

Yo, everyone. Here is the next episode of Death's Avenger. Sorry it took so long, but considering I added a little over five thousand words thanks to Tomon's ideas, I think you should all enjoy this. I hope anyway, LOL. It's also now the size of a small story chapter... so yeah. LOL.

This has been edited by Tomon and me with Grammarly.

## **Death's Avenger, Episode 4, Chapter 2**

The next day, Harry and Tyrande joined a select group from the High Chief's war band. They would be heading to one of the tunnels the Drogbar had used at the beginning of the current trouble set between the Blood Totem and Highmountain tribes. It hadn't been used since the initial push

At first, Lars wanted to take his entire band, but Harry counseled against it. "The more people I have to hide under my spells, the less effective they're going to be. For one thing, the more people I hide at one time, the more it takes out of me. For another, the more movement, the more quickly a spell breaks."

With Tyrande volunteering, the two of them showed what he meant by this. Walking, Tyrande could make her way entirely through the town without being seen or breaking the Disillusion charm placed on her. But when she started to run, the spell faded out in a few dozen steps.

"Hmm, it's actually good to see that your magic has limits. Unlimited power is something anyone sane should be happy about seeing in the hands of anyone, even themselves. Besides High Chief, you know that we'll have issues anyway invading the Drogbar caves," opined one of the older warriors there, reflexively tapping the top of his moose-like horns reflectively. "I doubt any spell will cover the sound of horns scrapping on rock overlong."

The other experienced warriors around them all grunted agreement, with a few of them even breaking out into chuckles. Tyrande and Harry looked at them in confusion, and Lars smiled, tapping his chest where Harry's head was and then where Tyrande's head was. "Let's just say that moving around underground is somewhat troublesome for beings of our size."

"I could shrink you," Harry suggested, his lips twitching. "I've done the same thing to Quetzal here a few times."

"I wouldn't recommend it," Quetzal grumbled. "It wasn't pleasant to relearn how to fight as a much younger version of myself."

"I don't know. Being small sounds like a fun adventure," Shy-rotam announced from where Tyrande was currently rubbing her belly, the tiger's voice interspersed with loud rumbling purrs. "It'd be interesting to fight one of those brave striped creatures on an even footing, or maybe even hunt a squirrel on its level."

All the Tauren there shivered, shaking their heads in unison, sending bangles and beads to clapping so loud it created a cacophony of sounds. "No, thank you, Harry," Lars said very firmly.

With Harry's point made, Lars cut down the size of his war band to be himself, three warriors, and a shaman. The choosing was fierce, but eventually, they were ready to go, and Lars led the way out of town, with his band of four Tauren fanning out around their new allies.

The Tauren headed slightly eastward from the direction that Harry and Tyrande had entered the town from. The forest around them became larger and deeper as they went. It was surprising to Harry that all of this was on top of a large mountain, but twice during their journey, Harry saw other steam vents explaining away how it was possible to have this abundant foliage and life. *Although how the heck some of the animals I've seen got up here is a different story. I don't see squirrels being able to get up that mountain, let alone tigers. Then again, maybe in the distant past, there was an easier way up here?*

After pausing for a light midday meal, the group carried on, but before long, they halted at a shout coming from one side of the route they were following. "There you are, oh High Chief! I understand that we are finally going to do something about the Drogbar problem?"

From out of the woods on all sides came a large band of Tauren, twenty strong or more. All of them were dressed in red and brown colors and showed the sigil of the Blood Totem tribe on their shoulders. Unlike the mix of spears and bows that the Rivermane tribe favored, these Tauren wielded large double-headed axes or warhammers to a man. A few favored multiple smaller axes, evidently for both throwing and dual wielding. All in all, they seemed a much more warlike group than the Rivermane tribe, which fit with what Harry and his companions knew about the tribe in question.

What was even more evident was the scowl on their faces and the glares that they sent in Quetzal's direction. "And why are you traveling with such a beast as that? Has a shaman bound with it, is it an ancestor spirit of some kind given life once more?"

"Hello to you too, Tarn Fangsnapper," Lars answered mildly. He showed no concern or even apprehension as he stepped forward towards the Tauren who had spoken.

While Quetzal and Shy-rotam both narrowed their eyes at the so-named Tauren, Harry and Tyrande also studied him carefully. He was the largest Tauren they had yet seen, with much broader shoulders than the High Chief. In one hand, he held a large axe that looked so large it could probably kill someone Harry's size just by the weight of it alone. Scars were evident scattered across his body, the most startling being one across the face that looked as if

it had opened nearly claimed his eye in some bygone battle, missing by a hairsbreadth and traveling along with his nose and then around the other end. It gave the Tauren a perpetually aggressive, snarling sort of appearance.

Lars exchanged a forearm clasp with the larger Tauren without any sign of fear or concern, even his tone continuing to reflect that. "As for the snake, his name's Quetzal. He came with his two companions, who have offered to aid us in this current crisis. Indeed, their aid is the basis of my current plan for dealing with the Drogbar at all."

"Companions?" Tarn's face had mellowed considerably as Lars stood in front of him as if accepting the fact that the High Chief wasn't intimidated and approving of it. But now, as he looked past Lars and spotted Tyrande and Harry, his scowl came back with a vengeance, and he broke off their handclasp to thrust a finger over Lars' shoulder to point at the two of them angrily. "What are outsiders doing here!?"

"Tarn, be known to Tyrande Whisperwind," Lars announced, not even needing to mention her title or anything else. Tyrande's name was enough. "With her is Harry Potter, a human."

At the name Whisperwind, Tarn's face seemed to fight itself between his automatic distrust of other races and respect for a warrior of her capabilities. "...I suppose if Tyrande's combat prowess hasn't been exaggerated over the centuries, that her presence in the warband is acceptable enough, although I still think that this problem is something we should be able to handle on our own! And as for her companion, what is a human?" Tarn barked a laugh. "And how could he be any help? He looks as if I could break him into by patting him on the back."

"You would find that a bit more difficult than you might think," Harry interjected before Lars could answer or Tyrande could try to calm the waters. "Especially considering I'd have to let you touch me, let alone hurt me."

Tarn stomped over, Lars allowing the other Tauren to pass them without comment, watching from the sidelines now as Tarn loomed over Harry. "And you think you could stop me, little creature? You barely come up to my chest, and your thighs barely look larger than my daughter's forearms! Are all your people so feeble?"

"We might be weaker physically than you Tauren, but I think we make up for it in speed. The council is still out on whether or not we have equal amounts of brain. Before this, I would've said so, but your example is making me question that assumption," Harry drawled, trying to give his words the same twist Snape always did when he insulted Harry or the other Gryffindors.

Tyrande stepped forward, but Lars stopped her with a gentle shake of his head, gesturing to Quetzal to stay out of the confrontation as well. Having another outsider step in would only exacerbate issues. Understanding what Lars meant without needing to be told, Tyrande sighed, then held up her hands and moved back a pace, pushing Shy-rotam behind her,

very visibly removing the two of them from the current confrontation. Whatever happened, she was not involved.

“You dare insult me!” Tarn bellowed, raising his battleaxe.

Whether or not he actually would have attacked Harry was a question since none of his fellows seemed at all concerned, nor did Lars and his own people. But Harry wasn't about to let Tarn even swing his axe. He waved a hand, magic flashing out.

To one side, Tyrande saw the magic hit the Blood Totem chieftain's weapon and had to roll her eyes, her ears flicking down then back up in a sign of resigned amusement.

“Among my people, giving someone a bouquet of flowers is part of the courting ritual. But I got to tell you, Tarn, you're not my type.”

Tarn frowned, feeling his weapon suddenly weigh far less than it should. Turning, he looked up at his battleaxe, only to find that it had been transfigured into a bouquet of paper flowers held together by a thin wooden vase, the only thing about the original weapon that hadn't changed. “What, how!?” His eyes turned red as he turned back to Harry, raising his free fist as he put two and two together. “How dare you use magic on me!”

The rest of his war band also growled, hefting their weapons and moving forward. In actuality, the Tauren didn't have much problem with magic because none alive could remember the Kaldorei who had fought for the Demons in the War of the Ancients. Most of the magic they knew of was the Nature and Element Magic their shamans could call upon. While they hadn't seen anyone using magic to change one thing into another before, it normally would simply be interesting to them. But using magic on someone else outside of a life or death situation was incredibly rude. Indeed, it was seen as grounds for a duel, especially if used on a chieftain without his approval.

But Quetzal moved out of the pack of Rivermane Tauren, who also hefted their weapons. The snake reared up, staring down at them, his tongue flicking out as the spines on his back stood straight in preparation for launching. “I think you should reconsider that decision,” the giant snake hissed while Shy-rotam also bounded forward, crouching down in preparation of leaping.

Since Harry had once again renewed the translation spell on both animals earlier that morning, all of the Tauren around him understood the Needlespine Shimmerback's words even if they didn't speak the common Kaldorei tongue, and the Blood Totem clan members all paused, shaken out of their anger at Harry's use of magic on their Chieftain by the revelation that the animal could speak intelligently. Shamans could speak with some animals and even understand their speech but allowing others to do so was beyond them. And most animals, bar the giant Eagles that the Skyhorn clan bonded with certainly didn't sound as intelligent as the giant snake.

Harry dodged the blow from Tarn easily, then leaped over a kick, rolling along on the ground for a moment. Tarn's speed had surprised him from someone so big, but now he twisted around, his fingers flashing out towards the large Tauren. Instantly the man doubled over in laughter, holding his stomach as he began to bellow and dancing in place as he was being tickled. "Haha, What, hahaha how, hehe, these spells, I, hahaha, I have never heard of the like!"

"Let's just say that I don't come from around here. Now, are we doing posturing, or should I start using lethal spells?"

Tarn looked around, trying to concentrate through his current peroxisomes of laughter, but couldn't find the creature he had challenged. "Where, haha, where are you!?"

"Why would I tell you that? You just tried to attack me, remember?" Harry's voice came out of nowhere. The wizard had taken the opportunity to pull his invisibility cloak around him.

"Ha, haha, have you no honor! Stand and, haha, fight like a..."

"I'm not a Tauren. Why would I fight like one?" Harry's questioned, his tone mildly incredulous.

Tarn surprised him a second later as he threw the bouquet of paper flowers in that direction. But Harry had used another spell to send his voice to a location two yards to his side, so the flowers didn't hit him and thus give his position away.

"I think that's enough, Harry. Cancel the spell on Tarn. Although, you might want to stay hidden for a bit." Lars finally spoke up, a little too late, and Tyrande's opinion. But he knew his people best, and she subtly pushed her moon glaive back into its holster on her back.

With an unseen shrug, Harry did so, noting absently that both animals were already looking in his direction. *Right, scent. I need to ask whether or not the Drogbar have a heightened sense of smell before we get there.*

As Tarn recovered, Lars helped the larger Tauren to his feet. "I let that go longer than I normally would allow someone to challenge someone given rights, Tarn Fangsnapper, because I wanted you to see what Harry brings to the fire pit."

Tarn grunted but heard the word of warning in Lars's tone and crossed his arms over his chest, bowing from the waist very slightly towards the High Chief. "Your pardon, High Chief, I didn't realize that you gave these outsiders guest rights. I don't agree that they should be part of solving this issue with the Drogbar. It makes us seem weak. But I'll at least listen to your reasoning."

