

Chapter 1

This world is full of secrets: secret plans, secret items, secret histories, secret immortals and a myriad of other kinds besides these. Even in this waning world there are many new secrets coming into play. An Archmage wages a secret war against the living out of vengeance and obligation. A Wyrms wields an empire like a warrior wields a cudgel to expand his hoard and influence. In a small city near the High-Passes the Antinium are slowly reinventing themselves. And perhaps the greatest secret of all the Island of Mages are collecting visitors from another world.

However, there are few secret legends of this world, and yet that is what this story is about. Legends forged between two worlds who might never rise to true notoriety but who collectively became something truly unique. This is the Saga of the Broken.

Nelak was freezing and that was usually impossible for someone of the Cold Wanderer tribe, but he was also far from the normal specimen of the tribe. Nelak carries with him the old blood of the drakes, a trait among most Drakes and practically unheard of to someone of mixed blood. And despite carrying the blood of dragons, even the heat burning in his chest can't keep the cold of winter from sinking its claws past Nelak's fur.

Not that he was overly concerned by his predicament, the majority of Drakes and Humans would not be freezing in his stead. They would be dead, as opposed to being forced to wrap

themselves up in a blanket to help cover their scaly parts. As a reindeer kin what would be deadly cold to most was merely chilly to him, and that would be before one factored in the [Insulated Fur] skill.

And yet he was freezing as he wandered through the darkest of the winter nights, which the clan's [Noaidi] named The Winter Solstice. The wandering was not by choice, but mandated by the [Headman] of the clan as an "important task", or rather a punishment as Nelak chose to view it. He was being sent to the clan's summer homestead to prepare it for when the others would come after Winter's end.

This would be an incredibly miserable task as the Clan's home was behind a mountain and near a rather large lake. The added moisture and exposure would make his life quite miserable for the several months left before the end of Winter. But it wasn't surprising that Nelak had been chosen for this task, he was an [Outcast] after all.

Outcasts no matter the species weren't exactly known for receiving no treatment, and Nelak was no exception. Add in his talents as a mage and it made perfect sense why he was banished to do this lonely task. The silver lining of it all was that with this Nelak could finally experiment again.

As the sole mage of not only the clan but as far as he knew the entire Cold Wanderer Tribe, he didn't exactly receive much understanding when it came to his needs. A mage needs to experiment or so his mother's journal said, practicing spells and creating new ones was just as important as studying spellbooks. After an unfortunate experiment combining his magic with the inner fire that burned in his chest, the Clan had forbidden him from practicing magic

unless the [Noaidi] was there to oversee it.

Total freedom to experiment and ,hopefully, level was the only reason that Nelak hadn't tried to get out of the assignment. The months at the summer homestead would be cold and lonely, but at least he could grow and make his mother proud. He kept the cold away while thinking about these things as he trudged on the snow with his sled dragging behind him, which was unfortunate since it meant he didn't notice the storm before it was already on him.

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The dig was going as expected, this deep beneath the well insulated hive of the Twisted Antinium, not even the cold of winter could harden the earth to the point that it would be an impediment. Wreckzrvrr or Wreck for short was standing watch over his assigned team of Workers and Soldiers. As the junior Prognugator of the hive he was not trusted to anything more important yet, and especially not while Wrymvr was away to prepare a raid on the Drakes.

A few days ago a group of Workers became Aberration while digging near this area, and this was most peculiar since it happened instantly to 23 workers while doing a task with almost no clear stimuli that could have caused this. Preliminary examinations of their bodies had not rendered any conclusive results, so it was decided that the area had to be properly investigated.

Wreck volunteered for the assignment and while his workers digged, he found himself

absently scratching at part of his cithin with one of his two digited hands. His armor plating itched as usual, and it was such a notable tick that his Queen at one point considered terminating him in case of Aberration. The nature of her creation made her especially inclined to be cautious in case it displayed any intolerably undesirable qualities.

“Increase the speed of the digging”

Wreck’s voice was a guttural gurgle unlike the regular chirps and clicks displayed by most Antinium, almost as if something wet and slimy had attached itself to his throat. The workers promptly accelerated their digging speed as the group responded to his will. When the new tunnel made contact with the same section as the incident, Wreck immediately felt something change.

It was not a result of a specific skill as Wreck possessed few of those, but rather as a result of one of his classes that he did not immediately succumb to what followed. [Mind-Crusher] to be specific, as the last bit of soil caved to the strong limbs of the Workers, an alien scent immediately filled the air. And mere moments after that the strangest of sounds came from his subordinate Antinium: laughter.

