

Hey all this is the next chapter of Death's Avenger. Yes, I know that it took a while to post here, but Tomon did see it and he did edit more than half normally and the whole thing lore-wise. He spotted one big issue in the penultimate scene of this chapter, and helped me fix it so there's no lore inconsistencies or other issues there. Unfortunately RL hammered him just as it did me Monday and Sunday, but for him it was a month pounding. So I do not doubt that even so, there will be lots of mistakes.

And speaking of Sunday and Monday, I am afraid that Making Waves isn't finished. I am doing a major battle scene in it that is yet to be written, and I was barely able to get the rest of the chapter done thanks to being sick. I had a major stomach bug. Not so much shitting – I didn't have much in me – so much as real stomach pain and loud roiling. I could not work through it very well, and only got like two thousand words done each day, on two days that should have been my most productive. I got a lot of it done today, but the battle scene is still extant.

I will hopefully finish it by Late Wednesday, and send it off to the editors. I want to get it out to you this coming Weekend at the latest.

### **Names previously introduced:**

Feldral Stonegrip – Seeker, Unseen Path's mountaineering expert.

Lesha – habitually cheerful tauren second in command, druid.

Two kaldorei brothers – Lufar and Ladros Sharpfang.

Tjar and Neeva. Both tauren, Tjar is a Shaman with earth, and air elementals. Neeva is a shaman with two water elementals and a fire elemental.

Nealu, Shai – kaldorei. Shai was the one who fell the first time they climbed out of the Trueshot Lodge Valley, and is one of the best shots.

Lathariel – Quel'dorei Ranger

Sylina – Harry's current friend with benefits.

Acali- kaldorei with light skin, Feldral's friend

One as yet unnamed tauren – silent, stoic or gloomy.

Cassandra – harpy matriarch

Maria – oldest daughter. The first to be introduced

Irene – warlike, protective daughter.

Icsy – flighty daughter, second oldest, but very much not trusted to lead.

Rica and Viol – Irene’s equally combative daughters.

Davo Bluefeather – tauren weapons master, teacher and friend.

Vurg Farstride – Pathfinder, leader of the Unseen Path

Master Cartographer Milifiana Barchfoot – leader of the mapmakers and librarians of the Unseen Path

Master Seeker Martuc Oakleaf – Leader of the Seekers, the spies, combat specialists and infiltrators of the Unseen Path

### **Chapter 10: Deific Approval Rating Up**

Harry looked around the longhouse he was standing in, sighing faintly in annoyance. This particular longhouse belonged to the Chief, and he had hoped to find something here. Beyond the body of a vrykul woman whose chest had been crushed by one of the harpy's dropped stones, anyway. The fact she had died naked and with one hand outstretched in supplication bothered Harry more than a bit but he pushed through it, looking around the single room once more, a scowl on his face. *There's nothing here either. Blast it. Other than those maps we found, we haven't found anything with writing on it.*

There were no internal walls in any of the longhouses, although the vrykul used hanging curtains to indicate different areas. Not that this was the source of Harry's current ire. No, Harry had hoped to find some book or scroll, something that could tell him more about vrykul society. But there wasn't anything of the sort here.

Oh, there were a few bits of armor that had what looked like runes on them, but what they could mean, Harry had no idea. Certainly not protection, that was certain. At least not from physical damage. Even there, though, there were few examples, and all of them looked like the same rune, if carved by different hands. Harry was putting those down as something superstitious rather than magical based at this point.

In contrast, there were several maps that Tjar had found in one of the smaller longhouses. They were mainly maps of Northrend's coastline and the Broken Isles. According to a few of the Seekers, most of those maps were very impressive, but Harry had yet to learn how to read maps all that well, so he couldn't tell much. They followed the coastline further north along the edge of the northern continent, that much was clear, including areas where the Cartographers had no knowledge of. On top of that, the maps showed what Harry had been told were markings to show how the winds and waves interacted in that area.

This was amazing, apparently, as that was something that even the Cartographers who also could act as sailors, only two within the whole Unseen Path, did not know how to do. So when it came to maps, the vrykul were, in their own area of expertise, well ahead of the kaldorei and tauren.

Yet that didn't change the fact there was nothing else. No books, although that was somewhat expected. But no scrolls? No written-out lists of supplies? There weren't even any notes, bits of parchment or hide with writing on it. Not even any pictograms or anything like that, the equivalent of ancient Egyptian or Sumerian back on Earth. Only a few scattered runes. That was it.

Not that the written word was the only way to learn of a people. Indeed, the Unseen Path had learned a good deal about the vrykul that they had not known before.

The Vrykul were masters of carving, as Harry had seen before. The Chief's longhouse showed this to an incredible degree. The roof had been caved in by one of the harpy's attacks, and even now, he could see one of them flying directly above the building, peering down into it. But even with the massive hole in the ceiling, it looked as if the roof had been carved to describe some kind of fighting scene against wyverns or some kind of flying lizard-type monster. It hadn't been colored in, but the carvings of a lizard face and several spear, Axe or even seax wielding vrykul around it remained.

Similarly, many of the other longhouses he had been in had carvings on the walls of incredible detail. Sylina's squeak of shock when she entered a building through a jagged rent in its side and found a giant spider thing facing her from a few inches to her left, its mandibles raised to attack, had everyone else laughing for a time after the battle.

*Although why Feldral and the rest think that spider thing is so unusual, I don't know. Is it so bizarre for the older Seekers to run into something entirely new?*

That craftsmanship expanded to other things. Their fur coats were heavy and thick, extremely well-made, so much so a few that had been left to hang during their battle had been taken as prizes by the tauren. Here and there throughout the settlement I, and especially here in this building, Harry had found worked silver belts, armbands or bangles. Most were worked to a fine polish or carved into in some elaborate fashion.

The vrykul were also very decent metalsmiths. The Sharpfang brothers had apparently taken up blacksmithing at one point as a pastime and routinely helped out the armorers back in Truesshot Lodge. They had informed the rest of the band that while the quality of the ore was bad, the actual process of the smithing was anything but. Even now, the pair had yet to leave the campsite's smithy. Apparently, they were taking drawings of some of the tools, as well as testing the kiln they had found there in some manner Harry hadn't followed.

The fact the smithy had both a kiln and an anvil had grabbed their attention, but again, Harry had nothing to say about that. He'd never studied metallurgy and had no idea why that was so interesting to them. The phrase, "A mix of kiln firing and beating the impurities out," went right over his head.

For Harry, though, his search had been entirely in vain. *I left this loghouse for last, thinking it'd be the place where I'd find something, but there isn't. Nothing written down, and nothing enchanted either.* Harry had thought to find totems filled with some kind of limited nature magic, having been told the vrykul worshipped small-scale nature spirits that made Northrend their home. Good luck charms, at the very least, maybe even weapons imbued with magic. But the only thing there were, was those strange runes, runes that very much did not have any magic to them. It seemed as if the former chieftain had been the only source of both magic knowledge and ability within the group, which was almost as irritating as not finding any kind of writing or anything else.

With a final sigh, Harry headed towards the door.

He had barely taken a step out from under the awning covering the entryway when the young harpy twins landed beside him, almost causing him to start. The rest of Cassandra's flock had joined them on the northern island soon after the battle, Cassandra having sent Viol back to ordered them over, not wanting her flock to be separated for too long. Now, they were all around the place, gathering food mainly or just enjoying flying over the island.

"Er, hey, you two," Harry said, looking between the two girls, who he had finally learned were named Aleri and Alari while they were all working on building their ship. Using the skills he'd learned over time with the Weasley twins, he was starting to be able to tell them apart, which seemed to both throw them off and make them happy at the same time. "What are you up to?"

Despite the conversations he'd had on the harpies flirting with him with Sylina, Harry wasn't certain how to deal with these two. They were the youngest looking of the harpies, and their bodies almost reminded him of Ginny Weasley when they first tried to date, svelte and athletic. That wasn't exactly a happy memory considering the date had been crashed by Death Eaters and while Harry was in the body of a very mature, very fit nineteen-year-old now, in his head, he was quite a bit older. So he wasn't certain how he felt about girls of that age giving him such straightforward looks some of the time. They never flirted, but it was very clear that both girls were very interested in him.

"What were you looking for," Aleri began.

"in there? And why do people who" Alari continued.

“have to walk always seem to,” Aleri started up once more.

“Want to put coverings over their heads?”

“Why be so elaborate? When all you”

“need is something to keep the rain off?”

“Although I suppose that,”

“if you can’t fly away from it, winter,”

“could be a factor too,” Aleri finished.

Chuckling, Harry again showed he was amused rather than annoyed by their twin speak, something that seemed to make them both smile happily. “Well, winter is indeed a part of it, so is comfort. A lot of people prefer to sleep with something between them and the stars at night or, in the case of the kaldorei, the sun. It simply makes it easier to go to sleep. As for why we go into wood and stone and such, it’s a case of permanence. Cloth and fur are fine for when we’re moving around, but when we settle into one place, we like to build something more durable. Sometimes to leave it to our children, sometimes just because. And I would wager that even you flying folk sometimes like to be warm and cozy in a cave for wintertime.”

One of the things he liked about the twins was that they actually listened. A few of the other harpies among Cassandra’s flock didn’t seem to care what he said, only about being near him. Icsy was the worst of those and the only name of the four he had heard so far. Luckily, their interest in him seemed to be waning as time went on.

The twins paused, twitching this way and that, then nodded as if to indicate that that made some sense to them. “True in winter...” Alari began this time.

“The flock did once...”

“stay in a large cave.”

We would still prefer...”

“To have the sky and the sun above,”

“to warm our wings. And to watch,”

“out for danger that we could fly from. But”

“The seasons must be obeyed sometimes. And”

“What you said did make sense,” Aleri and Alari finished as one.

Harry laughed at that, and both girls joined in, their laughs sending a slight shiver down Harry's spine. For a moment, Harry wondered about simply asking their ages outright but decided that, regardless of race, asking a woman her age so bluntly was probably very rude. *And, a small part of him reminded him, does it really matter? You know that harpies live for a few thousand years at most. Cassandra has said that she remembers the War of the Ancients as a chick and that she has at least a few more hundred years before she starts to decline. After the first two hundred or three hundred, does age really matter?*

The rest of his mind argued back that it most certainly did, especially when it came to maturity. In many ways, it was very clear that these two were not at all mature. *Whatever their bodies might tell me, they act more like young teens than young women.*

His thoughts on that score broke off as the harpy landed behind him with barely a tick of her claws on the ground. Then, his head, shoulders and chest were covered by wings, and two exceedingly soft objects were pressing into the back of his head. "If you're giving out attention, Harry, I believe that I would like to jump that line a bit," Recca trilled, pulling back only a little bit, then snaking in and biting lightly at his ear before pulling away. Flapping her wings once, her larger-than-average wings proved able to carry Recca into the sky and away as Harry stumbled forward before trying to turn around.

With scowls on their faces, Aleri and Alari took off after their older... Sibling? Cousin? Harry wasn't certain if the twins were Cassandra's direct daughters or her grandchildren through one of her other daughters. Yet he doubted that Irene, the mother of Recca and Viol, had also given birth to them. "That is cheating, Recca!"

"Yes, one must learn to share!"

Harry chuckled, trying to keep the embarrassed flush from his face with some difficulty, reaching up to the back of his neck and scratching at it thoughtfully as he stared into the sky above them. As he watched, the other harpies reacted to the two youngest chasing Recca, shouting encouragement or teases in equal measure from what he could hear.

He couldn't really argue with the teasers, regardless of who they were teasing. Watching the two youngsters chase after Recca looked much like two sparrows trying to chase down a falcon. The falcon was only going along with things because she was amused.

While the twins' questioning of him was perfectly normal, Recca had been far flirtier with Harry since the battle had ended. It seemed as if seeing his combat prowess had added still more interest towards him. Her mother had also flirted with him a few times, although strangely, Viol hadn't, where she and Recca had tag-teamed him at one point when he was in his half-phoenix form.

He was okay with that, understanding what they saw in him beyond the whole thankfulness angle, although the flirting was a bit much. He looked around for Sylina, only to find her looking completely unconcerned, a faint smirk on her face, her ears tilted in a position of high amusement. Then she looked back down at the edge of her weapon, seemingly trying to work a nick or something out of it. Unlike the other Seekers and Harry, she hadn't really been all that interested in seeing if they could discover more about the Vrykul, only brightening up when the two brothers began to examine the weapons the Vrykul had used.

"I take it you did not find anything in there, even with your magical senses, Harry?" Feldral half-teased, half-asked, striding towards him. On his back, the specialist in mountain climbing had strapped the Spear of the Ancients, completely unwilling to set it down even for a moment now that it had been reclaimed. As the overall leader of the party, it fell to Feldral to be responsible for the Spear of the Ancients for now.

Looking back at the man, Harry had a hard time looking Feldral in the eye rather than letting his gaze lock on the Spear of the Ancients. Regardless of whatever had been done to the Spear to try and corrupt the thing, the power was still there, pure and flowing out into the rest of the world. The blessing of several Wild Gods had created a fond of Wild Nature magic that even now was renewing the background nature magic of the island, which had been diminished badly by the necromantic energies the vrykul chieftain had been using. There was **power** in that spear, more power than Harry had seen since he had left Cenarius.

Yet he persevered, answering Feldral's question, giving the man the opportunity to say 'I told you so' he very obviously wished. "No, I didn't. As you had told me I would."

Feldral though shook his head, coming close enough to pat Harry on the shoulder, something few kaldorei did. It simply wasn't part of their body language most of the time. "Do not worry about it, Harry. As we knew going into this battle, this was not a true settlement. Despite having many a woman among them, this was a raiding crew, regardless of how many of them were here. They are not like other Vrykul. You would have to travel to Northrend to truly learn of their society beyond what we can tell you from our historical observations."

He snorted then. "Observations that are nearly a thousand years old. It has been at least that long since the Unseen Path sent even a single Seeker to Northrend, let alone a larger mission."

"Yeah, well, unlike me, at least you all learned something new. I noticed that you rotated everyone here into that building to look at that giant spider thing," Harry retorted. "Whereas you won't let me examine the Spear, and I haven't found anything else."

Even though he was half-joking, the pair of them looked over towards the longhouse with that specific carving within it. Feldral nodded slowly. "Yes. That is... possibly worrisome."

Harry made an interrogative noise, and Feldral hesitated for a moment before speaking in a low tone. "The Unseen Path was remade into the Order it is today to combat demons, only extending our remit to gathering information and combating the taint of the old gods when we learned that despite being sealed away, their blood seeping through the walls of their prison was enough for them to cause tragedy. And you have already seen the giant wasplike guns we had to deal with in the mountains. Is it any wonder that any of us are a little concerned when we see something like that, an entirely new bug species?"

At that, Harry had to nod, understanding dawning. "That makes sense. One of the old gods deals particularly enjoyed using bug type servants, I take it?"

"Indeed. You will learn more from Milifiana and her library eventually, and I am not the best one to explain. But that spider creature, the carving is so lifelike, you could almost see intelligence in its eyes. That could be both a good sign or a very bad one and unfortunately, it isn't a problem that we can deal with right now. The Unseen Path has few people who can even attest to being Northrend at all, let alone having any kind of mastery of the lay of the land there."

Harry frowned, then asked the older man if he thought that this was a real problem that they needed to deal with now. "As in, a sign that one of the Old Gods has found some real weakness in his prison."

At that, Feldral paused, then shook his head. "No. Not us in terms of this band, and perhaps not in terms of the Unseen Path. Judging by the fact that the spider carving had a spear thrust through it, we can only assume that the giant spider creatures, wherever they are, are a problem that the Vrykul are capable of dealing with. I would like to know more, and believe me..."

