circumstances could've been a little better. What are harpies doing so close to the Unseen Path? I thought they were supposed to be warriors of good or something."

"As interesting as it is to hear that you know this strange deformed vrykul who uses Arcane magic, I have to wonder why you're being so friendly with it, and what it is doing here," the other night elf said.

Harry turned in his direction, taking the man in a glance. He was one of the oldest looking night elves Harry had seen yet, which was surprising considering he thought that they just didn't age beyond a certain point. *But then again, perhaps being outside and under the sun will wear on anyone regardless of race.* Then too, Harry could see dozens of wounds covering the man's forearms and face, which added a certain sense of age all on their own.

That wasn't going to stop him from speaking his mind, however. "I really dislike that term for my race, and I am not one of them regardless. My name is Harry Potter, one-time student of Cenarius, travel partner of Tyrande Whisperwind, and dimensional traveler," he said mildly. "I don't exactly demand respect or anything so foolish, but I do demand a certain amount of good manners. I am he, not it. And you will address me as you would another Kaldorei or Tauren."

The night elf man snorted, but nodded his head, and gestured. "Come. First, we must clean up this battlefield, then you can tell me more about why you are seeking the Unseen Path. Depending on your reasons, and if I believe them, I will guide you as I was already guiding Silva to our lodge."

"And you can tell me why harpies have been allowed so close?" Harry demanded, his tone equally acerbic.

The two men glared at one another in equal mistrust, but after a moment, the Kaldorei man began to answer. "They have begun to appear in the surrounding mountains, but we have yet to discover their central location. I had hoped to trail a small group of them back, but instead, that small group of three met up with the larger flock we just decimated. That is why I allowed that last one to fly off. Hopefully now we have a direction towards their base."

Harry frowned thoughtfully, then looked up at Tricksy, who was buzzing around above them. "Tricksy." The fire elemental zipped down to them, and ignoring the now even warier gaze of the older Kaldorei, Harry gestured towards where the retreating harpy was now a dot in the sky. "Can you follow that harpy? Try not to be seen, but come back to me when she reaches a settlement of some kind."

The hummingbird-like fire elemental bobbed up and down and then zipped away. Turning back to the two Kaldorei, Harry took a second to nod at Sylina's partner, a large panther, who had moved over to speak to Quetzal. What the two animals had to speak about Harry didn't know, but he was grateful to not have to deal with Quetzal's brand of humor or diplomacy as he dealt with the suspicion and distaste from Feltstep.

Of course, he knew where it was coming from. The man had the look of a war veteran, and if so, he might well have fought in the War of the Ancients. A war begun, in no small part, by the greed and magical addiction the Highborne had developed over time, bringing Azeroth to the attention of the Burning Legion and thus beginning the war.

Still he wasn't going to address that until the man did, and he merely smiled politely. "Will that work?"

"Perhaps, if your elemental can be trusted to do the job correctly," Feltstep answered.

"He can. Tricksy might seem flighty, but he isn't when given a specific task. He'll want to help burn their camp a bit, but that'll be all," Harry answered, waving that off. "Although I can't tell you how long it will take."

“Very well. Do not use arcane magic any longer until we stand in Trueshot Lodge,” the man grunted, and turned away, leading the way off without another word.

Sylina grimaced slightly. “I am sorry about him, Harry. He is a veteran of the War of the Ancients, and I think he was personally hurt at some point by a Highborne using Arcane magic after the war had ended.”

“Don’t apologize for Feltstep, Sylina. I understand where the animosity is coming from. I just am not going to be apologetic for mistakes I had no part in. Feltstep and I will bury the hatchet, or we won’t. It isn’t the first time I’ve had to be around people I didn’t get along with,” Harry answered, and then, feeling as if he needed to do something, held out his arm to Sylina. “Come on, you can tell me about how the last few years have been for you.”