"We don't want a war. A war between the Drogbar and us would be inconclusive at best. We could invade portions of their tunnels, but we could never conquer them. But we both know that trying to solve this diplomatically has failed. So that leaves subterfuge. Harry, as you

just saw, brings quite a lot of skills that will help us in such a mission,” Lars explained, moving over to pick up the bouquet of flowers.

With a true wizard's sense of timing, Harry hit the flowers with a Finite Incantatum, reverting them back to their original form. Lars nearly lost his grip on the weapon but didn't, and then held it out shaft-first towards Tarn. “Do you think you will need another example, or can we move on?”

Taking his battleaxe back, Tarn looked at it suspiciously, hefting it this way and that and then moving over to a nearby downed tree limb, hacking through it with a single blow. He then inspected the edge of his weapon, nodding in approval. “Just as sharp as it was before it became flowers. I will not forget that affront, but this Harry Potter has proven that he will be useful High Chief.”

“That's good to hear,” Harry said mildly, coming out from behind his cloak next to Tyrande, who, much to his annoyance, didn't flinch. Instead, she simply cocked an ear in his direction, not turning away from where she was still watching the two Tauren leaders, her body language suggesting that she was amused by his antics but not surprised.

Tarn sent him a glare but turned back to Lars as he explained the plan. After a moment, Tarn nodded firm agreement. “I still don't like relying on an outsider, but his spells should allow us to infiltrate the Drogbar caves. Cutting the head of the beast off rather than becoming deadlocked in a war that would not go anywhere sounds like a good idea to me.”

Although the words didn't sound all that approving, he did clap Lars on the shoulder, an admission that he had been in the wrong. That act made Harry think slightly better of the bellicose Blood Totem chieftain, but he doubted the two of them would ever get along.

In contrast, when the next group joined them around evening, they were led by someone Harry already knew and was happy to see.

“Well now, when I was told a giant snake was traveling with the High Chieftain and the Blood Totem war tribe, I didn't quite make the connection. After all, the last time I saw you and your companion Harry Potter, he was not nearly that large. But it is good to meet you once more.” Tyre Fleetforest smiled at Harry as he clasped forearms with the human. “It's even better to see that you are alive at all, considering the last time I saw you, you were heading off to attack a force of satyrs.”

The other members of the Highmountain war tribe with Tyre all smiled in welcome as well. It was clear that he had told them how Harry had helped free Tyre from the satyrs several years ago.

“I didn't know you were a chieftain when we met, Tyre,” Harry answered, cocking his head to one side.

"I wasn't at the time, but my tribe elected me to the position after our old chief died soon after my return," Tyre answered, shaking his head with a sigh.

"What is this?" Tarn asked, looking between Tyre and Harry. "You have fought satyrs as well, human?"

"Yes," Harry said with a shrug. "I met Tyre when I rescued him and a group of Furbolgs from a warband of satyrs which had attacked the village he was staying in. Together we wiped out the warband and freed the other captives."

Tyre barked a laugh. "Ha! Harry is too modest. He did most of the work at the time, as I was poisoned by some fell satyr concoction that stopped me from using my shaman powers."

"If you had told me of your past accomplishments, I might not have challenged you," Tarn grumbled, still smarting from his humiliation earlier that day. Left unsaid was that he probably would still have challenged Harry, such was the antipathy the Blood Totem tribe had for outsiders.

Harry seems to sense that and replied mildly, "I'm not one to toot my own horn like that."

"What does tooting a horn have to do with anything?" Lars asked quizzically, while the others all around Harry also looked confused save for Tyrande, who chuckled quietly at the use of what she knew was another colloquialism.

Harry slapped a palm to his forehead. "Nevermind. It's just a saying among my people for bragging about one's own accomplishments. I just have never seen the point to it." *Except when I want to intimidate someone*, He amended mentally. *And even then, just my name and lightning bolt scar were normally enough.*

"That too does you credit in my eyes," Lars responded, with Tyre nodding in agreement while Tarn still looked annoyed with Harry. Indeed, he looked annoyed at Harry and Tyrande, but such was Tyrande's position and reputation that he couldn't quite challenge her being there. The two animals barely registered in his mind. "Tales around the campfire are fun and can help to educate the young but bragging about your own accomplishments is foolish."

"Well said," Tyrande murmured, and she and Harry exchanged a glance, the human bowing his head toward her in response. After all, Tyrande's experiences made Harry's pale in comparison.

Lars explained the plan to Tyre, who nodded instant agreement. Anything that kept the bloodshed to a minimum was good in his eyes, just like it was to Lars and Tarn, despite the latter's belligerence. "Besides, the Drogbar are monolithic and culture. Their King has far more power over their society and people than any Chieftain of the Tauren has ever had, Even Huln himself. Indeed, in a way, the Drogbar are almost animalistic like that: the alpha male being the king and controlling everything his pack does."

The other two Tauren leaders frowned at that, as did Tyrande. "It is that pronounced? I didn't realize it was that bad."

"It is simply their way. The Drogbar are simple folk, very set in their ways. They do not grow as we do, learn or expand as we do. Do not attempt to try to place our values and beliefs on them," Tyre warned.

"Bah, who cares about that? All I'm hearing is that the High Chief's plan to kill the Drogbar King will work even better than he expected. That is all I need to know." Tarn grunted.

Lars was about to remonstrate with him that violence was only going to be the last recourse, that they were going to sneak in and try to talk to the King first face-to-face, but he decided against it. *Tarn is in a bad enough mood as it is. Better to spring that on him when it becomes time, I think.*

After a few moments, Lars had picked out a group that would go with them. He only chose three others, but besides Tyre himself, two of his fellows were also shamans, giving them a total of four. That seemed to assuage even Tarn, who had offered ten of his own warriors to the effort, only to have them be pared down to an equal number to the Rivermane tribe without a single Shaman among them.

This gave the war band fourteen warriors, including the three Chieftains and four shamans. Harry, Tyrande, and the two animals added four more. This was still a bit larger than Harry thought was a good idea, but he didn't object, knowing the three clans wanted to be represented equally. Indeed, it was only the fact that the Skyhorn tribe was on the opposite side of the valley from the tunnel Lars had decided was their best bet that there weren't still more of the Tauren.

They stayed with the rest of the Highmountain warband that night, setting out early the next day, traveling at what would have been a breakneck pace for a human force, pushing Harry and Quetzal hard. Yet, it seemed the normal speed for the Tauren, who raced along on their hooves as fast as reindeer or moose could move.

Soon, they started to see signs of conflict in the trees and on the ground around them and signs of significant animal movement in the area. When Harry questioned this, one of the shamans running next to them responded. They'd been having a somewhat disjointed conversation about Harry's reasons for being there and the Nature Magic that the Shaman could sense in him, as well as if Harry had a source for his own magic power. Which he technically did, but not in the way the Tauren was concerned about, allaying their fears as he had done when he and Tyrande had first reached the High Chieftain's town.

"This area was home to several herds of reindeer. They were not exactly domesticated, but members of the Rivermane tribe routinely came by to harvest their fur and cull the herds. The Drogbar would come either to take a few of them, meat is not easy to come by in their



caves, or trade with the Rivermane tribe. But when these hostilities began, the herds in this area were among the first casualties, with a few survivors fleeing.”

“The same can be said for other beasts within striking range of one of the Drogbar’s tunnels,” another shaman interjected. “Meat is a staple of their diet, but they simply started to kill for the pleasure of it. I know that several other herds of animals and even some predators have been killed by the Drogbar since this began. They don’t just raid farms or settlements.”

Harry frowned at that, seeing a connection to how the Frost Maul Giants had acted, which was made worse when one of the other warriors muttered, “that’s as maybe, but I know that they also take a lot of their kills away. I didn’t think the Drogbar population was that large. What are they doing with all the meat they take away? They surely can’t preserve it for overlong, can they?”

“Perhaps. The Drogbar could transport ice relatively easily into their caves, after all,” the first Shaman spoke again.

Harry listened attentively and yet found himself glancing at one of the other shamans, one of the ones who hadn’t spoken yet. On the surface, there was quite a bit about him to grab Harry’s attention.

He was one of the few Tauren that didn’t come in shades of brown and red that Harry had seen. Instead, his hide was a darker color, almost a black hue, while his hair was pure black. His horns two were large and worthy of consideration, being almost as large as those on the Chieftain or some of the oldest members of their war party. Yet, the Shaman in question didn’t look all that old to Harry’s eyes.

Yet, that was simply physical. For some reason, Harry felt as if there was something... Off about the Shaman. Different. It was as if his Nature Magic was telling him that something here was not what it seemed. This was exacerbated by the fact the Shaman in question was trying to keep at least three of his fellows between himself and Harry at all times and seemed to flinch whenever he felt Harry’s gaze on him. It was quite odd.

Still, Harry decided not to inquire further. Instead, he questioned the others about fighting the Drogbar and why Lars said they might have trouble fighting in the tunnels anyway. Many of the Tauren chuckled, a sound mixing amusement with grimness in equal measure.

Surprisingly, it was one of the warriors from the Blood Totem tribe who answered him. His tone was gruff, and he didn’t look very approving as he looked at Harry and over at Tyrande, yet he still answered. “The Drogbar, as you have seen, are shorter than my people. Whenever we have gone to them on diplomatic missions before, we have come upon areas that take advantage of that. The tunnels narrow so much that even Drogbar have trouble getting past while the roof comes down to just above their head height. It makes us almost impossible for us to fight our way into the tunnels beyond a certain point.”

“Then why did Lars not agree to my idea about shrinking you all?” Harry asked disingenuously, wanting to both understand why and needle the Blood Totem tribe further. Their isolationist views reminded him a little too much of the prevailing thoughts of the Wizarding World, although he had thankfully not heard anything about their thinking that they were superior or wanted to wipe out other Tauren for having impure blood.

All of the Tauren within hearing range stared at him in horror, even the one that Harry had been surreptitiously gazing at before overcoming his aversion to Harry to stare at him in shock. “That would be horrifying! Having magic used on us in such a way by someone outside our own clans would be an indignity no warrior would allow. It was somewhat allowable during your battle with Tarn, but trust an unknown magic-user of another race to perform such on us? That would not be something any of us would endure save perhaps in the heat of battle,” the Blood totem warrior said, his voice conveying his shock at the very idea.

Tyre was a bit more honest, chuckling dryly. “There’s more than simple distrust of your magic working here, Harry. Height is **important** among Tauren. Our height is a sign of our status to our fellows. It is a social convention, much like our horns, and the marks we bare to show we have passed the Rites of the Earthmother and continue to do so to prove our status.”

“More importantly, much of our combat style relies on us having a greater reach and size than our opponents. If we went into a combat situation so shrunk, it might leave us open to being overwhelmed in a way we would not normally be,” another warrior added, looking around at his fellows, wincing. “But it might be a good idea to get through the chokepoints.”

There was a rumble of reluctant agreement at that, although most of them still looked very wary at the idea, and the conversation turned to other matters. Specifically, Harry was surprised to learn that the Drogbar also had some magic of their own. They had an extreme affinity with stone and earth magic and could take power from the earth and stone much like the Kaldorei druids and Tauren shaman could from nature, if in a very different manner from either of those equally disparate groups.

“They do not seem to innovate, and from what I understand, Drogbar shaman won’t have as vast a repertoire of different spells as you do, Harry. But what spells they do have are powerful and will be more dangerous underground,” Tyre said.

“Stone spikes, bringing the roof down, creating chasms on the floor, creating a Golem, maybe?” Harry asked, counting spells off in his finger.