As the scent filled the corridor Wreck felt a strange sensation in his mind and immediately tried to reject it. Around him his Soldiers, forever rendered mute by their intrinsic nature, shook an emotion alien to him. The workers chattered in a discordant cacophony of laughter as they turned on each other and the soldiers and rushed with swinging fists.

Wreck immediately rolled away from the charging workers and got to his feet. Unlike other

Prognugators this was not done in one elegant motion practiced over years and with data based on past Prognugators to learn from, but rather a clumsy dash that almost caused Wreck to be stuck on his back.

Before the Aberrations could turn their attention to him again, the Soldiers rushed at them and each other in a similar frenzy but without sound, except for the crunches of carapaces being broken. Wreck immediately assessed the situation and concluded the entire group had become aberrations and immediately spat several globules of acidic spit at the Soldier-Aberrations.

The toxic spit was pointless as even his venom was largely resisted by even lesser Antinium such as these. The acid immediately began to eat into the Soldiers, they were the most dangerous combatants on the field and had to be removed first. Two workers charged out of the chaos at him with improvised clubs made out of their own torn off arms.

Wreck immediately swung his injector arm into the trajectory of the first worker, it impaled itself on his arm and promptly was injected with the slime stored in the backportion of his chest carapace.

The other Worker spat a globule of acid onto him, which steamed and burned ineffectually on his Creler-derived armor. Wreck returned fire with a barrage of acidic spit on his own, and he then swung his soldier arm into the face of the impaled Worker, which caved in its skull.

In the meantime the quick rampage had mostly settled as the Soldiers had utterly massacred the remaining workers before working on one another. This allowed Wreck to

reposition himself and produce more acidic saliva before unleashing it on the last soldier standing.

The moment the fighting stopped Wreck felt the sensation again, almost like a claw being slowly poked into his mind through his antennae. Wreck shook his head in response to this mental probing and staggered past the corpses towards the new tunnel opening.

It was then he saw the stone archway with the monstrous head affixed to the top of it. The bestial head grinned down at him as he entered the chamber.

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The transition was apparently seamless, one moment Niklas was packing down their tent into their backpack, and the next they suddenly landed on the ground in a mossy forest. This was odd on multiple fronts, among them being that Niklas prior to this brief fall had been on flat and hard packed dirt. Not exactly at the top of a hill or in the process of crossing a bridge.

The other was that he was near a beach and not a forest at the time of this event, and of course thirdly he fell from one world and into another. Niklas didn't even know how they knew that, but the moment they sat up they just knew it. The first time they exhaled, they exhaled air from his old world and he breathed in the first gulp of air from another world entirely.

Unbeknownst to them, unlike most Earthers who had been summoned, they had actually

felt something. For a moment it felt almost like someone had hooked him and pulled him into a pool, and then he hit something akin to a wall of ice and bounced off it.

“That was...something.”

Niklas rubbed the back of his head and looked around. The moss beneath his hands felt unnaturally soft, the shadows beneath the trees surrounding him looked somehow both longer and thicker than what should be possible. Unlike the forests they are used to, this one is far from silent, various animal noises can be heard coming from every direction.

“Find water, make camp, and then try to find people.”

This predicament would be very upsetting if Niklas was the sort of person who took time to consider the implications of being whisked away into another world. Instead they focused on the immediate concerns he had at the moment. A cursory glance at the mostly hidden sky indicated that Night would be here soon.

Thankfully, Niklas still possessed his backpack with a few plastic bags strapped to it. So making camp would not be an issue if necessary. After checking on his backpack they finally rose to his feet and tried to look for a path out of the mossy clearing.

Almost instantly after the desire entered their mind, then a small path appeared at the edge of the clearing. Niklas would have sworn that they had checked that section before rising up and there was no gap in the trees then, but with everything that had happened they decided not to question their stroke of fortune.

The path was a winding thing, not a straightforward way through the trees at all. As he stepped onto it and began to walk, it quickly became apparent that this was no ordinary path. When it wasn't being unnecessarily winding as it could occasionally even twist around openings between trees, or suddenly turn and take Niklas back the same direction it came. It almost seemed to have been carved into the soil to be as difficult to walk on as possible.