Although she didn’t take his arm, which Harry was somewhat saddened by, she did smile and moved over to walk beside him as they followed Feltstep. Quetzal and Sylina’s partner, whose name Harry couldn’t remember, followed swiftly. None of them stopped scanning the woodland or the air above even as Sylina began talking, and Harry responded, filling her in on his own adventures since they had seen each other on the docks after the ship had brought Tyrande and Harry to the Broken Isles.

Not two days later, they arrived at their destination, although Trueshot Lodge turned out to not be anything like Harry had expected. And as they closed on the entrance to the actual lodge itself, he stopped and stared at it, ignoring the pointed coughing from the older Kaldorei man.

Sylina also paused in surprise, looking at the edifice ahead of them as she stood beside Harry, her panther partner, Nog, to her other side, resting her hand lightly on his head. “This isn’t what I expected...”

While the ways to and from the Unseen Path were extremely well hidden, that instantly went away once you came within sight of the lodge. The valley had opened up slightly to the point where Harry could not make out any details of the mountains surrounding it unless he used magic to enhance his eyes. The lodge itself was on a large hill situated within the center of the valley, and even that had been worth a few moments of examination as they closed, because the hill grew out of the middle of the valley like a talon thrust up from under the earth. The sides were so sheer, that Harry wondered if magic had been used here to smooth the stone.

That was only on the surface, though. Harry had spent so long by this point opening himself to the world around him that he could sense arcane or nature magic around him. And the whole talon-like hill radiated to his senses in a way Cenarius had by the time he had left his first teacher in this world. The Energies of the wind flowed around the area, looking almost natural, but not quite, and then was also oddly within the hill itself, something that should not have been possible. *Wind arcana in the earth? Strange. That isn’t something any druid would be able to do. Unless the whole thing is hollow?*

Built out of it on four sides to make the hill look almost like a castle were watchtowers. Each of them looked in one of the four directions on a compass, and were large enough for three Tauren or five Kaldorei to stand watch on at a time. As they closed, Harry had seen that instead of people animals were there. In the two closest to them as they closed, Harry saw one was a giant bear. On the other, there were a dozen crows, unusually silent for the breed.

From underneath the towers banners flew, the background a light green color. As Harry and the others moved around the edifice, he noticed that each of these banners had a different weapon on them and a phrase written in Kaldorei language, which Harry had not learned much of unfortunately. *Tyrande and I had better things to do, and I didn't have much time with Sylina or Berena before we separated. Lucky for me, I have two Kaldorei here to explain things to me.*

"What do those banners say?"

The older Kaldorei sniffed, and looked away, saying nothing. Sylina also didn't say anything for a second, looking at the older man her ears twitching in a way Harry hadn't seen before, twitching tight against the sides of her head before nearly flattening against her neck, reminding Harry that the Kaldorei ears were highly mobile, and were a major part of how they expressed themselves.

Eventually, seeing her elder not answering, Sylina's ears twitched upright once more as she shrugged. "I don't know the history of the phrases but the one we saw first with a bow and arrow on it said 'For it is in hunting in the dark that we serve the world. Make certain you aim truly, and hit only the targets worthy of your arrow.' I like that one." She then pointed to the one they had just passed, which bore a map on it. "And that one says, 'With our Oaths to serve the world, Knowledge of that world itself shall guide the way.'"

The third, ahead of them on the other side of the entrance held a Tauren-style double-bladed axe staff. "That one I like even better. 'For our strength is nothing without the will to defend others, guard your purpose well.'"

With that, Sylina fell silent, staring along with Harry not at the banners, but rather, the entrance that was directly between and below from the two watchtowers, creating a triangle on this portion of the talon. An edifice that needed no words to explain what it was or why.