“All but that last one I have heard of. But what is a Golem?” Lars asked from where he was leading the group forward.

“A stone monster that I can create and command during the battle. It could be a force multiplier if we need it.”

“Wait, you mean you can summon an Earth Elemental?” one of the Highmountain Shamans asked in interest. “That’s fascinating. How intelligent are the elementals you summon? I can summon a small one, but the stone around here is so saturated with magic it would stay around forever if I but allowed it.”

“Er, not intelligent at all. My golems are just dumb rock given form and commanded by me. What is an Earth Elemental? You make it sound as if it is something alive.”

As one, the shamans all turned to the oldest member of their brotherhood there, a Riverman tribesman who had come with Lars. He smiled and stepped over to Harry, running beside him. “I think, Harry, we need to talk a bit more about this. You see, when we speak about Elementals, we speak of actual element-based spirits. Elementals live on different planes of existence, and...”

The following conversation was utterly fascinating, and the Shaman was somewhat thankful to realize that Harry’s golems were not, in fact, elemental spirits, while also being pleased to discover Harry was a good listener. As the conversation shifted to the Elemental Spirits themselves, Tyrande began to add her own knowledge of the Elemental plains. She knew in particular about their Lords, having learned of them from Alexstrasza herself in ancient times, and knowing that they had served, some willingly, some not, the Old Gods. She hadn’t seen Harry use his golem spell before and asked him why at one point.

“Eh, it’s not something I do normally, as back home, large-scale constructs like that were often more trouble than they were worth. My enemies would either destroy them easily, or their creation would give my presence away,” Harry admitted, somewhat dumbing down the reasoning behind his decision to not use golems often.

The fact was, golems were destructive but easy to destroy in turn by most spells, although they had their uses when fighting in an area that you didn’t mind laying waste to. And to be blunt about it, Harry hadn’t really experimented with them all that often before coming to this world. Despite that and his bemusement on there being actual elemental spirits, Harry was certain now that attaining a new outlook on his chimeric body wasn’t the only thing he would be learning from the Tauren.

At around midafternoon, the warband’s scouts crested a rise and found themselves looking down into a small dell in the valley floor, where an entrance to a cave could be seen among sparse trees. Soon Harry and the other leaders were all hiding, laid out among a few bushes as they stared down into the dell.

Lars scowled, shaking his head very slightly so his horns didn’t rustle the surrounding foliage too much. “That is the Drogbar tunnel that I was leading us towards. It was one of the first they used to attack from, but they haven’t done so since. I’d hoped it would be abandoned, but...”

The reason for their caution was a force of four Drogbar moving around a small fireplace right in front of the cave. Given how the Drogbar had been able to ambush him and Tyrande on their way up the mountain, Harry knew that meant there were probably at least two, maybe three times that number hidden nearby.

“Spread out. We’ll attack the Drogbar from every direction,” Tarn growled out, taking command from Lars, who looked at him sharply. That was a challenge to his leadership that he could not allow, and he hissed out a negative, glaring at the Blood Totem Chieftain.

After a moment, the other Tauren backed down but gestured down into the dell, his tone dripping sarcasm. “How then would you attack, High Chief?”

“I don’t think we should attack at all.” Tyrande spoke up. Everyone turned to her in some confusion, and she looked over at Harry. “Do you think you could create a sleep spell that would take out those guards?”

Harry frowned speculatively. “I could, and I could even get close to cast it without them noticing. But I don’t think I could find all of the Drogbar in hiding. I have a spell that could reveal them if they were members of my race, but the Human Revealing spell doesn’t work on other intelligent races. And unfortunately, it would only take one of them to sound the alarm, and then we would be fighting our way through the tunnels, which is not what we want to do,” he ended, deliberately looking over to Tarn, who huffed angrily. “I could maybe make an illusion and lead them off after something they want to chase…”

“I suggest we do something different,” Quetzal said, smirking slightly from where he had slithered up unheard behind them, watching the Tauren twitch. Harry had shrunk him to half his normal size an hour ago when the Tauren told Harry they were getting close to their target. “You all are overthinking this.”

“Alright, Scaly, what’s your plan?” Harry asked.

“If we cannot get past them, and if you cannot put them all to sleep, then we must scare them away. Scare the Drogbar back into their tunnels and then follow after. And I am quite frightening, you know. Since none who have seen me have survived to speak about my connection to the pink-skinned one, they will think I am just a dangerous beast who has moved into the area.”

“That could work,” Harry agreed with a nod while the Tauren all frowned a bit but said nothing. “Which direction should we scare them towards?”

Lars pointed to the north of where the sides of the dell were least steep. “If you attack from behind where the cave is, you can scare them away from it down that direction. We’ll set up an ambush there and wipe them out. We don’t want any of their war band to just start wandering around behind us, after all.”

Tyrande wasn't so certain about that, but again, this wasn't her land, and she was more than willing to let Lars take the lead on this. He and Tarn conferred for a few moments while Tyre led the other shamans out and around, followed quickly by the others, who gave Harry an approving glance, before following after their leaders, leaving Harry and Quetzal where they were.

"So, how big do you want to be, and do you want to rely just on your own chameleon scales, or what?"

"Since I am rather insulted already that the Tauren believe I will leave any of these creatures alive to flee, simply return me to my present size, and then hit me with one of your spells to help get me close. After that, I will do the rest," Quetzal declared proudly.

Harry did so, and Quetzal moved to attack the Drogbar. Once in position, he covered the distance as fast as the Disillusion spell on him would allow his own chameleon scales not as much help on the move.

The first the Drogbar knew of their peril was when Quetzal reared up, covering the last few feet between him and the first Drogbar within seconds. A quick bite had one of the creatures flailing in his mouth, where he was quickly swallowed. Then Quetzal was rearing up, hissing as he stared down at the other Drogbar, his long tongue flickering out.

The three surviving Drogbar visible outside the cave screamed in fright. Two Drogbar rushed inside, the other one turning away after hurling his spear up at Quetzal.

The spear did nothing to Quetzal's thick hide, and that Drogbar died, Quetzal's teeth sinking into its back like twin swords, picking him up and shaking him from side to side, to release him from the fangs, the paralytic in Quetzal's bite overkill to the size of his fangs. At the same time, several dozen Drogbar appeared from out of hiding places all around the cave, proving Harry right in his supposition they would be there, although this time they hadn't just used fake rocks. Instead, the Drogbar had created little foxholes for themselves with bushes pulled over the top, hiding in them like only the best human snipers would've been able to do.

The Drogbar hurled Spears up towards Quetzal, but then one of them knelt to touch the ground with both hands. Harry watched in interest from his hiding place as spikes began to appear along the ground heading towards Quetzal. But Quetzal simply smashed them aside, coiling for a moment, then springing forward, his whole body extended towards the Shaman.

The Shaman was a little too quick for Quetzal to snack on but was still headbutted backward, rolling like a spiky ball around along the ground.

This left the other Drogbar to grab up spare spears and clubs. With these, the Drogbar began to strike at Quetzal from several sides, but he just thrashed, tossing them this way and that, crushing one underneath his coils and then eating a second. Watching this, Harry was

amused in a somewhat morbid way. *I wonder how much Quetzal's volunteering to do something for once had to do with his desire to try what Droghbar tasted like.*

If that was so, and Quetzal would never admit it, he was now regretting his decision. *Ugh, they taste okay, but those spikes are annoying my stomach something fierce.*

Regardless of Quetzal's stomach problems, it only took a few strikes each for the Droghbar to realize that they couldn't really harm Quetzal. As that realization went through them, the Droghbar began to flee one by one. Unfortunately, they fled in every direction while the Shaman attempted to cast another spell towards Quetzal.

Busy smashing a Droghbar with his tail Quetzal was hit by the Shaman's spell this time and hissed in fury as a stone spike took them in the center of his body mass, hurling him backward and to the side. Yet the spikes couldn't penetrate his scales, and he twisted around and hissed balefully at the Shaman before slithering forward once more.

Harry killed two of the Droghbar as they came racing up the slight incline of the dale. Waiting until they were out of sight from further below in the dell, Harry hit each with a cutting spell to the neck. They fell, but looking around from under his cloak, Harry hoped that the Tauren were in a position to do the same.

Several more Droghbar came out of the tunnel behind where Quetzal was chasing after the Shaman. But they took one look at the giant snake, then shook their heads and fled, heading back inside the cave as fast as their legs could carry them.

*Now that could be good or bad,* Harry thought, before racing down as quickly as he could towards the cave.

A few hundred yards into the tunnel, Harry caught up with the Droghbar as they retreated deeper. They met up with a few others, bringing their total numbers to almost the same as the group Quetzal had dealt with. This made Harry wonder if maybe their timing had just been super bad and this group was coming out to relieve their fellows.

*Or does every tunnel have a reserve force like this?* Harry wondered, remembering the ambush they had sprung on the Droghbar attacking young Pahr Fangstone.

Regardless, none of the Droghbar looked to have any interest in rushing outside to fight Quetzal. In Harry's opinion, this was uncommonly wise of them, and he followed on their heels as they retreated further into the tunnel.

The larger meeting area quickly gave way to a smaller tunnel, which choked off to the point where the Droghbar could only go in single file. The top of the tunnel almost scrapped their heads. *No wonder the Tauren had trouble fighting down here.* A Tauren would be forced to go on hands and knees, which would leave them horribly open to attack.

Harry had no such trouble walking behind the Drogbar as they entered. They continued on while the tunnel began to descend slightly. In this manner, they passed two more chokepoints before they reached a bend in the tunnel, at the end of which the tunnel connected to two others. There Harry paused, watching the direction they went, before deciding that the Drogbar didn't see Quetzal as a danger to their tunnels and seemed content to let him take control of the area around the entrance. *So that way will be the way to their main area.*

With that, he turned away, heading back outside, looking angrily at Quetzal and volubly denouncing Harry as a coward. "He fled! He ran away rather than take part in our foray into the tunnels. Are you certain that this one hadn't done all of his fighting for him, Tyre?" Tarn growled, pointing to Quetzal.

Pulling off his invisibility cloak, Harry called out, "Does that mean you wouldn't like to know what's exactly waiting for you in that tunnel? I could leave it as a surprise."

All of them turned to look at him, and he smiled. "I thought turning you lot invisible was the point of my being here. Is it any surprise that I would use that ability to scout ahead?"

"The Tauren are just bothered by the fact that Quetzal did his own thing and didn't let much fighting left for them, Harry," Tyrande replied, smiling faintly. "For my part, I thank you for scouting ahead of us. Did you run into any trouble?"

"There are a few chokepoints, but the Drogbar had a reaction force inside the tunnel. Heh, they took one look at Quetzal and decided to call it a day, so the tunnel is actually unguarded thanks to my friend."

"Just as I planned," Quetzal hissed. "My appearance terrorized them into fleeing, which allows us a much easier way forward."

"True, but you and the Tauren will all need to be shrunk, quite a bit in your case," Harry warned. "You were right about those chokepoints."

Tarn grumbled, but the other Tauren all looked pleased enough with Harry's forward-thinking, although apprehensive about the magic he would have to use on them. A moment later, the shamans began to cast spells to mask everyone's scents, making them smell like dirt and stone instead of living creatures, a useful spell to have among a race that preferred to hunt for most of their food. Another set of spells meant that anyone who heard anything of their passage would just hear natural noises, an equally nifty little spell Harry was eager to see if he could learn.