Feldral snorted a laugh, gesturing around at the other Seekers within sight, many of whom were pulling bodies together. That work had been going on since the battle ended, and Harry knew that they were preparing for some kind of funeral pyre, although he had turned his attention to searching for anything that could tell them more about the Vrykul as a culture too quickly to be included in that. "I am not alone in that. You could almost say that wanting to know more about our enemy is a bit of a necessity to make the jump from Oathkeeper to Seeker. But at present, we don't know enough about those bugs to think they are an enemy. I will bring it up with Pathfinder Vurg, but at the moment, I just don't think that we are in a position to send any kind of full scouting expedition to Northrend. One or two of the people who have been there before, like Narvae, but that is all."

Shaking his head, Feldral gestured towards the nearest pile of bodies. "And now it comes time for you to do your own unpleasant task of the day."



“I’m quite certain that you all came up with fire on your own before I came around, so what exactly do you want me to do?” Harry drawled.

Feldral snorted. “We need to burn the Vrykul in small lots. The necromantic energies that they all partook in would seep into the ground if we buried them. Letting them here to rot would be even worse. Burning will destroy their bodies and overwhelm their necromantic energies. The same thing occurred with those satyrs and the Tainted that we have dealt with in the past. But did you see that one map? The one that shows nearby islands to the north and west?”

When Harry nodded, Feldral continued. “None of us knew the northwestern island existed. It is within sight of the silence. And if there are other people out there, we don’t want them to know what happened here. Which means burning the Vrykul in small groups so that the fires don’t rise to the sky .”

“You could just dump them in the ocean, you know. Weigh them down with stones and toss them in that way,” Harry advised. This seemed to be a case of the desire of the members of the Unseen Path to go unseen kind of getting in the way of things. To wit, a quick return to the main island, and from there to shop Lodge with the Spear at hand.

Feldral blinked as if that idea hadn’t occurred to them, but then he nodded. “And the chaotic nature of the magic within the ocean here would render any necromantic energies released mute. Excellent thought.”

That still took quite a bit of doing, more to transport the bodies of the Vrykul down to the shoreline and then out to sea than anything else. The Vrykul were so large that it took two or occasionally three of the kaldorei to lift them, while the tauren could handle one at a time.

Or, would have, without Harry’s magic. Harry cast weightless charms on every corpse within the town, and with that, both tauren and kaldorei could carry the bodies as easily as if they weighed nothing at all. Even the harpies got into it, hopping down and grabbing at one of the bodies, lifting them into the air with happy, joyous squawks of amazement and how light they were. This led to several of them flirting again with Harry when they returned until Cassandra chased them off, shouting about how they needed to “Read the damn atmosphere you useless chicks!”

As work continued around them, Cassandra stayed where she was, her wings folded demurely in front of her as she looked thoughtfully at Harry. “I am sorry about how my flock reacts to you, Harry. I can tell that you are still uncomfortable with it, and not entirely because of your relationship with Sylina.”

“It is immensely flattering in a way. But I do not like being fawned over for things that I see as simple acts of kindness or goodwill,” Harry answered with a sigh and a shrug of his shoulders. *It kind of reminds me of when I had fangirls back on Earth. Ugh.* “I honestly accept Recca and Irene’s flirting with me after battle more than the rest of them flirting with me because they appreciate what I did to make all of your voices nicer and so forth.”

Nodding at that, Cassandra gestured with the wing, nonverbally asking him to step aside for a moment as the others continued to carry the now weightless bodies down to the shoreline. “I understand that. And I know from your perspective that such a thing seems small, unworthy of the offers they are making to share their bodies with you. But even setting aside the sheer... delight we all feel whenever we see you in your half-phoenix form, the introduction it has given us to the Unseen Path is a massive thing for my flock and me, Harry. Having allies such as the Unseen Path could be tremendous not only for my flock. If that Spear can somehow be used as a conduit to give me and others with the spark the ability to use magic without needing to search our Fel magic or The Taint as I thought when I first sensed it? That could be important to my entire race.”

She looked at him closely, raising a wing to gently press a pinion feather into his chest. Using it like a kaldorei or tauren woman would have a finger, she ran that feather up to his chin, causing Harry to shiver a bit at the touch. Despite all the flirting up to this point, he had yet to get used to that feeling. It was both unusual and sensual at the same time, making a part of his mind wonder what those feathers would feel like in more... personal ways.

“And you are the linchpin to both what has occurred already and the continued interaction between my flock and the Unseen Path. Your spells, to help us harpies with our voices. Your magical abilities also give us better weapons and those magnificent pouches of yours, making us stronger in terms of our own abilities and usefulness to the order. With them, we can leave behind some of the wildness, some of the wayward nature of our folks.” Cassandra grinned cheerily at him, pulling her feather away from his cheek. “So I’m afraid you’re going to have to deal with our admiration for a good while longer, Harry Potter, until you figure out a way to teach other shamans or Druids those spells of yours.”

Cassandra’s smile turned a little whimsical and a lot sensual for a second. “Even I am not immune to that feeling of admiration and veneration.” With that, she leaned forward, bussing her lips against his.

This kiss lasted only a second, then she was off, chuckling throatily as Harry blushed behind her, staring after her until one of the tauren poked him in the back of the head with a large finger. “Come now, oh so popular one, let us get a move on. I feel it is time that we leave this island behind and start our feet homeward.”

Soon, they were all down on the beach, where Harry, feeling he'd done enough on that onerous task, left the project of tying large rocks to each of the giant corpses to the others. Instead, he, Neeva, Lesha, Nealu and Sylina boarded the giant ship. Far larger than the ship they had used to get here, this longboat was also far more seaworthy. It even had actual sails to go with its banks of oars. While Harry, Sylina and Nealu went below to check the interior, the two tauren began to move the oars, practicing the movements they would need once they were out on the ocean, making certain the Seekers could wield the oars on the bigger boat as well as they could on the vessel Nealu had designed.

This boat was simply far more seaworthy, so the idea was to use it to get back to the original island.

"The problem is it's also far larger, and it will be more difficult to row with because of the added weight and area with which it interacts with the ocean," Nealu, the group's expert on seamanship, grumbled.

Sylina looked at Harry speculatively. "Harry, if you enchant the entire ship to, say, have half of its weight now while we are beached, then do you think that the enchantment would last once we are out on open water?"

"Your guess is as good as mine," Harry answered wryly, to which the listening Nealu's lips quirked in equally wry understanding. It had been him, after all, who told Harry about how magic did not react well to the Maelstrom even this far away from the so-called true edge of that phenomenon. "I tried to use a spell once while we were out in the ocean, and it failed miserably. I mean, I can experiment a bit, but I have no idea."

After a few moments of consultation with the others, it was decided that both the larger ship was a better idea than their own going back and that Harry should indeed try to experiment with enchanting something on land and see how long it lasted out into the ocean. Nealu was pretty certain it would fail, but the others held out hope that, as in so many other things, Harry's spells would prove the exception to the norm.

"And," Leesha stated, smirking slightly at Harry, "if anything does happen to them out on the ocean, he can just turn into his half-Phoenix form and fly back."

Harry's eyes narrowed, slightly annoyed at the cavalier way the man was willing to risk Harry's life. Yet Harry understood the basic logic.

It was but the work of fifteen minutes until Nealu had a small boat available for Harry, something like an away boat in size. Harry quickly cast a featherweight charm on it and himself and began to row towards the entrance into the smaller cove.

At first, everything went fine. The weightless spells on Harry and himself made the ship incredibly easy to move along. Even a single oar would've been enough, but Harry knew that would go away the instant he began to deal with heavier waves. Still, after half an hour of moving around the cove, Harry was ready to challenge the ocean. With the harpies watching from on high, ready to aid him if need be, he made his way out into the open ocean beyond the cove, planning to just stay within easy reach of the entrance.

Even so, Harry was very right to be worried. Fighting the current was incredibly difficult, and soon, Harry found himself being twisted around and then pulled in a different direction until he powered through.

Grimacing from the effort it took, Harry vowed that when they got back to Trueshot Lodge, he would do more upper body exercises. "Flipping heck! This is way harder than anything I had to do with the tauren! Even rock climbing wasn't this bad!" He grumbled to himself. There, at least, he would be able to rest. Here, it was simply repetitive and quick motions, and he always had to fight against the current. *I really don't think we thought this through...*

And then the spells on his body and the boat failed. Harry felt it on himself at first, a faint trickle down his spine as he felt his body get heavier swiftly, returning to its normal weight within a minute or so. "Oh shit."

Quickly, Harry turned the boat around, trying to get back to the cove while also preparing the image of his half-phoenix form, preparing it to be called on. The next instant, the same thing happened to his boat, and the ship was pulled sideways through the water, so hard and so fast that the boat was in danger of capsizing.

Dropping the oars, Harry quickly began to shift into his half-Phoenix form, while above, the entirety of the Harvey flock shrieked warnings. Irene and Cassandra, two of the flock's strongest flyers, dove down quickly, ready to assist if need be.

Their aid was needed. No sailor, Harry hadn't realized how quickly things could go wrong, and within a second, the ship nearly capsized, dumping his upper body into the water first, his head and shoulder disappearing into the water even as his wings finished transforming. Luckily, it seemed as if the Maelstrom's negative impact on magic couldn't do anything to magic directed inward, something that only occurred to Harry just then that could possibly have happened.

But even that would not have saved Harry from a watery grave if not for the harpies.

As his wings slapped at the water ineffectually, Harry's lungs filled with water, causing him to flail and panic, real, honest fear filling him for the first time in a very long time. Then he

felt claws grabbing at his back and pulling him upright as Irene and Cassandra grabbed at him, with Recca joining them a moment later. The strongest flyers among the flock beat their wings as one, lifting Harry up into the air until Harry's own wings had enough room to flap.

As they did, Harry pumped his arms strongly, feeling them screaming at him in pain. Evidently, a lot of the muscles he'd been using earlier to try and row were also those he used in the air. But the pain helped Harry push through the momentary fear he'd felt a moment ago, and he was able to push himself upwards into the air, the transformation finishing as he did. Soon, the inherent magic of his half-Phoenix body came into action, making it easier, making him able to ride the thermals coming up off the ocean for a bit until he got some air. As he gasped in relief, he smiled over at the harpies, shouting thanks.

All of them smiled or took his thanks with nods, although Recca went so far as to say, "I hope that this has taught you a valuable lesson, Harry! Those of us who were born with wings, or in your case, can grow them, do not belong on the ocean! We belong in the air above it!"

"You won't get any argument from me," Harry admitted ruefully, pumping the air even harder to gain some more altitude as he followed the other harpies, ignoring his battered muscles with difficulty.

As he did, he stared down at the ocean, falling silent as a shiver went through him. That had been... honestly, quite scary. It almost reminded Harry of his talks with Fleur about how she had felt during the second task of the tri-Wizard tournament. How helpless being in the water made the veela feel. Harry hadn't been entirely dumped in the water, just his head and the front of his shoulders before the harpies had pulled him up into the air, yet even that had been enough. That current was just simply deadly, and they weren't even anywhere near the center of the Maelstrom, barely on its edge, as many of the islands of the archipelago were.

Yet beyond that, when Harry had dove into the water, he had gained a sense of... of depth, maybe. He wasn't certain how to put it. It was some kind of visceral understanding coming straight from the hind portion of his monkey brain that here, there was no bottom for him to touch. There was only a limit to what his eyes could see, and beyond that limit lay a bottomless hunger, a sucking depth that would drag him under without a thought. There was no sense of sentience or anything like that, but it was still a terrifying feeling.

Recca flew below him, twisting around in midair so that she was flying on her back, staring up at him, looking at him thoughtfully. "Are you well, Harry?"

Harry nodded and then, feeling as if she and the others who had rescued him deserved something, let his wings furl. He fell towards her for a second before flaring them back out, kissing her before she could react. Recca squawked, and her wings suddenly stopped flapping in turn, causing her to fall away from him in turn before she flipped herself around and righted

herself, staring up at him in chagrin and more than a little rising desire, the sight of Harry in his 'male harpy' form having already gotten her going more than a bit.

"As thanks for the help," he explained.

For a second, Recca stared at him, then she pouted, a devastatingly cute expression despite her scarred visage, as she began winging away. "Ugh, tease! And I'm the chaser! I didn't like the tables being turned on me like that. Especially when it's all a tease!"

Irene chuckled at that as several of the others clamored for kisses as well before Cassandra ordered them away. She looked speculatively at Harry for a few moments, then shook her head and began to lead the way back to the island, chortling quietly.

Despite Harry's report about what had happened, Nealu and the others still decided that the bigger ship was safer. It would be much harder for them all to work it, but the higher gunwales and the added weight against the current would hopefully mitigate that with the aid of the sails. With the wind helping them, they would be better able to fight against the current, which otherwise might have been even worse going back south than it had been heading north.

The group rested that night on the shoreline, with Feldral and Terrence taking the lead in telling tales around the campfire and only one guard awake that night. Despite the trial to come, all of the Seekers were ebullient, delight and joy filling all of them, even the previously dour Matar, at the recovery of the Spear of the Ancients. Only the hard day's work of dealing with the dead bodies of the vrykul raiders dampened their spirits, keeping the rest from becoming a true celebratory party. There was a certain unspoken understanding that such would occur when they were back on the main island, though.

They were up the next morning with the tide, such as it was in the cove, and Harry lightened the ship enough to allow Quetzal to push the large longship out away from where it had been beached until the bottom was no longer scraping the ocean floor. Then he climbed aboard as Harry shrunk him. "Well done, Quetzal."

"Hmf, too often of late, I have been forced to serve in some fashion as a beast of burden. In the future, I might demand some recompense for this," Quetzal hissed.

As the ship started to shift with the incoming waves, the majority of the party began to work the oars. The only exception was Nealu, who took the wheel, grateful that the vrykul's craft made it so light he could move it on his own without any aid. When Harry saw him standing there, he had first called the wheel the tiller, thinking that was what it was called on a boat, but had been sharply corrected.

"Only boats have tillers. Boats are for shifting from a ship to shore or going up rivers. Anything that can survive out on the ocean is called a ship. Boats have tillers, ships have

wheels,” Nealu declared authoritatively. “There are exceptions, but they are few and far between.”

Rolling his eyes at the pedantic nature of the man about anything to deal with ships, Harry accepted the correction and moved on, lest he get some other kind of lecture. With some of the harpies perched on the topmost portion of the mast, a wooden beam that Harry hadn’t caught the name of, the ship eventually left the cove.

The sails stayed furled as they all took to the oars, pushing them through the same waves that had capsized Harry the day before for a bit. Only after they were several ship lengths away from the rocks surrounding the entry way into the cove behind them that the sailing expert order people to the sails, diverting them from the oars.

This caused trouble, as, without all of them working their hardest on the oars, they instantly began to lose way against the current, and this, in turn, caused trouble for those trying to order the sails. For a few fraught moments, they were being pulled directly sideways deeper into the swirling morass that was the tides coming out of the Maelstrom. But then, the wind came, and under Nealu’s shouted direction, the group of kaldorei Seekers shifted the sails to the right angle to catch it.

Wind and wave fought for a few seconds, with the tauren and kaldorei who weren’t working the sails helping as best they could on the oars. For a few dangerous moments, it looked as if the wind would not be enough, then it started to pick up more, and soon, they were on course once more.

Staying on that course was troublesome, but with the wind behind them now, they were able to make surprisingly good time. Within a few turns of the glass, they saw the entrance into the smaller cove that they had left a few days ago ahead of them.

They were not going to try to skirt all the way around the Broken Isles to the village and the wharf that served as the archipelago’s only connection to the greater kaldorei society. With a crew as inexperienced and small as this, that would’ve been a recipe for disaster. It was better to go over land.

As they entered the cove, Harry instantly lightened the ship and his companions and the group on the oars pushed the ship forward and forward until the ship was well up the rocky shore, and none of the oars could reach the water. With that done, and as the ship began to list, the members of the Unseen Path leaped ashore. As they landed, several of them went to their knees, some even falling flat on their faces in the rocks below, their legs giving out on them after hours spent sitting down rowing with the rest of their bodies just too damn sore to care.

Feldral was one of the few who was fit enough to have dealt with all of the exercises with something approaching aplomb, and even he was rubbing his arms a little. “Well, I should devise some way to train ourselves with a rowing machine of some kind in the future. This was an interesting experience, Nealu.”