The entryway was massive, more than large enough to allow Quincy entry. Indeed, the snake attempted to rear up and touch the arch at the top, and although he could, he was almost balancing on his tail to do it. More importantly than the size of the entryway though, was the magnificent carvings all around it. To either side, the stone of the hill had been carved into totems, much like the totems the Tauren used. But instead of each different portion of the totem being an animal spirit, these pillars depicted what Harry could tell was a battle of some kind. Each of them was different, although in many, the enemy was the same. Demons, members of the Burning Legion that had been the great enemy in the War of the Ancients.

But not all of them were like that. One totem near the top of the rightmost pillar depicted what almost looked like a debate between Kaldorei, until Harry gazed harder at that image. How the crafter had captured it was beyond Harry's understanding but the face of one of the Kaldorei in that argument was both beautiful and slightly somehow... Wrong. It was an incredibly gorgeous face one Harry would have held up against Tracy Whisperwind for the sheer impact of her beauty. But the more Harry looked at it, the more he decided he didn't like why that woman was smiling, the look in her eyes, the commanding body language, visible despite the racial differences.

That continued on many of the other carvings, and then the murals lining the long hallway leading deeper into the talon-like hill. All around them were murals and paintings and in each one, one or more of the enemy had been given that same touch. It wasn't so much that it looked as if they could step out of the painting. Many of the individuals that made up the painting could do that. Rather, it was as if their very essence had been distilled into the painting itself in some subtle fashion that worked on his mind and the mind of both of his companions for they too had stopped.

Seeing both of his charges pausing and staring, the older Kaldorei sighed and spoke up reluctantly, but firmly, going to one of the paintings himself, gesturing to it. "The fall of the city of Suramar as seen from afar. It was one of our greatest losses in the War of the Ancients, as it had been led by a full council of Highborne who opposed Azshara. But there were so many losses at the time, that we didn't properly mourn the city's fall until after. The city fell, and then Farondis, the region's prince, rebelled against Azshara, hoping to stop her mad plan of opening a gate for Dread Sargeras. He and the entire territory was cursed by the Dread Queen. Farondis himself was torn asunder by her magics, and the rest of the territory cursed with un-life for a time."

He shook his head, sighing. "It took several hundred years and hundreds of lives to remove the curse and lay the dead to rest. It was one of the first major projects that we of the Unseen Path and our allies in the Cenarian Circle undertook together."

Harry shivered at that, realizing that curse, even without any details, was undoubtedly the kind of thing that Death had sent him to deal with here. *But at least that one's already been --- nope, not going to jinx myself like that.*

To get his mind off that, Harry pointed to a painting that depicted a group of Kaldorei fighting a demon. One elf in particular had grabbed his attention in that picture, as well as the demon itself. The demon gave off a feeling of power incarnate, as if he wished to dominate and slay all before him, magic flowing around him, bright orange and deep, almost vile green, reminding Harry strongly of the Killing Curse. In his face was a look of both concentration and fury, his eyes speaking of a vile intelligence, alive only for a moment in the fury of combat.

In contrast, the elf's body language spoke of fierce opposition, his double-bladed swords caught in the moment of flashing forward to stab deeply into the large demon's arm. Yet Harry could

also see in his face a look of admiration, maybe? Or interest? Fascination for certain in the demon, or perhaps the power the demon wielded.

Why he could say that, Harry didn't know, and found it highly unusual. He had never been someone to see so deeply into a painting. Something unusual was going on here, which Sylina had also noticed. The young Kaldorei's voice was awed as she asked, "How, how are they doing that? The faces, some of them, some of them..."

"Look as if they had their souls emplaced into the paintings, filling the faces that they had once worn with their own temperament at the time of the painting?" The older Kaldorei asked, his tone making it a statement rather than a question. "I do not know. I have never taken up the paintbrush or the chisel. I do know that it has been like that since the Trueshot Lodge was made. There have been a few added murals since then, but none of them have the power of the original carvings or paintings made in the decade after the War of the Ancients."