Harry went to work when they were done, casting spells on them all as they held hands. That necessity left all of the Tauren looked a little bemused by. But when Harry explained why, they all understood.

The last thing to be done was Harry shrinking Quetzal down to a manageable size within the tunnels. Then they were entering the tunnel, with Harry and Tyrande in the lead. That caused even further grumbling, but that grumbling subsided instantly as they reached the first chokepoint. Many of the Blood Totem tribesmen looked a little uneasy, muttering about whether or not that size continued on. Luckily for them, it didn't, and Harry canceled the shrinking spells once they reached the intersection.

Behind them, they left two of the shamans by the doorway. Three of the other warriors waited with them to guard the tunnel keeping an eye on either direction of the intersection. This way, the way out would be kept clear if the infiltration team had to retreat abruptly. Which they probably would, unless Lars' hope of talking the Drogbar King down worked.

Following the same direction that Harry had seen the Drogbar go, the party traveled in silence for some time. The tunnel didn't break off again, instead heading further down in intervals, passing through what was obviously small natural caves that had been connected by the Drogbar in some long-ago time. Some of these caves were being used by other drogbar, causing the party to slow as they passed through mushroom and fungi farms, the mushrooms as tall as Tyrande.

These small caves did not prepare Harry for the sight that greeted them when they reached their actual destination. Harry had built up the idea that the Drogbar lived in small caves, like the ones that had been passing through, not really doing much to change them up, almost living like animals more than thinking beings.

But this, what had to be the central town, or perhaps even city, disabused him of that notion. The cavern was large, the equivalent of several football stadiums in size. Along the edge of it were several series of interconnected houses built out of the side of the cave, moving up and down the walls in intervals, connected by walkways and stairs. In the center, further houses dotted the area larger and seemingly more prominent, perhaps for public venues or artisans, Harry wasn't certain.

Several hundred, or perhaps more than a few thousand, Drogbar moved around the cavern. With them were tiny creatures of various shapes and sizes which Tyre whispered were examples of Earth Elementals. Some of them were obviously work beasts: a few of them were working what looked like a water wheel pulling up water from some source beneath the cavern. Others pulled carts. But many were anything but, simply following around their masters, many of whom were young-looking Drogbar, as if they were pets.

But what most fascinated Harry was that above them, the stalactites of the cavern had been worked to a mirror shine, and lamps had been hung in a long spidery network of golden chains. In each lamp was set a massive candle, Harry couldn't estimate their size, but he felt they would be at least as large as his leg, maybe even more.



This created an atmosphere below that was, while dimmer than daylight would be, actually quite nice. It reminded Harry of being in the Great Hall in Hogwarts when the lights were turned low for dinner.

But the most impressive structure in the large cavern was certainly the one set at one end of the cavern's ovoid-shaped interior. For there, what had to be the equivalent of an underground castle rose. Built into the cavern wall like the majority of the Drogbar dwellings, it also came forward in the form of a series of staircases designed for Drogbar legs, shorter and longer than that of a human or night elves would prefer. To either side of the staircases were a series of statues of ancient Drogbar, although Harry had difficulty picking out differences between them save for the crowns they all wore. The castle's front was made into a series of frescoes surrounding a few holes in the stone, signifying windows looking out over the city.

"I'm going to go out on a limb and say that is our target?" Harry quipped in a low tone, causing Tyrande nearby to shake her head and poked him hard in the shoulder, indicating that perhaps he should be quiet.

Without any words being exchanged, the band of Tauren warriors began to break up into groups of three. There were just too many Drogbar moving around the city for them to get through to the castle without bumping into if the Tauren tried to get across in one group. They each moved across the cavern one group at a time, taking a different route each time.

Everyone had a few close calls thanks to how many Drogbar were around the cavern, with one of the Highmountain clan members having the worst experience as he was nearly hit by a cart backing out of one of the buildings in the center of the cavern. Luckily, Harry was nearby and renewed the Disillusion charm on him a second after it went out due to his fast movement.

Yet eventually, they were all together once more in front of the castle, with Tarn and the other Blood Totem warriors looking exasperated at the experience. Sneaking around like this was not for them. Luckily, it seemed as if the castle wasn't expecting visitors, and this area of the cavern was much quieter due to that.

After they had all taken a few seconds to recover, Lars led the way inside, trusting to Harry's spell work. Harry turned back to glance at Quetzal. "Stay here, my friend, and guard our back."

Grumbling, Quetzal agreed, moving into the shadow of one of the statues. There he lay, his chameleon scales letting him blend into the background even without Harry's spells so long as he didn't move.

Inside, the castle wasn't quite as impressive as the exterior. The stairwell abutted into a hallway that went on deeper into the solid rock of the mountain, but the rest of the castle wasn't as large as you would have thought from the front. There were only three rooms to a

side and one stairwell leading up to more above them before the hallway ended at the open doors leading into the throne room.

That throne room was smaller than the main hallway in Hogwarts, which was the only castle Harry had to compare this to. And beyond a few columns set against the two walls to either side, there also didn't seem to be much in the way of decoration. Except, that is, a long carpet set into the center of the room, his colors red, gold and bronze, and what looked like metal sconces holding more giant candles, although these were free-standing, not inside crystal.

Oh, and there was also a throne at the far end, on a dais. The throne was made of wood for some reason instead of stone, but even from the doorway into the hall, Harry could see it wasn't exactly a master-crafted item.

On top of that throne sat a Drogbar. He was a little taller, a little broader in the shoulders, but his colors were much more striking. Instead of the normal gray tone to his skin, his skin looked a little black in places, like freckles on a Drogbar and his spikes were entirely black. A large club made of a single piece of stone rested to one side with bits carved out at the top to create spikes. On one wrist, the Drogbar king wore a few bracelets, and his armor covered his potbelly stomach and chest, unlike most of the armor Harry had seen previously on Drogbar, which only protected their stomach. And unlike those Drogbar, the spikes of stone-like protrusions that came out of his arms, back and legs were also tipped with some kind of dark metal.

Now they were here, Harry moved to one side of the door, intending not to participate in the discussions, making certain his hood was up. If it came to trouble, he wanted to be invisible. Any hope of this being a peaceful meeting (if such a thing were possible, frankly, Harry was on Tarn's side on that score) would be left to Tyrande and Lars.

But as Tyrande and Lars stepped forward to make the trek down the carpet, things began to go wrong.

"And who is this, who has wandered into my halls covered with magic? Magic to obscure the minds of simple creatures like these Drogbar. Has someone discovered me? They must have! But I, in turn, have discovered you." An instant later, a blast of magic, raw power like Harry had not seen yet in this world, flew out, acting like a Finite Incantatum spell on the Disillusion charm Harry had cast on the Tauren and Tyrande.

Harry himself had been using his invisibility cloak and remained unseen for a moment. But he, like the others, was blasted off of his feet by the same roll of magic.

Tyrande rolled the attack, flipping in midair, her feet smacking into the wall by the door, pushing herself off and into a forward roll. The Tauren, like Harry, couldn't do the same and

slammed back into the walls or down the hall where they now struggled to rise, grabbing at weapons.

Those in the hallway pushed themselves to their feet, as outside, the few Drogbar guards they had passed to enter the palace now became aware of them. As the Tauren pushed to their feet, the Drogbar charged down the hall, wielding their clubs hurling themselves forward. But unlike in the outer tunnels of the Drogbar nation, these tunnels were wide enough for two Tauren to stand shoulder to shoulder, and pair of blood totem warriors who had been flung out into the hallway did so now, blocking the six Drogbar moving towards them.

They were helped in this action by Quetzal. Roused by the shouts and the sight of the Drogbar racing into the castle, he reared up from his hiding place and attacked the guards from behind, halting half of them before they could even engage the Tauren.

Behind them, one of the archers from the Rivermane clan also pulled his weapon taut, the bow having miraculously survived his tumble. Now he shot into the charging Drogbar, downing one with a shoulder wound and another with an arrow to the neck.

Behind those three warriors, their fellows slowly pushed themselves upright as the Drogbar who had risen from the throne looked directly at Tyrande and smiled. "Now, this is a prize! Whisperwind, the hated leader of the night elves, not as hated by my Lord as the Stormrage but still a prize. Not as great an affront, as great a trophy as the one I am here to seek, but still great!"

"What are you talking about?" Tyrande asked, her moon glaive in her hand, as she crouched down low, grimacing internally. *And why do I think this is no normal Drogbar king?*

The King's eyes glowed, and then he looked over at Lars, his eyes widening in recognition. "And you have even brought me hostages!" Not just the High Chief, but two who wear the marks of clan chieftains! Magnificent. I will have the one I am here for, and you! With both, I will be raised greatly in my Lord Deathwing's eyes when he awakes, greater even than Nefarian and Onyxia!"

At the name Deathwing, Tyrande's blood ran cold, and she remembered with a certain amount of horror that the Drogbar had served Deathwing thousands upon thousands of years ago when he was the Aspect of Earth. And then again, only unwillingly, when he had become Deathwing, betraying all of the other aspects as he unwittingly came under the influence of the Old Gods, becoming a self-styled Aspect of Death instead.

*But this is not Deathwing, praise the goddess!* With that thought, Tyrande barred her teeth, her moon glaive flickering around her from one hand to another as she glared at the transformed Black Flight member in front of her, unwilling to try and gain distance to use her bow in so small an area. "You will find, dragon, that my head is not so easy to take!"

At the word dragon, the stasis that seemed to have fallen over the Tauren at the creature's words broke, and they scattered all around the hall readying themselves to charge in. But the creature on the dais ignored them, laughing even as he batted aside a spell coming at him out of nowhere. "Bah, a magic-user hahaha, that will at least make this amusing. My name is Badrinath, remember it, Tyrande! It is the name of your killer. It is the name of the black dragon who will hail the return of our Lord with your carcass!"

With that, another blast of magic rose to engulf several more spells Harry had sent the creature's way, but this time Harry had enough warning to create a Protego in front of him and the nearest Tauren, protecting them. Then the creature began to change shape, growing, his stone-like skin changing into scales as he fell to all fours, the metal tips on the ends of his rocklike protrusion expanding before being shoot off with the tips of the spikes with a clang. One of them hit a Tauren, a warrior from the Highmountain tribe, right in the head.

He was flung backward, knocked unconscious by the impact. But with the speed imparted on those little bits of iron, Harry wondered if he was even alive. An impact like that would have probably killed any human or Kaldorei.

Thankfully he was the only casualty while the transformation continued, the raw magic coming off the creature having smashed them against the walls bar those protected by Harry's spell. The two warriors thus protected charged forwards, with Tyre clasping his hands once and then thrusting a palm forward, sending a spell that looked almost like a Patronus, but far more diffuse, in the form of a group of wolves.

Taking his cue from the Tauren, Harry sent another cutting spell at the still-growing dragon. But neither of their attacks did anything against the black dragon's scales, and it hissed in amusement, looking around it, as the change completed, and the dragon's bulk began to press them all backward.

"Hmmm, speaking of which, I thought that you night elves did away with your arcane fellows?" The dragon mused, his calm, almost lazy tone angering Harry, who launched a bowel exploding curse at the dragon, watching in dismay as it faded away the instant it hit the dragon. "Well, no matter, you are no match for my might!"

"Out!" Tyrande shouted. "We need room to maneuver, and if we stay in here, he'll just crush us with his bulk!"