“One of many on this trip, I must admit,” the other answered with a laugh, which, as short as a week ago, would have been impossible to think from most of the members of the Unseen Path. “I had never thought to ever see the day when we would be able to converse peacefully with harpies, for one thing. And I, like many others, had long thought the Spear of the Ancients destroyed. To have it back in our hands is an ebullient feeling.”

Feldral nodded, reaching over his shoulder with a finger, gently running it up and down the Spear behind him, which, even on board the ship, had not been removed from his back or left his side for any reason. “True enough.” He looked up at the sky above, then gestured towards where the jungle began ahead of them. “Up you get, you lazy bones! Let’s move away from the shore and find something actually pleasant to sit on rather than these stones.”

Once all of them were sheltered under the eaves of the jungle, and the harpies had perched all around them in the trees, Feldral opened the floor to suggestions on their next move. “As Pathfinder Farstride hasn’t yet replied to the last message we sent via Harry’s message tubes, I vote that we simply go back the way we came, using Harry’s magic more liberally this time than we did before. We know what we’ll face up in the mountains, and besides the bugs, which we can deal with, we will not run into any actual threats.”

There were a lot of objections to this, and not all of them were well thought out, to say the least. “By Elune/Musha no!” encompassed the majority of everyone’s thoughts on this idea.

Despite the experience they’d had in making their way through the mountains, very few of the group of Seekers and Oathkeepers had actually enjoyed it. Surprisingly, or perhaps not given the history of the Unseen Path, there were also a lot of objections about using Harry’s power even more profligate plea than they already did. After all, Harry’s magic had made several of their more recent tasks far easier than they would otherwise be, and while they were happy for the help, they didn’t really want to get overly used to it or take it for granted.

Furthermore, several of the Seekers argued that they needed to know where this valley met with the rest of the lowlands. That was the knowledge that the cartographers would be very happy to learn about and would help them in the future when a mapping expedition was sent out to this valley, which very obviously needed to happen. The existence of the valley had been known, but no one in the band had ever seen any map of it, and even Feldral hadn’t realized that it had an actual shore.



Sylina, Lathariel and Harry, as the only Oathkeepers there, stayed out of the conversation, letting their elders hash it out. When it was clear that the group would rest there that night, Harry planned to head off all along the shoreline on his own, hoping to find a place that was at least a little bit romantic. At the same time, Lathariel left the band to hunt with Matar, who didn't care to add his voice to the argument one way or another. With the hardest part of the journey back hopefully behind them, the idea of having a bit of a feast and a real rest was a very nice one to everyone in the group.

As for Harry, he felt that he and Sylina could get away with heading off on their own for the night. With all the teasing the harpies had done, which had continued on the ship in various ways, Harry needed a bit of an outlet. And Sylina, always up to have a good time, agreed. "We surely have earned a bit of downtime, and another kind of full-body exercise sounds like a great way to do just that."

"Good," Harry whispered back so that the pair of them did not interrupt the debate going on. "Leave it to me. I'll try to find a place and set everything up."

"You're the one who still has enough energy to walk around, so I don't have a problem with that," Sylina answered, although inside, she determined that she, too, would do something for the night.

By the time Harry found a place and finished setting everything up, the debate had finished, although not via consensus. Instead, it ended with the arrival of a message through the messenger tube.

The group that had set such off on Cassandra's word of a source of wild nature magic had sent a message to Pathfinder Farstride at that point and then again after they had actually seen the Spear, before the attack on the vrykul that Harry had basically forced. Only now did they actually get a response back to those two and their third message of victory, which made many of the Seekers wonder if Harry could perhaps add in some kind of function to know when a message had been delivered.

"If you're doing other things, such as walking, fighting, or anything else that creates noise, even we kaldorei cannot hear a message arriving into the tube," Acali opined. He then looked around, frowning. "Where is young Harry? I haven't seen him in a bit. And he hasn't even set up his yurt, either."

Such was their skill that even carrying on a semi-raucous argument, the members of the Unseen Path had been able to set up camp. The area where they did so was in a small, open field situated around two large trees, their roots large enough to force them all to climb a bit to get over them.

He was promptly nudged in the side by one of his fellows, surprisingly, Shai. He wasn't exactly the biggest fan of Harry's magic, but he had come around quite a bit both during the fight and after, and while he also wasn't the biggest fan of abnormal relationships of any type, he also firmly believed that such was not his or anyone else's business. "Don't bother looking for him. Harry's been gone for a while. And given the looks he and Sylina were exchanging before he left, I daresay he's got other things on his mind."

"And as for the loss of Harry's 'privy,' as he calls it, we all can deal with a night going back to making our own latrines," Lesha agreed firmly. "one night of roughing it will not kill any of us."

That was enough for the tauren and kaldorei, some of whom chuckled, while others simply nodded sagely, glancing up to where the harpies were. Many of them had gone hunting, but others had remained in the area, napping at present. They seemed to enjoy doing so in the evening, waking up for a meal and then heading back to bed. Those that were awake were watching Sylina, not having followed Harry at his request.

And their Matriarch's orders, admittedly. Far more that, than Harry's request.

"What does the Pathfinder's message say?" Lesha continued, looking back at Feldral.

Feldral opened the small scroll, read it, and sighed theatrically. "It says precisely what all of you are hoping it does. We are to go over land rather than up into the mountains. In fact, Pathfinder Farstride has already begun the trek in our direction. He began it from the moment he read our first message. So we will meet with them somewhere within the lowlands."

Pathfinder Farstride had led another force of the Unseen Path down into what Tricky, Harry's tiny hummingbird-like fire elemental, had reported as the hunting grounds favored by the harpies. Given how quickly they could fly, having their main eyrie high up in the mountains and their main hunting grounds down in the lowlands hadn't bothered the harpies over much. Indeed, several times on the trek down, the members of the Unseen Path had heard the harpies commenting to one another about how slow those who went on the ground were. Considering how many harpies were probably out hunting at any one time, it had made sense to send out two expeditions in order to make certain that they wiped out the harpy nest entirely.

With a glance up at Cassandra and her flock, Feldral went on. "He reports they came upon the harpy hunters entirely unawares, and the battle went off without much trouble. He also apologizes for missing the first message I mentioned in my last because they were almost undoubtedly fighting at the time it arrived," Feldral read. "By Pathfinder Farstride's estimation of this valley's position in relation to the rest of the island, if we are able to push out of this valley, he might be able to meet us between the Long and Wide Lakes within a few days."

“Long and Wide Lakes? What are those?” Sylina asked, coming through the woods and sitting down near Feldral. After helping the rest of the party set up camp, she’d followed Harry’s example of leaving them behind for a bit heading deeper into the valley. No one had known before this where she had gone, but considering that she was wearing a clean outfit and her hair gleamed wetly, all of them could figure out that she had found someplace to bathe.

“The Long and Wide Lakes are inland lakes which feed into a few rivers and are fed by runoff of the various mountains. The Long Lake is precisely what it sounds like, a long, thin lake. You can see the other side of it if you’re standing on the shores in one direction. Indeed, it takes a swimmer barely ten minutes to swim from one side across to the other. Yet it is so long that even the best swimmer among us could have trouble reaching one long end from the other,” Lesha explained.

“The Wide Lake is shaped almost into a perfect circle and is so wide that even kaldorei have trouble seeing the far end anywhere around its length,” Ludros added.

Sylina blinked. “That doesn’t sound altogether natural.”

“It isn’t. Remember, the Broken Isles are what remains of our people’s ancient homeland, the area where we had lived for the longest time. The Long Lake is natural, created at some point during the cataclysm, with water having filled up a deep crack in the island that wasn’t quite deep enough to shatter it into two. The Wide Lake was magically created, back during the time of the Azshara Empire and fed water magically too at the time. Perhaps you have heard of the Floating waterspouts of House Streamstrong?” Lufa questioned, only to look shocked when Sylina shook her head. “That’s... honestly quite sad. While it was created magically, it was still a beautiful sight in its prime.”

The other kaldorei all nodded, their looks at Sylina making her feel a bit self-conscious, as more than a few mumbled about how such sights deserved to be remembered regardless of what came after. But she hid this as best she could, pushing on quickly. “So we are going to meet Pathfinder Farstride and the rest somewhere near the lakes? Are they so close together you can see both of them at the same time?”

“Honestly, no. Only by air could that be possible. But you can travel between the lakes relatively quickly, pushing through the forest a bare turn of the glass in either direction,” Lesha said, shrugging his shoulders. “The area between them is actually quite easy to traverse. The trees are larger, and there are few predators due to the nature of the terrain.”

With the decision of where to go from here made, the main discussion petered out, and the party broke up into smaller groups. A few began to prepare the food that Lathariel and Matar had brought in, while others started to see to the care of their equipment. Moving through the mountains had been hard on it, and more than a few had lost various items of

apparel. Such was always the way when you were on the march. A few others decided to instead pull out flutes and began to play long, haunting melodies. The harpies above congregated near these, listening intently, and the music and cheerful air of the camp made for an almost festive atmosphere.

Sylina joined the others in going over her equipment, turning down the offer of a plate of food when it was offered, knowing Harry well enough to think he would also be seeing to that too. Instead, she concentrated on her moon glaive until she finally straightened the edge of the blade near where it had been rolled again to her satisfaction.

As she set her weapon aside, the youngest kaldorei there felt eyes on her, and looking up, Sylina found herself gazing into the faces of a few of the harpies. Recca looked annoyed with something, and Sylina allowed a smirk onto her face as she stared up at the older harpy. Recca glared down at her, then huffed and shifted away. Aleri and Alari, on the other hand, simply smiled, settling into the branches above her.

A sudden surmise hit Sylina then, and she decided to speak on it immediately. “You do know that once Harry and I leave camp to go wherever he has set up for a set night, you two won’t be allowed to follow, right? In fact, I ask that all of you stay here and give us some privacy.”

“Maybe we won’t stay around while,” Aleri began.

“The two of you are together, but” Alari went on.

“We can still watch and take notes on the dinner, and”

“ambush you tomorrow morning!” The twins stated as one.

Rolling her eyes at that, Sylina sighed but felt that trying to chase them off would take more energy than simply letting them do their thing for now. “Just remember, once we start kissing, you two need to flap off, all right? And up to that point, stay out of sight, if you please. Having an audience even when we’re just having a meal is quite off-putting.”

The twins blinked in surprise at that, then actually agreed to leave them entirely alone so long as Sylina didn’t try to get out of answering their questions tomorrow morning. After a moment, Recca also agreed to this.

“That’s more than fine by me,” Sylina stated eagerly. “Really, I think both Harry and I would just prefer to get away from everyone for a bit and not just to have some \*ahem\* time. The enforced closeness of the camp sometimes bothers me a good deal.” *And you ladies have done your darndest to rile Harry up today and yesterday, too*, she added, mentally feeling just a little smug at the fact she would be the recipient of his response to such. *A part of me thinks I*

*should thank you for that, seeing as I'm going to get the spoils, so to speak. The rest of me is simply amused by it.*

With that agreement in place the two white-feathered harpies flapped off, not higher into the sky but away, as if playing tag with one another through the trees. Their merry chatter drew many a smile from the rest of the members of the Unseen Path, and Sylina smiled too, watching the Seekers laugh and play their flutes or just pull out small flasks of wine.

*That is a far cry indeed from my first impression of the Unseen Path when we reached Trueshot Lodge. I had hoped Master Feltstep had been an exception while we were traveling, but he proved to be the rule at that point. Still, we will see if this shift in attitude is universal and has any staying power. If it does, staying with the Unseen Path long-term will look far better than it has for the past few months.*

Deciding to continue to use the time until Harry returned wisely, Sylina pulled off her boots, setting them down. Kaldorei boots were a lot thinner and less protective than most humans would've been satisfied with, but their feet were also far more durable, the pads on their bottoms almost enough to have reminded Harry of the hobbits of Tolkien fame when he first saw Tyrande's feet. In strength only, obviously, not in looks.

Yet they still wore boots and very much preferred comfort over anything else. A stone had worked its way into the bottom of one of her boots, and Sylina spent a few moments removing it and a few others.

She was just starting to get hungry when a gentle cough had her looking up, smiling brightly at Harry. "Harry, I take it you found a place for us to set up for the night?"

"I did. I even took the opportunity to go fishing a bit. So long as no wild animal has descended upon my catch by the time we get back, we should have two of those brill that we tried on the island the night before that you liked."

Sylina smiled, getting to her feet quickly. She had had other lovers before Harry. In fact, as Sylina told Harry, her relationship with Berena had been the longest-running relationship Sylina had ever had. And she knew that she really wasn't in love with Harry or anything similar. But it was always nice when the man or woman you were sharing a bed with put forth more effort than pulling back the sheets or even foreplay. "I found some herbs while I was heading inland to wash. Give me directions to your boudoir, and I will give you directions so you can go and clean yourself up."

"I like how you don't even bother to hint at the fact that I need to do so, simply outright stating it," Harry drawled, eliciting a chuckle from Sylina, but she did lean up and kissed him for

a moment, uncaring of the fact that a few of the others could see them at the moment. Then she was pulling back, and repeating her question about directions.

Harry gave them, and she soon found herself back on the shore, heading westward. It did not take her long to see a bright red canopy had been set up between two large rocks, covering an area of the shore between them.

The area Harry had found was set between a series of large rocks that acted to protect an area between them of true sand. The nearby waves were also quieter because of the rocks, the sound more soothing than simply loud. Indeed, reflecting off the rocks and the canopy above, the sound of the waves was actually quite soothing while also being more than loud enough to make certain that their voices, or anything else, didn't carry over much.

The yurt was set up at the back of this area, further up the beach. And in the sand in front of the beach, three brill had been set up on wooden stakes over a tiny fire. Small magical lights had even been set up, illuminating the area far more than the fire as night began to fall. As a kaldorei, Sylina really didn't need much in the way of light, but the small, soothing, pale white light was almost like that of a moon reflected on the water and was quite nice.

But as Sylina took it all in, she frowned pensively. A part of her greatly enjoyed what she was seeing. As she had thought a few moments ago, it was very nice when the person you were sleeping with put forth effort like this. But a part of Sylina felt this was a bit too much. The two of them were friends with benefits, not truly courting, as she and Berena had been. While with Harry's magic, this setup probably didn't take him very long, it was the thought behind it that bothered her a little bit. *Is Harry getting a little too invested in our relationship, or am I just being overly sensitive due to how my relationship with Berena ended?*

She pondered on that for a moment before depositing various herbs that she had discovered in the woods to one side. Entering the yurt, she came back out with cooking utensils and began to work the fish, preparing them for whatever meal that Harry had in mind. *If he has, we will talk about it once more back at the Lodge. I doubt it, but it is better to make certain.*

Harry soon arrived freshly shaved and washed. When they had kissed earlier, she had felt little pinpricks from the downy hair that had begun to grow in his chin and beard and was honestly more pleased that she no longer could than she was of the area Harry had created.

The two of them talked throughout the meal, mostly about the fight against the Vrykul, their thoughts on the Spear of the Ancients, and the hope that with the Spear back, the overall feel of Trueshot Lodge would change. They had been all too aware of the underlying sense of greatness and guilt, the feeling of being in a place that was decaying due to sorrow, time and depression slowly around them when they lived in the Lodge. "I probably would not have been able to stand that long term. Two or three years at most, then the overall feeling of melancholy

would get to me, and I would have left,” Sylina admitted. “Especially when we didn’t know what was going on, and none of the others were explaining it to us. They wouldn’t have explained about the Spear at all if not for the fact that we were actually on the trail of it when we demanded answers.”

“True. That does bother me more than a bit, I will admit,” Harry stated, shaking his head. “But the Unseen Path knows that there is danger in sharing too much information, that new information itself can corrupt. I would wager anything that they have dealt with betrayal in the past.”

“Maybe. Maybe not. Whatever the case, I will be very interested to see how reclaiming the Spear of the Ancients will change things. Do you think that there is a chance that Ohn’ahra... himself, herself? I’ve never been too clear on the gender of that particular deity. Regardless, do you think Ohn’ahra will appear the moment we return with the Spear?”