A new voice interrupted their conversation, such as it was. A gruff, distinctly Tauren voice, cracking with age but still powerful. "The Trueshot Lodge was finished before the great exile. Our Order spent more than two decades reorganizing itself, coming here and building this place. And among those who have joined us at the time were five Highborne. Artists all before the demons began to appear, they were men who had stood against the depredations of their Queen and tried to fight against the demons during the War of the Ancients. They worked some kind of strange arcane energies into their work on the murals and carving. Records state that they took the memories of people who were actually in each of these scenes, and somehow transmuted a specific portion of that memory into their work. There was some serious question at the time about the work, but then we made our agreement with the Ancient Spirit, Ohn'ahra and he allowed them to stay, seeing they could serve a purpose."

Harry and his companions all turned in the direction of his voice and saw easily the oldest Tauren Harry had ever seen walking towards them.

The elderly man's beard nearly fell to his knees, his fur was entirely white with age and his head drooped. Even the Tauren's eyes seemed to have sunken deeper into a sallow almost ascetic face. With that age had come obviously quite a lot of conflict. One horn was missing near the base, it's ragged edge now covered by steel, each of the broken points actually looking as if they were sharp enough to use as a weapon just as much as the horn had been originally. His face was marked by a trio of scars that obviously came from an animal of some kind, possibly a wyvern or Harpy, going down one side of his face. His forearms showed scars leading up underneath his tunic. One knee was obviously a construct of some kind, both the knee itself and the leg below that point moving oddly to someone like Harry who had spent three years among the Tauren.

He leaned heavily on a massive staff, every inch of it marked by intricate carvings of various animals, leading up to a top that curved into a circle. Over the circle lay a piece of cloth, tied around the staff just below where the top began, almost hiding the hollow circle from view.

On the cloth was written, in ever smaller writing, a mandala of some kind that standing beside Harry, Sylina translated as the old man walked towards them. *Only in searching for those dangers unseen by any do we serve our purpose of keeping the world safe from those that would harm the natural order, keeping those beyond from finding the path back to our world, hiding one path as we find our own. That's profound.*

“That was in the old days of course, before the insanity of Dath’remar forced Tyrande and Malfurion to banish the remaining Highborne to save the Kaldorei from civil war. Let alone the madness of the Shandaral elves in Northrend.” The old man seemed to lose himself for a few seconds, then shook himself. “At any rate, all five of the artists decided to leave the order officially when the differences between the Highborne and the regular Kaldorei became irreconcilable, although they took no part in the conflict. The Highborne wanted to continue to use arcana, they were literally addicted to it. While the rest of Kaldorei society wanted to turn away from the arcane to fully embrace Elune and druidic style magic. And it is the great spirit our order gives our oaths to that was”

He gestured to the murals. “Yet even though many of our Kaldorei brethren wanted us to somehow remove the magic from these paintings, my predecessors have always denied that. There is something to be said about being able to stare into at least the memory of the face of true evil and wonder if you would be worthy enough to face it after all. It is one of our tests to ascend from Oathkeeper to Seeker.”

Harry nodded at that, although, considering his original life back on earth, the faces of the devils and those Kaldorei who had joined them weren’t enough to cause him to have such an introspective moment as it obviously had Sylina judging by her wide eyes and flattened ears. *Their evil might have been on a far grander more destructive scale, but that doesn't matter overmuch. After all, which is more vile, slaughtering thousands of people for your own purposes or killing children and spouses in front of their families and laughing as you do it?*

The old Tauren studied Harry closely, then glanced at the older Kaldorei, who was watching Harry with narrowed eyes, one hand on the long dagger at his side. He pulled at his long beard with his off hand for a moment, then gestured with the staff to a few of the images around them.

“What?” Harry asked, somewhat confused. “Touch the paintings? What would that accomplish? There aren’t any secret passages behind them or something like that are there? Or are they going to start talking to me?”

“No to the first and as to the second, in a way.” The old Tauren, we had yet to introduce himself, waved his staff when Feltstep met went to speak, his gaze growing heated, his ears flicking straight to the sides, becoming rigid in anger.