In what felt like a short amount of time Niklas ended up walking through three mudfields, up a steep incline with the path being so narrow that he almost couldn't stand on it with both legs next to each other, and then down a hill so full of thorn bushes next to it that it was a miracle Niklas didn't end up stung.

Eventually after almost walking into a field of stinging nettle, Niklas found it prudent to stop near a little stream. Whatever was going on in this forest was clearly too weird for him. The path had been so insistent on being annoying that he had barely been able to take in the beauty of his surroundings.

Glorious trees broader than trailer trucks stood next to miniature trees shorter than Niklas. Old logs and branches lay strewn across the forest floor, and rainbow coloured flowers bloomed alongside ivory colored mushrooms.

"It looks like it will be a nice evening, so no need to drag out the tent."

Niklas instead chose to pull out the hammock for just this occasion and stretch between two of the sturdiest looking trees. With that done came the most important step of all.

The Fire

It began with a circle of stones, each carefully placed to make a barrier. Next came logs harvested from the forest floor, these would form the foundation for what was to come. The next layers were sticks from this world intermixed with firewood from one of his plastic bag. Each layer thinner than the next, that was the rule for a fire such as this, a fire that would burn for almost a night.

Each stick was carefully and almost lovingly stripped of bark. Said bark would join the tiniest of twigs on top crowning the campfire and being what would start the fire. One flick of his lighter and a dried leaf was all that was needed to be dropped down on the crown of kindling, and soon enough the fire began to burn.

Niklas sat on a nearby rock and just stared into the flames as they began to grow, first they were tiny and almost pitiful. Carefully sinking their teeth into the kindling and crackling with heat as they began to spread. Soon enough the fire start to dance as the kindling made way for the fire to touch and consume the thin sticks beneath it.

“Well, what do I do now?”

Niklas was used to this, to sit alone and watch the fire dance. To whisper into the hearth and take comfort from the sounds of wood burning, of sparks flying, and of the bitter smell of woodsmoke wafting out from the flames.

What he didn't expect was a straightforward answer, but as he blinked away a tear the world...Changed.

The final lock on the ancient door fell down with a loud clunk as it hit the dusty marble floor. Jovela stepped over the broken lock and casually slapped it out of the way with her tail as she put her hands on the stone door. It had taken her a long time and a lot of gold to reach this place, but this was it. Finally, the time had come to see the insides of the sanctuary of one of the last Threadmakers.

“[Form Alteration: Armored Scales]”

Her body immediately grew scales all over itself and they immediately hardened, unlike the regular Drake scales she used; these were akin to a Lizardman. Multicolored and glorious compared to her usual pale scales along her arms and encircling her neck. With the armor in place she finally pushed the stone door.

And she promptly winced as an arrow struck her back and bounced off her scales. This again, Jovela stopped herself from getting too deep into a mental spiral and spun around to face her ambushers. Even here, even in the Great Desert people still thought they could take their shots at her. Jovela glanced from attacker to attacker quickly, before she dashed to a stone pillar to use it as cover before the next attacks could hit her.

“I count around five attackers. Two archers, two warriors and a mage. We don't have to

drag this out. This can still end amicably.”

Their reply was two [Piercing Shots] and a [Flame Jet] spells being sent at the pillar. When the eye on her left calf that she had exposed on purpose spotted the fire, she instantly realized that this was not going to be a fun round.

“Ohh fire...well I will have to kill you now.”

Jovela sighed as she used her long wings to flap out of the way. With the benefit of perspective she saw that as usual the entire group were String-People like her. Or not like her, nobody could be **like** her, constrained as they are by the ordinary.

Before Jovela could land she realized that this group might not be complete amateurs, the two warriors had predicted her dash and were rushing at her most likely landing spot. One of them carried a spear while the other wielded a comically large axe, both of them hoping to keep her at range so their compatriots could shoot at her with no risk to themselves.

“[Form Alteration: Rending Claws], [Form Alteration: Tentacles], [Form Alteration: Needle Wings]”

That was fine really, she was...flexible when it came to these things. So before the two warriors could get into range her body morphed in mid flight. Hundreds of cacti needles grew out of her wings, her hand claws grew to be as long as daggers, and 6 long tentacles sprouted out of her side.

“Alrgh...Dead Gods”

The axe wielder exclaimed as he beheld her majesty and Jovela simply winked at his disgusted reaction. Before he could say or do anything else she lazily flapped both wings and sent dozens of needles flying at him and his compatriot. His partner managed to dodge using a skill, but he did not. Loud shouts of pain followed as his body was peppered with needles.