The two blood totem warriors who had been guarding the hallway leading into the King's throne room now led the way with their Rivermane companion directly behind them. The group barely had time to get down the steps, pushing the group of guards ahead of them with the weight of their bodies when the black dragon burst out of the stone behind them. The monstrous beast treated the thick rock of the King's castle as naught but wood and not particularly strong wood at that.

With his forearms and upper body free, he now stood on all fours amid the rubble of the castle, slowly pulling himself out from the remnants, his tail swishing from side to side as it cleared. Badrinath kept his wings furled close to his body. The cavern was huge, but so was the dragon, and there wasn't quite enough room for him to fly.

The dragon reared his head up, staring past the invading force to the Drogbar all around them, before shrugging his shoulders. "Serve one way, or serve another, little creatures. That will be your choice once I have dealt with these interlopers."

At that, guided by old instincts and fears, many of the Drogbar fled, their screams filling the cavern with a cacophony that served as a harsh parody of the bustle before. In the ancient past, the Drogbar had served the Earth Aspect joyfully, but since his descent into Taint-fueled madness, Deathwing had become a figure of horror to them more than any other race. Hundreds died as they were crushed by their fellows in their haste to escape the dragon who had suddenly appeared in their midst.

But a few dozen stalwart souls did not flee. Instead, they hid, waiting for their fellows to pass or, if they were in apposition to, they charged towards where the former castle had stood. Some of those moved to attack the Tauren, causing Tarn to bellow a command to the nearest four Tauren, regardless of clan. They obeyed, forming a line behind their fellows to block the Drogbar set on attacking them.

More Drogbar, however, growled in anger and perhaps some chagrin, considering how Badrinath's words left no room to doubt what had happened. Already having grabbed up any weapon to hand, mostly mining tools or farming tools, they now charged forward, shouting out, "Never again! Never again!"

At the same time, a few smarter Drogbar shouted commands to the Earth Elementals around the cavern. Harry couldn't hear what those commands were, but the effect was obvious. The largest Earth Elementals started moving towards the dragon, while others shifted, growing into thick walls scattered around the cavern, providing cover.

The Drogbar who had moved to attack the Tauren found themselves boxed in by a few of these shifted elementals. And then, two times their number fell on the dragon-followers, bellowing insults and fury. It took only a few seconds to cut them down, and the four Tauren who had been waiting for the turncoat Drogbar now charged with those wishing to be free, joining the assault on the dragon, which had halted it in place for the moment.

Seeing that, Lars and Tyrande both smiled, realizing instantly that it was the black dragon that had been behind the Drogbar's recent attempts at expanding into the Highmountain territory. That meant that, if they survived this, peace might well be possible between the Drogbar and Tauren.

Harry disdained such long-term thinking. As Quetzal, who had been forced to retreat along with the others from the castle, slithered forward, a thoughtful expression on his reptilian

face, Harry also moved to one side of the black dragon away from the others. As always in a fight, his thoughts were analytical, almost cold now. *I wonder what kind of spells will work on that hide?*

The answer seemed to be 'not many', although it wasn't the dragon's hide that was the main issue, something that became apparent after a few spells into Harry's assault. Sectumsempra struck Badrinath on the ridges above his eyes, startling Badrinath, and suddenly, a sibilant hiss and an aura of some kind, hazy almost like thin black smoke appeared around him, blocking the next four spells from Harry as Harry teleported around the area.

Then Badrinath began to attack, smashing two Drogbar into paste with one clawed paw, his tail shattering a dozen Elementals who died to defend still more Drogbar, ducking away from the strike. A piercing spell struck that elbow but was slowed dramatically by the aura before hitting the limb. Although it did cause Badrinath to growl, turning towards where Harry had previously been, growling angrily. "I will find you, Arcanist! You will learn that no magic is strong enough to harm one of my flight!"

By that point, Lars, Tyre, and Tyrande had all closed and were attacking Badrinath with their weapons, the black-smoke-like aura doing nothing to stop purely physical attacks. The weapons of the two Tauren still bounced off, doing no harm beyond perhaps annoying Badrinath. But Tyrande's moon glaive sliced a slight furrow across a few of the scales, not penetrating but showing that perhaps it could.

But when Tyre tried to use a strangely colored lightning spell, this too failed to do more than anger the black dragon as it hit Badrinath's aura. *So it's an anti-magic defense, then? Crap.*

As Harry tried another series of spells aimed at a specific area to see if he could overcome Badrinath's aura, Tyrande leaped up and over the strike from his other front leg, then flung her hand out, hurling what looked like dust up into the dragon's face. Whatever it was caused Badrinath to rear his head back and scream angrily, "I will feast on your guts slowly for that, Kaldorei bitch!"

And then, Badrinath breathed out fire. Yet this flame was nothing like anything that could occur naturally in nature. Instead, it reminded Harry of Fiendfyre, save the near sentience of that fell spell. It was as black as it was red and so hot the overall temperature in the cavern rose dramatically.

Harry was well away from the attack, which flashed down towards where Tyrande had recently been standing. She dodged under the tongue of flame and to one side, grimacing at the heat but otherwise unharmed. But the fire kept on going, so hot that when it hit, it melted the very stone into magma for a few moments as Badrinath angled the attack up and away. This caught two of the Tauren warriors, another group of Drogbar, and then hit a house set into the side of the cavern, melting its façade into a pile of molten magma.

“Okay, so fire spells probably aren’t the way to go,” Harry whispered to himself, remaining hidden for now as he launched another spell towards the creature. “But that does give me a clue.”

Shifting tactics for a moment, Harry hit Lars and Tarn with Engorgio charms to start. Both of them had been hiding behind one of the Earth Elementals turned walls. Now they exchanged a grin as they saw one another growing by at least half again the size they had been. “Now that’s more like it! Someone hit us with a Bloodlust spell!” Lars bellowed over the tumult of the battle, no easy feat.

Still, one of the Drogbar Shaman heard him. A second later, both Tauren and several nearby Drogbar glowed red. The red then faded into their skin, becoming a tint instead of a glow around them.

Their normal semi-animosity gone, Lars and Tarn charged out of their hiding places, weapons raised. “For Our Ancestors!”

To take some of the pressure off them, Harry then gestured to the other side of the dragon, directly behind Tyrande. The rubble and bits of a house that had been there previously shifted and grew into a large, if somewhat simply, constructed golem. “Attack the dragon!” Harry ordered, before Apparating away as the dragon sent a tongue of flame toward where he had just been standing, grateful that the sound of the battle covered the implosion of air this spell created.

The dragon took several blows from the two Tauren and a few of the Bloodlust infused Drogbar. But even with their size enlarged and the Shaman spell heightening their strength further, they weren’t strong enough to do much more than push the dragon around. Getting through his scales to really do damage was beyond them, although it was clear by his bellow that those blows hurt Badrinath regardless.

Meanwhile, having pulled back from the front line, Tyre started to use his magic to defend Lars and several warriors as they attacked, working alongside the Drogbar. But even so, the Tauren, Drogbar and few remaining Elementals were almost a sideshow. Tyrande was the dragon’s main target, and she danced around it, dodging every flail of its claws, every strike from its tale.

{play <https://www.youtube.com/watch?v=dVE9FAf-y9Q>}

Watching her move, it was almost like Tyrande was dancing. Every strike, every flail from the dragon was dodged by the nearest inches as Harry’s spells zipped in, trying to penetrate the dragon’s aura or aiming at his mouth or eyes. She leaped up over one strike only to somehow dodge a second in midair, then disappeared, holding onto the dragon claw with one hand to avoid a blast of fire. A strike against the dragon’s scales caused a flash of sparks, then Tyrande was dodging a tail strike before leaping up onto the tail and then off as the dragon lashed out at her with his forepaws.

If it wasn't for the deadliness of the battle, it would have been amazing. And also the fact that the tail strike destroyed his golem and crushed two Drogbar to a pulp. The golem's blows hadn't even registered as much as the attacks of the Tauren. *And is it my imagination, or did the golem's hands start to fall apart before hitting the dragon's actual scales? Damn.*

A final spell from Harry picked up the rubble of the golem, reforming it into a ball, then hurled it at the dragon's head. Right before it impacted, Harry hit it with a Reducto, creating a wall of moving shrapnel.

The dragon's scales ignored the assault, but it did flinch away from it slightly. The dragon's scales and magical aura were proving a powerful defense. Yet that was fine. Harry had other tricks.

"In that case, it's time to put my third rule of warfare to work. First, blind the fucker," Harry roared before Apparating to one side and behind the dragon's right flank.

At those words, Quetzal, who had just gotten into position to attack the dragon from behind, closed his eyes automatically. He had moved slowly to allow his chameleon scales work, hiding him from the dragon's sights. But Harry, his stomach now queasy from the continued Apparitions, took the time to shout, "Shut your eyes!" before casting his next spell. **"LUMOS Maxima!"**

The spell created a Lumos right in front of the dragon's eyes that was so bright it was almost like the sun had suddenly appeared in the middle of the cavern. It was the same spell Harry had used against the harpies and satyrs years ago, and like them, the Tauren and Drogbar were all blinded, stumbling back.

Tyrande had followed Harry's orders quickly enough to avoid it and now raced forward, hopping on the dragon's forearm then back even as the dragon thrashed. The few remaining Elementals were not affected at all, and their attacks, centered on the dragon's tail, actually did some damage, denting scales or knocking a few loose.

Neither attack was noticed at present as the dragon had other things to worry about.

The light as bright as the sun appearing right in front of his eyes, Badrinath screamed, his voice going from a basso rumble of delight and evil merriment at what he was doing to the puny creatures attempting to fight him to one of agony in an instant. He thrashed away from the light, twisting so that his head was under one wing, even as Quetzal entered the fighting by biting into his other one.

The snake's venom didn't seem to do anything against the dragon's physiology, yet his fangs did tear nice big holes through the dragon's wings, and Harry paused in his next spell to hit the snake with an Engorgio charm of his own to make those wounds even worse. Thanks to his already large size, this meant the snake was almost as large lengthwise as the dragon,



although the dragon had Quetzal beat in girth, and the dragon's overall weight was probably still more than three times the snake's own.

Better than crippling the dragon's ability to fly, Quetzal's assault protected a few of the Tauren, forcing the dragon to twitch away from that assault instead of crushing them under his weight. His front paws kept scrambling at his face, trying ineffectually to cover his eyes while his back legs came up, kicking out spasmodically.

Unfortunately, many of the Drogbar were too slow to back away and were slain in the dragon's pain-wracked spasms, and Quetzal was hurled aside, hissing in pain as gashes appeared on his flanks. The snake hastily retreated, firing off his spines into the dragon's side and neck, doing nothing against the dragon's scales, something Quetzal noted even as his chameleon scales let him fade into the background.

Still able to see, Tyrande on his back leaped clear as the dragon roared, now thrashing even more violently, his wings opening despite the agony. But his thrashing still protected the dragon from her strikes going wild or skittering along his scales instead of penetrating. The dragon's scales were now marked with numerous slash marks and gashes, while blood was starting to seep out from between a few of them where the Tauren or Elementals had landed blows.

Suddenly Harry oofed in pain, his breath leaving him in a gasp as the tip of Badrinath's tail caught him in the side, a rib or two breaking under the impact. He had been concentrating so much on the dragon's main body that he hadn't seen the tail spasming out towards him at the same time, twitching away from the Elementals attacks.