“Er, do you want me to do it as well?” Sylina asked, looking between her guide and the old Tauren.

“Eventually you will be asked to touch a specific painting later in your time with us. If you believe that following the Unseen Path is the way forward for you.” The Tauren sent her a kindly smile, and then his gaze flicked back to Harry, still keeping his staff, which must’ve been quite heavy given its size and width, outstretched towards Feltstep with no apparent effort showing in his arm. “Touch it.” He ordered, his tone this time brooking no argument.

“I would suggest you not do so Harry. That old man is far too pushy about it boards to lead to anything good,” Quincy opined.

“Maybe, but I really doubt any painting here in the Unseen Path would be the type to suck away my life force or something equally horrifying. No, I’m thinking this is going to be some kind of vision or other.” With that, Harry turned away, locking gazes with first Feltstep and the old Tauren in turn, sending a smile at Sylina for last. “What do I have to do?”

“Simply touch the painting, the magic woven within and empowered by spirit that inhabits the displays will do the rest.” The elderly Tauren said, over the now vocal protests of Feltstep.

With a sigh, Harry moved over to the painting that had grabbed his attention most of all: the one with the Kaldorei who seemed to be both enthralled and horrified by the demon he was fighting. He touched it, and within a second, Harry’s body stiffened, then began to spasm as his mind suddenly was pulled into the memory contained in the painting.

The first thing that hit him was the heat, the feel of the burning fire held in the demon’s hand, hotter and even more cursed than Fiendfyre despite the man being several yards away. . The feeling of loathing he had for the demon, the fear, the hatred of the man filled Harry, but almost overriding all that came the feeling of being in the demon’s presence.

It was like, yet utterly unlike being in the presence of a Dementor. It was just as powerful as one, but instead of causing you to lose all happiness and joy, the demon’s aura was one of raw fear and a need to dominate. As if the creature was reaching into Harry’s mind and mashing a primal button there marked terror. The aura contained other feelings, feelings of the demon’s superiority to the individual whose memory Harry was currently feeling. As if the demon was so above the man that fighting the demon was impossible. It was best to simply bow down and get the inevitable over with.

Dark delight filled the demon’s aura and his expression, his body language obvious. Delight in destruction, and causing carnage and chaos, a pseudo-sexual thrill of it, conveyed by the sneer on the demon’s face, the glare he gave one of the other individuals in the painting, a female Kaldorei standing to the other side of the main fighter, the one wielding double-ended sword glaives. The need to destroy, to break people, and a delight in the doing. All of that was woven into the aura of the demon, conveyed to Harry through the memory used to enchant the painting.

And just as disturbing to the owner of this memory was the sight of both one of the demon’s followers, who Harry hadn’t really noticed in the painting at all, and the man fighting the

demon. Unbidden to Harry came the term 'demon hunter' pulled from his memories of conversations with Cenarius about the War of the Ancients, which had been a major topic of discussion between the two of them for the seasons that Harry had spent with the ancient demigod. Those like Illidan Stormrage who had taken on an aspect of demonic power to better combat the demons.

But that way lay madness, which Harry acknowledged now even as he had when he had heard that story before. *You can't turn to Dark spells to combat dark wizards and not expect to be changed by the use.*

Certain spells and magical abilities from Harry's home world brought with them the danger of tainting those who used them. To use the killing curse, you must hate absolutely, must wish to kill with every fiber of your being. To use the Cruciatu, you must wish to cause pain, agony, to lord over your opponents. And such thoughts changed an individual, even when they were not connected to magic, and magic had an impact all on its own. Where the Highborne had simple magical addiction, a need to create sources of arcane power and use that power, in Harry's old world there had been Dark spells, rituals and enchantments which could change an individual from the inside out. And in the eyes of the demon hunter, the man whose memory Harry was experiencing could see a person warring with interest in the power and abilities being shown, combating that interest with his own knowledge. But the unknown watcher still felt uneasy, felt disturbed by the interest therein.