“Her, and do I detect a hint that someone wasn’t as dutiful a student as they should have been?” When Sylina simply smirked at him, Harry chuckled and continued. “And I don’t know. It will certainly be interesting. You know how I had met Cenarius, but he is a very different sort to the impression I get from Ohn’ahra. Ohn’ahra seems more aloof, more willing to empower others to work in his stead rather than do it himself, having actual followers and clients rather than family members like Cenarius.”

Their discussion on that score took a while, and more than once, Harry got the impression that Sylina really wasn’t as enthused about the Unseen Path as Harry was. Exploration and traveling, sure. Those she had a passion for. Yet the brush with the necromancer had shaken her. As had watching Harry go through the trials of the tapestry as he had.

His thoughts on that score were interrupted when Sylina asked if he was done eating. He nodded absentmindedly, setting the plate that he had been idly toying with aside before turning to her.

Then his eyes widened as Sylina leaned into him suddenly, kissing him hard. As Harry somewhat bemusedly began to respond, Sylina pushed on his shoulders so that he lay back on the ground behind the log that they had been sitting on in front of the fire.

“Good. In that case, I think you deserve a reward for setting all this up...” She whispered before moving down his body, her hands working his belt.

**OOOOOOO**

The next day, Cassandra watched with some amusement as several of her daughters and granddaughters attempted to swarm Sylina, only to be warded off by the incredibly odd trio of

her youngest twin and Recca. *That is a trio that I would never have thought would work together on anything.*

The young kaldorei was limping a bit, but the smug look on her face told the tale even more. She was somewhat amused by that but was more interested in the mellow smile on Wizard Potter's face. That look was quite nice on the young 'human'. *Pity he is so young-looking. I have never taken a male lover, but my preferences have always leaned toward the more mature, and while he is fun to tease, I have seen no reason to throw my feathers into the nest.*

More importantly, though, was watching the other Seekers. The tauren were simply ignoring the pair of lovers, which told Cassandra a good deal about their society. It was evident they believed in keeping to their own business. The kaldorei were doing the same for the most part, but it was obviously a decision rather than something automatic, and she could spot more than a few rounds among them and a few speaking glances, although the narrow-eyed looks back at those who seemed less happy with it seemed to work. This, too, told Cassandra that the kaldorei, as a society, might have issues with Harry sleeping with one of their own. Or perhaps just Harry himself, although she doubted that, considering how Harry had dropped Tyrande Whisperwind's name a few times over the past few days.

*As a harpy I might not know much about the kaldorei as a whole, but even as a chick, I heard of that name. I don't doubt the high priestess of Elune is still as important to her people now as she became in the War of the Ancients.*

*So, with that in mind, will their normal society be more or less accepting of Potter, and in turn, us? The Unseen Path has been somewhat open about its history in a way without giving any actual details beyond the loss of the Spear of the Ancients. But I get the impression that, in many ways, they are more accepting of people being different. And in others, very much not. Regardless, it will be interesting to see what they think when Harry becomes involved with one of my flocks.*

*Or more than one. Some of my children and grandchildren have learned how to share, as well as the weight of their actions. I hope, the matriarch thought, fighting back an urge to scratch at the branch she was currently perched on in a show of nervousness on that score.*

It never occurred to Cassandra that Harry would not eventually fall into a relationship with one of her flock. While she knew that many would give up on Harry after they started interacting with still more tauren and kaldorei, others were more serious, something that was, in a way, being shown even now by the unusual trio she was watching protect Sylina from being swarmed by most of her family.



They understood the importance of their bodies and seemed to have decided they were willing to offer not only their bodies but more, and what they wanted in turn. *Even setting Recca aside, who I never suspected to be interested in sex at all, let alone a male, there are Aleri and Alari.*

As the last of the others finally left them alone, it was Alari and Aleri rather than Recca who turned to speak to Sylina. As Cassandra watched, Sylina sighed, nodding, her ears drooping. A moment later, the four were moving off. *Real interest, infatuation, or what? Even I have trouble reading those two. On the other hand, I'm certain Aleri and Alari would be up to actually sharing. Unlike Icsy or Irine, who I note has already given up on Harry.*

Cassandra did not look up from watching Harry talking to Alaric and Lesha as she felt someone step onto the large tree branch she was currently perched on. The weight of the individual on the tree branch told her that it was no harpy, but she had seen Feldral and a few of the other kaldorei climbing trees before this, so when he spoke, she was not surprised.

"Might I ask, in the spirit of trying to spot potential problems in the future, how many of your daughters and grandchildren are serious about their pursuit of Harry? Only, I truly don't think that any of the Cartographers or the others who remained behind would be pleased to have harpies flying in and out of Trueshot Lodge all the time."

Although his voice was droll, Cassandra could understand the underlying concern as she had seen some of his men becoming irritated at her flock occasionally over the past week. Not only would there be issues with their coming and going in what was very obviously a secret fellowship's headquarters, but it would be simply intensely disruptive to what, from what she had gleaned from conversations with Feldral and the others, was something of a monastic life. Not like the priesthood of Elune, as she had heard it described as a chick, but certainly something leaning more towards asceticism than openness.

"I believe that most of them are already starting to back off as it becomes clear that Harry is not interested in their offers of recompense. What you're seeing now is a mix of true gratefulness for what he has done and simple interest in him as a male. That last will fade in many when they have more variety to assuage their curiosity, I feel. At present, only three seem serious enough to keep chasing him."

"That begs another question, one that we have not addressed directly," Feldral answered, his tone becoming far more serious. "One of the two ways you harpies..."

"I know what you are going to say. After our great mother's death, many of my people descended into true barbarity, kidnapping men away for themselves, keeping them and using them as breeding stock. It was not needed to simply breed new harpies, but it was done

because those who did so enjoyed the fear of their victims. And I have seen that the offspring of such forced joinings do become bigger and more aggressive. And far less intelligent!”

After she nearly barked out that last sentence, Cassandra’s lips curled, and were she, not an almost impeccably well-mannered mature lady, Feldral suddenly realized that she probably would’ve been spitting at this point. Or simply cursing her entire race for its stupidity.

Instead, she turned to him, and for the first time in several hundred years, nearly a thousand in point of fact, Feldral found himself a little intimidated. Not overmuch. He had, after all, stared directly into the eyes of a Burning Legion lieutenant as he thrust a dagger through his heart. But even so, it was impressive.

“I was but a chick when Aviana died, which allowed me to survive the backlash, as I have mentioned. In the thousands of years since, I have never taken a male lover, nor have I ever allowed any of my children to.” She shuddered then, remembering Ivella and how she had fallen into the taint of the Old Gods. That act had spurred her on to leave the flock they had been a part of at the time with Maria and Icsy, who was barely a chick at the time. And while Cassandra had hinted at the fact that Ivella’s attempt to corrupt her had been the final straw, there had been many leading up to it. One of which had been stealing away a **far** too young kaldorei, and beginning to rut with him. “No. I never allowed that, and hopefully, with everything that has been going on, it will cease to be an issue in the future.”

She then smiled, banishing her foul mood with the ease of long practice. The pain of Ivella’s corruption was an old wound. A sore one, but one whose pain had long since dulled with age. There were more and far more amusing things to think of now.

“After all, I have seen the glances that even you, Feldral Irongrip, have given some of my flock. And me occasionally.” Cassandra arched an eyebrow at Feldral, daring him to comment, but he very intelligently didn’t. It was true, after all. Nearly all of the harpies were striking if they were not outright beautiful.

“We harpies are, once you get past our voices and the general disposition of the rest of my race, quite beautiful,” Cassandra stated matter-of-factly. “I do not doubt that if we are able to civilize ourselves a bit more, those of us who wish to will have no problem attracting mates among the civilized kaldorei or tauren. Moreover, our preference is for set, well-established pairings, despite what you might think at the moment, seeing my flock clamoring after Harry. As I told him before, sex was a currency among us but is also held in some high regard.”

She then chuckled a throaty, low sound that made portions of Feldral’s mind and body go *\*twoing\**, a response that he hadn’t had for at least three hundred years or more. “You will also note that Viol is not down there with the rest of my flock. I believe that she has found her

own interest somewhere else. And that interest has been astonishingly returned. Nor is she the only one.”

Blinking at that, Feldral scanned the group of harpies that were now taking off from around Sylina and Harry. The only one left standing near Harry was Recca, who had broken off from the twins and Sylina. Feldral had gotten so used to them over the past few days that he was able to pick out individual harpies with ease. After a few moments, he noticed that they were indeed missing two. Looking down at the camp, he could also see that two of his own party members were also missing.

The implications were very interesting, and Feldral began to chuckle wryly. “Well, I wonder how Pathfinder Vurg is going to deal with the fact that we might have two established pairings between your harpies and my little band beyond the trio you think are truly interested in Harry.”

“You think your leader will react negatively?” Cassandra asked, frowning. “You mentioned concerns about how the rest of the Unseen Path would react to my flock being near Trueshot Lodge, or as you put it, flying in and out to bother Harry.”

“It... might be an issue. Depending on where you make your eyries and precisely how those two relationships fall out, I suppose. If they are simply casual, or simply long-term, casual relationships, where both parties can come and go as they wish but seek physical and emotional comfort in one another without making demands... That actually might be helpful. Such things are known to help the mental strength and wellness of people. But if you expect to move into Trueshot Lodge, don't. There are secrets we keep, relics we have that might tempt even the strongest of souls.”

One of the two pairs that Cassandra and Feldral were talking about returned at that point. Alaric walked back into camp with Maria flying above him, trying to look nonchalant. This did not work. Several of the other kaldorei turned to him, eyebrows rising in query, their ears twitching up right into expressions of surprise or shock.

This was a very subtle shift in the ears that even those tauren who had worked alongside them for decades would probably not understand. kaldorei ears were incredibly mobile, and could be just as equally subtle in their movements. It was why, as kaldorei aged, their body language started to fade away in favor of minute facial expressions and movements of the ears. At least, that was the case in normal kaldorei society. This did not happen among kaldorei who interacted continually with other races, like the members of the Unseen Path for the most part. Rather, those who made up the Unseen Path had found their body language opening up more, changing from what it had been before the War of the Ancients.

kaldorei did not go into gathering around and gossiping or demanding questions of another. At least, the menfolk didn't. If there were more women among the Unseen Path, perhaps Maria would've been facing some interesting questions right now. But as it was, the exchange of shocked or appalled glances was mostly silent.

Not so much when the other pair that had seemingly broken off during the night before came back. When they returned, the tauren stared, then began to laugh or just shake their heads and mutter, "Good gods, how did that work!?"

This one, Feldral had to admit, he had not seen coming. Viol was one of the three most warlike harpies, and Feldral had seen her take part in the battle against the vrykul by diving down to claw one of them in the face at one point when her dropped stone had missed its target. She had gored out the vrykul's eyes, and then the winged back up into the air before his fellow could take a swipe at her, then flipped into a kick, her claws raking across the side of that one's face before she retreated entirely. Viol wasn't very in your face about it, and unlike Recca, she hadn't really gotten any closer to any of the members of the Unseen Path, although she had flirted at one point along with her sister with Harry.

To see her take up with silent, stoic Matar Orangehoof of the Highmountain Tribe was astonishing. And not just because a part of Feldral's mind was, like a few of his fellow tauren Seekers, wondering how a tauren Tab B fit into a harpy-sized Slot A.

In fact, if you had told Feldral that Matar had anything in him besides grief and rage after he had joined the Unseen Path and learned of the loss of the Spear of the Ancients, Feldral would've called you a liar. His fellow Seeker was an incredible warrior, mixing the raw strength and ferocity the tauren were famous for with a cold calculation and economy of motion that was entirely unlike the majority of his fellows. No one who knew Matar would ever think of him as a romantic or someone who would be able to get into any relationship at all.

"They're not quite opposites, but I think inside, the two of them might be kindred spirits. Especially now that the edge of melancholy and guilt-driven rage has left your fellow warrior," Cassandra mused. "That could be an interesting pairing."

"Both of them could be. But I noticed that you didn't answer my question about whether or not your fellow harpies would disrupt life at Trueshot Lodge in their pursuit of Harry," Feldral drawled, shaking his head, ignoring the look his friend Alaric sent his way, surreptitiously twitching one of his ears into an upright position. This served their people as a thumbs-up would among tauren, a sign of amused approval. This had Alaric flushing a bit and looking away, but Feldral kept most of his attention on Cassandra.

"I did not. That is an issue we will need to address in the future. Hopefully, well... hopefully, those of my flock who are not truly serious about pursuing Harry will find other

things to grab their attention swiftly. Unfortunately, many of us tend to be like those... hmm... come to think of it, I do not know what they are called in your language. They are small, usually banded white and black, always flying after something shiny. Only for us, it is something interesting.”

Feldral chuckled at that, then asked more seriously, “And Recca and the two-white-feathered ones? Will there be problems there or between them?”

“... I do not know. Recca... She acts brash, and when she was younger, she truly was. But there is a mind in there as well. Aleri and Alari are a bit of a mystery even to me, their grandmother,” Cassandra huffed. “And Recca, well... have you ever had a harpy among the Unseen Path?”

Feldral’s eyes widened at that, and then he began to chuckle. “Well, I can unequivocally say we have not. Yet, there is no rule against it. If so, hopefully, your daughter will eventually be able to somehow power and learn Harry’s spells. If he is not around, and they fail, well, I can see harpy/Unseen Path relations going downward quickly.”

Cassandra was still chuckling at that when he hopped off of the branch, landing lightly on his feet below, where he began to clap his hands. “Gentlemen of the Unseen Path and lady harpies, and you Sylina, the day is wasting. Don’t look at me like that. It’s not my fault you’re the only woman among us right now. I know that there have been a few changes recently, and I know that turning your feet towards home is enough to make you relax your guard and how you would normally go about things. Yet no mission is complete until we are home at Trueshot Lodge, especially not this one.”

He placed a hand on the shaft of the spear behind his shoulder, gripping it as if to draw it, but even doing that was enough to get the members of the Unseen Path more focused. Not that many of them needed it. A few of the tauren, including Matar, had already begun to clean up their camp, and Viol was already in the air high above the others, circling around them, then heading out and towards the southwest. Yet many of the others did take Feldral’s words to heart and quickly began to move around the campsite, cleaning up as best they could.

Feldral moved forward to help them as Cassandra barked an order to her flock. It was time to get on the move again.

**OOOOOO**

At around midday, Viol and the other harpies in the lead of the party found where the valley that they had essentially climbed down into a few days before interacted with the rest of the island. It was a small, exceedingly wet passage thanks to a steady, if not very deep, stream in the center of it. About three yards across, the tiny crag was lined with moss and led down into

one of the rivers that ran deeper into the valley. The slipperiness of the flooring and the need to wade through what amounted to nearly a foot or more of water was annoying, but they all did so with aplomb. With Quincy shrunk down to merely human-sized and Sylina's Panther companion going ahead of them, the group finally left the valley, finding themselves entering one of the larger jungles of the islands.

Pushing to the other side of the crag, they found the river took a sharp right turn, creating what looked almost like a dead end once you exited out of the small crack in the rock between two mountains there. The angle was so sharp and so harsh that the tauren had to turn themselves sideways to get around the blind. Even then, they had a lot of trouble getting through, almost to the point of needing Harry to shrink them down for a bit.

Grumbling and stretching his shoulders out, Leesha shook his head. "No wonder the last cartography group in the area missed it. Indeed, I wonder how Dorro Highmountain and Andiel realized that blind was there. It's proof positive that nature can sometimes create things that are even better than our own."

"We may never know. All we can say with certainty is that finally, we have made good that mistake, returning the Spear of the Ancients to Trueshot Lodge." Ladros murmured.

"We have not yet done so. Pray do not tempt fate by muttering such things until we step foot into Trueshot Lodge itself," Feldral warned. Right before Harry could get the words out, who well understood the stupidity of such comments.