Despite being only the tip, the impact still lifted Harry off his feet, hurling backward to crash into the cavern's wall, although Harry was able to use a cushioning charm to soften the impact.

Leaning against the now-soft cavern's wall, Harry touched his side with his other hand, casting a quick bone-mending charm. This spell wouldn't repair the bone perfectly unless accompanied by a diagnosis spell, but it would keep the user up and moving.

Dropping to the ground once more, Tyrande dodged through the thrashing dragon's paws, her moon glaive stabbing here and there with better penetration this time. When Badrinath responded to these attacks by flinching away, she darted under his forearm, stabbing with all her might at his side where the smaller, somewhat softer-looking scales covering his stomach began.

But Badrinath suddenly superimposed his back leg between itself. Tyrande's blade stabbed deep into his arm, penetrating several scales to the flesh beneath. This enraged Badrinath further, and Harry saw his back leg kick at Tyrande like a dog with a football. But Tyrande leaped up and over the attack, although she was forced to leave her moon glaive stuck in the creature.

*I am rather glad I convinced Shy-rotam to stay behind. This fight is not one that she is prepared for.* With her moon glaive gone, Tyrande rolled and rolled again before getting to her feet and racing away from the dragon, pulling her bow from her back and an arrow from her quiver. A few of them had been smashed when she had been tossed off Badrinath a moment before, but most remained intact, and Tyrande put one of them to her string, turning, aiming it towards the dragon.

“Elune’s light might not find me here, dragon, but her strength is always with me. Piercing Arrow!” Tyrande shouted, calling upon a specific power that Elune had blessed her with. A second later, she felt the rush of her connection with Elune filling her for a moment, passing through her body and into her hands, then into the arrow. Diffuse as it was thanks to the many thousands of tons of rock between her and the sky, that connection was still strong, and her spell lashed out, crashing into the dragon’s upper arm and pectoral with all the power of a trebuchet.

The dragon, whose eyes had begun to clear, was hurled off his feet again onto his side. But despite that, Badrinath’s anti-magic aura had stopped the majority of the attack’s power, and now his sight had adjusted to the day-brightness. “You will pay for that. You and your bitch goddess will...”

“Die, dragon!” the still-enlarged Tarn roared, charging forward once more.

At the same time, Tyre had been given enough time to call on some of his own Shaman spells. Now he slammed his hand to the ground and beside him, a large mound of Earth shifted upwards, forming into a somewhat scary, heavily modified Tauren face. “Earthmother, fill my allies with your power!”

All around the dragon, the surviving Drogbar and Tauren, and the still hidden Harry and Tyrande glowed with a light brown color as the Shaman’s spell impacted them. This was followed by another spell from a nearby Drogbar Shaman. A second totem appeared in front of the Shaman, and the warriors around them were covered by another grey aura.

The dragon bellowed in real pain now even though the axe still couldn’t penetrate his scales, the flesh underneath was going to feel it, and blood spurted out from between his scales. Yet without a weapon that could break Badrinath’s those scales, they weren’t doing enough damage, and as he too charged forward once more, Lars knew it.

Yet only one weapon existed on Highmountain that could really harm a fully mature dragon, one with full access to their Aspect and the intelligence to use magic: the Hammer of Khaz'goroth, an ancient weapon, older than the Tauren race, older by far than even the War of the Ancients, where it found its way into the hands of Huln Highmountain during the last days of that conflict. It had been used in ages past to help drive out Deathwing himself and would undoubtedly have been up to slaying this far weaker member of the Black Flight.

But Lars hadn't brought it along, thinking that would be immense overkill against simple Drogbar, and dangerous besides to risk on such a mission. Lars had also been worried that the weapon would overawe the Drogbar if they could actually converse with their King. Now he was castigating himself severely for that, even as he charged forward only to suddenly changed direction. Instead of attacking the dragon's neck, he body-checked Tarn out of the way of a backhand from the dragon that would have splattered the Blood Totem High chieftain.

Despite the Stoneskin Totem of the Drogbar, both Tauren were sent flying, bones broken and out of the fight but still in one piece, generally speaking. The same could not be said for their followers. Two more of the Highmountain tribe who Harry hadn't enlarged was struck by another claw strike. The claws caught them as they tried to charge forward, and while the spell the drogbar Shaman had cast kept them largely in one piece, the strike still snapped necks and horns alike, hurling them aside as their chieftains had been.

At the same time, a tongue of flame flashed out towards Tyre. A hasty spell shifted his own enhancement spell to that of an added layer of Stoneskin, causing him to have some immunity to the fire, while the Earth Elemental in the wall hiding him from the dragon pulled up further stones between Tyre and the incoming fire. The reinforced wall melted, the elemental within letting out a low, pain-filled groan as its essence gave way, the sound unheard by all save Tyre, then the much-reduced fire washed over the Highmountain chieftain in turn. Even with the fire being weakened and the double layer of Stoneskin, the pain was indescribable, and Tyre screamed in agony, the torture causing him to collapse.

Thankfully for Tyre, Harry now attacked once more, his back healed now, and a series of flechettes slammed into Badrinath's head all around his eyes and snout, causing the dragon to bellow in pain though once more none penetrated. Badrinath even used having his head turned away from the attack to launch another burst of fire at the Drogbar Shaman, who fared just as poorly as Tyre.

"Don't let up!" Harry shouted before Apparating away. A second later, Harry collapsed forward, his stomach now in open rebellion so much that he had to fight back the urge to throw up as he appeared once more elsewhere in the cavern.

Apparating was easily the second-best method of magical travel Harry had ever run into and the easiest to use in combat. But it had hard limitations, above and beyond the need to have a proper mental map of the area you would Apparate into. The human body wasn't meant to simply jump from one place to another without crossing the intervening space in the first place. Hermione had tried to explain it once to Harry using Muggle science and something she called 'spatial jump theory', a term she had come up with, but what it amounted to was that a person's internal bits could only take so much sudden shifts in space.

Despite his stomach's revolt, Harry clapped his hands together, then thrust them forward. From the ground all around Badrinath, the stone in a large radius began to shift and

move, becoming almost like water, rising up to grab and drown the dragon. "Lapis Palus!" he whispered.

This was a modified spell Harry had developed with the help of Dumbledore's ghost. A master in transfiguration, the ghost had taught him this spell, Stone Swamp. Harry rarely used it because he couldn't do so nonverbally, the spell taking too much concentration and power, depending on the size of the swamp you wanted to create.

With a squawk of fury and a burst of fire up into the ceiling, Badrinath's rear quarters disappeared into the stone swamp, destroying the amazing lighting that Harry had admired earlier. But the dragon's foreclaws dug into the stone, pulling his bulk out of the water stone. But Harry kept his magic flowing into the spell, and the liquid nature of the stone made Badrinath's attacks simply pass through it, rather than actually getting him out of the morass that was trying to reach up and pull him down into its depths.

While internally rolling her eyes at Harry's unneeded 'advice', Tyrande sent another Piercing Arrow spell rocketing towards the dragon. Her attack blasted through the dragon's uninjured wing, which was not as tough as the rest of him, causing Badrinath to below in pain and anger as the blow shattered some of the delicate bones there. Even if the dragon won the fight, he would need to spend months healing before flying.

Seeing Badrinath slowly starting to pull himself out of the water stone, Harry began his next spell while at the same time, Quetzal once more attacked. Having moved right underneath the dragon, the Needlespine Shimmerback fired his quills up into the dragon's face as Badrinath attempted to shoot another fireball towards Tyrande. The dragon recoiled, although none of the spines could penetrate even the dragon's snout and eyes.

With the dragon's neck exposed, the large snake attempted to sink his fangs into the dragon's neck but found his fangs couldn't penetrate. Instead, his bite pinched the dragon's neck a bit, his fangs dragging downward, causing another deep furrow in the scales to join the multitude of other such. *Oh dear, I think I have miscalculated thisSSS!!!*

Quetzal's thoughts disappeared in agony as Badrinath's claws came up from where he had been clinging to the rock to tear at the snake. And unlike Badrinath's scales in relation to the snake's bite, Quetzal's scales were no defense against the dragon's assault. Blood spurted, and it was only a hasty spell from Harry that saved Quetzal from having his head bitten off. The piercing spell struck, impacting Badrinath's snout with enough force to cause the dragon to reel backward in pain, more of his body disappearing into the swamp of stone. This was accompanied by several Drogbar, added by another Shaman spell, trying to attack from the dragon's other side and another Piercing Arrow from Tyrande nearly taking the dragon in one of his eyes.

Bleeding badly from a series of gashes that would have killed any lesser creature, Quetzal tried to slither away. He might not have made it if not for Harry Apparating to his side,

his hand flashing out to touch his friend's side. A second later, both of them were well away from Badrinath, groaning in pain as their stomachs rebelled against the side-along Apparition. "Okay," Harry gagged, "Not doing that again."

"You do, and I'll eat you," Quetzal groaned. "I'm a snake, we aren't supposed to get stomach aches, but this is the second time I have had such since we started our association, Harry!"

"Oh shut up, you have it easy right now, believe me," Harry grumbled before leaving his friend there, trying to rush to the side of the dragon only to have to shamle along thanks to his stomach. But thanks to Tyrande, the dragon was kept busy until he was in position, and, with the dragon now trying to both claw his way out of the swamp once more and fight her off, Harry launched his next spellchain, attacking Badrinath indirectly once more.

First, a modified Bubblehead Charm encased Badrinath's head and a good portion of his neck out to several feet in every direction. Then on the heels of that one, the next spell filled the globe with tiny particles, particles of flour, a bit of gas and gunpowder all mixed together. Each of them conjured into being by a separate spell, hence the time Harry had taken to set up this assault, and at the outer edge of the bubble, outside the radius of Badrinath's anti-magic aura. And because the spells conjuring these items into being were outside the aura covering the dragon, the field couldn't affect them. The magic in the particles was gone by the time they wafted into that aura.

Not knowing what odd smells were assaulting his battered nose, Badrinath decided to break the globe of magic around his head as he would overcome any problem he faced: by fire.

Yet the instant he opened his mouth and a flame appeared within, the fuel-air explosion Harry had prepared went off, the equivalent of several hundred pounds of TNT condensed into the area as large as a tall man. The dragon screamed now in real pain, his nose basically destroyed, many of his teeth gone, and one of his eyes had simply burst due to overpressure in its socket while several scales had been blasted off or simply shattered.

Despite his agony, the dragon's mind was still working. The anti-magic aura seemed to lose some power as Harry watched, the dragon using his magic to cast a second spell. That spell flashed throughout the dragon's body from his head down, covering ruined flesh and ruined scales with a spell that looked like the Stoneskin the Drogbar Shamans had used previously. A glow engulfed Badrinath's mouth in the next second, some kind of healing spell, perhaps the equivalent of Harry's Episkey, healing the area around and within the mouth.

Of course, the remaining Drogbar and Tyrande were not idle during this, pressing the attack hard. The dragon stumbled back, yet even as more of his body disappeared into the stone swamp, Badrinath twisted, his one remaining eye staring right at Harry. Seeing that bloodshot gaze latching onto him. Harry realized with a start that in his hasty side-along Apparition with Quetzal, his hood had fallen off his face.

With his stomach still roiling so much Harry knew he'd splinch if he tried to Apparate away, Harry hastily concentrated, casting a spell chain he had practiced dozens of times when fighting flame-happy wizards. First, he transfigured a stone wall up from the ground in front of him and then backed it up with a Protego and a Flame Freeze charm cast on the wall. Although not the most powerful shield he could create, Harry had to hope that it would be enough as in the next second, flame roared towards him.