In a way, the image of the Highborne elf working with the demon was one thing. In her face, there was a kind of animalistic delight in what they were doing, a desire to destroy that was almost spiritual in nature, an addiction that was horrifying to see, like a druggie hitting a high after months or abstaining. As if she worshipped the very act of destruction, along with the demons would give her so much power. Gone was any sense of fellow feeling from that face, gone even was any recognition as the eyes of the Highborne elf following the demon moved over the eyes of the watcher, despite the watcher himself feeling +that pang of knowledge keenly.

Harry wrenched his hand away from the painting, gasping and shaking his head, growling in fury. "No!" Not certain what he was shouting no too, Harry still felt he had to give it voice, his mind rattled by what had just happened, his Occlumentic realm, which was still not quite set up the way he really wanted it to be, now a jumble. The basilisk side of him was furious, angry at what it saw as a threat to the natural order of things. His Phoenix side was on guard, the Light within him worried and seeing so much Dark magic at work. And his human side was simply appalled and angry, willing himself to fight both the evil the demon itself represented, the vileness its corruption represented.

"Know what, Harry Potter? What are you saying 'no' to, Planeswalker?" The old Tauren asked quietly, while both Kaldorei looked on, the older man's face shutting down even further for a moment, his eyes skittering away from Harry than to the painting and back while Sylina simply

watched Harry in confusion, wondering what kind of vision he had been shown and worried about what seeing that vision might mean for her in the future.

“No. I mean, that those demons, they cannot...” Harry paused, gathering his disjointed thoughts before going on. “Along with seeing what the demon was doing, I could feel the corruption it had caused both in the world around it and in the individuals nearby but those who had willingly given themselves to the pursuit of power and those who were being drawn to it for what they thought of as noble reasons. It is horrible, almost beyond my understanding. I want to, to reject it, I want to stop it from happening again.”

“And that is but one image. A powerful image to be certain. The individual whose memory was used in that painting was a soldier. A member of our Order in point of fact, when we were but the scouts and thief catchers of Kaldorei society, working with the army and greater police force. We noticed the corruption plaguing the Highborne, and did our best to combat it, never realizing the corruption came straight from the top until it was too late.”

Sighing faintly, the old Tauren went on. “He knew both Illidan and Ur’kusa, the sorceress you see standing with the demon in that image, indeed, they were cousins. Thus his emotions of facing her in battle comes through quite strongly, as well as his appalled understanding growing of what was occurring to Illidan, what had occurred to his cousin already. You should see the image that was made by taking Shan’do Cenarius’ own memories of the breaking of the world. That is another mural like this one, although it is kept by the temple of Elune in Nordrassil. Only the most powerful minds can touch that particular painting without being broken by the grief contained within.”

The old Tauren stepped closer to Harry, laying his staff gently on Harry’s shoulder, although despite the gentleness of that gesture, the sheer weight of the staff nearly drove Harry to his knees. While far stronger and imbued with nature magic, he was still just a seventeen-year-old squishy human after all and there was a lot more weight to the staff than its physical appearance conveyed. “I was watching you closely. As was Feltstep. You showed no sign whatsoever of being interested in the demonic magics, you showed no sign of being seduced by the power of the arcane magics being used. All you showed was determination, you wanted to fight that demon did you not?”

“Of course! Who wouldn’t?” Harry retorted.

“Far too many.” The old Tauren said, shaking his head and removing his staff from Harry’s shoulder, letting the butt of it fall to the ground once more. “Far too many, when it becomes time to give their final oath to the Unseen Path shirk away from it, knowing that they might be called upon to fight such powerful evil. But it looks as if you are indeed made of sterner stuff than that, as I was told you might be.”