The other man rushed at her twirling his spear before launching himself even faster with his spear aimed towards her midsection.

Unfortunately for him his attack never struck her, one of her tentacles intercepted the blow using it's protective scales to lessen the damage of the blow. Two more wrapped themselves around the spear and tore it out of his grip. She snuck a fourth tentacle to wrap itself around his left ankle, and two last ones to send sand flying into his eyes.

A simple pull was all that was needed to send the confused warrior sprawling to the ground. Two arrows flew at her from the Archers and she moved her wings around to function as a protective barrier while she knelt down to take care of the downed fighter. She slashed her rending claws through his cheeks and down to his midsection, her skill enhanced claws not only cutting into his flesh but destroying the integrity of the fabric.

By the time she was done a second volley of arrows had been launched into her wings, but [Greater Pain Tolerance] made those attacks rather impotent. Her wings flicked back so she could have a better look at the battlefield.

The Axe Wielder looked like he had tried to hug a porcupine and not been well received, his eyes were bloodshot and his breath had grown alarmingly heavy. Likely some kind of rage skill at work to cancel out the pain from the needles. The two Archers looked shocked and thankfully the shock made them too sloppy to immediately resume the attack.

The Mage had realized that casting fire spells with a comrade that close would be ill advised to put it mildly, so he sent forth a blast of sand.

“[Torrent of Sand]”

“[Recall Alterations]”

Jovela had no time to react beyond lifting her left arm and feeling it shift instantly from her present human hand, to an old experiment of hers. A grey arm appeared in its place that ended with a large door sized shield. She had made it out of iron thread a long time ago, and it was impractical but useful for this.

The sands formed into a spout and flew right into her impromptu shield, so instead of sending her tumbling away, she was instead merely pushed back as her shield held against the torrent of sand. Eventually the attack subsided and that was good, because the Warrior was rushing at her and he looked rather perturbed by recent events.

“[Form Alteration: Stretch Legs]”

As she activated her skill she moved her right leg out into a kick similar to what she had seen fighters from Pomle do. Promptly her leg shot out several feet and kicked the warrior in the ribs, the sudden shock of the attack along with the speed at which he ran into her taloned foot. Sent him sprawling to the ground, the leg on its end immediately retracted back to being it's normal length.

The archers were finally realizing the need to actually do something again, so they began to fire arrows at her once more. Jovela was not inclined to be hit further or waste more skills on the fight, so before they could hit her she began flapping her wings. Sending volley after volley of needles flying at the three ranged combatants. Which the Mage eventually countered by raising a wall of sand to stop her from turning them into pincushions.

Jovela lazily flicked a barrage of needles at the Warrior to serve as motivation, and it predictably worked as he surged at her while practically frothing at the mouth. He swung his axe at her and despite the rage-skill adding to the speed and power of the blow, it was now so telegraphed that a blind man could dodge it. So, Jovela had an even easier time of it as she sidestepped the blow and lightly jabbed her clawed right hand into his cut. Her [Rending Claws] made short work of the stitches keeping his torso and legs connected, and he promptly collapsed as the two fell apart.

Jovela did not get to enjoy her work as yet another torrent of sand sent her flying backwards, fortunately it had not been coordinated with the two furies of arrows that had been sent at the same time. So they missed her now prone form, Jovela sputtered as she moved the shield arm into the sand torrent and the attack eventually subsided after pressing her down into the soil.

Well then, maybe she had been a bit too lax about this.

“[Recall Alteration]”

And as the shield arm disappeared she sprung to her feet and rushed at the trio, now once more with both of her clawed arms in place.

“[Confusing Guard]”

Her tentacles and arms immediately were lifted up in a guard stance as she rushed them, flickering and moving in strange patterns to distract and confuse her opponents. Without the two warriors in the way, the Mage would most likely unleash fire on her, so she had to be quick.

“[Flame Burst]”

As the fire exploded towards her, Jovela grinned and used her [Stretch Legs] to shoot up in the air, at which point she canceled the alteration and the legs were promptly retracted back into her. The fire flew away beneath her and she unleashed yet another storm of cacti needles at the three Stitch-Men, before she landed among them.

“[Disorienting Slap]”

Her hand flashed and struck the Mage across the face before she spun and lashed the two

Archers around the throat with her tentacles. The two were casually pulled up from the ground and dangled in her grip. The Mage experienced quite the messy magical backlash as he tried to unleash a fire spell while under the effect of