Harry's hope was in vain as his defenses started to fall after a few seconds. Desperately Harry dodged out of the way as the fire finished turning his defensive wall to magma, but then the dragon did one simple thing almost no wizard had ever been able to given the nature of even the strongest fire spells. Badrinath turned his head, following Harry's desperate dodge.

The dragon's fiery breath rolled over Harry, wider and taller than he was, burning Harry to a crisp so fast he didn't even have time to feel pain. Yet as he died, the Phoenix flames of rebirth activated, bringing him back to life as his twelve-year-old self once more. The next instant, his heavily warded and rune-protected expanded trunk seared a brand into his chest and neck, so hot was it despite the number of protections on it.

That was honestly scary since some of the runic arrays on the trunk, a Black Family item, had been reputed to be able to stand up to Fiendfyre, a spell the Blacks had created near the creation of Magical Britain. According to Sirius, he had seen his father cast that spell on the trunk in question to show the greatness of their family, and afterward, Sirius had been forced to touch the trunk, only to find it was cool to the touch. The dragon's black and red fire had proved far, far worse and gave Harry a greater appreciation for the Shaman's defensive spells.

Yet that thought couldn't stay in Harry's head, indignation at his body's current circumstances driving it out. *Fuck! Not again. I hate being so freaking young. I need to figure out a way to control that!* Growling, Harry crouched down, making his way through the smoke as he went on all fours as he tore the sizzling hot expanded trunk from where it hung on his chest, ignoring the sizzling pain from his hand, another brand-like scar appearing there.

Tyrande stared aghast at where Harry had once been as the flame attack from Badrinath died off, and he pushed itself further out of the water stone that Harry had created. "Hahaha! With your Arcanist companion dead, none of you will be able to kill me! And down here, there is nowhere you can run. You will all die by my flame, no I will kill you slowly! I..."

The next second, Harry stepped out of the smoke, the invisibility cloak flying behind him, barely tied around his naked body at the moment. Connected to his new life as a chimera at Lady Death's instigation, it could not be permanently destroyed or taken from him, not even with dragon fire. Or at least not Badrinath's.

A stone spike appeared, transmuting into a kind of metal that shone in the light. Harry had conjured it into being as he was hidden by the smoke. Now he hurled the transfigured steel spike forward, and Badrinath screamed in agony as it crashed into his side and back leg

right above where that leg had finally clawed its way out of the stone swamp. Scales exploded away from the impact, and blood spurted the leg going dead instantly, causing Badrinath to stumble back into the morass of the water-like stone floor of the cavern behind him.

Seeing that, Harry shouted out to Tyrande. "Catch!" and tossed the sword of Gryffindor towards the area between her and the dragon, where it impacted point first, sticking upright in the stone of the cavern.

Out of arrows and with many questions now swirling in her head, Tyrande raced forward, grabbing up the sword of Gryffindor. As Harry had hoped but hadn't known until she did it, Tyrande was able to pick up the enchanted blade.

That wasn't because of anything silly about the sword only being wielded only by a true Gryffindor or anything like that. No, it was due to a series of spells Harry had put on the blade himself after some asshole goblins had attempted to lawyer it away from him. Now only Harry or someone who trusted Harry implicitly and vice-versa could even touch that sword without Harry's say.

Not that any of that mattered now as Tyrande charged forward, holding the sword expertly despite it being so different from her own moon glaive. Meanwhile, Harry gestured with both hands once more, taking control of the swamp-stone with a spell that allowed its user to control water, which, magically speaking, the swamp-stone currently was. Arms grew out of the water-like stone, one grabbing at the dragon's back of the neck and twisting, pulling it back as it thrashed. The other hand grabbed the dragon around the neck.

While the dragon's anti-magic aura started to disintegrate the water as the water touched it, that didn't stop the attack quickly enough to protect Badrinath fully. And the next second, Harry canceled the original Stone Swamp spell. Instantly the stone began to revert to its former nature, acting like quick-dry cement and encasing the dragon from just behind his forearms and down.

A magical blast from Badrinath blasted the water-stone all around him, shattering the arms trying to drag the dragon back and allowing Badrinath enough space to try and pull himself slightly out of the now solid stone. But by then, Tyrande was by the dragon's side. Racing up the back of his neck, she made her way towards his head, where few of the scales had been blasted off by Harry's earlier magic and had not yet been healed.

"For Elune and Azeroth!" Tyrande shouted. Invoking the name of her goddess, Tyrande's glowed like a star for a second as she finally reached the dragon's head. There, the sword of Gryffindor stabbed into the dragon's face, directly behind his cheek, and then Tyrande leaped clear as Badrinath tried to claw at her once more, his flames trying to track her.

A second later, She found herself yanked several dozen yards away, flying swiftly towards Harry even he ran away from the dragon. "Harry?" she asked, landing beside him, landing and running next to him.

“Just wait for it,” Harry said grimly as they reached one of the last wall-elementals hiding there for a moment as he turned to look back at the black dragon. “I have told you a time or two that my blade is covered with poison.”

“Surely you don’t think it’s going to work on a dragon of this one’s power and size!” Tyrande shouted incredulously. “All dragons are sustained as much by magic as by their life force. The magic will counter the poison.”

In far more pain than he had been ever since he had been whelped, Badrinath attempted to pull his ruined body up and out of the solid stone, sending tongues of flame out in several directions, driving back the few remaining Drogbar. Yet despite his wounds, when Badrinath spoke, it was clear he felt he still had the upper hand. “Hahaha! I do not know how he survived my fire, but even your Arcanist knows you have lost. None of you can stand against me, none of you can stand, can stand... against... A black dragon, what, what is...”

Badrinath slumped, his useless wings flapping to its side, his jaw no longer responding, his legs and spine no longer working as they should. But the black dragon was still alive, astonishing Harry. He watched as Badrinath continued to try and pull himself out of the stone despite more than half his body not responding. Yet, even so, Badrinath was still alive and was now stretching his claws out towards where Lars and Tarn lay, unconscious from their earlier wounds.

Instantly changing tactics, Harry sent out a Bombarda spell towards the dragon’s head, where he had lost a lot of his scales thanks to Harry’s earlier spell work. When the spell struck, followed by a Sectumsempra, the dragon’s remaining eye burst in his head as more teeth shattered, gore exploding out of his mouth even as it raised a feeble forearm to protect his head.

Tyrande raced forward, holding out one hand towards the dragon’s side, where she could just make out her moon glaive sticking out of one of the dragon’s forearms. “Come!”

The intent-based enchantment on Tyrande’s moon glaive had the weapon pulling out of the dragon and into her hands as she quickly twisted to the other direction as Badrinath turned towards where she had spoken. Another tongue of flame lashed out, but Badrinath was definitely moving slower, and she was able to get right up underneath his head. “I’m down here, dragon!”

Badrinath reared, then forgetting the horrid wounds his head had taken, dove down, intent on biting Tyrande in half. But Tyrande rolled clear, then kicked up off the ground and stabbed her moon glaive into the dragon’s forehead. With no scales to get in the way, she only had to contend with bone and flesh, and neither was enough to stop a moon glaive dedicated to Elune. The blade of her weapon bit into Badrinath’s head and then into his brain, killing the black dragon instantly.



Instantly the dragon's neck went limp, and Tyrande leaped clear, rolling a bit as she landed. She crouched there, staring at the black dragon as it lay twitching on the ground, waiting as the dragon finally stopped moving. When it did, she moved forward and pulled her glaive out of the wound in the dragon's four head, releasing a river of blood and brain matter which slowly seeped out and down the corpse's head.

Turning away, Tyrande walked over toward where Harry had moved over to where Quetzal lay. The snake had long since fallen unconscious from blood loss, more wounded than Harry had thought when he left his companion's side. The wizard now hastily went to work, aided by the arrival of the Tauren Shaman and a few Drogbar Shaman who had survived the fight.

Having been so far away from the main cavern the Tauren they had left to guard their exit hadn't even known anything was happening until the fleeing Drogbar had reached them. Then they'd been trying to push against the crowd for a while. Now, several Healing Rain spells went off in the air of the cavern, spreading tiny drops of healing magic on everything they touched, Tauren and Drogbar alike. Then Tauren were racing towards their comrades, hoping to help them.

The sole exception was the oddly black-furred Shaman, who remained at the entrance, staring at the dead black dragon for a moment before moving forward, heading for Tyre Fleetfoot. He waved off another Shaman who turned aside and moved towards Tyrande, Harry, and Quetzal.

Many questions were going on in her mind. She had known Harry was strong but strong enough to help her slay a black dragon? *No, say it true, Tyrande. Without him here, you might well have died. If that is, you could have gotten here in the first place without fighting through the Drogbar.*

With that self-deprecating thought, she reached Harry and laid a hand gently on his shoulder as he knelt beside his animal companion. "How is he?"

"He needs a lot more blood than my Blood Replenishing spell can create in one casting," Harry answered, repeating the same gestures and whispered spell. "Beyond that, he'll live. Although I doubt he'll ever be able to move quite as well ever again. I'm not good enough with healing spells to heal him without leaving a lot of scar tissue."

"Nonetheless, that was very brave of him. If he hadn't wrecked Badrinath's wing, he might have been able to fly even in here. And his second attack should have blinded the dragon if he didn't have the iron eye trait," Tyrande answered, mentioning a trait black dragons could often grow after they reached maturity: a thin film of crystal over their eyes that could protect them from harm. *Most harm, anyway,* She thought ruefully, remembering the spells Harry had used to turn that strength into a weakness earlier.

“He still should have stayed outside with Shy-rotam. But I thought he could help us in here if it came to a fight. I never expected that,” he growled, jutting his head out towards the dragon.

“I don’t think any of us expected to run into a black dragon. And if one of us did, I would be having stern words with them later for not sharing their concerns,” Tyrande said with a little laugh, pulling a similarly dry-sounding chuckle from Harry.

Neither noticed the black-furred Tauren flinch nor the guilty look on his face as he knelt beside his chief. Instead, Harry made way for one of the other Highmountain Shamans, who began to run gently glowing hands over Quetzal’s side. “What do you think, Shaman?”

“My name is Fen Croweyes, Harry, and yes, I believe that he will live, as you said a moment ago. I can even heal his body up to full mobility, although he will bear the scars of this days’ battle for many moltings.” The aged Tauren spoke, shaking his head. “As will many others, both physical and mental.”

“In that case, I will leave my friend in your care, Shaman Croweyes.” With that, Harry turned back to Tyrande. “Come on, let’s check on the others. And then I think I am done with this underground nonsense.”

While Tyrande fervently agreed with that statement, it wasn’t that simple. Having returned to their cavern, the Drogbar were incredibly sorrowful for their part in the conflict between them and the Tauren, not having had any idea that their King had been a black dragon before this. “He seemed to change decades ago when Grillkul went out on an expedition to the foot of the mountains to retrieve some herbs for his mother, but he was the prince, so no one commented on it. And until he led us into the conflict with the Tauren, he had been leading us quite well.”

“It is evident that Badrinath long planned this operation, so no fault lies in you and your people. The black dragons would know how to act to emulate a Drogbar if anyone would,” Tyrande soothed, shaking her head at the speaker, one of the oldest surviving Drogbar.