The lowlands beyond the valley were a jungle, unlike within the valley they had just left, muggy and close in a way the forest before had not been. And at that point, Harry knew himself well enough to know that he would probably have been completely turned around. He had barely been able to figure out what direction they were going in as they exited the forest that dominated the small valley. Now, as they ventured further south according to Feldral, and the trees became even closer, the skyline above even denser, Harry would probably have lost all sense of direction unless he resorted to a Point Me spell, the efficacy which would vary wildly, as he had already figured out on this world. And what signs Harry knew to look for on the trees in order to figure out which direction was which did not help here. Every tree was covered with vines wherever he looked. And judging from their faces as they looked around, Lathariel and Sylina were in the same boat.

The harpies, though, as well as the older Seekers, knew what they were doing. Feldral had everyone still pointing in the right direction, although this did not mean that they were moving in a straight line, even remotely. Instead, he was leading them on a bit of a curve, technically away from Highmountain, which was now invisible to Harry thanks to the canopy

above them. Instead, they were moving deeper inland and around an area that apparently the Long Lake fed into. It was a huge bog that was nearly impassable for anyone going on foot.

“Trust me, the place is utterly miserable. Deep pits of mud, the ground even away from the mud so soft you have to watch your footing, full of small snakes and snapping turtles, and flies, lots and lots of flies,” Lesha explained, shuddering.

“He’s telling the truth. Two decades ago, we were part of a band that was supposed to map out those bogs. Feldral bowed out almost instantly, saying that he wasn’t an expert in bog travel, and it took barely two days before the Copier we were with decided that enough was enough, and one bog bit of land was much the same as any other,” Alaric joked, mentioning someone at the second level of the Mapmaker sect within the Unseen Path.

“How far out of our way will that take us?” Harry asked.

“In terms of actual time, not far at all. In terms of distance, quite a ways. Do not worry, Harry. The going will get easier in a few days when we move further towards the Wide lake. Once we are between the two, we will be able to make up time.”

Why that was, Feldral didn’t elaborate, and Harry garnered that the man was hoping for some kind of reaction either from himself or Sylina to what they would find there. *Perhaps some kind of ruins or the remains of a road? Landros did say that the Wide Lake had once been some kind of magically created nature park or something,* Harry mused.

Honestly, the going was relatively easy even now and continued being somewhat easy the next three days. With the two alpha predators ahead of the party and the harpies even further out and encircling the party, they didn’t run into any direct threats as they put more distance between them and the river that led into the other valley. The harpies became somewhat annoyed at how slowly they moved, but the food Harry and the other cooks provided them in the morning and at night more than made up for that irritation. Cooking was not something harpies could do very well. Lufar’s joke of needing opposable thumbs for such things was all too accurate.

On the fourth day out from the valley, Sylina and Harry began to see signs of why the area between the two lakes would be safer going. First of all, the ground leveled out considerably. Where before it had been a series of rolling hills up and down, all of it covered by trees, here, it was mostly flat. Further, it was more open than the rest of the jungle. There were also a few trees scattered around that looked different from the others.

When Harry pointed this out, Sylina whispered that some of them were fruit-producing trees, trees that were routinely grown in farms among her folk, who really didn’t go into

agriculture as Harry understood the term, with wheat, cows and so forth. Instead, they used far more tree-type farms. Harry thought those were called orchards but wasn't certain.

Those were more scattered than the other reason why this area was easier going. Because as the ground flattened, so too did appear stones on that ground. Not as in small cobblestones or the ground itself becoming rocky. No, what appears here was... Well, Harry didn't know the name of this particular type of stonework because for certain it was **not** natural.

It mostly resembled the wharf at the village where he and his then companion Tracy had come ashore in the broken islands years ago. But instead of being a single continuous piece, this area had been smashed. The apocalypse-like event of the Sundering had shattered it, and significant portions of it had been so cracked that for so long, trees had sprouted among them, along with lots of smaller bushes. Yet still, much of those shattered remnants of the stone stood, a mute testament to the skill of ancient kaldorei architects, something Harry had seen only scattered examples of up to this point.

"How far does this go on?" Harry asked as he moved from one rock to another over a large tree root.

"Quite a ways, around a hundred and forty leagues. You can find similar remnants elsewhere among the Broken Isles," Feldral said. "It was one of our main roads back before the War of the Ancients, and it ran parallel along the nature preserve of House Streamstrong."

"While they were among the first to begin to follow the Bitch Queen, they at least were willing to share what they called their artform with the rest of us low-born before that," Lufar muttered. "Then, of course, they turned that knowledge to using water magic attacks on us when we tried to rebel against her rule and the agreements the Bitch Queen reached with the demons."

The others said nothing, although Landros nodded in his brother's direction. The two of them continued marching side-by-side for a time, using that familial closeness to get past the bad memories.

"How is this stone made?" Harry asked, leaving the two brothers to their remembered anger and pain.

Feldral blinked at that, then shrugged. "It's no great mystery, Harry, although I do not know the secret of dense stone myself. We still use it routinely in construction, it is simply that we kaldorei no longer aspire to conquer the land, only work with it."

"Wait, really? It's **really** called just dense stone?" Harry asked incredulously.



“It is indeed. Not all kaldorei are so able to come up with names or fancy words to describe simple things, Harry,” Alaric joked.

“Dense stone was used in the creation of the temple of Elune and many of our other more important buildings in the capital of Nordrassil,” Sylina pointed out. “We tend not to use it elsewhere, as other settlements occasionally shrink or move with time. But it isn’t magical or anything of that nature. At least... I don’t think so.”

“The magic comes after the building is completed, as all of the various smaller portions of dense stone are merged together into one,” the high elf ranger, Lathariel, interjected. When the others all looked at him, he shrugged his shoulders. “We too use it quite a bit, and I have family members who are stone masons. It is truly made to last a long, long time, and yes, Harry, it is simply called dense stone even among us. I think there’s some kind of joke there whose punchline has long since disappeared, but that is neither here nor there.”

Harry nodded and would have continued the conversation if not for the sudden shriek of a diving harpy above them. **“Alarm! Alarm!”**

**OOOOOOO**

As the group of landbound warriors set off that morning, Irene had found herself in the lead of the loos sphere the harpy flock was keeping in place above them. From where she flew in the early morning light, Irene could see three of the flock, the pair bonded duo, her cousin Cilla, and her bonded mate, along with Viol.

As she flew Irene split her attention, watching the other two out of the corner of her eye, even as she focused most of her attention on the ground below, idly wondering if they would have time to stop for a bit to fish. She was rather partial to fish and loved Harry’s cooking over the last few days.

Thinking about Harry was a somewhat complex thing for Irene. She had at first been heavily attracted to him and still felt both in debt to him and somewhat willing to pay off that debt in the way most harpies would: by sharing their body with him. But she had seen Recca become truly interested in him and thus had backed away in favor of her daughter.

But she still deeply admired Harry and, more than that, was well aware of what his aid had led to so far, namely her and her family’s survival against a far superior group of warriors. And what it could mean in the future for them and their race if her mother was right about what that Spear could mean.

Thoughts on that score were partly why she was watching the bonded pair. While she trusted Cilla to be intelligent and reasonable, she wasn’t so certain about Sazah. While the

other harpy seemed intelligent enough and had willingly gone along with things, she still wasn't part of the family, not really. At least not from Irene's point of view.

Nearby, on Irene's other side and below, she saw that one of the others was diving down towards the Wide Lake and shook her head slightly. The magnificent colored plumage meant it was Icsy, and Irene just did not have any time at all for her flighty, flirtatious sister.

However, something she saw on the water because Irene's eyes narrowed, and she swooped down, following Icsy down. Before she could shout out a warning, though, several things happened at once. From elsewhere along the Wide Lake's surface, fishheads appeared, followed by spears launched up toward the harpies.

Some of them must've been launched from some kind of underwater catapult because they went much further and much farther than any spear that Irene had ever seen, one of them almost clipping her before she had a chance to correct her course around it. At the same time, several heads appeared all around where Icsy was about to dive down, and a net was hurled upwards.

Icsy screamed in shock but had already shifted her flying position so that her legs were pointed downwards, eager to grab up a fish or what she had thought was a fish. This meant that the net entangled her legs instead of her wings, and Icsy flapped hard, getting a cut in her side from one of the flung spears as she gained altitude away from the ambush.

Flying near the edge of the Long Lake, Cilla and Sazah also came under attack, as did, further out, one of Irene's other sisters. Sazah screamed in pain as an arrow shot from a crossbow of some kind slammed into her knee while another nearly took her in the throat, slicing a gouge there out of her plumage. Cilla also took a crossbow bolt, but instead of hitting her leg or body, it slammed into and through her wing.

Unlike wyverns or other creatures with leather wings who could still somewhat fly with holes in them, harpies could not fly if something interfered with their wing feathers. "AGGGGHHH!!!" Cilla found herself screaming as she fell towards the ground, slamming into it with bone-crushing force, breaking her collarbone and shoulder.

Instantly, the harpies reacted. Sazah followed her bonded mate down to the ground, clawing at the first of the fish people to rise out of the lake to finish off the downed harpy. Icsy, the other harpy who had been attacked, and Irene all began to gain altitude while Viol and Recca, having been flying almost out of sight on her sister's other side, twisted around, coming down towards the attackers. Both of them had asked Harry to refill their drop pouches, and now rocks began to descend into the Long Lake, slamming into fishmen heads or the water with concussive force.

Turning in that direction, Irene began to close as well with the conflict, thankful that she, too, had gotten her pouch of stones refilled over the past few days. Screeching a battle cry, she released one stone, then followed it down. As the stone shielded her from flung spears and bolts, Irene flung herself sideways, her wings flapping out. If Harry or anyone aware of the aerodynamics of a bird had been there, they would once more have realized that harpies, despite most of them still not being able to use magic unless exposed to it, did have to have some kind of inherent magical their own. Because the move she performed would have broken the wings of any bird, and been flat-out impossible.

Instead of diving beak first down into one of the fishman, because she didn't have a beak, Irene stopped almost on a dime, flipped herself in midair, and lashed out with her claws, which slashed deeply into the target, sinking past scales and digging deep into the flesh of his head, before she was flapping her wings hard to gain further altitude. For a harpy, staying in one position was death, and Irene had been in hundreds of fights over the centuries. The fact she pulled the string on her drop bag and let loose a few more stones only added to the confusion of the enemies below.

Despite that, more and more fishlike heads were seen popping up around the island in small groups, then one very large group near the bank of the lake, as two or three dozen of the creatures pushed themselves up out of the water. They didn't wear any armor or any clothing but held large stabbing spears in their hands, with bushels of throwing spears in their backs. That seemed to be their preferred weaponry, while others were armed with stone daggers and very simple-looking crossbows. But for all the crudeness of the weapons, they were very deadly, and Irene shrieked a warning as several of them lined up to fire on the downed Sazah and Cilla. "Move you two!"

Before they could fire, the crossbow fish's formation was broken by two falling boulders from Recca and Viol before Cassandra was on the scene, dropping still more. "Maria and the rest, form wings of three, fall on those on the ground, rake and fly!"

For a moment, all was violence, crossbow bolts and spears flying into the air, harpies diving, boulders dropping, and Irene had no mind to pay attention to anything else. Rika went down, a crossbow bolt catching her in the side and her wing, causing her to fall almost like the stones she had been dropping. Yet somehow, she was able to roll with it as she hit the ground, ignoring the pain in her wounds in a way that Irene had seen before from her daughter.

The scarred harpy warrior lashed out with a kick to one fishman, opening up his guts with her talons. She then charged into another, biting hard down on his gills, tearing them away in a welter of blood even as she bounced backward, dodging a spear thrust.

While they didn't normally use them, harpies did have incredibly powerful jaws and neck muscles to go with incredibly sharp teeth. While Recca's sister continued to drop boulders along with her grandmother and mother, Recca was forced to use those tools now, darting in among the spear-wielding fishermen, hoping that in doing so, the crossbow wielded wouldn't fire at her. They didn't. Instead, they concentrated on firing up at the harpies still in the air. This let Recca bash her way through the spear wielders to Cilla, and the two of them whirled in place, dancing almost like ostriches could, lashing out with kicks and quick thrusting head chomps or head butts.

It was still going poorly for the flock of harpies, though, as two more were knocked out of the eye. Neither had died, but they were down for the count, and neither Cilla nor Recca could reach them in time.

And there were fireballs.

Harry had taken to wing the moment Alari had slammed into the ground ahead of them, shouting about what was going on ahead of the band of Seekers. Now, he rained down fireballs and cutting spells into the horde already ashore, slaughtering several groups of their crossbow wielders, forcing the others to retreat into the water only to shriek in agony as the boiling water boiled them alive in their scales. Others around Recca and Cilla fell to cutting spells, too close for their brethren to drop stones on or for Harry's fireballs.

This gave the two of them time to tag team, one of the few remaining before Cilla cried out in agony, a spear stabbing into her side.

Rica used the harpy equivalent of a backkick to disembowel the creature that had just struck her aunt. Then, several of the kaldorei were there, rushing in to battle hand to hand, while an air elemental slammed into the ground, creating a crater. A series of totems followed, hurled ahead of the slower-moving tauren. Bark Skin, healing energies and further aid flared from them, although the healing energy could not do anything to those with spears or bolts still stuck into them, which meant most of the harpies that he had been struck from the sky. Recca, on the other hand, was soon practically healed from everything but the original bolt that was still stuck in her side, and howled in renewed fury.

A water elemental also slipped into the water while Harry dropped Quincy into the middle of the largest group of fishman, hitting him with the finite incantation spell while the snake was still midair. "I do not approve of this, Potter!"

As the snake fell, so too did it grow, and suddenly, a large portion of the crowd of fishermen half-in, half-out of the water looked up to find themselves in shadow.

The snake crushed them as it landed, then lashed out with tail and head, biting down, tearing, smashing, crushing. His quills launched as he landed, twisting sideways so that he basically sprayed the quills over the water as if his back was an organ gun. More of the fishman fell, paralyzed back into the water, even their gills no longer flapping. Many of them would, quite ironically, drown because of this. Others were slain from follow-on spells from Harry or Lathariel and Shai, who had stopped well away from the battle. Hiding among the woods, they fired as rapidly as they could, sniping at the enemy, giving their tauren fellows cover fire as they particularly went to work on the fishman crossbowmen. Then, the last of those fell as Lesha led Matar and the others into close combat in support of Sylina, Acali and Feldral.

Soon, the battle below was so close that even Harry couldn't attempt to use magic, and he dropped into the middle of it, crushing a fishman into the ground before turning himself back into his normal body. His sword in one hand, Harry began to lash out with point-blank spells from the other, while a golem of earth grew, then began to cover the still-wounded Sazah in a stone cocoon. He would've done the same to Recca if not for how much fight she still had obviously in her despite her wounds.

These were also suddenly protected by stone walls as another elemental was summoned into being by Tjar. The same stone elemental that he had used continually up to this point raised mounds around the wounded, similar to what Harry had done with Sazah, and then went on the attack. Punches of stone slammed into the fishman, crumpling scales and rupturing internal organs. Slaps from stone hands crushed heads, and even as more of the fishman rose out of the water and charged forwards, they found themselves in what amounted to a killing ground.

This was only added to as several more water elementals suddenly arrived from the other side of the fight. They entered the water of the Long Lake and instantly began to use it to tear the fishman apart from below the water. Soon, the water of the Wide Lake turned almost blood-colored, and the reinforcements faltered.

With his staff directing his fellows forward, Pathfinder Farstride shouted commands and two more elementals appeared. One fire elemental charged forwards, his voice a hissing cackle of fiery delight, while a wind elemental moved forward purposefully, striding along behind him, lashing out with precise strikes of intense high-speed air that sliced into the fishmen.

Realizing the battle was practically over, Harry slipped his sword into its sheath again and also began to retreat, reaching over to grab Recca's shoulder as the harpy meant to charge after the retreating spear-wielding fishman. "Enough Recca! They're broken. Let the others finish it, and let me and the other healers see to removing those bolts."