“That’s the second time you’ve mentioned that you were waiting for me. Did Tyre tell you I was coming?” Harry asked, now once more on firmer ground, mentally speaking.

“You and your giant snake companion yes, although that was not the first time I had heard your name. The whispers of the wind carried it to me from Ashenvale. Now, I believe that Narvae owes you an apology.”

Harry turned to look at the older Kaldorei, whose first name was apparently Narvae, something the man hadn't shared with them before this. He scowled, the expression far more open than anything Harry had seen from him before, his ears practically rigid as they stood up from his head in his annoyance. And when he spoke, he did not address Harry, but the old Tauren. “Why did you do that Vurg? What could possibly have allowed you to let this arcana user to touch one of our order's sacred paintings?”

“You well know the answer. Or can you look me in the eye and say that your primary concerns for Harry Potter still exist? This way, both you and any other Kaldorei who are concerned of Harry's presence will have at least the majority of their questions answered,” the old man said dryly.

Feltstep winced, but could no longer put it off. He turned fully to face Harry Potter, nodding his head once in supplication. “I apologize,” he said stiffly. “You are an arcana user. I was among those who were sent to North read and at one point to try and convince the highborn there to give up magic. But we were too late. While some of their men detained me and my fellows, the blue dragons came, furious at something. We still do not know what, as they have not communicated with us or anyone else. Regardless, they attacked the colony of highborn there, and the highborn, in their hubris, created some kind of enchantment that backfired. Now all that remains there is crystals and the dead.”

He spoke brusquely, but Harry could see horror in the man's eyes, the stiffness of his posture now making more sense as he went on. “I've seen firsthand both in the War of the Ancients and since what arcana addiction can do. And even though I sensed no external source of magic that you were drawing upon bar the natural powers of the world I could not be certain that you would not crave more. Now, after you passed the trial of the painting, I no longer can doubt your convictions. I am still leery of your magic, and would prefer not to be around you. I am also concerned that even as odd as your magic is, it could still be a beacon to demons.”

“That last, I can put it rest at least. Both Shan'do Cenarius and Tyrande Whisperwind have stated on different points that they do not believe that my magic is detectable at any kind of range. It can a splash close by, but farther away, there isn't even a whisper.” *That was why I was able to move about Ashenvale for so long undetected.*

“I will believe that, for now. I will not even object to you joining the Unseen Path. But I think I will always be wary of you Harry Potter, and you should not believe that others of my race among us will be as welcoming as Sungaze is either. I will leave you and Sungaze with Vurg. Sylina, you will rejoin me at a later date for further training.” With that, he turned and marched off, heading back outside, presumably to some other task.

The old Tauren bowed, the movement both welcoming, and somewhat wry as he once more gestured with his staff deeper into deeper into the hill. "Welcome, Harry Potter, Sylina Sungaze. We have been expecting you. My name is Vurg Farstride, which Narvae would have told you were he not currently off-balance at having his presupposed notions of your character being so easily dispatched. I am currently the leader of our... somewhat now diminished order, my rank being that of Pathfinder. I believe that we have much to talk about, but before that, your first Oath must be taken. Come, Ohn'ahra awaits."

End Chapter

I could have continued on here for a bit, but I really want to get the Unseen Path perfect, you know? This will give me some reoccurring characters to continue to use through the next literal ages of the timeline, which cannot be understated. Further, it will give Harry a means to more easily get in contact with allies he is far away from, once his own message delivery magic has started to spread. And Harry in turn can help the Unseen Path become far more organized and better at its duties going forward. At present, as you can see, they've got quite a few tricks up their sleeve, but the troubles they are facing will become evident going forward.

Despite the abrupt end and the lack of action, I hope you all enjoyed this chapter, the last chapter that was almost completely devoted to Harry's getting stronger and growing in self-knowledge. From now on, while he will still be growing in such a manner, the world exploration will also begin! I predict at least four chapters maybe six or so of that before we get to the first real conflict in this story.