Many of them had died in the stampede to flee the cavern. Yet others, nearly three dozen, had died fighting the dragon, which had won them quite a bit of respect from the surviving Tauren.

And the Drogbar had not died alone. Indeed, it was only luck and Harry’s power that none of the three Tauren leaders had died. That, and Badrinath seemed to have thought that Lars and Tarn were both dead after he had knocked them unconscious until they started to stir near the end of the battle.

All three would bear the scars of this battle for the rest of their lives.

One of Tarn’s horns had been broken off near the base, and his arm was broken in multiple places to go with several cracked ribs. Although the horn bothered him far more than

the other wounds, that wasn't just because even now, the Shamans were healing him and the other wounded as best they could. Tyrande put that down to some kind of social cue she hadn't heard about.

Tyre had been knocked out by the pain of being struck by the fire of the dragon as it tore through the earth Totem protecting him and the others with its magic. Trying to block the fire had drained him of all his magic and vitality. Only his strong connection with the elements and the Earth Elemental protecting him allowed Tyre to survive. Even now he was being supported between his surviving Tauren, looking like he had not eaten in weeks.

As her eyes flicked over to the Highmountain Tauren, Tyrande noted they, like the others left behind at the entrance, looked very guilty for not having been involved in the battle. This was especially true of the oddly black-haired Shaman. He seemed unable to look away from Badrinath's corpse, a snarl on his face.

But High Chief Lars had actually taken more harm in the blow that had knocked him and Tarn out of the battle, having smashed back-first into a corner of one of the central buildings, breaking his spine. Luckily, the Shamans were able to heal him, and he was now walking around under the watchful eyes of the Rivermane tribe Shaman he'd brought along.

However, the leaders got off lightly. None of the other Tauren they had led into the main Drogbar cavern escaped the dragon's wrath. And while seven of the Drogbar who attacked Badrinath did, the subterranean race had lost far more people in total than the Tauren, despite their Shamans and Earth Elementals.

"While that is true, we should have questioned things. The King has always, he has always been the one, the **leader**, the one who sets policy. Perhaps after this, we should rethink that." the Drogbar said, although Tyrande could detect no hint of actual hope for such a thing in his voice. He seemed more resigned to it than anything else, which probably meant that such a change wouldn't occur in the future.

That was mildly worrisome that the Drogbar would keep their current 'follow the leader blindly' attitude. But there was nothing she could do about that beyond converse with Lars about it later. If it really was a mental thing rather than simply a social one, she had no idea how to change it.

Once Lars moved over to join her in talking to the Drogbar, Tyrande stayed there for a time to mediate between the two groups. In return for more meat being sent to them every month, the Drogbar agreed to completely shut down many of their tunnels, filling them in with stone with the magic of their shamans. Of course, they could open those up again, but the Tauren shamans could set up warning systems and traps outside of them, thus being warned if trouble stirred from this area again.

More importantly, the Drogbar agreed to pay recompense to the Tauren for the conflict between them in the form of jewels and metals they mined out of the rock. The Tauren would

receive a percentage of all such they mined for two years. While the Tauren had several good smiths among them, they didn't routinely work with metals like that, simply because of how rare they were in Highmountain and because only a few Tauren devoted their craft to mining.

However, Lars pushed for access to the dragon's carcass. Its scales, fangs and claws would make magnificent weapons and armor. Armor which his shamans and artisans were better able to work with than metal. The Drogbar tried to quibble but agreed to it so long as they could keep some of the bones of Badrinath for themselves.

In the end, like most compromises, neither side was fully happy, but they were willing to go along with the final decision. That was all Tyrande could hope for.

As she had mediated between the two groups, Harry and a somewhat revived Quetzal had left, the snake demanding they return to the surface so he could hunt. Blood replenishing potions seemed to have a lot in common with Shaman spells, eating the vitality of the individual to power the spell's effects.

Harry had ignored all the looks Tyrande and Tauren sent in his direction thanks to his far more youthful appearance. While Harry liked the Tauren, he wasn't about to explain everything about his abilities past or anything else to them just yet. Conversely, Harry knew Tyrande probably did deserve an explanation, and he was not looking forward to giving her one.

He needn't have worried. Tyrande was very understanding about why he had kept his odd resurrection ability from her. They hadn't even known each other a year after all, and even if they had been friends for longer, Harry would still be under no obligation to share everything about himself with her, just as Tyrande wouldn't in reverse. However, now that it had come to light, she understood that Harry was an even more unique individual than she had thought.

*Heh, make that a **very** understanding woman to deal with this resurrection of his. This method of longevity would certainly take some getting used to, at least, and his oftentimes childish body would no doubt throw off many.*

"I would say, Harry, that I think you need to figure out a way to control the age you become when you resurrect." She then smiled, ruffling Harry's hair. "It is incredibly difficult right now for me to take you seriously, child~," she teased.

"I still have my magic, you know, so unless you want to be subjected to a tickling spell that will have you laughing for the rest of the night, I suggest you back off the teasing," Harry retorted, although he was smiling slightly as he did so.

Shy-rotam huffed from beside Tyrande. The young frostsaber was still of the opinion she should have come with her chosen partner but had stopped complaining about it at least. And Quetzal, who no doubt would tease Harry about his new, smaller size, had yet to return from hunting.

The silence extended for several minutes, then Harry frowned. "By the way, do we have any idea what Badrinath was after?"

"Not really. The Drogbar didn't know. They were simply riled up to make trouble for the Tauren, to force them into a confrontation. Badrinath said something about a prize when he was bragging about how he would kill me, so Lars and I assume he was after the Hammer of Khaz'goroth. It is a weapon of the Ancient Titans which was used to drive Deathwing off."

Harry's eyebrows flew up in surprise at that, and he fought back a sudden urge to salivate at the idea of studying such a weapon. *Mind you, I doubt I'd be able to make much headway, but if I learn enough about the local magics and how magic interacts with the world...* "That's interesting." Then he frowned, his lips twisting into a pensive scowl. "Still... there seems to be something odd about that. About what Badrinath said..."

A shout from nearby made both of them look around, and they saw that Lars had returned with the rest of the surviving Tauren. With them, the Tauren carried the bodies of their dead, and a funeral pyre had already been erected by two of the Shamans.

Realizing it was time for the funeral rites, Harry and Tyrande stood up, making their way over to the others.

"Are you going to be happy here, Harry?" Tyrande asked as they walked.

"I think so, yes. Tyre has said that he would be happy to house me with the Highmountain tribe for a time, while Lars has officially given me leave to go wherever I wish in Highmountain. Even Tarn says that I would be welcome as a warrior among the Blood Totems, although he looked as if he had bitten into something sour when he said it."

Harry chuckled. "Seeing a Tauren make that kind of sour face was somewhat hilarious heh, helped by his now mismatched horn. So I will probably move between the tribes for a time, learning more about their shaman traditions and seeing if they can help my own issues."

Tyrande paused then before deciding to share a secret with Harry. A secret that the most senior Shamans of the Tauren and her own people had kept for some time. "If you run into trouble on that path, there is a group here, mostly Kaldorei, hunters, a few Shaman, and explorers. They form a secret society called the Unseen Path, whose task is to help those in need. You and they might be able to bond over your 'people saving thing'."

*And I seem to recall that a few young ladies are among them as well. If any of my race can be open enough to accept Harry's strangeness, it is they. And... well, I am almost certain Harry will eventually meet with our estranged kin as well. When that happens, it is best to have some willing to speak for him.*

"Huh. I might look this Unseen Path up. When I'm ready to travel further than the Highmountain Valley, anyway." Harry answered, amused by the idea of a secret society based

around something so prosaic as helping those in need. “And you? Are you going to be happy to get back to your work as leader of the night elves? I’m assuming you need to leave soon.”

“Happy is putting it somewhat strongly. Content is a better word, I think. As to my leaving, I will actually be making my farewells after this ceremony. We’re closer to the entrance to the Highmountain valley here than we would be if I continued with you and the others back to the high chieftain’s town, and... well, leaving like this should be done quickly in my opinion,” Tyrande admitted. “Elune is high in the sky, and I can perhaps make it well down the mountain before I must rest. And if I stay, I will continue to find excuses to do so.

Harry laughed at that, saying, “I will take that as a compliment to how good a companion I am.”

“Hah, it is not you but Quetzal I will miss,” Tyrande retorted, her lips quirking as she fought back a laugh. As they had just reached the Tauren circle around the pyre, that would be grossly inappropriate.

They reached the others, who nodded solemnly at them, making room for the two strangers without complaint even from the Blood Totem tribesmen. If one of the animals had been there, they might have, but as Shy-rotam stayed to the shadows and Quetzal was nowhere in sight, that was not an issue.

When they took their places, Lars began. As the leader of this expedition, it was his role to say the rites. “Earth Mother, An’she, Mu’sha,” he intoned, naming the primary spirit the Tauren worshipped and using their names for the spirits of the sun and moon. “We return these brave warriors to the world. They fell fighting against a great evil, obeying the laws of our people and standing shoulder to shoulder with their brothers. Let their spirits fly to the afterlife, as their ashes are consigned to the wind.”

With that, Tyre, Tarn and Lars all lifted burning torches, setting it to the pyre from three sides. For several moments there was silence as the fire blossomed quickly, growing from the torches throughout the pyre, fueled by another Shaman spell. Then the Rivermane Shaman began to beat on a small drum, joined by several cymbals among the other survivors as the others started to hum. It was wordless, a simple dirge-like sound, but one full of sadness and more than a fair bit of pride at how the dead had passed.

The music continued for a time, and then at some unseen signal, the Tauren all took a step away, signaling the end of the funeral. If the bodies of the dead were fit to carry with them, they would have been returned for a more formal set of funeral rites among their clans, but none of them had been fit to carry for overlong. Even the bodies of those who had died while covered with Stoneskin had been crushed later in the fight by the dragon.

Seeing the Tauren preparing to leave, Tyrande turned back to Harry, holding her hand out. *It is time to pull off the bandage.* “Farewell for now, Harry Potter. And know wherever you

go, you have a friend in me. I expect to see you stop by occasionally, once every decade or so perhaps.”

Harry chuckled dryly, wondering how many of his lifetimes it would be before he too often that kind of term, and saw from Tyrande’s small smile that she too was wondering that same thing. He also thought that he would have preferred a hug of farewell rather than a mere handshake after all they had been through. *But there is no way I’d do that now, not at my current height. It would place my head right into her chest, and that just isn’t going to happen.* “It’s been an interesting journey. Shame our destinations are different. Until next time Tyrande Whisperwind. And know you have a friend in me too.”

At that, Tyrande’s smile widened into a beaming grin that made her look far younger for a moment, then she pulled her hand away from Harry’s and looked over at the still disconsolate Shy-rotam patting her on the head before sending a nod towards Lars. “Come, Shy-rotam, it is time for us to run.”

With that, the two of them were off, racing away in the direction Lars and the others pointed her toward the exit to the valley.

Behind her, Harry watched her go for a time before turning back to the Tauren, noticing with annoyance that Tarn and several of the others were smirking at him, knowing that had to do with his currently childlike appearance. But for now, Harry ignored it. He would get even with them another time, maybe when he visited the Blood Totem tribe. *I wonder what the Tauren think about pranks? “So, where to now?”*

### **End episode 4, chapter 2**

See what I mean by it being more of a small story chapter than a normal episode style? Anyway, I hope you enjoyed this romp.