Rica snarled but did as she was told, allowing Harry to lead her over to sit on one of the dense stone cubes nearby. When he conjured up a piece of wood to put in her mouth, she bit down on it, letting him pull out the crossbow bolt in her side, groaning all the while, then one in her shoulder she had taken a moment before. He closed both wounds with a quick Episkey before one of the tauren with Pathfinder Farstride moved forward, and healing magic began to hit them both. Harry hadn't even realized he was injured but had taken a long gash to the back of his shoulder, leaning down to his elbow from a spear tip.

Seeing the youthful wizard's confusion, the tauren explained. "Many of these fishman put various types of poison on their weapons. These weapons can either poison or can deaden the wound in some fashion, much like your snake's quills can paralyze. One never knows what one will find in the depths."

Harry nodded, and after working on Recca for a few moments, the man moved off, and Harry moved towards Vurg, who was directing his water elementals, both of whom had surfaced a moment before. "Hold back, then. If they have their own water elementals deep down, there is no need to fight them."

Vurg saw Harry's scowl but shook his head at the younger man. We have beaten them off, and I doubt they will have the courage to try such an ambush again. Further, such creatures are not truly evil as demons, satyrs or... even most harpies are. They are simply fiercely territorial. Let them keep their territory to the lake, not what flies above it or walks between them, and they can have peace."

The water elementals nodded and slowly rose out of the water, showing their forms to be that of a... somewhat comical-looking creature with the lower body of a crowd and the upper body of a snake and a kaldorei woman. That continued the trend at least of water elementals who identified as female choosing that particular form, something Harry was somewhat amused by, but did not comment on.

Turning back to Harry, Vurg looked at him closely, and something in his old eyes told Harry that the man was barely suppressing his emotions at the moment. "Harry. I hear that we have you and your peacemaking abilities to thank for the first clue to the location of the Spear of the Ancients. I thank you for that, as well as for speaking up on behalf of these harpies. If there is even a chance that harpies can be turned away from seeking out Fel or Tainted magic, it must be grasped with both hands."

Harry nodded at that, and then Vurg abruptly turned away, staring at where Feldral stood. He had not fought the battle with the Spear of the Ancients as Harry had actually thought he might. Instead, Feldral fought with his regular weapon, one of the triple-pointed moon glaives that was common among his people. Now, he moved forward towards Vurg, pulling the

Spear of the Ancients off his back and going to his knees in front of the older-looking tauren. “Pathfinder Farstride, I give on to you the Spear of the Ancients. Recovered and returned to the Unseen Path once more.”

“To think we would see this in my time,” the ancient Pathfinder said, reaching forward gently to run a finger along the shaft of the spear, pausing every few seconds on a name etched within. “This is a great day for the Unseen Path, Feldral Stonegrip. Your service will not be forgotten. Nor that of Harry’s or anyone else who aided in back our spear, the symbol of our connection to our past and our patron both.”

During this moment, Recca had moved up behind Harry and was now leaning into his back, her arms around his shoulders, the feathers lightly touching his skin, causing him to shiver. “And thank you, Harry,” she whispered, hiding her scarred space against his neck as she fought back a blush. “I don’t know if I actually ever did that before. Thank you for helping our people before and me right now. If not for you, me, Sazah, Cilla and I, we all would’ve died.”

“I don’t think I did anything that anyone else with my powers would not have, but I will take your thanks all the same,” Harry said, trying hard not to blush at the feel of Recca’s chest pressing into his back... again. He wasn’t altogether successful, and she giggled, lightly bit his ear and then moved off, moving to stand with her mother as she landed in front of Pathfinder Farstride, bowing from the waist. Harry barely registered Sylina moving up behind her, her voice a murmur, “You do know that everything you do seems to enhance their interest in you, Harry, at least Recca’s and the twins, anyway, who, I note, are staring at you again like you’re the last sweet on the table.”

Harry snorted at that but continued to watch as the very old, although she did not look it, Matron of the harpy flock and the very ancient-looking and indeed being for his species Pathfinder Farstride met. “Matriarch Cassandra. Thank you from the bottom of my heart for the help you have given the Unseen Path. This Spear is an important heirloom of our Order, a visible connection to our patron, Ohn’ara. I understand that some of that was a self-serving interest, but the majority of it was not. You want a better life for your people, and that is something we can all respect. As such, I am willing to formalize the alliance between your flock and the Unseen Path. We will extend hospitality for you as long as you need it, and you will be allowed to create your eyries within our valley. I cannot give you access to the larger Highmountain Valley, though. That will only be given to you by the High Chief. But I do not think you will need that for many decades if not centuries. Our own small valley is more than large enough for both of our communities... so long as we come to a few ground rules.”

“Your thanks and approval of our alliance is more than welcome to hear, Elder,” Cassandra replied, bowing from the waist, her normal regal, authoritative air was on Stark

displayed now. “Yet I will remind you that part of our alliance is based on the spells that Harry Potter placed upon us. The spells to make our voices less than the harsh shrieks that nature intended, as well as the gift of translation for many of my flock. Amongst us, I am the only one who can speak normal kaldorei. That will need to continue, less our alliance sour not through any fault of ours, but simply the inability to communicate without irritation. Further, there is one aspect of our alliance that you touched upon but not with me. You said moments ago to Harry that you would take any chance to wean my people away from the need to search out Tainted blood of the Old Gods or demonic Fel magic. Did you mean it?”

Vurg did not hesitate. He bowed his ancient head in turn, the movement adding an incredible weight to his next words. “I do. The harpies fought on the side of the satyrs for the Saytr War and caused trouble not only here in the Broken Isles but in Ashenvale more recently. If we can create a force of good among your folk, the Unseen Path will help as best I may.”

“In that case, I ask for two things. One: that any of my flock who wish to are allowed to become Oathkeepers, to start along the path of the Unseen like Sylina and Harry have done. I cannot guarantee that any of my flock will stay on task for long enough to become a seeker, let alone anything else. But it may give some of my flock direction in life.”

The look she sent Recca did not need any translation, and the younger harpy smiled cheekily, completely unfazed by her near-death experience moments ago, her eyes flitting from Vurg to Harry and back again. This made it very clear that while she was interested in the Unseen Path and the fights it might bring her, Harry was still the main draw for joining.

Vurg nodded slowly, then, with a wry twist of his lips, answered in much the same way Feldral had to that point that morning. “There is no law against any harpy joining the Unseen Path. I do not see a problem with that. And your second?”

Cassandra hesitated, then plowed on, her shoulders back, her bearing still stern yet respectful. “I request an audience with your patron if such a thing is possible. Our great mother, Aviana, fell in the War of the Ancients, and my people are drawn to other sources of magic. But if I can gain access to another source other than the Taint or the demonic Fel, I will grasp that with both talons and light a new path for my people.”

“That... I cannot promise,” Vurg answered after a moment’s contemplation. “Simply because we have not been in contact with Ohn’ara ever since we lost the Spear of the Ancients. I am hopeful that our reclaiming it will allow us to reconnect with him again, but I am not certain. I can promise to try, but that is all.”

“That is more than enough,” Cassandra breathed in relief, staring over at a few of her daughters in particular. They all looked back just as hopefully as their mother, and Cassandra



turned back to Pathfinder Farstride. “In that case, once our wounded are completely seen to, I suppose we should get on our way once more. The sooner we learn if it is possible, the better.”

**OOOOOOO**

While Pathfinder Farstride had formally welcomed Cassandra and the harpies, the next few days as they traveled through the jungles of the central broken island proved that there were still many among the Unseen Path who had misgivings about the harpies. Many of them professed quietly to having fought harpies in the past, to having been scarred or blasted by Fel Magic during the Satyr War. One of the kaldorei had lost a sister to them before joining the Unseen Path. One of the tauren, one of the few among the Unseen Path who didn't hail from the Highmountain Valley, coldly informed Harry and Sylina that he had lost his wife and child to a Harpy raid on his home tribe.

Yet while Harry's trio of followers and the two pairings earned many a glower and the other harpies found their welcome around the campfires at night chillier than before, none of this tension broke out into outright violence. By the time they were once more within sight of the foot of the High Mountain (which Harry was still felt should be called a range of High Mountains rather than a single mountain given the sheer size of the thing), some of that simmering anger towards the harpies and the idea of their fellows shaking up with the enemy, so to speak, had faded.

While Icsy and a few others were still incredibly flighty, there was no denying that many of the harpies were actually quite charming when you spoke to them. They were also incredibly beautiful in kaldorei terms, and even the tauren were not immune to that simple fact. There were several female kaldorei among the Unseen Path, but none could be called beautiful. It was a simple fact that straight men would always be more easily swayed by a pretty face and gorgeous voice. Something that came out when a few of the harpies tried their hands at singing one night with their spell-enhanced voices.

The tauren seeing the harpies as good-looking was a surprise to Harry, though. He had lived among them more than long enough to know their idea of beauty did not normally match up with that of the kaldorei or human equivalent, and given the physical differences of the races, could it be any different? But when it came to the tauren, Matar was not the only one who found the harpies alluring. Harry honestly wondered if it was some other manner of inherent magic, something like a very low-key equivalent of the veela charm Fleur and her fellow veela could use.

Regardless, Harry was happy to see the tensions start to abate. It boded well for the future. Although Harry was still a bit frustrated by having three of the harpies very much after him and how Sylina had not closed the door on their joining them, something Harry wasn't

certain he was ready for, especially with the growing certainty that Sylina and he were not going to be a long term thing. She was a bit too like Icsy in a way, flight at times, serious in others, and didn't seem to put much effort into the relationship. Nor did she seem to like it when he was 'too romantic', which he hadn't even known was a thing before this.

Dinner dates were fine for special occasions like back on the small beach, but the one time after meeting with Vurg's group he had suggested they set up their own camp away from the others, Sylina had refused. At first, Harry had thought she just wasn't in the mood, but then she had crawled into his sleeping bag and ridden him through half the night. It was very clear that she was uncomfortable with the romance aspect and wanted to make it clear that they were very much friends with benefits. As such, there were no real constraints to Harry creating similar relationships with the trio of harpies.

Well, besides the fact he doubted he could keep up with four lovers, and still had issues with Aleri and Alari's possible age. And if he would be able to separate his emotions from his physical desires as Sylina seemed to do so ably.

Somewhat surprising Harry, the large party did not start ascending High Mountain in the same place that he and Tracy had. Instead, Vurg led them to what at first looked like a flat rock surface. However, when two of the tauren shifted some of the portions of the stone that Harry had thought were simply tiny protrusions out of the mountainside, they revealed incredibly well-hidden handholds. Grunting and straining allowed them to remove a large slab of rock set upright on the ground to block what looked like a hidden trail leading upwards.

It wasn't easy going by any means, steep and with sheer sides, offering no handholds to help you along. But it was certainly easier and safer than the path that he and Tracy had followed heading up to the Highmountain Valley.

"It can't even be seen from up top!" Cassandra murmured, landing beside Harry with Maria beside her. The harpies had obviously not been willing to simply march along with the rest of them, nor had Vurg asked them to. "I could barely see any movement at all from the front of your column until this trail pops you out well, well above where we are now. There's a bit of hard climbing there through what looked like a small avalanche zone of some kind, and then, a true tunnel, I believe. Would you like us to wait for you on the other side of that tunnel, Master Farstride, or in the stone field?"

"Pathfinder, please, if you wish to be formal, my dear. Or simply Vurg if you can. As to where to wait, if you could have some of your siblings wait for us in the stone field and then fly the rest of them straight up and to the east, you will find the beginnings of our valley."

"East, not west?" Harry asked, staring at the start of the hidden pathway, then higher up and to the side. "Good grief, I have gotten severely turned around here, I think."

“Our valley lies east to west at a lower in comparison to the Highmountain Valley Harry, and at decently lower elevation. We also only have three of the volcanic vents that make High Mountain so livable. Our winters are brutal in comparison to what most of the larger valley sees.”

“I wintered with the Skyhorn Tribe. I think I can handle your idea of a heavy winter Pathfinder,” Harry said deadpan.

The ancient tauren chuckled at that. He did a lot of that these days. Of the Unseen Path members that Harry had seen so far since the Spear had been reclaimed, Vurg was the one who most looked relieved, even beating out the stoic Matar. Matar’s general attitude hadn’t changed much, although he was much more... Not cheerful, Harry could barely picture the man smiling, let alone happy. But less grim, instead simply being silent and efficient.

At any road, with Matar it was a subtle change, more felt than seen. With Vurg, it was very much not. He smiled more, he laughed more. The old tauren joked almost as much as Feldral, although he didn’t seem to have one particular straight man like Feldral did with Alaric.

“Perhaps you can at that. But I think that it will surprise you nonetheless. We don’t get as cold as with the Skyhorn Tribe, but we get even more snow.”

“Yet our snow does not endanger the lives of ourselves or the group at large, Pathfinder,” a voice said from behind them, and the reason why Harry and the Pathfinder had been waiting here pushed his way through the underbrush to join them.

Davo Bluefeather moved up beside Harry, nodding his head to his human friend, and Harry nodded back, gesturing to the large animal that the man had found tracks a few hours ago. Which now currently was on the tauren’s back. “I take it that your hunt was successful? And what manner of beast is that?”

“No, I ran into a completely different beast than the one I was trying to track. Yes, it was successful. Not a beast, simply an animal, it is a herbivore and armored giant armadillo. It has few natural predators because of its armor, and the swing of its tail can be deadly. But its eyes are unarmored, and there is a small point in the neck as well if you know where to look for it. The armor can be made into particularly good armor, although it is quite heavy.”

The expectant look he gave Harry caused Harry to groan. “The list of things you people want me to try with my magic and ruins is growing all the time.” *Which is kind of hilarious given how against Arcana the Unseen Path is in the main.* “If I concentrate solely on your list of requests, I’d never get any of my own education in your ways done.”

“True. We will need to set up a more permanent schedule for your work going forward, Harry. We prioritized those messenger tubes for a reason, although admittedly, in this case, the

reason only vaguely paid off. There does need to be some visual or auditory component to alert someone when a message arrives,” Vurg said. “Still, myself and the other senior members of the Unseen Path will sit down and go over what you have offered the Order, as well as our estimate of how quickly you are taking to learning our own lore. We will come up with a schedule that is fair for everyone involved,”

The ancient tauren then smirked as Sylina gestured over to them to join her by the entrance into the semi-covered trail. “Although, I think that you should still prioritize getting a certain someone the weapon she so desires, lest you deal with the friends-with-benefits equivalent of a cold bed.”

Harry flushed a bit, looking away. Having someone like Feldral acknowledge that he knew of his and Sylina’s relationship, or indeed the entire party had been, was one thing. Having someone in authority, in particular the highest authority within the Unseen Path, acknowledge it was something entirely different. *It’s like knowing that a professor saw me exiting a broom closet with a girl, ugh.* “I \*ahem\* I’ll get right on that. I can use that as an experiment to see what I can do with weapons in the first place. Recall I made no promises there. Nor did I make any promises about armor, although having a template to work with from start to finish is perhaps a good idea there. So you’ll need to mark some experimental time in that schedule of yours.”

Honestly, with how good he had gotten in that particular runic array, messenger tubes wouldn’t take a lot of Harry’s attention, simply time. That, and the sheer number of them that the Unseen Path wanted to make. *A better idea might be to find one of the Cartographers or Seekers to teach that array to, as I did with that young fellow when I stayed with the Highmountain tribe.*

Actually, on top of the ones the Unseen Path wanted, Harry wanted to make a few sets to send to Tracy. How they would get to her was another matter entirely, but since the Unseen Path had a generally semi-open connection with the sentinels of Ashenvale he hoped that problem at least would solve itself. But surely, having instant communication would be a major help to a society as far-flung as the kaldorei.

“Understood. With all that you have agreed to help us with it would be incredibly churlish of us to not allow you time for your own projects, above and beyond helping you learn our ways further.”

Davo nodded firmly at that and asked Harry about his own physical training. It had become clear in the weeks leading up to the mission against the harpies that Harry and Davo’s combat styles were just a little too different for Davo to really help him much, but Davo had proven to be an excellent strength and conditioning teacher. Under his direction, Harry’s body

had been honed even further than his time with the tauren had allowed for. In particular, his endurance was far better now, something that could only be partly explained away by his continued use of Nature Magic.

The two of them walked off still talking, meeting up with Sylina in the tunnel. There, they were joined by a few of the others, talking and joking quietly as they made their way up the hidden pathway, followed by Vurg and the rest of the group. All the while, they kept an eye out for enemies or one of their own having trouble on the trail, as the true veterans they all were.

It only occurs to Harry a few hours later, and it was with a jolt that it did, that beyond being acquaintances and friendly sorts, Harry had really begun to make actual friends with many in the Unseen Path. Sylina and Davo were the first. Feldral, Alaric and Lesha followed. Even Matar was a friend now, if of a sort Harry had never had before, the strong, silent type. *I would say they are as much my friends as Tessa or Tyre became*, Harry thought, his smile at a deadpan taunt from Alaric widening as that realization struck him.

Marching next to him, Davo noticed and elbowed him. "What is that smile for?"

"Nothing, just life in general," Harry replied, shaking his head with a smile. "Just life."

Davo laughed at that. "That is both an oddly mundane statement and an incredibly mature outlook."

"I am quite a bit older than I look, remember," Harry drawled, causing everyone nearby to laugh too.

Cassandra and Maria and one or two of the other harpies occasionally stopped in whenever they could see the party from above, which became more normal over time, while the rest of the harpies headed on towards the valley, looking for a few markers that would mark it out as the correct one. Apparently, and this was something Harry hadn't known because he hadn't been taught any of the maps from the Unseen Path just yet, there were a few other small valleys out there. A few of them were even big enough to support a family or two, but no one lived in most of them. The Valley which held Trueshot Lodge, though, had a few markers that could be visible even from the sky.

Not the actual strangely shaped hill that was Trueshot Lodge. The Lodge itself was hidden from the air via a subtle Nature Magic spell that made it seemingly blend in with the rest of the valley. Rather, there was a vein of blue rock directly above the tree line of the valley that was well known to grab the eye of fire or air elementals that flew up that high.

So it was that the rest of Cassandra's flock met them at the entrance into the valley and the group continued on through the valley without further incident. Vurg spent most of that time speaking to Cassandra about where she and her flock would make their home, a

conversation that Harry wasn't a vital part of. Instead, when she learned that Harry would be setting aside some time every day for experimentation with his runes, Recca began to almost crowd him with her ideas of how his magic could help her people fight better, with her mother and sister joining in with their own ideas. All three were enamored of the idea of bettering their ability to drop things from on high on people, having seen how efficacious that was in two extremely sharp battles already. Having something they could also use in close combat would be a great idea.

Harry was somewhat willing to do that, but he also wanted to figure out a way to somehow tie what he was creating to the people using it. Shit happens, especially in a fight, and he didn't want anything he created to fall into the wrong hands, like the fishmen they had fought, the vrykul or other sentient enemies he had fought in this world.

Despite an urge to rush forward and reach Trueshot Lodge with the Spear of the Ancients as fast as possible, the group continued on its normal ground-devouring lope, resting only once in the valley before they came within sight of the Lodge at around midmorning of their fifth day after they reached the valley.

As they closed, Harry saw Cassandra and the other harpies pausing in the air above them, seeing the Nature Magic, the wind Arcana, boiling within the claw-shaped hollow hill of Trueshot Lodge. *Can't blame them for that, I was somewhat astonished by the feel of that too. Although I have to wonder how any of the harpies would react to the magical tapestries, or the other secrets hidden here.*

For now, that wasn't so important though. And as Harry set aside those musings, it became clear that someone had been waiting for them.

While Harry was examining those changes, the watchmen announced their arrival with a series of hornblows. Loud and long, the deep booming calls of the horns, made from some creature whose horns made a tauren's look small, reverberated around the valley. One long note, followed by a second, then three quick blasts of noise, a roar of triumph and joy. The sheer noise reverberated all around, filling this area of the valley, causing many of the harpies to start flinching away and flying higher into the air until Cassandra corralled them all.

When they reached the entryway, the large band found the rest of the Unseen Path waiting for them. Vurg had sent a message back to the messenger tube left behind with the rest of the members of the truth Lodge. Now Master Cartographer Milifiana Barchfoot, and Master Seeker Martuc Oakleaf and those left behind were lined up in several small rows facing the returning heroes. Many had to lean on canes. Others peered at what was going on through thick glasses. Almost all had their eyes locked on the Spear of the ancients, which Pathfinder Farstride was using in lieu of his walking staff. Those that did not were staring up at the harpies.

A surprising number of them looked on with interest rather than concern or anger at the harpy's arrival, although the furbolgs looked leery, one hand on their weapons.

With some effort, Cassandra, Irene and Maria corralled the other harpies, getting them to land and even somewhat look as if they were information. A strange, sort of squished diamond formation, but still, a formation on the ground. With that done, Cassandra and her flock waited at the back of the group of secrets as they returned.

Vurg strode forward, trying hard not to lean too heavily on the Spear of the Ancients. But despite his good humor, the trip had been hard on him, and his limp was very pronounced as he moved. Old age and arthritis were not things that could be healed by druidic magic, nor could old wounds that had begun to heal in the normal way before being seen to, he thought ruefully.

He nodded to his fellow leaders and wordlessly held out the Spear for them to examine, never relinquishing his own grip on the Spear. Both Martuc and Milifiana examined it closely while those behind them stared at it avidly. One or two were even able to notice specific names, murmuring them under their breath. The names of heroes of legend, calling forth their tales like living things to those who had studied them.

Yet no one spoke louder than a murmur, as if everyone had the sense that speaking too loudly might cause the illusion in front of them to fade. They would then wake up in their bunks, the recovery of the Spear of the Ancients but a dream.

But Martuc was an old man even by kaldorei standards, and while normally respectful and even somewhat softspoken, he had left all his fucks to give after his hundredth near-fatal wound. "This is indeed the Spear of the Ancients. I would recognize it anywhere. Amazing!"

When the dream did not vanish like a drop of rain hitting a fire, other voices rose in agreement, a feeling of amazement and delight finally overpowering the concerns of the crowd. Many a kaldorei member of the Order agreed with the Master Seeker, with three Copiers announcing firmly that the portions of the Spear of the Ancients they could see matched a series of reconstructed tapestries they had been working on off and on for the past few decades.

Vurg ignored all this goings on and then made for the entryway. The crowd parted before him, then crowded in behind him as the hunting party followed. The Harpies were given a wide berth at first, but when Lesha and Feldral called them forward, several of the harpies moved forward to join the cavalcade, entering the hill with Cassandra at their head. Maria led the others back to the edge of the small clearing around the talon-shaped hill, perching there among the tree branches, watching the god-made hill intently.

Behind Vurg, the Order shifted into two lines, following after him, traversing the long hallway with its various tricks and traps for any enemy who had gotten past the exterior defenses. Behind them, Cassandra, Irene, Recca, Alari and Aleri followed. Cassandra had a feeling that something momentous was about to occur, and she wanted to be there when it did. Irene wanted to be there to protect her mother and flock members just in case. Recca and the twins, despite being leery about being underground, were motivated most by curiosity and interest in Harry and Cassandra knew she could trust them to follow orders and remain polite. Something she could not say for her whole flock even after the last few weeks of interacting with the members of the Unseen Path, alas.

As they neared the gilded, ornate doors leading into the central cavern, Harry felt something in the air. Looking forward, he could see the wild nature magic, created by the multiple blessings on the Spear, begin flowing from the Spear in a pattern feeding the latent nature magic within Trueshot Lodge.

Only as one of the kaldorei in the lead pushed the mural-covered doors open did Harry realize that he was only partially correct. It wasn't feeding the nature magic of the Lodge as a whole. Instead, it was flowing into, the far more contained, directed Nature Magic embedded within the feather of Ohn'ahra, empowering it further. And as Harry watched the light of the feather began to gleam even more than before. *It is changing the nature of the enchantments there. There's far more wind-type nature magic coming off of that feather now too.*

As Harry noticed that wind seemed to pick up out of nowhere, rustling clothing everywhere. The banners outside and the feathers of the harpies waiting there also rustled, and everyone within could feel it, almost like the air right before a massive storm.

Despite that, Vurg strode forward towards the feather, and as he did Harry watched as the resonance between the feather and Spear grew. Indeed, the Spear of the Ancients was vibrating now. The magic within the two items were calling out to one another so strongly that Harry could almost see a solid line of nature magic forming in the air between them.

Still staring between the Spear and the feather, Harry allowed Davo to guide him and Cassandra forward, following some order given to him by the Pathfinder. Feldral came next, along with his second-in-command, Leesha. Soon, the main cavern was lined with members of the Unseen Path. Cartographers mixed with Seekers, forming a thin line around the edges. The sole exception to this was Feldral, his second-in-command, Harry, Cassandra, and Vurg, the others following after Vurg as he walked forward.

Even the other three harpies were gently but firmly moved to the wall of the cavern despite Irene's effort to follow or take to the wing, despite the winds building to the point she



would have trouble even getting off the ground. It took a look from her mother to stop Irene's attempts, and then all of them were watching Vurg once more.

The harpies were naturally magical beings. Even more than the Highborne, magic was a part of them, one that their race had lost when Aviana died as surely as the Highborne had lost the ability to manipulate Arcana when the Well of Eternity was destroyed.

which was why harpies were practically forced to seek sources of magic to use. Even without having learned any magic, they could sense it, as Cassandra had when she first felt the echo of the Spear of the Ancients, the knowledge of which forced Feldral and the company to forge on to try and discover it. Thus, while the majority of the tauren and kaldorei could only see the effect of the nature magic building up between the feather and the Spear, Cassandra and her flock could see almost as much as Harry, or the druids and shamans could.

Even as the Spear shook in his grip Vurg turned away from the feather, staring all around him at the members of his order, stopping as his eyes came to rest on the four behind him. "Several centuries ago, Pathfinder Dorro Highmountain stood where I now stand, holding this spear, the Spear of the Ancients. This ancient relic long served the Unseen Path as a connection to our patron and a living embodiment of our history. Like those before him, he had earned his place as Pathfinder, in a campaign the satyrs, and as such, had earned the right to use the Spear of the Ancients."

"From the time it was named Eagle Spear in Ohn'ahra honor, to when it became the Spear of the Wild Gods, then the Spear of the Ancients, this weapon served as both a potent weapon and a symbol. With each name, we renewed our bond, our oath to one another, to the secrets we keep, to the goal this Order serves. We, the Unseen Path, do not fight for accolades. We do not fight out of love of battle, or a simple duty to one race, but to Azeroth as a whole. We stand against true evil, the creatures of the Old Gods like the aqir, n'raki or their other kin. We face Burning Legion, from the lowly satyrs to the eredar. We seek out knowledge and those evils that might be out there beyond the site of the normal Quelthalasi, tauren or kaldorei society. North, South, East West. Our duty is to Azeroth as a whole," Vurg repeated. "And the names of those who had gone before etched into the Spear are to remind us of that, of our lineage and our purpose all in one. And then we lost it."

Vurg let the silence of that simple blunt statement after his previously poetic words ring for a moment within the cavern. However, the effect was somewhat ruined by the gradually growing humming of the feather vibrating in its crystalline container, of the Spear of the Ancients in the elderly Vurg's hands. Such was it now that even those who didn't have magic themselves could sense it deep in their bones, a green, growing power flowing from the world around them while the rising sound threatened to rattle their bones apart.

“We lost the symbol of our past and of our connection to our patron, Ohn’ahra, the Spirit of the Wind, who believed as Arien Highmountain did, that there always needed to be an order devoted to retaining knowledge of how to seek out and fight demons and the creatures of the Old Gods. She was the first of the Wild Gods to bestow her power upon the Spear even before the war began, and when Huln handed it over to his daughters, she became the patron of our Order. She helped us create Trueshot Lodge and hide ourselves from any who might try to look for us. And then we lost the Spear.”

“We did not lose it in glorious battle or during an important mission fulfilling our Order’s purpose. That could perhaps have been borne. Rather, it was lost because Dorro decided to take it on what should have been a routine mapping mission, a mission that should never have called for the use of the Spear. Yet he was young, the position of Pathfinder new, and he wanted to keep it beside him. Then he and his companion disappeared along with the Spear of the Ancients. The guilt of that, the shock of losing that connection to our patron, reverberated throughout the Order. With no way to contact Ohn’ahra as we so often had in the past, we lost direction, we lost drive, and it was decades before the Order could even choose another Pathfinder. No longer could those who were part of the Order then or who joined later like me continue to follow the tenants of our Order with enthusiasm and energy, knowing we did so under the eyes of Ohn’ahra. Instead of feeling the honor of our duty, we only went about it grimly, determined to keep to our Oaths, but even those who came after were racked with guilt and shame. That sense of guilt, of losing our way, of lacking that connection, rode us harder than any sense of obligation, resulting in fewer staying with the Order and many deaths as those who did join tried to find the Spear, only to fail and disappear in turn, or to return bitter at their failure”

Again, Pathfinder Farstride fell silent, the last few words having been nearly entirely overpowered by the building thrum in the air. When next the monstrosly old tauren spoke, it was with strength and volume that could scarce be credited to someone his age as he bellowed over the rising noise. “Now the Spear of the Ancients has returned. Restored through the acts of our brethren, new and old. Returned through the words and aid of allies unlooked for, found from among a race that has long since become our enemy. Let this act, and the Spear itself reminds us, give hope to those of us who had, in our hearts of hearts begun to believe that the Unseen Path no longer served any purpose. Praise these men and women who have returned our honor and our future!”

Cheering resounded from every corner, despite cheering like that not really being a kaldorei thing. It **was** a tauren thing, but the kaldorei among the Unseen Path created just as much noise as their larger brethren.

As the others all cheered, Vurg bowed from the waist, holding the Spear crosswise near his waist as he did so. Harry, Feldral and Lesha all bowed back formally, while Cassandra merely nodded her head, as regal as any queen for a moment.

Straightening up, Vurg turned away from them, turning his attention towards the glowing feather. He moved towards it, and Harry watched as the magical resonance between the Spear and the feather continued to build and build, the wind continuing to pick up, almost to the level where it was a physical force within the cavern. Soon it was all Harry could do to keep his feet, such was the wind pressure and the building magical tension. *Something is happening here... a divine visitation, perhaps?*

Even more strangely, while the pressure within the cavern was immense, it wasn't to the point of lifting anyone off their feet or hurting them. Rather, it was pressing them down without doing so. While throughout the Lodge, the wind picked up to the point where many a thing that wasn't nailed down, in particular in the library, were flung about. The winds outside too were reacting, to the point the trees were swaying, and the harpies within were forced to drop to the ground, huddling up as they stared in shock at Trueshot Lodge, wondering what was going on within.

When Vurg reached the same position where Harry and Sylina had stood to reach out to touch the feather after the furbolg attendant had opened its case, there came a crack like a sound of thunder from every direction, causing every kaldorei there to clamp hands over their ears. Yet none looked away as the container around the feather shattered. Bits and pieces of the crystalline structure floated away, creating a kaleidoscope effect even as it spread outwards, although far slower than an explosion would have accounted for.

Vurg willed himself not to react, standing there, the Spear raised up crossways in front of him. Despite his aching leg, he stood there, trembling, until the wind pressure building up around the spear became too much, and he was forced to release his grip. The wild wind magic pouring out of the Spear quickly lifted it up into the air, where it and the feather began a dance creating a visible hurricane of air which grew, and then there was an even louder \*SNAP !!!!!\*

And there stood the Wild God, Ohn'ara, Skymother and Goddess of the winds.

Instantly, the Spear of the Ancients fell back into Vurg's hands, it's wild magic still pouring forth, but controlled now. Instead of being controlled by the god of the winds, it was now doing what it was supposed to do normally: simply adding more power to the larger matrix of wild magic that sustained everything within Trueshot Lodge and hid it from discovery.

Catching it, Vurg stumbled back, leaning on the Spear heavily. Yet despite the ache in his joints and the fire from his old wounds he ignored even the pain in his leg as he stared at the

wild god who he had sworn to when a young, headstrong tauren, but who he had never truly expected to see in person.

Well, not in person, really, Harry was quick to realize. While he knew that every god would be different, the feel of the being in front of him was not the same as being in the presence of Cenarius. For all the strength of his presence and personality, for all that his will permeated the massive forest of Ashenvale from edge to edge at a very low level, Cenarius was still very much flesh and bone. So much so that he had, at one point, mated with another god (at least, Harry assumed that, he really didn't know), creating his sons and daughters. This being was not flesh and blood, but etched out of the world by insanely dense winds, creating not just the shape of the god, but even colors.

Ohn'ahra was called the Eagle Mother by the Tauren because they held she had birthed the Giant Eagles the Skyhorn Tribe had bonded. Seeing her now, Harry could see that, but also could see other birds represented in her shape as well as simple oddities. The wings along with the main body and head was that of an eagle, but her neck was a little longer than it would be for a normal eagle, and Ohn'ahra's beak was far more sharply curved, like that of a falcon. Her tail feathers were far longer than an eagle's as well, like that of a pheasant. Yet somehow while the rest of the god's body was blue and white the swirling winds that created the tail gave Harry and those watching the impression of a kaleidoscope of colors. Oh, and she had horns on the top of her head. Ram's horns for certain, but still, not something any natural bird would bother with.

As the sending finished coalescing, Ohn'ahra, let loose a cry of triumph and delight. At that noise, most of those within the cavern fell to their knees, and those beyond flinched, staring in shock towards the Lodge. Not because they were worshiping the demigod, but rather, because of the presence of her pressing them down. Whereas Cenarius made an attempt to not overawe others, Ohn'ahra's arrival and joy seemed to make her forget the need to rein in her deific presence for a few moments.

Surprisingly, for all his age, Vurg did not go to his knees, nor did a few of the oldest among the kaldorei. The kaldorei could probably remember standing in the presence of this particular god or maybe even Cenarius and others during the War of the Ancients. As for Vurg, well, Harry suspected the old tauren was just too stiff for his knees to bend. *And stubborn, too.*

Ohn'ahra's eyes swept the room, radiating joy and approval in equal measure even as the impact of her presence faded. "Well done!" The eagle-like deity boomed before continuing in a more normal tone... or as normal a tone as a construct of wind magic could use anyway, which was to say, not much. There was still a feeling of multiple voices speaking as one, each word carried on a different air flow in some strange fashion. "Long have I feared that what

happened to the Spear of the Ancients meant that Unseen Path had itself collapsed in its entirety.”

A beak could not really lend itself to a grimace, but Ohn’ahra’s face tried its best despite that as the sending continued. “I do not know what hardships you all have been going through, nor could I honestly have done anything to stop it. Though you might not know it, but the being who first stole the spear from Dorro had somehow become Tainted. It tried to reach out to me, to Taint me in turn even as it tried to feed off my power, and the damages dealt to me... it took me centuries to heal from it, and that was with me blocking the connection off as soon as I became aware of it. Afterwards the feather alone was not enough to let me communicate directly with you all. The enchantments on it were not enough to let me actively communicate with you, not at the same time I was suppressing the connection to the spear.”

Ohn’ahra’s form seemed to waver for a moment, as her attention turned elsewhere. “Alas, we wild gods have our own concerns. Mine is to control the winds above the Maelstrom. Since that wound in Azeroth was created, it has threatened to grow, to tear asunder the fabric of the winds across the entire world. Keeping that contained is my charge, and I **cannot** turn aside from that duty.”

As Ohn’ahra spoke, her voice echoed nearly to the edge of the valley, carried by the winds that was her charge. Thus, the harpies outside heard that, and also received the same vision as the people within the cavern did: that of a titanic funnel of air threatening to burst out, only constrained by the will of Ohn’ahra, a visible web of wind colored blue and white against the semi-sickly dark green and gray of the continual hurricane above the Maelstrom. With that image came the feeling of a great struggle, aided by the comings and goings of dragons of various colors, of other Wild Gods feeding her energy. Harry could also sense that there was at least one other spirit in the water trying to contain the magic or the effect of the whirling Maelstrom from becoming worse.

For a moment, it seemed as if Ohn’ahra’s mental projection would disappear again, but then her eyes flared with dark blue light, and she turned, gazing at those all around the room as if she looked into their souls one after another. “This order is intended to be the hands and eyes of those of us who cannot do all we would for this world. You are to stand against the dark, to seek out evil and combat it.”

The mental projection seemed to smile as she looked at Marduc. “Well do you know this, Marduc, my old friend. I remember you standing beside me during the War of the Ancients, as you fought a horde of lesser demons as they tried to push into a village of your folk. Only your being there saved those people.”

“Ha, th, that is not how I recall it, Ancient One. I remember felling a few demons, then being nearly slain in turn while you slaughtered them to a being,” Marduc quipped.

“Ah, but if you had not been there, I would never have been able to do that. It was your courage to stand alone against the raiding party that kept them out of that village. If you had not done so, the demons would have been in among your folk by the time I arrived. There are limits to even what we Wild Gods can do. To kill so many lesser demons, I would have had to run the risk of killing innocents too, to say nothing of how much longer the lesser demons would have lived to take their bloody harvest,” Ohn’ahra gently cajoled.

She then turned to other kaldorei, calling them out by name. Even a few of the tauren were called out, their features showing Ohn’ahra that they were related to specific warriors she had known in the past. Harry thought that her comment to Feldral was the most amusing though. “How could I not remember the kaldorei who seemed as at home in the high spires of the mountains as any bird on the wing? I remember all too clearly the time I had stopped on a abandoned nest for a rest during the War of the Ancients only for a voice to speak up from above me, where you were clinging like a blue-skinned limpet to the rocks!”

“Yet for all the courage you have show in in the past, I can sense that you all let your guilt at the loss of the Spear of the Ancients cloud your judgment,” Ohn’ahra turned her attention to the Order as a whole, her voice turning from amused to stern. “You have not lost your way, but your energy, your enthusiasm for what I know is a thankless task. Yet it is an important task, a path that must be followed, whether you can see the end of it or not. And even though you thought you lost your way, you have persevered. More, in listening to these harpies in your quest for the Spear, you have opened the door for their entire race to turn away from the dark.”

Ohn’ahra shifted straightening her back as she stared down at Cassandra, Recca, and Aleria and Alari, smiling once more. “It will take time, and it might never be fully accomplished. But the children of my old friend Aviana are not **born** crooked, are not **born** evil as are the creatures of old gods, or as the satyrs were permanently transformed into by the demons. Rather, their fall from grace is because of the loss of Aviana and the desire all beings who can sense magic have, to discover ways to wield it. And now we have a way to help them from seeking out those sources which will in turn use them. Step forward, Matriarch.”

Cassandra trembled under the gaze of the demigod. Unlike everyone else there, she and the harpies with her and outside had all gone to their knees willingly, prayerfully. Even those who could not see her felt Ohn’ahra’s divine nature even after she had pulled her aura back. Now Cassandra stared up at the being that could be the long-term hope of her entire race before pushing herself upright with difficulty. Stepping forward on trembling talons, her normal

poise missing for the first time since she had begun to speak to Feldral and his assault team, yet she still stepped forward, addressing the god as best she could. “Y, y, Your Greatness?”

“My name is Ohn’ahra. I do not ask Unseen Path to worship me. We wild gods have no need of such. Rather, we give out our blessings as we will it and where we think it will do the most good.” Ohn’ahra gestured with a wing, and a few of the tattoos, the signs of the various Oaths the members of the Unseen Path took, glowed. Specifically, a few around the throats of the Pathfinder and the other, most senior members. Harry wondered what that signified but set that mystery aside to look at Ohn’ahra as she leaned down towards Cassandra. “And I believe that is why you are here, is it not?”

“Y, yes, your... er, Lady Ohn’ahra. I, ever since I was a chick, I have tried to keep from falling, to keep away from the Fel and the Taint alike, to keep those I have birthed away from it. I have not always succeeded, and I, I like all my race, deal with the emptiness within us left from our Ancient Mother’s death. I, I ask of you to help us, please,” Cassandra answered, bowing her head.

Ohn’ahra nodded her head, and once more the sending seemed almost to... well, Harry likened it to the time he saw a computer screen glitching due to the use of a spell nearby, the whole thing threatening to come undone as the willpower behind it tried to split its attention. But then, another feather flew through the sky, causing the harpies outside to screech and cry as they stared up at it, a great booming noise nearly flattening them and causing more than a few avalanches elsewhere in the mountains as the feather flew down towards its target. Seconds later, it flew slowly through the tunnels of the Lodge to float next to Ohn’ahra’s head.

This new feather was identical to the glowing feather that had been within the plinth previously and it began to rotate above the god while the other feather shifted forward from where it had also been hovering previously. At the same time, the pieces of the crystalline structure that had shattered slowly began to reform, heat and magic coinciding to melt these bits of crystal into not one creation, but two. One finished quickly, covering the moving feather with a thin protective covering, while the other continued to work in the background

“This will grant you and yours access to nature magic, much like the Spear of the Ancients would have” Ohn’ahra explained “I cannot tell if your use of it will be limited or as varied as that of the druids that can manipulate Wild Nature Magic without the need of a deity’s intervention. That will be up to you to discover. As will repeating the magics that have fixed the problem nature created within your vocal cords,” She added dryly. “I cannot tell you how often Cenarius and the rest of us remonstrated with Aviana on that score, but she was tone deaf in many ways, and could not understand the problem.”

Cassandra hesitantly cupped the feather within her own wings, then gasped. She should have only been able to feel the rock-like structure of the crystal. But instead what Cassandra felt was warmth. And as she held it, that warmth suddenly flowed into her, filling a void that Cassandra had known was there all her life but had fought with every fiber of her being from filling as so many others had.

As she held the feather a bright bluish light suddenly appeared, creating a V-shaped mark on Cassandra's forehead, somewhat reminiscent of Harry's own scar if in a very different form. And from her talons, white and light green magic began to swirl in a visible aura as that emptiness within was filled with magic. "By Aviana..." She nearly moaned. *Is this what Ivella and those like her felt when they used Fel magic? No, it cannot be. This is not only empowering but almost **cleansing**, and I cannot imagine either the Fel or the Taint feeling like that.*

Turning slightly away from Cassandra, Ohn'ahra continued, addressing the Unseen Path as a whole, her gaze sweeping across the hall even as her mental projection seemed to threaten to cut out once more. "While there are few who still cling to demonic magic outside of the satyrs, the Old Gods are still a major concern. Sleeping they might be in their various prisons, but even the dreams of such creatures have power. The Emerald Dream is being slowly corrupted, despite the best efforts of the kaldorei druids and the Emerald Flight to try and combat it. And elsewhere, their blood and thoughts seep out, changing those that come in contact with it or calling those with evil intent already in their hearts. The threat is always out there. Similarly, while the demons are gone, the scars they have left, the wounds on Azeroth, stand as mute testimony to their strength."

"What my departed sister was to your people I will become to any harpy who chooses to come here and swear on my feather," Ohn'ahra went on turning back to Cassandra. "Any who agreed to never turn to such will continue to have access to my magic."

Cassandra bowed profoundly, as outside, her flock shouted and began to dance around like wild chickens doing a jig. Promising to not turn to other sources of magic was a small price of pay to gaining one of their own. "All who look to me will do so, Great One."

Ohn'ahra's face twisted a bit, and her voice became droll. "I see we will have to work on that. I am not nearly as formal as Aviana was with her children, young one. I hope you can remember that in the future."

That won a round of laughter from the watching members of the Unseen Path, even as Cassandra, easily one of the most dignified, composed, mature women that Harry had seen in this lifetime or back on Earth, blushed like a schoolgirl. The color of her face almost reminded Harry of the first time he had met Ginny and she had put her elbow into a bowl of pudding at the Burrow.



Ohn'ahra waved off her blushing form, turning her attention to Harry, looking down at him thoughtfully. "And you. The one called human Cenarius sent a dream to me about." Harry's fingers twitched, but Ohn'ahra went on, staring at him with all the intensity her mental projection could muster, which was quite a bit despite it looking as if the will behind it was starting to fade.. "You are very much not from around here. Even now, I can still feel the touch of foreign winds upon you somehow. But that is all right by me. You have acted like the final bit of water needed to change a cloudy day into rain, and so far, I have been very pleased with the changes you have wrought."

Harry nodded, saying nothing, and Ohn'ahra chuckled, a kind of weird buzzing noise from the wind construct. "But I cannot bless you in turn with my magic. You not only have no need for it, but I am honestly uncertain how both sides of your being would react to that. Your phoenix side fascinates me, and if I could but hold this projection for longer, I would be immensely interested in hearing about that form, even if your other side holds no interest to me."

Again, the sendings' eyes bored into Harry. "There is also something about you that...." Ohn'ahra feathers ruffled and she cut herself off, ending the conversation instead of saying whatever she had been about to say. "For now, I can give only my thanks and my hope that you will continue to aid the Unseen Path, even if you do not always march in step with it in your many lives, and look forward to when next we can converse."

As Ohn'ahra finished speaking, magic flared out. Deep into the stone of the cavern, it went, and suddenly, the central area where the plinth had been grew, Ohn'ahra flapping her wings and flying into the air above the plinth as it did. The stone formed into a series of steps leading up to a new plinth, where the smaller container for the feather settled down. Another series of stone arms rose from the ground, thin, ending in talons, creating what looks like a sword holder. Without prompting, Vurg stepped forward on unsteady feet, and as Ohn'ahra watched, the Pathfinder of the Unseen Path settled the Spear of the Ancients there above and behind the feather.

Magic flared out from the feather, only this time it was a more constant stream, not a building torrent, connecting back to the underlying matrix of the nature magic within the Unseen Path. This was steady and would remain so, Harry sensed. The feather was now so bright that the torches lining the cavern were no longer needed. Instead, the feather filled the entire cavern with light almost the color of moonlight, but with a light blue tint to it.

The creation of the new plinth finished, Ohn'ahra looked around the cavern once more. "Let this new plinth stand as a sign of the continued covenant between myself and the Unseen Path. Keep to your Oaths, keep to your goals, continue to expand your knowledge of the world,

to seek out and combat evil, and always will you find aid if you stretch out your hands to me and my surviving brethren.”

With that, the sending popped out of existence, leaving behind the so-called mortals to stare at the giant plinth. And as they did, renewed purpose filled the members of the Unseen Path in a way that had been absent for centuries and a roar of affirmation came from nearly every throat there.

The harpies in the cavern did not join in. Instead they stared at the feather in Cassandra’s wings. As the roars turned into cheers, backslaps, and plans for the future, the twins approached their grandmother, awe on their faces.

Recca though, ignored all that, flapping up into the air and then dropping down next to Harry before the crowd of jubilant Unseen Path members closed on the foursome that had been behind Pathfinder Farstride while the deific manifestation occurred. When Harry turned to her, the warrior harpy smirked, the expression pulling at the scars on her face, creating an even fiercer than normal expression. “So, where do I sign up?”

### **End chapter**

Now, I had thought initially to have another scene here, but I... well, I just didn’t like it at all. So instead, that scene will help me start putting in ever larger time skips so we can start putting some real time on this bad boy. Remember guys we’ve got thousands of years, and at least five or six major events I want Harry to become involved with before ‘canon’ begins, so we need the centuries to start moving.

Anyway, I hoped you all liked this chapter, a bit more lore about the vrykul, Northrend, and the Broken Isles. And then some romance. I am also now done with introducing new characters. I will be creating a real band that Harry will interact with for the next thousand plus years from the characters so far introduced.

From here, there will be one more chapter in the Trueshot Lodge arc, with a lot of magic/research, and some character interaction, and just a lot of retooling. Somewhat like what has begun in Bhaalson Remodel funnily enough. Then Harry and co. will begin to venture out into the wider world, letting me play with other... things... heh.